

D. H. LAWRENCE'S SONS AND LOVERS: A
STUDY IN CRITICISM

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BY
ANN HUETT PATTERSON, B. A.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of literary criticism is to lay out "terms and parallels of appreciation from the outside"¹ in order to further the meaning of works of art. Criticism must illuminate as it "names and arranges what it knows and loves, and searches endlessly with every fresh impulse or impression for better names and more orderly arrangements."² Through its search for new technical methods, criticism is questing like some knight of old to see through the tangled brush of artistic accomplishment--with its insights, judgments, and hidden motives--to the meaning of the work as well as the creative impulse itself.

With such a difficult task, every critical approach develops its strengths as well as its weaknesses as it journeys through the land of artistic creation, with its intermingling of reality and illusion. Each approach is valid in that it enlarges our understanding of a particular work. Its invalidity is established when it claims for

¹R. P. Blackmur, "A Critic's Job of Work," Criticism: The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment, rev. ed., edited by Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKenzie (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), p. 309.

²Ibid.

itself omnipotent powers, as each mode of interpretation is limited in the technical application of its own particular methods. When its viewpoint is accepted literally, it becomes dogma and, thus, loses its usefulness to art; it becomes the idée fixe³ which not only is reductive to the work but also forces criticism itself into an untenable position.

Freud's theory of neuroses is an example of the idée fixe of our day which, as Lionel Trilling points out, claimed too much for the speculative thought in relation to reality.⁴ Although Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex is now being questioned by psychoanalysts,⁵ their doubts of its validity have not dampened the enthusiasm of the literalists who continue to confuse hypothesis with fact. Thus, critical theory has been displaced by a psychoanalytic theory of neurosis which is not factually ascertainable.

³Ibid., p. 312.

⁴Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," Criticism, p. 175.

⁵Cf. Erich Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp. 69-82. Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of Our Time (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1964), pp. 82-88.

D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers⁶ is an example of the literal use of Freud's theory as an analogous explanation of the writer's Freudian repressions at the expense of literary theory. Although there is some very good criticism devoted to the novel, the most influential by far is the psychological approach.

There are several causes for the widely accepted Freudian viewpoint: Freud's intellectual and moral position, Lawrence's reputation, and the age itself. Freud by his sheer capacity of intellect was the force which molded the age as few men have ever done. In trying to balance the superego and the id in order to control impulses which are detrimental to man's sense of well-being, he gave a noble ethic to a supposedly unethical age.⁷ Lawrence also was a contributor to psychological criticism in that he suffered as a writer who, because of his puritanical background, could not resist his seeming preoccupation with sexual matters. Thus, his candor in artistic expression caused his reputation to be greatly exaggerated as a writer obsessed with sex. Such candor in fact caused the English

⁶D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1913; reprint ed., New York: Viking Press, 1958).

⁷Wylie Sypher, Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 72.

to suppress The Rainbow⁸ and later by order of the courts to destroy Lady Chatterley's Lover.⁹ Thus with Lawrence's own penchant for honesty in the face of Victorian mores, the impetus of Freud himself, and the amateur's love of psychological probing which is inherent in the age, psycho-analytic theory became a mode of criticism which has had an extensive influence upon Lawrence's works.

Yet the sexual passages in the works are few in comparison to the vast amount of work Lawrence produced--essays, poetry, travelogues, and, according to Diana Trilling, letters second only to those of Keats in the English language.¹⁰ However, in the vast amount of work Lawrence produced, there has been little critical evaluation.¹¹ Some of the most valid evaluation is devoted to Sons and Lovers, with its two main categories--Freudian and

⁸Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart: The Story of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954), pp. 201-204.

⁹Ibid., p. 397.

¹⁰D. H. Lawrence, The Selected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Diana Trilling (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958), p. xiv.

¹¹Maurice Beebe and Anthony Tommasi, eds., "Criticism of D. H. Lawrence: A Selected Checklist with an Index to Studies of Separate Works," Modern Fiction Studies V (Spring, 1959); 83-98.

vitalist. It is difficult to define the latter, which seems to mean a "worshiper of life." With such a vague definition, the vitalist arguments, as Stoll observes, are rather meaningless in the face of Freudian theories.¹² Yet such a mode of interpretation of the work often becomes a case study of neuroticism which--although highly interesting for insights into behavioral patterns--neglects the techniques of the artist, as well as other possible meanings in the work.

Although Lawrence's achievements as an artist have been questioned, there is no doubt that his literary place is assured with Sons and Lovers. In tracing the history of the novel, Raymond Williams notes that Lawrence was able to bring language and feeling together for the first time in the lives of his characters. George Eliot and Hardy had succeeded to a degree in giving their characters realistic situations and language, but it was Lawrence who was most at ease in the portrayal of his characters through their sense of language.¹³ Sons and Lovers then is not only

¹²John E. Stoll, D. H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers": Self-Encounter and the Unknown Self, Monograph No. 11 (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University Press, 1968), p. 13.

¹³Raymond Williams, The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 173.

important to literary history, but it is also important as a basis of understanding Lawrence's later philosophical and moralist attitudes concerning relationships between men and women, his social attitudes towards the division between classes, and his interest in the nonrational forces in life.

Therefore, the three approaches to the novel which I have used--psychoanalytic, formalistic, and sociological--not only are related to the work itself but also establish a basis for examining the contradictions in Lawrence's own life. In the beginning chapter, I have used some of the main arguments of Freudian critics, which demonstrate the theory of the Oedipus complex as applied to Paul Morel. Thus, Paul's neurotic tendencies in the work are probed through Lawrence's statements concerning his relationship with his mother, as well as his intentions in the work. In Chapter II I have explored the possibility that Paul's artistic self precludes the merging of identities which is the basis of the Oedipal tie. That is, the Oedipal and artistic selves are diametrically opposed in the characterization of Paul Morel. In the third chapter, I have examined the characters of the women in social context in which Victorian mores and customs limited each in their abilities as well as decisions affecting their lives.

CHAPTER I

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH: PAUL MOREL AND THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers is one of the most prominent autobiographical novels of the twentieth century, and one which has been highly regarded for its Freudian insights into neurotic behavior. Although Freud's theory of neuroses is now being questioned by psychologists as well as literary critics, this paper is not concerned with the validity of his findings. Neither is this paper concerned with the supposition that man has become so alienated from his experiences that "the novelist who hears the word psychology" should "lower his eyes and blush."¹ It attempts only to trace the main points of Freud's argument concerning the Oedipus complex, which is the basis of his theory of neuroses, as applied by Lawrence in the novel.

In November, 1912, Lawrence wrote Edward Garnett that his new novel "has got form--form: haven't I made it patiently, out of sweat as well as blood."² Lawrence indeed

¹Wyllie Sypher, Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 71.

²D. H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Viking Press, 1962), I, 160.

had used "sweat as well as blood" to make of Sons and Lovers a seemingly classic example of the Oedipus complex.³ By the time of the last revision of the novel, Lawrence had learned from his German-born wife Frieda the rudiments of Freud's theory of neuroses.⁴ Therefore, in his letter to Garnett he is more explicit about his intention in the work than he might have been previous to his elopement with Frieda Weekley to the Continent where the last draft was finished. Lawrence then explains to Garnett the plot of the new work:

. . . a woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has had a passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion, and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up she selects them as lovers--first the eldest, then the second. These sons are urged into life by their reciprocal love of their mother--urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they can't love, because their mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them. . . . As soon as the young men come into contact with women, there's a split. William gives his sex to a fribble, and his mother holds his soul. But the split kills him, because he doesn't know where he is. The next son gets a woman who fights for his soul--fights his mother. The son loves the mother--all the sons hate and are jealous of the father. The

³Karl Menniger, Love Against Hate, with the collaboration of Jeanetta Lyle Menniger (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1942), p. 57.

⁴Frederick J. Hoffman, "Lawrence's Quarrel with Freud," The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), p. 109.

battle goes on between the mother and the girl, with the son as object. The mother gradually proves stronger, because of the tie of blood. The son decides to leave his soul in his mother's hands, and, like his elder brother go for passion. He gets passion. Then the split begins to tell again.⁵

Thus Lawrence in his letter to Garnett summarizes and establishes his own Freudian point of view towards the novel. The tragedy of Paul Morel with his mother-fixation is also the tragedy of Lawrence himself, who was never able, it seems, to master his own obsessive attachment to his mother. In a letter written while his mother lay dying, he indicates his feelings for her:

We have loved each other, almost with a husband and wife love, as well as filial and maternal. . . . We have been like one, so sensitive to each other that we never needed words. It has been rather terrible and has made me, in some respects abnormal. . . . Nobody can have the soul of me. My mother has had it, and nobody can have it again.⁶

Lawrence thought that he had attained wholeness of being after his mother's death when he regained his "soul." Through his artistic efforts, he expected to establish his identity, since "one sheds one's sicknesses in books-- repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them."⁷ Lawrence, however, was never able to master his

⁵Lawrence, Collected Letters, pp. 160-61.

⁶Ibid., pp. 69-70.

⁷Ibid., p. 234.

emotional disturbance, as his works show. From Sons and Lovers to Lady Chatterley's Lover, his characters are either left alone in the end or else they plan to flee civilization to some promised Eden. As Mellors and Connie plan to flee to their Eden, so Paul stands alone, unable to acknowledge his own failure with Miriam. Since neither escape nor alienation is the desired human state, one must assume that Lawrence himself tasted the bitter fruit of his own promised Eden. Although the relationship with Frieda was less than he had expected,⁸ he nevertheless did manage to keep it going until his death. Thus Lawrence's deep emotional disturbance was to limit him in life, even as it did his characters with their sense of alienation from self and society.

Freud believed that one could not overcome a neurosis, such as Lawrence's, except by transference in psychoanalysis.⁹ Lawrence himself thought he could master his "sickness" by writing novels. Sons and Lovers proves him wrong. His "attempt at self-analysis is a failure, not as novel, but as a cure: it does not enable Lawrence to make

⁸Emile Delavenay, D. H. Lawrence, The Man and His Works: The Formative Years, 1885-1919, trans. Katherine M. Delavenay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), pp. 153-54.

⁹Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis, with a Preface by Ernest Jones and G. Stanley Hall; trans. by Joan Riviere (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1968), pp. 384-87.

a new start."¹⁰ His later works are centered on an obsessive male figure who cannot come to terms with his Oedipal feelings. Since the Oedipus complex itself is at the center of all neuroses, according to Freud, one cannot hope to attain wholeness of being unless one can overthrow the childhood tie.¹¹

Freud in an early essay states the cause of the Oedipal conflict with the ensuing effects:

To ensure a fully normal attitude in love, two currents of feeling have to unite--we may describe them as the tender, affectionate feelings and the sensual feelings--and this confluence of the two currents has in these cases not been achieved. . . . The sensual feeling that has remained active seeks only objects evoking no reminder of the incestuous persons forbidden to it; the impression made by someone who seems deserving of high estimation leads, not to a sensual excitation, but to feelings of tenderness which remain erotically ineffectual. . . . Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love. . . .

. . . the man almost always feels his sexual activity hampered by his respect for the woman and only develops full sexual potency when he finds himself in the presence of a lower type of sexual object; and this again is partly conditioned by the circumstances that his sexual aims include those of perverse sexual components, which he does not like to gratify with the woman he respects.¹²

¹⁰Delavenay, p. 516.

