

Gender Performativity in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

The present thesis explores Lawrence's Sons and Lovers from the perspective of gender performativity. The gender perspective is related to the idea of gender identity in the society. Gender is not a natural and predetermined category, but it is the result of what roles men and women perform. For instance, men are assigned the role as bread earners for their family whereas women are assigned the role of the caretakers of their family and their homes. For the investigation of Lawrence's novel, this research uses Judith Butler's concept of gender trouble and performativity of sex. This research concludes that this novel questions and attempts to subvert the traditional notion of gender roles. The novelist has provided traditional masculine role to a female character and feminine role to some men. On the one hand, a woman has become the head of the family and also is in contact with the outer world and on the other hand, a man performs feminine roles like taking care of family members instead of accomplishing brave deeds and is limited only inside his home. With this, Butler's claim gets various evidences from this book that gender is just the construction of our practices in the society.

Keywords; Gender, Performativity, Masculinity, Femininity, Subversion

This research is an investigation on the gender issue in David Herbert Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* through the theoretical perspectives of gender performativity. Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of man and woman that are created in families, societies and cultures. It is determined by the conceptions of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in the society. Judith Butler, in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, writes:

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free – floating attributes... the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. ... Gender proves to be performativity – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (33)

Likewise, gender performativity is related to the idea of gender identity in society, whereby certain codes of behaviour are according to gender. Which is learnt both consciously and ingrained unconsciously on the psyche of the individual, who is aware that they are performing a gender role but accept the gender identity assigned to them by their own behaviour or performance.

Going through Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, readers come across various questions and gaps. The questions can be placed at the way characters are performing their gender roles in various scenes of the novel. Some instances can be taken of the characters like Mrs. Morel (Gertrude Coppard), Mr. Morel (Walter), William, Paul, Miriam and Clara. During the reading of this text, the questions can be raised as do they follow the conventional pattern of gender role? Or do they challenge such stereotypes and establish a new way of dealing with gender performance?

These various characters perform their gender roles in different ways. Basically most of the characters do not follow the traditional model of gender role. In traditional model, males are supposed to play masculine roles and females are supposed to play feminine. But in this novel, on the one hand, Mrs. Morel demonstrates brave endeavours by becoming the head of the family. She is more beyond the boundary of stereotypical definition of feminine character. She performs manly behaviours in most of the cases. But on the other hand, her son Paul behaves

more in feminine pattern. For instance, he cannot make his good relation with both of his girlfriends-Miriam and Clara, but eventually comes to his mother and takes care of her by doing all of the household works. Dealing with the behaviours performed by other characters, Mr. Morel and Walter Morel perform masculine roles as they are a mineworker and a soldier respectively. Observing the behavioural performance of all major characters, it directly challenges is traditional model of gender role. And it is similar to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity which claims that no human being occupies the masculine and feminine quality and roles by birth. So, a female can perform masculine roles and a male also can have feminine roles. They are not predetermined.

A British born gentleman, D. H. Lawrence was born in 1885 in the Nottinghamshire mining village of Eastwood. He established a roomy fame in the universe of English literature as a novelist, short-story writer, poet, playwright, essayist and a critic. Lawrence, as a literary figure, belongs to the transitional period that oscillates between the Victorian and the early twentieth century England. During the time, England witnessed the widespread transformations in several fields. Especially, the occurrence of the First World War vitally demolished the established values, practices, thoughts and beliefs. "In and around 1910 December, human character changed" (Woolf 2). The psychological reality surpassed the earlier material emphasis of Victorian society. During such scenario, Lawrence's novel is written with extraordinary power because he has a strong morel honesty and courage to accept life with no pretence. Much of Lawrence's writing reveals the themes of sex and gender, human psychology and relationship, class-conflict, political turmoil, etc. Many critics have made up their minds to throw light on the works of Lawrence. David Daiches asserts:

Lawrence's aim is to project character and incident in such a way as force on the reader a radically new apprehension of the meaning of human personality and human relationships. And the assault is frontal, not through the slow and complex accumulation of moving moments whose total effect might be [...] challenging. In this respect he is more like Blake than any other English writer. (1166)

With this periphery, *Sons and Lovers* was also written to challenge the stereotypical notion of gender roles. The turmoil and changes of the era motivated Lawrence to establish a changed notion on gender that it is not fixed and predetermined as traditional beliefs claim. But rather it is based on how a person performs his or her behaviour. As a result, a man by birth does not acquire masculine and a woman by birth does not have feminine roles but it can be reversed.

