

Reflections on Sons and Lovers by D.H. Lawrence

Background

I have first met Mr. Lawrence when I was preparing for an English exam in high school. There was a short piece of Sons and Lovers in the textbook, describing how Mrs. Morel and her devoted son Paul went together over the fields, how Paul was worried about her Mother's health and how she was spoiling his romantic relationship with young Miriam. And there were some questions below the text hinting at the possessiveness of the Mother towards her Son, such as if Paul was trying to get away from his Mother, but his love for her had tied him, and it was she who would not let go of it. Seemed logical and as I wished to pass the exam I was keen to acknowledge the view of the author of the textbook. But I felt the expression of Mr. Lawrence simple and gentle, and when some years later I found the Penguin edition of the Sons and Lovers (1) on the bookshelf in the store, have bought it and read it. Have then been reading many books in English, have been enjoying the language, also to accomplish myself, to be able to express myself better. After reading the whole book, I thought that it was about relationship between Mother, Son and his girlfriends, not that much about possessiveness of the Mother. I thought it beautiful, but it did not touch me profoundly.

There were sayings that D.H. Lawrence was famous. We had a copy of Lady Chatterley's Lover, translated into Slovene language, at home, on the shelf with my Mother's favourite books. Mother recommended the book to me at my high school time, and I have read it. Mother said that people were much against the writer for bringing up the problem of a lady that wished to be loved and her sexual needs fulfilled. Also we went to see the movie together and I remember the lover, a handsome forester, taking a shower in the woods and the lady looking at him from behind the bushes. As I saw it then, the lady had a husband that provided for her material goods, but could not satisfy her sexual needs. The forester, however, could. He was physically active, good looking and sensitive to her. I was rather taken then by the way of life described by classics, in particular, Galsworthy, and wondered why there was so much fuss about such simple urges, that someone may become famous for writing about them.

Then the years have passed and I have been reading many scientific texts that were written in a rather poor English, also been writing texts in rush and was not satisfied with, been putting together texts of contents that I did not care enough for and was alienated from the literature written in English language. Have scarcely ever read a Shakespeare for years. Have come to a conclusion that it is high time to do something about it since the number of projects that I am likely to be engaged in in the future is but finite, and the number is not large. One day there was a telephone call offering lessons in languages. I have asked whether they have a native English speaker to help me improve my language. The goal was to edit the manuscript on nanostructures with the deadline to Pan Stanford publishing house and learn the language on the way. They told me that they have two »native speakers«, one turned out a Slovenian wife of an Englishman. And the other was a girl from Africa who was studying economy in Ljubljana. She claimed that she was a native speaker and I could not deny that in a way this was true. It did not seem quite the thing but I have agreed to it. She brought some grammar textbook and we went through it. Also we have decided to read the same book and then have a discussion. From my library I have randomly chosen the Women in Love, by D. H. Lawrence. When the time planned for our lessons was over, she has already read the book, but I have lagged behind, so we were unable to fulfill our goal. I have started to read the pages many times, had trouble remembering numerous characters and putting together fragments the author was stacking. I was amazed at the descriptions of sophisticated intellectual relations taking place within and between the characters. Could hardly believe it were probable enough to happen in real,

at least in our time. But also due to my struggle, I have grown fond of it and was happy to read through, especially as it had been a long time since I have had a pleasure of reading a fiction book.

The above readings were scattered over time and circumstances and if blinded, I would not have guessed that the texts were of the same author.

A year ago I had a privilege of meeting prof. Andrew Boulton. We went to the Pen club to part the successes of the lecture that he held at the Dept. of Orthopaedic Surgery that day. We have learned that his Father was a specialist for the work and life of D.H. Lawrence and that although a medical doctor, he himself cared about literature and this subject. It was a lovely and meaningful evening for me to remember.

Seemed to me that D.H. Lawrence has come closer to me in a new context, for some reason, and I wished to relate with him again with increased attention. Sons and Lovers were waiting for me to meet again, with a new perspective that I have acquired in decades that have passed since our first sejour.

