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An Explorative Analysis of D.H. Lawrence as a Novelist and a Playwright **(A Study of "Sons and Lovers" and "A Collier's Friday Night")**

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Abstract:

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) is celebrated for his exceptional versatility as a writer. His upbringing with incompatible parents profoundly influenced his creative expression. Lawrence's novel "Sons and Lovers" (1913) exemplifies his autobiographical approach, setting him apart from contemporaries by delving into autobiography and psychoanalysis. Similarly, his play "A Collier's Friday Night" (1934) draws extensively from his life, making it another autobiographical piece.

This paper aims to explore D.H. Lawrence as a novelist and a playwright. For this purpose, an in-depth analysis of his much-acclaimed novel "Sons and Lovers" and his play "A Collier's Friday Night" has been attempted. The examination of the two autobiographical pieces provides an opportunity to understand the literary genius of the author. It also is an attempt to establish the identity of D.H. Lawrence as a master playwright.

Keywords: **Autobiographical, Oedipus complex, Psychoanalysis, Naturalism, Symbolism, Realism.**

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) stands out as one of the most versatile and multifaceted writers of the twentieth century. His diverse talents encompassed novels, plays, poetry, literary criticism, short fiction, and travelogues, reflecting the true breadth of his genius. The roots of Lawrence's creativity can be traced back to his tumultuous upbringing, marked by incompatible parents and disharmony. Despite his

lifelong pursuit of happiness, it eluded him, leaving behind a restless soul that found its expression in his literary works, imbuing them with an autobiographical essence.

The objective of this paper is to explore D.H. Lawrence as both a novelist and a playwright. To achieve this, an analytical examination of his much-celebrated novel "Sons and Lovers" and his play "A Collier's Friday Night" has been conducted. Notably, both works share a significant autobiographical element.

Among his works, "Sons and Lovers" published in 1913 stands as an exemplar of Lawrence's autobiographical approach to writing. Revered as a landmark in twentieth-century literature, this novel brought about a significant shift by delving into the realm of autobiography and psychoanalysis, setting him apart from his contemporaries.

Lawrence's talent as a playwright only received its due recognition after his death in the year 1930. His play "A Collier's Friday Night" published in 1934 draws heavily from the writer's own life and experiences, and is considered an autobiographical piece of writing.

"A Collier's Friday Night" is a significant work in Lawrence's playwriting career and is known for being one of the first plays to employ naturalism in the drama genre. The play centers around the lives of working-class characters and explores themes related to family, relationships, and the struggles of industrial life. It offers a vivid depiction of the working-class ethos and presents a slice of life set in the context of Nottingham Collieries. The play's confined setting, taking place in the kitchen of Mrs. Lambert, creates an intimate atmosphere that adds to its sense of reality. Through the interactions and dialogue of the characters, "A Collier's Friday Night" delves into the complexities of human emotions and relationships, making it an essential work in Lawrence's dramatic repertoire.

"A Collier's Friday Night" showcased another autobiographical piece revolving around the themes akin to "Sons and Lovers." Lawrence's innovative use of naturalism in this play breathed new life into the subject matter. The autobiographical element remained an ever-present core in Lawrence's major works, whether novels or plays.

The seamless incorporation of this element hints at the artist being guided by an inner compulsion and spontaneity that captivates readers even today.

Middleton Murry's observation of Lawrence as a "tortured soul" for a considerable portion of his life rings true, as his writings became a medium for expressing inner suffering, frustrations, and emotional complexities. Thus, the essence of his work lies in personal revelations, with an autobiographical thread running through most of his creations.

"Sons and Lovers" and "A Collier's Friday Night" serve as remarkable instances showcasing the autobiographical aspect woven into Lawrence's works. Despite belonging to distinct literary genres, both pieces masterfully handle the same theme with equal skill and urgency.

The characters in "Sons and Lovers" and "A Collier's Friday Night" are clearly inspired by individuals from Lawrence's own life. Each character bears a connection to the artist's personal experiences. For example, in "Sons and Lovers," the parents Walter and Gertrude Morel mirror Lawrence's own parents, Arthur John Lawrence and Lydia Breadsall. Similarly, in "A Collier's Friday Night," the characters Mrs. and Mr. Lambert represent Lawrence's parents.

