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THE SYMBOLIC PRESENCE OF THE MOTHER IN *THE HORSE-DEALER'S DAUGHTER* BY D. H. LAWRENCE

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This paper focuses on David H. Lawrence's short story *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter*, providing an exploration of the way in which the symbolic presence of the mother influences the main character's life. To explore the topic, my study employs a hermeneutic interpretive method, drawing on Freud's psychoanalysis in *Family Romances* and Heidegger's existential philosophy in *Being and Time*. My purpose is not to propose a complete analysis of the work. Rather, my text draws on specific concepts in order to support my own line of thought.

Key words: D. H. Lawrence, Mabel Pervin, mother, symbol, death, love, life

The 20th century began with hope and full of new ideas, which spread in all spheres of social life: inter-personal relations, culture, literature, arts, psychology and philosophy. New order was established and the radical approach of the Modernist era showed people's rebellious attitude towards the old values, the corruption of society, the immorality and false apprehension of life. People's struggle for development and the rejection of the previous models marked the opening of the new epoch. Its major characteristics were urbanization and industrialization – processes which showed society's new way of perceiving the world. Artists experimented with numerous styles and techniques, and trends, e.g. Expressionism, Cubism, Dadaism, etc. They wanted to keep pace with all the artistic and technologic advances in the world. The wars and other problems of the era, such as disillusionment and the crisis of identity, led to an upheaval of the human spirit, revealing a strong desire for progress and change. Literature presented the individual with both their good sides and flaws of character. Their inward world was of utmost significance. The research paper *The Impact of The Modernist Movement on English*

Literature by Doctor Sujatha presents in detail the aim and significance of the changes which took place and the fact that society (and writers) wanted to escape from the Victorian and Romantic norms:

> Modernism brought itself as the idea of critiquing earlier literary traditions by making understandings in terms of subjectivity, individualized consciousness, and fragmented reality pointing toward a more authentic picture of human experience. […] Writers of the time would not go back to the traditions of the past, especially the endless narrative of optimism and idealism projected by the Victorian and Romantic writers, but dared into the new realms of innovation, fragmentation, and experimentation in form and content. Modernism, in fact, aimed at decoding the intricacies of human life and held up a rather stark and ruthless mirror to the wide range of alienation, disillusionment, and disintegration of values that characterize the wonder of the modern world.
>
> (Sujatha 2025: 414 – 415)

Therefore, the period appears to be thought-provoking and conflicting, and this could be rendered to all the factors and occurrences which were taking place.

The Modernist period[1] is thought to have emerged at the very end of the 19th century, gained its momentum in the early 20th century and lasted roughly till the mid-20th century. Despite the difficulties which Britain had to face at the end of the 1920s, people managed to sustain their ambitions. Many authors reflected this desire in their literary pieces. As Allegretti proposes, Modernism is "[…] a difficult term to define, but at its most basic, it was [a] […] **movement in literature and art that sought to break away from ordinary social values, commercialism, and the "genteel" literary tradition** that preceded it [emphasis added]". Therefore, writers and artists presented life as it should be and the way they saw it, challenging certain old literary conventions, and quite often the main characters of the pieces were working class people, because they comprised the greater part of society. Novelists and poets allowed themselves to use symbols, feelings, and depictions of the inner life of their characters. Fiction's focus shifted from the man in his social surroundings to man as an individual. Very often the juxtaposition between people of different social class and their inter-personal relations is the central issue of numerous literary works from the period. Symbolism is vital, because

[1] For further explanation about the Modernist period, see Raymond Williams' work *When Was Modernism?* (1987). Although he proposes approximate temporal boundaries for Modernism, he resists strict periodization as he finds that the period is bound to specific historical contexts.

symbols allow and even invite the readers to participate intellectually in the texts. What is more they reflect people's struggles and convey meanings which undoubtedly could be said directly, but through symbols a shared culture which presents the era is created.

