

Struggle between Love and Lust: A Case-study of the Relationships in David Herbert Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract: Generally, a literary fiction gets its accomplishment with the skilful delineation of the characters and its relationships. D. H. Lawrence is known for his mastery over this and his *Sons and Lovers* is no exception. In this novel, colourful portrayal of the characters and their relationships attracts the readers' attention to a great extent. The struggle between spirituality and sexuality, in other words love and lust is artistically drawn throughout the novel. The intent of this paper is to analyze and evaluate Lawrence's representation of love and lust to understand the complex relationships among the characters with special reference to the prominent critics and theorists like Sigmund Freud, Frank Kermode, Kate Millet, and Helen Fisher.

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The word 'love' which owes its origin to the German forms of the Sanskrit 'lubh', is closely associated with Greek terms 'eros', 'philia' and agape. 'Eros' often stands for sexual desire which is well connected with 'lust' and in contrast 'philia' refers to loyalty, virtuous love and agape stands for the parental love of God for man and of man for God. Different religions have different conduct for love and lust as well; the Hindu philosopher Vatsyana (India, 3rd century CE), the author of the *Kama Sutra*, advised man and women to get married for physical love, but the medieval church contradicted this view and condemned such sinful indulgence. Again, classical Greeks rewarded couples who were willing to conceive, where as Muslims jealously protected their wives and concubines away in harems. In fact, a society's attitude towards love and lust intensely distorted over time. In Medieval England love was mainly religious in nature, and however, from twelve to fourteen century, idea of courtly love had emerged. In the age of Shakespeare love was seen as a consuming passion and in the Victorian era romantic love was depicted as a delicate spiritual feeling. In the first part of 20th century, 'Sexus' has been introduced as the basic instinct of the soul in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, in combination with the principle of lust, and it has a magnificent impact upon D.H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* where the central theme is the love relation of Paul with his mother, with Miriam and with Clara.

In a letter to Edward Garnett written in 1912, Lawrence explicitly talks about his own description of *Sons and Lovers*, and there he mentions the unusual love relation: "...as her sons grow up, she selects them as lovers... these sons are urged into life by their reciprocal love of their mother". The story of Paul Morel is closely based on Lawrence's own life, his relationships and family. The highly personal material of the work necessitated, as Lawrence recognised, a correspondingly impersonal treatment. Hence, he remarks that it would be 'a restrained, somewhat impersonal novel'. But it is a novel and as the title indicates, it seeks to enlighten a more general theme of the son's need to free himself from the emotional bondage with the mother. The generalising of the theme

may reflect Lawrence's acquaintance, through his wife Frieda, with Freudian thought. His writings on Freud, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), designate his resistance, endorsed by many subsequent thinkers, to the normative premises of Freudian thought.

The first major cultural dislocation attracts the readers' attention within the marriage of Gertrude and Walter Morel. It turns out to be an unfruitful and unhappy marriage where Mr. Morel puts all his attention upon drinking alcohol, and Mrs. Morel therefore, finds her hope to live in her two sons, William and Paul. But with the sudden demise of William, Paul becomes her centre of affection, dependence and survival actually. Primarily, the bonding between Gertrude and Paul may appear as a manifestation of 'storge', but kind of sexual impulse is also conspicuous in their relationship. The novel even provides the readers with glimpses of the 'oedipal' situation which Sigmund Freud introduced for the first time in his book *Interpretation of Dreams*, where he opined that a desire for sexual involvement of son with the mother is a latent phenomenon of the human nature, and this is the prevailing theme in *Sons and Lovers*. Paul trots after his mother like her shadow. Like an exactly romantic lover he watches every physical movement of his mother, enjoys her dressing up with sensual pleasure. Lawrence delineates, "Paul loved to sleep with his mother, sleep still most perfect in spite of hygienists, when it is shared with a beloved..." (Lawrence 106).