¹¹Sigmund Freud, The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, trans. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 617n.

¹²Sigmund Freud, "Contributions to the Psychology of Love: The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud, ed. Ernest Jones; trans. Joan Riviere, (New York: Basic Books, 1953), IV, 203-216.

In brief, the neurotic cannot bestow eroticism and tenderness upon one sexual object. In adolescence when his sexuality begins to assert itself, he will not be able to bestow sensual feelings upon the one who holds his love. For her he will reserve his tender feelings that he has previously given his mother. A man will be able to overcome the Oedipal tie if his attachment to his mother has not been too intense. Therefore, the mother-son relationship in Sons and Lovers must be examined for its intensity if the Oedipal tie is justified between Mrs. Morel and her sons, William and Paul. Lawrence must not only show the intensity of the relationships between the mother and her sons, but he must also demonstrate the inability of the men to bestow erotic and tender love upon one sexual object if his Freudian interpretation of the novel is to be accepted.

The relationship between Paul and his mother begins in the novel when Walter Morel, in a drunken stupor, locks his pregnant wife out of the house. She walks "down the garden path, trembling in every limb," as she rages at her husband's indifference. But gradually the night begins to take its effect upon her and she is soothed by the magical qualities in the garden:

Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon.¹³

When Mrs. Morel "melted out" into the night, the child, "after a time," seems to melt with her. Thus the scene establishes the dominant role the mother is to play in the child's life. She feels that the child is not a separate being, but an extension of her own self. She then burdens the child with her own emotional responses, the misery as well as the ecstasy of the night. Jessie Chambers felt that the above incident, which actually happened to Mrs. Lawrence, was one of the causes for the strong attachment between mother and son.¹⁴ The traumatic experience was, seemingly, the cause of an unusually strong bond between mother and son.

Lawrence himself felt, however, that the bond between him and his mother was caused by social conditioning. That is, socially learned patterns of behavior were

¹³D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1913; reprint ed., New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 24.

¹⁴Jessie Chambers (E. T.), D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record (New York: Knight Publications, 1936), p. 138.

responsible for the attachment between the two which was detrimental to the son's growth into manhood. He built his philosophical system¹⁵ upon the need of the self to be free from such bondage in order to develop an identity. Lawrence, furthermore, believed that consciously learned patterns of behavior were responsible for neurotic tendencies in relationships. He felt, for example, that the neurotic need for the conscious merging of identities was the basis of the incest problem.¹⁶ The imagined or actual incestuous relationship was based upon consciously learned patterns of behavior. It is then only the unconscious which is free and incorruptible from the need to merge identities that can exist between mother and son.

It should be noted then that Lawrence's concern was not so much with physical intimacy, but with the bondage of the unconscious--the soul. In the previously mentioned letter, it is his soul which concerns Lawrence, as he says: "Nobody can have the soul of me. My mother has had it, and nobody can have it again." It is well to remember that Lawrence had the sensibility of the poet with the passion

¹⁵D. H. Lawrence, Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious, with an Introduction by Philip Rieff (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

¹⁶John E. Stoll, D. H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers": Self-Encounter and the Unknown Self, Monograph No. 11 (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University Press, 1968), p. 3.

and the language to render the prosaic into highly poetic words. Therefore, he uses the word soul for the unconscious.

When mother and child merge in the above garden scene, for instance Lawrence establishes the sense of possessiveness of the mother towards the child. Even before the child is born, the bond is established between them. Yet the mother does not actually possess the child's soul, as Lawrence has suggested in his own relationship with his mother. She is merely being possessive towards the child. It is not Paul, however, who is to feel the impact of his mother's love in the beginning of the work, but William, the first-born son. Although Gertrude Morel has been happy in the first months of her marriage, she quickly becomes disillusioned with her husband, who breaks his pledge to stop drinking. In her disappointment with her marriage, Gertrude turns to her young son for consolation. William becomes all things to the woman who cannot bear the drab mining community with its lack of beauty, culture, and intellectual interests. Her own lost dreams will be realized through the boy's success in life.

Walter Morel, with a sense of displacement of his wife's love, vents his frustration on the boy. He thus

takes out on his son his ill-concealed hostility towards his wife. He has too much pride to protest against his wife's behavior towards him when he senses her contempt; he, therefore, turns his anger on the boy for his escapades. When William and the Anthony boy get into a fight, the father's overreaction to the situation reveals his frustration concerning his wife. But as he approaches the boy in fury, his wife comes between them as she cries: "Only dare, milord, to lay a finger on that child! You'll regret it for ever."¹⁷ Walter is cowered by her sudden outburst, as she takes command of the situation. William then is not punished at all for his arrogant behavior towards the Anthony boy, as his parents direct their anger towards each other.

William becomes an object to be used in his parents' frustrated lives. Between the two, however, it is the mother who will be the dominant force in her children's lives. It is she who will control their values and ambitions. Walter seems almost a negative force, as the children accept her middle-class standards. The sons are "urged on" into life, as Lawrence noted in his analysis of the novel's plot. Mrs. Morel's ambitions for them soar high above the pit with its long hours and back-breaking work.

¹⁷Sons and Lovers, p. 51.

Although the miner wants William and Paul to work in the mine, his wife refuses such a trade for her sons. The miner protests, therefore, when Gertrude wants William to become a clerk. Walter is proud of his trade; it has in fact been his whole life since he was ten. Thus, he objects when his wife dismisses his job as being unworthy of her sons. Gertrude Morel, nevertheless, has her way. The miner knows that she has rejected him and his trade, as he says: "It wor good enough for me, but it's non good enough for 'im."¹⁸ And indeed the mine is not good enough for William, who becomes a clerk at the co-operative office in the village. Mrs. Morel is very pleased with William's new position as she sees it as a beginning to a successful career. William himself is rather pleased to bring his wages home to his mother, who remains the center of his life.

Lawrence thus establishes the intensity of the relationship between mother and son, as each becomes the center of the other's world. It is only when William begins to mature sexually that the relationship begins to flounder. As he becomes popular with the girls, his mother rejects them as "baggages."¹⁹ She is unable to accept her son's

¹⁸Ibid., p. 52

¹⁹Ibid., p. 53.

maturity and, thus, rejects the girls as unworthy of her son. William himself is faced with a conflict as he tries to accept his masculinity in the face of his mother's censure.

William is unable to escape his mother's domination until he leaves for his new position in London. In the city he soon becomes engaged to Lily "Gypsy" Warren, a beautiful girl with limited intelligence. Coming from the small village of Bestwood, he is pleased that he has captured such a sensuous woman. But "Gypsy's" lack of intelligence begins to annoy him to the point that he complains to his mother that the girl is shallow. His mother, worried about the pending marriage, begs him to break the engagement before he is tied to the vain creature for life. He replies: "But I can't give her up now; it's gone too far"; then he adds, "And, besides, for some things I couldn't do without her."²⁰

Thus William selects a girl for whom he has little respect, but one who is able to fulfill his sexual needs. "Gypsy" is Freud's "lower type of sexual object," who evokes "no reminder of the incestuous persons" which has been forbidden in the mother-son relationship. Gertrude

²⁰Ibid., p. 131.

Morel with her habits of thrift and emotional reserve is indeed a far cry from the vain girl who has become William's fiancée. The girl's spendthrift ways soon begin to take their toll upon poor William's health, even as his mother has feared. William, pressed physically to keep up with "Gypsy's" social demands as well as his studies after work, becomes ill and suddenly dies. His mother is consumed with grief and cries out in her agony: "If only it could have been me!"²¹ And after William's death, she could not "take her old bright interest in life. She remained shut off."²²

It is only when Paul becomes gravely ill that the mother recovers from her mental depression as she realizes that Paul may die even as William has died. She then turns her obsessive love on Paul. He becomes the center of her dreams and ambitions, as she shares her daily joys and anxieties with him. Their close relationship is based upon mutual concern and trust. They share their little experiences with great excitement and joy. When Mrs. Morel gets a small dish for fivepence, she exults to Paul about her experience with the pot man who sold it to her. When Paul goes to work at Jordan's factory, he shares his daily life with her.

²¹Ibid., p. 139.

²²Ibid.

Wherever they go, their devotion to each other is not unlike young love. When they go to visit the Leivers family, Paul teases her about her new cotton blouse, a compliment which pleases her immensely. He is delighted to have such "a fine little woman to go jaunting out with!"²³ As they walk to the farm, he stops to pick her some forget-me-nots; then he looks at her and "his heart hurt with love, seeing her hand, used with work, holding the little bunch of flowers he gave her."²⁴ On the way home, he realizes it has been a perfect day for them. He feels that "his heart was full of happiness till it hurt. His mother had to chatter, because she, too, wanted to cry with happiness."²⁵

Such bliss is seldom experienced in any relationship and is even more rare in a mother-son relationship. When it is found in the latter, the son is seldom able to mature and thus is unable to transfer his love, as Freud observes, to the women in his life. That is, his sense of loyalty, tenderness, and trust remains with his mother to the extent that the new love is secondary in his affections. The woman in the case then, sensing his withdrawal, aborts the romance.

²³Ibid., p. 122.

²⁴Ibid., p. 124.

²⁵Ibid., p. 128.

The son, faced with his own lack of masculinity, cannot endure losing his new love and yet begins to blame her for their failure in love. That is, he transfers to the woman his sense of guilt concerning his inability to love and thus blames her for his failure. Lawrence demonstrates this point with the love-affair between Paul and Miriam Leivers. The friendship between the two, based upon their love of literature, begins to ripen as they mature. The young man has such great respect for her mind, her intellectual gifts, that he is baffled at his suddenly strange feelings towards the girl. Having assured Miriam that their affair is strictly based upon friendship, he is puzzled at his newly-aroused sexuality.

Thus when he and Miriam are walking in the country, sometimes

. . . if she put her arm in his, it caused him almost torture. His consciousness seemed to split. The place where she was touching him ran hot with friction. He was one internecine battle, and he became cruel to her because of it.²⁶

It seems that Lawrence himself was ill-prepared for maturity with the ensuing sexual problem concerning Jessie. He seemed to have been protected to the extent that he had slight knowledge of sexual functions.²⁷ Therefore,

²⁶Ibid., p. 173.

²⁷Delavenay, p. 35.

Lawrence-Paul could not cope with his conflict between physical needs and his social conditioning, which consisted of cultural mores which forbade all but limited sexual relationships.

Paul then is not only trapped by his social conditioning, but he is also hampered by his mother's objection to the girl of his choice. When the conflict between mother and son over Miriam becomes unbearable, Paul realizes that his mother means too much to him for the quarreling to continue. When he tells his mother that he does not love Miriam, he stoops to kiss her. She confesses that she could not bear Miriam as his wife. Then she adds:

"And I've never--you know, Paul--I've never had a husband--not really--"

He stroked his mother's hair, and his mouth was on her throat.

"And she exults so in taking you from me--she's not like ordinary girls."

"Well, I don't love her, mother," he murmured, bowing his head and hiding his eyes on her shoulder in misery. His mother kissed him a long, fervent kiss.

"My boy," she said, in a voice trembling with passionate love.

Without knowing, he gently stroked her face.²⁸

²⁸Sons and Lovers, p. 213.

