

SONS and LOVERS as a Modern Novel

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ABSTRACT

This Paper focuses on Sons and Lovers as a modern novel and D.H Lawrence as a modern writer. I have taken into account the episodes depicted in the novel and reviewed them critically to come to conclusion that this 20th century novel can be called as a modern novel. The writing style, structure, plot, grammar and autobiographical elements have also been taken into consideration. Opinions and views of critics have also been focused on, moreover, the personal life events of the author are also looked upon to see their impact on the writing of the author. Therefore, I can conclude that this novel can be called a modern novel.

The 20th century novel, from 1990 to the present day, covering over sixty years can broadly be divided into three periods. D.H Lawrence was a novelist in the second period. (1919-1939). It is during this period that 'Stream of consciousness' novel comes to its own. D.H Lawrence is one of the most disputed geniuses in the history of the modern English. He has been excessively praised as well as abused. His preoccupation with sex has resulted in his being condemned as a sex maniac, and there are many who still regard him as a turner out of cheap sex novels. Lawrence is one of the greatest artists who writes because of internal compulsion, and in this way seek relief for their inner problems by externalising them in fiction. He had to endure great emotional stress in youth and face many urgent personal problems.

Lawrence's love of his mother was of abnormal intensity, in a fit of involuntary exaggeration he once said that he loved her like a lover and always believed 'there was a bond between them of pre natal origin which could never be broken and which made it impossible for him to find a real mate in any other woman. Lawrence's environment as a child and as a young man played an important part in conditioning the novelist of the future. Their home was torn by the parental conflict, and as a result Lawrence came to consider the relationship between men and women as a form of conflict and not a natural expression of harmony. This is why sex conflict assumes such a gigantic part in his novels. Sex looms large in the novels of Lawrence in all its biological, psychological and metaphysical relations. He is most modern in his treatment of sex, there is nothing in him of the Victorian prudery and inhibitions.

Each one of his novels is remarkable for its free and frank treatment of sex, so much so that his 'The rainbow and Lady Chatterley's' lover were proscribed on grounds of obscenity. He was by no means the voluptuary that he is often depicted, rather he insisted on the sacred nature of sex, on the religious element in its consummation. The fact is as Diana O' Neil tells us; Lawrence represents the revolt against reason. The vein of mysticism runs through his thought. Discontented with contemporary civilisation, he seeks to achieve, 'a new synthesis between mind and matter, flesh and spirit and male and female. He finds Christianity wanting no longer a living

religion, and wants to give humanity a new faith to replace the old one. It is a religion of the blood he preaches, he senses a dark and mysterious God hovering behind the human conflict and asserts victory.

According to J.W. Beach, the addition of mystical poetry to the psychology of love is his distinctive contribution to the English novel. In the traditional novel, love is taken for granted, and the story deals with the obstacles that come in the way of love which either overcome, or which frustrate the love in the long run. But, with Lawrence, love is conceived of, in terms of connecting affinities, sometimes the psycho magnetic fields affecting the lovers. The lovers love each other but they don't know why.

Just as Lawrence represents the revolt against the well made novel. He shows little concern with the novel as an art form. There is no plot or character in the conventional sense. Plot appears in the form of intrigues or mysteries to be solved, misunderstandings to be ironed out, conflicts of interests to be settled, moral issues to be brought to a conclusion. His plot is simply the line of movement of the elemental life force- a rapid, shifting wave like movement. Though more often than not, vividly visualised, are not interesting in them, or for the projects they might undertake, but as centres of radiation quivering with the interchange of impulses, as the carriers of vital life force.

Time is a flux and hence he does not draw a sharp line between what happened this year, what happened ten years ago. He distinguishes between the inner time and mechanical and clock time. The characters are no doubt vividly visualised externally but chief interest lies in the rendering of 'the tangles of emotions and sensations', in which successive lovers are involved. D.H Lawrence sees his subject less in terms of the outline that is known to be there more in terms of the mass that strikes the eye. He is an impressionist because he is not concerned with the dramatic shape of the thing, but with the living feel of it.

Since it is not easy to communicate 'the shimmeriness of life, he strains to push expressiveness beyond the possibilities of language.

There are several layers of experience in *Sons and Lovers*, some very close to biographical actuality, some more remote. The element of autobiography constantly obtrudes itself in Lawrence's fiction. But the relation to reality is a peculiar one in *Sons and Lovers*. The novel is a catharsis, achieved by reliving an actual experience – reliving it over and over again.

D.H. Lawrence the son of John Arthur Lawrence, a coal miner, was born in east wood, a small town near, Nottingham, an area which had been a major coal mining area for centuries. That is why we find a fully developed picture of colliery life in the novel. The memories of that life have been sketched graphically by the novelist.

The novel has autobiographical touches. We find a lot of similarities between Lawrence's father and Mrs. Morel is the portrait of his mother. Lawrence witnessed fierce quarrels between his parents amid their grinding poverty. His father's drunkenness would infuriate his mother and she would nag him. He would shout back and sometimes strike her. Once, when she was pregnant, he pushed her out of the house and locked her out for the night. The children always took their mother's side, Lawrence has described these incidents and it seems as if we are reading his biography.

Lawrence's elder brother William Ernest was a favourite of his mother as she turned to him after disappointment in marriage. Ernest had a promising career in a London firm but he died at the age of 23 because of pneumonia. His health had broken down because of his mother's disapproval of his fiancée. There is great similarity between Lawrence and Paul so far as their jobs are concerned. Lawrence got a job as a junior clerk in a Nottingham firm manufacturing surgical goods. Paul also works as a junior clerk in Mr. Jordan firm in Nottingham. He, like Lawrence, falls ill, and is nursed by his mother. Both are deeply attached to their mothers, and the mothers develop great attachment to them after the death of their elder sons.