Reading of Sons and Lovers

I have been contemplating over the recent leaving of my beloved Mother. I cannot embrace the thought of living without the ones that I love, cannot find the reason and beauty in it. Suppose that is with most, therefore those who came before us and survived, have come up with some customs to make it easier to bear. In my parents' house we were not allowed to listen to the music when someone died. Also, for that symbol, when Christ died on Calvaria, there should be no sound until Saturday when he rised. This was not an issue to be questioned. Mother was very much particular about it. So I never thought of other reasons why this should be so. But I was arranging the burrial of her remains then, and had to go to church just a couple of days after her parting. The priest invited me to join the service and I humoured him, as my parents an myself seldom went to church and I was afraid that he might deny to perform the service if he were not pleased with me. The chorus sang Kyrie eleison. I have grasped the meaning of Mother's ways then. My heart could have stopped, and as it did not, I have not been able to preserve the dignity that she would have insisted on.

Yet a sign was there, to seek the solution in music. I was questioning myself whether it is true that we should let our loved ones go, as some are saying, to make them free of us. After some weeks I was able to listen to the music at home and found some parts of G.Faure's Requiem (2) particularly close to me. I have read the holy text; it says: Libera me, Domine de morte aeterna. Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine et lux perpetua luceat eis. But why am I asking to be free, am asking for myself, not for the one who has gone? Why me, that am still alive?

Some years I was watching over the tiny light, see that it would not cease and the hill grew steeper each day, the slope increasing as the abyss was approached. Afterwards I had to step outside. I found the sun almost too much to bear, the night unfit to sleep, the air too radiant to breathe. After many years I went into the sea, remembering the delight of gently rocking wavelets, remembering how the sea had taken the weight off my body and how the sea had been able to quench the fire burning inside it. I could feel a bit of relief as I was afterwards bathing still in warm air with a scent of young pines, their branches swaying over the sky. There I was meeting Mr. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers again, still holding my Mother and questioning myself about the meaning of Libera me.

Description of the image

There is gentleness and nobility in the characters that Mr. Lawrence has created, accepting everything that goes with them and not ruining their style.

The book praises love from a point starting with the creation of the child. It glorifies the nature in the »Deus sive natura« mode. It raises love to the sky, defining the origin of the world at the point of the meeting of the lovers.

The passion in Paul, the young man, develops and towards the end of the book, Mr. Lawrence writes:



'All the while the peewits were screaming in the field. It was all so much bigger than themselves that he hushed. They had met and included in their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass-stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of stars. After such an evening they were very still, having known the intensity of passion. It was for them an initiation and a satisfaction. To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them away, gave them rest within themselves. There was a verification which they had had together. Nothing can nullify it, nothing could take it away. This wonderful stillness in each thing in itself, while it was being borne along in a very ecstasy of living, seemed the highest point of bliss.'

Through Paul, Mr. Lawrence shows his experience, devotion and appreciation for the love and passion and also acknowledges its origins in the love and passion that his parents had had for each other. They have taught him, they have helped him to the success. Paul says:

'My Mother, I believe got real joy and satisfaction out of my Father at first. I believe she has had a passion for him; that is why she stayed with him. That's what one must have, I think, the real real flame of feeling through another person – once, only once, if it only lasts for three months. Something big and intense, that changed you when you really come together with someone else. Once it has happened to you, you can go on with anything, and ripen. And my Mother had it with my Father.'

Family jewels

Mr. Lawrence is describing the tearing of the bonds between the Mother and the Son as he becomes a man. It is painful just as it is to bring a baby into the world. The reader here feels with the son, for it is his voice that we hear.

But these pains should be viewed as a part of the progeny link and should be praised and acknowledged, not denied. It is wrong to think that a mother should be denied her pains in labor. Yet, she wishes to see her baby born and delight in its growth. For this she is willing to undertake anything. But the growth is not limited to bringing the baby out of the womb, letting it suck the milk and providing food and shelter, it includes the development of the soul to which there are no bounds. All her life she wishes to see her child fulfilled in many potentials.

Much has been acknowledged about the pains of the Mother. And what of the child? If it gets to breathe, its cries can be heard. If not, they are damped and no one learns of its pains.

During the pregnancy, the Mother forms the child in every way, to pass on to it experiences of generations that enabled her own survival. Thereby already in the womb, she shapes the child's physical and social potentials. Mrs. Morel was worried about Paul, for the pregnancy was not a happy one.

'She felt wretched with the coming child. For herself – nothing but dreary endurance. She did not want it.'

Afterwards:

'Now she felt strangely towards the infant. Her heart was heavy because of the child, almost as it were unhealthy or malformed. Yet it seemed quite well. Suddenly, looking at it, the heavy feeling at the Mother's heart melted into passionate grief. My lamb, she cried softly. And she felt that she and her husband were guilty. With all her force, with all her soul, she would make it up to it for having brought it into the world unloved. She would love it all the more now it was here, carry it in her love. Did it know all about her? When it lay under her heart, had it been listening then? If he lives, what will become of him? What will he be?'

