

Mother's Love as Impediment to the Sons' Emotional Development in *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract: This paper intends to explore mother's extravagant love which negatively shapes the son's emotional responses and, consequently, diverts his emotional development from its fulfilling normal course. In exposing this governing idea of possessive love which deplorably informs the human predicament in *Sons and Lovers* and, which organises the narrative text, Lawrence recognises that which eventually encourage human emancipation. It is true that Lawrence has not yet discovered his technique in *Sons and Lovers* in the way Schorer argues for² - he frequently falls on colourful depiction of setting, on natural phenomena to reveal psychic states, on earnest qualifications that verge on preaching ... etc. - but it is equally true that he has been thematically and creatively aware of that which distorts human life and makes man impotent. The rejection of negative states such as dependence, possessiveness, rationalism etc, Lawrence argues, will realise that rhythm of life which makes man wholesome.

Keywords and phrases: extravagant, direct, governing idea, eventually, argue for, psychic states, earnest qualifications, rejection, negative states

1. Thematic Burden

The thematic burden of *Sons and Lovers* crystallises what Dorothy Van Ghent rightly establishes as “an organic disturbance in the relationships of men and women”³, an organic disturbance that is caused by a destructive, maternal sense of possessorship. Such disruptive sense manifests itself, for example, in Gertrude's attitude towards Paul her son, who is wearing William's evening suit to attend the dinner party at Jordan's. “And as she smoothed her hand over the silk collar she thought of her eldest son. But this son was living enough inside the clothes. She passed her hand down his back to feel him. He was alive and hers” (p. 312). The sense also unequivocally suggests itself in establishing Miriam as a menacing rival. “I could let another woman – but not her. She'd leave me no room” (p. 261). Miriam's “unordinariness”, in fact, dispossesses her: ‘And she exults so in taking you from me – She's not like ordinary girls’ (p. 262). earlier, aided by her bourgeois tendencies, she manifests a kind of personal possessorship when she rejects a girl who comes to the Morels' house to inquire after William: “I don't approve of the girls my son meets at dances. And she is **not** at home” (p. 70). It is quite significant that we see all this from Mrs. Morel's point of view.

Gertrude Coppard looms large in Lawrence's novel. Interestingly, her positive as well as negative concerns are vividly illustrated. “Lawrence portrays in Mrs. Morel a person with a soaring capacity for life – though she can stunt the life in others.”⁴ Yet, her truthful value lies in reflecting the agony of perplexed human beings, her sons, in this case. Weiss point out that “Gertrude Morel moves through *Sons and Lovers* like a cry of pain”⁵ and we have to recongnise her as a medium for transmitting and releasing this sense of human anguish. But

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² Schorer, pp. 67-78

³ Ghent, pp 16-17.

⁴ Alastair, p. 38.

⁵ Weiss, p. 28.

she is also the source of that painful reality of her sons whose inadequacies are manifest. Arthur excluded, what justifies the title of this paper is Lawrence's treatment of William and Paul. The latter, in particular, arrests the central issues of **Sons and Lovers**, issues that are pervaded by his negative responses. The discarded title of the novel bears, in fact, the name of **Paul Morel**.

There is a sense in which Paul realises his incapacity for love, a sense that organically relates to his almost sacred connection to his mother. Thus, his love for Clara and Miriam falls short of marriage because he is unable to offer a permanent relationship. Significantly, his reproachful tone suggests this dismal conclusion to his mother: "But, no, mother I even love Clara, and I did Miriam; but to **give** myself to them in marriage I couldn't. I couldn't belong to them. Seem to want **me**, and I can't give it them" (p. 427). Quiet earlier, the Lawrentian text emphasises Paul's 'biological' relation with an idealised mother: "Instinctively he realised that he was life to her. And, after all, she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing" (p. 261). It is this connection which keeps pulling at him and which Paul blames for his failure to love: "And I never shall see the right woman while you live" (p. 427).

