

Mrs. Gertrude Morel and Her Realization in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers: A Study

Salma Haque

Department of English Language and Literature,
International Islamic University Chittagong, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Abstract: Sons and Lovers, the third novel of D.H. Lawrence is a masterpiece in English literature. Though it has received severe criticism, it is one of the most highly acclaimed novels of Lawrence. Lawrence wrote I have patiently and laboriously constructed the novel^[1]. It has been widely thought of as a simply and directly autobiographical novel by an author who invariably included in his fiction his own experiences and portraits of people he knew. In Sons and Lovers Lawrence analyzes the growth, development of three man-woman relationship. Among the three major women characters Mrs Gertrude Morel is the most important. This paper aims to discuss her effort to realize herself.

Key words: Realization in D.H. Lawrence's, sons and lovers, English literature, acclaimed novels

INTRODUCTION

Some readers think the novel Sons and Lovers deals with the mismatch of the mother of Paul, the hero of Sons and Lovers. On December 3, 1910 when the mother of DH Lawrence was nearing her death Lawrence wrote to Rachel Anand Taylor about her My mother was a clever, ironical, delicately moulded woman of good old burgher descent. She married below her. My father was dark, ruddy, with a fine laugh. He is a coal miner. He was one of the sanguine temperament, warm and hearty, but unstable: he lacked principle, as my mother would have said. He deceived her and lied to her. She despised him-he drank^[2].

The background of this novel is the social and economic history of the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire border. The novel also discusses about the social structure of a mining village and narrates the style of the colliers and their wives.

The social forces are directly related to the characters and their conflicts. Some characters have conflicts and compromise with these forces. They try to adapt themselves to the rough situation in which they have to live.

The three major women characters are seen struggling for liberation, denying social restrictions, anxious to lead a fuller life, attempting to escape in hope and imagination from the limiting social conditions^[3]. The notable fact is the three major women Mrs. Morel, Miriam and Clara are unhappy and dissatisfied. They try to get rid of their unhappiness and Mrs. Morel is one of them.

Mrs. Morel came of a good old burgher family, famous independents, who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson^[4]. She had acquired some education, taught school and wanted to marry a young man named John Field. She inherited pride and unyielding temper from her

forefathers. When she was young she used to hate her father's behaviour towards her mother. Her hopes shattered when she found that her lover wanted to marry a monied landlady who was also a widow. She realized the value of money for the first time. But she copes up with her disappointment well.

Later she meets Walter Morel when she is twenty-three. She meets him at a Christmas party and is attracted to his gaiety, liveliness and the rich sensuous flow of life in him^[5]. She thinks he is a man with two houses, a bank account and is a miner with the drive to get on^[6]. She does not know that the man who is going to be her husband possesses nothing. If she had realized the social difference between them, her married life would not have ruined. She does not know anything about the hard life of the miners. She visualizes a romantic life and makes her first mistake. She finds the work of Mr. Morel noble unless she comes into contact with the realities of this life.

At the beginning Mrs. Morel does not face any problem with her husband. For six months she remains very happy. She gets shocked for the first time when she brushes his coat and finds in his breast pocket the unpaid bill of the household furniture. Though Mr. Morel takes it easily, she cannot. She finds it insulting. Later on she realizes lack of communication arises: She tried to open her heart seriously to him. She saw him listen deferentially, but without understanding. This killed her efforts at a finer intimacy and she had flashes of fear^[7]. This lack of communication makes their married life complicated and makes them separate from each other. She feels lonely with him now and his presence only makes it more intense^[8].

When she marries Mr. Morel, she does not know that the life of the coal miners at Bestwood lacks financial

security. The miners have certain ways of life. And Walter Morel is a part of this community. When Mrs. Morel understands it she takes time to realize it. She tries to control their house. This lead Mr. Morel to stay much time in the pub. And the fellow miners do not enter his house without her permission except Jerry, Morel's drinking companion.

Mr. Morel is uncultured, barely literate and does not understand his wife's culture and taste. He is happy with his life and is not ambitious. He is not attracted to anything beyond his locality. He toasted his bacon on a fork and caught the drops of fat on his bread. Then he put the rasher on his thick slice of bread and cut off chunks with a clasp knife, poured his tea into his saucer and was happy^[9]. It means he is happy with the simple way of his life. He thinks a fork is useless to him, as it is a symbol of refinement, which he does not need. This leads to his unsuccessful marriage.

On the other hand Mrs. Morel is fed up with her life at Bestwood. Poverty, the monstrous attitude of Mr. Morel towards her makes her frustrated. After the birth of William, her first child, she feels lonely and clings herself to the child avoiding her husband whom once she finds so full of color and animation^[10]. As she has been disappointed at her husband's job she is determined that her children will not follow their father's profession of a coal miner.

Poverty strips her mind terribly when she and her son Paul go to Nottingham for his interview. After the interview both go to a restaurant and orders the cheapest dish. But she cannot order dessert for Paul. When the waitress ignores them for being poor, she gets hurt and humiliated, because she wants to get rid of poverty.

When they start their married life she tries to impose her values on her husband. She tries to make him dutiful and likes to judge him from her point of view. For these reasons she makes him separate from other coal miners of his society. And she fails in her attempt to change him.

The attitude of Mrs. Morel towards her husband shocks him. Mr. Morel does not think his behaviour, way of living should be accepted by his wife. He does not find anything unnatural in his lifestyle. Even according to him Mrs. Morel should not oppose drinking, as it is a part of the miners. He does not want her to change his life. He wants her to submit to him, but as she is not a weak type of woman, she does not easily give in. Though when Mr. Morel falls seriously ill she does everything for him what is wanted of her. As he is the breadwinner she does not want him to die. During the illness Mrs. Morel spoils him by her attention. So after the illness he wants her attention but she remains unmoved. She does not give importance to his feigned sickness.