The Mother is a treasurer of the line of ancestry that made her so perfect and it is her utmost duty to convey these gifts to her progeny. An important milestone is the point when her offspring should be initiated to accept this purpose as well. She will not be at rest before she sees her children succeed at it.

'His Mother prayed and prayed for him that he might not be wasted.'

'My boy, remember, you are taking your life in your hands. Nothing is as bad as a marriage that is a hopeless failure. Mine was bad enough, and ought to teach you something, but it might have been worse by a long chalk.'

Mrs. Morel is observing Paul becoming a man. Seems to her that Miriam was likely to make him one. 'She wished bitterly that Miriam had been the woman who could take this new life of his and leave her the roots.'

But Mrs. Morel finds Paul's choice frustrating. It is a disappointment of a nobleman that has acquired some goods and his progeny is not holding them but giving them away. Mother promotes Son towards the origin of his existence, in which the sexual issues are particularly important to her. And she is against the relation with Miriam.

'She will never let him become a man. She never will.'

Mr. Lawrence in Paul cannot understand her standpoint because he is yet a virgin and thinks that Mother wants him for herself, especially as the wholistic urge to exist and be aware of it fertilizes in Paul also other potentials that Miriam does have.

- ❖ You have been far enough tonight. You must be right home with her. She must be wonderfully fascinating that you can't get away from her but must go trailing eight miles at this time of night.
- ❖ I do like her.
- ❖ Like her! It seems to me that you like nothing and nobody else. There is neither Annie nor me, nor anyone now for you.
- ❖ What nonsense Mother. You know I don't love her. I – I - tell you, I don't love her-she does not even walk with my arm, because I don't want her to.
- ❖ Then why do you see her so often?
- ❖ I do like to talk to her. I never said I didn't. But I don't love her.
- ❖ Is there nobody else to talk to?
- ❖ Not about the things we talk of. There are a lot of things you are not interested in.
- ❖ What things?
- ❖ Why, painting and books. You don't care about Herbert Spencer.
- ❖ No, and you won't at my age.
- ❖ Well, I do now - and Miriam does.

It is a lose – lose situation.

- ❖ Why don't you like her, mother?
- ❖ I don't know, my boy. I'm sure I've tried to like her. I've tried and tried, but I can't – I can't.

Mother feels that Son should become the progeny link at the cost of his personal happiness. As she was able to ripen, she feels the continuation of the 'tremendous living flood' which is not yet possible for Son to see, and wishes them to be a part of it.

But, Gertrude Morel also loves her son Paul and wishes him to be happy.
'Perhaps I am selfish. If you want her, take her, my boy.'

Sons

'She was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing. There was one place in the world that stood solid and did not melt into unreality; the place where his Mother was. Everybody else could grow shadowy, almost nonexistent to him, but she could not.'

Yet, seems that there is a weakness in Mr. Lawrence that makes him see this a burden, a burden too heavy to bear.

'It was as if the pivot and the pole of his life from which he could not escape, was his Mother.'

But it is for her joy of life and for her dignity, that the children were able to escape from the ways of their Father, an addict and a bully. The children follow the Mother, not the Father.

'There began a battle between the husband and wife – a fearful bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. The sense of his sitting in all his pit-dirt, drinking after a long day's work, not coming home and eating and washing, but sitting, getting drunk on an empty stomach, made Mrs.

Morel unable to bear herself. From her, the feeling was transmitted to the children. She never suffered alone any more. The children suffered with her. There was a feeling of misery over all the house. The children breathed the air that was poisoned and they felt dreary. They were particularly against their Father, along with their Mother. Morel continued to bully and drink. The children had one tight place of anxiety in their hearts, one darkness in their eyes, which showed all their lives.'

When Father wanted to bully Paul, Mrs. Morel stood up to him:

'Only dare Mylord to lay a finger on that child! You'll regret it forever. He was afraid of her.'

But not her of him:

- ❖ The house is filthy with you.
- ❖ Then get out on it, it's mine. Get out on it. It's me as brings th money whoam, not thee. It's my house, not thine. Then get out on't – get out on't.
- ❖ And I would. Ah, wouldn't I have gone long ago but for those children. Do you think it's for you I stop – do you think I'd stop one minute for you?