In this most controversial passage, there are undercurrents which have undermined, to some extent, Lawrence's reputation as a writer and as a man. In the western world the taboo against incestuous relationships, which is implied in the above scene, contains such horror that, as Freud observes, much literature throughout the ages has been devoted to this subject.²⁹ Although much criticism is devoted to the possibility of Lawrence's homosexuality, there is little overt attention paid to the theme of incest per se. Yet the taboo is so strongly implanted in men's minds that few critics or biographers have been able to ignore the subject entirely.³⁰

Lawrence himself contributed to this unfortunate situation: the day before his mother's funeral he told Jessie Chambers that he loved his mother. When Jessie assured him that she knew he did, he replied: "I've loved her, like a lover."³¹ Jessie, at that time was not fully aware what sexual love meant;³² therefore, it was unlikely that she knew the implications of Lawrence's remarks. It

²⁹Sigmund Freud, Psycho-Analysis, p. 296.

³⁰Lawrence's reputation was badly damaged by his former friend, John Middleton Murry, in Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931).

³¹Chambers, p. 184.

³²Delavenay, p. 33.

is highly unlikely that Lawrence himself, with his puritanical background, knew the implications of his words. A study of the novel itself, as well as comments of contemporaries, indicates that Lawrence's remarks were a poetic rendition of a close relationship which was ended by the mother's death.³³

The scene, nevertheless, with its incestuous imaginings, has been costly in terms of Lawrence's reputation as a writer. The hint of incest seems to interfere with critical evaluation in that few literary artists are so bothered by inference of homosexuality as Lawrence; thus, we must reach beyond the usual charges of inversion to understand the implications involved in the charges of Lawrence's being obsessed with sexual matters.

Studies of Lawrence reveal, however, that charges against him are without foundation except the one which states that he was hampered by the Oedipus complex. How much this element of neuroticism was to affect his genius as a writer is difficult to say; we do know, however, that it did affect his love-affairs as well as his marriage.³⁴

³³Cf. D. H. Lawrence, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Aldous Huxley (2nd. edition; London: William Heinemann, 1932), p. xv.

³⁴Delavenay, p. 159.

Perhaps this influence is best shown by his treatment of the Paul-Miriam love-affair in the novel. Paul must bring his "tender, affectionate feelings and the sensual feelings" together, as Freud notes, if he is to achieve his sexuality. Yet with Miriam, Paul seems to be "always on a high plane of abstraction, when his natural fire of love was transmitted into the fine stream of thought."³⁵ He seems unable to bring the "confluence of the two currents" into a harmonious response, as Paul tries to love Miriam with "passion and tenderness,"³⁶ but he is unable to do so. He then assumes the blame for the failure of their love-affair, as he tells her: "I can only give you friendship--it's all I'm capable of--it's a flaw in my make-up."³⁷

If Lawrence had continued his emphasis upon Paul's inability to love because of some "flaw" within him, then he would have achieved a classical example of Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. But he confused the issue of the Oedipal tie in the Miriam chapters, as various critics have noted, when the passional failure is shifted from Paul to Miriam. When, therefore, their love is actually consummated, Paul, disappointed in Miriam's responses, blames

³⁵Sons and Lovers, p. 173.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 221.

her for their failure. Miriam, in deep humiliation, tries to explain to the youth: "'You see,' she said, taking his face and shutting it out against her shoulder--'you see--as we are--how can I get used to you? It would come all right if we were married.'"³⁸

Miriam's touching appeal, however, is lost upon her lover, who realizes that "for one day he had loved her utterly. But it never came again."³⁹ Paul seems to base the failure of their love entirely upon sexual incompatibility, as he gradually "ceased to ask her to have him."⁴⁰ Yet he at no time considers that his own ineptness as a lover might be responsible for the failure.⁴¹ Since such a theory seems to be upheld by modern psychology,⁴² one must concede that Paul may have misjudged his sexual role in the affair with Miriam.

Miriam then not only has a possibly inept lover, but also she is hampered by Victorian mores which forbade sexual relationships without the marriage contract and the church's blessing. It was, as Helen Corke points out,

³⁸Ibid., p. 290.

³⁹Ibid., p. 291.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Delavenay, p. 120.

⁴²Theodor Reik, Of Love and Lust: On the Psycho-analysis of Romantic and Sexual Emotions (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1957; new ed., New York: Bantam Matrix, 1967), pp. 369-72.

very difficult for a girl with Jessie's background to overcome her religious and social scruples in physical intimacy without marriage.⁴³ Although Lawrence did offer to marry Jessie, his proposal was with "the old forced note, the need to convince himself," that he wanted to marry.⁴⁴ Thus in the novel Miriam accepts him, but "the tone of hopelessness" when he talked to her of marriage "grieved her deeply."⁴⁵

Lawrence, therefore, failed to see himself realistically in the affair with Jessie, as he never considered that his behavior might have influenced her misgivings. He in fact blamed the girl to the extent that even his wife Frieda assumed, from conversations with Lawrence, that Jessie was "a blue stocking and he had more warmth for her than she for him."⁴⁶ An analysis of the situation, however, reveals that Lawrence contributed to some of the underlying causes which inhibited Jessie in her responses. Before physical intimacy, for example, Jessie knew that the "whole question of sex had for him the fascination of

⁴³Helen Corke, D. H. Lawrence: The Croydon Years (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), p. 22.

⁴⁴Chambers, p. 180.

⁴⁵Sons and Lovers, p. 291.

⁴⁶Frieda Lawrence, Frieda Lawrence: The Memoirs and Correspondence, ed. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 321.

horror. . . ."47 She, furthermore, felt that "in his repudiation of any possibility of a sex relation between us he felt that he paid me a deep and subtle compliment."48 Knowing Lawrence's views towards sex, Jessie might well have become an inhibited "blue stocking."

Lawrence thus was hampered in the novel because of his own bias towards Jessie. It might be noted, however, that there is one exception in the work when the writer confronts Paul's inability to love because of the Oedipal tie. Paul has been sent by Clara to test Miriam's love; he, with Clara's assurance that he has misunderstood Miriam, begins to debate his reluctance to force the issue of physical love. He begins to realize that his own "shyness and virginity" cause him to deny his sexual needs.49 He could not bear "any reproach from a woman" who was much like his mother, whom he held in high esteem.50 Thus Paul's respect for the woman causes him to sublimate his physical needs in deference to the woman who reminds him of his own mother. His "sexuality is actually hampered by his respect for the woman," as Freud noted in his theory.

However, Lawrence's ability to demonstrate clearly Paul's inability to love because of the Oedipal tie is

47Chambers, p. 153.

48Ibid.

49Sons and Lovers, p. 278

50Ibid., p. 279.

lessened by the time the love-affair is actually consummated. Thus his portrayal of Miriam is more complex than he had expected in his analysis of the work to Garnett:

"The son loves the mother. . . . The son decides to leave his soul in his mother's hands. . . . " In the work the mother does not win by "the tie of the blood" until the son decides that his sexuality "break through" can be gained with Miriam "alone."⁵¹ Then he feels that "if they could get things right, they could marry; but he would not marry unless he could feel strong in the joy of it--never."⁵² Thus Paul bases his acceptance of Miriam upon physical intimacy, as they "get things right" between them. Therefore, Paul does not put "his soul in his mother's hands" until after Miriam is tested and is found wanting.

If Lawrence failed, however, in the Miriam chapters to be as specific as he intended in showing the Oedipal "split," he rectifies his mistake in the love-affair between Paul and Clara Dawes. Paul, as Lawrence notes, decides to "go for passion." He turns to Clara for the impersonal passion which has been denied in his affair with Miriam. With Clara he then gains his "baptism of fire in passion."⁵³

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 278-79.

⁵²Ibid., p. 279.

⁵³Ibid., p. 354.

However, it is less than the perfect union which it seems, as Stoll points out, since Clara is unhappy with Paul's attitude towards her.⁵⁴ She feels that Paul has rejected her except on a sexual level. Trying to communicate her doubts, she asks:

"Do you think it's worth it--the--the sex part?"

"The act of loving, itself?"

"Yes; is it worth anything to you?"

"But how can you separate it?" he said. "It's the culmination of everything. All our intimacy culminates then."

"Not for me," she said.

.

"I feel," she continued slowly, "as if I hadn't got you, as if all of you weren't there, and as if it weren't me you were taking--"

"Who, then?"

"Something just for yourself. It has been fine, so that I daren't think of it. But is it me you want, or is it it?"⁵⁵

Paul, angry at her questions, begins to realize, nevertheless, that "Clara was, indeed, passionately in love with him, and he with her, as far as passion went. In the daytime he forgot her a good deal."⁵⁶ As Clara continues

⁵⁴Stoll, p. 46.

⁵⁵Sons and Lovers, pp. 362-63.

⁵⁶Ibid., 351.

in her effort to win Paul's love, he begins to tire of her, even as William tired of "Gypsy." Clara then becomes Freud's "lower type of sexual object," who is unable to gain her lover's esteem. She is justified when she complains that Paul in his love-making is not "there." To Paul she is just a sexual object who has failed to gain from him a sense of uniqueness, which is the foundation of love between man and woman.

Lawrence thus shows Paul's inability to love as he cannot bring his erotic and tender feelings together. Paul is hampered by his intense relationship with his mother, which precludes a normal relationship with a woman. The author then has demonstrated Freud's theory of neuroses with the ensuing effects in which the man is unable to reach sexual potency unless he is with a woman for whom he has little regard.

If Lawrence had continued to hold Paul accountable for the break with Miriam, then he would have achieved a more coherent work from the psychological, as well as the literary point of view. The author, however, unlike the analyst in the letter, was forced to confuse the issue, or else to acknowledge the destructive quality in his mother's love. He could not say with candor, concerning his mother

and sister Emily, as he had once said to Jessie: "They tore me from you, the love of my life."⁵⁷ The novel, after all, was written as a "justification" of his mother's life.⁵⁸ It was not meant to show fully his mother's destructive love in the Oedipal relationship.

⁵⁷Chambers, p. 186.

⁵⁸Corke, p. 22.

CHAPTER II

THE FORMALISTIC APPROACH: THE STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY OF THE NOVEL

There is some warrant for thinking that the ending of Sons and Lovers is ambiguous. As Paul contemplates the extinction of self in the face of the "darkness that out-passed them all,"¹ he suddenly turns "towards the faintly humming, glowing town" to life.² With such a shift in the point of view in the last few sentences of the work, one might well question Paul's ability to survive his mother's death. As Schorer points out, there is nothing in Paul's previous history to turn him back towards the humming town.³ Therefore, the conclusion of the work is generally acknowledged by various critics to be flawed.

Was Lawrence so careless a craftsman that the flaw was inevitable? Or was it simply a "failure of nerve"⁴

¹D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1913; reprint ed., New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 420.

²Ibid.

³Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," cited by John E. Stoll in D. H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers": Self-Encounter and the Unknown Self, Monograph No. 11 (Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University Press, 1968), p. 15.

⁴Stoll, p. 27.

that caused Lawrence to deliberately blur the ending in order to escape coming to terms with his "deliberately handled theme" of homosexuality.⁵ Lawrence had specified in his letter to Garnett that Paul is left at the end with a "drift towards death."⁶ If Lawrence had left his hero with such an explicit drift, would the work have been more integrated as to form? It does seem that such a conclusion would have been more accommodating to the narrative. Paul Morel with his Oedipal tie cannot survive. Such a view is essentially the basis of Freudian objections to the work.

