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## **Intimate Imperialism: Maternal Power and Emotional Colonization in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers***

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to present that maternal love in Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* is nothing but an emotional dominance. It goes beyond the conventional interpretation of maternal love. This study moves beyond the traditional Freudian interpretation of the Oedipus complex. It aims to present a deeper understanding of the maternal love of Mrs. Gertrude Morel for Paul. It reflects as a form of sustained emotional colonization, where love becomes a form of control and dependency. It encapsulates Michel Foucault's understanding of power as diffuse, internalized, and self-perpetuating. This study aims to present maternal love as a form of power that is not coercion, but it is emotional colonization through love, guilt, silence, and ethical authority. This paper utilizes Said's understanding of hegemony; this study explores maternal love as a form of intimate imperialism, where maternal love becomes a form of emotional dominance. This study examines a close textual analysis to showcase a deeper understanding of the ways through which emotional colonization leads towards possession. That's why Paul's emotional development takes a pause even after Mrs. Morel dies. This study aims to present that Lawrence's description of maternal love is dominating in nature. Love has always been understood to be selfless and liberating force in the family.

**Keywords:** Maternal love, Emotional dominance, Intimate imperialism, Oedipus complex, Hegemony, Intimacy

Most critics have considered *Sons and Lovers* an autobiographical novel. The psychoanalytic critics have seen Paul's emotional inactivity as a result of his mother's fixation based on Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. Such studies of *Sons and Lovers* have considered Mrs. Morel primarily as a feminine entity. Feminist critics have also re-evaluated Mrs. Morel as a woman who is intellectually superior to Walter Morel. She has fallen in love with her sons as a means of survival. Such analyses of *Sons and Lovers* have added moral ambiguity to the character of Mrs. Morel and, at the same time, romanticized the mother's sacrifice. This study

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differs from earlier analyses of *Sons and Lovers* as it regards maternal love not as sacrifice but as a form of power and authority that is tied to emotional dependency, moral obligation, and emotional control. Critical reception of *Sons and Lovers* has been very vibrant, particularly because of the novel's intense psychological inwardness and familial intimacy. Since its publication in 1913, *Sons and Lovers* has been subject to a variety of critical receptions. The critical reception of *Sons and Lovers* may be broadly divided into biographical, Marxist, and, more recently, post-Freudian and cultural materialistic approaches. The early critics' reception of *Sons and Lovers* centred almost on the autobiography of Lawrence. Critics such as Jessie Chambers and Edward Garnett focused their attention on the novel's documentary realism. They presented it as a faithful depiction of Lawrence's own experiences in Nottinghamshire. Mrs. Morel, therefore, was seen as a refined lady who was forced to live in a brutal marriage, her love for her sons being seen as just and heroic. Thus, within this framework, Paul Morel's emotional suffering was seen as a natural by product of social conditions and emotional sensitivity. While such reception of *Sons and Lovers* ignored the power dynamics of the mother-son relationship.

The development of Freudian criticism in the mid-twentieth century revolutionized the field of Lawrence criticism. John Middleton Murry was influenced by Sigmund Freud's ideas of the Oedipus complex. He saw *Sons and Lovers* as an example of oedipal love. Mrs. Morel was depicted as a dominating mother who unconsciously channels her unfulfilled marital desires towards her son. Therefore, Paul was incapable of heterosexual love. Though Freudian criticism provided a terminology to discuss Paul's emotional state and his confused sexuality. It also resulted in the readings of the novel that it became a psychological case study. Such insights of the novel generalized Paul's experiences, and it saw maternal possessiveness as a kind of universal phenomenon. It ignored the cultural, economic, and gender factors that allowed Mrs. Morel to exert power in the domestic affairs. The feminist critics of the 1970s and 1980s tried to free Mrs. Morel from the accusations of emotional tyranny leveled by the Freudian scholars. Kate Millett, Juliet Mitchell, and other feminist critics pointed out that the patriarchal oppression is the cause of Mrs. Morel's emotional dependency on her sons. This dependency is a result of her disempowerment from economic and sexual fulfilment. However, the feminist critics praise Mrs. Morel for her refusal to accept her working-class status. The contradiction within feminist criticism lies in their acknowledgement that Mrs. Morel can both be victimized by patriarchy and exercise power over her sons. Marxist theorists have replaced the focus on individual psychology with class conflict and industrial alienation. Paul's split loyalties are viewed as a product of late Victorian capitalism. In which family is an emotional compensatory unit in a context of economic insecurity. Mrs Morel's dedication to her sons' social advancement is actually a maternal aspiration and ambition.