Mrs. Morel is fearless and ruthless. She does not beg for mercy, she takes whatever there is to take. She is not broken by the misery of her marriage, nor by harsh life that she must bear, nor by the death of her first son whom she loved dearly, nor by being left behind by Paul, nor by severe illness, pain and death. There is joy of life and dignity in her that keeps her going beyond expectations. It is for this that the Husband and the children look up to her so.

What about Mrs. Lawrence, Bert's Mother? In the letter to Louie Burrows, dated December 6th, 1910 (3), just three days before the death of his Mother, Mr. Lawrence writes: 'She is my first great love. She was a wonderful, rare woman – you do not know; as strong and steadfast and generous as the sun. She could be as swift as a white whip-lash, and as kind and gentle as warm rain, and as steadfast as the irreducible earth beneath us.«

But, is it possible to stay that much upright, untouched by God's laws, that do not spare those that are trying? Or was this a Son's wish whose heart bled as he was watching his Mother loosing the 'struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness'?

In his letter to a friend, Arthur McLeod, dated December 5, 1910 (3), Mr. Lawrence writes: 'She had had a bloody hard life, and has always been bright: but now her face has fallen like a mask of bitter cruel suffering. '

But maybe Son's perspective was narrow? He had no experience of his own yet, and could have no idea of the complexity of wed relations. It could as well be viewed as if Mrs. Morel has won the bloody battle by lengths. It is clear who was the pivot and the pole in the family. Maybe that is why her Husband wished to have a glass or two before comming home after work? She was that much stronger than him that he should encourage himself to face his defeat day after day. Paul saw that Mother was frustrated by her marriage, but when it came to the point that him or his brother may physically overpower the Father, she stood up for her Husband. When he was hurt in the pit, she supported him in every way. She held him, also for her own sake for he was a part of her. She would not let the Sons bite through the Father's neck, as this neck was her own. And most importantly for Mr.Lawrence's future career as an artist, at the cost of bloody battle she was able to sustain her sincerity and leave her Husband his, unlike many women who are afraid to express their feelings and opinions, or are even afraid to have feelings and opinions in order not to disturb their Husbands'

overpowering influence and self esteem. In spite of the men possibly being the weaker part. The overpowering influence, that is usually closely connected to material issues. It is the selling of the soul for material goods which is truly frustrating and makes the air poisoned, the more as it seems to have a sweet smell. The Son's insight is just not deep enough to understand the roots of the suffering of his parents, the more as he feels that the world has been created at the moment of his conception. And it could not be denied that the parents have tried, that they were willing to give their heart and their blood.

Also Paul is ruthless. But not in such heroic mode, not with himself but with those that had given him much.

'You are old, Mother, and we are young'.

'There was nothing to do for her now but the housework, for all the rest he had gone to Miriam.'

'It's too bad of you to be ill.'

'And I don't want her to eat, and she knows it. When I ask her shall you have anything she's almost afraid to say Yes. I wish she'd die.'

'Lord, let my Father die, he prayed very often. Let him be killed at pit, he prayed when, after tea, the Father did not come home from work.'

And with Miriam.

'He seemed almost unaware of her as a person. She was only to him then a woman. She was afraid.'

Lovers

Miriam induced the desire but did not give him to perform.

'Paul was now twenty three and though still virgin, the sex instinct that Miriam had over-refined for long now grew particularly strong.'

'He sat there sacrificed to her purity which felt more like nullity.'

Miriam's desires were different from Paul's.

'It would come all-right if we were married. I'm not used to the thought.'

