

Power Struggle & Strategies from an Inferior Position in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract

Gertrude Morel, a middle class educated girl, the heroine of the novel - *Sons and Lovers*, fell in love in with Walter Morel an uneducated labour in the coal mines and married him. But within a year of their marriage she gets disillusioned with this marriage and finds several faults with Walter and tried to reform him. Walter resisted it. She turned cold to him and started to despise him. Walter turns to heavy drinking and sometimes attacked her physically. Their relation remains only in the physical level. There is no mental connection. As a result of this kind of relation they have 4 children. Mrs. Morel turns her entire attention to her children, completely neglecting the existence of her husband. This starts a fight between them which lasts till the end of her life. Being physically and economically in an inferior position to her husband, she uses several strategies to defeat her husband in this struggle. She even goes to the extent of using their children as her ally in this fight against their father and completely alienates Walter in his own house. Thus she makes her husband a non-entity in the eyes of their children and becomes the driving force of the family.

Key words: Struggle, Dominance, Class, Strategies, Ally, Alienation.

Sons and Lovers by D.H. Lawrence develops the story of a post Victorian family in which domination is an important characteristic. The novel represents a microcosm of the society of that time and its themes are continuing modern preoccupations. The struggle for dominance in the Morel family establishes the pattern of Lawrence's later novels since the conflict in *Sons and Lovers* is qualified basically by the strength of the mind (in the mother) against the body (in the father). The struggle is shown in terms of the mother's rejection of the father exactly because of her superior mind. However, trying to explain this struggle through feminist approaches may lead to a simple conclusion that the horror in *Sons and Lovers* is the 'madness' induced by patriarchy and male power and Mr. Morel being male oppressor representing patriarchy is obviously the winner of this struggle over Mrs. Morel who is a stereotype of Victorian 'angel in the house' also representing the marginal-the suppressed 'other'. Being inferior both physically and economically she inevitably loses the battle.

But a close reading of the novel reveals a completely different story. What I understand in this regard is from the beginning of their marriage there was a gulf of difference between Mr. and Mrs. Morel.

Mr. Walter Morel	Ms. Gertrude Coppard
Young man	Young lady
Dark, gruff, physical	Carefree, romantic, proud
Dialect speaking	Having little education
A Miner, <u>Working class</u>	From a impoverished <u>Middle class</u> family

This is not to say that, being of a higher class, Gertrude Coppard could not marry a man of a lower class, but to say that belonging to a 'learned' family, she could never face the simple life of the colliers. After all, her husband hardly knows how to sign his own name and she is too 'intellectual' to tolerate the low vocabulary of such people. Gertrude only marries Walter Morel due to the fact that she is fascinated by the "well setup, erect, and very smart" man. Walter, a handsome and attractive miner, spellbinds the 'lady' so that for some months she forgets the simple man he is, to love passionately the male she has by her side in bed. However, as soon as she opens her eyes to reality and sees that sex is not everything in life, she despises him. And here is the point where life becomes like hell in the Morels' home. This is only the seventh month the young couple has been married! Besides this unhappy discovery, Gertrude learns from Walter's mother that he does not even own his house — he pays rent to his mother, and what is worse: he pays a higher rent for the house whereas the other people pay less. Mrs. Morel cannot stand this lie. Walter, it seems, for the sake of appearing well-off in the eyes of his lady-like wife, has hidden from her his true monetary state. After she comes to know the real situation of her married life "She said very little to her husband, but her manner had changed towards him. Something in her proud, honourable soul had crystallized out hard as rock" (Lawrence, 22). In what refers to Walter the situation is not different for "The estrangement between them caused him, knowingly or unknowingly, grossly to offend her where he would not have done" (Lawrence, 23-4).

The first child of the couple, William, is born and it is he who makes the mother's life endurable: "He 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"(Lawrence, 23). As the Morels' marriage has been developed without any grounds of equality — social position, education, view of life, and so on — there is really nothing enduring in it. The only link between the couple is the child. Therefore, Mrs. Morel turns to it and runs from the father. The only place where she accepts him is where there is no social scale, nor any talking — which is in their bed. In it she forgets the humble man Walter is and faces him just as a male. As a result of this carnal love come the other children: Annie, Paul and finally Arthur. The birth of Paul is the hardest one. He comes in a moment of terrible conflicts. There is the

enormous gap between Walter and Gertrude; there is his hard drinking; there is the lack of money. Paul is then rejected even before being born:

The world seemed a dreary place, where nothing else would happen for her — at least until William grew up. But for herself, nothing but this dreary endurance — till the children grew up. And the children! She could not afford to have this third. She did not want it. The father was serving beer in a public-house, swilling himself, drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him. This coming child was too much for her. If it were not for William and Annie, she was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness (Lawrence, 23).

