

Autobiographical Elements in *Sons and Lovers*

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ABSTRACT

Lawrence had begun writing the novel *Sons and Lovers* as a tribute to his mother. The plot is firmly knit and the characters are well drawn. It contains some of Lawrence's finest descriptions of life in the mining village. The first title given to it was 'Paul Morel'. The novel is autobiographical, Paul Morel being Lawrence himself. However, whatever we receive in this novel is not pure autobiography but autobiography fictionalized. So, it is an adaptation from life and a work of art. Majority of the critics call this novel as 'semi autobiographical'. Analyzing all the important events in the novel this article tries to find out all the autobiographical elements present in it by exploring the lives of all the major characters in the novel as well as of those real persons on whose life they are modeled on.

Keywords- Resemblance, Similarity, Paul, Lawrence, Jessie, Miriam, Alice, Clara.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sons and Lovers has always been Lawrence's most popular novel. It is true that the novel reflects the life of the author, and in analyzing it we find that the novel shapes all Lawrence's own experience, as his personal problems. It is noted that his novels are an outcome of the personal feelings that he himself experienced during his life. One can trace an autobiographical note in almost all his novels, yet that element is very tangible in his first masterpiece *Sons and Lovers*. He uses novels as a kind of self-dramatization. Almost all the main characters in his novels have a remarkable resemblance to their creator, Lawrence himself. For example, Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, R.L Somers in *Kangaroo* and Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love* are to great extent self-portraits of the novelist himself. One of the most striking features of Lawrence's main characters is the resemblance they bear to their creator. The major characters in *Sons and Lovers*, for example, very closely resemble their real counterparts in Lawrence's life. Paul, the protagonist, has a very close resemblance to his own creator. Like Paul, Lawrence was also a weak and sick boy and he had a very close morbid relationship with his mother. Lawrence uses Paul

as his spokesman to articulate his ideas and philosophy concerning life, love and marriage. However, this should not be construed that his novels are nothing more than real historical records of the writer and his community. They are artistic fictions in which reality, art and imagination are successfully combined together in the hand of Lawrence's great literary craftsmanship.

II. PARENTS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

David Herbert Lawrence was born in 1885 in the midland mining village of East-wood, Nottinghamshire. He was the fourth child of his parents. The Lawrence family lived in a rented house near the mines and there was an ash tree near the house. His father Arthur Lawrence was an uninformed, uneducated coal-miner, who barely knew how to write his name and spoke a dialect. His father's bad temper and rough manners caused Lawrence a lot of suffering. Whenever he was sober and in a jolly mood, he loved to sing old ballads. He had certain vitality which made him glow in the house. He loved to mend old things in the house and engaged himself in the works like cobbling, soldering. He could hardly write and his reading does not go

anywhere else beyond the newspapers. Although he sometimes tries to read newspapers, he could not understand of everything he read. Therefore, often he had to call his wife as 'lass' and ask her the meaning of certain words and expressions. He entered in the mining job at the age of seven. He often abused the pit managers and drank regularly only to become a habitual drunkard. The children detested him.

On the other hand, Lawrence's mother Lydia belonged to a middle class family, better educated than his father, and was teaching in a school. She struggled through all her married life to lift her children from the working class to an upper middle class. Her father George Beardsall was an engineer by profession. The maternal grandfather of Lawrence's mother worked in the less industry. She was a high minded pious woman who hated dirt, drink and poverty. Lydia loved reading and talking more than anything but she could not have any real conversations with Lawrence's father who has little knowledge of reading and writing. When they first met Lawrence's father told his fiancé that he was a mining contractor but later after their marriage it was revealed that in reality, he was a poor coal miner. As a result Lawrence's parents had frequent quarrels and tension was always there in their household. Lydia Lawrence, frustrated by her marriage life, began to despise her husband and tried her best to provide her children with good education to keep them away from a career in the mines. In the process she transfers all her affections to her sons and thus makes them husband-substitutes .

Lawrence started his education at a local school and after winning a scholarship went to the Nottingham High School. Ada, his sister was fond of playing piano. All the children of the Lawrence family make frequent excursions to nearby fields and woods and collect blackberries.

Almost a replica of everything mentioned above can be found in the novel. In the novel Mrs. Gertrude Morel Paul's mother, has great resemblance to Lawrence's mother, Lydia Lawrence. Walter Morel, Paul's father is portrayed after Lawrence's father Arthur. Walter Morel marries the granddaughter of a Nottingham less manufacturer. Before their marriage he told her that he was a well to do person and had a house. But later everything comes out as lies. He appears to be a coal-miner who lives in a rented house and started his job at the mines from the age of ten. He speaks in dialect, remains angry with the pit managers and is addicted to drinking. Mr. Morel returns home from mines being drunk and he has frequent frictions and fights with Mrs Morel. Children hate him. However, when he is sober, he likes to repair old things in the house and often whistles to express his joy.