If Paul fails to love, Miriam's failure is even more evident. Miriam, who strongly reminds us of Roddice Hermione in **Women in Love** with her "exhausting... mental pressures"⁶, emotionally fails with Paul because she is not in touch with life. Only in glimpses do we discern in her that which identifies her with a remarkably creative universe. The narrative act emphasises her hatred to and fear of physical contact and the instinctive power which regenerates man. Unable to offer herself as a woman, she falls upon her spirituality: "Her soul quivered. It was the communion she wanted" (p. 198). Suggestively, she stresses her abstraction, a word that recurs overtly and covertly in **Sons and Lovers**. Paul, thus, realises that "the intimacy between them had been kept abstract" (p. 213). Paul also recognises that what Miriam wants is a kind of intellectual relationship which finally refines her abstraction: "with Miriam, he was always on the high plane of abstraction" (p. 214). So as to have Paul "all to herself", he "must be made abstract first" (p. 214). per possessive sense, her "masculine" aspect and hatred to men (p. 192) and her scorn of the male sex (p. 177) suggest her difficulty "to get into normal human relations with anyone" (p. 205), hence her almost perverted substitute in Nature: "so her friend, her companion, her lover, was Nature (p. 205). Her religious intensity (p. 185) and mysticism (p. 207), her guilty feelings for entertaining the idea of loving Paul, her Christ - like humility (p. 212) which is recognisably "not a studied pose but Miriam's acceptance that she is to be martyred on the cross of male passion"⁷, her concern with "inner life" as suggested in her French diary (p. 255), her 'unfailing topic' ie books (p. 384), her passivity (p. 279) her negativity (p. 288), her impeding virginity (p. 340), and paralysing 'purity' (p. 221), her moral sense ('she was his conscience') (p. 307) ... all these tendencies reinforce her abstract aspect or non-physical reality.

Miriam's incapacity for normal love may be safely established to relate to the religious intensity of her mother. Lawrence reveals in Mrs. Leivers a woman who "exalted everything even a bit of housework - to the plane of a religious trust" (p. 182) and who could influence her daughters but not her sons: "she could not instil it (the doctrine of 'the other cheek') at all into the boys. With the girls she succeeded better, and Miriam was the child of her heart" (p. 183). Earlier, Lawrence prepares us for some nullifying implications when she when he vividly interweaves the two women's sense of mysticism:

Her great companion was her mother.

⁶ Lawrence, **Womrn in Love**, p. 101

⁷ Alastair, p. 52

They were both brown-eyed, and inclined to be mystical, such women as treasure religion inside them, breathe it in their nostrils, and see the whole of life in a mist thereof

(p. 177)\

Relevantly, Lawrence's narrative emphasises Miriam's absorbing reality and incapacity for physical love. We see these negative gestures from Paul's and Gertrude's points of view. Thus, Paul's mother is worried to realise that "she (=Miriam) will suck him up" (p. 237). Paul himself realises that "she wanted to draw all of him into her (p. 239). In the scene where Miriam wants to show Paul a certain wild - rose bush, she irritates him by her disturbingly performed ritual: "she lifted her hand impulsively to the flowers; she went forward and touched them in worship" (p. 198). This emotional intensity which edges on perversion ultimately urges Paul to a vehement outburst in his valedictory letter to her: "see you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun - as a mystic monk to a mystic nun" (p. 307). We are, thus, made to realise that Paul's concepts of physical love radically differs from Miriam's. Whereas she holds it to be an agonising, shameful act, he recognises it as a creatively rhythmic response that miraculously identifies him with the non-human impulses of a blind and an overwhelming instinctive life.

As a rule when he started love-making, the emotion was strong enough to carry with it everything - reason, soul, blood, in a great sweep. Gradually the little criticism, the little sensations, were lost, thought also went, everything borne along in one flood. He became not a man with a mind, but a great instinct. (p. 442)

Miriam fails with Paul because she precisely has no capacity for that creative act. Her sterility which is emphasised may ultimately explain Paul's abhorrence: "he hated her for having got him, and yet not got him, and he tortured her. She took all and gave nothing, he said. At least, she gave no living warmth. She was never alive and giving off life" (pp. 357-358). Paul's sense of failure, on the other hand, manifests itself gradually: "At first it was only sadness. Then he began to feel he could not go on" (p. 356).

