

## Class Conflict in D. H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers"

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### Abstract

**The present paper is an analysis of the conflicts between Walter Morel and Mrs Morel, the two sons and Walter Morel and Paul and his two lovers based on the core class conflict in D. H. Lawrence's classic novel "Sons and Lovers". The conclusion is that all the conflicts between the main characters in the novel originate from class conflict which in turn contributes to their respective tragedy.**

### Keywords

**Class conflict, D. H. Lawrence, "Sons and Lovers".**

### 1. Introduction

"Sons and Lovers" is a highly autobiographical novel created by D. H. Lawrence. In the masterpiece, there exist many conflicts. Superficially, there are the conflicts between Walter Morel the husband and Mrs. Morel the wife, the two sons and his father, Paul and his two lovers Miriam and Clara etc. At a deeper level, there are the conflicts between the industrial society and undeveloped nature, body attachments and soul attachments etc. However, as far as I am concerned, the core conflict in D. H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" is class conflict from which all the other conflicts arise. In the present paper I will try to analyze some of the superficially major conflicts based on class conflict in a bid to help readers enhance their understanding about these major conflicts in the novel.

### 2. Body

#### 2.1 Conflicts between Walter Morel and Mrs Morel

The very conflicts between Walter Morel and Mrs Morel in nature are class conflict which induces all other conflicts in the novel. Mrs Morel, who is well-educated and a devoted Puritan, comes from the middle class. She holds high moral principles and likes to talk about politics, philosophy and religion with learned people. By contrast, Walter Morel, half-illiterate and vulgar, but direct, enthusiastic and open, belongs to the lower working class. Mrs Morel is attracted by Walter Morel's handsome appearance, strong body and his vitality. Everything is so fresh to Mrs Morel that she falls in love with Walter Morel at first sight. An unmarried young lady without too much social experience, Mrs Morel even appreciates Walter Morel's job as a coal miner at the very beginning. After they get married, their attraction to each other does last for several months. But as time goes by, conflicts arise. The conflicts appear to have originated from the family's deteriorating financial condition. Being the backbone of the family, Walter Morel works day and night only to be able to keep the ends meet, while Mrs Morel stays at home to take care of the family. Instead of living a comfortably-off life, the single-income household just struggles to survive. They often quarrel over spending or paying the bills.

The conflicts mostly come from within---their different characters cultivated in two vastly different social environments during their growing up. In essence, Walter Morel represents the sensual, the primitive, nature and the harmonious combination of the body and the soul, while Mrs Morel represents the rational, the civilized, nurture and the repression of the sensual. Born in the working class, Walter Morel is in nature frank, direct, upright, open, enthusiastic, passionate, vital and diligent. Before marriage he never complains about the heavy load of work that he has to endure every day. Instead, he finds passion in his work and has built intimate friendship with his co-workers. He laughs when he feels happy and explodes when he is angry. However, the marriage transforms Walter Morel to a totally different person. After long hours of hard manual work in the dark, Walter Morel has

become exhausted. When he is back home, what awaits him are not comforting words from his wife but constant complaints and blames. Gradually, he becomes more and more silent, indulging himself in the bar every day as a heavy drinker. For Walter Morel, Mrs Morel is becoming a sex machine for him to vent his lust, while for Mrs Morel, Walter Morel is becoming a money machine for her to maintain her living standards and middle-class grace. Mrs Morel at first try to communicate with Walter Morel in a bid to make him more civilized and knowledgeable, but in vain. So the desperate Mrs Morel turns to her sons to fill her void. In a word, due to their different social backgrounds, with Walter Morel being the working class and Mrs Morel the middle class, Mr and Mrs Morel are totally different from each other in world views and values, which leads inevitably to their spiritual and emotional detachment.