Some of the authors who use symbols in their pieces are T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, etc. Many of the works are predominated by pessimistic mood and alienation from society. Estrangement from the others and the world, and setting the self as an outcast is the theme in Lawrence's short story *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter* (the main topic of the present text), which examines Mabel Pervin's struggles to reconnect with life. The author David Lawrence is one of the most prominent figures of English Modernism. His life, marked by the vicissitudes of fortune, shaped the literary figure we know today. He explores the motifs behind his characters' behavior. Their psychological being[2] is of primary significance, as it is what drives them towards certain actions: "The notion of the invention of concepts sits well with Lawrence's view that only with the help of philosophy would the novel acquire the 'courage' to tackle new propositions whilst avoiding the pitfalls of abstraction" (Wallace 2020: 136 – 137). These few lines outline the author's writing, claiming that philosophy and psychology are essential for him and his writing. In addition, Lawrence explores human nature through frank discussion of (im)morality, sex, class belonging, etc. Often Life and Death emerge as one inseparable whole. His story clearly presents this whole through the character of Mabel Pervin and her conflicted being.

Lawrence's narrative style, being marked by deep exploration of his characters' inner life and the recurring tension between death and life, provide the basis for approaching Lawrence's text. Symbols play a leading role in the text. They are connected with each other; they make the reader anticipate certain actions of the plot and guide the interpretation of the characters' psychological unfolding. Later in the paper, I propose a brief commentary on the major symbols in the story: the selling of the horses, the house, the water (river), the naked body (the change of the soaked clothes), the fire, Dr. Fergusson and of course the symbolism of the missing mother.

[2] For further discussion how Lawrence implies psychological and philosophical concepts into his fiction see *Unclamping "Philosophy"* in D. H. Lawrence by Jeff Wallace. My aim here is to draw a connection between Lawrence's exploration of being and his engagement with philosophy, as I consider these two concepts intertwined. Wallace's quotation proposed above explains the idea that the author incorporates philosophical reflections into his works, especially in terms of psychological experience, allowing his works to resonate with modernist experimentation.

The image of the mother figure in David Lawrence's literary pieces varies in presentation, development, and influence upon others.

The Horse-Dealer's Daughter's plotline follows the life of Mabel Pervin, whose mother died; her father remarried, got bankrupt and eventually also died, leaving his five children orphans and in a huge debt. The narrator presents their situation vividly, using words which make the reader feel the frightening and even disastrous life they are forced to live: "They were all frightened at the collapse of their lives, and the sense of disaster in which they were involved left them no inner freedom" (Lawrence 1922: 226). The tragedy was enormous, and it left no ground for bright future to the four people. They had to sell the horses and to find their way in life. Symbolically, the selling of the animals means the disintegration of the family. The horse could be connected with freedom, energy and life, and the act of parting with them signifies the loss of hope for the future. This family disruption is evident in Mabel's brothers' behavior towards her. The three men disregard her by calling her a "bull-dog" (Lawrence 1922: 225) and not showing any respect for her at all. Mabel is offered to either live with another sibling of theirs, called Lucy, or to train for a nurse, but she provides no answer. The fact that the girl is marginalized by her brothers before the death of their parents transforms her into an outcast, who has to find a way to live on her own. Although the text does not state that marginalization clearly, it is implied that it does not emerge suddenly after the parents' death. Mabel's position in the family has always been gendered and subordinate. She has always been the one keeping the household functioning. In the opening of the story, the brothers dismiss Mabel and do not show any emotional connection with her. Her brother's disinterested and even disdainful attitude shows that she has always been seen as an encumbrance: "Without listening for an answer, he turned aside, worked a grain of tobacco to the tip of his tongue, and spat it out" (Lawrence 1922: 225). This quotation suggests that the daughter is perceived as part of the domestic life and not as an independent human being. The family has always relied on her labor, and now that it is time for important decisions (i.e. what path in life each of them would take), the brothers try to decide her future themselves. In this period women were regarded as subordinate to men and their choices were limited[3]. Everyday

