

Chapter VI :

Psychoanalytical Study of Man-Woman Relationship in *Sons and Lovers*

VI.1 Introduction

A thorough study of D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* reveals Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex theory acting as a vital issue in the novel. Lawrence depicts a different sort of mother-son or male-female relationship, which is really unusual, even sometimes it appears to be odd. According to Freud, man usually falls in love for first time in his life with the image of his mother. When he grows up a little, his super ego gets activated. (Super ego is that part of Psyche which is unconscious). As he grows older, his Super ego is suppressed by ego (Ego is the conscious part of Psyche). The protagonist Paul, in this novel is trapped by the conflict between his ego and superego. Inertly and subconsciously, he begins to feel a soft corner for his mother, Mrs. Morel.

This attachment has a very disastrous effect on the mental state of Paul. He never finds a girl who can satisfy him. Miriam is too spiritual and sacrificing and Clara is too sizzling to please him. Both are extremes and Paul wants a combination. Yet he returns to none of the girls because he realizes that it would never be possible for him to overcome the affection towards his mother. Due to his mother fixation, Paul is unable to have a satisfactory relationship with either Miriam or Clara. He begins with a spiritual kingship and moves on to a sexual liaison. Thus, while a young teenager, Paul develops attachment to the introspective Miriam. "He would not have it that they were lovers. The intimacy between them had been kept so abstract, such a matter of the Soul, all thought and weary struggle into consciousness, that he saw it only as a platonic friendship. He stoutly denied that there was anything else between them, Miriam was silent, or else she very quietly agreed". (Lawrence: 1913, p. 191)

Though Miriam remains in tune with Paul spiritually, as the years pass, Paul begins to yearn for something more, for sexual satisfaction which Miriam seems incapable of giving him. While waiting for Miriam Paul takes notice of Miriam's friend Clara who peaks his sexual interest. Paul sways back & forth in his affection

for Miriam and Clara, yet neither appears to satisfy his needs though he eventually convinces Miriam to yield up her Virginity to him, he sadly

“.....realized that she had not been with him all the time, that her soul had stood apart, in a sort of horror. He was physically at rest, but no more.” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 314)

Furthermore though Clara comfortably engages in sexual activities with Paul, he comes to the conclusion that,

“Clara could not stand for him to hold on to. She wanted him, but not to understand him. He felt she wanted the man on top, not the real him that was in trouble”. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 442)

Thus, he has a failed relationship with both the women & at the end, he remains alone with only the memory of his deceased mother to keep him company.

The book falls into two parts. The first describes the early married years of a coal-miner and his wife and also the youth and adolescence of their children. The miner, Morel is illiterate, no match for his wife in self-consciousness and articulacy. She is a former pupil-teacher with aspiration towards the middle classes. The story is biased heavily in her direction. Nevertheless, the miner is a portrait of some complexity, and over and over again intimations of his former attractiveness and latent kindness come through, almost in spite of the author. But what for the most part is shown to us is a conflict between husband and wife, terrible in its concentration and expenditure of energy. One such example is seen when one day he arrives home drunk and hungry.

“Is there nothing to eat in the house?” he asked insolently. In certain stages of his intoxication he affected the clipped, mincing speech of the low ones. Mrs. Morel hated him most in this condition.

“You know what there is in the house’, she said so coldly it sounded impersonal. He stood and glared at her without moving a

muscle. 'I asked a civil question and I expect a civil answer', he said affectedly" (Lawrence: 1913, p. 217)

This in its particularity, its narrative flow, its mastery of dialogue, is representative of the book. It is a language which utilizes even the limitations of colloquial speech as a means of defining character.

VI.2 Man – Woman Relationship:

Lawrence has created his characters to be lively, characters which create society and give it life, not merely fit the frame work of society. If art is to nourish life, it must show humanity in contrast with all that is organic revealing the relation between man and his circumambient universe. L & S characters respond to the physical universe which extends beyond, behind above and outside all personal, social and artistic limits.

Lawrence saw relations between the sexes as essentially a war. He tells in his essay 'Love'.

That all love between men and women is dual, a love which is the motion of melting, fusing together into oneness, and a love which is intensely frictional and sensual gratification of being burnt down into separate clarity of being unthinkable otherness and separateness. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 14)

Lawrence emphasizes the idea that men and women are metaphysically different. In other words, they have different and even opposed ways of being in the world. They are not anatomically different; they have different ways of thinking and feeling and achieve satisfaction and fulfillment in life through different means. He regards maleness and femaleness as opposed, yet complementary. The fundamental metaphysical difference has the consequence that men and women, in a real sense, live in different worlds. Hoffman links the temperament of Paul to the influence of Freudianism:

Writers modeled their studies of character on the therapeutic situation. The hero of this type of fiction was frequently pale, shy,

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sensitive, given too much introspective brooding over the world, which struck him as being harsh and importunate. His experience with the often sex were less affairs than adventures in understanding. (Hoffman: 1967, pp. 73-74).

