

## Sorrow by D.H. Lawrence

WHY does the thin grey strand  
Floating up from the forgotten  
Cigarette between my fingers,  
Why does it trouble me?

Ah, you will understand; 5  
When I carried my mother downstairs,  
A few times only, at the beginning  
Of her soft-foot malady,

I should find, for a reprimand 10  
To my gaiety, a few long grey hairs  
On the breast of my coat; and one by one  
I let them float up the dark chimney.

The title of this poem is "Sorrow" and it is one of many that fall under the title of *Amores*, which means "showing feeling." For Lawrence, instincts and feelings were of paramount importance. In this poem the speaker's memory collides with thought, and the intrusion of emotions is much more potent than thought.

The controlling metaphor of this poem which gives all else meaning is "the thin grey strand" which is literally the line of cigarette smoke, but represents the strands of grey hair belonging to the poet's mother as well as acting as a trope for the waning life of his dying mother. And, because this poem is autobiographical, there is a sense of unrestrained emotion wafting through the verse just as it passes through the soul, heart, and mind of the poet:

Why does it [the grey smoke] trouble me?

Ah, you will understand....

I should find, for a reprimand

To my gaiety, a few long grey hairs....

The poet/speaker is both relieved and happy that his suffering mother is at peace now after he has assisted her suicide by giving her an overdose of sleeping pills; nevertheless, he feels a certain guilt and, surely, sorrow and heartbreak at losing his beloved parent. Emotions and memories rush upward from his heart intruding into his mind, causing him pain and sorrow as he realizes the finality of her death--"the darkness of the chimney."

The impact of Lawrence's "Sorrow" suggests lines from another of his poems in the *Amores* collection, entitled "Dreams Old and Nascent":

The old dreams are beautiful, beloved, soft-toned, and sure,

But the dream-stuff is molten and moving mysteriously

Alluring my eyes; for I, am I not also dream-stuff,

Am I not quickening, diffusing myself in the pattern, shaping and shapen?

Like the smoke of grey-strands that rises "up the dark chimney, The memories of his childhood with his mother and his youth and his final days with her become "dream-stuff"--the real mixed with emotion in an expressionistic image of "a thin grey strand" of memory and the essence of their lives together "shapen" into the pattern of their souls that suffers loss.