Gertrude tries to create in her husband her ideal of man — well educated, moral and religious. Here, the resemblance between Mrs. Morel and Helena from *The Trespasser* is considerable: both neglect their real and living men to idealize them according to their minds and both women somehow destroy their men because of this dreaming idealization. In Mrs. Morel's case, she tries to transform Walter but as she cannot, she hates him and makes his life horrible. There is no love and she only scorns him. If he sinned, she tortured him. If he drank, and lied, was often a poltroon, sometimes a knave, she wielded the lash unmercifully. The pity was, she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be; she would have him the much he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. Morel, feeling the heavy burden of her scorn, turns to drinking. There is no space for him at home. There only an atmosphere of fight and coldness exists.

There began a battle between the husband and wife — a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of 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 his mind (Lawrence, 23).

Walter differs from Helena's lover, Siegmund, in the sense that Siegmund is weaker, he commits suicide. Walter in his hard drinking is only escaping from a battle with his wife because he unconsciously knows that he has no strength of mind to fight Mrs. Morel. Although the miner is physically strong, his undeveloped mind allows him to be defeated by the strong coldness and righteousness of Mrs. Morel. The Morels' home becomes a battlefield: on the one hand, the powerful military woman with the brains and the force (her mind and her children); on the other, the poor soldier trying to escape from power and whose only weapon is his money and the "name" he has given his wife. They are tied up to one another with fearfully strong handcuffs: the children. These handcuffs are the reason why they cannot get divorced, as Mrs. Morel is forced to admit in one of their fights:

The house is filthy with you', she cried. 'Then get out on it — it's mine. Get out on it!' he shouted. 'It's me as brings th' money whoam, not thee. It's my house, not thine. Then get out on n 't!' 'And I would,' she cried, suddenly shaken into tears of impotence. 'Ah, wouldn't I, wouldn't I have gone long ago, but for those children. Ay, haven't I repented not going years ago, when I'd only one' — suddenly driving into rage. 'Do you think it's for you I stop — do you think I'd stop one minute for: you?' 'No!' she faced round. 'No,' she cried loudly, 'you shan't have it all your own way; you shant do all you like. I've got those children to see to. My word,' she laughed, 'I should look well to leave them to you (Lawrence, 33).

Walter, despite appearing strong and severe with his words, is nevertheless afraid of his wife. She is stronger than he is. However, the conflict is not so simple. Mrs. Morel fights with the support of an interior and deep force that is brought out into truthful words. Walter in his rage is only using his physical force because in his mind he is afraid of her. He will not do anything mainly due to the guilt his wife inflicts on him. He has no courage to really confront her. This point can be supported by the fact that later on, in another battle, he arranges his bundle pretending to leave home. But he does not. It is only Walter trying childishly to blackmail his wife, perhaps wishing to frighten her or to see how important he is in his family. It is a useless joke because Mrs. Morel knows her husband and even before she sees his bundle behind the door, she soothes her children about his returning. This unhappy event shows that, up to this point of the novel, Mrs. Morel has already established who the 'almighty' in the family is. She is able to control the whole family without being contradicted. The poor husband has then to creep back to his shell and the only refuge that is allowed to him is the bars. Even the children he is not allowed to love, for his wife, in a certain way, forbids him to love them. Apart from this 'prohibition' the children cannot feel the father as part of the house. They take the side of the mother in the fights in which they are always present. The mother forces the children to side with her because she lets them see the flaws of the father. Mrs. Morel thus lives for her children and Walter for his work and drinking. Home means rage, fear and unhappiness. Walter resents the fact that he has no love from the children.

Mrs. Morel uses some strategies to win this struggle from an apparent inferior position. She uses the absence of her husband in the home as an opportunity. She presents herself as a victim to draw sympathy from her children. She spreads fear among them against their father. She is very selfish; there is no care, no anxiety for the absent husband. She uses the children as her allies and completely alienates Mr. Morel from his home and family. He becomes a stranger in his own house. Alienated Mr. Morel feels the environment of his family entirely hostile to him. He goes crazy. His sole sense of self is reduced only to a bread winner and his self-esteem is asserted through aggressiveness & buffoonery in equal measure. He becomes the pathetic loser, spiritually wounded and imprisoned in his ridiculousness by the strength of his pride. Mrs. Morel with her successful execution of strategies creates a reversal of power and becomes the driving force of the family.

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