

# A Critical Study of Short Stories by D. H Lawrence

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## D.H Lawrence

*All I want is to answer my blood, direct, without fibbing intervention of mind, or moral, or what – not.*

-D. H Lawrence

Born in September 1885, David Herbert Lawrence was one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. Son of John Lawrence and Lydia, he spent his essential years in a coal mining town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. He belongs to an age which was almost overshadowed by the two world wars. There is an attempt to find new values, politics and psychology are indeed essential clues for the interpretation of life. Lawrence was concerned to find ways of describing the deepest experiences of his characters. He often drew his inspiration for his characters and stories from his working class and stories from his working class background and the tensions between his parents instilled in him, the emotional reserve providing him the raw material for his work. He was called 'Messiah of sex'. In 1929, Lawrence became seriously ill and died of tuberculosis on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1930.

*Lawrence's work is among those in which the men and women of then time have found their own restlessness most accurately mirrored.*

-Legouis and Cazamian

Lawrence is a writer of great imaginative force, whose best works has a spontaneous vitality. Much of Lawrence's writings unfurl his deep sense of English provincial life. He wrote in numerous genres – fiction, poetry, story, travelogue, criticism and

psychology. He was concerned with the basic problems of human existence, man's relationships with his fellows and with the universe beyond himself. Psychological exploration of human characters, man – woman relations and a passionate belief in the physical world of nature which a modern man has lost contact with are the central themes of many of his novels and short stories. He believed with a passion and was able to communicate this passion through his literary creations. Lawrence was concerned to find new ways of describing the deepest experiences of his characters. His characters are creatures of strong impulse and primitive emotions. He has depth of understanding and keenness of insight. He is successful in his analysis of the unconscious. His chief works are 'Sons and Lovers', 'The Rainbow', 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', 'Women in Love' in novels; 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', 'The Virgin', 'The Gypsy', 'The Fox', 'The Rocking Horse Winner' in short stories. He is a short story writer of considerable power. In many of his short stories, he sets the restricting life of middle – class convention in contrast with liberating forces outside. He possesses a remarkable gift for fine description and lyric emotion.

## **Lawrence's Short Stories**

### **Odour of Chrysanthemums**

*The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston with seven full wagons.*

The opening sentence of the story sets the tone as well as start with the theme of the story, which is an unusual story from other ones. This was written in 1909 and got published in 1911. The principle of composition here is simple contrast, the whole suffused. The plot is very simple yet thought provoking because of its climax.

Elizabeth Bates is the main character of the story. She has two young children and is pregnant with the third. She is waiting for her husband Walter, a coal miner, to come home. She thinks he has gone straight to the pub after work and she feels angry. It turns out to be completely different in the end where the dead body of Walter arrives and she's come to realise that they never really know each other. And this point is a recognition of the naive, inviolable, impregnable dignity of an ordinary workman laid out on the floor of a miner's cottage, his life wasted, the lives of his family blighted, his cooling body prepared for burial.

*She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame.*

### **The White Stocking**

*'I'm getting up Teddlinks,' said Mrs. Whiston, and she sprang out of bed briskly.* The opening sentence of this story marks the symbolic quality of Lawrence where each and every word is a symbol. One style of modernist writings is that of psychological symbolism, and 'The White Stocking' demonstrates this near perfect. Elsie and Teddlinks are in a marriage. On the eve of valentine, Elsie has received a white stocking and a pair of pearl ear rings from her previous suitor, Sam Adams. She is chirpy over it till Ted gets to know the giver. Elsie goads him by telling over her continuance with Adams, to the end he swells in rage and hits her. Elsie realises her mistakes, both cuddle each other at the end and are in harmony. The story is simple enough and requires little comment. It is the power to communicate to the reader those secret, mysterious impulses that exist between men and women which is the ultimate power of the story. In the Lawrence code of beliefs, there must always be this conflict between opposites; they complement each other in a sense are in control of each other. Though Elsie's husband is her master, he cannot exist without her.

*'My love - my little love -', he cried, in anguish of spirit, holding her in his arms.*

### **The Fox**

*The two girls were usually known by their surnames, Banford and March. They had taken the farm together, intending to work it all by themselves.*

This opening sentence of this technical short story 'The Fox' marks the theme and mood of symbolism. The two girls Ellen March and Jill Banford are trying their level best to make a success of their poultry farm. And, they are not succeeding, to start with, there is something wrong with the birds who refuse to lay eggs. Then comes the fox. It takes away some of the birds. The girls are in despair. Whilst they are busy in their problems, a young soldier appears. The farm has been reasonably owned by his grandfather. He breaks up the harmonious relationship present between the two girl friends and imposes his will upon March. Banford objects vehemently and the result is

that the soldier contrives to bring about her death . The story ends with March and soldier planning to go to Canada . The changes brought about her ( March ) psychologically by the stress of the circumstances , is the most important thing in the story . The author concludes by observing that at long last March has been able to fulfil her destiny that of being a real and complete woman , but is not at peace with herself .

