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Dystopian Representations in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract

It is significant to note that D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* can be looked at from the dystopian perspective. Much has been written about it in terms of realism, the Oedipus Complex, Symbolism, Eco-criticism and more many besides as far as the this novel is concerned. However, besides these representations, this research paper sheds light on the dystopian representations which can be detected in the novel. Moreover, definition, historical background and the significant dystopian representations are pointed out in the introduction to this paper. Much concentration is made on the influence of the industrial revolution which shows its merits and demerits.

What concern this paper most are its demerits, for they are part and parcel of the dystopian elements exposed in this study. Thus, the industrial revolution in this respect is the source of all the social evils which have inflicted the individual and society as well, for the dystopian ingredients are based on corruption, absolute evils, repression, killing by one means or another, poverty and disease, which are all exposed throughout the interactions of themes and characters contained in this novel. In a word, the paper, directly and indirectly, exposes those dystopian elements which are shown to the readers, so that they can have full understanding of it from the dystopian perspective.

Sons and Lovers was published in 1913, being the product of its time. It draws its essentials from the harsh reality facing and afflicting all the main characters living in a mining environment. Hence, it is a historical document of a time period during which the individual has been unfairly used and exploited by the capitalistic society that can by no means be merciful in this regard.



المستخلص

من الجدير بالملاحظة أن رواية (أبناء وأحباء) للكاتب الروائي دي. أج. لورينس يمكن ملاحظتها من منظور الواقع المرير أو الواقع الفاسد أو ما يسمى بمنظور الدستوبيا—المنظور الذي يبين بان الانسان يعيش مجردا من إنسانيته حياة مليئة بالخوف وذلك مايتعلق أو ما يوصف بالواقع المرير أو بالعالم السيء الفاسد أو الدستوبيا. وفيما يخص هذه الرواية فقد تم كتابة الكثير عنها من حيث الحركة الواقعية وعقدة أوديب والحركة الرمزية والنقد البيئوي. وإضافة الى هذه المعطيات من ناحية اخرى يسלט البحث الضوء على المخرجات الدستوبية التي من الممكن استكشافها في هذه الرواية. يشير البحث في مقدمته الى تعريف الدستوبيا وخلفيتها التاريخية ومخرجاتها المهمة. يركز البحث كثيرا على تأثير الثورة الصناعية التي لها مزاياها الايجابية والسلبية. ومما لاشك فيه، تعد المزايا السينة ذات اهمية بالغة في هذه الدراسة لانها تعد جزءا من العناصر الدستوبية والتي تعد مصدرا للشورور الاجتماعية التي أبتلي بها الفرد والمجتمع في هذا المجال إذ يمكن إعتبارها مصدرا للكثير من الشورور الاجتماعية التي ابتلت الفرد والمجتمع على حد السواء وذلك لأن المقومات الدستوبية التي تعتمد على الفساد والشورور الأستبدادية والقمع والقتل بطريقة أو اخرى والفقر والمرض قد تم عرضها من خلال التفاعل بين الموضوعات المهمة للرواية وشخصوها. وباختصار يستعرض البحث بشكل مباشر وغير مباشر للقراء تلك العناصر الدستوبية وذلك للتوصل الى فهم تام كتبت فيه حيث أنها للرواية من المنظور الدستوبي. لقد نشرت رواية أبناء وأحباء في العام 1913 إذ كانت نتاج العصر الذي استمدت دعوماتها الاساسية من الواقع المؤلم والمرير الذي أبتلى الشخصيات الرئيسية فيها والتي تقطن في بيئة مليئة بمناجم الفحم، ولذلك تعد هذه الرواية وثيقة تاريخية للفترة الزمنية التي تم فيها استخدام وإستغلال الفرد والمجتمع سيما الطبقة العاملة ابشع إستغلال من قبل المجتمع الرأسمالي الذي لم يكن رحيمًا أبداً في هذا المجال.

Introduction

It is necessary to shed light on the definition of the term dystopia. This term has been developed from the term Utopia that is generally well-known among literary media as the idealistic and the fiddle country that is located nowhere, whose representations are set by the Greek philosopher Plato. Utopia acquires the name 'Plato's Republic,' as well. The fiddle country has not been brought to existence, and therefore Utopia comes to be known as nowhere.

As to the etymology of the term "dystopia," it can be suggested that it has been used as the antonym of utopia by John Stuart Mill as he adds the prefix "dys," meaning 'bad' to "topia, meaning place," in ancient Greek. As to the term utopia, the initial "U" (as the prefix 'eu' in ancient Greek) means "good." In one of his orations Mill denounces the policy of the Irish government when he says that that government should not be called Utopian; rather, it should be called dystopian; he frankly says, "It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dystopians, or cacotopians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favor is too bad to be practicable" (Mill, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dystopia>).