Similarly, Daiches agrees with the fact that Lawrence has raised the issues like sex, human psychology and gender consciousness in his writings. He writes:

[...] in *Kangaroo* (1923), set in Australia and containing moments of brilliant insight in to Australian society and psychology together with passages transcribed straight out of his disputes with his wife and in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), set in Mexico, an unsatisfactory novel with its willed atavism and compulsive anti-feminism. With *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) [...] the possibilities of adequate human relationships in modern civilization [...] because of its frankness about sex, it remains the only one of his novels that most people read. (1166)

Daiches agrees with other critics to claim that Lawrence has raised the issues like gender and sexuality, socio-politics, emotional health, vitality and so on.

Lawrence, as a modernist writer, developed his own innovative modern writing with new pattern of gender perspective because he was interested in, as Alev Baysal quotes Schapiro, “profound institutions of life, which imply a radical revision of traditional moral ideas” (Baysal 191). Like many modernists, he offered a set of alternatives to the relationship between men and women by repudiating the traditional demarcation between them. Lawrence, although belongs to early period of modernism, his representation of the female characters as the nonconformist in the mode of evolution marks an initiation of modern gender studies of literature. It was ahead of its own time as Lawrence himself asserts, “art is ahead of the times” (113). His advocacy of change in his individual character echoes the ethos of modernism as a cultural and literary movement for the progress and change. Characterizing the distinct objective in his novels, Lawrence concludes, “as a novelist, I felt it is the change inside the individual which is my real concern” (*Sex, Literature and Censorship* 137). The portrayal of female characters in his novel always evolves in the pursuit of new being beyond any social restrictions.

The novel *Sons and Lovers* emphasizes the complex and complicated relationship between men and women. And also focuses on the issues of emotional love between children and mother, and also of sex and gender discrimination. In the novel, main character Mrs. Morel has become a victim of a patriarchal society but as a result of this she eventually becomes a rebel against it. She comes from mid-economic family background. She is portrayed as a woman of knowledge. Likewise from very young days of her, she has been struggling against patriarchal society, longing to become an authoritative, independent and responsible person. In the man-centered family her husband treated her sadistically and she also suffered financially, physically and mentally. So her love goes to her children’s side. She wants to make

her children more intelligent and give respect to women and wants to give good future to her children.

Sons and Lovers is a novel written by D. H. Lawrence in 1910 and published in 1930. It tells the story of Morel family during the early 20th century and depicts the working class family of England at the turn of the century. The novel begins with Gertrud Coppard who is twenty-three years old. She meets Walter Morel in a Christmas party and eventually falls in love with him. Later on, their relationship gets crowned by marriage. Their marriage becomes passionate and days go on with fun but only for three months. She realizes the difficulties of living with her husband's meager salary in a rented house. Considering their very different expectations in life, they seem oppositional characters. Mrs. Morel is religious, intellectual and educated woman on the one hand but Mr. Morel, on the other hand, is a miner, uneducated and a drunkard. Very soon after marriage, she gives birth to their sons William and Paul. Later Mrs. Morel turns all of her attention to her children. As a result, they perform very well in school because of their ambitious mother that derives them onward. William, the eldest, is ambitious. Mrs. Morel is very proud of him because he is the best shorthand clerk and book keeper in the area. Unfortunately he moves to London because he finds a lucrative job to assist the family economically. He gets married against his mother's wish but he falls ill and dies soon.