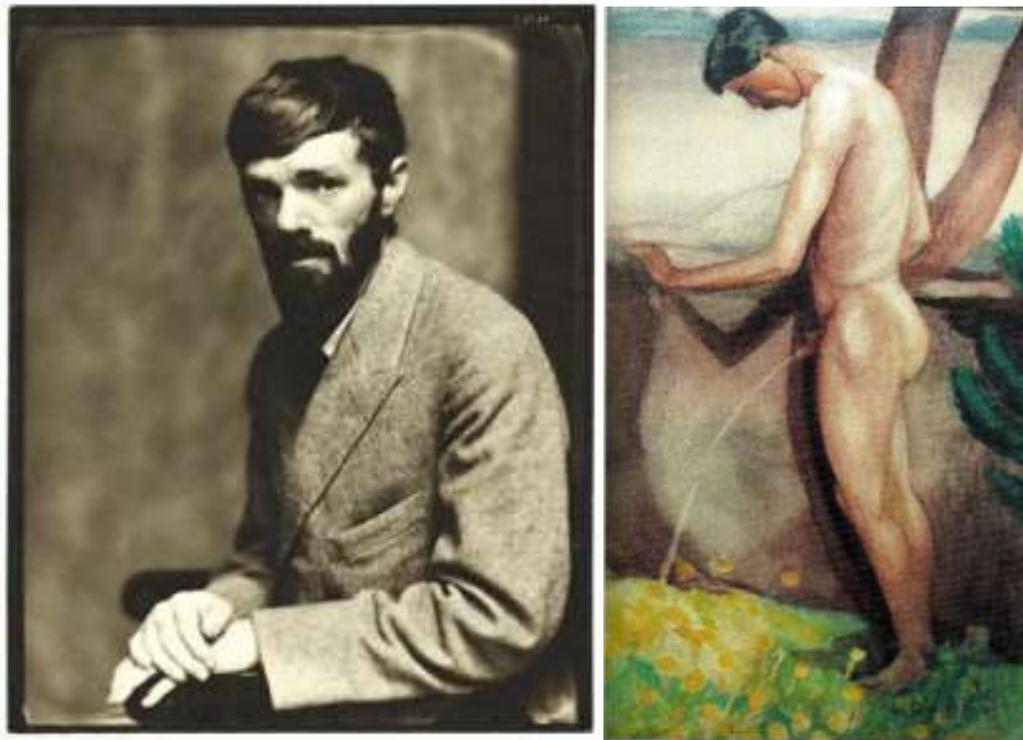
'Not yet, she pleaded.'

'She brooded and brooded and brooded herself towards accepting him.'

'Over this which did not seem so all-important to her was their love to break.'

Mr. Lawrence was bold to write about sexual issues then. But does he daresay it exactly, or is he gentle and discrete?

'Often as he talked of Clara Dawes came thickening and quickening of his blood, that peculiar concentration in the breast as if something was alive there, a new self or new centre of consciousness, warning him, that sooner or later, he would have to ask one woman or another.'



D.H. Lawrence, a son and a lover, a writer and a painter.

The problem seemed general.

'A good many of the nicest men he knew were like himself, bound to their own virginity, which they could not break out of. They were so sensitive to their women that they would go without them forever rather than do them hurt or injustice. Being Sons of Mothers whose Husbands had blunted rather brutally through their feminine sanctities, they were themselves too diffident and shy. They could easier deny themselves than incur any reproach from a woman; for a woman was like their Mother, and they were full of the sense of their Mother. They preferred themselves to suffer the misery of celibacy, rather than risk the other person.'

Paul is more successful with Clara.

'His hands were like creatures, living; his limbs, his body, were all life and consciousness, subject to no will of his, but living in themselves. Just as he was, so it seemed the vigorous, wintry stars were strong also with life. He and they struck with the same pulse of fire, and the same joy of strength which held the bracken proud stiff near his eyes held his body firm. It was as if he, and the stars, and the dark herbage, and Clara, were licked up in an immense tongue of flame, which tore onwards and upwards. Everything rushed along in living beside him, everything was still, perfect in itself, along with him. This wonderful stillness in each thing in itself, while it was being borne along in a very ecstasy of living, seemed the highest point of bliss.'

But them peewits have set the standard high.

'They did not often reach the height of that once when the peewits had called.'

The Jocasta and the Oedipus

Mr. Lawrence explains the motivation of the Sons and Lovers to E. Garnett, the publisher of Sons and Lovers (4): 'The novel follows this idea: a woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has had a passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion, and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up she selects them as lovers – first the eldest, then the second. These sons are urged into life by their reciprocal love of their mother – urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they can't love, because their mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them.'



Louie Burrows.

Maybe that is why the work is often regarded as an Oedipal drama: 'the story of a mother who is unhappy in her marriage and turns her sons into something like surrogate lovers. Therefore, the sons, in particular Paul cannot get out from under the shadow of their mother.'