As previously mentioned, Lawrence's early life was fraught with discord due to his incompatible parents. This tumultuous atmosphere is also reflected in both "Sons and Lovers" and "A Collier's Friday Night." A fitting portrayal of Lawrence's mother, both Gertrude Morel and Mrs. Lambert, reveal her overbearing nature towards her husband, both socially and intellectually. The motherly figures were cultured and sophisticated women who were captivated by the physical charm of their husbands, leading to marriage.

Lawrence's personality was largely psychological, and he analyzed each life event at a profound psychological level, delving into the minds of his characters in the same manner. His early life experiences, particularly the powerful influence of his mother, affected his ability to form healthy relationships with other women he came in contact with. He sought to find an image of his mother in every woman he encountered, longing for a maternal connection that was vehemently resisted. This

psychological struggle was later coined as the Oedipus Complex, “which was a tragedy of thousands of young men in England (Moore 161).

In "A Collier's Friday Night", the play abstracts the Oedipal element, focusing on the conflict between the mother and the son. The mother's attachment to her son is so strong that she becomes possessive and apprehensive about him having relationship with other women. The son is acutely aware of this dynamics and expresses it to his mother.

Ernest: And you wouldn't care if it was Alice or Lois or Louie.
You never row me! I'm a bit late when I've been with them..... It's
just Maggie, because you don't like her

The mother also plainly admits this fact and says:

Mother: No, I don't like her....and I cant say' I do

(Lawrence Hienneman 524-525)

In Sons and Lovers, a similar dynamic can be observed as depicted in the triangular relationship among Paul, his mother, and Miriam. Mrs. Morel becomes jealous and resentful of Paul's intimacy with Miriam, leading her to prevent him from meeting her. When Paul returns late after spending time with Miriam, Mrs. Morel loses control and expresses her feelings, implying that Miriam must be incredibly captivating to keep Paul so enthralled.

She must be wonderfully fascinating that you can't get away from
her, but must be trailing eight miles at this time of night.

(Lawrence 199)

This conflict between the mother and son in “A Collier's Friday Night” arises from the mother's resentment towards the girl and Ernest's emotional desires. Looking at the failed relationships of both Paul and Ernest with Miriam and Maggie, respectively, one can conclude that both men unconsciously sought their mothers' image in the personality of every woman they encountered. Even though they become dissatisfied with their partners, their dependence on their mothers remains constant,

forming the central aspect of the mother-son relationship in both the novel and the play.

It's worth noting that Lawrence's heroes differ significantly from characters like Oedipus or Hamlet. Oedipus was ignorant of his situation until the truth about his relationship with his mother was revealed, leading to self-reproach. In Hamlet's case, his subconscious mind was deeply affected by his complex, and everything he saw was a harsh denouncement of his mother and her incestuous marriage with his uncle. On the other hand, Lawrence's heroes, such as Paul and Ernest, are aware of the presence of this complex within themselves. Despite their desire to get rid of it, they avoid deep introspection and self-examination that would lead to feelings of reproach. Lawrence seeks to faithfully represent the primal psychological dynamics without transgressing social decorum.

It is the technique with which an author discovers, explores and develops his subject matter. If on the one hand, 'naturalism' marks the play *A Collier's Friday Night*, on the other hand, 'symbolism' forms the core of *Sons and Lovers*.

