

Study on the masterpiece: *Sons and Lovers* of Lawrence's

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Abstract

Sons and Lovers published in 1913 is the Lawrence's first most important novel which receive praise. It is a great work of art and is based on his direct experience of life. The novel depicts the story of the Morel family, and in particular, of Paul Morel. The story focuses on the problems of human relationship, chiefly relations between man and woman, woman and woman, children and parents. It has been found that in the novel, Lawrence has attempted to examine the possibility of happiness in the life of man. Men and women whose lives are not in tune with their souls (inner self) but are entirely controlled by their minds cannot live happily. One can listen the voice of one's Soul only when the mind is silent and the psyche remains still. The man who dives deep and gets into contact with his soul achieves real freedom.

Keywords: Lawrence's, Masterpiece Publication, Sons and Lovers

Introduction: Mrs. Morel is terribly distraught over William's death and nurses her physically weak second son, Paul, with great love and care that also maintains her own mental balance. She wants the fulfillment of her self through him. Paul too feels that his life and achievements have meaning only in relation to her. She has a strong spiritual hold on him. When he grows up, this spiritual bondage makes him unfit to establish healthy adult relationship with any woman. Paul comes close to Miriam, the love between them is idyll. But his mother not allowed a mature love between them because she regards Miriam to be one of those women "who will want to suck a man's soul out". She fears that this relationship will leave "no room" for herself in the mind and soul of Paul. Paul deeply loves his mother so not wants to go against wishes of his mother. Thus the strong mother-pull stands his way of giving himself completely in love to Miriam. On the other hand, Miriam's attitude towards love and sex is typically Christian that may be regarded as 'Spiritual', but it is certainly neurotic, as her mother told to her that marriage is always dreadful. This awareness of physical passion makes them feel uneasy that becomes the reason of the failure of their relationship. Miriam thinks that if Paul's 'lower' desires (physical passion) are burnt away through Clara, she might then have him altogether for herself. Miriam brings Paul and Clara together and Paul goes all out for passion with Clara, a sensuous woman. Mrs. Morel is not hostile to her and rather glad to know it as she thinks that Clara will take his body and leave his soul to her. Their passion soon gives way to dissatisfaction and uncertainty. Now Clara feels that in the matter of sex her husband Baxter was preferable to Paul. Both of them realize that they will not stay together permanently. Clara realizes that Paul will never surrender his will to her.

According to Lawrence, the great crime which the moneyed classes and promoters of industry committed in the palmy Victorian days was the condemning of the workers to live and work in ugliness. Mrs. Morel was not anxious to move to the Bottoms, when she came to it from Bestwood. But it was the only option she could take. That is not the only irony of the workers. She prided herself on having an end house in one of the top blocks and thus had only one neighbour; on the other side, she had an extra strip of garden. And, in having an end house, "she enjoyed a kind of aristocracy among the others women...."³ But "this superiority," Lawrence writes, "was not much of a consolation to Mrs. Morel" (514).

She was thirty-one year old, and had been married eight years. Her husband was a miner, one who loved to drink and make merry. By this time, they had two children, William, a boy of seven and a daughter, younger to William. But Mrs. Morel was not happy, though theirs was a love marriage. She had come from a better family, both financially and in sophistication. In the opening scene itself, her frustration becomes visible. She waited for her husband late in the night, as he had gone to a fair. She was alone but she, during these eight years, had become used to her loneliness. Lawrence seems to blame the industrial life which had broken the old social and

familiar bonds, affecting family life adversely. Colliers, like other working class people, took to drinking in the absence of cohesion in family and social life. In place of organic society, a pure mechanization or materialism had set in, resulting in disintegration of whole, organic solidarity among people. Away from their roots, workers lived a nucleus family life. Lawrence was deeply concerned with the onset of industrialism. For him, it was something unfortunate that the tradition was lost.

As a consequence of the loss of organic society, colliers were left to somehow, live on meagre resources. Mrs. Morel felt wretched in bringing up the family on scanty resources. She was already pregnant with the third child in her womb. The world seemed to her a "dreary place, where nothing else would happen for her—at least until William grew up" (516).

