

An Analysis of the "Two-in-One" Relationship in Sons and Lovers

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Abstract: D.H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* is well known as a classic of English literature in many ways. This paper deals with the characters' quest for the relationship of "Two-in-One," a relationship coming from Lawrence's "dualistic philosophy," in which sexual love and spiritual love combine into a whole and individuals in this relationship get a perfect self-fulfillment. Through the analysis of the three failed relationships, one can know clearly what Lawrence's so-called relationship of "Two-in-One" is and how it influenced the individuals' life. In Paul and Mrs. Morel's relationship, it is the incest taboo that causes the failure. In Paul and Miriam's relationship, however, it is due to the lack of physical love. While in Paul and Clara's relationship, on the contrary, it is the lack of spiritual love that results in the failure. In conclusion, each character's quest for the "Two-in-One" relationship finally causes the failure of the romances in this novel.

1. Introduction

D.H Lawrence is one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. His bold ideas on sex are reflected on most of his works and also make him the most controversial writer of the 20th century. His *Sons and Lovers*, considered as his autobiography, is a creative masterpiece, in which most of his ideas on sex get reflected and because of this, it becomes a classic of the English literature.

In this paper, the writer deals with the characters' quest for the relationship of "Two-in-One" put forward by Lawrence himself. It is believed that each character is looking for a "Two-in-One" relationship and that the failure of the romances in this novel is caused by their quest for this relationship consciously or unconsciously. The writer chooses three main failed relationships as example to show what "Two-in-One" relationship is and how it eventually results in the failure of each romance.

2. The Relationship of "Two-in-One"

The relationship of "Two-in-One," according to Lawrence, is a relationship in which sexual love and spiritual love reach a complete and balanced union. The "two" refers to "spiritual love" and "sexual love" respectively, while the "one" is the balanced state in which neither spiritual love nor sexual love is in lack of or prejudiced against. Lawrence believes that a successful relationship is such that both sexual love and spiritual love are fulfilled.

This "Two-in-One" relationship derives from Lawrence's "dualistic philosophy,"^[1] which he

explains in his "Study of Thomas Hardy." In it he proposes that all the different varieties and contexts where life presents a dualistic face to the individual are really only part of two dominant principles which govern the whole of life, gender, culture and history: the two principles of "Love" and "Law." According to his exposition of this theory, it is showed that each of these dominant principles is composed of numerous aspects, and manifests itself in diverse ways. For example, Lawrence identifies his principle of "Love" as masculine force, and that of "Law" as feminine. Then he attaches "Spirit" to masculinity and "Love" and "Emotion" to femininity and "Law."

Usually these two dominating principles are often at war with each other. Individuals confronted by dualism must resolve the conflict. They often find a way to reconcile and balance these two overriding principles. As Lawrence indicates, to choose one of them is totally wrong and fails the individuals' self-fulfillment. Lawrence tells us that it is better for us to accept these two battling forces and make them into a new whole. Lawrence's term for this ultimate whole is "Two- in -One."

In a relationship, the two "battling forces" are "spiritual love" and "sexual love." According to Lawrence, a relationship of "Two-in-One" is to accept and combine these two kinds of love into one balanced whole. Therefore, either side in a relationship can gain a kind of freedom and independence.

3. Three Failed Relationships

In *Sons and Lovers*, the characters especially the protagonist Paul Morel have been searching for a "Two-in-One" relationship all through the novel, which is responsible for the failure of the romances in this novel. In Paul's relationship with his mother, he got trapped in the weird and uncontrollable attachment to his mother where his physical need could not be satisfied. However, his love to Miriam was restrained by her deeply-rooted religious belief which frustrated their physical intimacy over and over again. As for his relationship with Clara, it was nothing but a product of pure sexual desire with no spiritual communication between the two. Driven by the need for a "Two-in-One" relationship, Paul's relationships with his mother, Miriam and Clara are doomed to fail.

3.1. Paul and Mrs. Morel

Mrs. Morel and Paul are mother-son relationship. But Mrs. Morel has an unhappy marriage in which she fails to establish a "Two-in-One" relationship. As a result, she develops a morbid love to her sons. However, this relationship cannot last long because of the incest taboo.