But the question is not whether the Freudian critics are right in thinking that the conclusion injures the work. The question of real importance is more general: what is the relation of the conclusion to the narrative as a whole? Can the ambiguous ending be justified by what has previously gone on in the work? Such an ambiguous ending should drive us back to a consideration of the context in which the ending is set. It will not be sufficient, however, if it merely drives us back, as Stoll suggests, to Lawrence's

⁵Ibid., p. 2.

⁶D. H. Lawrence, The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Harry T. Moore, I (New York: Viking Press, 1962), 161.

theory of incestuous merging.⁷ Lawrence developed his theory of merging long after Sons and Lovers was finished. When the final draft of the work was finished, Lawrence's position in fact was seemingly based upon Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex,⁸ which he was later to refute in his philosophical searching.⁹ Therefore, one cannot conclude that the ending is based upon a "rationalization" of Freud's theory of incest.¹⁰ Such a critical position anticipates Lawrence's intellectual development, when he in fact was enthusiastically embracing Freud's theory of neuroses.

Generally, it is assumed that the theme of the Oedipal tie was implicit in the early drafts,¹¹ but this position is conjectural as the themes in the early drafts were possibly submerged as Lawrence adapted Freud's theory to his own use. It was in fact only after the third draft

⁷Stoll, p. 27.

⁸Lawrence, Collected Letters, I, pp. 160-61.

⁹Harry T. Moore, The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1951), p. 182.

¹⁰Stoll, p. 27.

¹¹Frederick J. Hoffman, "Lawrence's Quarrel with Freud," The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), p. 109.

that Lawrence's portrait of Paul was fully drawn.¹² In an autobiographical novel it is generally assumed that the work illuminates the writer's life, as the life in turn illuminates the work. Therefore, Freudian critics base their analyses upon the merging of the two, the life and the work, to arrive at conclusions which are not so easily detected in the work alone. Such critics then are inclined to explain Lawrence's work through his family background. Freud himself would not have been so irresponsible as he was aware that neither genius nor the act of creation can be explained.¹³ This is not to say that Freudian critics attempt to explain genius per se; it is to say that Lawrence's work is explained without full consideration of the fact that Lawrence was an artist. In brief, if the theory of the Oedipus complex is discarded for, say, the theory of genetic

¹²According to Jessie Chambers, there were two themes in one of the first drafts Lawrence showed her: the conflict between brutal husband-wife-minister and the conflict between mother-son-girl. Jessie Chambers, D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record, (New York: Knight Publications, 1936), pp. 190-191. Because of her own interest in the latter, Jessie Chambers asked Lawrence to rewrite, sticking closer to reality, which she presumed to be the mother-son-girl theme.

¹³Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," Criticism: The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment, eds. Mark Schorer, Josephine Mills, and Gordon McKenzie (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948), p. 177.

aberrations or some scientific principles of electrical impulses, then a large body of Lawretian criticism will be negated.

A critic then must take into account that Lawrence was an artist, and at the same time, it must be acknowledged that it is not known what constitutes the creative impulse. Freud theorized that what could be known about the artist is what constitutes the temperament which produces works of genius.¹⁴ In other words, society cannot by will produce the artistic impulse, but it can come to some conclusions about the characteristics held in common by artists.

If it is acknowledged that Lawrence is an artist with the temperament associated with the creative impulse, then might it be possible to explain his alter-ego, Paul Morel, based upon that assumption? Paul is indeed an artist, a painter, who is quite "clever with his brush."¹⁵ He has the characteristics of the artist with the ability to relate, to associate, to bring together disparate parts into new relationships. Paul also has the shy, sensitive, introverted temperament of the artistic personality.

From the beginning Paul's mother notices that he is different from her other children. She notices "the

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Sons and Lovers, p. 83.

peculiar knitting of the baby's brows, and the peculiar heaviness of its eyes, as if it were trying to understand something that was pain."¹⁶ He is not a happy child, much to the vexation of his parents. Paul's mother is inclined to blame herself for his "misery,"¹⁷ as she did not want the baby. Her feelings, however, seem to be without foundation as to the cause of the baby's misery, as Arthur too was not wanted, but he is a happy child without the introverted qualities which mark Paul as he grows into adolescence. The portraits of the three boys in the work are finely drawn. Although William and Arthur have much in common as they both are outgoing personalities, the former is more his mother's son in that he is ambitious, hard working, determined to be a success, while Arthur is more reckless in thought and action.

Paul, with his sensitivity, differs from the other boys as he is more aware of his mother's joys and agonies. He is always "attentive"¹⁸ to his mother's feelings, while William is "scarcely conscious"¹⁹ of her pain when he leaves for London. It is, nevertheless, William who holds his mother's love to the extent that she almost "lived by

¹⁶Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 56.

him,"²⁰ as he "occupied her chiefly."²¹ With William dominating her thoughts, she cannot help comparing him to Paul. For example, as Paul walks across the field, she thinks that if it had been William "he would have leaped the fence instead of going round the stile."²² William with his self-confidence would never refuse a challenge whether it is jumping fences or conquering the hearts of young girls.

Paul, unlike his brother, is too shy, too timid, for such a light-hearted approach to life. He takes himself far too seriously to jump fences or to toy with the affections of young girls. His mother is well aware of Paul's timidity, his "ridiculous hypersensitiveness" which sometimes makes "her heart ache."²³ She knows, for example, how he suffers when he goes to collect his father's wages. He suffers "the tortures of the damned,"²⁴ when he must encounter the teasing banter of the miners in the office. Paul becomes so flustered on these occasions that he cannot count the money for the debts of the butty and his workers. Therefore, he pushes the coins towards the clerk, who brutally

²⁰Ibid., p. 55.

²¹Ibid., p. 68.

²²Ibid., p. 101.

²³Ibid., p. 73.

²⁴Ibid., p. 71.

asks the trembling boy, "Don't they teach you to count at the Board-school?"²⁵

It is only when Paul is accepted as a member of the farm family, the Leiverses, that he becomes more outgoing in personality. As Paul is gradually accepted by the large family, he becomes the leader in their limited social evenings, as he teaches them card games, leads their singing, and brings them books to read aloud when the chores are finished. The family's farm becomes a second home to him as he works with the boys and talks with Miriam about literature. He is so loved by the family that each member considers him special to his or her life. Thus Mrs. Leivers takes Paul, not her own sons, to see a bird nest which she has discovered. Paul kneels to examine the nest:

"It's almost as if you were feeling inside the live body of the bird," he said, "it's so warm. They say a bird makes its nest round like a cup with pressing its breast on it. Then how did it make the ceiling round, I wonder?"

The nest seemed to start into life for the two women.²⁶

The nest no longer is a thing of dead leaves, bits of straw, and pieces of string; it now quivers with life because Paul has brought his sense of wonder and curiosity into play as he views the small round nest. Miriam and her mother realize

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 148.

that Paul causes them to see things from a point of view different from the ordinary one to which they are accustomed. Thus the ordinary nest becomes a thing of wonderment as he ponders over the rounded ceiling. Paul's innate ability to observe details causes him to view things according to their interrelationships. The nest then becomes tied to the mystery of the universe with its cycles of birth and death. It is not the nest that he sees but the possibility of life which it is to bring forth. Whether he is viewing a bird's nest or flowers, he observes the details of the object which ties it to other objects. Thus the ordinary celandines become something to marvel at with their "scalloped splashes of gold," which seemed to be "pressing themselves at the sun."²⁷

Paul's sensitivity to the vibrations of life causes him to be keenly aware of nature in all of its manifestations. Small tasks on the farm then become adventures which give him much pleasure. Lawrence's own capacity to enjoy working on the farm caused the father of Jessie Chambers to say: "Work goes like fun when Bert's there. . . ."²⁸ Lawrence's ability to enjoy himself endeared him to the Chambers family, who relied upon him for their main contact with village life.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Chambers, p. 31.

He meant so much to them that they could not conceal their pleasure when he brought his artistic works to show them. Thus in the novel when Paul brings his paintings and sketches to show the family, they eagerly examine each work. Paul realizes that almost they "interest the Leivers more than they interested his own mother. . . . Mrs. Leivers and her children were almost his disciples. They kindled him and made him glow to his work. . . ."29

It is eventually Miriam, however, who becomes his most devoted disciple. Miriam examines his work as she tries to understand what the paintings mean in order to understand the boy better. She asks Paul why she likes the work. He replies:

"It's because--it's because there is scarcely any shadow in it; it's more shimmery, as if I'd painted the shimmering protoplasm in the leaves and everywhere, and not the stiffness of the shape. That seems dead to me. Only this shimmeriness is the real living. The shape is a dead crust. The shimmer is inside really."30

Thus Miriam forces Paul to examine his purpose in painting as he realizes that there is a deeper reality to life, a "shimmering protoplasm" that cannot be captured by form, by the "dead crust."

29 Sons and Lovers, p. 149.

30 Ibid., p. 152.

It is the inner reality, the "shimmer," that Miriam recognizes about Paul himself which so attracts her. She notices that Paul is different from other boys as "there was something more in him, something deeper!"³¹ Because Paul is different, Miriam is able to reconcile herself to his interest in Clara Dawes. She reasons that he will come back to her as he wants "to be owned, so that he could work."³² Miriam of course is not interested in his work at the factory; she is interested in his artistic creations.

Moreover, Paul realizes that she is his catalyst in creating because "with Miriam he gained insight; his vision went deeper. From his mother he drew the life-warmth, the strength to produce; Miriam urged this warmth into intensity like a white light."³³ It is Miriam then who urges him into artistic production. Although his mother gives him the love he needs, the "life-warmth," it is actually the girl who gives him the incentive to produce. With her interest, her faith in his ability, she becomes more or less his Muse in that through her he comes in contact with his own self, the creative self.

It is Paul's creative self, the artistic self, which develops apart from his mother. He knows that "it was not

³¹Ibid., p. 284.

³²Ibid., p. 318.

³³Ibid., p. 158.

his art Mrs. Morel cared about; it was himself and his achievement."³⁴ Paul states his mother's feelings towards art very well when he shows Miriam one of his latest creations:

He went into the parlour and returned with a bundle of brownish linen. Carefully unfolding it, he spread it on the floor. It proved to be a curtain or portière, beautifully stencilled with a design on roses.

"Ah, how beautiful!" she cried.

The spread cloth, with its wonderful reddish roses and dark green stems, all so simple, and somehow so wicked-looking, lay at her feet. She went on her knees before it, her dark curls dropping. He saw her crouched voluptuously before his work, and his heart beat quickly. Suddenly she looked up at him.

"Why does it seem cruel?" she asked.

"What?"

"There seems a feeling of cruelty about it," she said.

"It's jolly good, whether or not," he replied, folding up his work with a lover's hands.

She rose slowly, pondering.

"And what will you do with it?" she asked.

"Send it to Liberty's. I did it for my mother, but I think she'd rather have the money."

"Yes" said Miriam. He had spoken with a touch of bitterness, and Miriam sympathized.³⁵

³⁴Ibid., p. 149.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 201-202.