[3] For further information on the understanding that women were considered subordinate to men, see Chapter Marriage "Part III: The Lot of a Woman Under the Rule of Man" in Mona Caird's book *The Morality of Marriage, and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman*. In this part the author suggests that this perception has its roots in early social structures.

life in Modernist Britain proves this: women were excluded from public and political discourse (until 1918 most British women were denied the right to vote) and those who tried to express their opinion and views publicly, were labeled immoral. What is more, they were expected to marry and to take care of their families. Mona Caird examines the relations between a man and a woman, and openly speaks about marriage. *Part IV: A Moral Renaissance* from Chapter *Marriage* in her book "The Morality of Marriage, and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman" depicts the fate and life of girls if and if not they get married:

> We cannot expect [...] every woman to be a dauntless heroine, and to choose a hard and thorny path [...] when the pressure of public opinion urges strongly in that direction. A few braver natures will resist [...] They [...] [the people] blame the unfortunate girls whose horizon is as limited as their opportunities [...] whose very right and wrong, just and unjust, are chosen for them. [...] This idea that the wife should subordinate her dominant interests is perhaps one of the most frequent causes of coulourless and monotonous homes. [...] On the other hand, if a woman remains single, her lot, under present social conditions, is often a very sad one.
>
> (Caird 1897: 100 – 102)

Although the episode from Lawrence's story illustrated above does not comment on a marital relation, it could be connected with Caird's viewpoint as it suggests that women were thought inferior to men and dependent on them. Later in the current paper I examine the theory of social determinism as it was influential for people's life.

There is one paragraph which describes both the decline of the family's social status and Mabel's understanding of it:

> For months, Mabel had been servantless in the big house, keeping the home together in penury for her ineffectual brothers. She had kept house for ten years. But previously, it was with unstinted means. Then, however brutal and coarse everything was, the sense of money had kept her proud, confident. The men might be foul-mouthed […] But so long as there was money, the girl felt herself established, and brutally proud, reserved. […] She would follow her own way just the same. She would always hold the keys of her own situation. […] Why should she answer anybody? It was enough that this was the end, and there was no way out. She need not pass any more darkly along the main street of the small town, avoiding every eye. She need not demean herself any more, going into the shops and buying the cheapest food.
>
> (Lawrence 1922: 233 – 234)

That is to say that Mabel had some pride due to their social status, but after the family's deterioration, she becomes more and more sullen. The symbol of the house is significant because it illustrates the Pervins: the family lived in it when they were all together and they were happy but after the tragic events of the bankruptcy and the two deaths of the parents, the house is no longer a cozy and warm place, but depicts social decline, family disintegration and emotional confinement. It could be said that this house appears as a cage for Mabel, because of the degradation of her social status. It is possible that currently the brothers are worried about the woman's positioning in life after the tragic events, but because of their behavior towards her, she mistrusts them:

> Well, what in the name of fortune are you going to do? Say what you mean to do," cried Fred Henry, with futile intensity. But she only averted her head, and continued her work. She folded the white table-cloth, and put on the chenille cloth.
>
> (Lawrence 1922: 232)

Mabel feels socially displaced. The trauma she undergoes leads to a crisis of self-worth. She is in a depressive state. [4]In his evaluation, *Masterpieces of British Modernism* (2006), Miller explains:

> […] Themes commonly found in Modernist literature feature an exploration of the **consciousness of the individual**. The Modernists believed that truth could no longer be found in the organization of family and society based on the authority of the father or a select male few. As a result, these writers explored the psychological interior of characters struggling to make sense of the **disrupted world** around them. From interiority, one moves logically to the theme of the **alienated** individual so commonly found in Modernist literature [emphasis added].
>
> (Miller 2006: 6)

Here, the word of utmost significance is "alienated". It perfectly relates to Mabel's humble persona. Even the doctor – Jack Ferguson (who later becomes her savior) in the beginning of the story seems as if unaware of her presence in the room:

> At this point Mabel rose from the table, and they all seemed to become aware of her existence. She began putting the dishes together. The young doctor looked at her, but did not address her. He had not greeted her. She went out of the room with the tray, her face impassive and unchanged.
>
> (Lawrence 1922: 230 – 231)

[4] For further explanation on the state of depression, following a beloved person's loss, see *Mourning and Melancholia* by Sigmund Freud (1917).