It is a significant pointer to Mrs. Morel's state of mind. She had started looking forward to the day when William would earn. She did not want the third child. She could imagine Walter Morel serving bear in a public house, "swilling himself drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him" (516). She had already cast off her husband, at least in her mind. Her struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness had left no romance in her life.

Sons and Lovers

There is no need of critics to tell that *Sons and Lovers* is Lawrence's most autobiographical novel, for his own father was a collier and that there was no love lost between his parents. Critics like Mark Schorer have taken exception to the autobiographical strain in *Sons and Lovers*. His main argument in his essay "Technique As Discovery"⁴ Schorer has affinities with New Criticism. He is a formalist in this regard. He thinks that form or technique not only discovers but also develops and evaluates a text. He thus makes a difference between content and achieved content. In his view, Lawrence remained stuck with his life and therefore failed to rise above the raw content of his life. Technique, according to Schorer, "alone objectifies the material of art".⁵ Since Lawrence wrote his own life in *Sons and Lovers*, he could not objective his material. Hence- Morel and Lawrence were never separated. The third child threatening to come in the world, as Mrs. Morel felt, was Paul Morel. After the early death of William, Mrs. Morel was left with the hope that Paul would grow and earn and thus improve the financial position of the family.

One of the banes of New Criticism is that in searching for objectification, it forgets that it sacrifices the value of content. Lawrence's purpose in telling this tale was not whether it was his own life or not, but that he had an intimate understanding how the loss of cohesiveness of organic society created problems for family bonds. These bonds could no longer hold the family together. William had to go to London for a better job and eventually lost his contact back at Bestwood. Lawrence hoped to recover the organic society and within it the organic family. As Scherer himself concedes in another essay "Lawrence and The Spirit of the Place",⁶ "War, the dehumanizing process of society in the destructive mass, always seemed to him (Lawrence), a portion of the industrial process, and it is not accidental that Lawrence's hatred of industrial England seemed to have reached its height during the war years".⁷ Indeed Lawrence, like Mrs. Morel felt during the war years, sick. In a letter to Catherine Carswell, he wrote that he finds it difficult to live in England, that he would die of foul inward poison. It is the same sickness and nausea that Mrs. Morel had felt living on the pit-ash of Bestwood.

Gertrude Morel was very ill when the boy Paul was born. Her husband was good to her, but she felt very lonely, "miles away from her own people. She felt lonely now, and his presence only made it more tense." (522) In these early intimations, Lawrence underlines the loss of family life-her people and his people. She was utterly alone, more so when he was around. She searched for others and found none. The image of a woman absolutely alone is the one that Lawrence underlines "He (Paul) came just when her own bitterness of disillusion was hardest to bear; when her faith in life was shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely. She made much of the child, and the father was jealous" (522).

Her longing to belong was most acute at this moment-to have the power of communicating with others, "identifying and defining the individuated quality of life, the physical essences of things outside the personality, the *notme*, the very *ding an sich*."⁸ Gertrude Morel searched for an organic relationship in marrying Walter Morel, she was unable to remove her loneliness. It not only persisted, but even grew many fold in his company. The Freudian is wrong in saying that marriage removes endemic loneliness of mankind. This is what happened with her as it also happened with Walter Morel. If ever we are able to overcome our alienations, it is only in the organic social order, a kind of community which Lawrence envisaged. Lawrence wished to establish his identity not only with the social order but also with the whole universe which he called circumambient universe. One of his chief motives of artistic creation was the need for feeling that we are in relationship to the whole world. It is in such a relationship that one feels at home. Mrs. Gertrude could not feel at home with her husband: "There began a battle between the husband and wife--a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of the one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfill his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it - it drove him out of her mind" (522).

