

## **Sons And Lovers: Lacanian Feminine Jouissance In Lawrence's 'New' Clara**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper intends to analyze the character of Clara Dawes in D.H.Lawrence's autobiographical novel Sons and Lovers, through Lacan's concept on Feminine Sexuality. Clara's womanliness impresses Paul, the protagonist, from the first time that they meet and throughout their relationship. Her 'womanliness' leads the readers to understand Lacan's one of the important psychoanalytic theory-Feminine Sexuality. Lacan's theory of feminine sexuality occupies a prominent place in contemporary debate concerning on sexual difference across an impressive range of disciplines. Though this paper can't fully covered up the whole sense of "Feminine Sexuality" but it will focus mainly on "Feminine Jouissance". Lacan explains that there is a jouissance that is hers about which she herself perhaps knows nothing if not that she experiences it. A jouissance doesn't exist and doesn't signify anything until it comes (arrives). The paper will use Lacan's concept of feminine 'Jouissance' to reflect on the character of Clara. Lacan explains the debate on femininity which is based on psychoanalysis and feminism. The relationship of Paul and Clara fit into the concept of sexuality formulated by Lacan. Lawrence portrays the sensual 'dark' side of Clara's sexual life and it finally finds Clara Dawes sensually appealing, bold and robust in attitude and it easily shows how Clara becomes the irresistible, powerful, mysterious female source of Paul's life.

**Keywords-** Femininity, Sexuality, Psychoanalysis, Jouissance, Sensual.

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Sons and Lovers is generally considered Lawrence's autobiographical, indeed 'psychological' novel in which we can see both the reflections of Freud's 'Oedipal' instinct and representation of Lacan's psychoanalytic thesis. In the novel, Lawrence describes his youth, dwelling on his relationship with his mother and the problematic bond she cultivated between herself and her son, a bond which is presented in the novel as a source of great confusion and pain for the hero of the story, young Paul Morel, especially regarding his sexuality. This confusion and pain leads Paul to find out the real him and incidentally he meets Clara Dawes, the sensual and passionate woman who beautifully stands for Lacan's concept of feminine sexuality. Lacan evaluates this concept in order to represent each and every sides of a female's thoughts regarding her sexual life. He explains that the woman however flawed, are by their nature the guardians of real life: life in the body; life in emotion and feeling; the preservers of the deep mysterious human resources that can lead to regeneration. Lacan's feminine sexuality doesn't justify about what a woman is but it shows her psychic condition of her mind and the unconsciousness state of herself. And it immediately establishes the framework within which the whole question of 'female sexuality' can be understood. As Freud put it:

"In conformity with its peculiar nature, psycho-analysis does not try to describe what a woman is- that would be a task it could scarcely perform- but sets about enquiring 'how she comes into being'." (qtd.in Jacques Lacan & The Ecole Freudienne : Feminine Sexuality, 4)

David Herbert Richard Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, England, on September 11.1885, the son of coal miner Arthur Lawrence and school teacher Lydia Beardsall. A novelist, critic, and poet known for writing about the conflicts between men and women, Lawrence derived much of his material from his childhood. Much of Lawrence's writing addresses the intersections between sexual desire and class identity and the consequences of denying the wants of one's animal self. By explicitly depicting human sexuality in his novel, Lawrence flouted the moral conventions of the genre and of the society, and his notoriety grew.

Lawrence argued that modern society had somehow come to be dominated by mental consciousness and so was largely unconscious of its own desires. He wrote about his theories of human behavior in *Psychoanalysis and Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), along with the theories about male-female relationships. His controversial novel, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (1928), was accused of being obscene and pornographic, and its publishers were taken to court. Subsequent novels and critics cemented his reputation as an enemy of bourgeois morality. At the time of his death, his public reputation was that of a pornographer who wasted his considerable talents. E.M.Forster, in an obituary notice, challenged this widely held view, describing him as the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation.