Paul, who is very talented and artistic boy, then takes William's place as the center of his mother's world in an abnormal close filial relationship, and this leads Walter to spend more time in pub. Mrs. Morel fails to make husband nobler as she wants but instead she succeeds in destroying him and turns him into a careless drunken man. Paul follows his mother around like a shadow, establishing himself as a special place in her heart. He hates his father and views life from her point of view.

He only wishes to earn a small salary and when his father dies, he dreams to have a respectful life with his mother through painting and live happily ever after. At the age of fourteen, he gets his job at a factory where he works 12 hours a day. As Paul comes into manhood, he develops his friendship and eventual love relationship with a girl named Miriam Livers, the girl from the Willy farm. Paul visits her home, teaches her math or sometimes he meets her at the library. But Mrs. Morel resents and disdains Miriam because she thinks that Miriam will snatch Paul from her, and this act of her restricts Paul from forming any successful and lasting relationship with other women.

Similarly Clara Dawes, another older sensual woman, enters Paul's life and another love story begins. Clara fulfils every need for Paul. Eventually, Paul meets Baxter Dawes, Clara's former husband, in the pub and they nearly have a fight. One thing always upsets Clara that she is in love with Paul who confesses that if he will be rich, he will continue his life with his mother in London happily. However, the excessive attachment of Paul to his mother again leads this stormy fresh relationship to end up because he realizes that Clara is not his soul mate. At that time Mrs. Morel is very ill and closed to death, since she was affected by cancer. Upon her death Paul feels nothing but a longing for his own death.

The novel emphasizes on the different issues of gender performance, different social classes and upbringings of characters. Here, the clash between Mr. Morel and his wife is therefore a conflict between two ways of life of working class people. It is very much a clash of personality. Mrs. Morel is social and rigidly immovable while Walter is more of a social animal who is quite content in his surroundings. Mr. Morel performs his gender through the rigid and traditional type of behaviour but Mrs. Morel does not like his conventional way of life because she is well educated and is from a capitalist family. Mrs. Morel is disillusioned with her marriage to Mr.

Morelshe yearns for a change in her husband, change that seems against the facts of the working class life. But Walter does not share Gertrude's sense of social identification. His class is not defined by ideal but by actual works. The clash in their relationship is due to their background, temperaments and sensibilities.

On the basis of psychological features human beings are categorized into two different genders men and women, and are accordingly assigned different social roles to be performed by them. These roles, in turn, help them to have different experience of life. In contrast to relative stability of sex, gender changes over time because of the changing social or cultural roles assigned to genders are constantly mould by the experience of the performance of those roles.

The specificity of gender is that the elision of sex with gender equates male with masculine and female with feminine. To put it in simple words, if the proper terms for sex are male and female, the corresponding terms for gender are masculine and feminine. Sex is dependent on biology but gender might be independent of biology and has psychological and cultural connotation. In this sense, sex is unalterable, permanent and biological in origin which refers to the physical differences of the body whereas gender is socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to males and females based on the perceived differences of the sexes themselves.

Biology is destiny concept of sex and it is taken for granted. Notion of gender have been challenged by psychological, sociological and critical theories and practices after 1970s. The advent of Post-structuralism, especially the works of Jacques Derrida, post-structural psychoanalysis of JacquesLacan and Michael Foucault's theoretical discourse on sexuality, have brought about a radical change in the discourse of sex and gender. Those challenges are continuously aided by new

theories and findings of sociology, feminist movement and literary criticism. According to Judith Lorber:

The concept of gender is constructed and explored by American feminists in the 1970s, particularly Susan Kessler and Wendy McKenna. It is only now, in the 1990s that a full-fledged analysis of gender as wholly constructed, symbolically loaded and ideologically enforced is taking place in American feminism. (5)

When it is established then it can also be 'undefined' or 'deconstructed'. Thinking that the social, cultural and political discourses and practices of gender lie at the root of women's subordination, feminists and others have understood the analysis of gender as necessary to the defeat of sexism and important to general social change. The traditional notion of gender functions to prioritize male sex superiority to female because of having masculine and feminine gender roles respectively. With the emergence of various modern and post modern theories it also got questioned. In Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* also the characters are given gender roles by not basing on their biological sex but it is reversed. It means a male is given the feminine role and a female performs the masculine role. In such a way this novel of Lawrence also contributes to challenge the traditional notion of gender.