Lawrence's quest to harmonize all disagreeable will come to fruition only in a communal world. Bereft of it, people would clash for supremacy. Mrs. Morel considered herself superior to other Collier's wives, because she occupied an end house, though it was a poor consolation. She also found her husband negligent of his duties and responsibilities. In addition she had a better background. She came of a good old burgher family. Her grandfather had, however, gone bankrupt. Her father was an engineer — "a large, handsome, naughty man, proud of his fair skin and blue eyes, but more proud still of his integrity."⁹ Gertrude resembled her mother in her small built. But her temper, proud and unyielding, she had from her mother's family. She loved her mother. She remembered to had hated her father's overbearing manner towards her gentle, humorous, kindly souled mother. Since she had affinity with her mother, she hated her father.

As is evident Mrs. Morel had religious and moral disposition while Walter Morel loved good things of life. And though they married for love, they began fighting early in their married life. It was because they had no family or society to iron out their differences nor had they courage and discipline to balance their relationship. So they indulged in objectifying each other, that is, making each other objects and things, robbing each other's identity. When they first met at a Christmas party, they ironically felt for each other's opposite nature. Gertrude watched the young miner as he danced. "She thought him rather wonderful, never having met anyone like him"(519). Gertrude herself was rather contemptuous of dancing. She was a puritan, like her father, high-minded. Therefore "the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle not baffled and gripped into incandescence by' thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful beyond her"(519).

Walter came and bowed before her; he seemed melted away before her. But this romance soon evaporated. She even liked his job, to begin with, for she thought, he risked his life daily and with gaiety. The next Christmas they were married and for three months she was perfectly happy: for six months she was very happy. Afterwards, she started finding faults with him. Whenever she tried to open her heart seriously to him, he seemed to listen but without understanding. This killed her efforts at finer intimacy and she had flashes of fear.

But Gertrude felt that this was what she lacked in him. And finally when one day she found out an unpaid bill in his pocket, her reservations against her husband burst open into a fight into death. She said very little to her husband, but as Lawrence records, "her manner had changed towards him. Something in her proud, honourable soul had crystallized as hard as rock" (521).

Walter Morel henceforth lost his true relationship. He did no longer belong to either her

or his family. As Lawrence writes: "The estrangement between them caused him, knowingly or unknowingly grossly to offend her where he would not have done (522). Thus alienation is the last word in Lawrence's fiction. Walter loses his subjectivity on the one hand but he tries to regain it by offending her where perhaps she more felt hurt. There was no mutual respect for each other left to bring them together. He was now a subdued man. He would creep into the house, eats his dinner all alone. He tried to offend her, at times, by hurting the small boy, Paul, when he burnt his hair. This act of "masculine clumsiness was the spear through the side of her love for Morel"(523). She could bear him no more but then she ceased to fret for his love: "He was an outsider for her"(523).

Thus the two fell asunder. They had no cementing family or society around them. They thought that this made life much more bearable. Nonetheless, she would still want him. She still had her high moral sense. After all, she inherited it from generations of Puritans. Perhaps she felt guilty because she loved him or she had loved him but at the same time she continued to torture him for his alleged sins. As we have noted earlier, she wanted to re-form him in her own image by annihilating his subjectivity. That was a cruder way of reforming or re-forming but this is what Lawrence feels we do to each other when our aspirations are not met with. If he drank, and lied, he was often given a lash unmercifully.

What Lawrence emphasized in this man-woman relationship, and for that matter, any man-woman relationship was that the man and wife struggle for their survival, their existence; their subjectivity; they feel threatened in the presence of each other's subjectivity. The other in Walter Morel was seen as a liar, a drunkard, an irresponsible husband and father. To her high moral sense essentially puritanical, she felt as if he was allowed to have his being, he would destabilize her world. The pity was, as Lawrence wrote, "She was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much that he ought to be"(523). So, in seeking to make him "nobler than he could be, she destroyed him"(523).

In the process of destroying him, Gertrude ironically also injured and destroyed herself. She lost her husband but she had the consolation that she had the children eventually to destroy in case they do not come up to her expectations. Walter Morel started drinking heavily, though not more than other miners; his wages fell off. He became a loud-mouth. The authorities did not like him. He became abusive. In short, he was reduced to a non-entity. He became an object among other objects. He fell under the slavery of others. He brought home, reduced salary, keeping, of course, some part of it for himself. Mrs. Morel continued to hate him. Each forgot everything else-love or affection accept the hatred of the other and the battle between them. Both fought fiercely, calling each other liars.