Gertrude Coppard and Walter Morel come from different social classes, which pave the way for their unsteady marriage life. Gertrude is a middle class of ideas, a puritan and is considered intellectual. In a word, she lives a spiritual life. On the contrary, Walter is a typical working class, who possesses physical beauty, but he is non-intellectual, more animal-like. Therefore, after the passion of the two, all the differences come into surface to disturb the marriage. Finally, as Lawrence tells us:

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 fulfil his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. ^[2: 16]

It is obvious that the marriage between Gertrude and Walter is far from the so-called "Two-in-One" relationship. On Mrs. Morel's part, it is her spiritual love that fails to be satisfied, so she searches for this compensation from his sons. As Lawrence states in his letter of 19 November 1912 to Edward Garnett:

A woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has a passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion, and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up she selects them as lovers---first the elders, then the second. ^[3]

Paul's quest for the "Two-in-One" relationship is destined to be failed in the relationship with his mother, because they can not satisfy each other sexually. Paul was born into this unsteady marriage and grew up under his mother's excessive even sexual morbid love. In Paul and Mrs. Morel's relationship, spiritual love overrides the physical or sexual one because of the incest taboo. From Paul's birth to Mrs. Morel's death, even after her death, Paul was spiritually attached to his mother. When Paul was young, he as other children in his family loved her mother very much. He tried his best to attract his mother's attention and to please her. When he was ill, he needed his mother badly. And he also loved to sleep with his mother. To Paul, "...sleep is still most perfect, in spite of hygienists, when it is shared with a beloved. The warmth, the security and the peace of soul, the utter comfort from the touch of the other, knits the sleep, so it takes the body and soul completely in its healing."^[2: 68] Whenever Paul went out to gather blackberries, he would never come back empty-handed. "That, he felt, would disappoint her, and he would have died rather."^[2: 69] Paul would bring his mother a spray, always the best one no matter how far he went. When she received it, she would praise its beauty "in a curious tone, of a woman accepting a love-token" instead of a mother's normal happiness. But Mrs. Morel ignored Paul's effort to please her, because she at that moment focused on her first son---William, who was man already. "She was a woman who waited for her children to grow up"^[2: 69] to be her lovers.

After William's death, Mrs. Morel shifted her focus on Paul, which had a bad impact on Paul's emotional growth. It is better to choose Paul and Miriam's relationship as an example. Paul and Miriam's love was "purely abstract and platonic."^[4: 36] Miriam was Mrs. Morel's true rival who Mrs. Morel believes "will want to suck a man's soul out til he was none left."^[4: 36] What she really worried was that one day Paul would drift away from her and become Miriam's lover instead of hers. In the novel, she once said: "I can't hear it. I could let another woman--- but not her [Miriam]. She'd leave me no room, not a bit of room---"^[2: 212] When Mrs. Morel was dying, Paul had no mood in doing anything but staying with his mother or being sad. After her death, Paul felt that his life went crashed: his painting, even his relationship with Clara was nothing for him. His love towards his mother stayed in his mind even after her death. As is demonstrated in the novel: "And his soul couldn't leave her, wherever she was. Now she was gone abroad into the night, and he was with her still. They were together."^[2: 416] Yet, thanks to his search for the relationship of "Two-in-One", he was finally dragged out of this mournfulness. "But yet there was his body, his chest, which leaned against the stile, his hands on the wooden bar. They seemed something. Where was he?"^[2: 416] It is his body that dragged him back into the real world. Finally, he decided to move on to hunt for the relationship of "Two-in-One." A short paragraph could be the best conclusion of this part: "But no, he would not give in." "He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her[Mrs. Morel]. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly."^[2: 416]

3.2. Paul and Miriam

Mrs. Morel and Paul's "Two-in-One" relationship cannot come into being because of their mother-son relationship. Just because of this failed quest, Paul went on his search for the ideal relationship. However, Paul and Miriam can only maintain a spiritual relationship because of Miriam's religious piety.

