

## AARON'S ROD

With Aaron's Rod Lawrence returned to the theme of Sons and Lovers - the distortion of love by feminine possessiveness, which, as he represented it, prevents man and woman from achieving peace and fulfillment with each other. The novel is given as one of the positive answers to a Laurentian question: "What laws of life have been ignored that there should be the deadlock between a man a woman?"

Aaron Sisson, a checkweighman, whose hobby is flute-playing (his flute is called Aaron's rod) and which symbolizes his spontaneous life, finds it difficult to live with Lottie, his wife, who, like Mrs. Morel of Sons and Lovers, is Puritanical and intensely possessive. Lottie instinctively believes that he, a man, must yield to her, a woman - "the life-bearer, the life-source-",<sup>248</sup> a mother of his children, and a maker of a decent home for him. Feeling that she must be adored, and obeyed, Lottie tries more and more to force Aaron to acknowledge her as his superior: "For all her instinct, all her impulse, all her desire, and above all, all her will, was to possess her man in every fulness..."<sup>249</sup> This is the root cause of the strife between her and Aaron. Most men, even while they are demanding their rights as superior males, surrender to their wives. But Aaron is a Laurentian man who cannot bear to see his individuality, the germ of his life, destroyed by a woman's compelling love: "Born in him was a spirit which could not worship woman."<sup>250</sup> Strongly believing

that he, like all living beings, is an isolated and single being, "his intrinsic and central aloneness was the very centre of his being,"<sup>254</sup> Aaron feels that the moment his isolation breaks down, it is his death.<sup>252</sup> But Lottie does not, and will not share this belief; she tries to impose her "terrible will" on him - to make him abandon himself finally to her.

First Aaron resists his wife with a good-humoured indifference; he lets her do what she likes, but always guards his integrity from her possessive maternal love: "She was acutely aware of her husband,"<sup>253</sup> but, "he seemed not very much aware of her."<sup>254</sup> His unawareness is his withdrawal. Then, after twelve years of his gentle resistance, on Christmas Eve Aaron goes out to buy candles for his children and to have a drink, but when it is time to return home, turns another way "in a delirium of icy fury." However, a few days later, he returns home; but he does not enter it. He sits in the shed at the bottom of the garden, watching the windows of his own house through the raining darkness; he contemplates his twelve years of marriage life and knows that he cannot go on with it. Stealing closer, for what purpose he doesn't quite know, Aaron overhears his wife's account of him:

....He kept himself back, always kept himself back, couldn't give himself...I'm sure it was death to live with him, he seemed to kill everything off inside you. He was a man you couldn't quarrel with, and get it over. Quiet - quiet in his tempers, and selfish through and through. I've lived with him twelve years - I know what it is killing! You don't know what he was ---<sup>255</sup>

Lottie is thus revealed as a domineering, demanding and complaining woman - a type that Aaron hates. And he

decides to leave her. He is now thirty-three, and wants to spend the rest of his life as if it is really his. Aaron becomes a flutist (symbol of independent power - Aaron's Rod) in an orchestra in London, where he meets Lilly, a free-lance writer, who becomes his intimate friend.<sup>256</sup> Lilly's marriage life is not satisfactory either, because of his wife's possessiveness. Tammy loves Lilly very much, but he senses behind her love a possessive dominating will, seen clearly in her retort to his belief in male supremacy. "Don't be so spiteful," she says, "You see that you have a woman always there, to hold your hand."<sup>257</sup> And when he denies it, his wife becomes angry: "Doesn't it!...But you're so beastly ungratefully and mannish. Because I hold you safe enough all the time, you like to pretend you're doing it all yourself."<sup>258</sup> To Lilly his wife stands for all women who want to dominate their men. Lilly and Aaron are drawn together by a certain amount of fellow-feeling over their common mistreatment at the hands of women. Lilly hates feminine possessiveness so much that he becomes a misogynist. He feels that the only way to fight against the whole female sex is for men to stick together;<sup>259</sup> but he knows that there is a little hope in it, because women will use "their children as a means of establishing their female dominance,"<sup>260</sup> and there are men, he believes, who are "grovelling before a baby's napkin and a woman's petticoat."<sup>261</sup> Lilly knows this, and he admits to Aaron: "Can you find two men to stick together without feeling criminal, and without cringing, and without betraying one another? You can't."<sup>262</sup>

Since the idea of grouping men together sounds impossible, Lilly develops a new theory of man-woman relationship. It is the same idea that Birkin in Woman in Love has - a relationship in which man and woman "are together and apart at the same time, and free of each other; and eternally inseparable..."<sup>263</sup> Aaron too believes that this is the only possible relation between man and woman. He feels that so long as a woman tries to possess her man the mystery of life is travestied. Determined to make the best of marriage with his wife again, Aaron returns to Lottie, hoping to re-establish their relationship on a level where he has his individuality and she has hers:

Two eagles in mid-air, grappling, whirling, coming to their intensification of love-oneness there in mid-air. In mid-air the love consummation. But all the time each lifted on its own wings: each bearing itself up on its own wings at every moment of the mid-air love consummation. That is the splendid love-way. 264