The first chapter of the novel is given to their frequent battles. They shamed each other but regained their selves for another battle. Now he made his own breakfast. The only real rest seemed to be when he was out of the house. Meanwhile Mrs. Morel took care of her family besides devoting herself to religion. She had a visit everyday from a clergyman Mr. Heatton. The young man often stayed to tea with Mrs. Morel. In such moments, she would not wish her husband to come too soon. She hated his presence. She also did not like the new baby because the battle had started by the time he was conceived. Paul was also a delicate baby. She had not wanted this child to come because of her feeling for her husband. She was apprehensive regarding the child's survival. In case he survived, what would become of him, she often thought. She even wished him dead for his weak constitution.

Lawrence, thus, looked at the breakdown of all communication with dismay. Walter would come home, unwanted and unloved. But he would not take it lying down. He would growl, would wish to be waited on by his wife. He refused to be a dog spurned at the door. The battle would ensue. In the process she was hurt one day. As a result of these fights, "The family life withdrew, shrank away, and became hushed as he entered. But he cared no longer about his alienation."(541). Even his children withdrew from his presence; they felt that he injured their

mother. But men and women are curious creatures. They would not live with or without each other. She would always fear the possibility of his going to some other pit: "One part of her said it would be a relief to see the last of him; another part fretted because of keeping the children; and inside her yet, she could not quite let him go. At the bottom, she knew very well, he could not go (542).

That is what Lawrence would call the variety of human wishes. However, the final casting off Walter Morel begins in chapter-III. Caught between loving and hating him, Gertrude Morel remained in a dilemma for quite sometime. Perhaps she hoped that she would finally cast him off after William's coming of an age. She had already arrived at a point when she thought that there was a limit. Up till this time, in spite of all, he had been her husband and man. She had felt that more or less, for all that he did to himself or did to her, her living depended on him: "There were many, many stages in the ebbing of her love for him, but it was always ebbing" (544).

Almost as soon as *Sons and Lovers* appeared, there were critics, said Jemini Salgado, the editor of Case Book on D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* who saw in it a startling endorsement of Freudian theme about the Oedipus complex. We have earlier noted that Lawrence is not a Freudian in that his psycho-analysis is existential. Moreover, Lawrence had not read Freud by the time he wrote this novel, though, he might have heard about his theories from Frieda. The fact is that Gertrude Morel's dependence on her sons, in terms of her financial well-being cannot be said to be Freudian by any stretch of imagination. She has been slowly casting off her husband is the hope that her son would grow and start earning. We must look in a different direction for Gertrude Morel's slow but steady rejection of Walter Morel. But criticism of the novel continues to harp on the novel being Oedipal in its nature. Lawrence own objections to the psycho-analytical approach are important in this regard. As Salgado in his introduction to the Case-Book on *Sons and Lovers* but it that the psycho analytical criticism "ignores the palpable surface of the novel...it smoothes awkward details in its efforts to cut the novel into the size and shape that fits the theory."¹⁰

Lawrence also felt that the psycho-analytical critics falsified the truth of the novel in the name of half truths of intellectual schematizing. Nevertheless, *Sons and Lovers* continued to invite this kind of critical approach more than most other novels by Lawrence and this fact is an interesting and important clue that theories are generally procrustean beds.

As a result, the novel is not read for what it is. The present study makes an attempt to study the novel in and for itself. That is why we have quoted at length the text so as to see that there is nothing superfluous or discordant in it. In this context Gertrude was casting Walter Morel off, though half regretfully but relentlessly, using him now and then for love and for life of the children. But in any event he was increasingly being reduced to a husk. Not surprisingly, Walter himself acquiesced, as Lawrence writes, so many men do, yielding their place to their children. He was himself becoming irrelevant. She, on her part, looked wistfully to William. The boy was getting big. She hoped that he would one day replace his father. "She saw in him a man, young, full of vigour, making the world glow again for her." (544). Meanwhile, she was big with another child, thanks to the truce between the two. She was sorry when she came to know that she was big with the child "both for economic reasons and because she did not- love her husband ..." (545).