Yet it seems from the biography of Mr Lawrence, from his correspondence, from his work and also from Sons and Lovers itself that strong love of the Son for his Mother is not the obstacle for his love-life development, neither emotionwise nor sexualwise. Mr. Lawrence experienced passionate and meaningful relationships with women, in particular with his wife Frieda. But he has learned of 'peewit's calling' even from his former relationships, as evident from his descriptions in Sons and Lovers. The experiences glancing through those descriptions could make most men and women envious. I. Mrak, a playwright, says: 'Have you heard a whistle of the train engine at night?' (5) Mr. Lawrence certainly has. There seems nothing wrong with Paul's (or Mr. Lawrence's) sexual life. On the contrary, one could assume him as an exceptionally successful lover.

As there is much said about Paul loving his Mother first and Mr. Lawrence saying that he and his Mother 'have loved each other, almost with a husband and wife love', there is no evidence that this feeling was mutual. Just seeing that Mrs. Morel's marriage was miserable does not mean that she considered her Sons taking the place of her Husband to be a good solution. The Sons do not and cannot know the origin of the relations between their parents and it is rather unlikely that the Sons could ever satisfy her in that role. And Mrs. Morel also has a Daughter who has quite similar relation with her Mother as the Sons have. Should their relation also be considered as an Oedipian drama? Mrs. Morel is rather explicit in what she wants of her Sons: to distinguish themselves, be successful in their love and family life and 'leave her the roots'. It must therefore be remembered that the fiction characters are not real people and that the Oedipian character of the Mother - Son love is artificial. Evidently intentional, this intellectual part I found a less prominent contribution to the work; also, it is not original, owing the popular idea to Dr. Freud and his followers. The autobiographical part reflecting the real world in Mr. Lawrence's field is bigger than that. Not intentionally addressed were some important issues that regard existential and sociological problems of the characters. These issues are parts of persons that underlay them. Without considering these issues it is impossible to understand for example why Paul and Miriam were not successful lovers, or why Mrs. Morel stayed with her Husband in spite of her dissatisfaction with his ways, or why Walther Morel continued to drink and bully his family at the cost of everyone's misery? Another question: Lawrences had two daughters and three sons. Morels had one daughter and three sons. Why the second sister is not included in the book?

Sons and lovers is essentially a book on Mr. Lawrence's view on his Mother. In his letter to Louie Burrows, dated December 6, 1910 (3), Mr. Lawrence writes: 'Whatever I wrote, it could not be so awful as to write a biography of my mother.' Seems that it or its parts have been written already when she was still alive, as a tribute to her, but it was something he was keen to overcome. He writes: 'But after this – which is enough – I am going to write romance – when I have finished Paul Morel, which belongs to this.' And he also looks forward to living his future: 'I must feel my mother's hand slip out of mine before I can really take yours. When I think of you, it is like thinking of life. You will be the first woman to make the earth glad for me: mother, Jessie – all the rest, have been gates to a very sad world. But you are strong and rosy as the gates of Eden. We do not all of us, not many perhaps, set out from a sunny paradise of childhood. We are born with our parents in the desert, and yearn for a Canaan. You are like a Canaan – you are rich and fruitful and glad, and I love you.'

If anything, it could be said that the traces of the Oedipian character of Mr. Lawrence's love for his Mother helps him to be successful in his lovelife with women.

Et misericordia eius a progenie in progenie timentibus eum

Mrs. Morel is religious and devoted to her family. She expects that her standpoint will lead to success.

'Now she had two sons in the world. She could think of two places, two centres of industry, and feel that she had put a man into each of them, that these men would work out what she wanted. They were derived from her, they were of her, and their works also would be hers.'

'Paul was going to distinguish himself. She had great belief in him, the more because he was unaware of his powers. There was so much to come out of him. Life for her was rich with promise. She was to see herself fulfilled. Not for nothing was her struggle.'

But there is much to be owed to destiny, and Mrs. Morel is not that lucky. Her great hopes do not reach her expectations. William dies suddenly, Paul is driven away from her at his transformation

from a boy to a man. However, the other two children, Annie and Arthur are doing well. They have founded their own families and have become treasurers of the family jewels. She certainly has done her duty and has every reason to be proud of her children.

When she takes seriously ill, the children take care of her, but it is Annie and her Husband who take the largest share.

Paul is devastated for his own sake as Mother was the pivot and the pole of his life. Even before that, he hates to see her fragile.

- ❖ Why can't a man have young mother? What is she old for?
- ❖ Well, she can scarcely help it.
- ❖ What are you old for? Why can't you walk? Why can't you come with me to places?
- ❖ At one time I could have run up that hill a good deal better than you.
- ❖ What's the good of that to me? It's too bad of you to be ill.
- ❖ Ill? I'm a bit old and you'll have to put up with it, that's all.