The above passage is central to understanding the basis of the conflict between Paul and his mother over the girl. Mrs. Morel does not understand the creative impulse. Miriam not only understands it, but she urges Paul to express his artistic self. The mother's hostility towards the girl goes far deeper than the usual resentment she might feel towards someone Paul loves. She knows that there is a bond between Paul and Miriam that she cannot share or even understand with her bourgeois background. As a Victorian devoted to material success, she does not have the capacity to understand the importance that the creative impulse holds for Paul. Mrs. Morel can only understand achievement to mean what one can achieve in the business world through monetary success. The beautifully designed curtain with its red roses and dark green stems is to be sold because, as Paul says, "she'd rather have the money."

It has often been noted that the artist views his work as a creative act not unlike that of giving birth to a child. Thus Paul, after showing Miriam the curtain, folds the work with a "lover's hands." The act of creation has been for him a labor of love. Therefore, he cannot help expressing his disappointment to Miriam that his mother has rejected the gift. The bitter experience, nevertheless,

has prepared him for his mother's reaction at the expectation of his painting's being sold for twenty guineas. She is, at this point, so beside herself with joy that he has actually sold the painting that she cannot contain her emotional response. Her outcry of joy brings Fred the postman back to see the cause of her outburst. Paul himself is "afraid of her--the small, severe woman with greying hair suddenly bursting out in such frenzy."³⁶ Paul is afraid because he knows that if his mother has misread the amount of purchase she will be disappointed. When he has reassured himself that he has actually sold the painting for twenty guineas, he then says to his mother:

"You didn't think, mother--" he began tentatively.

"No, my son--not so much--but I expected a good deal."

"But not so much," he said.

"No--no--but I knew we should do it."³⁷

Although Mrs. Morel has been elated when Paul has won prizes at the art gallery, the Castle, it is only after his work has been sold that her emotional response becomes unrestrained.

Without being unduly harsh with a woman who is constantly beseiged by economic worries, it is still worth

³⁶Ibid., p. 253.

³⁷Ibid.

noting that Mrs. Morel is most impressed not when Paul wins first prizes, but when he actually sells his work. Society places value upon works of art if they are valued in the market-place; thus, Mrs. Morel is representative of an attitude which society has most consistently held towards art in the past. Society has always held the artist himself to be a madman, while at the same time it accords him some honor as a prophet.³⁸ But he must be an artist who sells, else neither his madness nor his prophecies is of interest except to a selected few.

The different attitudes held by mother and son toward art cause the boy to hesitate in expressing his ambitions to become a painter. Although his mother is "the chief thing to him,"³⁹ he does not reveal to her his desire to become a painter. When he is fourteen, Mrs. Morel asks him what he wants to be in life. He replies, "Anything."⁴⁰ But to himself he thinks that "perhaps he might also make a painter, the real thing. But that he left alone."⁴¹ Paul then keeps his innermost feelings to himself. It is in fact some ten

³⁸William Phillips, ed., "Introduction: Art and Neurosis," Art and Psychoanalysis (New York: Criterion Books, 1957), pp. xiii-xxiv.

³⁹Sons and Lovers, p. 212.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 89.

years later, when he is twenty-four, that he reveals to his mother for the first time that he wants to be a painter. He says to his mother: "I s'll make a painter that they'll attend to."⁴²

Why does Paul wait so long to tell his mother? He realizes that her hopes for him lie in the business world; she wants him to follow in William's footsteps from junior clerk to a fine position in the business world. Thus Mrs. Morel encourages Paul to apply for his first job at Jordan's factory. She feels that his future as a clerk is a beginning to a highly successful career, even as William had succeeded in attaining a good position in London. Therefore, Paul cannot tell his mother about his plans for something as financially insecure as artistic endeavor.

Paul's conflict then is between his artistic self and his social self. Mrs. Morel and Miriam represent the division within him since each woman encourages the part which she knows and loves best. From the beginning, Miriam has encouraged the artistic self into production. Paul, therefore, hesitates to break-off with her; he needs her friendship as he has no one else to play the role Miriam does in his artistic development. He realizes that "she did hold the best of him," but there was a part of him,

⁴²Ibid., p. 301.

"three-quarters," which was not hers to hold.⁴³ Usually Paul's division of self is assumed to be the division between the physical and spiritual sides of the human being. From this point of view, Miriam holds his spiritual interest, while Mrs. Morel holds the physical side.

Such a simplification of the issue does not take into account the complexity of the artistic meaning of spirituality. The genius is no ordinary mortal groping for a spiritual experience to justify his existence; the genius knows that he creates through some as-yet-unknown means which he sometimes calls God, the Unknown, or the Muses. The names are different, but the concept which underlies each is the same: the genius creates not at his own bidding, but by some means which he cannot will into existence. Therefore, Miriam represents more than the spiritual life; she represents the Muse, the creative impulse. The instinct of the writer to both accept and reject the creative impulse is expressed by Paul when he says that, concerning Miriam, "half the time he grieved for her, half the time he hated her."⁴⁴

Although his feelings towards Miriam are ambivalent, it is the girl who keeps him in contact with his artistic

⁴³Ibid., p. 251.

⁴⁴Ibid.

self. His need of her inspiration and faith is best shown at the conclusion of the work when they meet for the last time. Miriam, as was her custom, picked up his sketch-book to examine his latest work. He assures her that there is nothing of interest in the book. But as she continues to pore over the sketches, a flicker of interest stirs the absolute nihilism which has engulfed him since his mother's death:

"There's nothing new in it," he said, "and nothing very interesting."

He put down the tray, and went to look over her shoulder. She turned the pages slowly, intent on examining everything.

"H'm!" he said, as she paused at a sketch. "I'd forgotten that. It's not bad, is it?"

"No," she said. "I don't quite understand it."

He took the book from her and went through it. Again he made a curious sound of surprise and pleasure.

"There's some not bad stuff in there," he said.

"Not at all bad," she answered gravely.⁴⁵

Thus Miriam strikes the only chord of interest which Paul has known since his mother's death. Miriam, with her ever-present interest in his creative work, is the guardian of that fragile spark of life which flickers as he re-examines the sketches that once gave him a sense of

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 415.

fullfillment. As he looks at the work, he realizes that he has executed some "not bad stuff" in the past. But is the realization enough to keep him from the possibility of suicide? Artists are as prone to the suicidal impulse as other men. What then is to save Paul from a destructive end? The conclusion itself is rather optimistic in tone:

But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly.⁴⁶

Lawrence thus concludes the work on an affirmative note. What of the objection that the final lines break the tone of the novel as Lawrence has not properly prepared for Paul's turning towards the city? One can summarize by noting that Lawrence's hero is an artist with the introverted, sensitive qualities that his brothers lack. He is, as Aldous Huxley says of Lawrence, an artist from the beginning with the temperament of the artist which would not have been drastically different "even if his mother had died when he was a child."⁴⁷ He has a selfhood apart from his mother as his dedication to his work shows in spite of her

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 420.

⁴⁷D. H. Lawrence, The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Aldous Huxley (London: William Heineman, 1932), p. xv.

lack of support. Paul recognizes their differences when he tells his mother that she is not interested in paintings or books. She protests that he has not tried to engage her interest. He says: "But it's not that that matters to you, mother, you know t's not."⁴⁸

The portrait-of-the-artist theme has often been used in literature; it is seldom acknowledged that Sons and Lovers has such a thematic interest.⁴⁹ However, if one neglects the hero-as-artist theme, then it is difficult to believe in the plausibility of Paul's survival at the conclusion of the work. One might indeed conclude that Paul is left with a "drift towards death," and thus the Freudian critics would be justified in charging Lawrence with a failure in structural form. But Lawrence made his hero an artist, who "believed firmly in his work, that it was good and valuable. In spite of fits of depression, shrinking, everything, he believed in his work."⁵⁰ With such a firm commitment, Paul will survive.

⁴⁸Sons and Lovers, p. 212.

⁴⁹The notable exception is Maurice Beebe, "Lawrence's Sacred Fount: The Artist Theme of Sons and Lovers," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, IV (Winter, 1963), 539-552.

⁵⁰Sons and Lovers, p. 301.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH: THE ROLE OF THE VICTORIAN WOMAN

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, England had a rigid class system which provided for very little vertical mobility. Although the ethic of extensive upward mobility did not fit with reality, the individual was inclined to set his goal towards a higher rung in the social structure. He hoped to succeed through hard work and austerity; thus, the middle-class creed of success came into being which was to affect, in some way, each social class.

Young men hoped to gain entry into a higher level of social activity through the business world. But since few men managed to get beyond their own class, there was much resentment intermingled with the ambitious goals. Each class had its own definition of desirable social conditions based upon accepted mores of long standing among its peers. The mores were passed from one generation to the next, a practice which resulted in a conflict of values as each generation defined its purposes within the framework of

accepted standards from previous generations. The value conflict between classes extended into the family, disrupting the stability of relationships within the group. The conflict of accepted goals within the family then affected those outside the circle.

D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers exemplifies such a conflict within the home since the members hold different views of what constitutes a desirable life. Gertrude and Walter Morel with their different class backgrounds disrupt their own lives as well as their children's. The struggle between the classes affects every character in the novel who tries desperately to maintain his or her own version of what constitutes a good life. Lawrence himself never was able to escape the conflict of his own home, even though he put Eastwood behind him as he wandered far from his native village. He wanted to be free of his ties with England, but he was never able to eradicate his memories of home. So after almost two decades of wandering, he went home, back to Eastwood, back to the ugly mining community in the Erewash valley district.

And what did he find in Eastwood? There was a strike, and the miners were living on "bread and margarine and potatoes." They were scouring the countryside for

blackberries which they could sell at fourpence a pound to help their meager budgets. Strange policemen had been brought in to help with the strike. The people in the village hated them and called them "blue-bottles" and "meatflies."¹ It was a scene alien to everything that Lawrence remembered. He was appalled at the lack of pride among the miners and the policemen who had taken over the countryside. In his father's time the policemen had been friends and neighbors. And no miner would have scoured the countryside for blackberries.

Moreover, a miner, a collier, belonging to the valley had too much pride to do a woman's work. Lawrence found that the miners were without pride, without life, without the sense of vitality which had belonged to their fathers. Lawrence went back to the valley and tried to remember it as it was when he was young:

And I, who remember the homeward-trooping of the colliers when I was a boy, the ringing of the feet, the red mouths and the quick whites of the eyes, the swinging pit bottles, and the strange voices of men from the underworld calling back and forth, strong and, it seemed to me, gay with the queer, absolved gaiety of miners--I shiver, and feel I turn into a ghost myself.²

¹D. H. Lawrence, "Return to Bestwood," Phoenix 11: Uncollected, Unpublished, and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence, eds. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 258.

²Ibid., p. 263.

Lawrence is remembering as a child remembers. He remembers the events as larger than life-size; there is no smallness, meanness, or triviality about the images that float in his mind. There is only a dim and sweet memory of his childhood, the old home filled with joy and sorrow, the meadows splashed with wild flowers, and the miners with their sense of gaiety as they go to work. All the dullness, the monotony of life, has been erased as he walks down the streets of Eastwood, remembering his childhood days.

And thus Lawrence came home to his memories. He came home to his sister Ada's house, where he found his mother's ghost. He stood in the garden with its violas and almond tree:

"Do look at the house, my dear! Do look at the tiled hall, and the rug from Mexico, and the brass from Venice, seen through the open doors, beyond the lilies and the carnations of the lawn beds! Do look! And do look at me, and see if I'm not a gentleman! Do say that I'm almost upper class!"³

Then he adds, "Do say it is reached, es ist erreicht, consummatum est!"⁴ Has Ada then reached the consummation, the fulfillment of life, with her house and garden? Lawrence directs his question to his mother's ghost,

³Ibid., p. 261.