These details, though, at times, repetitive, confirms Lawrence's view that marriage is no guarantee for the couples' mutual happiness. In terms of existential analysis, human beings are essentially alone. In order to assert their selves, they make the other an object. Mrs. Morel did the same. She had no love for the children either. It was her interest in them, in their earnings, that she loved them. In fact, her pride in William was in proportion to his brilliance at school. He was already sixteen and was learning shorthand and book-keeping. He was also ambitious. He gave all his money to his mother, keeping only a fraction of it for herself. But then Gertrude

Morel was heard that William was going away. By this time she almost lived by him. She liked to do things for him, washing and ironing his clothes. William was not so much against his father as was Paul. In fact, he was like her--slightly and rather small. As the mother depended more and more on her sons, Walter would willingly take a back seat but at times he would bully. And sometimes beats her. Paul would suffer no more ill-treatment of her mother. So he bore a deep-seated hatred against his father.

Lawrence at this point seems to come closer in terms of psycho-analysis to that of Freud but this was not because he loved his mother and therefore hated his father, but that he could not bear his father's destruction. The mother obviously loved Paul on this score. The boy also loved his mother, the way he has been treated. He loved to sleep in his mother's bed, not because of any incestuous feelings for her but that he was still very young and weak. The warmth, the security and peace of soul, he found in her, heated his otherwise sick body. He lay against her and slept and got better.

These words have nothing incestuous about them. What Lawrence, perhaps, wished to say was that the mutual objectification between husband and wife leads the couple to depend upon their children. That is why, there are complexes like Oedipus and Electra. It is the couples' mutual antagonism which develops these complexes. They are otherwise not born of incest. This is not to say that there are no intimations of this kind in the novel. For example, Paul always brought one spray, the best he could find. In response, his mother would say, "Pretty", in a curious tone, as Lawrence writes, "of a woman accepting a love token"(559).

These intimacies, however, should not be misconstrued. They are part of harmony between the mother and sons, because after reducing husbands to nothingness, they would dote upon their sons. There is not much psychoanalytical, as much sociological in these responses. The woman's positions, precarious as is in a family, she in all probability finds her sons to be more responsive to her than her husband. The sons are her defense mechanism.

Mrs. Morel did nothing untoward in keeping her hold on her sons. As Lawrence writes "William had gone away to London and his mother missed his money. He sent ten shillings once or twice, but had many things to pay for at first..." (566). Lawrence makes it clear that she missed his money and though she still thought him to be her knight "who wore her favour in the battle, she knew that she would have to depend upon Paul more than on William" (566) Lawrence makes his position clear that in the original foreword to *Sons and Lovers*. It is in the form of a letter written to Edward Garnett. Here, Lawrence referred to the old son-lover oedipus complex and added that "if a son-lover takes a wife, then, is she not his wife, she is only his bed. And his life will be torn in twains, and his wife in her despair shall hope for sons, that she may have her lover in her hour."¹¹

He made this reference in the context of his own bible of human relationships. It is Darwinian in symbolism. What Lawrence meant to say in the title itself of the novel was that a woman would not spare her son for his wife. She would rather chain him for herself. The son is, thus, pulled in two opposite directions, towards his wife and towards his mother.

This is clear how firm was Gertrude's hold on Paul and yet the mother always feared Paul's attraction for Miriam and later for Clara. The two women, in turn, fear the mother and fear each other. The battle between the women--mother and Mistresses is for exclusive claims on the man, whether son or lover. It is not that the mother claims Paul for her son and her lover, both Miriam and Clara also claimed him for both as their lover and son. They are his mammas, as Lawrence writes.

Lawrence was obviously unhappy with such a relationship which destroys the object of love. He found this relationship unhealthy. For him it was an old relationship, of the dominant and the dominated, of the master and slave.