In this relationship, both try to reach a balanced state in which sexual love and spiritual love exist together, though Miriam's desire for sexual love is less obvious and at most time unconscious. Miriam was a pious puritan and considered spiritual love as the higher standard love while sexual love the lower standard one which was despised by her. She subconsciously repressed her sexual desire for Paul because it was considered as a shame according to religion. For instance, once on Paul's arrival, there was a paragraph to describe Miriam's psychology in which it showed her sexual desire for Paul :

She heard the rope run through the hole as it lifted its head from the lad's caress. How she loved to listen when he thought only the horse could hear. But there was a serpent in her Eden. She searched earnestly in herself to see if she wanted Paul Morel. She felt there would be some disgrace in it. Full of twisted feeling, she was afraid she did want him. She stood self-convicted. Then came an agony of new shame. She shrank within herself in a coil of torture. Did she want Paul Morel, and did he know she wanted him? What a subtle infamy upon her. She felt as if her whole soul coiled into knots of shame.^[2: 178]

Finally she prayed to God and concluded that it was God's will to make her love Paul and she should make a sacrifice for him. It was obviously a sort of self-deceit and self-comfort.

As for Paul, he was once immersed in this spiritual love with Miriam and insisted that theirs was purely a platonic relationship. As it is stated in the novel: "A sketch finished, he always wanted to take it to Miriam. Then he was stimulated into knowledge of the work he had produced unconsciously. In contact with Miriam he gained insight; his vision went deeper."^[2: 158] Paul loved this kind of communication, which brought him many inspirations on his art. However, unconsciously he was in need of sexual love. Whenever he spiritually loved Miriam more, a sense of hatred to Miriam came into being. Because he also has the false idea that sexual love to Miriam was somewhat shameful. Lawrence stated in the novel that "She [Miriam] was slightly afraid---deeply moved and religious. That was her best state. He was impotent against it."^[2: 178] To Paul, it was, as Lawrence stated in the following part, a normal passion that "he might want her as a man wants a woman," but Miriam's "purity" prevented their physical intimacy, and "Paul hated her because, somehow, she spoilt his ease and naturalness."^[2: 179]

Conflict appeared when there was no sexual love between them. After a time of separation, they had a reunion and tried to establish the "Two-in-One" relationship. However, due to their different opinions on sex, they failed to reach a balanced state and got separated. When they were on sex, physically they were together; spiritually they were far away from each other. At the beginning of their sexual intercourse, Miriam shrank a little and behaved as a pious puritan making a sacrifice. It is described like this:

And then he wanted her, but as he went forward to her, her hands lifted in a little pleading movement and he looked at her face, and stopped. Her big brown eyes were watching him, still and resigned and loving; she lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice: there was her body for him; but the look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation, arrested him, and all his blood fell back.^[2: 287]

Paul stopped because he found that spiritually Miriam was retrieving from him. In this paragraph, the split idea on sex between Miriam and Paul hindered their sexual intercourse. To Miriam, sex is "a dreadful" thing a woman must "bear" after marriage. This idea was rooted in her mind and formed her horrified feeling to sex. While to Paul, sex should be a union of body and soul. As he thought in the novel, "If he were really with her [Miriam], he had to put aside himself and his desire. If he would have her, he had to put her aside."^[2: 288] However, their sexual experience proved to be a failure, because neither of them was able to gain a "Two-in-One" feeling, consciously or unconsciously.

3.3. Paul and Clara

Paul's relationship with Mrs. Morel and with Miriam failed for the same reason that both are in lack of physical contact, which is one of the elements of a "Two-in-One" relationship. Yet, Paul didn't stop his quest for the "Two-in-One" relationship, and went to Clara directly after he left Miriam.

Paul was attracted by and obsessed with Clara's body. Lawrence uses "Passion" as a subtitle to indicate that their relationship is nothing but a product of sexual desire. He was initially immersed in the pleasure her body brought to him. "He was in a delirium",^[2: 302] so he ignored the spiritual

communication between the two. For example, he picked a bunch of scarlet, brick-red carnation for Clara and praised the color was fine. What Clara reacted was “I’d rather have had something softer.”^[2: 303] However, he was then indulged in the “delirium” and totally ignored this divergence.