⁴Ibid., p. 262.

reminding her that what she had wanted for her children was that they be successful in the world by belonging to the upper classes. Now that he and Ada have reached some measure of success, he questions his mother's meaning of the word. Has Ada become fulfilled because she has a house and garden?

Lawrence then questions his mother's values in life, her urging the children on to material success. What would Lawrence have wanted for Ada? Perhaps he would have her become a servant, since the greatest opportunity a young girl could have in Ada's time was to become a servant in London.⁵ Perhaps Lawrence himself should have become a miner scouring the countryside for blackberries. But instead, Ada has a lovely house, and Lawrence is a writer of some renown. Ada seems happy and Lawrence is not too unhappy with his lot as a writer. Therefore, one might wonder why Lawrence rejected his mother's values as he did.

Lawrence's mother had given him a chance to pursue his own life, his own way, his own talents. Yet Lawrence never acknowledged the debt he owed to her. He spent his

⁵Marghanita Laski, "Domestic Life," Edwardian England, 1901-1914, ed. Simon Nowell-Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 143.

life exulting over the miners, their sense of life, their sense of beauty, and their sense of awareness. The miner who had an "instinct of beauty," who loved his garden and the "beauty of flowers,"⁶ seemed to be more a figment of Lawrence's imagination than historical fact. The Victorian miner was not much inclined to sit around contemplating the beauty of flowers or his garden yield. In Sons and Lovers it is Mrs. Morel, not Walter, who loves the garden and "knew every weed and blade," as she works in the garden every morning. It is Mrs. Morel who has the "instinct of beauty," as she calls out to Paul to come see the three blue scyllas in bloom. She exults over her find under the hedge as she says, "Three glories of the snow, and such beauties!"⁷ If Walter loves the beauty of the garden or works in it, the author fails in the novel to inform his reader.

Walter Morel is in fact drawn realistically as a miner belonging to the Victorian era with the habits and attitudes of the working class. His wife Gertrude belongs, as Lydia Lawrence herself belonged, to the middle class.

⁶D. H. Lawrence, "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside," Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald (New York: Viking Press, 1936), pp. 136-37.

⁷D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1913; reprint ed., New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 164.

Gertrude had come from "a good old burgher family,"⁸ with all the values such a family might have: hard work, piety, and thrift. These were values dear to the heart of the middle class which were almost unknown to the working class. The division between the two classes with their different values was too great to be easily overcome in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Although a man of ability and talent might cross the barrier, few men actually were able to do so. One was born into a certain class and stayed there until he died. The immobility of the classes to move vertically, or horizontally as modern society moves, was the lot of human beings for centuries and, one might add, is still very much in evidence, as Sir Charles Petrie observes, in England today.⁹

Therefore, it is through the sociological context that one can best understand Sons and Lovers with its rigid class system. Although Lawrence himself escaped from the mines and the bourgeois values of the valley, Paul Morel, still a factory worker at the end of the novel, knows little return for his artistic efforts, and each character in the work is limited by his or her social background.

⁸Ibid., p. 7.

⁹Sir Charles Petrie, The Victorians (New York: David McKay Company, 1962), p. 30.

However, because of the limitations of this paper, I have chosen the three women--Gertrude Morel, Miriam, and Clara Dawes--for this study. Although one might be inclined to separate the women as middle and late-Victorian, such a division cannot be so easily made.

Victorianism began before Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 and ended with the First World War when the internal combustion engine replaced the railway to a great extent.¹⁰ English industrial growth, which had occurred during the first part of the Queen's reign, had been founded upon the extensive railway system in the country. By 1914 the automobile had replaced the railway's importance in the national picture. Thus the Victorian age is generally acknowledged to be from 1820 to 1914.

The age was shaped by the ideas of the early Victorians, ideas which did not flower fully until the 1870's.¹¹ Thus, it is Lawrence's own generation which benefitted, and also suffered, from the ideas of the period. If Lawrence benefitted from the Education Act of 1870, he also suffered from the narrow view of morality which

¹⁰Ibid., p. 13.

¹¹W. J. Reader, Life in Victorian England, English Life Series (London: B. T. Batsford, 1964), p. 163.

was inherent in the age, and indeed Lawrence shows in the novel his own pain, as well as his mother's suffering and frustration.

Gertrude Morel can be better understood when her life is examined according to concepts belonging to the Victorian era. It is thus more than a clash of personalities that causes her marriage to flounder. It is a class-war with the husband and wife representing the division between the miners and the burghers. Although the division between the gentry and the burghers was just as great, it was easier to breach the line between them as the two intermarried for social betterment. The burghers gained social position while the gentry gained economic advantage from such marriages.

The division between the working class and middle class was not so easily solved. The middle class, which was built upon trade, held to the creed that "individual effort, backed by austerity of life, would propel any man, no matter what his origins, to success in this world. . . ."¹² Such a creed was alien to the thinking of the workers. A worker did not believe in competition; he believed in nepotism to protect his trade from outsiders.¹³

¹²Ibid., p. 114.

¹³Ibid., pp. 104-105.

And he certainly did not accept the middle-class view of austerity. Gambling and drinking were his favorite pastimes which he enjoyed with his friends in the same trade as he.¹⁴ And the austerity demanded by the clergy was felt to be an infringement upon his pleasures of the flesh.¹⁵ Thus the workers and the burghers held different views about life.

But whatever their differences, the two classes held in common their terror that fate would send them spiraling down to join the poor. The Victorian could not conceive of a fate more horrible than becoming one of the poor who were without hope except for the workhouse.¹⁶ Death was the great expectation as they fought hunger, crowded conditions, and lack of clothing. Death was sometimes their only hope in life, and needless to say, they were disenchanted with middle-class piety and the disorganized systems of the fast-growing industrial cities of the country. Therefore, the worker viewed with terror the fate that was his if he failed to find steady employment. His only security was in a trade, and even this sometimes failed to keep him in wages. No man could

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 108-109.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 74.

protect himself against old age, illness, or trade cycles which caused depressions that were "accepted as a law of nature."¹⁷

The depression in the lace industry had ruined many families in Nottingham. Lydia Lawrence's own family had been ruined by such a trade cycle in Nottingham. Thus in the novel the Coppard family is ruined when the trade cycle causes a shift in industry which disrupts the economics of the city as well as that of the family. Gertrude's father had been "bitterly galled by his own poverty."¹⁸ He had become an engineer; engineering was one of the new professions which a middle-class man might enter if he could not become a rich burgher. Gertrude herself has married into the working class, a social position which is far removed from the prestige given the professions or the burghers. Her position is one step away from the dreaded workhouse; therefore, Gertrude fights hard to make Walter realize his responsibilities.

Walter Morel, however, is a worker who is without a sense of the future. He lives in the present as he socializes at the pub, buying drinks for his friends if he

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 74-75.

¹⁸Sons and Lovers, p. 7.

has had a good week in the pit. It was the custom of the workers to spend their extra shillings at the pub; therefore, Walter "never saved a penny, and he gave his wife no opportunity of saving. . . ." He keeps part of his wages every week: in the good weeks when "he earned forty shillings he kept ten" and in the bad weeks "from eighteen he kept a shilling; from sixteen he kept sixpence."²⁰ Thus his spending habits constantly vex his wife who considers thrift the main virtue in life.

Gertrude prizes not only thrift but the Victorian idea of success through "individual effort, backed by austerity." It is the foundation of middle-class life and, therefore, Gertrude finds it difficult to accept Walter's indifference to the creed. He is a good worker, but he makes little effort to get along with his superiors. He abuses the pit-managers because he is a "tongue-wagger" who cannot tolerate authority.²¹ Consequently, he is assigned poor stalls with little coal yield, and his wages are drastically reduced. Yet in England at this time twenty-five shillings to thirty-five shillings a week gave a worker a comfortable living while as little as ten shillings a week could mean the difference between

²⁰Sons and Lovers, p. 18.

²¹Ibid., p. 16.

comfort and poverty.²² Being aware of these economic facts, Gertrude simply cannot understand Walter's deliberate attempt to court economic disaster.

Furthermore, Walter faces enough other problems as a miner without courting monetary troubles, for the family of every miner lives in the shadow of mine accidents which could destroy the family as a unit. Thus when Walter is injured in an accident at the pit, the children wait anxiously for their mother to return home from the hospital. Walter's leg has been "smashed," but Gertrude comforts the children with the news that he will soon recover:

"And," she continued, "of course he says he's going to die--it wouldn't be him if he didn't. 'I'm done for, my lass!' he said, looking at me. 'Don't be so silly,' I said to him. 'You're not going to die of a broken leg, however badly it's smashed.'"²³

But it is Gertrude's courage during the time of Walter's recovery that reveals the depth of her character. In her great anxiety about Walter she still manages to be steadfast and cheerful for Walter's sake as well as for the children's, and throughout all the difficult years, she tries to make a cheerful home atmosphere for the

²²Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London, cited by Reader, p. 92.

²³Sons and Lovers, p. 85.

children. It is a home, furthermore, which is different from others in that there is "nothing cheap or tawdry"²⁴ in the furnishings. From this fact, one realizes that Lawrence's home was not typical of Victorian tastes, which had a penchant for cheap ornaments, overcrowded rooms with "too many chairs, too many hassocks, too many small tables, too much pampas grass. . . . Everything had something else superimposed upon it. . . ." ²⁵ Certainly, this description of the typical Victorian room, stands in vivid contrast to the Lawrence home as Ada remembered it:

I close my eyes and see again father's wooden arm-chair on one side of the fireplace, and mother's little rocking-chair on the other; the sofa, with its shake-up bed covered with pretty red chintz and cushions to match, the little painted dresser, and the book-case with its rows of books of which we were so proud.²⁶

Lawrence too was proud of his home, but he failed to recognize the role his mother played in their lives as a positive force for good. Instead, he felt that he had wronged his father in life as well as in the novel.²⁷ Therefore,

²⁴Ada Lawrence and G. Stuart Gelder, Young Lorenzo: Early Life of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 20.

²⁵V. Sackville-West, The Edwardians, quoted by Laski, p. 153.

²⁶Lawrence and Gelder, pp. 18-19.

²⁷Harry T. Moore, The Intelligent Heart: The Story of D. H. Lawrence (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1954), p. 8.

he tried to make amends in his works by denouncing the intellectual-spiritual qualities which characterized his mother. Lawrence gave his mother little credit in Sons and Lovers, and later in life he gave her even less credit.²⁸

Yet Lawrence's mother was a practical woman who tried to give her children a sense of reality as they matured. In the novel, for example, Paul tells his mother that he belongs to the common people because from them he gets "life itself, warmth. You feel their hates and loves." She replies, "It's all very well, my boy. But, then, why don't you go and talk to your father's pals?" He says, "But they're rather different."²⁹

Mrs. Morel understands her son well enough to know that he would be bored with miners such as Jerry and Mr. Barker. And Lawrence himself was more at ease with the intellectuals of his day than with the common people. He might well exult over the miners' intuitive knowledge of life, but it was John Middleton Murry he chose as a friend, not some miner. Also, he married a baroness, a fact which

²⁸R. E. Prichard, D. H. Lawrence, Body of Darkness: Critical Essays in Modern Literature (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1971), p. 35.