In *A Collier's Friday Night*, naturalism is utilized skillfully and significantly, bringing in a sense of authenticity and realism in the events of the play. The readers, however, never perceive any artificiality in the actions depicted. On the other hand, "*Sons and Lovers*" cleverly incorporates symbols that seamlessly blend with the narrative, enhancing the novel's richness. Mark Spilka remarks –

The symbolic scenes are extremely literal and the symbols seem to function as the integral strands in the web of the emotional tensions. (78)

The titles, "*Sons and Lovers*" and "*A Collier's Friday Night*", carry great significance and have been chosen imaginatively. The central protagonist of the novel, Paul Morel, embodies both the son and the lover, suggesting that these roles are not distinct but intertwined. Lawrence himself admitted this connection in a letter to Garnett, where he mentions –

A woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class...but her sons grow up. She selects them as lovers first the eldest, then the second. (E.T. 32)

As the story unfolds, the relationship between Gertrude and Walter disintegrates after the birth of William. Gertrude, the mother, fights against poverty and distances herself from her husband while fiercely protecting her sons. When their father mistreats her, the sons stand up to him. The death of William deeply affects Mrs. Morel, and gradually, Paul fills the void left by his brother, assuming the role of a lover in their bond. Their connection is so strong that Paul seeks a motherly image in all the women he encounters, making it impossible for him to love any other woman in the same way he loves his mother.

"A Collier's Friday Night" can be classified as a thoroughly realistic and naturalistic play. Beneath its surface, the story holds a deeper symbolic significance. The central symbol of darkness, representing the pit where the colliers work, plays a crucial role in conveying the meaning of the play. Each character in the play either exhibits a preference for or an aversion to darkness. The darkness of the pit symbolizes sensuality, mystery, and the alien nature of their existence. It stands as a natural symbol, embodying the raw intimacy of the colliers' lives, lived intuitively and instinctively. This symbolism of darkness is intricately woven into the fabric of the play, which eventually culminates in darkness, despite the mother's attempt to dispel it with her candle.

In "Sons and Lovers", symbols are scattered throughout the narrative. The swing at Willey Farm symbolizes the love-hate relationship between Paul and Miriam. Paul's attitudes towards Miriam fluctuate unexpectedly, loving her at one moment and hating her the next. The swing's movement signifies the extremes of Paul's feelings and their inability to maintain a lasting connection. Another significant symbol employed by Lawrence is that of the 'flower.' In a scene where Clara is introduced to Paul by Miriam, they all walk in an open field and pick flowers. The way each character interacts with the flowers symbolizes their approach to life. Paul picks them mechanically, with a natural and direct contact. Miriam picks them lovingly but fails to

find happiness in it, seemingly draining life from the flowers. Interestingly, Clara refrains from picking any flowers, as she believes it kills them.

A similar symbol appears in *A Collier's Friday Night*, emphasizing the play's themes. The symbol of a rose, given to Ernest by a college girl, elicits different reactions from the characters. Some girls on the street are so drawn to the rose that they plead for it, and one even snatches it from Ernest's hand. Mrs. Lambert, however, reacts differently and avoids the whole affair altogether. Ernest's sister Nellie takes the rose for herself, claiming it as her own. Later, she goes to meet Eddie, whom she loves, but ultimately decides not to give him the rose and returns home. As the play unfolds, we hear Ernest singing.

Rose, red rose, that purus with a low flame, what has broken you?
Hearts, two hearts caught up in a game of shuttle cock.

(Lawrence Hienneman 528)

It should be noted that the rose serves as a dual symbol representing both the life force and the dark and dismal aspect of life. When the college girls give Ernest the rose, it symbolizes the investment of life force in him. On the contrary, the mother's rejection of the rose signifies her refusal to embrace this life force's rhythm. Nellie taking the rose indicates her affection for the life force and her hope to be with Eddie. The poem Ernest recites highlights the incapacity of both Ernest and Eddie to form a meaningful connection with Nellie and Maggie, which is the central theme in the play. Consequently, the rose symbol further adds nuance to the central symbol of darkness and the negation of life.

Upon closer examination of the floral symbol in “*Sons and Lovers*” and “*A Collier's Friday Night*”, it becomes evident that it represents the various characters' attitudes toward life. While both the works share thematic similarities, they belong to distinct literary genres. A novelist has the advantage of working on a broader canvas, allowing for more detailed exploration of scenes and episodes, as seen in “*Sons and Lovers*”. On the other hand, a playwright faces limitations due to the confined space in a play, like in “*A Collier's Friday Night*”. This leads to a more controlled portrayal of the events.