Lawrence's handling of the important female characters in the novel is intimately connected with the feminine unconscious. This unconsciousness reflects in the female characters like – Ursula and Gudrun in *Women In Love*, Lady Daphne in *The Ladybird*, or Kate in *The Plumed Serpent*. In *Sons and Lovers*, his most famous and autobiographical novel, Lawrence brings out the unconscious side of every female character. Mrs. Morel is the embodiment of a mystery far more complex and perilous than all the other women in the novel. But, Lawrence also puts his effort in describing another two major women characters – Miriam and Clara. Miriam stands for spirituality but Clara represents the sexuality, the sensual dark side of human nature. Clara is the 'flesh'. Lacan made the observation in Seminar XX, *Encore*, that woman dwells on the dark side of God who is weighty and fecund. And, it will not be wrong to say that – Lacan's concept of 'feminine jouissance' perfectly suits Clara's character.

Jacques Lacan, the French philosopher, in his Seminar XX, *Encore*, represents the cornerstone of his work on the themes of sexual difference, knowledge, jouissance, and love. Historically, Seminar XX has been known to many readers as Lacan's treatise on feminine sexuality. The chapters presented in *Feminine Sexuality* have come to occupy a prominent place in contemporary debate concerning sexual difference across an impressive range of disciplines.

Lacan adapted the theories of language from Saussure and Benveniste to outline a theory of feminine sexuality. The role of Language in all of this is pivotal; as Freudian psychoanalysis had initially borrowed notions from medicine and biology to strengthen its conceptual purchase on the human psyche and sexuality, so Lacanian psychoanalysis borrows from the study of structural linguistics so as to further its engagement with the unconscious processes of subject formation. In investigating the structure and operations of language, Lacan is also intrigued more generally with the power and structuring principles of the larger category of the symbolic. In the words of Fink: "Men and women are defined differently with respect to language, that is, with respect to the Symbolic order". (qtd.in Lacan, the meaning of the phallus and the 'sexed' subject, 61). Lacan suggests that the symbolic plays a significant role in the development of feminine sexuality. In this concept, Lacan explains a lot about *Feminine Jouissance*. In French, *Jouissance*

means ‘enjoyment’, in terms both of rights and property, and of sexual orgasm. Poststructuralism has developed the latter sense of *jouissance* in complex ways, so as to denote a transgressive, excessive kind of pleasure linked to the division and splitting of the subject involved. Lacan considered that *jouissance* is essentially phallic, meaning that it does not relate to the other as such. In his Seminar XX or Encore, however, Lacan introduced the idea of specifically feminine *jouissance*, saying that women have –

“In relation to what the phallic function designates of *jouissance*, a supplementary *jouissance*...a *jouissance* of the body which is...beyond the Phallus.” (qtd. in Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality, 18).

This feminine *jouissance* is ineffable, for both women and men may experience it but know nothing about it. The woman who is situated on the feminine side can testify to the experience of another *jouissance*. She can reveal herself as experiencing such a *jouissance*, but she can’t say anything about it. Lacan refers that woman is the symptom of man –Lacan tells us precisely because she can’t promise him the unity that he expects from her and that he hopes to reach through her. The fusion of another with her would realize the one. But as Lacan tells us:

“One can only get pleasure from one part of the body of the other, for the simple reason that one has never seen a body curl itself up, to the point of inclusion and devouring, around the body of the other. That is the reason why we are reduced to a simple little embrace, like that, to grabbing a forearm or anything else – ouch! Getting pleasure (*jouir*) has this fundamental property: that it is, in effect, the body of one who gets pleasure from a part of the body of the other.”(qtd. in What is a Woman and What is Feminine *Jouissance* in Lacan, 5).

A woman is not an object more than a man is. She herself is concerned about an object. On the one hand, she takes on the role of semblance and attracts a man to her by posing as the object of his desire. On the other hand, she herself looks for a sign of the presence of her object in a man. Woman also has access to a supplementary, feminine *jouissance*, beyond the phallus, a *jouissance* that can’t be named, nor conceptualized, nor explained. Woman has the possibility of a supplementary sexual *jouissance* – they may enjoy sexually beyond the limit of a simple orgasm; they may show intimacy more easily than a man who knows, consciously or not, that women are ‘crazy’, (“pas toute crazy” – according to Lacan). Lacan made the observation in Seminar XX that woman dwells on the dark side of God who is weighty and fecund. To believe in the impossible, in the real, is weighty. By dwelling close to nothing, women are closer to the real than are most men.