Lawrence describes young men of Paul's generation as being too diffident and shy 'and' so sensitive to their women that they would go without them forever rather than do them a hurt, an injustice". (Lawrence: 1913, p. 306). Specifically, Lawrence portrays Paul with fair reddish hair, 'a pale quiet child, with eyes that seemed to listen and with a full, dropping underlip'. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 65)

Man-woman relationship through marriage is only a conventional necessity. Lawrence wants woman to be considered exactly as a source for satisfying physical appetites, as a functional process and not as a fulfillment. He believes in pure freedom for both man and woman, according to whom their individuality is superior to sex, that is subordinate.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence depicts some unusual man-woman relationship. This can be evident in the relationship between Gertrude and Mr. Morel, Paul and his mother, Mrs. Morel, Paul and Miriam and Paul and Clara.

VI.3 Gertrude and Mr. Morel:

The relationship between Gertrude and Mr. Morel is full of contrast and conflicts. Hence, their happiness is short lived and the relationship gets strained even before the first child is born. The contrast is due to the difference in their social class and upbringing. Mr. Morel is quite content with the crude mould of the working class family, but Mrs. Morel resents it. The conflict between Mr. Morel and his wife is therefore a conflict between two elements in the way of life of working class. It is of course, very much a conflict of personality. Gertrude is social and rigidly immovable while Walter is more of a social animal, who is quite content in his surroundings. Their battle begins when Gertrude learns that Walter does not own their first home as he has led her to believe. Having her own home is important to Gertrude, while Morel is content to be outdoors, free from

confinement. Lawrence summarizes this aspect in the passage contrasting Mr. and Mrs. Morel.

“Walter Morel seemed melted away before her. She was to the mines that thing of mystery and fascination, a lady. She watched him. He donned well.” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 117)

This attraction soon turns into repulsion, but a certain bond remains between husband and wife for a long time. The unlikeness of their characters and upbringing are the inevitable causes of friction, which is all the more intense because it coincides within the friction inherent in the tensions of the working class life. Mr. and Mrs. Morel of ‘Sons and Lovers’ embody both the Psychological and a social study of working class conflict. Many episodes in the novel could be used to illustrate this friction, but one is particularly worth considering. This is a scene in which Mr. Morel cuts the curls off baby William’s head. This comes as the first stage of disillusionment in the marriage of the couple.

“William was only one year old and his mother was proud of him, he was so pretty... ‘Oh my boy!’ she faltered. Her lips trembled-.... It was like sipping something out of her sobbing”. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 97)

By cutting off these curls, Mr. Morel hurts both his wife’s love for the child and her social aspirations. She is disillusioned with her marriage to Mr. Morel. She yearns for a change in Mr. Morel, change that seems against the facts of the working class life. She herself is aware that the change she wants is impossible to come as she says to herself.

“I wait and wait, what I wait for can never come.” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 79)

Walter does not share Gertrude’s sense of social identification. His class is not defined by ideals but by actual work. His identity changes according to his activity. He can be a drunkard, tyrant, and a loving father or in sickness even a child. Gertrude identifies herself to be a part of nature, her achievement,

recognition of her relation with the circumambient universe is the apex of human existence. Gertrude actually takes part in and of the whole natural world. The conflict in their relationship is due to their backgrounds, temperaments and sensibilities. This conflict characterizes their relationship. In *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud contents that

“It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct on first sexual impulse towards on mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father”. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 221)

Accordingly, the male children of the family, especially Paul and his older brother William, develop a deep attachment to their mother and an intense dislike of their abusive father:

“All children, but particularly Paul, were peculiarly against their father” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 66)

As Freud labels oedipal feelings as a common developmental stage in young boys, the eldest son, William is logically the first child to openly, and physically, expresses his abhorrence for his father in a scene that involves potential violence:

“Morel danced a little nearer, crouching, drawing back his fist to strike. William put his fists ready. A light came into his blue eyes, almost like a laugh. Another word and the men would have begun to fight” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 67)

VI.4 Paul and Mrs. Morel:

The relationship between Paul and Mrs. Morel or The Mother – Son relationship serves as a nucleus around which the whole plot revolves. The attachment of Paul to his Mother is extraordinary and this oedipal tie with his mother is responsible for stunting Paul’s vital growth. He rejects other women because he compares them with his mother. He has an affair with Miriam, who awakens the artist in him, but on account of the mother-pull which is strongly operative in Paul, and also due to Miriam’s own sensual inhibitions, the two fail to achieve harmony. Paul is then attracted to Clara Dawes. For a while they are

passionately in love, but the consummation of their love brings only momentary satisfaction. The relationship soon breaks down.