This episode illustrates the position assigned to women in the society of the period, as pre-outlined and reinforced by the male figures [5]– Mabel is confined to housework and the silent care of the family. The narrative invites the reader to speculate about the exact inner motifs which made Miss Pervin so somber and withdrawn. On the one hand, her condition might be attributed to her brothers' neglectful behavior, and the family's financial and social decline, but on the other hand there are the deaths of the parents. First, her mother passes away, and it appears as the central event of the story, which plays a decisive role in shaping her psychological state. Her father marries a second time but later when he dies, what remains is a huge debt. Mabel loses her sense of security within the family; she stops having associates and becomes isolated. She is bereft of hope and emotional anchors, which intensifies her depressive condition. The following quotation illustrates life before and after the family's deterioration:

> But the stables were empty. Joseph Pervin, the father of the family, had been a man of no education, who had become a fairly large horse dealer. The stables had been full of horses, there was a great turmoil and come-and-go of horses and of dealers and grooms. Then the kitchen was full of servants. But of late things had declined. The old man had married a second time, to retrieve his fortunes. Now he was dead and everything was gone to the dogs, there was nothing but debt and threatening.
>
> (Lawrence 1922: 233)

The presence of death foreshadows the psychological crisis. Although Mabel is presented as a proud lady, she stops being social. The two pillars of the home are gone for good. There is no one to unite the family. The death of a parent as a tragic event in one's life marks psychological changes in the characters' being. We may distinguish certain Freudian ideas here: in his *Family Romances* Freud states that the parents are the two figures of utmost significance in one's life: "For a small child his parents are at first the only authority and the source of all belief. The child's most intense and most momentous wish during these early years is to be like his parents (that is, the parent of his own sex) and to be big like his father and mother" (Freud 1959: 237). In our case, it appears that Mabel has taken the mother's role of managing the household, but after her

[5] For further understanding on gender roles, see Marva Milo's *The Freewoman: Feminism, Dialogism and Women's Education*, where she analyses the periodical of the same name, criticizing conventional gender roles and the marginalization of women (both by society and by men). The word 'feminist' appears for the first time in it and the Suffragettes' movement is outlined. The articles in the periodical evoked debates and challenged social norms.

father's death, the family was disrupted and the role was taken from her. Traditionally a mother is the person who gives the family emotional security. While she is never directly depicted in the narrative, it is implied that before her death she was the figure who held the family together. The mother symbolizes unconditional love and attachment, energy and life. After the tragic loss, the household rapidly disintegrates: the brothers are busy with their own affairs, the father marries again, and Mabel is left alone in this male-dominated world. She is fragile and vulnerable and experiences a psychic void which later culminates in her attempt to commit suicide. William James in his *Principles of Psychology Volume I* (2007) ("The Consciousness of Self") also proposes a view on the parent-child bond: "[…] our immediate family is a part of ourselves. Our father and mother, our wife and babes, are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. When they die, a part of our very selves is gone" (1890: 292 – 293). Through this quotation he illustrates the idea that the relation mentioned is a fundamental component of one's self. In Lawrence's short story misbehavior and disrespect start ruling people's relations: "It is evident that the Pervin brothers tend to disregard women in general. They treat women as if they are inferior to men and demonstrate this through their language and actions" (Jacobs 2015). In early 20th century Britain, society pre-outlined women's life. The Pervin brothers are an example of a social system which placed women as subservient to the male authority; women were given no social and personal freedom. The quotation above mentioned not only illustrates the Pervin brothers' attitude towards women, but also implies one significant idea, i.e. the idea of **social determinism**[6], which is characteristic of Modernism [emphasis added]. This is the belief that an individual's identity, choices, behavior, etc. are determined – or constrained, by society, rather than by free will. Social expectations are powerful and oppressive. The individuals are trapped by social position or decline, they do not have much social mobility; women are constrained by people's expectations of tackling domestic chores, and in many of the cases are physically and emotionally dependent on men. Due to these

