



# The Treatment Of Sex In The Novels Of D.H. Lawrence: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** D.H. Lawrence was deeply concerned with sex. He was abused as 'sex-maniac' by some and hailed as a liberator by others. He opposed all restraints on the sexual life- religious, moral or merely social- in so far as they were based on fear. He strongly believes that the proper norm of the human sexual relationship was the marriage for life. He opposed both the romantic idealization of sex and its opposite pole of sniggering lewdness. It was his conviction that sexual desire would be neither repressed nor sublimated because it would no longer be a base passion. He wished to rid mankind of the shame complex which leads many people to associate sex activity with indecency. He reacted against the misanthropy which seeks to make the body the prisoner of the mind. He deplored the modern dualism – the setting up of barriers between mind and body or between brain and blood. Lawrence was influenced by Freud's psychology and his psychology of man-woman relationship, more specifically his psychology of sexual relations. This paper tries to focus on the relationships between man and woman in different novels written by Lawrence. For the purpose of illustrations Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* may be taken into consideration.

**Key words:** D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, Sexual Mysticism, Mother-fixation, Man-Woman Relationship, Separateness-in-Union, Psycho-Dynamics, Sexual Psychology, Freedom in love,

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Nothing is more modern in Lawrence than his free and frank treatment of sex. Lawrence does not imbibe in himself any of the inhibitions of the Victorians. His attitude towards life is deeply rooted in sexual mysticism. He believed that the deepest mysteries of life can be known through sex, and so sex is organic and fundamental to an organic and complete life. He believes that sexual harmony was an essential condition for the attainment of happiness in life. To him, sex was a great spiritual passion which could lead one even to the realisation of God. According to Baker, "To Lawrence, not only was sex the way woman fulfils her being and man, one of his chief creative functions for which reason he always extolled marriage, but the sexual experience was a door to new realms of consciousness, and initiation into divine mysteries, the mystery of the other world that is close behind us."

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence depicts a different sort of mother-son or male-female relationship, which is really unusual, even some times appears to be odd. According to Freud, Man usually falls in love for first time in his life with the image of his mother. When he grows up a little, his super-ego gets activated. Super-ego is that part of psyche which is unconscious. As he grows older his super-ego is suppressed by ego. Ego is the conscious part of the psyche. The protagonist of the novel Paul Morel is trapped by the conflict between his ego and super-ego. Inertly and subconsciously, he begins to feel a soft corner for his mother, Mrs. Morel.

This attachment has a very disastrous effect on the mental state of Paul. He never finds a girl who can satisfy him. Miriam is too spiritual and sacrificing and Clara is too sizzling to please him. Both are extremes and Paul wants a combination. Yet he returns to none of the girls because he realizes that it would never be possible for him to overcome the affection towards his mother. Due to this mother fixation, Paul is unable to have a satisfactory relationship with either Miriam or Clara. Thus, while a young teen ager, Paul develops attachment to the introspective Miriam:

“He would not have it that they were lovers. The intimacy between them had been kept so abstract, such a matter of the soul, all thought and weary struggle into consciousness, that he saw it only as a Platonic friendship. He stoutly denied that there was anything else between them, Miriam was silent, or else she very quietly agreed.” (Lawrence: 1913, p.191)

Though Miriam remains in tune with Paul spiritually, as the years pass, Paul begins to demand something more, for sexual satisfaction which Miriam seems incapable of giving him. While waiting for Miriam Paul was drawn towards Miriam’s friend Clara who peaks his sexual interest. Paul sways back and forth in his affection for Miriam and Clara, yet neither appears to satisfy his needs though he eventually convinces Miriam to yield up her virginity to him, he sadly

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

Furthermore, though Clara comfortably engages in sexual activities with Paul, he arrives at a conclusion that,

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

Thus, he has a failed relationship with both Miriam and Clara and at the end, he remains alone with only the memory of his deceased mother to keep him company. Thus it can be said that *Sons and Lovers* presents conflicting man-woman relationships, and a psychological and social study of working class conflict. The novel remains essentially void of the external conflict of society and centres exclusively on the inner conflicts of the characters. Nowhere does Paul fret about his Oedipal feelings for his mother or lament about engaging in a sexual relationship with a separated but still married woman, Clara. When propositioned for sex by Paul, even the saintly character of Miriam

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

In this way Lawrence shifts guilt away from social institutions and places them solely on the internal feelings of the characters.