Lawrence condemns Mrs. Morel for her stifling hold on Paul. He is presented as a mere victim on whom her views of the world are forcibly branded. As Jessie Chambers points out.

The climatic rejection of Miriam does not come about because Paul has made a conscious decision, but because he cannot successfully resist his mother. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 197)

In other words, Paul is an object over whom two strong women are struggling. Paul Morel's efforts to emancipate himself from the influence of women often make him very cruel. In spite of his extraordinary attachment with his mother, he is determined to get away from her. His passion for her in the end is unreal self-indulgent, in line with his desire to join her in death. Paul must separate himself from his mother in order to survive. Mrs. Morel is presented by Lawrence, an almost a magical figure, who breathes life and purpose into her son. On this basis, Lawrence based his theory of Man-Woman relationship. Paul's conflict with his father and attachment to his mother Amy initially present a natural stage of development. Paul has difficulty developing out of his stage, and thus this oedipal stage becomes a complex:

The analytic picture of the Oedipus complex is an enlarged and accentuated edition of the infantile sketch: the hatred of the father and the death – wishes against him are no longer vague hints; the affection for the mother declares itself with the aim of possessing her as a woman (Sophocles: 2013, p.39)

Paul's unnatural connection with his mother hinders his relationship with other women:

He had come back to his mother. Hers was the strongest tie in his life. There was one place in the world he stood solid and did not melt into unreality. The place where his mother was. Everybody

else could grow shadowy, almost non-existent to him, but she could not. It was as if the Pivot and pole of his life, from which he could not escape, was his mother (Lawrence: 1913, p. 245)

Paul is complicated by his incestuous attraction to his mother. Freud aptly surmises that

The erotic life of such people remains dissociated, divided between two channels, the same two that are personified in art as heavenly and earthly (or animal) love. Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love (Plummer: 2002, p. 177)

Mrs. Morel subconsciously realizes how she is preventing her son from achieving his own independence and she tries to reduce her influence on her son. She realizes that it is better for Paul to marry Miriam than to carry on in his restless drifting fashion. There is no suggestion however that her death is a kind of resignation on her part. Still she cannot give up fully. She clings to life tenaciously and when the priests comfort her that she will have her relatives in the other land she replies.

“It is the living I want, not the dead.” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 57)

Even after her death, Paul is not able to disentangle himself from his mother. He wants the actual physical presence of his mother, much more than Miriam or Clara. Paul has never emerged as a separate human being. He is in a kind of dilemma. The mercy killing of his mother is probably his compulsiveness. The purpose is quite plain. Paul must kill his mother to disentangle himself from her influence, before it is too late. That is the radical dependence on his will upon her, which he realizes is irrevocably fired by her death. He can now deny that his love for her was self-destructive.

Lawrence based much of his novels on personal experiences and his relationship with his mother on the subject of his mother Lawrence wrote:

This has been a kind of bond between me & my mother. We have loved each other almost with a husband and wife love, as well as filial & maternal". (Lawrence: 1913, p. 79).

With regard to the credibility of Freud's Oedipus complex, Lawrence asserts,

Beware of it – this mother incest idea can become an obsession. But it seems to me there is this much truth in it: that at certain periods the man has a desire and a tendency to return unto the woman make her his goal and ends, finds his justification in her. (Lawrence: 1913, p. 301 – 302)

This acknowledgement that the Oedipus complex conveys a certain amount of truth about human nature suggests that the author, at the very least, recognized the similarities between Freud's theory of incest and his own portrayal of the mother – son relationship in the novel and was most likely in some manner influenced by Freudian Psycho analysis.

VI.4.1 Paul and Miriam:

The romantic element in *Sons and Lovers* is an intricate relationship between Paul and Miriam. Miriam is an extremely sensitive girl. She has been seduced by her mother's mistaken high mindedness, to a semi neurotic condition. As the love affair between her and Paul develops, her terror of sex becomes a serious barrier between them, though one might also add that Paul's clumsiness and selfishness create an even greater block. By rejecting Miriam's suggestion of marriage, Lawrence depicts Paul as able to recognize that he cannot satisfactorily live with only the spiritual components of desire. Instead of choosing a woman he rejects her, had he chosen a female partner with integrated components of sexuality, he might have fared better in life.