Lacan points out that this *jouissance* can be referred as homosexual. To enjoy in this way, reducing one’s partner to object, is to enjoy like a man – that is, in the sense of someone

characterized by masculine structure. Lacan even makes a pun here, saying that this kind of jouissance is hommosexual, spelling it with two m's, 'homme' being the term for man in French. Regardless of whether one is male or female(those are biological terms), to enjoy in this way is to enjoy like a man.

It is clear that, women know about man's symptom regarding her own sexual attractions, even if they do not know they know. Women know they have something men want even if they do not know for sure what this is. Both men and women confuse the semblance, with sexual desire. Woman knows that the man is caught in the infinite limitations of desire, while she knows that desire concerns something more, the void in being. Sex concerns the impossible search for the infinite. One could even call this the human search for the infinite. So, "woman is not only man's symptom of the infinite impossibilities of desire, but of his confusion between the semblance and the real".(qtd.in The Sinthome 14 , 9)

In *Feminine Conditions of Jouissance*, Genevieve Morel takes up more specifically one of the controversial aspects of Freud's account of sexual development – the function of castration – in order to articulate its role in Lacan's discussion of feminine conditions of jouissance. Lacan's own account has been the target of much scrutiny and criticism, as he maintains the language of both castration and the phallus in his theory of sexuation. In her discussion of what psychoanalysis has to offer regarding the ways in which a woman(a feminine subject)experiences jouissance with a man (a masculine subject), Morel focuses in particular on the condition of jouissance that Lacan describes as the figure of the "castrated lover" or "dead man".(qtd.in Reading Seminar XX: Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality, 8). Her argument engages Lacan's claim that the phallic function and castration are required for a woman to experience jouissance in relation to a man. Morel demonstrates the role of castration and the phallic function in women's sexual jouissance by elucidating the rather complicated set of structural relations between the feminine subject, her sexual partner, and the symbolic other that Lacan presents in *Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Feminine Sexuality*. In "Guiding Remarks", Lacan discusses that there are two modes of possible jouissance in women-phallic(sexual) jouissance and Other jouissance, the latter being related to the real or the "God" face of the other. Thus, Lacan sets the concept of jouissance. Jouissance is used here to refer to that moment of sexuality which is always in excess, something over and above the phallic term which is the mark of sexual identity.

Clara is a portrait of the modern early twentieth century woman who combines a number of significant characteristics: she is intensely attractive, though not always aware of her power; she is fiercely independent, considering herself as a woman apart from her class, and a woman of passion. Yet, she is also "a sleeping beauty", a "dormant woman", the "femme incomprise"(P 361) who never had the real thing which would fertilize her soul and help her accomplish the

sacred mission to serve the instinct. Paul sees her through mystified eyes, as another lost goddess who needs to awaken to her sacred female self and experience “the real, real flame of feeling through another person”(P 361-2). At first, Clara comes across as a hard feminist who, if she’d been born a few decades later, might’ve burned a lot of bras. Among all the women characters in Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*, he portrays the character of Clara most sensual, appealing and full of desire. Clara is clearly a girl who’s ahead of her time. You might call her a rebel without a cause, because she’s got a penchant for rebelling against whatever seems normal to most people. But really, she’s just an iconoclast. And may be these qualities of her perfectly fits to the characteristics of woman which Lacan describes in his concept of Feminine jouissance.

According to Lacan- woman is man’s confusion between semblance and real. This perfectly suits for Paul. Paul feels attracted towards Clara for semblance or her outer look. Clara’s physical charm and sensuality attracts Paul so much that he can’t resist his feelings to her. Full of sensuous female energy, Clara, with her large breasts, heavy, dun-coloured hair and imposing stature, has the magnificence of an ancient pagan goddess:

“Whenever she was seemed to make things look paltry and insignificant. When she was in the room, the kitchen seemed too small and mean altogether[...]. All the Leivers were eclipsed like candles. Yet she was perfectly amiable, but indifferent, and rather hard.”(P 269).