The difference between the two pieces can also be attributed to the techniques employed by the artists. In “Sons and Lovers”, Lawrence uses symbolism extensively and benefits from the ample space to depict various aspects of life through symbols like the Ash tree, swing, hens, and flowers. The style is elaborate in its treatment of these symbols. Conversely, in “A Collier's Friday Night”, the use of symbols is limited, with the rose being the most significant. The play's episodes are molded to unfold naturally, requiring less elaborate description.

The main drawback of using symbolism, as opposed to naturalism, in “Sons and Lovers” is that Lawrence delves into the symbols in such intricate detail that it often brings a sense of artificiality. This lead the readers to believe that the novel has deviated from reality. The setting in “Sons and Lovers” offers variety, whereas “A Collier's Friday Night” has a localized setting, taking place solely in Mrs. Lambert's kitchen. Moreover, the subtle and vivid descriptions bring the narrative closer to life and reality.

In “Sons and Lovers”, the writer’s elaborate descriptions at times appear poetic

—

Everybody was mad with excitement. William was coming on Christmas Eve. Mrs. Morel surveyed her pantry. There was a big plum cake and a rice cake, jam tarts, lemon tarts, mince pies, two enormous dishes. She was finishing cooking Spanish tarts and cheese cakes. Everywhere was decorated. The kissing bunch of berries hung with bright and glittering things, spun slowly over Mrs. Morel's head as she trimmed her little tarts in the kitchen!
(Lawrence, 92)

In contrast, the opportunities for elaborate descriptions are limited for the playwright in “A Collier's Friday Night” due to the constraints of it being a play which was meant to be performed. Instead of extensive narrative descriptions, the play relies on elaborate stage directions to set the scenes and convey the ambiance. Paradoxically, this approach contributes to a greater sense of realism in the play.

Nellie (continuing to read, her hands pushed in among her hair:
You can ask me properly.

(The FATHER pushes his beard forward and glares at her with futile ferocity. She reads on GERTIE COMMBER at the back, shifts from one foot to other, then coughs behind her hand as she had a little cold. The mother rises and goes out by door on right.)

Father: You lazy, idle bitch, you let your mother go!

(Lawrence Hienneman 478-479)

A charge is often leveled against Lawrence that his plays lack structure and form. But this is not true as for Lawrence writing a play was a spontaneous and delightful experience. Regarding this, once he wrote to Edward Garnett:

I enjoy so much writing my plays - they come so quick and exciting from pen-that you must not growl at me if you think them waste of time. At any rate, they'll be stuff for shaping later on, when I'm more of a workman....The plays I can rewrite and recreate. I shall love it. When I want to do it. (Huxley 90)

While “Sons and Lovers” is celebrated as a significant milestone in twentieth-century literature due to its autobiographical aspect and use of symbolism, “A Collier's Friday Night” stands as an unparalleled achievement in Lawrence's playwriting career. The play holds special significance as it marks Lawrence's pioneering use of naturalism in the genre of drama, bringing the narrative closer to reality and establishing its importance in Lawrence's body of work.

Despite the criticism and questioning of Lawrence's patriotism and morality, his undeniable genius left even his worst enemies in doubt about him. As an artist, Lawrence excelled at perplexing and provoking his audience, ensuring an enduring interest in his work.

Throughout our discussion, we have demonstrated Lawrence's versatility in prose fiction and drama. His works reflect the working-class ethos, characters, personal experiences, and his ‘religion of blood’. Both “Sons and Lovers” and “A Collier's

Friday Night” delve into the thematic area of Lawrence's early life and the Oedipus complex, but their choices of form lead to remarkable differences. “A Collier's Friday Night” embraces naturalism, absent in “Sons and Lovers”, which focuses more on the Freudian approach. While both works begin with vivid depictions of Nottingham Collieries, the working-class background of Lawrence's father, they diverge significantly in their themes and settings. “Sons and Lovers” leans towards Freudian exploration, while “A Collier's Friday Night” represents a drama of low life with a naturalistic setting and dialogue.

Lawrence's contribution to English drama was once overlooked, but new critics have begun recognizing essential connections between his works and post-World War II English literature.

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