It is quite significant that Paul suggests that he will break off with Miriam after the floral scene that starts with a telling sentence: "the beauty of the night made him want to shout" (p. 358). The "half-moon", the "white fence of lilies", the inviting Corncrake, the 'brutal' scent of "purple iris" all inform remarkably elating scene that revives in Paul that dark force which reconciles him to the instinctive rhythm of life. Earlier, however, Miriam realises that he is striving to free himself of her: "And in her heart of hearts, unconsciously she felt that he was trying to get away from her" (pp. 240-241). She seems to have expected the termination of their relationship for which she first blames Paul's immaturity: "'you are a child of four', she repeated in her anger" (p. 361). Bewildered, she then proceeds to accuse him of initiating the conflict. "It has always been you fighting me off". But her unconscious thoughts suggest that she always recognises the impact of the dangerous rival in Paul's mother: "She guessed somebody had been influencing him. She felt upon him the hardness, the foreignness of another influence" (p. 272).

With Clara, Paul succeeds up to the point where she realises that he does not belong to her. "She knew she never fully had him. Some part, big and vital in him, she had no hold over; nor did she ever try to get it, or even to realise what it was" (p. 439).

Unlike Miriam's, Clara's concept of love suggests a physically responsive woman, hence Paul's "passion", a word which significantly occurs as the title of a lengthy chapter in **Sons and Lovers**. This is how Lawrence shows Clara's flexibility in an exceedingly sensuous scene:

‘Will you go down to the river?’ he asked. She looked at him, leaving herself in his hands. He went over the brim of the declivity and began to climb down.

‘It is slippery’, he said.

‘Never mind’, she replied (p. 376).

When they rest between the roots of two beech-trees on a hill ..., the scene eventually assumes a symbolic value where scarlet flowers baptise passion:

When she rose, he, looking on the ground all the time, saw suddenly sprinkled on the black wet-beech roots many scarlet carnation petals, like splashed drops of blood; and red, small splashes fell from her bosom, streaming down her dress to her feet (p. 379).

Only when Clara pursues things to an extravagant point that she becomes burden: “ ‘The night is free to you, “ (p. 437). Clara's almost masculine intellectuality is also a disruptive element: “Sometimes when I see her just as **the woman**, I love her, mother; but then, when she talks and criticises, I often don't listen to her” (p. 426). In Miriam, however, Paul consistently sees a girl with an abhorrently restrictive attitude: “but love should give a sense of freedom, not of prison. Miriam made me feel tied up like a donkey to a stake ... It's sickening!” (p. 438).

Clara, interestingly, suggest that impersonal relationship which does not advocate the merging of identities which Miriam strives for: “It is through the very strangeness of the woman that Paul gains access to the darkness which is both the unknown forces and purposes of the wheeling universe”⁸. A telling passage in **Sons and Lovers** remarkably suggest the point:

All the while the peewits were screaming in the field. He lifted his head, and looked into her eyes. They were dark and shining and strange, life wild at the source starting into his life, stranger to him, yet meeting him, and he put his face down on her throat, afraid. What was she? A strong, strange, wild life, that breathed with his in the darkness through this hour. It was all much bigger than themselves that he was hushed. They had met, and included in

⁸ Sagar, p. 33.

their meeting the thrust of the manifold grass-stem, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars (P. 430).