Judith Lorber again argues that gender is "a social institution" (15). This 'institution' came in to existence with the rise of modern Europe:

With the eighteenth century, seaboard Europe and North America at least we can speak of a gender order in which masculinity in the modern sense-gendered individual character, defined through an opposition with femininity and institutionalized in economy and state-had been produced and stabilized. (Connell 248)

When the society got its gendered structure it began to produce the gendered system of dominance and power as well. She here focuses on the superiority of one gender and the marginalization of another gender. In normal traditional stereotype, femininity is subordinated to masculinity and as a result females are subjugated. But Lawrence has questioned this notion by providing the reversed gender roles to his characters in *Sons and Lovers*.

Mr. Morel is quite rough in his manner and words that is why his children hate him for his unfamiliar behaviour towards them. He becomes offensive towards members of his family. An instance for it can be taken as he says “‘I’ll lay my first about they y’ ead, I’m tellin’ thee, if thadosena stop clatter! Dost hear?’ (56). That is why:

He was shut out from all family affairs. No one told him anything. The children, alone with their mother, told her all about the day’s happenings, everything. Nothing had really taken place in them until it was told to their mother. But as soon as the father came in, everything, stopped. He was like the scotch in the smooth, happy machinery of the home. (56)

Morel is out cast from his family for his rascal manner. With such manner he does not dare to share his day’s happening in his family and to his children. He seems like a child who just likes silence but hates noise. Because of his manners children become more close to their mother and as a consequence, father constitutes a marginalized figure. Thus Mrs. Morel becomes the centre of her children.

It is said that gender is defined in term of binary opposition between masculinity and femininity. And it operates as a means but not as an end. Barbara F. Reskin notes that “if one set of difference is successfully challenged, another set will

take its place” (qtd. in Lorber 5). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also defines gender in terms of power differentials:

Compared to chromosomal sex, which is seen ... as tending to be immutable, immanent in the individual, and biologically based, the meaning of gender is seen as culturally mutable and variable, highly relational (in the sense that each of binarized genders is defined primarily by its relation to the others), and inextricable from a history of power differentials between genders. (28)

Gender performativity, it seems that in Judith Butler’s perspective which is performative in two senses: a) Gender as an “act” suggests that the essence or identity it expresses is contingent construction or fabrication; and b) The matrix of gender relation institutes and sustains the subject. Butler’s instance is that gender performativity is a repetitive act which serves to perpetually reproduce itself.

According to her:

Sex is not an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize sex and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (1- 2)

Butler also states that physical bodies are initially of “indeterminate gender and are destabilized further in the performativity of gender, as well as by race, class and sexuality. Which only serve to further destabilize the performative” (4).

In the first sense the essence of gender appears to be the sediment effect of repetition. Butler affirms “gender is repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a high rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43-44). Here we are reminded of Butler’s assertion that gender is the cause of gender, “[T]here is no gender identity

behind the expression of genders; that identity is performativity constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33).

These expressions of Butler are precisely reflected by the characters of Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*. For instance, Mrs. Morel has become the head of the family and performs brave deeds. She is not afraid of society people and her husband. She likes to raise questions to get her rights. So she performs masculine roles. But in another side, male characters are acting as very passionate, loving and caring. They take care of other family members. Paul cannot succeed his love affairs with two of his girlfriend. Throughout the novel, readers cannot get Paul doing brave deeds.