Gertrude being a pious woman and an educated lady from a middle class family who exactly like Lydia loves reading and conversing while hates poverty and dirt. She speaks King's English and cannot share her

feelings or make any intimate or intellectual conversation with her husband Walter because very much like Arthur, Walter was a poor, irresponsible and uneducated miner. He can hardly sign his name and needs help of wife in reading newspapers. Her wish for long intellectual conversations is only fulfilled through her periodic conversations with a clergyman who visits her at brief intervals. In real life Lawrence's mother also had occasional visits from a clergyman. Being utterly disappointed with her married life she starts to hate her husband and pins all her hopes to her sons. She exerted herself to the utmost in order to keep her sons out of a mining career and gave them a good education. In the novel Walter Morel wants to make a miner of his eldest son William. But Mrs. Morel puts up a strong resistance to her husband's intention and succeeds in keeping William away from becoming a miner. Like Lawrence's parents, Paul's parents in *Sons and Lovers*, never enjoy a happy marital life, and this has a negative psychological effect on the children of the family. There is an ash tree just beside the house of Morel family. It is the symbol of discord in the family. When wind blows through its leaves it makes a strange moaning sound and the children become frightened. Only Mr. Morel likes the sound. Paul goes to the local school. Annie, sister of Paul likes to play piano and Paul with her brothers and sisters has several excursions to nearby fields and woods collecting blackberries and other fruits. So everything in Morel family is similar with everything in Lawrence family.

III. FIRST DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Laurence's elder brother Earnest was a favorite of his mother and indeed Earnest was his mother's joy and Pride. He was very handsome and intelligent. He was also a very good athlete. He could do all the things that any descent man is expected to do. His promising career in a London farm was ended when at the age of twenty three he fell sick with pneumonia and died a few hours after his mother reached his bedside. His health had been undermined by over- work but also perhaps by the agony caused to him because of his mother's disapproval of his fiancé whom she regarded as a frivolous girl. In the novel, Paul's elder brother William who being very handsome and intelligent, his mother's favorite also dies a premature death and he too dies of pneumonia a few hours after his mother reaches his bedside. Like Lawrence's mother Paul's mother also disapproves of William's sweetheart Gypsy. Although William was attracted to this girl but he soon found her as a very shallow and annoying girl. Yet he was unable to dismiss her from his life. Thus, this tragic death of William in the novel closely corresponds to a similar tragedy in the Lawrence family. Just as Lawrence's mother had pinned all her hopes to Earnest Mrs. Morel as well has placed William at the center of all her hopes.

IV. LAWRENCE AND PAUL

Lawrence was deeply attached to his mother. In fact, in his childhood, he was tied to the apron strings of his mother, even he would frequently wear the apron himself preparing bread or potato cakes. He would help his mother with miscellaneous chores. In the novel Paul too was deeply attached to his mother and he too helps his mother with domestic tasks including the baking of bread. On one occasion, Paul feels sorry at the thought of his mother would be annoyed at him for having allowed a loaf to be burnt in the oven because he was busy speaking with Miriam and Beatrice. After the death of William, it is Paul who becomes his mother's favorite in the same way as Lawrence became the center of her mother's life after Earnest's death. Lawrence got a job as a junior clerk in a Nottingham firm manufacturing surgical goods. He quickly settled down at his job and enjoyed the company of his colleagues in the office. However, the job kept him busy for twelve hours on most days because he had to travel to and from Nottingham. After three months he fell sick with pneumonia. His mother nursed him during this illness and it was then that she transferred all the intense love and ambition which she had for Earnest. Much of this is also true for Paul in the novel. He too gets a job as a junior clerk in Mr. Jordan's firm which manufactures surgical goods. Paul too feels very happy in the company of his colleagues though he too has to spend twelve hours a day working in the office and traveling to and from Nottingham. Paul too is subject to the attack of bronchitis.

