

THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF A SINGLE EVENT

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Seminar: Personal Lives

[Assignment: Both Ada Lawrence Clarke and Jessie Chambers describe day trips that D.H. Lawrence and his friends took to nearby places like Hemlock Stone, Wingfield Manor and Crich Stand. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences of these three accounts of the same events. Pay attention to the particular details in each account, the tone of each passage, and the significance each author attaches to these events.]

(1) In the three narrations of the day trips led by D.H. Lawrence, several similarities and differences are evident. In D.H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography, Lawrence's sister, Ada Lawrence Clarke, methodically describes the visits to Wingfield Manor, Crich Stand and Whatstandswell. Jessie Chambers describes the same trips in an essay entitled "The Friendship with 'Miriam'," but also includes a flashback to a place called Hemlock Stone. In chapter seven of D.H. Lawrence's novel, Sons and Lovers, he fictionalizes the same events, altering them only for literary reasons. Although each person participates in the outings and the general facts are at least similar, the differences lie in the emphasis each places on particular events and the tone of each passage.

(2) Ada Lawrence Clarke's narration contains the most straightforward factual account. On their "Easter ramble," the group first travels by train to Alfreton, where they visit Wingfield Manor and a nearby church. From there, they go to Crich Stand, then through Holloway and Lea to Whatstandswell. Finally, they scrape together sevenpence among themselves to buy a dinner of bread and butter at a cottage, and then journey home (Clarke 52-53).

(3) In addition to providing a factual account of the day, Clarke's objective view is also beneficial to the reader as a character sketch. Clarke's main purpose in her essay is biographical; therefore, she reveals the various aspects of D.H. Lawrence's personality, his love and knowledge of nature: "... however deep in thought he might be ... he was the first to see the baby rabbit or the cock-pheasant, the first primrose or the fascinating male and female flowers of the larch" (Clarke 52). This description reveals Lawrence's sensitivity to religion; upon their arrival at the church near Wingfield Manor, Clarke describes Bert's reaction to the Easter decorations, "he said we must sing a hymn or two, and threatened awful punishments if anyone laughed or treated the occasion lightly" (Clarke 52). The biographical description in Clarke's essay creates the tone and brings Lawrence's personality to life.

(4) Jessie Chamber's account is also factual, but in contrast to Clarke, Chambers merely lists the events, and then focuses on their visit to Hemlock Stone, describing it in more detail. By returning to this event in particular, she attached a greater importance to it, and therefore, the others seem inconsequential. The tone of her passage is spiritual; there is a significant emotional weight associated with this event. During this walk, the group leaves her behind, and as she hurries to catch up, she spies Lawrence "in the middle of the road, bending over an umbrella" (Chambers 22). The scene seems to awaken a strong emotion within her soul, an emotion which she had never fully faced before--love. That moment is an epiphany, "the beginning of our awareness of sympathy for one another" (Chambers 22). The emotional intensity of this passage is parallel to the intensity of Jessie Chamber's relationship with Lawrence.

(5) Lawrence also emphasizes this scene in Sons and Lovers; he even isolates it from the other events by making it occur on Good Friday rather than Easter Monday. Lawrence agrees with Jessie's description, writing ". . . [Miriam] knew she must love him. And she discovered him, discovered him in rare potentiality, discovered his loneliness" (Lawrence 166). Whereas this event sparks love in Miriam, it sparks conflict in Paul, who, later in the evening initiates a conversation about the "natural" quality and balance in love:

He . . . seemed to be struggling with himself.
"You know," he said, with an effort, "if one person loves, the other does."
"Ah!" she answered, "Like Mother said to me when I was little, 'Love begets love.'"
. . . And Miriam, thinking he had assured himself, felt strong in herself (Lawrence 166).

Ironically, as Lawrence's account places the event on Good Friday, it has a sense of underlying doom. Jessie's account places the event on Easter Monday; to her it was only the beginning.

(6) Lawrence's account is set apart from the others also by his combination of vivid physical imagery and symbolic meaning. Rather than totally isolating the emotional epiphany, he skillfully surrounds it with imagery to convey the encounter's significance: "Beyond, one rift of rich gold in that colourless grey evening seemed to make [Paul] stand out in dark relief. She saw him, slender and firm, as if the setting sun had given him to her" (Lawrence 166). This image of sacrifice can also be connected with the fact that it takes place on Good Friday in Lawrence's version. Lawrence also uses that kind of imagery and symbolism in his description of the futile misery of Mary Queen of Scots "being told of a God as cold as the place she sat in" (Lawrence 168). Here in one simple phrase, he relates the coldness of Wingfield Manor and also the coldness that Mary Queen of Scots must have felt in her abandonment.

(7) Excluding the minor variations in factual details, the major contrasts among these three writings are in the significance of each author. Clarke emphasizes Lawrence's sensitivity and reverence for religion; thus her passage is highly biographical. Chambers stresses the emotional and spiritual aspect of the trip; therefore, her passage is poignant and intense. Lawrence utilizes the freedom of fiction to blend these two extremes perfectly. Every experience holds a different meaning for each individual, a truth which applies to virtually every aspect of life.