Definitions of the Key Words: Dystopia, Utopia, Sons and Lovers, and Dystopian Representations

Dystopia



It can be suggested that any new event that may occur in the world is of positive and negative aspects. That is, what may be positive to some people can be negative to other people. The industrial revolution, for instance, shows its merits and demerits to societies. It serves the capitalistic greedy society and harms the lower class represented by workers given low wages that could hardly afford for their living. It is then a source of ruin for the poor. In *Sons and Lovers*, Mr. Morel, a miner, can be regarded as representative of those workers ruined by the new circumstances imposed by capitalists whose main source of income has been industrialism. Though the industrial revolution lets the poor keep on living, they are to suffer from the social ills caused by destitution. Hence, the industrial revolution has been more of death and destruction than of benefit and blessings:

The watershed event of the nineteenth century, the Industrial revolution, not only transformed the lives of individuals in England but across the globe. Serving as a bane as well as a boon it not only provided nations with a much needed thrust to move on and progress in the vital spheres of life, contrarily it solidly demarcated the already stratified society. (Nagra, 2018)

Dystopia may represent an imagined society whose members are deeply afflicted, dejected and distressed in body and soul. Yet, in realistic novels such as *Sons and Lovers*, the working class represented by the Morel family appears to be wretched, dehumanized, whose environment seems to be a dystopia in which violence, a sense of utter distaste and repulsive antagonism, disease and death prevail. Here is the sense of anti-utopia of oppression, bad practices, disintegration, a lot of suffering and tyranny. These dystopian representations are applicable to George Orwell's novel *1984* which depicts a tyrannical government and his novel *Animal Farm* that is representative of the tyrannical governments:

Dystopian societies appear in many sub-genres of fiction and are often used to draw attention to society, environment, politics, economics, religion, psychology, ethics, science, or technology. Some authors use the term to refer to existing societies, many of which are, or have been, totalitarian states or societies in an advanced state of collapse. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, often make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system. (Tisdall, 2018)

Utopia

Utopia can be defined as an imaginary environment or a country in which all things are perfectly set. The first utopian novel was written by Plato. Later on, there developed the term dystopia that was considered the opposite of utopia. As a matter of fact the dystopian representations have given Plato and others to think of a utopian society or a republic in which everything is perfect. It was then the imperfections that prevailed in Plato's time that gave rise to the appearance of what was called to be the Utopia or Plato's Republic, a place void of all kinds



of evils whatsoever, where justice should prevail in every aspect of life. Hence, this study proposes that the source of Utopia is supposed to be dystopia.

Dystopian Representations in *Sons and Lovers*

Lawrence depicts a slice of life representative of a miner's family that has greatly suffered from poverty which leads to social ills and bad environmental effects. Lawrence seems to attack the political system that gives rise to such representations that cause disease and death to the individual. The government appears to be indifferent to the working class that endeavors to manufacture wealth and fortune for the capitalists on the account of their general health, social status and bad economic situation: "Dystopias are often characterized by rampant fear or distress, tyrannical governments, environmental disaster, or other characteristics associated with a cataclysmic decline in society" (2012, Merriam-Webster Dictionary). For instance, Mr. Morel could hardly stay with his children at home because he works day and night for the sake of affording to their living, and at the same time he finds it necessary to drink wine in the night house for he feels comfortable in doing so after long hours of work. Hence, the entire responsibility for bringing up the children has been left on the shoulders of his wife, Mrs. Morel, a middle-class woman who has married him because of love and passion despite the fact that he is a lower-class person, a miner. As she has learned the merits of being a middle-class person, Mrs. Morel has paid great attention to her children's education and managed to transform them into the middle-class characters. Had she not taken care of them, her sons would have become miners like their father who usually insists that they should follow his example when choosing their career. This reflects Lawrence's anti-capitalism and anti-industrialization, for he thinks that they "tended to demoralize men and to destroy individuality" (Tyeryar, 1963).

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence endeavors to associate the psychological aspects, division of classes and industrialization inasmuch as he suffered from those aspects in his childhood. His father was, like Mr. Morel, a miner living in a mining town, which gave him an opportunity to have a clear-cut vision of the kind of life lived by the poor in an industrial environment. Hence, Lawrence manages to depict the cruel circumstances of a miner such as Mr. Morel who has become addicted to alcohol, so that he can escape from the dystopian situation he is in. Not only does Morel suffer from hard circumstances, but also his wife suffers from destitution and the bad treatment she receives from him. He used to beat her and dismiss her from home. Before their marriage she loves him most, but then she does no longer love him and begins to hate him for his bad behavior. Hence, the industrial environment gives rise to human sufferings as is the case with the Morel family. Lawrence has faced similar sufferings and he decides to live in nonindustrial environment, so that he can live a peaceful life void of poison and disease:

This is precisely the very reason that he begins the novel by giving an elaborate description of the dwellings of the colliers, not only to depict the harsh conditions they were subjected to live in but



to also foreshadow that this will be the propelling factor in the lives of almost all the characters involved in the novel. Lawrence's disgust with industrial world is at its pinnacle in his description of the mining areas that are spread on the countryside. (Nagra, 2018)

Furthermore, Lawrence envisions an insight into the kind of life lived by the working class, pointing out how those families try to oblige their children to work in mines and other factories since their tender age, so that they can help in providing more income to them. This fact has been alluded to by Lawrence through the character of Mr. Morel who in his first meeting with Gertrude (the then Mrs. Morel) tells her that he started to work in the mine when he was ten years old. Hence, he started his career as a collier through a very difficult job. Here, Lawrence tries to advocate the bitter dystopian fact that parents of his time tried to compel their children to work in mines. Despite the fact that those children working in dark mines get a certain amount of money aiding their families' living, the capitalists in this respect are to deform their childhood innocence and turn them into savages reflecting the characteristic features of Mr. Morel. Mr. Morel tries to let William be a miner, but he fails because Mrs. Morel insists that he pursue his education for a better career.

It is one of the social evils that Paul, Mrs. Morel's second son, the protagonist in the last nine chapters of the novel, has made illegal sexual relationships with two women, Miriam, an educated character who prefers education to love but she yields to the cheap desire of the flesh, and Clara, a married woman cut off from her husband for three years. The latter finds her refuge in Paul to gratify her sexual desire. This corruption is considered one aspect of the dystopian representations in the novel in which Lawrence explores aspects of the industrialization and shows his disagreement about this situation. He directs the reader's attention to what he considers to be as social wrongdoings, inequity and injustice, not to mention the moral misconduct. He concentrates on the utmost embodiments of the social changes that are the result of forming new industrial societies that are made to live in the workers' houses near to the mines and factories in which they used to work.

Sons and Lovers explores a variety of themes that find their origin in the aspects of industrialization and conflicts. This is the main reason why Miriam has been rejected as a wife, for Paul whose relationship with her fails because she thinks that she is superior to the Morel family that descends from the lower class. Hence, the love relationship between Paul and Miriam leads nowhere but to adultery, not to the sacred relation of marriage. Due to class divisions and industrialization, corruption is to prevail among characters. Similarly, William, the eldest son of Mrs. Morel makes illicit sexual relationships with Louisa who, like Miriam, considers herself superior to the Moral family. Hence, her relation with William leads nowhere but to adultery. Hence, class stratification prevents the two sons from having been married and enjoyed an ordinary innocent life.



The Oedipus-complex concept in *Sons and Lovers* can be regarded as an aspect of the dystopian elements. This concept means the warm-heartedness of a child for the parent of the other sex. The novel shows how the adolescent Paul feels sexual inclinations toward his mother, and he thusly tries always to distance himself from her, so that he would not commit that illicit relation with her. This is one of the main reasons why he has resorted to Clara and Miriam to gratify his sexual appetite. These love relationships show that Lawrence deals with the theme of love in an unusual manner; that is, all the characters come to an end in a tragic way, for the lovers have been separated from one another due to the contradictions between emotions and intellect or between what is real and what is ideal. Lawrence seems to advocate an emotional crisis for which there is no healing, for the representations of industrialization have brought corrupted principles to the modern individual, and at the same time the concept of materialism seems to engulf and erase all signs of passion, love and emotions. This can be regarded true when the fact that Paul and his sister Annie have killed their mother on the grounds that she could not bear the pains caused by her disease. They have deliberately given her an overdose of morphia, so that she can die and enjoy peaceful repose. Moreover, William has died of pneumonia from the pollution caused by the smoke produced by the mines and factories in the place where he lives, Bestwood.

Conclusion

Sons and Lovers depicts dystopian representations in that the novelist envisions the fact that industrialization has been the result of the poverty of the lower class which results in disease, death and corruption. Besides, many social ills appear as a result of destitution, and the mining environment has caused death to many people among whom William who dies of pneumonia, a disease caused by the smoke getting out of the mines and factories. Mrs. Moral, on the other hand, has been afflicted by an irrecoverable disease that has obliged her children, Paul and Annie, to give her an over dose of morphia, so that she can die and no longer feel the pains. Hence, they have practiced euthanasia. However, the general idea in this regard is that the mining environment gives rise to the crime of parricide. Another dystopian element is that the children of the family hate their father with whom they often quarrel because he is unable to provide dignified living for them, and because he becomes an alcohol addict due to his miserable situation. All these delineations are regarded as social ills underlying the definition of dystopian representations in *Sons and Lovers*. It can be concluded then that the industrial revolution can be considered the source of most kinds of social ills.

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