“Darkness” in D.H. Lawrence, as it is in this passage, has always an intense symbolic value. Ghent only reinforces this conclusion by suggesting its emotive potency:

“... it (=darkness) offers itself with a special richness to Lawrence because of the character of his governing vision. Darkness is half of the rhythm of day, the darkness of unconsciousness is half of the rhythm of the mind, and the darkness of death is half of the rhythm of life. Denial of this phase of a universal tide is the great sin, the sin committed by modern economy and modern rationalism. In acceptance of the dark, man is renewed to himself and to light, to consciousness, to reason, to brotherhood”.⁹

Clara responds nicely to Paul's physical overtures because, like Paul, she identifies herself with the instinctive impulses of a virile universe. This is how Lawrence shows Clara's fascination with Mrs. Limb's stallion. “ ‘Your horse is a fine fellow!’ said Clara” (p. 288). This suggests that human experiences and values in D.H. Lawrence are to be seen in a relationship with an animistic universe:

... they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass-blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing, then why fret about themselves? They could let themselves be carried by life, and they felt a sort of peace each in the other. There was a verification which they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away; it was almost their belief in life (pp. 430-431).

It may be safely suggested that unconscious, emotional strength always shape the sons' attitudes towards the girls they strive to love. Thus, Gertrude's sons implicitly and explicitly compare the lover's image with their mother's unique example. Paul, who suggests Miriam's sterility: “There was no looseness or abandon about her” (p.171), establishes, in chapter XII, his mother's flexibility: “See, my mother looks as if she'd **had** everything that was necessary for her living and developing. There's not a tiny bit of feeling of sterility about her” (p. 386). Earlier, the serious and the thoughtful woman deflates, for William, his frivolous and thoughtless lover, Miss Western: “You know, she's not like you, mother. She's not serious, and she can't think” (p. 148). Relevantly, Miriam's emotional intensity is felt against the background of an intact and sensible mother. Paul realises the striking difference: “And this fearful, naked contact of her own small occasions shocked him. He was used to his mother's reserve. And on such occasions he was thankful in his heart and soul that he had his mother so sane and wholesome” (p. 190). Earlier still, the children who idealise their mother are aware of her graceful and unfailing movements: “Her movements were light and quick. It was always a pleasure to watch

⁹ Ghent, p. 25.

her. Nothing she ever did, no movement she ever made, could have been found fault with by her children” (p. 86).

Significantly, the lover’s ungraceful movement urges a worrying comparison to Paul: “She (=Miriam) was not clumsy, and yet none of her movements seemed quite **the** movement” (p. 191). Even Clara seems to be favourably impressed by the resoluteness of Paul’s mother: “There was something hard and certain in his mother, as if she never had a misgiving in her life” (p. 392).

Conflict characterises the Lawrence text in **Sons and Lovers**. Technically, it is this web of contradictory points of view that gives Lawrence’s book its coherence. Thus, Walter Morel and Gertrude Coppard have a good start but the germ of dissociation is there. At the time of their courtship, Gertrude appears to be fascinated by ‘the dusky, golden, softness of this man’s sensuous flame of life that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence of thought and spirit as her life was’ (p. 18). In chapter VIII, Walter Morel makes us feel her momentary passion for a ruined husband. “Morel watched her shyly. He saw again the passion she had had for him. It blazed upon her for a moment” (p. 243). Ford suggests that “such a coupling of opposites will result in strenuous tensions”¹⁰ and, indeed, we strongly realise this when the mother turns to her new born baby for fulfilment:

There began a battle between the husband and wife - A fearful bloody battle that ended with the death of one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfil his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it - It drove him out of his mind (p. 23).

The more the children hate their father, the more they become attached to their mother. At this point, Walter Morrel is no longer a recognised member of the family:

He was shut out from all family affairs. No one told him anything. The children alone with their mother, told her all about the day’s happenings, everything. Nothing had really taken place in them until it was told to their mother. But as soon as the father came in, everything stopped. He was like the scotch in the smooth, happy machinery of the home. And he was always aware of this fall of silence on his entry, the shutting off of life, the unwelcome (p. 81).

¹⁰ Ford, p. 65.