Again the relationship between Gertrude and Paul can be analyzed as a resultant of 'Jocasta complex', the term proposed by Raymond de Saussure (1920). This complex represents a type of perverted mother love, and covers various degrees of intensity- from the maternal instinct slightly deformed to a frank sexual attachment, in which both physical and psychic satisfaction comes together as an integral part of their lives. In *Sons and Lovers* Mrs. Morel's complexity with Paul is evident from her assertion after Paul's birth, "with all her force, with all her soul, she would make up to it for having brought it into the world

unloved” (Lawrence 58). Generally, when sons grow up, they maintain distance with their mother, but Paul is an exception. Mrs. Morel also seems to have misused her son’s affection for her sensual pleasure. She did not allow her son to pursue relationships with other women with silly intentional excuses. She disapproves Miriam by saying that she doesn’t like her children “keeping company”. Even a strong sexual connotation can be traced in the words of Mrs. Morel when she says that, “you know Paul- I’ve never had a Husband- not really” (Lawrence 326). Therefore, Alfred Booth Kuttner in his article “*Sons and Lovers: A Freudian Appreciation*” rightly remarks that, “Sons and Lovers has the great distinction of being very solidly based upon a veritable commonplace of our emotional life; it deals with a son who loved his mother too dearly, and with a mother who lavished all her affection upon her son” (Kuttner 264).

When Paul first ventures forth into the larger male world, it is again the women who prepare the way. In a few days, he becomes popular among the girls at Jordan’s Surgical Appliances: “the girls all liked to hear him talk” (Lawrence 171). Firstly, he gets engaged in a relationship with Miriam Leivers, who is a spiritual girl and wants to possess Paul’s soul with all loyalty and virtue. Their intimacy has been kept so abstract that Paul sees their relationship as Platonic friendship. But, Paul is bound to his mother, and his passion for mother overcomes him which leads him to declare that, “I can only give friendship- it’s a flaw in many make-up. The thing overbalances to one side- I hate a toppling balance. Let us have done” (Lawrence 339). Here, Paul breaks off not only because of his emotional tie with his mother but also with Miriam’s coming from a class from which he is being encouraged to escape. Macdonald Daly in his article, “Relationship and Class in *Sons and Lovers*”, rightly remarks that, “one of the achievements of *Sons and Lovers* is that it encourages us to look through romantic notions of love to see the material basis, the economic roots of sexual life” (Daly 89).

However, Paul manages to subdue the passion for his mother while he engages himself with another married woman Clara Dawes, who happens to be a measure to fulfil Paul’s sexual gratification. The therapy Clara affords to Paul is meant to be a balm to his virulent Oedipal Syndrome, but is even more obviously a solve to his ego: “She knew how stark and alone he was, and she felt it was great that he came to her...she did this for him in his need, even if he left her, for she loved him” (Lawrence 540). But this relationship falls short as Clara realises her true love for Baxter and finally returns to him. Kate Millet, in her article “Sexual Politics”, criticized Lawrence for showing Clara as his sexual mistress : “Miriam is Paul’s spiritual mistress while Clara is sexual one- the whole arrangement is carefully planned so that neither is strong enough to offset his mother’s ultimate control”, (Millet 87).

There are interesting common elements in *Sons and Lovers* and Freud’s important and almost contemporaneous paper, “The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life” (1912). In this paper, Freud talks about a conflict between affection and sex, perceptible to an incestuous fixation on

mother or sister, and the consequence is the inability to get on with one’s well brought up wife. This is well manifested within the pages of this novel. Here, Paul is almost aware as is Mrs Morel that his relationship with his mother is not entirely a matter of sexless ‘affection’. Therefore, he cannot pursue a healthy relationship with any other woman (like Miriam, Clara) as he is always within the grip of his mother’s love.

On the question of love and lust, it can be said that lust is actually another dimension of love according to biologist Helen Fisher who talked about *Lust, Attraction and Attachment*, as the three brain systems for Love in her paper, “The Drive to Love: The Neural Mechanism for Mate Selection”. And after analyzing the entire novel *Sons and Lovers*, it is quite clear that in Miriam-Paul relationship Paul feels ‘Attraction’ towards Miriam whereas Miriam looks for ‘Attachment’, and on the contrary, in Paul-Clara relationship ‘Lust’ becomes the prominent aspect. Most importantly from Fisherian perspective, it can be said that the relation between Paul and his mother is a constant oscillation between ‘Lust’ and ‘Attachment’. Eventually, Paul decides to end all three agonising relationships. Even towards the end Paul decides to give an overdose of morphine to his mother in order to end her suffering, which may be physical agony as well as the mental agony of not being able to have her physically. But death has not freed Paul from his mother. It has completed his allegiance to her, and paves way for their ideal reunion, and now he can love her as Dante loved his Beatrice.

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