
The Dreaming Woman In Sons And Lovers: A Study of Miriam's Character

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Abstract

Sons and Lovers is a remarkable novel written by D.H. Lawrence. This novel indicates Lawrence's personal feelings and concerns during his youthful years. That is why Miriam has been characterized as a 'dreaming woman'. The complex and often contradictory elements which made up this concept of New Woman is a persistent theme in Lawrence's early work in his portrayal of the 'dreaming woman'. These women are emancipated, educated and intelligent; they are stimulating companions and are often crucial in the spiritual development of the men with whom they are stimulating companions and are often crucial in the spiritual development of the men with whom they are involved; but they cannot, or will not satisfy these men's sexual desires. In other aspects of lives of Lawrence's 'dreaming woman', 'spirituality' is potentially radical and liberating; but with sexuality it coincides, in effect if not in cause, with the prevailing social conventions.

Keywords : Spirituality, Mutual Fascination, Individual Identity, Sacrifice, Masculinity.

In *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence portrays Miriam as a dreaming woman. He attempts to make an objective assessment of the weakness and the failure of the ‘spiritual women’ as all ‘dreaming women’ tend to become. The initial descriptions of Miriam establish her affinity with the Pre Raphaelite type, a witch, a priestess or a prophetess. At first we are shown that Miriam perceives herself in this way in order to escape from the drudgery of her day-to-day life: ‘She herself was something of a princess turned into a swine girl, in her own imagination’. Then we learn that this is also Paul’s perception of her, so that between them they acquiesce in the creation of a shared myth about Miriam’s image.

Miriam seemed as in some dreamy tale, a maiden in bondage, her spirit dreaming in a land far away and magical. And her discoloured, old blue frock and her discoloured, old

blue frock and her broken boots seemed only like the romantic rags of King Cophetua’s beegar-maid.

‘If you put red berries in your hair’, asks Paul, ‘Why would you look like some witch or priestess, and never like a reveler?’ By such remarks Miriam is tacitly established as a ‘spiritual woman’, until eventually Paul discovers that he doesn’t like what he has created.

The crucial issue of the novel is the nature of the sexual failure between the hero and a ‘dreaming woman’. Miriam relationship with Paul is a characteristic illustration of the relationship based on love in the head, which Lawrence always despised. The relationship between the two begins in a very subtle manner. Their mutual fascination is due to similar accomplishments in both of them. This was a material factor, other than their intuitive desire

for each other on which their love rested. Miriam, a sensitive and over refined girl, is drawn to Paul for his interests in painting, poetry, algebra and French. They continue to see each other and often go out for walk to the sights of nature in their mental and emotional intimacy. Thus gradually they become fond of each other. Miriam falls in love Paul's mental accomplishments, not with Paul.

The relationship itself is not rooted in the spontaneity which Lawrence advocates so much. The dominant mood of their whole relationship remains that of tension because they try to suppress their natural sex instincts and sublimate them into the fine stream of thought and abstractions. 'The fact that he might want her as man wants a woman had in him (i.e. in Paul) been suppressed into a shame'. The sexual tension between them is intimated early in the novel that hints at her future sexual problem. In the first

scene, she is afraid to let a hen peck at her hands and take grains from there in spite of Paul's assurance that 'it doesn't hurt a bit; it only just nips rather nicely'. In the second, she is reluctant to go high on a swing although she has seen Paul swinging 'like a bird that swings for joy of movement'. Both the scenes suggest that 'she is unable to lose herself in any simple pleasurable occasion, her body tense and lifeless, her abnormal spiritual intensity is coupled with a genuine fear of things physical'. "She finds difficulty in assimilating sensuous experience".

The difference of temperament is fundamental, and much of difficulty and conflict in their relationship is caused by this deep dissimilarity. Miriam being spiritual in temperament would have him as, 'if he were jolly and, as she put it, flippant, she waited till he come back to her, till the change had taken place in him again, and he was wrestling

with his own soul, frowning passionate in this passion for understanding her soul lay close to his; she had him all to herself. But he must be made abstract first’.

In Miriam, Lawrence is presenting the difficulties of sound man-woman relationships in the absence of healthy sexuality. Miriam embodies the negative virtues of spirituality which obstruct not only proper human relationship but paralyze normal responses and attitudes too. She stands for perverted intellectuality. Ambivalence in Paul’s behavior towards Miriam is because instinctively he wants physical union with her, but owing to the impact of her spirituality on him he feels impotent against the hold of purity. He becomes apprehensive of the loss of his identity and starts striving to escape Miriam’s suffocating religiosity. “I am so damned spiritual with ‘you’ always”: he cries. She asks him why he cannot be otherwise to

which he replies: “You make me so spiritual”. Paul, whose mother is his best love looking for a “baptism of fire in passion”, and the girl he is in love with is too spiritually absorbing to allow him any warm physical contact, not to speak of the fulfillment in flesh. Rather he feels the stifling and crippling impact of her too much spirituality on himself. He feels that Miriam wants the soul out of his body, and not him. All his strength and energy she draws into herself through some channel which unites them, she does not want to meet him, so that there were two of them, man and woman together. She wants to draw all of him into her. Thus Miriam wants to have a complete hold over Paul which he resists.