V. JESSIE AND MIRIAM

Lawrence's mother on one occasion took him to a farm situated at a distance of a couple of miles from their house in the village. Lawrence was then fifteen. The owner of this farm was Chambers family. On his visit to the farm Lawrence met Mr. and Mrs. Chambers and their children. One of them was a girl named Jessie who was fourteen at that time. Thereafter Lawrence was a regular visitor to the farm and soon he became quite intimate with Jessie. Jessie's elder sister began to feel jealous of Jessie because of Jessie's growing affinity with Lawrence. This closeness between them ultimately develops into a love affair for a long time. Both of them have love of books. Jessie inspired him to be a writer but Mrs. Lawrence does not like Jessie. However, there were some ups and downs in the relation and there was a major problem in respect of physical intimacy. This problem ultimately breaks the relationship.

In the novel we have Willey farm where Paul met the girl named Miriam. The owner of the Willey farm was Leivers family. So, in the novel as well Paul and Miriam feel attracted to each other and after recovering from the initial hesitation they are gradually falling in love with each other. Like Jessie's elder sister

Miriam has also an elder sister named Agatha. However, unlike reality in the novel Agatha does not feel jealous of Miriam's affair with Paul. Miriam shares Paul's interest in books and she also praises him for his skills of painting. But very much like reality the relation between Paul and Miriam does not go smoothly. There are also several ups and downs. Again, the main source of problem in the relation are the passive disapproval of Mrs. Morel and the complexity Paul faces while trying to establish a physical relation with Miriam. Paul cannot overcome the problem and as a result he leaves Miriam by finally breaking the relation with her.

VI. ALICE AND CLARA

Soon afterwards Lawrence began an affair with a married woman by the name Alice Dax. Alice was involved in the campaign and movement which was then going on England demanding the rights of women. She was quite well known for her activities in this movement. After being in a love relationship for some time she had no objection against physical intimacy with Lawrence. However, after a while she thought that Lawrence was not suited to her. So, she did not make any effort to retain him as a lover in her life. Again after a few ups and downs this relationship also ended. But after the breakup she regretted and suffered deeply for a period.

Almost the same thing happens in the novel as after the failed relationship with Miriam Paul develops a friendship with a married woman named Clara Dawes who is separated from her husband Baxter Dawes. Very soon they grow an intimate relationship which even extends to sexuality. Clara was a liberal woman who actively takes part in women rights movement. This relationship also ends up after Paul is attacked by Clara's husband Baxter and becomes injured. Therefore, we can easily find that the character of Clara is based on the real life person Alice, and Paul - Clara relationship is the reflection of Lawrence- Alice relationship. However, the character of Clara though mainly based on Alice there were other girls whom Lawrence met in his life like Miss Burrows and Miss Corke whose personal traits also influenced the character of Clara. In fact, the portrayal of Clara is a blend of elements taken from the personality of these three ladies

Again the character of Miriam is although based on the character of Jessie Chambers it is not an exact portrayal of Jessie. Miriam is also a composite character of several real women whose names were Helen, Louie and Agnes. Lawrence personally knew them. Miriam is the embodiment of the idea of spiritual love while Clara is the representation of carnal love.

VII. MOTHER FIXATION

The unusual relationship between Paul and his mother is one of the most discussed topics. Paul is too

attached to his mother. He is a great admirer of her mother. His adoration of his mother is one of the most prominent traits of his character. In reality Lawrence was definitely too much obsessed with his mother. He described his mother as a wonderful rare woman, as strong, steadfast and generous as the sun. She is as swift as a whip - lash and as kind and gentle as rain. So, there is no doubt that the relation between Lawrence and his mother is vividly portrayed in the novel's mother son relationship. The most significant point of similarity in this respect is the way both Paul's and Lawrence's mothers suffer from cancer and finally dies with the overdose of morphia given to them by their respective favorite sons with their sisters were helping them in the act.

Let's turn our attention to some dissimilarity between Lawrence and Paul. Lawrence at the initial stage of his career was a part time teacher and later became a full-fledged school teacher. But Paul was never engaged in the teaching profession in any period of his life. Again, Lawrence at the age of twenty five decided to be a writer. But Paul does not want to be a writer. He has skills of drawing and painting and he wishes to be an artist in the field of visual art. Though Lawrence wanted a literary career for himself yet he had knack of drawing and painting. Lawrence received a scholarship and went to a boarding school. Paul never goes to any boarding school. Lawrence's mother was teaching at a local school but Paul's mother was only a

house wife. So, except these type of little dissimilarities Paul is a faithful portrayal of Lawrence himself in his experience of childhood in the colliery belt having a miner father and an educated middle class mother always fighting each other, in his loss of the elder brother, in his two failed love affairs, in his critical view against the orthodox Christian creed and obviously in his mother fixation and relief from it after his mother's death.

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