The recent approaches to the text go beyond traditional understanding, and they explore how maternal love can be a form of coercion and emotional colonization. These approaches view Mrs. Morel's love as an internalized mechanism of control over Paul's desires and identity. Here the son is emotionally colonized, and he is incapable of experiencing love in

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any other way. Such approaches allow critics to theorize the relationship between Mrs. and Paul as a form of intimate imperialism. Here dominance is exercised not through force or coercion but through emotional obligation and moral debt. Paul's failure in his relationships is not seen as a personal failing but as a result of emotional colonization by his mother. While the richness of the traditional criticism is undeniable, what is also evident is the relative absence of a discussion of maternal power as a colonial construct in relation to the realm of intimacy. The traditional criticism has not gone beyond maternal aspects. This paper attempts to do justice as it combines psychoanalytic theory and theories of power in a re-reading of *Sons and Lovers* as a novel of emotional colonization rather than familial strife.

This study makes use of interdisciplinary methodology. It utilizes textual analysis in the light of psychoanalysis and postcolonial theories of power. Psychoanalytic theories are helpful in understanding the nature of attachment, repression, and guilt. Michel Foucault's theory of power is an internalized force without the use of force. Edward Said's theories of hegemony help to understand dominance in the guise of benevolence. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theories of silenced agency help to understand the subject's state when agency is pre-empted by paternal or maternal authority.

The emotional hold Mrs. Morel exercises over her son is rooted in the failure of her marriage. Lawrence's description of Mrs. Morel is really shocking and negative. Lawrence writes her nature: Gertrude resembled her mother in her small build. But her temper, proud and unyielding. She had from the Coppards (Lawrence 7). She is disillusioned by her husband Walter Morel's alcoholism, emotional lack of sophistication, and lack of responsibility. She displaces her affections from her husband to her sons. Lawrence writes about when Paul feels that he has affection for Miriam but his mother doesn't approve to it. When Mrs. Morel says in the novel: She frankly wanted him to climb into the middle classes, a thing not very difficult, she knew. And she wanted him in the end to marry a lady (Lawrence 256). Here it becomes quite clear how she transfers her affections to her son Paul. The son becomes the object of her unrealized desires and affections. Her affections, therefore, are displaced. The intensity of her affections is further revealed by Lawrence: "I believe you are jealous that you can't swank as well" (Lawrence 334). The word 'jealous' shows the shift from nurturing to possession. That is how emotional colonization comes into existence. This study argues that the reality of intimate imperialism in *Sons and Lovers* cannot be understood without Mrs. Morel's marital failure and her emotional displacement. It combines to create a compensatory world of power within maternal love. The unhappy marriage of Mrs. Morel is a cause of her relationship with her sons. Without the emotional support, intellectual companionship, and marital respect, Mrs. Morel channels her unfulfilled desires into her sons, especially Paul, creating a world of home and family as a compensatory world of power. Marital failure is the first cause of dislocation, which undermines the moral equilibrium of affection. Mr. Morel's emotional failure and incompatibility with his wife drive Mrs. Morel into a psychological isolation from which motherhood becomes a refuge and a weapon. Her love is not enhanced by the presence of excessive affection but by the lack of it. Her lack of a

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fulfilling marital relationship becomes the cause of it. This lack leads to emotional displacement, whereby the sons become a surrogate for the husband's emotional needs. That is how love becomes possession.

Paul Morel goes through inner conflict throughout the novel due to her mother's displaced intimacy. That's why Morel becomes the object where Mrs. Morel concentrates her unfulfilled desires. Morel's romantic relationships fail because they are made to compete with the maternal bond. The novel, therefore, shows how emotional displacement not only creates an abnormal maternal authority, but it also creates an abnormal subjectivity for the child. That results in feelings of guilt, indecision, and emotional paralysis in adult relationships. Mrs. Morel's intimacy is, therefore, an act of survival within a world that denies her fulfilment as a wife. As Lawrence says: "Mrs. Morel loathed her husband, loathed him for days; and he went out and drank; she cared very little what he did, only on his return, she scathed him with her satire" (Lawrence 14). Lawrence doesn't seem to criticize motherhood; he criticizes the conditions that force emotional energies into abnormal channels. It creates abnormal maternal authority. *Sons and Lovers* shows how failed marriages and misplaced emotions result in an escalation of personal power dynamics in the family. Through this approach, Lawrence provides an interesting analysis on how emotional deprivation gives rise to the emotional empire and how failed marriages result in personal power structures in the family. Emotional colonization is defined as an appropriation of another's emotional independence through dependency, guilt, and morality. Emotional colonization is different from other forms of domination, as it involves affection and self-sacrifice rather than force or coercion. Mrs. Morel's desire is portrayed: "At last Mrs. Morel despised her husband. She turned to the child; she turned from the father" (Lawrence 14). Here, Paul is portrayed as an emotional resource rather than an independent entity.