Mankind, according to Lawrence, has failed to achieve a pure relationship, because it is difficult to achieve. We are happy in old relationship because they are easier to achieve, as for

example our relationship with the prostitute: "if a man establishes a living relation to her, if only for one moment, then it is life, but he does not, if it is just money and function, then it is not life but sordidness, and a betrayal of living."¹²

Lawrence was thus for a healthy, wholesome and pure relationship. Gertrude's relationship is for money. If she cast off Walter Morel it was because he earned dismally low wages. Other weaknesses could be added to make him a non entity. Similarly she depended on William mainly for money. She did so in the case of Paul also. For Lawrence, any relationship which is functional is a sordid relationship, a betrayal of life. There is no subtle inter-relatedness in such relationship. Lawrence's conception of human relationship as we have seen by now, is of wider significance. It is a relationship with the whole universe. It is eternal, subtle, perfected relationship between a human being and his whole circum ambient universe. It is also noted that his views of a believing community in which man- woman relationship is not problematic. In such a society, in earlier and modern times, there is the disturbance of organic relationship. It is a kind of society in which one's identity is not threatened. One remains whole and alive as he and she allows others to be whole and alive.

After the death of William, Gertrude comes to depend upon Paul. His wages had been raised at Jordan's. He was already in love with Miriam. But his mother would not let her hold go on him. She was still young. She had her sophistication intact, she could walk in mud without dirtying her shoes. But Paul had to clean them for her. She still had her beauty. One day she appeared in her inner doorway rather shyly. She had got a new cotton blouse on. Paul exclaimed, "on, my stars! " (595). He told her that she was a fine little woman to go jaunting out with. And she added that he was too young for her. These exchanges confirm the general impression that there was something Oedipal in this relationship. She would tell him that marriage is a hopeless affair and that her marriage was bad enough. In fact, she was afraid of losing her hold on him. Her break from her husband, though bad enough, did not destroy her power to live but she would not be able to survive if after William, Paul also betrayed her.

Paul's love for Miriam also turned out to be hopeless, partly because of the pull of his mother and partly Miriam's own spirituality. He loved to sleep with his mother for warmth, the security and peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of the other. This made him hate Miriam. From the moment Gertrude sensed his interest in the girl she tried to fight her off. Always when he went with Miriam, and it grew rather late he knew his mother would be fretting and getting angry with him—why, he could not understand? Paul's inability to understand Mrs. Morel's antagonism to Miriam was, at this stage of the narrative, was bound up with his own repressions. Struggling as he was with his complex towards his mother, "it was hardly surprising he should fail to realize that her jealousy was," as H.M. Daleski says, "nakedly sexual."¹³ The real reason for her annoyance is casually phased as an after thought, but her sudden employment of the word "disgusting and the illogical asperity of the comment itself are sure guides to her feeling," adds Daleski: It is seldom, however, that the serpent in the garden slitters out of the undergrowth in this way. She rationalized that Miriam was not like an ordinary woman, who could leave her share in him. She suspected that Miriam would absorb him. She also feared that Paul would be crippled. She will suck him up. However Paul had his own problems. Miriam was extremely religious. He felt impotent against her spirituality. He, as Lawrence, wished to live as a whole man. But with Miriam it was not possible. He had his physical side. "His blood was concentrated like a flame in his chest" (635). Miriam, somehow, ignored the stream of blood flowing in his veins. She was expecting some religious state in him. He was naturally so young but their intimacy was so abstract. He wanted to crush her on his breast to ease the ache there but he was afraid of her. In short, he felt ashamed. Her religious look made him feels small. It is in this way that the spirituality of Miriam brought him his shame of the original fall, a fall which can be most generally described as a fall from himself. Her purity prevented even their first love-kiss. It was as if she could scarcely stand the shock of physical love, even a passionate kiss, and

then he was too shrinking and sensitive to give it.