When Paul had to go to Wiley farm to meet Clara he was very excited even though at that stage of his life he was in a relationship with Miriam. Not only was he eager to meet her but “there was something he hankered after”, whenever he heard Miriam speaking about Clara he “rouse” and would get “slightly angry”(P 268). When Paul entered the parlour the first thing he noticed was “the nape of her white neck, and fine hair lifted from it.”(P 269). He feels passionate and his sexual desire provokes him to come closer with Clara. Paul becomes so confuse in Clara’s physicality that he can’t realize the real intention of her about their relationship for some moment. When Paul realizes that Clara doesn’t want to separate from her husband and want a permanent relationship, he disappoints. Here, ‘semblance’ of Clara guards the real self of her before Paul. As Lacan says “she takes on the role of semblance and attracts a man to her by posing as the object of his desire.” (qtd.in *What is a Woman and What is Feminine Jouissance* in lacan , 5)

Lacan argues that – woman’s desire is complicated. She has no idea what actually she wants right now, most of the time. At the very beginning, the desire of Clara towards Paul was more complicated. She didn’t feel for Paul but she liked his company. Though there was no sign of ‘libido’ in attitude of Clara towards Paul but she was much aware of his desires. In the seminar xx, *Encore*, Lacan observes-“Woman dwells on the dark side of God who is weighty and fecund. To believe in the impossible, in the real, is weighty. By dwelling close to nothing,

women are closer to the real than are most men.”(qtd.in *The Sinthome* 14 , 7) Clara knew that she was much older than Paul that’s why she never shows any feelings for him. But she was unaware of her own “dark” side. Paul thinks that she needs to be awakened to her “dark” but real self. She feels horror for this darkness, this unknown and unfamiliar feminine part of her. She is reluctant to accept her real nature, which Paul thinks he sees so clearly. Her wild instinct, her female consciousness, is bound by civilization: “She seemed denied and deprived of so much. And her arm moved mechanically, that should never have been subdued to a mechanism, and her head was bowed to the lace, that never should have been bowed.”(P 375).

The particular meaning of the ‘jouissance’ i.e. ‘enjoyment’ comes in front of us throughout the relationship of Paul and Clara. Clara’s ‘feminine jouissance’ reflects when she realizes she also feels same towards Paul as he does. As Lacan states – “women know about man’s symptom regarding her own sexual attractions[...].” (qtd.in *The Sinthome* 14 , 9) Regarding this statement, it can be said that Clara has the knowledge about Paul’s desire to be united with her physically. Lawrence describes Paul’s inner conflict in such way — Paul could not concentrate in her presence because “although she stood a yard away, he felt as if he were pressed against her, and was full of warmth”. (P.307). Paul and Clara very soon realized that “they have grown very intimate, unawares”, and that there was “a sort of secret understanding between them (P.347). Both of them started falling for each other passionately. Clara’s feminine ‘jouissance’ seems to have no bound when for the first time, they make love. What Lacan describes- “Woman also has access to a supplementary, feminine jouissance, beyond the phallus , a jouissance that can’t be named ... nor explained...they may enjoy sexually beyond the limit of a simple orgasm”.(qtd.in *What is a Woman and What is Feminine Jouissance* in Lacan, 5) And it is appropriately suits with Clara. Clara enjoys the pleasure by making love and she realizes that for the first time, she comes across to a new herself. Clara’s psychic state of mind gives her the hint that this ‘jouissance’ is ineffable : she may experience it but know nothing about it. Lacan explains that woman can reveal herself as experiencing such a jouissance, but she can’t say anything about it.

Clara belongs to the dark – as the flesh and the body is the dark, passionate other of human existence – and her dark side is actually an important part of the attraction Paul feels for her. Through her, Paul is baptized in the Flesh and encounters the elemental feminine nature. Clara represents an inert form of deep instinctual life; she is endowed with an untamed female power and thus, Clara stands as an incarnation of the eternal woman. Lawrence had narrowed this significance of hers, and represented her as the unknowable female force.

D. H .Lawrence’s “*Sons and Lovers*” reflects the psychoanalytic aspects of various characters and Lawrence also gives us the hints about female sexuality throughout his female characters. The character of Clara as Lawrence portrays in his novel, perfectly stands for the

concept of Lacan's feminine jouissance. Lawrence portrays her character as a supreme woman of twentieth century and she resembles the criteria of new woman. Clara always leads in her relationship to others, as Lacan also shows in his theory that women in every situation want to lead and they enjoy their leadership very much. Clara and Paul's relationship doesn't work out because Paul possesses much. That's why she likes to stay back with her husband, Baxter. Despite all her cynical talk and feminist ideals, Clara really just wants to feel needed.

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