The author's view of the conflict and his claims for vital self, permeate the entire Paul–Miriam relationship. For example, two distinct but crucially related ideas emerge from the garden scene.

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“See, said Paul to Miriam ‘what a quick garden’, she saw the dark yews and the golden crocuses, and then she looked gratefully. He had not seemed to belong to her, he was different then, not her Paul, who understood the slightest quirks of her innermost soul, but someone else, speaking some other language than hers. How it hurt her and deadened her very perceptions. Only when he came right back to her, leaving his other self, she thought she would feel alive again.” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 187)

Paul feels threatened by Miriam’s very presence. To maintain contact with her; he must repress his essential maleness. The basis of their relation is established as an extension of the conflict within Paul, to be resolved only by the victory of one over the other, the vital over mental self.

Paul wants to maintain a platonic companionship with Miriam so that he can continue to have her help with his work, without giving anything in return. His cruelty consists in the fact that he has no sense of her as a human being. Throughout the conflict with Miriam, Paul ascribes feelings to the girl which are not very convincing. A typical moment in the dealings between man and woman in Lawrence’s works occurs at the beginning between Paul and Miriam. Paul is complaining that Miriam is making extortionate, unnatural demands on him which he has a right to refuse to fulfill.

VI.4.2 Paul and Clara:

Paul’s second sweetheart Clara has the sensuous quality of Walter Morel, Paul’s awareness of the ‘Blonde Hair’ which grew low and fluffy on her neck... recalls Mrs. Morel’s sensuous awareness of the man who was to become her husband. Clara’s attachment to the suffragette movement seems to be included mainly to emphasize her alienation from intellectual life. The introduction of the Paul – Clara relationship to illustrate the emergency of vital self, conceals the imperfection that is carried over from the previous section of the novel. Lawrence’s purpose in introducing the new relationship after the defeat of Miriam is almost clear.

“This was the end of the first phase of Paul’s love affair. He was now about twenty three years old, and though still virgin the sex instinct that Miriam had over-refined for so long now grew particularly strong. Often as he talked to Clara, came that thickening and quickening of blood, that peculiar concentration in the breast, as if something were alive there, a new self or a new center of consciousness.” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 221)

It is fully evident from the later sensual encounters with Clara – the new self or a new center of consciousness is the answer to Miriam’s and his mother’s possessiveness, the means of initiating Paul into manhood.

The transfer of Paul’s interest from Miriam to Clara is indicated at the point when the three meet Miss Limb with the stallion. Miss Limb’s overt admiration for the masculinity of the horse embarrasses both Paul and Miriam, but Clara goes to the heart of the problem by asserting that Miss Limb wants a man. Immediately Paul forgets Miriam and turns his attention to Clara.

“She was kneeling, bending forward still to smell the flowers. Her neck gave him a sharp pang, such a beautiful thing, yet not proud of itself just now. Her breasts swing slightly in her blouse. The arching curve of her back was beautiful and strong; She wore no stays” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 262)

The Clara episode is redundant; it begins as a re-run of the Miriam relationship. Lawrence perhaps wanted to show that Paul was capable of successful sexual relations.

Clara has more vital substance than Miriam. She is less rigidly formed by values. This affair is also defeated as Paul is actually much interested in handing Clara back to her husband, once she has fulfilled her purpose of vindicating Paul sensually.

VI.5 Conclusion:

Sons and Lovers presents conflicting man-woman relationships, and a psychological and social study of working class conflict. The conflict in the relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Morel is because of difference in their background which proves an insurmountable barrier to communication and mutual trust. In fact there are two sets of relationships, one (Sons) within the family and another (Lovers) outside the family. Some connection seems to be implied between the two. By using such a title, Lawrence is emphasizing a connection between men's capacity to form serious adult relationships and their first relationship with their parent. Paul is a Son and a Lover also. The relationship with his mother is never allowed to fade. He tries to make a relationship outside the family but is caught in an internal conflict of loyalty between Miriam and his mother. The whole novel revolves around the conflict in Man – Woman relationship.

The novel remains essentially void of the external conflict of society and centers exclusively on the inner conflicts of the characters. Thus, nowhere does Paul fret about his oedipal feelings for his mother or lament about engaging in a sexual relationship with a separated but still married woman, Clara. When propositioned for sex by Paul, even the saintly character of Miriam

“....was not afraid of people, what they might say, but dreaded the issue with him” (Lawrence: 1913, p. 311)

Thus, Lawrence shifts guilt away from social institutions and places them solely on the internal feelings of the characters.

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