His only defense against her spirituality was to objectify her-shame her, as she shamed him. This is how he could re-establish his identity. Lawrence feels that this involves fight, at times, unto death. That is why Chapter-8 of the novel is titled "*Strife In Love*". It is a significant pointer to Lawrence's view that fight is an essential ingredient of recovery of one's relationship. He in this chapter uses the word "gaze" when she looked at him. The strife begins when Paul meets Clara. Clara was separated from her husband and had taken up Women's Right. She appeared to him opposite, to Miriam who was uninterested in such matters. Clara interested him as Miriam's opposite the physical part. When he next met Miriam, she asked him about Clara. Paul replied that what interested him "was her fighting spirit. Her very mouth showed her deep passion, he told Miriam. He complained against Miriam: "You make me so spiritual". He, however, added, "And I don't want to be spiritual" (642).

This was the beginning of revolt that finally ended with the casting off Miriam. He simply could not kiss her. There was something that prevented him. He felt low and degraded in her company. This hatred against her stirred his blood because she never realized the male he was. He felt he was not valued. It is not that he was not attracted by her spirituality. Indeed, he was part spiritual, but he has also his physical self. He was angry with his mother precisely for this reason that she also prevented him from meeting any woman, for that matter. He was twenty-one at this point of time and Miriam was twenty. Like the persons in Eliot, she was beginning to dread the spring. In fact, she hated to be alive in body. This made Paul hate her. He questioned: "Why did she make him feel as if he were uncertain of himself, insecure, an indefinite thing ..." (645).

The culture of sacrifice

He "culture of sacrifice" of the title of this essay spans a wide range of literal and symbolic meanings, at least two of which have profound resonances for a reading of Sons and Lovers. While the practice of individual self-sacrifice is pervasive throughout the novel, it assumes significantly different forms in Parts 1 and 2. Although the literal sacrificial disciplines (mainly economic and verbal) Mrs. Morel imposes (Part 1) allows her sons to escape the coalmining destiny their father endures, it slowly reduces and alienates him, recasting him as a virtual outcast within his own family. By contrast, a symbolic investment in sacrifice (Part 2), especially in relation to sexuality, dominates the Paul/Miriam relationship, undermining its erotic potential, exposing the abyss of misrecognition that ends the affair. Paul's relationship with Clara in turn opens up a radical new possibility--that of sacrificing sacrifice itself, putting an end to the traumatic investment in suffering as a mode of transcending the body in favor of those erotic desire-flows the text calls a "belief in life" (398). Sacrifice is thus not simply a moral concept, but an interiorized disposition--the lynchpin that secures both the choices and the contracts the protagonists make, whether with themselves or the larger community, or the God they believe in. Of course, the notion that sacrifice structures subjectivity and, as such, is basic to personal, social, and religious self-definition is not new. Psychoanalytical theory, for example, posits sacrifice as foundational to man's status as a creature of language--the mark of his/her distinction from animals who do not possess the same signifying powers. Whether it is termed the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction (Freud), or of the "presymbolic life substance of enjoyment" (Lacan/ Zizec), or of the "semiotic chora" (Kristeva), it marks man down as a being who is subject to sacrifice at an age before free choice is available. (1) Through his/her entry into language, the subject renounces short-term enjoyment for longer-term gain. In the wider perspective, this economic understanding of sacrifice exchanges terrestrial suffering for the kind of celestial reward that at once justifies and vindicates it. Because sacrifice is assumed to give more than it takes, it always pays off in the end. The difference between Parts 1 and 2 is now easily defined: while Part 1 cultivates an earthly system of economic payoffs that isolate the father as the guilt-figure who obstructs the family's social advancement, Part 2 looks to the

transcendental as the site of rewards for the sexual self-sacrifice Miriam practices to bring her closer to God. In the end, Paul rejects both dimensions: his quest for a greater "enjoyment" (with Clara) discloses a primordial "impersonal" state, the "wild source" (398) of life where the laws of self-sacrifice no longer apply.