*And her eyelids dropped with the slow motion , sleep weighing them unconscious . But she pulled them open again to say “Yes , I may I can’t tell I can’t tell what it be like over there.*

## **Marriage – Conventional and Lawrentian**

### **Conventional Marriage**

Conventional is what is generally expected by people based on what is common , at a specific time , in a specific culture . Marriage , also called matrimony or wedlock is a culturally recognised union between people , called spouses . The definition of marriage varies around the world not only between cultures and between religions but also throughout the history of any given culture and religion , evolving to both expand and constrict in who and what is encompassed . It is principally an institution , in which interpersonal relationships usually sexual , are acknowledged or sanctioned. In ‘The History of Human Marriage ( 1891 ) , Edward Westermarck defined marriage as “A more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after birth of the offspring.” If taken conventionally , it is the relation between two opposite sexes recognised by custom or law , in which there are rights of sexual access , legitimacy of offspring , commitment to the relationship and dominance of male over female . In Christianity , Apostle Paul quoted from both Genesis 1 and 2 that God had created humanity as male and female and that in marriage “The two become one flesh”. Then he added , “So they are no longer two , but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together , let no one separate.”

When defined broadly , marriage is considered a cultural universal . Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “Men and women of full age , without any limitation due to race , nationality , religion , have the right to marry and to found a family.”

## Lawrentian Marriage

*Great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman . The relation between man and woman , woman and woman , parent and child will always be subsidiary . It is the relation itself which is the quick and the central clue to human life.*

Lawrence

Lawrence's environment as a child and as a young man played an important part in conditioning the novelist of the future . The home was torn by parental conflict , and as a result Lawrence came to consider the relationship between a man and woman as a form of conflict and not a natural expression of harmony . Lawrence was not a social reformer . His main interest was always human relationships , the problem of reconciling full self-realisation with true love of another . Subject-matter itself was anti-materialistic , increasingly outspoken in love and sex. He said about history that it is made the registered in the practices of everyday personal life . Even in sexual relationship , in the most private and intimate domain of the personal historical changes make their mark . His collected works represent and are extended reflection upon the dehumanizing effects on modernity and industrialisation . The question of which part of partner should dominate in marriage ( arising directly out of his own stormy yet committed relationship with his wife ) is much in his mind . He hated the conventions which place taboos on certain words . In all matters and particularly when dealing with sex , he speaks with the utmost frankness and fearlessness .

*It is a pity that sex is such an ugly little word . An ugly word and really almost incomprehensible . What is sex , after all ? The more we think about it , the less we know.*

He is concerned about the physical part of sex , but he is deeply conscious of their religious nature . His own appeal is to the heart rather than head . For Lawrence , love was concerned of *in terms* suggesting chemical affinities in moral , sentimental – *social terms* .

In his view , the conflict between man and woman arises from The civilised woman's having become the desperate antagonist of man , drawing from him his greatest possession , his method or his masculinity and feminizing him and bringing him under the control of her will.

*Love is the happiness of the world . But happiness is not the whole of fulfilment . Love is a coming together . But there can be no coming together without going asunder. If people marry , they must live together as affectionate humans , who may be commonplace with each other without feeling awkward not as two souls .*

## **Redefining Marriage in the Short Stories of Lawrence**

*She knew she had never seen him, he had never seen her. they had met in dark ,and fought in dark, not knowing whom they met nor whom they fought.*

### **Odour of Chrysanthemums**

The chief reason behind the destroyal of marriage was the repercussions of Industrialisation. It bore the confusion in minds of the couple who conflicted between the ideals of marriage and realism of the time. They were denied ideal love, support and joint salvation in compliance with the ethics of marriage. On other side, sexual gratification is reduced to accidental procreation. It is just infused in the vein of the story that female was at more at loss: personal , economic and social security in all. Husband 's after-death now served financial crisis along with personal and familial vulnerability. Yet the purpose of death has good hands in the success of marriage post-death in the final realisation of mutual pathos.

*The fact was too deadly. There had been nothing between them yet they had come together , exchanging their nakedness repeatedly....*

We have the marriage between Teddy and Elsie as foil to the Bates'. Published six years after,we see a shift in background from semi-rural to urban economy wherein Elsie stands the New Woman . Whiston couple share equality and

recognition based match. Both are ay complete knowledge of self and their partner. Narrative is both from male and female perception of union rather than single speech of Elisabeth. Hence its character portrayal rather than the psychological or social forces speaking in the story before. Elsie is flirty, charming wife deeply adored by Ted, who is strong male portrayal of a reserved and conscientious man.