### **2.2 Conflicts between the Two Sons and Walter Morel**

Conflicts between the two sons William and Paul and Walter Morel are also in nature class conflict. What is unique here is that the two sons stand on the side of their mother Mrs Morel who strives to cultivate them to be respectable middle-class gentlemen rather than working-class laborers resembling their father. William and Paul ignore and keep a distance from their father. When Mr and Mrs Morel have a fight, the two sons always favor their mother. When Mr Morel is ill in hospital, the younger son Paul is even happier in that he can take the place of his father and become the new owner of the house. In essence, what Paul really intends to get rid of are all the things related to working class.

But climbing the social ladder and getting rid of their humble origin is never as easy as Mrs Morel and her two sons have imagined. At first, the elder son William seems to have succeeded in becoming a middle-class gentleman. He gets a decent job in London and earns a substantial amount of money for his salary. But the hypocrisy, treachery, dog-eat-dog nature of the middle-class circle can be easily guessed out by readers between the lines. Eventually, because of William's working extra hours to satisfy his girlfriend's increasing appetite for luxuries, he drains himself to death. Paul's road to middle-class is as difficult. Paul has a talent for drawing. But in his mother's eyes, his very talent is just a means for making money, which definitely hinders Paul from further developing his drawing abilities. To summarize for this part, the two sons standing on the side of his middle-class mother are against their working-class father. And the mother is striving to cultivate her two sons into middle-class successes, but unfortunately, she fails in the end.

### **2.3 Conflicts between Paul and his Two Lovers**

Conflicts between Paul and his two lovers are for the third time in nature class conflict. Paul's first lover Miriam possesses all the "merits" of a typically middle-class lady despite her growing up on a farm. Like Paul's mother, Miriam is graceful, sensitive, thoughtful and highly religious. She represses her natural sensual desires by showing her objection to making love with Paul. Miriam feels as if she were making great sacrifices for Paul when making love: ".....She lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice: there was her body for him; but ht look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation, arrested him, and all his blood fell back." [1] As both Mrs Morel and Miriam belong to the middle class spiritually, morally and religiously, they are destined to compete for controlling and dominating Paul. In an extended figurative sense, Paul's failure with Miriam is a good indication of the bankruptcy of middle-class thoughts and values.

Paul's second lover Clara is a married woman from the lower working class who represents the sensual. Clara is beautiful, sexy, worldly, brave, open and direct. With Clara, Paul compensates for the sexual needs that he fails to satisfy himself with in Miriam. Mrs Morel even encourages Paul to get along with Clara because she believes Clara's working-class characters will not appeal to Paul for long after long years of her cultivation of Paul's middle-class world views and values, and they are doomed to part sooner or later. In the end, Paul and Clara parts as Mrs Morel has expected.

Some critics believe the failure in Paul's two attempts in his love affairs originate from the disseverance of body and soul [2], but in my opinion, the failure originates from the defects in both middle and working classes. So after Mrs Morel's death, Paul finally shakes off his mother's middle-

class influence and begins to revalue his father's working-class merits so that he will live a happy life independently. By adopting the proper attitudes towards middle and working classes, "Paul finally begins to embrace a new life and take charge of his own life." [3]

### 3. Conclusion

The core class conflict contributes to the specific conflicts between Walter Morel and Mrs Morel, the two sons and Walter Morel and Paul and his two lovers in D. H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers". As for Walter Morel and Mrs Morel, their different social statuses determined by their different economic conditions form their different characters, world views and values which induce the violent conflicts between them. As for the two sons and Walter Morel, their conflicts with their father originate from their choice of middle-class world views, values and morality advocated by their mother. But it turns out that the middle-class ideals have their innate defects, and the two sons both partly fail in their pursuit of middle-class lives. As for Paul and his two lovers, Miriam representing the middle-class ideals and Clara representing the working-class ideals prevent Paul's love blossoming into marriages. Only a combination of the two ideals can make Paul a biologically and mentally healthy individual. From the above analysis, we can reach the conclusion that all the conflicts between the main characters in the novel result from class conflict, which in turn leads to the tragedy of every character involved in the novel.

### References

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