Through a rigorous parsimony that ensures their higher social status within the mining community, the Morel family engages in a literal economy of sacrifice, enforced by the mother to secure her sons' release from a narrowly class-bound society. (2) The price paid is a high one--the expulsion of the father from the family circle, his "casting off," as the text puts it (61)--a frigid exclusion in which both the mother and children collaborate. This surface structure of sacrifice, however, conceals a deep structure, hidden from the narrator and protagonists alike. Rene Girard's theory of the sacrificial "scapegoat" is of special relevance here; the animal victim that a disordered community (read family) expels from its midst serves to assuage its own guilt and restore a lost order. Designed to protect the whole community from its own potential violence, this sacrifice (almost always of an animal) "reinforce[s] the social fabric," repressing its "rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels" (Girard 8). (3)

Because Morel bears the brunt of the guilt the family projects onto him, he is sacrificed as the surrogate animal to secure their greater cohesion. A rhetoric of incessant abasement, "mercilessly" exploited by Mrs. Morel (25) reduces her husband to the figure of a "filthy" intruder, a "cowardly beast" whom she desires to "smite ... down" (33) in order to impose the family unity she feels it most lacks. As the family combine to expel him, Morel is at once the generator and the victim of the violence directed against him. In this particular economy of sacrifice, familial success and uplift are the reward: while her sons ambitiously climb into middle-class culture, Mrs. Morel secures her position as cultural icon, writing essays at home that she reads at the Women's Cooperative.

The conception of sacrifice that dominates Part 2 is of a different order from the purely social one I have just outlined, although both share a base in the economic exchange--the investment in hardship in expectation of a greater gain. At once more openly named in the narrative, it is also more interiorized as a subjective disposition, especially towards sexual love and the sex act itself. Aligned to its transcendental intention, a new agent (God) enters as the celestial witness and mediator in the sacrificial interactions between the human and the divine. The human investment in suffering (for Miriam, as we shall see, suffering and sex are virtually synonymous terms) has its recompense in a new intimacy with a heavenly creditor whose original immolation on Calvary paid off the debts to himself that "sinful" humans accrued. (4)

This particular (Christian) concept of sacrifice--one that has "worked its way into the very heart ... late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century theories of sacrifice," according to Dennis King Keenan (10)--also underwrites the dynamics of the Paul/Miriam affair. As the magnet that attracts a complex nexus of sexual attitudes, it centers on the immolation of the "brute beast" in man--of those darkly turbulent instincts that cloud what would be the light-space of communication between man and his God. Thus the chronic sexual angst Miriam endures separates her not only from God, but also from Paul, whose overcoming of sacrifice is reserved for his erotic engagement with Clara.

The option of "overcoming" itself has its roots in Nietzsche's critique of sacrifice, expounded especially in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, which Lawrence read in 1908-10 just before writing *Sons and Lovers*. (5) Nietzsche's fiercest polemic is reserved for sexual asceticism: the idea of sacrificing "to one's god the strongest instincts one possessed" is fueled by a "hatred of the human, and even more the animal" (*Beyond* 62; *Genealogy* 136). In its starkly nihilistic intent, the act of sacrifice negates "this life in favor of celestial rewards for terrestrial tribulations endured" (Keenan 60), this concept of sacrifice is essentially anthropocentric, excluding by definition the nonhuman domain. Because animals have no stake

in the symbolic mandate that undergirds it, they reap no benefits from it, except the dubious one of being its privileged victims. (6)

Incarnated in his relationship with Clara, Paul's break with his religious inheritance replaces an anthropocentric theater of sacrifice with a non-sacrificial life force that incorporates the nonhuman, and that, for convenience's sake, I shall call biocentric. Indeed throughout this essay, I shall employ "anthropocentric" and "biocentric" as framing concepts to highlight the crucial distinction between the Paul/Miriam and the Paul/Clara affairs. (7) Before the encounters with Clara, however, Paul has already distanced himself from a culture of sacrifice through his "agnostic" interrogations of the "orthodox creed," which has belief in a divine act of sacrifice as its foundational precept (230-267). Displacing man from the center, Paul puts in his place the "great instinct" the cosmos embodies (408)--what Cary Wolfe calls the "other-than-human [that] resides at the very core of the human" (17). His dramatic re-vision of sexuality entails the shift from the anthropocentric disjunction that represses the animal body to a biocentric continuum that incorporates it.

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