Lawrence's mother on one occasion took Lawrence to the farm, where the Chambers family lived. Lawrence became a fast friend of one of the boys, Alan. He developed relations with Jessie Chambers, who was fourteen at that time. The love affair between Lawrence and Jessie serves as the basis of love affair of Paul and Miriam. The relation between Lawrence and Jessie broke because of the latter's Puritanical temperament.

Soon afterwards, Lawrence had a love affair with an older woman, Alice Dax, who was married. He developed sexual relations with her, to which she did not object. In the novel, the relationship between Paul and Clara is based on the actual relations of Lawrence and Alice Dax.

The unusual relationship between Paul and his mother is based on the actual relationship between Lawrence and his mother. He told a girl named Louie, that his mother is his first love. Like Lawrence, Paul Morel's deep attachment with his mother smothered his soul. His mother engrosses his soul till the end when she suffers from cancer. Her death takes away the entire joy from his life. There is a great resemblance between

the circumstances of the death of Lawrence's mother and death of Paul Morel's mother. Lawrence's mother fell seriously ill. He could not tolerate the physical agony. The portrayal of Paul in the novel is a fairly authentic portrayal of Lawrence himself.

Regarding the construction of Lawrence's novel, critics do not hold good opinion. They find *Sons and Lovers* to be a formless and rambling novel, without any clear cut design. But some critics find a definite pattern and a unity of design in this novel.

Graham Handley observes that *Sons and Lovers* is a structurally uneven novel with a number of episodes which could be safely omitted without any loss in the overall effect. But this opinion cannot be accepted on the ground because everything in the novel contributes to a design. Moreover, this critic clearly says that the novel falls naturally and easily into certain sections. Thus he indicates the presence of a design. According to Handley, Part 1 of the novel describes the Morel family and its domestic disharmony caused by the drinking habit of Walter Morel. Part 2 covers the life of Paul from his teens to his twenties.

Dorothy Van Ghent holds a very high opinion about the construction of the novel. According to her, the novel appears to have the most conventional chronological organization. She says the structure of *Sons and Lovers* is rigorously controlled by an 'idea of an organic disturbance in the relationships of man and women- a disturbance of sexual polarities that is first seen in the disaffection of mother and father, then in the mothers attempt to substitute her sons for her husband, finally, in the sons unsuccessful struggle to establish natural manhood.

The beginning of the novel that attempts to portray the courtship and marriage of Mrs. Morel, disillusionment after marriage, disintegration of her wedded life, and finally casting off Mr. Morel is quite conventional. But Lawrence soon gives up the conventional narrative and resorts to a more natural pattern. The development of the plot is so close to the rhythmic movements of the waves. Betsky illustrates this aspect in the following words, "each event is a successive wave and the movement of relationships is the full tide which is its consummation. After that consummation, there are wave like returns to the achieved tension in that relationship but now each wave shows a diminishing strength and intensity."

The first rhythm traces the married life of the Morels. The courtship and marriage of the morels is just mentioned in the few pages. Then comes the disillusionment of Mrs. Morel because of her temperaments and education. She tries to adjust herself with her husband, but she finds it difficult to be in harmony with him. But their relations are estranged. She seeks fulfilment of her dreams in her sons, whom she makes lovers. Finally, Mrs. Morel is cast off, and here ends the first wave rhythm.

William goes to London and Mrs. Morel finds it difficult to live without him. This separation provides a scope for Paul-Mrs. Morel relationship. William's separation from his mother causes

a spirit, which he fails to stand, and it results in his death. Now, Mrs. Morel turns to Paul. This wave-rhythm moves something like a flood tide. Then Paul falls ill Mrs. Morel realises that she should save him rather than clinging to the dead. Paul also realises the aspect of mother fixation.

Along with it gradually raises the wave rhythm of Paul Miriam relationship. Paul feels drawn towards Miriam but recoils in anguish at the slightest suggestion of physical intimacy. Paul feels his soul being sucked by Miriam. Mrs. Morel and Miriam struggle with Paul's soul as the object of pursuit, Paul is attracted towards Clara. Clara represents merely the passion. After the consummation of their love both of them are tired of each other and seek release.

There are beats and counter beats of successive wave rhythms in the novel. When Morel is cast off, William is taken on. But when Morel is confined indoors with a compound fracture of leg, we find the family striving at some sort of harmony. Paul denounces Miriam as a nun and decides to break off, but he comes back to her. Again they fail to achieve sexual harmony and break off when he is quite thick with Clara. He feels that he belongs to Miriam. Betsy in this regard says:

there are wave-like returns to the achieved tension in that relationship but now each wave shows a diminishing strength and intensity.

The Oedipus complex also brings structural unity. After William's death, Mrs. Morel finds emotional satisfaction in Paul. As both Mrs. Morel and Paul love each other, Oedipus complex becomes a leading theme in the novel. It gains more importance because of mutual love of the mother and the son becomes a great hindrance in the way of Paul's love making either with Miriam or Clara.

Symbolism is also integral to the structure of the novel. The novel is replete with symbols. The coal mines have a symbolic significance. The ash tree is at one time symbolic of the family discord and strife and at another time, symbolic of stability and security. The hen's pecking at the grains held in the palm and the swing both are symbolic of sexual act. Flowers that appear repeatedly serve a symbolic purpose, symbolising the passionate love of Paul and Miriam. It is true that sons and lovers does not confirm to the climatic pattern of development of a novel. But for that reason it cannot be said to be lacking in form.

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