Now Mrs. Morel is diagnosed with cancer and he is yet young, he is 24. Mrs. Lawrence died of cancer, when she was 59 and Bert was 24.

'He felt as if his life was being destroyed, piece by piece, within him. Often the tears came suddenly. He ran into the station, the teardrops falling in the pavement. Often he could not go on with his work. The pen stopped writing. He sat staring, quite unconscious. And when he came round again he felt sick, and trembled in his limbs. It's almost as if he were agreeing to die also.'

Watching her suffer and die was impossible for him to bear. He wished that she would die.

'And I don't want her to eat and she knows it. When I ask her shall you have anything she's almost afraid to say Yes. I wish she'd die.'

And he acts. He gives her a large dose of morphia. But not large enough. She has grown used to it in months and her exhausted body cannot absorb the drug. It has suppressed her breathing, but not completely. So he witnesses the agony going on.

'She breathed with great hoarse breaths, like snoring, and there were long intervals in between. The sound so irregular, at such wide intervals, sounded through the house. The night was going, breath by breath. Heave – heave – heave; than a long pause – then ah – ah – h – h – h – h! as it came back. He knelt and put his face to hers and his arms around her. My love – my love – oh, my love, he whispered again and again. My love – oh, my love.'



The Lawrence family (left) and Lydia Lawrence (right).

Mr. Lawrence's writing seems to derive from his experience. He was nursing his mother. In his letter to Arthur McLeod (December 5) (3) he writes: 'We watched her breathing through the night. And the mornings come, snowy and stormy, and like this chill with early showers, and she is still here, and it is the old slow horror. I sit hour after hour in the bedroom for I am the chief nurse, watching her – and sometimes I turn out to look out from the window at the bright wet cabbages in the garden, and the horses in the field beyond, and the church tower small as a black dice on the hill at the back a long way off, and I find myself apostrophising the landscape »So that's what you mean, is it?« and under the mobile shadowy change of expression, like smiles, on the countryside, there seems to lie the cast of eternal suffering.' And then: 'I have just turned her over – she cannot move. »Bert« she said, very strange and childish and plaintive – half audible »It's very windy.« She had just been able to make out what the noise was. The cellars and chimneys are roaring, and the windows are banging. You have no idea I hope how many degrees of death there are. My mother's face – almost all but the cheeks – is grey, as grey as the sky.'

In his letter to Louie Burrows, dated December 6, 1910 (3): 'It is morning and she is still here. I look at my mother and think »Oh heaven, is this what life brings us to?«' And then 'My heart winces to the echo of my mother's pulse. There is only one drop of life to be squeezed from her, and that hangs trembling, so you'd think it must fall and be gone, but it never will – it will evaporate slowly.'

But we do not learn of Mrs. Lawrence's death. Either Mr. Lawrence is gentle and discrete ('My mother is a sight to see and be silent about for ever. '; letter to Mr. McLeod), or he was not there, as indicated in the book. It is evident from his writing that it was difficult for him; maybe he could not

endure it, or maybe she could not leave while he was close to her, holding her, and waited for a moment when he left the bedside.

From the diary of Ivan Mrak (6), visiting his wife Karla who was dying of tuberculosis at the Golnik hospital, August 14, 1957: 'Yesterday, before I dragged myself into the bus, I have stared into Karla's face! She did not turn away from me her burning sight. I am a living glass which mirrors her as nothing else could. And a day before yesterday; a look upon her nude body; as from an ancient thomb pulled out, in amber dressed skeleton.' August 15: 'She is dying, he said. As if I did not know for myself. Didn't I start to stupidly smile at her?'



Karla Bulovec, self portrait.

Karla died August 23.

The next diary writing is from 1959 (6): 'Haven't I been avoiding all doctors and at the same time greeting them politely? Haven't I been seeing someone daily at the bus, about whom I presumed that he was a doctor? I was greeting him eagerly. As I have sheltered myself into the opera after a dreary day, I have met the stranger at the stairway. I spoke to him. We have been talking one besides another. The stranger has remained for months one of the men of destiny floating like Chagall's angels over her here-being, there-being. The next day I did not go to Golnik, but only a day after. When I looked into her face shapen by pain, I could hardly remain standing on my feet. »A day without you is lost. Who knows how many days still?« That is what she said, as if she has been reading my woes. Whenever I have entered her little room she has with endless effort turned towards me smilingly.'