[6] For better understanding of the concept of determinism see Vladimir Marko's article *Determinisms* (2016), in which he defines a few types, pointing out the key features of all of them. Social determinism is the focus of *The Problem of Determinism: A Sociological Solution* by Peter Razzell, where the author proposes the term *moral self* which addresses the social norms and expectation which a character faces and the term *free will*, which is guided (but according to the author not restricted) by determinism. Razzell proposes a possible sociological solution to the problem, stating that social determinism and free will may coexist.

reasons people often suffer emotional breakdown, alienation and psychological crisis. This concept is discernible in the short story *Odour of Chrysanthemums* by Lawrence, in which working-class life and industrial labor shape people's lives and the personal views are neglected. This story may serve as an analogy to *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter* in a few ways: both stories discuss social determinism; they use trauma and loss in order to describe the inner life of a person and both protagonists face existential crises. Mrs Bates is presented by her role as a miner's life and is restrained by poverty and disappointment from her life and her husband. The story suggests that marriage is socially conditioned and not always driven by intimacy and attachment:

> It is a scandalous thing as a man can't even come home to his dinner! […] There had been nothing between them, and yet they had come together, exchanging their nakedness repeatedly. Each time he had taken her, they had been two isolated beings, far apart as now. […] He and she were only channels through which life had flowed to issue in the children. She was a mother—but how awful she knew it now to have been a wife. And he, dead now, how awful he must have felt it to be a husband. She felt that in the next world he would be a stranger to her.
>
> (Lawrence 1922: pp. 9, 23, 24)

Society expected people to get married, to have children and to work. Free will was underrated by society. Modernist literature aimed to show people's desire to express this free will and the fact that doing so was demanding. Consequently, it is vital to notice that literature from that period emerged in tension with social determinism – i.e. society tried to shape a person's life, but in many cases the person tried to express their will and in this way the search for the self is not presented optimistically. In order to illustrate my thoughts, I would like to give examples from the two stories by Lawrence: in *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter* Mabel is alienated, goes through psychological crisis, and in her attempt to free herself from the socially determined existence and to come closer to her dead mother, she attempts suicide. This act of hers is ambiguous because on the one hand it could be interpreted as a desperate effort to escape from reality and social norms, which do not allow her autonomy, but on the other hand this step of tragic assertion of selfhood represents the limits of free will in a world, in which social constraints dominate. The story *Odour of Chrysanthemums* proposes a similar viewpoint: the text suggests that Elizabeth Bates is emotionally dissatisfied in her marriage and lives under strict social and gender norms. Even after her husband's death she performs an act of duty by tending for the dead body not out of intimacy

but of female responsibility which seems to be so deeply embedded in her psyche that she finds herself compelled to do it. In moments of contact with Mr Walter's corpse she experiences instants of self-awareness and emotional realization, but this awareness does not free her from her duties, which illustrates Lawrence's idea that social determinism dominates individualism and free choice.

Mabel's brothers' attitude towards her is another example of the social expectations of male authority and dominance in that period. Their behavior is a product of cultural norms and it seems to intensify Mabel's oppression in the family. Her mother's demise (and later the disruption of the family, following the father's death) left her in an existential emptiness. As Cohen explains it in the Introduction to *Humanism of the Other* (2003) "suffering and dying are not private affairs but solicit the concern of the human community, calling for aid and compassion […]" (Levinas 2003: xxxiii). This means that suffering and dying are not purely private occurrences, but they demand attention and responsibility from the others. Therefore, the sense of compassion is largely absent in *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter*, because the narrative centers on the missing maternal figure. Traditionally, she is not only the biological parent, but also a caregiver, who is responsible for emotional nurturing and physical closeness and I consider that this is not applicable only when the children are infants, but even in their early adulthood (as is Mabel's case), because the bond with a mother is foundational and could never be entirely dissolved. Freud examines this bond by implying that a complete separation from a parent is impossible:

> The liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development. It is quite essential that liberation should occur and it may be presumed that it has been to some extent achieved by everyone who has reached a normal state.
>
> (Freud 1959: 237)

Mabel's crisis following her mother's death supports the idea that a separation between the two was not and cannot be completed.