²⁹Sons and Lovers, p. 256.

he was rather pleased to announce to his friends. Therefore, when Lawrence denounces the intellectual qualities of his mother in his later works, one cannot help echoing Gertrude Morel: Then why do you associate with the intellectuals?

Lawrence's own mother accepted the fact that she was an intellectual. Ada notes that her mother was indeed the prototype for Mrs. Morel, who "loved ideas, and was considered very intellectual."³⁰ In the novel Gertrude Morel knows what she is and what she is not. She knows that she has married the miner Walter Morel because she has been jilted by John Field. Although he had made her no promises, she had expected to marry John Field, who was "the son of a well-to-do tradesman, had been to college in London, and was to devote himself to business."³¹ She always remembered that September day when she sat with John Field under the vine-leaves at her father's house:

"Now sit still," he had cried. "Now your hair, I don't know what it is like! It's as bright as copper and gold, as red as burnt copper, and it has gold threads where the sun shines on it. Fancy their saying it's brown. Your mother calls it mouse-colour."³²

³⁰Lawrence and Gelder, p. 11.

³¹Sons and Lovers, p. 8.

³²Ibid.

But because of illness she was forced to leave her young suitor and her teaching position. She went to Nottingham to stay with her retired father. As she waited in her father's house for her gentleman caller, the months piled upon each other like autumn leaves in the wind. After two years, she, a Victorian woman fenced in by convention, inquired about her old suitor. She was told that his father's business had failed; John Field had then "married his landlady, a woman of forty, a widow with property."³³

What was it like to be Gertrude Coppard, a Victorian woman without prospects of a suitor for her hand? What was it like in an era when "from infancy all girls who were born above the level of poverty had the dream of a successful marriage before their eyes, for by that alone was it possible for a woman to rise in the world"?³⁴ The Victorian woman, unlike the women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had lost her independency. She had no legal recourse in the courts; she could not own property, or even her own clothes, without her husband's permission.³⁵ Victorian women had lost status in the world. They had lost their position of importance in the

³³Ibid.

³⁴Petrie, p. 199.

³⁵Ibid., p. 207.

business world when industry was conducted upon such a large scale that it was difficult for women to go into business as they had done before the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, the Victorian woman did not have the independence of the woman in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and she had no hope of success in the world except through marriage.

In this highly competitive world of marriage contracts, one hoped to marry into the higher classes. The successful marriage was the dream of every small girl, and Gertrude Coppard was no exception in the marriage game. She was the granddaughter of a well-to-do burgher, the daughter of a professional man, an engineer. Therefore, she hoped to marry if not a rich burgher, at least a professional man, and when John Field considered the ministry as an occupation instead of business, she urged him on: "Then why don't you--why don't you?"³⁶ But then Gertrude had no dowry. Her grandfather had been ruined by the trade cycle in the lace industry in Nottingham, and her father had become a professional without financial security. As a result, John Field married the rich widow who was his landlady, and Gertrude became a spinster without a suitor, a maid without hopes.

³⁶Sons and Lovers, p. 8.

Gertrude might have resumed her teaching career, but there were few positions open to women in the teaching field at the time. She could have become a governess; however, girls would not willingly choose the roll of governess unless they were forced to do so by circumstances since the role of governess was rated so poorly by the Victorians. In fact, it was not unknown for them to be refused as subscribers at a circulation library.³⁷

Therefore, Gertrude's only hope in making a life for herself is to marry a man with some degree of success in the business world. And from the beginning Gertrude considers Walter Morel the miner a successful man. When she meets Walter at a party, she is captivated by him. He is so charming to his dancing partners that he, "laughing alike whatever partner he bowed above,"³⁸ captivates the young ladies, including Gertrude Coppard. She cannot help being pleased, therefore, when the young miner singles her out among the women at the party to pay her court. She thinks that he is quite charming, and although she knows nothing about mining, she thinks the miner is quite "noble."³⁹ Therefore, Gertrude is intrigued by the miner when he courts her during the following year.

³⁷Petrie, p. 203.

³⁸Sons and Lovers, p. 10.

³⁹Ibid., p. 11.

Then when she marries Walter, she is very happy with him and her newly-found independence as a woman with standing in the community. She is pleased that they own good solid furniture and two houses. As a Victorian with middle-class values, Gertrude places great stress upon ownership of property, but later is shocked to learn that the houses are actually owned by her mother-in-law and that they still owe money on the furniture. Walter's mother, however, assures Gertrude that she is lucky to have a husband "as takes all the worry of the money and leaves you a free hand."⁴⁰ Now if there is anything that Gertrude does not want it, is to be so "free" from managing the household expenses. She feels that she, unlike most Victorian women, is quite capable of handling money. It is a bitter blow, therefore, when she realizes that Walter has put them in debt and owns no property. Gertrude, with her Puritanical upbringing, is even more revolted by his lack of integrity. He has lied to her about the houses, as well as broken his pledge not to drink. When he begins to spend his time in the pub with his friends, she, therefore, turns to the children in her disillusionment.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 13.

As many critics have observed, Gertrude is a vitalist in that she has great faith in life, a concept which she tries to instill in her children. She refuses to give in to the dullness and monotony of her life as she brings up her children in the mining community. She is an unusual woman, as was Lawrence's own mother, in that she, unlike many Victorian women in the working class, refuses to become one of the "hopeless drudges" who sadly limits their children's lives.⁴¹ She never gives in to despair, and she can say about her marriage that "it might have been worse by a long chalk."⁴²

Gertrude Morel, therefore, never becomes a drudge about her marriage or her surroundings. She refuses to let her sons become miners. Thus William becomes a clerk, a position which a boy might hold without family interests.⁴³ William is aware of the limitations that hinder a miner's son; therefore, from an early age he works hard to succeed. Although his mother is the catalyst for the road he chooses, it is the Victorian work ethic which pushes him beyond his strength. Since "work lay at the centre of middle-class

⁴¹B. Seebohm Rowntree, Poverty, quoted by Laski, p. 188.

⁴²Sons and Lovers, p. 132.

⁴³Reader, p. 125.

life," to insist upon working hard was central to the creed.⁴⁴ Thus when William goes to London, he is very much the man of his time who went to the city seeking good wages and a better social life.

Yet even long before he leaves for the city, William's social life has already become a source of anxiety for Mrs. Morel, for she protests:

"Dance, if you want to dance, my son; but don't think you can work in the office, and then amuse yourself, and then study on top of all. You can't; the human frame won't stand it."⁴⁵

Mrs. Morel's warning to her son goes unheeded when he gets to London and finds that he can "associate with men far above his Bestwood friends in station."⁴⁶ And like many working-class boys, William, even as Lawrence, wants to become a gentleman. When he succeeds he is "rather surprised at the ease with which he became a gentleman."⁴⁷

In his eagerness to climb into the middle class, William combines his social life and work with the study of Latin "because he intended to get on in his office, and in the law as much as he could."⁴⁸ William then works hard,

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 142-43.

⁴⁵Sons and Lovers, p. 55.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 90

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

not because his mother urges him on, as Lawrence has suggested, but because he is dedicated to business and social success. He furthermore, chooses "Gypsy" Warren as his mistress because she is a beautiful girl who turns heads as she walks with William in Piccadilly Circus. He tells his mother that she is a woman "after whom the men were running thick and fast."⁴⁹ William chooses "Gypsy" because he is flattered as only a miner's son could be to capture such a beautiful woman among the sophisticated young of London. He is pleased that he is the envy of other men when he escorts the sensual girl to the parties in London, and he uses the capture of "Gypsy" to measure his success in the city. It is little wonder then that William, only a shipping clerk with limited social contacts, considers himself so fortunate to possess "Gypsy."

Because William is proud of his conquest, he tries desperately to make her happy. He dissipates his strength as he tries to keep up with the girl's social demands, as well as his studies after work. But he is a Victorian who is ambitious in his social and business plans and, like many others of the era, is broken by the pace. When he dies, his mother is grief-stricken because William was her

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 91.

favorite son, as Ernest had been Mrs. Lawrence's favorite. As Ada points out, Earnest was "the pride of my mother's heart. . . . Always full of fun and humour, he was the life and soul of the house. . . ."50 Mrs. Lawrence always joined in the games and songs, but after Ernest "died she would stay in the kitchen in her rocking chair, pretending to read."51

William, as was his prototype, was well loved by his mother as well as by the whole family. His coming home from London was the greatest event in their lives. And when he went away the whole family grieved. When he died, "the life and soul of the house" died, leaving a void in their lives. It was Paul with his frail body, not William, whom they expected to die. Therefore, it is with shock and a sense of guilt that Mrs. Morel begins to nurse Paul when he becomes ill. As his mother begins to fight for his life, she realizes that Paul has less chance to live than William, who had been a robust child. Therefore, Mrs. Morel is determined that she will not lose him to the grave as she had lost William.

⁵⁰Lawrence and Gelder, pp. 28-29.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 43.

The death of William then is the event which alters Paul's life. His mother, who is unable to bear losing another son, begins to be unduly concerned about him. She begins to resent Miriam Leivers, who keeps Paul away from home so much of the time that Mrs. Morel feels that the late hours will undermine his health. She resents too that Paul should be interested in a farm girl. She wants her son to marry into the upper classes just as Mrs. Lawrence desired a good marriage for her son, a goal which has been confirmed by Ada who said that Lawrence should have married someone like Frieda.⁵² Since Frieda was a baroness, it was her title that impressed Ada. Furthermore, Lawrence's family wanted him to marry into the upper-classes, as did most Victorian families want their children to marry for social position. In the novel, Mrs. Morel certainly wants Paul to marry some woman who is a "lady."⁵³

Although Miriam Leivers is certainly Paul's equal in ability and charm, she is a farm girl. And to the Victorian mind a farm girl is no "lady." Therefore, Miriam

⁵²Emile Delavenay, D. H. Lawrence, The Man and His Works: The Formative Years, 1885-1919, trans. by Katherine M. Delavenay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 35.

⁵³Sons and Lovers, p. 256.

loses the family approval as a mate for Paul just as Jessie Chambers was rejected by the Lawrences because she was working class, not because she lacked charm. Indeed, Jessie had enough charm to captivate Ford Madox Ford, Lawrence's first editor.⁵⁴ Certainly, she managed to captivate and influence Lawrence as Helen Corke, who was a friend at Croydon when Lawrence taught there, confirms Jessie's contribution to Lawrence's development as an artist: "I came to understand how she had fostered that genius, unconsciously, by the intensity of her own spirit."⁵⁵ Jessie's intense approach to life might have encouraged Lawrence to become a great writer as Helen Corke has suggested, but Jessie herself blamed that same intensity that was inherent in her character for the destruction of her love-affair with Lawrence.⁵⁶ Jessie is possibly right in that with her natural reserve she could never have been the "gushing" type of woman who attracted Lawrence.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Jessie Chambers (E. T.), D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record (New York: Knight Publications, 1936), p. 175.

⁵⁵Helen Corke, D. H. Lawrence: The Croydon Years, with an Introduction by Warren Roberts (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), p. 21.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁷Chambers, pp. 215-216.