In the second sense, gender constitutes the subject as an effect. According to Butler, "gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect that very subject which it appears to express" (qtd. in Barker 246). Here we are encountered with the complex notion of subject, that comes into being in and through the deed as Butler has argued, "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed', but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in through the deed" (18). This variable construction of subject is necessarily sexed and gendered as Amy Hollywood has noted, "Butler argues that performativity is a kind of 'citational practice' by which sexed and gendered subjects are continuously constituted" (1). It means gender is the matter of performance which is continuously built. In the novel *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs. Morel's gender is continuously being formed as she performs various behaviours. In the beginning, she acts like a real female in traditional notion. But as the plot develops, she performs masculine roles. So Mrs. Morel's gender is not predetermined as feminine but it is constructed later as her performance. She executes masculinity.

Once it is established that gender is a copy with no original or it has no ontological foundation. The same applies to the gendered body as well. Butler writes,

“the gender body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (173).

But gender is not free from the expected standards of the given society or culture. For Butler, “gender is a performative with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genders are part of what humanizes ‘individuals’ with contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (qtd. in Gabriel 1). Person who fail to comply with the recognizable standards of gender are denied by cultural intelligibility through exclusion and objection. So in Butler’s view “persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (22).

We should bear in mind that the “body” comes in gender. The very process of gendering starts from the beginning of life itself: “Gendering begins parentally when amniocentesis reveals the sex of the child, it gets a gendered name” (Lorbor 40). But the irony is that this process of gendering is not human because the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the human. According to Judith Butler in her book *Bodies and Matter*:

The ‘activity’ of this gendering cannot strictly speaking be a human act or expression, a wilful appropriation, and it is certainly not a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all wiling first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relation is prior the emergence of the ‘human’. (7)

This clearly shows that the subject has subjectivated status that is the subject emerges only through its subjection which is generally known in Louis Althusser’s notion as ‘interpellation’.

When we accept that there is a matrix of gender relations that institutes and sustains the subject, we are argued to believe that the subject is subjected to gender where gendering is among other things, the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being. For its justification Butler argues, “subjected to gender, but subjectivity by gender, the ‘I’ precedes within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves” (7).

The subject as a social construct is an established assumption in Anglo-American enterprise of critical theory. In Foucault’s view power orchestrates the formations and sustenance of subject but for Butler “construction is neither a subject not its act, but a process of reiteration by which both “subject” and “acts” come to appear at all. There is no power that but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (9). To sum up, if gender is a ritualized form repetition, the performance required by the action of gender as in other social dramas is the constitutive of the performers.

The novel *Sons and Lovers* is full of acts that question the traditional expectations. Characters frequently perform different gender roles as per the demand of this novel. The view that “the gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the stylization of the body” (Butler, *Gender* 17). Likewise, in the novel the central character Mrs. Morel performs her role as a lover, wife and a mother but her husband is not happy with her because her husband comes from the conventional society. At the beginning of part of the novel Mrs. Morel performs her gender roles as a beautiful lover and wife but her feminine gender gets transferred into masculine with the movement of plot. She protects her children in her own side and

performs her masculine quality over her husband and sons. And Paul, one of the male characters performs his role with feminine qualities.

The novel entirely centres and moves around the struggle of women characters, particularly of Mrs. Morel, for their freedom and distinct identity in men's society. The female characters here fight more specifically to achieve their self-realization and individualization in the family. At first she has got very close relation with her husband but when she finds him as a drunkard and irresponsible husband, their marital relationship starts to ruin. She leaves him as she cannot move as her desire and turns towards her eldest son William. But she is greatly saddened by William's engagements to gipsy. She feels threatened and scared that William's future wife will take her place as the woman he loves most in his heart. So, she turns to Paul, her second son, for comfort and support. Mrs. Morel instinctively importantly she feels that her destiny and her dream will be fulfilled by Paul. She knows that Paul is capable of accomplishing all of her goals and her dreams.