This is the complete polarized relationship in which the lovers do not merge in love, but each achieves from the other fulfillment without violating his or her individual self.<sup>265</sup> But Aaron finds that it is very difficult to make Lottie accept this "splendid love-way," for she cannot destroy her motherly instinct to possess him. Seeing him standing at the door of her house, she flies into a rage, and furiously accuses him of being selfish and irresponsible for leaving her with the children on her hands (though he has provided for her financially.) Although she wants him back, Lottie determines that he must submit to her before she will have him: he must admit how wrong and cruel he has been to her. But Aaron cannot do that, because he believes that she has no right to force him

to say that he is wrong in leaving her. Neither one of them wants to submit to the other, and, thus, Aaron cannot establish his "splendid love-way" with her. Failing with his wife Aaron leaves her and decides not to see Lottie again. To him "love was a battle in which each party strove for the mastery of the other's soul. So far, man had yielded the mastery to woman. Now he was fighting for it back again. And too late, for the woman would never yield."<sup>266</sup> But "whether woman yielded or not, he would keep the mastery of his soul and conscience and actions. He would never yield himself up to her judgement again. He would hold himself for ever beyond her jurisdiction."<sup>267</sup> His failure with Lottie makes him determine on single life, on - "sheer, finished singleness."<sup>268</sup> For him "to be alone, to be oneself, not to be driven or violated into something which is not oneself, surely it is better than anything."<sup>269</sup> His love of singleness is reinforced by his impression of the lily which he sees in Sir William's garden:

The lily toils and spins hard enough, in her own way... The lily is life-rooted, life-centered...She is perfectly herself, whatever befall! even if frosts cut her off. Happy lily, never to be saddled with an idle life, never to be in the grip of a monomania for happiness or love or fulfillment. It is not ~~laisser~~ laisser aller. It is life-rootedness...<sup>270</sup>

The lily, with its roots thrust deep in the nourishing earth, and with its face uplifted in perfect singleness, symbolically shows Aaron that man must accept his aloneness as his being. He feels that man and woman should be like the lily: each should accept his own singleness, and never try to destroy the other's. Valid love and a permanent relation can be maintained only between persons who acknowledge that

"being with another is secondary -" <sup>271</sup> who know that: "In so far as I am I, and only I am I, and I am only I, it is my last blessedness to know it and to accept it, and to live with this as the core of myself - knowledge." <sup>272</sup>

Although Aaron loves his loneliness, he cannot be alone, and keep himself aloof from women forever. "No human being," wrote Lawrence, "can develop save through the polarized connection with other beings." <sup>273</sup> In Florence, Italy, Aaron has an affair with the Marchesa, who is drawn to him by his flute-playing. He enables her, whose spontaneous life has been ruined by her intellectual husband, to escape momentarily from the "stone-tablets of consciousness." Listening to Aaron's flute "she felt she had seen through the opening door a crack of sunshine, and thin, pure, bright outside air, outside, beyond this dark and beastly dungeon of feelings and moral necessity." <sup>274</sup> His flute-playing arouses her spontaneous feelings, and releases her from the prison of "mental consciousness" where she has been locked by her insensitive husband "for years and years," and she sings sweetly to the accompaniment of Aaron's flute. <sup>275</sup>

Very soon Aaron feels that he has made another mistake with the Marchesa. "This is not my woman," <sup>276</sup> he says to himself over and over again. Like his wife she is intensely possessive and he feels "blasted" by her "strong and hateful power." <sup>277</sup> Even in their physical consummation she ignores his individuality: "she used him as a more magic implement, used him with the most amazing priestess-craft. Himself, the individual man he was, this she ignored with an indifference

that was startling to him."<sup>278</sup> In a sexual act "she was absolutely gone, like a priestess utterly involved in her own terrible rites. And he was part of the ritual only, God and victim in one."<sup>279</sup> Moreover, although Aaron cannot go back home to be made to "love" and to "care", he feels that it is impossible for him to love any other woman while he remains married to Lottie. He has a sense of the finality of his marriage, the permanence of the tie that holds him to his wife:

...I don't feel free. I feel my wife, I suppose, somewhere inside me. And I can't help it... But when one has been married for ten years - some sort of bond or something grows. I think some sort of connection grows between us... And it isn't natural to break it...<sup>280</sup>

Thus he gives up the Marchesa with whom his relation is proved unsatisfactory: it is self-destruction through love. The sense of failure with women is so strong that he decides to reject all women. He goes to Lilly whose friendship once he refused to accept, and tries a man-man relationship. But Lilly also demands submission from him. There is no God, he tells Aaron, but there are two great dynamic urges in life - love and power. "We've exhausted our love-urge for the moment. And yet we try to force it to continue working. So we get inevitably anarchy and murder..."<sup>281</sup> Therefore we must accept the power-urge and obey it. Women must submit to men, and men to "the heroic soul in a greater man." You too," Lilly concludes, "you have the need to submit...to yield to a more heroic soul...to give yourself..."<sup>282</sup> "To whom shall I submit to?"<sup>283</sup> asks Aaron. "Your soul will tell you,"<sup>284</sup> Lilly answers. Aaron finally decides to give in to Lilly "rather

than to the quicksands of women..."<sup>285</sup> He thus gives up his independence, but on his terms.

On the whole the novel is about a disturbance of a satisfactory relation between man and woman by feminine possessiveness. Mrs. Sisson's compelling love which she tries to impose on Aaron makes her lose him to Lilly, a misogynist. The conflict between man and woman, shown in this novel, arises from the woman's attempt to possess the man, who furiously struggles for his independence. And in Kangaroo, written immediately after Aaron's Rod, Lawrence shows another kind of conflict frequently existing in marriage - the conflict between love and social activity.