In the sense of a father's "bullying fashion", the passage recalls Butler's post-Victorian novel, **The Way of All Flesh** which exposes the tyranny of Ernest's father.¹¹

Lawrence, however, unfolds Walter Morel's cruelty in narrative episodes (p. 24, p. 76 ...) that suggest his disconnected reality.

The crippled relationship of the Morels becomes the pivot of emotional conflict in **Sons and Lovers**. Gertrude who confesses to Paul that "I've never had a husband - not really" (p. 262) initiates the conflict with her sons' lovers and also, eventually, becomes its target. She sees in possessive Miriam a rival whose moral strength resembles hers:

‘She exults - she exults as she carries him off from me’, Mrs. Morel cried in her heart when Paul had gone. “She’s not like an ordinary woman, who can leave me my share in him. She wants to absorb him. She wants to draw him out and absorb him till there is nothing left in him, even for himself. He will never be a man on his own feet she will suck him up” (p. 237).

It may be right to suggest that it is this absorption by Miriam which is causing the split in Paul's consciousness.

Miriam, likewise, establishes Mrs. Morel as an upsetting menace: “This is your mother... I know she never likes me” (p. 276). A page earlier, Miriam was indignant at the Morels' interference: “People should leave him and her alone” (p. 275)

Miriam - Gertrude conflict subversively perplexes and dismays a bewildered Paul: “And he felt dreary and hopeless between the two” (p. 238). But there is a sense in which Paul resolves the issue by siding with his mother. Paul's supposition clarifies the point: “If Miriam caused his mother suffering then he hated her” (p. 238). Recurrent narrative episodes in Lawrence's texts such as Paul's dismay at his mother's broken umbrella (p. 205) and at his mother's burnt bread (p. 254), only to give illustrative examples, suggest Paul's close connection with his mother. Earlier, at Paul's illness, Paul-mother intimacy realises that of lovers:

Paul loved to sleep with his mother. Sleep is still most perfect... when it is shared with a beloved. The warmth, the security and peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of the other, knits the sleep, so that it takes the body and soul completely in its healing. Paul lay against her and slept, and got better (p. 87).

Relevantly, Paul's home becomes a place of safety because it is the place where his mother lives: “I talk to her, but I want to come home to you” (p. 261). The unreality of all other places underlies the only solid reality left

¹¹ See in particular p. 79 where Ernest's cruel treatment pervades the scene.

to Paul: "There was one place in the world that stood solid and did not melt into unreality: the place where his mother was" (p. 273).

Paul's mother, on the other hand, accepts Clara because the separated woman does not undermine her moral integrity: "He seemed to like Mrs. Dawes. At any rate that feeling was wholesome" (p. 316).

Paul's lovers also clash. Miriam sees in Clara a rival of low order: "It made Miriam bitter to think that he should throw away his soul for this flippant traffic triviality with Clara" (p. 306). Later, her reproachful remarks suggest that she is worried by Paul-Clara developing relationship: "What about Clara? I hear nothing of her lately" (p. 356). Clara, on the other hand, is worried by Paul's failure to dispel Miriam from his mind: "And yet you lover her!" (p. 339). She sees in Miriam not the abstraction which Paul has come to hate but a sensuous woman: "She doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's your own imagination. She wants you" (p. 339).

Paul's return to Miriam as 'a man' unleashes an obvious conflict with his mother. His 'overbearing way' becomes as emblem of this conflict. The resentful image Lawrence depicts in **Sons and Lovers** is that of a worried, subservient and discarded mother who, thus ignored, reverts to preoccupying herself with the housework, a substitute refuge:

There was a coldness between him and her. He hardly told her anything. Discarded, she waited on him, cooked for him still, and loved to slave for him; but her face closed again like a mask. There was nothing for her to do now but the housework; for all the rest had gone to Miriam. She could not forgive him. Miriam killed the joy and warmth in him (p. 342).

Earlier, Her hater to Miriam surfaces to a similar heightened degree: "You only want me to wait on you - the rest is for Miriam" (p. 261).