Furthermore, Jessie felt that her intensity, as well as Lawrence's mother, contributed to the destruction of their love.⁵⁸ Jessie felt that Mrs. Lawrence's dislike of her caused Lawrence to dismiss the possibility of their marriage. Although, as Ada writes, Mrs. Lawrence was certainly jealous of Jessie,⁵⁹ we cannot hold the mother accountable entirely for breaking up the affair because men seldom break off with the women they love just to please their mothers. The same situation is acted out in the home when Mrs. Morel says to Paul, "Perhaps I'm selfish. If you want her, take her, my boy,"⁶⁰ as she expresses her displeasure at his leaving her for Miriam and yet she does not want him to stay at home for the rest of his life. Also it is Paul himself, not his mother, who is responsible for the end of the courtship with Miriam. Paul denies his love for Miriam time and again, and yet he is unable to break completely with her. As Helen Corke writes about the fictional and actual relationships, she concludes that "this weakness of his, this indecision and self-distrust," kept Lawrence from either rejecting or accepting Jessie.⁶¹

⁵⁸Corke, p. 26.

⁵⁹Lawrence and Gelder, p. 72.

⁶⁰Sons and Lovers, p. 213.

⁶¹Corke, p. 13.

This inability to come to a decision about Jessie tends to make Lawrence culpable. Moreover, he never completely broke with Jessie even after he eloped with Frieda, for much to Jessie's humiliation, he wrote to ask if she would join him and Frieda on the Continent.⁶² It is Lawrence's lack of concern for her feelings that caused Jessie to say that in the novel as in life "he held over me a doom of negation and futility."⁶³

From the beginning of their friendship, Lawrence was never concerned enough about Jessie's feelings. He failed to defend her against his mother and his friends, and indeed he "left her in the lurch--seemed almost to have a sort of revenge upon her then."⁶⁴ Lawrence not only failed to defend Jessie, but he also told her that she had "no sense of humour"⁶⁵ and "no sexual attraction."⁶⁶ When he also told her that "there must be some fault in you if nobody likes you,"⁶⁷ Jessie began to feel that Lawrence was "freezing the springs of my spontaniety."⁶⁸ It is

⁶²Chambers, p. 219.

⁶³Ibid., p. 213.

⁶⁴Sons and Lovers, p. 203.

⁶⁵Chambers, p. 132.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 131.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 132.

clear that Jessie felt that Lawrence was a powerful negative form in her life.

Yet Jessie had no other suitors except Lawrence. Her life as a farm girl was a lonely one until Lawrence came into the family circle at the Hags. She had no other opportunities in a society that felt that women were inferior in body and brains, useless except for "breeding purposes."⁶⁹ Like Jessie, Miriam then, hemmed in by such conventional thinking, protests to Paul:

"Why should I, because I'm a girl, be kept at home and not allowed to be anything? What chance have I?"

"Chance of what?"

"Of knowing anything--of learning, of doing anything. It's not fair, because I'm a woman."⁷⁰

At the turn of the century, Miriam's opportunities were indeed limited as were most Edwardian women who sought an outlet for their abilities. There were a few women who managed to use their talents, as did Louisa Burrows, the girl Lawrence was engaged to at the time of his mother's death.⁷¹ But for every Louisa there were many women like

⁶⁹Petrie, p. 223.

⁷⁰Sons and Lovers, p. 154.

⁷¹D. H. Lawrence, Lawrence in Love: Letters to Louie Burrows, ed. by James T. Boulton (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1968), p. xxvii.

Jessie and Miriam who were never allowed to develop their abilities. Yet Jessie's memoir concerning her days with Lawrence shows a great literary gift, as so many recent critics have noted. But Jessie, captive of Victorian attitudes, had little opportunity to pursue her talent at the time. When Ford asked Jessie for a "sketch," it was Lawrence himself who quickly squashed her opportunity for fame. This incident also finds expression in the novel as Lawrence allows Paul to express his attitudes toward Miriam's chance for intellectual fulfillment.

Lawrence's Victorian attitudes are well captured in the following scene. Miriam has at last got an opportunity to teach in a farming college. Since Paul has rejected her as a mate, she is rather pleased to let him know that she is not completely shattered by the experience; she does, after all, have a future.

"I suppose you're glad," he said.

"Very glad."

He was rather disappointed.

"I think it will be a great deal," she said, almost haughtily, resentfully.

.....

"I suppose work can be nearly everything to a man," he said, "though it isn't to me. But a woman only works with a part of herself. The real and vital part is covered up."

"But a man can give all himself to work?" she asked.

"Yes, practically."

"And a woman only the unimportant part of herself?"

"That's it."⁷²

Lawrence is expressing the typical male attitude of the time which denied women the opportunity of developing their minds or talents. The Victorian man thus had reduced the game of chivalry once played in medieval courts⁷³ to a dull fact of everyday life. And once this reduction had been accomplished, the men fled from such useless creatures to the pub or to women whom they considered "loose" in morals. Thus Paul, finding Miriam too inhibited sexually, flees to Clara, who promises a more passionate experience. Clara, who is separated from her husband, works in the factory with Paul. Since factory workers were generally considered without morals,⁷⁴ Clara is considered easy prey by Paul. From the beginning of their stormy courtship, Paul has little respect for her. When his mother asks him to be more considerate concerning Clara's reputation, he answers:

⁷²Sons and Lovers, pp. 415-416.

⁷³Reader, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁴Petrie, p. 210.

"Well, my dear, she lives separate from her husband, and talks on platforms; so she's already singled out from the sheep, and, as far as I can see, hasn't much to lose. No; her life's nothing to her, so what's the worth of nothing? She goes with me--it becomes something."⁷⁵

Clara does indeed talk on platforms as she is a suffragette. In the years that she has been with the women's movement, she has acquired some education. Clara, therefore, considers herself a "woman apart, and particularly apart, from her class."⁷⁶ She does not consider her life worth "nothing." Paul, however, from the beginning of their relationship tries to reduce her life to a meaningless existence. Even on a holiday to the sea-shore as he sees her approaching the water, she becomes a "tiny white foam-bubble, almost nothing among the morning." And then he thinks, "But what is she? It's not her I care for."⁷⁷ With the approaching death of his mother, he no longer conceals from Clara his utter rejection of her as a human being. Clara, realizing Paul's indifference to her, begins to feel that when he loves her it is "as if death itself had her in its grip."⁷⁸

⁷⁵Sons and Lovers, p. 314.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 264.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 357-58.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 387.

With such a callous lover as Paul, it is not difficult to understand why Clara goes back to her husband, Baxter Dawes. Whatever else Baxter might be, he does acknowledge Clara as a human being. Clara recognizes that he does when she complains to Paul, "About me you know nothing. . . ." Then she adds, much to his anger, that even Baxter knows that she exists. But with Paul she seems nothing except a sexual object. She finally asks him, "Do you think it's worth it--the--the sex part?"⁷⁹ Clara knows that Paul never sees her as a struggling human being with all the expectations and agonies which people suffer in this our star-crossed world.

And Clara, like Miriam, is a struggling human being with expectations which have been denied her. With no opportunities in life except marriage, she marries Baxter not because she loves him but for the simple reason that he is available. A woman who was "trained like a race-horse" for the "marriage market"⁸⁰ might accept "almost any sort of marriage that was offered" in the Victorian age.⁸¹ Clara accepted Baxter's proposal of marriage as

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 362.

⁸⁰W. F. Neff, Victorian Working Women, quoted by Petrie, p. 200.

⁸¹Petrie, p. 206.

she had no alternate course. And Paul is quite right when he tells Miriam that "a good many women would have given their souls to get him," as women indeed had little else to give their souls for in the Victorian era. Paul then adds that Clara is lucky to get Baxter and, therefore, that she must be responsible for their separation as she "treated him badly, I'll bet my boots."⁸² Since boots were hard to come by during the period, one must assume that Paul feels strongly about his opinion. Yet there is nothing in Clara's behavior with Paul or Baxter to suggest that she is a shrew. She is in fact just unlucky in her choices of men.

Clara seems to have few choices of men or job opportunities. She, Miriam, and Mrs. Morel are women without the right to choose their own destinies. They are women without the chance to develop their talents or skills, as were their prototypes in life--Mrs. Lawrence, Jessie, and Alice Dax. The main prototype for Clara, Alice Dax, who had an affair with Lawrence in Eastwood for many years, was certainly a gifted and intelligent woman. She was "ahead of her time" in her taste in fashion, her behavior as a leader in the women's movement, and her belief in

⁸²Sons and Lovers, p. 317.

personal freedom which few women of the time actually experienced.⁸³

Yet Alice Dax was tied to a small mining community, married to a man she did not love, and had little chance to explore her sense of freedom. She, Lydia Lawrence, and Jessie Chambers were typical of Victorian women who were limited by the era. Jessie Chambers was certainly limited in the use of her intellectual and artistic gifts. It was ironic then that Lawrence, who rejected her as a mate, could say to her: "I think God intended you to make a good wife--and not much more."⁸⁴ Lawrence not only rejected her as a mate, he compounded the injury when he wrote Sons and Lovers with its depiction of their love-affair. Jessie expressed her bitterness:

And as I sat and looked at the subtle distortion of what had been the deepest values of my life, the one gleam of light was the realization that Lawrence had overstated his case; that some day his epic of maternal love and filial devotion would be viewed from another angle, that of his own final despair.⁸⁵

Jessie recovered and later married a farmer. Thus Jessie, as well as Lydia Lawrence and Alice Dax, joined the legend of Victorian women who managed to get a marriage

⁸³Delavenay, pp. 52-54.

⁸⁴Chambers, p. 181.

⁸⁵Chambers, p. 204.

contract. All three were bound by their class background, unable to rise in the world except through the possibility of successful marriage. And even though the marriages of the Morels and the Daweses in the work demonstrate the folly of such unions, they were sanctified by Victorian mores which limited women in their choice of roles.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study my purpose has been to investigate three critical approaches to D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. The first chapter delineates the psychoanalytic approach; the second chapter discusses the formalistic approach; the last explains the sociological approach.

In the first chapter, which delineates the psychoanalytic approach, Lawrence's synopsis of the work is probed for its Freudian insights into Paul Morel's behavioral patterns. Although the psychoanalytic approach affords some interesting insights into the characterization of the hero, it is reductive in that art becomes a case study of neuroticism. Such an approach then is used as an analogous explanation of the writer's Freudian repressions. Thus fact and illusion intermingle to the detriment of the artistic interests in the work.

The Freudian critic not only neglects the techniques of art, he also ignores the fact that Lawrence made his hero an artist with a selfhood apart from the mother-son relationship. Therefore, in the next chapter, the formalistic approach explores the possibility that Paul, as an artist, will survive his mother's death. Thus with the development

of the character of the artist, Lawrence justifies the ambiguous ending. Even though the formalistic approach provides important insight into the artist-as-hero theme, it presents certain difficulties when applied to Lawrence's novel, Sons and Lovers. The text itself does not readily yield to such a critical inquiry because of Lawrence's mystical ideas--such as the "baptism of fire in passion"--which are basic to a better understanding of this novel.

In the final chapter, the sociological approach does yield a remarkable study of the status of women during the Victorian era. Although such a study seems vital, the sociological approach does neglect the artistic values in the work. Such an approach, however, has been virtually ignored in Lawretian criticism before this study. Until the Freudian approach loses its omnipotent position, many aspects of the novel will continue to be neglected.

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