Then, no more is written on this.

But Paul is fascinated to see his Mother beautiful when dead.

'She laid like a maiden asleep, dreaming of her love. The mouth was a little open, as if wondering from the suffering, but her face was young, her brow clear and white as if life had never touched it.'

She was young again. Only the hair as if asched so beautifully from her temples was mixed with silver and the two simple plaits that lay on her shoulders were filigree of silver and brown. She would wake up. She would lift her eyelids. She was with him still. Looking at her, he felt he could never let her go. Then, he crouched on the floor, whispering to her: Mother, Mother.'

Libera me Domine de morte aeterna

About a month after the parting of my Mother, D.H. and myself were to play at the second mass for her. I was moved by the G.F. Handel's *Cara sposa* (7) and as I could not find the organ part on the internet, have transcribed it for flute and organ, based on the orchestral part. D.H. who is now a prominent student of organ, was not happy when he went into the part. There are many mistakes in it, he cried. What are they, was I curious. Why, parallel fifths, and crossing of the voices, for example, he responded. Our professors told us that harmony is God's law, it is based on physics. Just as breaking laws of gravity would cause a cathedral to collapse, it will be a disaster not to consider them in music, he argued. I respectfully disagreed. As much as I know, some tone combinations support each other for interference of waves. But nobody will die for parallel fifths, I replied. Then we tried to play and it did not sound quite right to me. Maybe the part was really bad.

But there he sat at the piano, where my Mother had played with me many times. *Amante cara, dove sei? Dei ritorna a piantì, a piantì miei.*

Then, suddenly, he stopped and asked me. Do you think that your Mother is somewhere just now? For herself, No! I answered. He paused. Now I am disappointed, he said, because you think just as I do; the church would find us apostates. Maybe, I replied, we should not take the texts literally. I think she can be alive in another way. I have come to some solution what the *Libera me* means. If Mother lives in me, then 'I am saved from eternal death' and at the same time 'eternal light should shine on her'. It means that we are living now and are therefore not dead forever. So I plead for the mercy and the strength, to be able to accept her. But, I think you cannot play *Cara sposa* if you don't like the part. It would be a blasphemy towards the one who created it and towards those who listen if you play without love.

He assured me that he will reconsider. When we were set at the chorus, he told me, that he was willing to play. For your Mother, he said.

After two more months we have played Faure's *Libera me*. I insisted to play the leading theme as I was thinking so much about it and as it is I that am seeking the solution. Just before we were to perform, there was the reading from the Bible. It was from Job's book:

"Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest with kings and rulers of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins, with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not hidden away in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day? There the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout. The small and the great are there, and the slaves are freed from their owners. Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave? Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? For sighing has become my daily food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."

I am not learned in Catholic liturgy and have heard this reading for the first time. So bitter, but true. Was it about me? To challenge my faith? To give me the answer? In die illa tremenda quando coeli movendi sunt et terra; in die illa tremenda, when one learns of one's own nothingness, 'to know the tremendous living flood which carries us away'?

Then we played. As I was listening to myself, the leading theme sounded desperate and angry and it pulled all the strength out of me. D.H. took it rather slow and it sucked the breath out of me to sustain the notes. As we went on, it had occurred to me that there is no point in going on and I wished to stop playing. Then, as for Mother's sake, I shouldn't, and the thought of her survived me through it. I did not perish to nothing. Albeit dead, Mother still is the pivot and the pole.

After the death of Mrs. Morel, Paul sees the necessity of accepting her.

- ❖ She's dead. What was it all for – her struggle?
- ❖ You are alive.
- ❖ She's not.
- ❖ She's – in you.
- ❖ You've got to keep alive for her sake.

'He would not admit that he wanted to die, to have done. He would not own that life had beaten him, or that death had beaten him. And his soul could not leave her wherever she was. Now she was gone abroad into the night and he was with her still. They were together. So much and himself infinitesimal at the core, a nothingness, and yet not nothing. Mother – he whispered – Mother. '

Summing up

Being driven by the 'tremendous living flood', Mr. Lawrence has put up the effort to fulfill the commitment to his Mother, as a man and as an artist, and he has left her the roots. By sincerity and gentleness in his creations, he bowed, so that her arrow could fly far and high. And after he has joined her wherever she is, it is many that carry the image on and are keeping them alive. This is the fruit of commitment and mercy on the progeny of Mrs. Lydia Lawrence and her Husband Arthur.

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