Paul's internalization of his mother's power is so complete that he allows feelings of guilt to direct his emotional life. Paul's conflicted loyalties lead him to confess: "Why was he torn so, almost bewildered, and unable to move? Why did his mother sit at home and suffer? He knew she suffered badly. But why should she? And why did he hate Miriam, and feel so cruel towards her, at the thought of his mother" (Lawrence 193). This zero-sum logic of emotional commitment is similar to the logic of colonial loyalty, where commitment to one power precludes commitment to another. Lawrence's text again underscores the persistence of maternal power: "You sit a minute, mother," he said, and she took a seat on a bank, whilst he sketched rapidly. She was silent whilst he worked" (Lawrence 123)

His mother's grip was still upon him, even when she was silent. Here, power operates without language, having become conscious. Michel Foucault's concept of power helps us understand Mrs. Morel's power over Paul: "Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes" (Foucault 39). Mrs. Morel doesn't prohibit Paul's relationships, but she establishes the emotional circumstances through which power operates. Foucault goes on to say, "The individual, that is, not the vis-a-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and

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at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect (Foucault 98). Moreover, Paul's emotional blockage is also a crisis of masculinity. He is unable to separate emotionally from his mother's authority and therefore is unable to reach emotional independence associated with adulthood. His masculinity is caught in a struggle between dependence and desire, illustrating how maternal power can arrest emotional development.

Both Miriam and Clara represent a threat to Mrs. Morel's emotional dominion. Paul contemplates when his relationship with Clara is almost over. He asks his mother: "Why don't I want to marry Clara or anybody? I feel sometimes as if I wronged my women, mother" (Lawrence 350). The concept of a rival's love represents a moral or spiritual evil. According to Foucault, knowledge is created by power; therefore, Mrs. Morel's perceptions represent knowledge created by domination. According to Freud, maternal attachment is a fundamental bond: "We learn from them that child's sexual wishes - if in their embryonic stage they deserve to be so described- awaken very early, and that a girl's first affection is for her father and a boy's first childish desires are for his mother" (Freud 275). Lawrence, however, takes this attachment beyond adolescence and illustrates how Mrs. Morel's resistance to emotional detachment creates dependency. Freud also explains how unconscious desires can continue to exert an influence throughout life: "Indeed, it is a prominent feature of unconscious processes that they are indestructible. In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten" (Freud 576). This phenomenon can explain why Paul is unable to form a successful relationship. Mrs. Morel's death does not free Paul: "Everything seemed so different, so unreal" (Lawrence 410). She was gone, yet he could not escape her. According to Foucault, power can persist even in the absence of a person wielding it. Colonization survives the colonizer. According to Edward Said, domination is a structural relationship where "The relationship ... is a relationship of power, of domination, of a complex hegemony" (Said 5). Mrs. Morel's emotional knowledge is what gives her power over her situation: "To have such knowledge of a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it" (Said 32). Spivak's statement: "The subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak 308). It can be applied to Paul's situation, where he wants, but the words that express his emotions are not his.

*Sons and Lovers* emerges as Lawrence's most subversive work on the politics of intimacy in dominance cultures when it defines maternal love as emotional colonization. Paul's emotional space is colonized, autonomy is subverted, and independent selfhood is silenced by Mrs. Morel's love, which is the result of poverty and frustration. Said's definition of hegemonic possession, Spivak's dramatization of silenced agency, Foucault's prefiguration of internalized power, and Lawrence's appropriation of Freud's critique of attachment are all revealed in *Sons and Lovers*. Unabated love turns from nurturing to dominating. Being emotionally mature is about having the guts to give up, not how deeply you feel. It has been revealed in the study, maternal love in *Sons and Lovers* is not only an emotional relationship but also a sophisticated form of intimate imperialism in which emotional domination by Mrs. Morel over the emotional and psychological lives of her sons is revealed. This study extends its metaphor from imperialism to the domestic sphere. This study has focused on how

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maternal love, conventionally viewed as selfless love, can become a form of domination and dependency. Mrs. Morel's love towards her son is due to her suffering and marital disappointment. Paul Morel's conflicts and his troubled romantic relationships are because of his mother's dominance in his life. He is divided between loyalty to the mother and the need for independent selfhood. Mrs. Morel's role as an intimate colonizer is precisely a product of the failure of social and economic life, marriage, class, and masculine responsibility.

Moreover, the application of psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory to the novel creates a richer scope for its interpretation. The idea of emotional colonization, for example, makes it possible to re-imagine domestic relationships as sites of power, echoing the colonial theme of domination and resistance. Like colonial empires, maternal imperialism in the novel justifies its emotional domination through the idea of sacrifice and moral high ground. Paul's partial resistance, for example, through his artistic expression and longing for freedom, hints at the possibility of decolonization, although the novel's ambiguity implies that such freedom from intimate empires is very problematic and complicated. In conclusion, *Sons and Lovers* is a novel ahead of its time in addressing issues of emotional freedom, toxic intimacy, and care ethics. This study examines how maternal love has devastated Paul Morel's life. Lawrence presents a very modernist criticism of family power dynamics.

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