Maggie Humm has offered that task of attacking on gender stereotypes of feminist because gender is the social construction where male roles always take the superior position either in society or in a family. As Humm claims, "Mrs. Morel has attacked on the traditional male dominated patriarchal tendency by keeping masculinerole over all her family members and marginalized father domination on her family". Due to Mrs. Morel's active role in family all her children are loyal toward her but not toward their father and all responsibility of the house are taken by her. Because of Mr. Morel's irresponsible guardianship in family, Mrs. Morel has provided the cool and safe shadow to her children and does not let them to feel the lack of good guardianship in the family. That is why Paul openly praises his mother to Miriam: "[...] see my mother looks as if she'd had everything that was necessary for her living

and developing. There is not a tiny bit of a feeling of sterility about her” (276). It also shows the performance of the female masculine nature. But to some extent, the gender identity in society and certain codes of behaviours are according to stereotypical patterns of gender.

Butler’s conception of gender performativity differs radically from what one refers to the common-sense view of gender. It is the view that claims:

Gender is in no way a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts processed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time [...] an identity instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and abiding gendered self. (9)

It is in the repetition of these gestures, movements and enactments that gender is constituted- albeit misleadingly- as a stable, essential identity or structuring principle.

Likewise in the novel, Mrs. Morel’s desires for such males who move according to her own will if she differentiates him and seeks for substitution. When she does not find her husband in the way of fulfilling her all desires, she begins to dislike him as if he is no one of her and turn toward sons whom she hopes can fulfil her desires. Here, she seems to be a caring mother and neglect her conventional husband which further becomes clear in her conversation with Paul about her husband:

‘Where’s my dad?’ Said William, coming from school.

‘He says he’s run away,’ replied the mother.

‘Where to?’

‘Eh, I don’t know. He’s taken a bundle of blue handkerchief, and says he’s not coming back.’

‘What shall we do? Cried the boy.

‘Eh, never troubled, he won’t go far.’

‘But if he doesn’t come back,’ wailed Annie.

And she and William retired to the sofa and wept. Mr. Morel sat and laughed.

(40)

This conversation depicts Mrs. Morel’s negligence toward her husband after she finds him not moving on her path. Now, she has become too much selfish and neglects her husband that leads him to leave his own family and house. But neither she worries about her husband nor cares her sons’ love towards their father. William weeps on sofa where as Mrs. Morel sits and laughs mercilessly because she has got her sons who are always ready for fulfilling her each and every wish.

In the discussion of gender performance, Butler argues that it is “a performance of gender norms but then taking it away by function of the constant treatment as merely tools for the sexual and emotional gratification of the people” (Gender 56). But in the novel, it is not seen as a sexual and emotional relationship. Here, a woman properly performs the role of a mother and she is constantly required to fulfil the needs of her child above her own will treating herself as an object through which the emotional and physical needs of the child are met. The irresponsible father, Mr. Morel, has given chance to perform her active gender role for Mrs. Morel to be more responsible and active in family. It is so because if Mr. Morel was active in his family and manage everything and everyone carefully and responsibly, Mrs. Morel wouldn’t have got any chance of doing so. And also she would have not been able to show her masculine gender role in the family. So the very act and behaviours of Mr. Morel is the main cause of the emergence of Mrs. Morel’s masculine roles and Mr. Morel seems irresponsible in various ways.

Similarly, Butler argues in her book *Gender Trouble* “performativity is not a singular acts but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood in part as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (15). Here, in this novel also, Mrs. Morel performs her repetitive acts as a mother, housewife and a family guardian. The reason of these repetitive acts is her irresponsible and conventional husband Mr. Morel as shows his performance is very irresponsible guardian of his family. In the conventional model of the gender roles of man, he needs to be the saviour and guardian of the family. For him, beer and drunkard fellows are in his first priority of his life but not his wife and children. He just desires to have his free and enjoyable life by drinking with other miners and neglects his responsibilities toward his family:

The weekend was his chief carious. He sat in the miners’ arms until turning time every Friday, every Saturday, and every Sunday evening. On Monday and Tuesday he had to get up and reluctantly leave towards the o’clock. Sometimes he stayed at home on Wednesday and Thursday evening, or was only out for an hour. (16)

These lines illustrate the character of Mr. Morel as an irresponsible person. Mr. Morel’s irresponsibility towards his family stages Mrs. Morel’s masculine roles to wield responsibility for her family.