Just as Paul’s relationship with Miriam is purely spiritual, the relationship with Clara is completely physical. Neither can reach the standard of a relationship of “Two-in-One.” As time went by, Paul’s interest in Clara died down, leading to a conflict both should confront and solve. On Clara’s part, this conflict is expressed in a form of her unsatisfied desire and her lack of sense of security. For instance, she needed Paul at every moment, even in the factory:

And she was mad with desire of him. She couldn’t see him without touching him. In the factory, as he talked to her about Spiral hose, she ran her hand secretly along his side. She followed him into the basement for a quick kiss; her eyes, always mute and yearning, full of unrestrained passion, she kept fixed on his.^[2: 352]

Actually, Clara’s need for Paul is caused by the fact that she and Paul have no spiritual communication. One scene in the novel can illustrate it clearly: “For hours they sat together, or walked together in the dark, and talked only a few, meaningless words. But he had her hand in his, and her bosom left its warmth in his chest, making him feel whole.”^[2: 349] They had nothing in common to share but the need of each other physically. Spiritually, Clara cannot hold Paul, so she wants to hold him physically, though she doesn’t know it herself. Though both satisfied and content with their sexual life, Clara felt that Paul didn’t belong to her. The her thought in the evening walk with Paul has proved it clearly:

She knew she had not got him. All the time he whistled softly and persistently to himself. She listened, feeling she could learn more from his whistling than from his speech. It was a sad dissatisfied tune---a tune that made her feel he would not stay with her.^[2: 349]

Her feeling was confirmed by the following conversation between them, in which Paul mentioned that he would go abroad. Because of the lack of spiritual love, the relationship of “Two-in-One” is failed to establish. Thus Clara did not fulfill herself completely.

It was also true with Paul. On Paul’s part, the conflict is showed in a form of his lack of freedom. Paul indeed devoted much time to Clara, but mostly the evenings, because he needed some time to be himself and enjoy his freedom. As a matter of fact, Clara was only a sexual object, though he did not realize it clearly or he denied it unconsciously. Their conversation on their seaside trip is the best illustration:

“It seems,” she said, as they stared over the darkness of the sea, where no night was to be seen—“it seemed as if you only loved me at night---as if you didn’t love me in the daytime.”

“The night is free to you,” he replied, “In the daytime I want to be myself.”

“But why?” she said. “Why, even now, when we are on this short holiday?”

“I don’t know. Love-making stifles me in the daytime.”

“But it needn’t be always love-making,” she said.

“It always is,” he answered, “when you and I are together.”^[2: 356]

And it is during this trip that Paul realized what Clara is to him. In the novel, there is a short paragraph of Paul’s own unconscious thoughts, in which Paul’s true feeling towards Clara was revealed. Lawrence writes like this:

“What is she [Clara], after all?” he said to himself, “here’s the sea-coast morning, big and permanent and beautiful; there is she, fretting, always unsatisfied, and temporary as a bubble of foam. What does she mean to me, after all? She represents something, like a bubble of foam represents the sea. But what is she? It’s not her I care for.”^[2: 355]

He was not sure why Clara held appeal to him, but what he was sure was that he did not love her. Actually, Clara is Paul’s suppressed sexual desire. Lawrence uses the words “fretting”, “unsatisfied” and “temporary” to describe Clara and compares her to “a bubble of foam” which to some extent

allude to Paul's sexual desire, which drew him close to Clara over and over again and tortured him and puzzled him as well. However, this trip made Paul realize that how he was confined in front of Clara in the daytime. He felt "imprisoned" and couldn't "get a free deep breath". After this trip, their relationship became more mechanical and finally came to an end. It is also a failed "Two-in-One" relationship, in which neither Paul nor Clara gained a satisfying self-fulfillment.

4. Conclusion

According to Lawrence, the relationship of "Two-in-One" is a relationship in which both spiritual love and sexual love are involved and fulfilled. It is a balanced state and each side of the relationship can gain a kind of self-fulfillment. Characters in *Sons and Lovers* all try their best to establish this relationship consciously and unconsciously, especially the protagonist Paul Morel. In Paul and Mrs. Morel's relationship, the main obstacle is their mother-son relationship, which on the way of their satisfying each other physically. While in Paul and Miriam's relationship, both are too young to overcome the traditional and religious ideas on love and sex. Thus, the physical love gives way to the spiritual one and finally leads to the failure of this relationship. As for Paul's relationship with Clara, it is purely a physical one. With the physical desire dying down, it is inevitable that this relationship comes to an end. The conscious or unconscious quest for a "Two-in-One" relationship finally leads to the failure of the above romances.

References

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