It is Mrs. Morel who first notices that Miriam is pulling heart of Paul. Gradually it becomes clear that it is this “absorption” by Miriam on the one hand and Mrs. Morel’s desperate efforts to retain Paul’s

consciousness. Mrs. Morel can never forget that it was the same kind of split killed her eldest son William. But when she notices Paul's helplessness in his fascination for Miriam, she feels all the more sad and apprehensive about Paul's future, because she cannot give him what he expects from Miriam. Paul realizes that Miriam's body is not "flexible and living"; still he is fascinated by her, because in contact with her he gains insight. Mrs. Morel finds the growing attachment of Paul with Miriam ominous and she keeps crying in her heart.

Later in the novel, Clara's mother, Mrs. Redford's observations on Miriam's domineering and too absorbing nature also resembles Mrs. Morel's. Mrs. Redford says: She will never be satisfied till she's got wings and can fly over everybody's head, she won't'. Since Miriam is very much aware of the pulls and pressures exerted by Mrs. Morel on Paul, she

does not believe she ever will have him, and she sees tragedy, sorrow and sacrifice ahead. So, she gets ready for sacrifice and, the sacrifice and, the same time her attitude towards Paul grows more and more possessive. On the other hand Paul, because of being repeatedly warned by his mother against Miriam's "dreadful all comprehensiveness" get on guard to defend his integrity of self and there begins the characteristic Lawrence a conflict between Paul and Miriam for the preservation of their individual identity". He flights against her persistently because of her desire to 'absorb' him, to have all his soul, which he cannot give her. In reaction to Miriam's possessive attitude that, once finding her crouching, slipping the yellow bursts flowers with fervid kisses, he bursts out irritably, scolding out of it. You absorb as if you must fill yourself up with love, because you've got a shortage some here. Miriam is bestowed with keen insight

and understanding. She can easily guess that such an attitude of Paul is surely because of his mother's interference in their affair. The mother, Miriam knows, is always on the alert not to let her sons be taken away by Miriam or other girls. Torn between the love for his mother and the need for finding fulfillment in the love for another woman, Paul is aware of his situation. He tells Miriam:

'I can only give friendship- it's all I am capable of – it's a flaw in my make-up. The thing over balance to one side- I hate a toppling balance. Let us have done'.

Miriam's Overwhelming spirituality frets Paul to the bottom of his soul by the time he is twenty three. He feels the irresistible pressure of sexual urge and wishes to escape the spiritual stronghold of Miriam. But he finds himself in a very complex situation. He cannot leave Miriam, because she is his conscience and

because she holds the best of him, which is three- quarters. However, the inherent masculinity in Paul, which has remained suppressed so far owing to his early impressions and influences of Miriam, bursts out under the sensual influence of Clara and he decides to break off with Miriam. He writes a valedictory letter to her:

See, you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun in all your relations nobody enters. I do not talk to you through the senses – rather through the spirit. That is why we cannot love in the common sense if people marry, they must live together as affectionate humans, who may be common place with each other without feeling awkward- not as two souls.

Lawrence is often labeled as a woman-baiter. He is accused of

cutting short his women characters when they become some kind of a challenge to male ego. Even in Sons and Lovers. Miriam's relationship with Paul gives the impression that the failure of the relationship is predominantly Miriam's fault, despite allusions to Paul's, in his youthful inexperience is unable to rouse it in her". However, there is more involved than simply excessive 'spirituality' on Miriam's part. Like Ellis in Neutral Ground, Miriam resists the yielding of identity that passion seems to demand. When Paul's ego receives a terrific blow from the realization that Miriam has been developing apart (and away) from him, and that he has not been hero as he imagined. 'She had despised him when he thought she worshipped him. All these years she had treated him as if he were a hero, and thought of him secretly as an infant, a foolish child. Miriam, has struggled to resist Paul's domination over her, and succeeded :

She knew she felt in a sort of bondage to him, which she hated because she could not control moment it grew too strong for her. And, deep down she had hated him because loved and he dominated her. She had resisted his domination. She had fought to keep herself free of him in the last issue. And she was free of him, even more than he of her.

Running as a minor strand through the novel is Miriam's desire for independence, towards which Paul displays marked lack of interest. In the last Chapter she reveals to him that she is to become a teacher, but Paul is 'rather disappointed' and seeks to play down her achievement: 'You'll find earning your own living isn't everything'. These passage point up the inadequacy of the romantic, Pre-Raphaelite image which Paul

assigns to Miriam, and such an interpretation is supported both by Jessie Chambers account in D.H. Lawrence : A Personal Record and by a couple of short stories e.g. ‘A Modern Love’ and ‘The Shades of Spring’.

Now concluding the discussion it can be said that Miriam’s character serves to highlight many aspects of Lawrence’s art of characterization. It serves as an indicator of Paul’s mind, its immaturity and its narcissism on the one hand and on the other it reveals the complexity in Lawrence’s art of portraying women and the dichotomy that marks this art. His woman characters are manipulated by him to an extent but they tend to slip away from his control and acquire an independent identity of their own. Miriam has been one such character identified as a dreaming woman in *Sons and Lovers*.

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