Similarly, Mrs. Morel performs good and loving behaviour upon her children. There was good conversation among them “The happenings, everything” (56). Through the means of conversation she is able to keep the power of unavoidable influence upon them unlike her husband because Morel’s conversations with them lack its mutuality. This is proved by his conversation with Paul after he wins a prize:

‘I’ve won a won a prize in a competition, dad’ he said.

Morel turned round to him.

‘Have you, my boy? What sort of a competition?’

‘Oh, nothing – about famous women.’

‘And how much is prize, then, as you’ve got?’

‘It’s a book.’ [...]

And that was all. Conversation was impossible between the father and another member of the family of the family. He was outsider. He had denied the God in him. (57)

Here, Paul is eager to share his happiness of winning prize in competition with his father whereas Mr. Morel is asking the cost of prize and when he knows it just as a minor thing his conversation stops. He seems to have interests only to the cost of prize but not with his son’s feeling. So, ‘he was outsider’ (57) refers he is marginalized in the family which means that Mrs. Morel is the fore of Morel family.

Mrs. Morel also dares to fight with her husband in order to bring him in proper track. She tries to make him responsible guardian from his irresponsible behaviour: “she fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfil his obligation” (14). So, her battle against her own husband for good care contradicts the traditional passive notion of women.

Her gender performance over Mr. Morel not only lies of economic sense and household activities but physically too her subjectivity over him is justified that can be known once when Mr. Morel beats William, a one years old child:

Mrs. Morel stood still. It was her first baby. She went very white, and was unable to speak.

‘What do you think of him?’ Morel laughed uneasily.

She gripped her two fists, lifted them, and came forward. Morel shrank back.

‘I could kill you, I could! She said. She chocked with rage, her two fists uplifted. [...]. His attempt at laughter had vanished. (15)

In this way she is active not only in managing the house and wining the favour of her children but also in battling with her husband. Due to her strong masculine gender in her life, she succeeds challenging the patriarchal rules and restrictions.

Besides, Mrs. Morel’s gender performance over her sons William and Paul is also remarkable. Due to the unavoidable loving influence of Mrs. Morel over William after he leaves home for London, he keeps his contact only with his mother behaving as if he does not mind his father and other members of his family. So Lawrence, by presenting William’s link with Mrs. Morel just from London, attempts to prove her skilful masculine role over him which Mr. Morel becomes unable to attain:

His letter came regularly once a week. He wrote a good deal to his mother, telling her all his life, how he made friends [...]. His mother felt again he was remaining to her just as when he was at home. She wrote to him every week her direct, rather witty letters [...]. Almost, he was like her knight who wore her favour in the battle. (70 – 71)

These lines indicate Mrs. Morel’s skill that keeps William close even when he stays in London far away from his home. Because of her loving influence upon him makes him to realize that being physically in London he is always with his mother in their own home. Her reply to him is a way to impose her subjectivity upon him, the line “he was like her knight” (71) refers him as a submissive child of Mrs. Morel that paves her to keep her same performance on him.

On the one hand her influence over William can be seen when he departs from home and her same subjectivity can be realized on the first meeting of William after he returns from London. In the text it presents the scene as:

He dropped his Gladstone bag and took his mother in his arms.

‘Mater!’ he said.

‘My boy!’ she cried.

And for two seconds, no longer, she clasped him and kissed him. Then she withdrew and said, trying to be quite normal:

‘But late you are!’

‘Aren’t I!’ he cried, turning to his father. ‘Well, dad!’

The two men shook hands.

‘Well, my dad!’ [...]

Then the son turned round to his mother.

‘But you look well,’ she said proudly, laughing.