*He was the permanent basis from which she took These Giddy little flights into nowhere. At night, like chickens and curses, she would come home to him, to Roost.*

### The White Stockings

He restores Elsie to a stable genuine bond, through his act of violence which was more of a friendly reproach than male sadism against woman in crude sense. The final integrity of the duo is a proof to it. Hitting on Bates' core conflict, that is absence of love, Whiston couple present iconic compliance with authorial marriage, mutual understanding, trust and care. Besides, her flights to other man apart from fickle femalia also alludes the interpersonal quantam Elsie missed in the company of reserved Ted. Male- female bipolarity show interdependence rather than two impenetrable worlds at conflict. Union of women is similar to that of mutual relation between Whistons'. Their bond tightened due to their self-dependency in view of the new philosophy of personal happiness. But the lurking fact behind their together was war-borne shortage of men add the fear of their loss. Such were the causes behind the rise of women taking up exchanged gender roles. However idealistic the bond would be Lesbianism was a hypocrisy then, so neither had religious or social recognition nor legal protection. The end met in disaster for March and Banford. Though male –ego centricism possess the female, yet its ravaged, violated, broken and lost.

### **Present Day Relevance**

Marriage is the great puzzle of our day. It is our sphinx-riddle. Solve it or be torn to bits, is the decree.

The foundation of relation rests upon man's biological and psycho-social needs. Relation, as in family or between a man-woman is the first agency of

association and socialization and foremost agency in terms of impact, it bears on individuals. Marriage is one of the basic institutions of social life. A normative structure has developed around this association as conventionally defined, is a voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all other.” The attached norms and practices reflect the change in general, social, cultural and psychological affecting the marital conditions prevailing the world. D.H. Lawrence, who had been philosophically ruminating on these intellectual issues going on, finds an ample substantiation in his work. Lawrence was acutely conscious of and concentrated on man-woman relationship. He was aware of numerous hurdles that hamper the normal relation and so, he at certain turnings suggested a plane beyond the social.’He used metaphors of bird, fox, rabbit, Chrysanthemums, rainbow, stars and so on to describe characteristics and relationships. His deep insight and interest on the subject is relevant in the modern times as well. His three short stories namely, *The Odour of Chrysanthemums*, *The White Stocking* and *The Fox* show his great contribution on the exploration of the human mind and the modes in which people think and behave by literally leaving aside all the constraints that were imposed on them by various social movements.

***“From the mechanical monster terrifying the catering colt at the beginning, to the un weeping woman at the end, we may think that this is just a tale. But hours after the story is finished, the images are still with the reader.”***

**Helen Croom**

An opposition between nature and society creates the central juxtaposing theme of D.H. Lawrence's *The Odour of Chrysanthemums*. A versification of this theme is evident in Elizabeth's recognition of the absolute differences between her world and the world of her now dead husband, based on her perceptions. Elizabeth is confronted with the guilty and shocking reality that she only knew the body of Walter, her husband, but never gained knowledge of his true existence; his soul.

*The Odour of Chrysanthemums* functions as the depiction of human relations and the effect on them of class, gender, industrialisation as portrayed by the third person, limited omniscient narrator. Lawrence constructs separation,



especially within human relationships by the use of Chrysanthemums well as descriptive, symbolic imagery, especially nature and the surroundings encompassing the characters. The initial mention of the "... dishevelled pink Chrysanthemums" is coupled with a dreary introductory diction of a "small", "stumbling", "locomotive engine...thumping heavily past..." show a changing factor, and a stationary hedge, signifying a more constant, independent variable is of a great significance when taken into account in terms of current and future situation.

*"The horror of the distance between them was almost too much for her-it was so infinite a gap she must look across."*

Chrysanthemums, as well as light and darkness, are used throughout the story symbols representing life and death, this lending support to the theme. In the present day scenario, it holds relevance as it displays a broken marriage and family often found more real than fiction. This story mirrors its title, although the Odour is not of flowers, but of the "utter separateness" of life.

This paper attempts to find the redefinition of marriage as proposed by Lawrence in his short stories. Lawrence was creating in an age where there were new attempts for learning. Much influenced by his personal life and family background experiences, he created altogether a different persona of literature. In his prescribed texts, there he tried to attempt the psychological as well as spiritual part of marriage which is ahead than the concept of conventional marriage. In his 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', he showed that marriage is not mere a matter of having sex in the dark and bearing children afterwards. Marriage is much about the union of two souls as it is about the license of having sex. In 'The White Stocking', he goes demonstrating that marriage is irrespective of class differences and seeking materialistic things. If two persons are in nuptial knot, they must not be moved by the things outside but remain committed by the feelings inside. In 'The Fox', he is at his best in using symbol art in literature. There are two girls who are at peace living with each other until a boy arrives in their nest to disturb them. One of them is killed

and the remaining one went with the boy thinking of reunion , but is as restless as she never had been. It is symbolically yet beautifully shown here that marriage is not about the union of ‘two opposite sexes’ but is the union of ‘two connecting souls’, irrespective of biological sex or constructed gender. The present world has become more diverse and accepting towards different ideas of marriage , where there are people having not only union irrespective of their sexes but also living their life peacefully and happily.

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