The theme of *Women in Love* is the psychodynamics of man-woman relationship, which exercised great influence on Lawrence's mind throughout his life and which often gives rise to baffling situations. His constant object is what may broadly be called sex-psychology as this manifests itself in every human relationship that of men and women, parents and children, and more obscurely that existing between persons of the same sex. His treatment of sexual psychology in *Women in Love* is often criticized and sometimes called very frank and bold, since such open discussions of sexual behaviour and man-woman relationship were not completely acceptable due to social taboos. Lawrence's men and persistent purpose in *Women in Love* was to revolutionize modern attitude towards sex and male-female relationship.

Birkin- Ursula relationship is an exposition of D.H. Lawrence's psychological norm of love, the way in which satisfactory human relationships can be established and fulfilment achieved by recognizing the 'otherness' of other individuals. The long drama of Birkin's relations with Ursula, illustrates the astonishing originality of Lawrence's genius. Before their marriage, both Birkin and Ursula are frustrated. They both sail in the same boat, that is frustration in life. The Ursula-Birkin relationship is mainly concerned with Birkin's choice of Ursula as the woman with whom he is to try this way of 'freedom' in love, and to whom he preaches against her understandable resistance- a curious doctrine of 'sexual apartheid' that goes with it. Birkin thinks he must educate Ursula out of the sentimental and romantic love-ideal which she wants to impose on their relationships. Ursula says, 'why should love be a bond... love is freedom ...love includes everything.' Birkin replies, 'Love is a direction which excludes all other directions... it is freedom together, if you like.'

The relationship of Gerald and Gudrun is of self-destructive type. Both try to impose his or her will on the other. Their relationship is well contrasted with that of Birkin and Ursula. It is not creative. There is an attempt at domination and possession. Ronald Grey comments upon their relationship 'the love between Gerald and Gudrun is always one of self-assertion on the one hand and self-surrender on the other, now the man, now the woman being dominant.' There is never fulfilment for both together, but always for one only, while the other lays awake and conscious, 'hatred growing within'. The psychological relationship between men and women in *Women in Love* is more like a fight than friendship. Birkin finds the old ideals, dead as nails. There only remains this perfect union with a woman, in man-woman relationship, a sort of ultimate marriage. It is a relationship of separateness-in-union. The main argument of *Women in Love* is the distinction between the love of Birkin and Ursula on the one hand and of Gerald and Gudrun, on the other, is not wholly justified. Birkin and Ursula are represented as on the way to salvation and Gerald and Gudrun as on the way to damnation. The real difference between them is that Birkin and Ursula are a whole stage further on in the process of damnation, for Gerald and Gudrun simply represent the earlier stage of Birkin-Ursula sensual self-destruction.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* was written in the conviction that Lawrence had found the solution for society's ills. In this novel the entire social system is made to depend on an integral sex-relationships. Chatterley returns crippled and impotent from the war. He stands for the degenerate post-war world. His game-keeper, Mellors represent the new social stratum that holds within it the possibility of renewed vitality. Mellors is the 'natural' man and has affinities with Morel in *Sons and Lovers* and with Birkin in *Women in Love*. Connie, Lady Chatterley, is the feminine consciousness that must decide between the old social order, de-vitalised and sterile, and the new, bright with promised life. In this novel Lawrence returned to his first theme- the natural mating of man and woman. What the orthodox describe as lust, as shamelessness, as unnatural sexual practices, become cardinal virtues. Lawrence's motive was to cleanse the sexual relationship of guilt and fear.

#### ■ CONCLUSION

Lawrence wants to propagate the idea that men and women are metaphysically different. They have different and even opposed ways of being in the world. They are not anatomically different; they have different ways of thinking and feeling and achieves satisfaction and fulfilment in life through different means. He regards maleness and femaleness as opposed, yet complimentary. The fundamental metaphysical difference has the consequence that men and women, in a real sense, live in different worlds. He strongly believes that man-woman relationship through marriage is only a conventional necessity. He wants woman to be considered exactly as a source for satisfying physical appetites, as a functional process not as a fulfilment. He believes in pure freedom for both man and woman, according to whom their individuality is superior to sex.

#### ■ REFERENCES

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