I consider that the protagonist's life is life TOWARDS death. Mabel Pervin gathers her courage and tries to become one whole with her mother by attempting to drown herself in the river. The main character is overcome by despair and Mabel finds no other solution but to take her own life. Mabel starts visiting the grave often, and symbolically it could mean her (un-) conscious will to become one whole with it. In the following quotation from *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger argues that our existence is always intertwined with the awareness of death. Death is part of our

being: "Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality – for – Being. […] Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein[7]. […] If Dasein exists, it has already been thrown into this possibility" (1962: 194 – 295). Death is the ultimate limit of one's existence; when witnessing somebody's death, we experience only their absence (as in Mabel's case) but not their dying. This is a key point which Heidegger examines, i.e. the fact that we cannot understand what death means only by looking at other people die, because death belongs to one's own existence as Dasein.

> Thus from the kind of Being which Dasein possesses as Being with one another, we might draw the fairly obvious information that when the Dasein of Others has come to an end, it might be chosen as a substitute theme for our analysis of Dasein's totality. […] Even the Dasein of Others, when it has reached its wholeness in death, is no-longer-Dasein […]. Does not dying mean going-out-of-the-world, and losing one's Being-in-the world? Yet when someone has died, his Being-no-longer-in-the-world (if we understand it in an extreme way) is still a Being, but in the sense of the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of a corporeal Thing which we encounter. In the dying of the Other we can experience […] the change-over of an entity from Dasein's kind of Being (or life) to no-longer-Dasein.
>
> (Heidegger 1962: 281)

This quotation supports the idea that witnessing death only gives us some absence but not a full understanding of death itself. Lawrence's text illustrates Heidegger's analysis because the maternal figure does not appear as a living human being but is presented as absence, which structures the household.

The emotional crisis which Mabel goes through is also suggested through the use of other symbols in the text. The symbol of the river is vital and one of the most powerful in the story because of its twofold meaning. On the one hand, the stillness of the water symbolizes the doomed life and mirrors the girl's emotional stagnation. Mabel wants to dive in it: "She thought of nobody, not even of herself. Mindless and persistent, she seemed in a sort of ecstasy to be coming nearer to her fulfillment, her own glorification, approaching her dead mother, who was glorified" (Lawrence 1922: 234). This act of delving into the water is an

[7] *Dasein*, in the ontology and metaphysics of the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), the form of *Being* or existence of the human individual" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

act of regression and returning to the maternal womb, where one feels safe and united. On the other hand, the river symbolizes the cleaning power of water: the rebirth of the person's mind and new understanding of the world. When Mabel dives into it and the doctor follows her, they do not realize that this is their purification and unification. Lawrence describes the river as "dead water" (1922: 238), and the reader could grasp the implied juxtaposition of life vs. death: "Despite his use of morbidity in his expressions, the pond actually symbolizes the major conversion for Mabel and is a key to her empowered being. All features to his writing provide a more vivid image of Mabel's mental and emotional transition" (Jacobs 2015). These words aim to present the transformation which the protagonist undergoes. Therefore water is assumed as a liminal space between life and death; it is a threshold which also embodies strength, cleanliness and new wisdom. The pond is that place, where social status is not of any importance and boundaries are blurred: there people behave like human beings, and that is why Dr. Jack Fergusson acts instinctively and decides to intervene so that to save Mabel's life:

> He followed her minutely as she moved, direct and intent […] straight down the field towards the pond. […] She never raised her head. Then she waded slowly into the water. […] Then he could see her no more in the dusk of the dead afternoon.
> "There!" he exclaimed. "Would you believe it?" And he hastened straight down, running over the wet, soddened fields […]. He slowly ventured into the pond. […] Then he looked at the water. She had risen near him. He grasped her clothing, and drawing her nearer, turned to take his way to land again. […] He laid her down on the bank. […] He made the water come from her mouth […]. The house was empty. But **the fire was burning** in the grate. […] He ran upstairs, took blankets from a bed, and put them before **the fire to warm.** Then he removed her saturated, earthy-smelling clothing, rubbed her dry with a towel, and wrapped her **naked** in the blankets [emphasis added].
>
> (Lawrence 1922: 237 – 240)

This paragraph emphasizes some of the most significant moments in the narrative. Dr. Fergusson is an embodiment of life and conscious vitality. His presence cannot be described as an entire solution to the protagonist's emotional crisis, but he manages save her. Mabel suddenly becomes aware of her own vulnerability. The experience of being near-death makes her realize the seriousness of her action and restores her self-awareness.

Lawrence uses two more pivotal symbols which help him articulate Mabel's psychological renewal, i.e. fire and nakedness. Fire symbolizes

vitality, never ending hope and home (I used the word *home* as a reference to Dr. Fergusson's personage as well, because later in the text the reader understands that he is not only a savior, but also becomes an object of affection for the lady). The naked body symbolizes cleanliness and rebirth. It signifies psychological exposure and vulnerability in front of the other. Mabel's nakedness, her mentality and true (or rather new) self signify that she is already a new human being. This transformation culminates when doctor Ferguson rescues her, and although she is a bit confused in the beginning, she states her love towards him, as if "forcing" him to love her in return. The salvation of the body is the first step of the process of her psyche's change and purification. Mabel is motivated to live again: "You love me," she murmured, in strange transport, yearning and triumphant and confident. "You love me. I know you love me, I know" (Lawrence 1922: 242). The very idea of "love" indicates that she has already found some meaning in life. Despite being a bit puzzled by these words, the repetition of Mabel's own phrase "you love me" seems to assure the doctor in his feelings; the rescue appears to trigger Jack's belated recognition of feelings towards the girl. This sudden emotional awakening might be interpreted through Levinas's philosophy of the other: Mabel's suffering evokes the doctor's ethical attention. From a Levinasian perspective, suffering is not a private affair but something which engages community and in our case it stirs an emotional response towards the woman. The narrative shows that ethical responsibility and emotional attachment intertwine. The story suggests that change is possible. Therefore the symbol of the mother appears as both annihilation and a reconstruction of self.

Lawrence is an author who understands human psyche and shows it through his characters' development. *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter* aims to teach us that the loss of maternal attachment leaves the protagonist without an emotional anchor, leading to her psychological crisis, while simultaneously creating her emotional awakening. The short story also explores the gender-based constraints and the existential crisis individuals go through. As a contrast to the all-giving mother's figure in the story discussed, the work *Daughters of the Vicar* presents one missing mother figure. Despite being still alive, the mother represents physical withdrawal. She becomes an invalid after an illness, and the family has to do their best in order to earn their living. The focus is on the two sisters, Louisa and Mary, who are illustrated as stout women (in contrast to Mabel Pervin's persona), who follow two different paths in love. Another literary piece by Lawrence interprets motherhood as well: in one of his most popular novels *Sons and Lovers*, this figure exerts enormous influence upon the children's

lives (especially on Paul). Yet, in the novel after Mrs Morel's death, Paul faces a decisive moment regarding his future life. He chooses life and not emotional annihilation, which is depicted by his act of walking towards the lights of the town. Paul's inner conflict is not fully resolved; he is not totally independent after his mother's dying, but he decides to seek his own future. It is evident that the theme of death and love and affection towards the mother are highly significant in literature and Lawrence masterfully explores them, by mingling them in other more complex psychological and social issues, which makes them truly compelling.

A further investigation of the story is possible through an analysis of inter-personal relations. *The Horse-Dealer's Daughter* and *Sons and Lovers* could serve as core texts of a comparative analysis, proposing an investigation of Lawrence's treatment of intimacy and love.

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