2. Conclusion

To recapture things, one may criticise the technique of **Sons and Lovers**. Evidently, Lawrence tries in his fiction to explore and work out his own personal problems and there is nothing in his book's organisation which makes it unique. Ghent rightly establishes that "it is the kind of organisation that a naive autobiographical novelist would tend to use".¹² Relevantly, Lawrence's "concrete" imagination fails to draw the line between

¹² Ghent, p. 16.

the reality which feeds on factual episodes and the metaphor for which that reality stands, a thing “which makes it (Lawrence's book) plain to us.”¹³

But the novel's thematic value asserts itself. Thematically speaking **Sons and Lovers** is a remarkable book in its human capacity and universal implications. Lawrence himself reinforces these conclusions and a letter to Edward Garnett:

It is a great tragedy, and I tell you I have written a great book. It's the tragedy of thousands of young men in England... Now tell me if I haven't worked out my theme, like life, but always my theme. Read my novel! It's a great novel. If **you** can't see the development which is slow, like growth - I can.¹⁴

‘Love’ figures out as a governing theme in **Sons and Lovers**. But it should be refined mythically rather than psychologically, a thing which Kazin emphasises in “sons, lovers and mothers”¹⁵, his excellent essay which introduces the 1962 Modern Library Edition of **Sons and Lovers**. This mythical resonance of Lawrence's fiction may explain Lawrence's unhappiness with the Freudian interpretation of his book: “I hated the Psychoanalysis Review of **Sons and Lovers**”, he protests in a letter to Barbara Low.¹⁶

Sons and Lovers, thus, embodies Lawrence's organising idea that mothers extravagant love hinders sons' emotional development. In his attempt to turn autobiographical material into a highly poetic narrative, he exposes the plight of young men everywhere, men whose unconscious bond to mother prevents them from fulfilling themselves. Lawrence's message to be sure, leaves no room for justifications. But is quite significant that **Sons and Lovers**, like **The Rainbow**, Lawrence's mature novel, ends on a positive note. The word ‘quickly’ which terminates the novel and qualifies Paul's town-word movement, underlies the future quality of Paul's energetic, purposeful life, his determination not to succumb to obliterating death and, ultimately, his acceptance of father.

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¹⁴ A letter to Edward Grnett, Italy, November, 14, 1912, p. 153.

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حب الام بوصفه عائقا للتطور العاطفي للأبناء في أبناء وأحباء

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المستخلص

ينوي هذا البحث إلى إستكشاف حب الأم المسرف الذي يكون، على نحو سلبي، استجابة الإبن العاطفية، ونتيجة لذلك، يحرف تطوره العاطفي عن تحقيق مجراه الطبيعي. وفي كشف هذه الفكرة الحاكمة للحب المتسلط الذي يكون، على نحو مؤسف، المعضلة الانسانية في أبناء وأحباء والذي ينظم النص الروائي، يميز لورنس ذلك الذي يشجع، في النهاية، التحرر الإنساني. إنه لشيء صحيح أن لورنس لم يكتشف، بعد، أسلوبه في أبناء وأحباء بالطريقة التي يدافع فيها شورر-ففلورنس كثيرا ما يركز على تصوير زاه للمهاد وعلى الظاهرة الطبيعية ليكشف حالات نفسية وعلى تحفظات ملحة تشرف على الوعظ... إلى آخره. ولكنه صحيح كذلك أنه كان يشعر من ناحية الموضوع و الابداع بذلك الذي يشوه الحياة الانسانية ويجعل الإنسان عقيما. إن رفض الحالات السلبية، مثل الاعتماد على الآخر وحب الملكية والعقلانية... إلى آخره، يجادل لورنس، يحقق إيقاع حياة تجعل الإنسان كامل الصحة.

الكلمات والعبارات المفتحة: مفرط، يوجه، فكرة حاكمة، أخيرا، ينافح عن، حالات نفسية، تعديلات ملحة، رفض، حالات سلبية