She wants her children not to have poverty-stricken existence. She realizes that Mr. Morel's once fine body is lost over the years due to hard work and accidents. And with the change of his body his cheerful nature is also lost.. And he has become a brute. Mrs. Morel wants to have a better life for her children. She does not want them to behave like their father. So they do not speak in Mr. Morel's dialect. To them, the mother's speech represents education and points to a future beyond Bestwood.

As she decides her children will not follow their father's footstep in the pits she finds a job for her son William when he is thirteen. For this Mr. Morel gets dissatisfied. This job, in Mrs. Morel's eyes is the beginning of a bright future for her and her children.

Mr. Morel questions his wife about the starting salary of their son. He asks this question to impress his wife that he earn more money than their son. So he is superior to William. He wants to force respect for himself out of her. But she does not feel any kind of respect for him. She reminds him that she is bothered about social status not about money.

One reason for this difference between father and son can perhaps be traced to the difference between the two mothers. It becomes clear by the reply of Mrs. Morel If your mother put you in the pit at twelve, it's no reason why I should do the same with my lad?^[11]. The elder Mrs. Morel had thought nothing of being in a mortgaged house but Gertrude Morel went white to the lips simply on the hearing of it^[12].

The elder Mrs. Morel lived in a narrow and limited world. But Mrs. Gertrude Morel likes to look at the outer world. So she wants her son to have such type of job which will carry him beyond the limited world of Bestwood.

William works at the co-op office. He later goes to London in order to do better. Mrs. Morel emphasizes on the second son Paul to take up any respectable profession. Paul, however, has no ambition other than to earn a modest living. But he is an artist and wins prizes at competitions. Annie, the daughter becomes schoolteacher and Arthur the youngest, settles down to work at twenty-one shillings a week. So Mrs. Morel becomes happy to achieve her aspirations of a life better than that offered by the mining community of Bestwood.

Around this time Mrs. Morel joins the women's Guild-a club of women who meet to discuss social problems and from the basis of the Guild, the women could look at their homes, at the conditions of their own lives and find fault^[13]. It means other women are also becoming conscious of their problems.

The mother and sons like to exchange ideas. But Mrs. Morel and Mr. Morel do not like to do so. She shares her

experience of the Guild meetings with her children, especially William enjoys to talk about his relationship with his mother.

Paul's life-story, like an Arabian nights, was told night after night to his mother^[14]. There is a close affinity between mother and sons and they shun their father in their conversation and later on he becomes an alien in his own house.

The unhappy relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Morel affect the lives of the two sons William and Paul. For William the problem gets pronounced when he gets engaged with Lily. He strives to achieve his goal that is to reach a higher strata in social life. He is bothered about fulfilling his goal without taking a deeper look at it. He becomes worried about the necessities of a gentleman's life and associates with people who in Bestwood would have looked down on the unapproachable Bank Manager and would merely have called indifferently on the Rector. So he began to fancy himself as a great gun^[15]. Later on he cannot send any money to his mother as it is all spent in maintaining his life.

Lawrence criticizes Mrs. Morel's desperate ambition and her methods have also criticized by him. As she becomes unhappy with Mr. Morel she shifts the burden of her unhappiness to her sons. She wants them to fulfill her goals, which will bring her satisfaction. This does not bring real happiness for either the mother, or the sons. At twelve when William won a first prize in a race, she took it with pride. Because it was the first tribute to herself. Later William becomes a failure. And Paul hardly manages to save himself and Mrs. Morel finds her rejected. In the end she starts an abnormal relationship with Paul which brings her self-destruction.

Women who are not happy with their husbands tend to shift their attention from their husbands to their children. It is common in contemporary society. Therefore, it is not an individual problem Lawrence projects here, but a general one.

Miriam, the lover of Paul and Mrs. Morel are alike in some ways. They share one common emotion-frustration.

There is a strong attachment between mother and son. Paul is her last hope. William is dead, Arthur is indifferent to her. So she gets obsessed with Paul. She

cannot think of losing Paul at this stage. This attachment of Mrs. Morel makes her son unsure of his relationship with Miriam. Even his relationship with Clara breaks-up when he realizes that as long as his mother is alive he will never be able to find total fulfillment with any other women. At the end Paul goes back to his mother. He wants to cast her off, but cannot. The slow, agonizing process of Mrs. Morel's death is a painful picture of a woman's desperate attempt to hold on to a life which has not given her much. It is her dogged desire to relish the only happiness given by her son. but the situation is pathetic as she realizes that Paul is now rejecting her to find his own happiness and he does not wish to share it with her. In giving her an overdose of sleeping pills, Paul is making the last bid to lead his own life. Through his relationship with his mother, Miriam and Clara Paul finally realize his own inadequacies, which enables him to determine his own life.

REFERENCES

1. Boulton, James, T. Ed., The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Volume 1,
2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 478. Hereafter referred to as letters, I. letters, i., pp: 190.
3. Dix, Carol. Lawrence And Women, London and Basing stoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 180, pp: 21.
4. Lawrence, D.H., Sons and Lovers, Cambridge, Cambridge: University Press, 1992, pp: 15.
5. Ibid., 19.
6. Sanders, Scott. D.H. Lawrence-The world of the Major Novels, London: Vision Press Limited, 1973, pp: 34.
7. Lawrence, D.H. Sons and Lovers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp: 19.
8. Ibid., pp: 22.
9. Ibid., pp: 37.
10. Ibid., pp: 17.
11. Ibid., pp: 70.
12. Ibid., pp: 21.
13. Ibid., pp: 69.
14. Ibid., pp: 164.
15. Ibid., pp: 115.