‘Well’! He exclaimed, ‘I should think so – coming home!’ (73)

The quote above shows William’s formal relation with his father. Where as he takes his mother in his arms and the utterances of his words like ‘mater’ and reply ‘my boy’ refers that on one side- between mother and son- there is true intimacy. Here, through the means of kissing, she is attempting to keep her roles stronger on him and her proud laughter in association with her ego functions in keeping her subjectivity upon him.

Likewise, Mrs. Morel’s performance of her masculine quality also takes control over Paul. She desires to absorb his last drop of manhood and to make him puppet that moves according to her will. She wants to be the remote of the television whose name is more than Paul. In this regard, the narrator says:

She is not like an ordinary woman; [...]. She wants to absorb him. She wants to draw him out and absorb him till is nothing left of him, even for himself. He

will never be a man on his own feet – ‘she will suck him up.’ So the mother sat, and battled and brooded bitterly. (269)

These lines, referring her gender performativity upon males, assist to the extent that discloses her negative reflection. She desires to be an assertive woman. She likes to absorb Paul mercilessly till there is nothing left of him for himself. She is imposing her subjectivity upon Paul as if to make him her best puppet. She offends him deliberately in order to impose her influence over him. So, the author is depicting Mrs. Morel’s role together with presenting the negative stereotypes of female.

Mrs. Morel’s gender role performance over Paul seeks to control all his desires. Whereas Butler asserts:

Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate preciously to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep non-normative sexuality intact (Gender 13).

In opposition to Mrs. Morel, Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers* depicts another character named Paul who has got the ambiguous nature because by birth he is a male but his performance looks more feminine. Mrs. Morel does not like her son who chose his own way of happiness by himself. So that, to be happy he seems to get the permission from his mother:

‘My boy,’ said his mother to him, ‘all your cleverness, your breaking away from old things, and taking life in your own hands, doesn’t seem to bring you much happiness.’

‘What is happiness!’ he cried, ‘It’s nothing to me! How am I to be happy?’
(224)

This controlled happiness of Paul refers how his every step is directed by his mother. Blackmailing and loving are two mighty weapons of Mrs. Morel to keep Paul on her own control and to create boundary upon his free-floating desires.

On the other hand, Paul performs his role as ambiguous and drag or transvestite role. This role is most typical of gender parody which plays upon the distinction between the exterior and the interior as Judith Butler has argued, “the performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of performed” (Gender 175). The performance of drag does away with the ineluctable relationship between the appearance and the reality. Esher Newton remarks:

At its most complexes, [Drag] is a double inversion that says, “Appearance is an illusion.” Drag says... “My ‘outside’ appearance is Feminine, but my essence inside [the body] is masculine.” At the same time it symbolizes the opposition inversion: “my appearance ‘outside’ [My body, my gender] is masculine but my essence ‘inside’ [myself] is feminine. (qtd. In Butler, Gender 174)

These lines depict the transitive behaviour of Paul where he is in relation with two girls but later he does not accept these relationships because of his drag and ambiguous role.

In his novel *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More says that women can marry at eighteen, men at twenty two. This fact is properly known by Paul who is now twenty four but is still unable to marry. His gender is masculine but he performs like a female. He can do nothing beside thinking and talking about his marriage. Once, on his matter Paul discusses with Miriam:

‘Sir Thomas more says one can marry at twenty four.

She laughed quaintly, saying’.

‘Does it need Sir Thomas More’ sanction?’

No but ought to marry about then,

‘Ay, she answered brooding,’ and she waited.

‘I can’t marry you,’ he continued slowly. (244)

Here Paul performs his inability to marry with Miriam still in proper age as referred by Sir Thomas More. He becomes unable to marry due to his feminine and ambiguous nature. When Paul becomes with his mother, time and again he is drowned into the deep intimacy with her. This is no more than her unavoidable influence upon him:

‘What do you want to be?’ his mother asked.

‘Anything.’

‘That is no answer,’ said Mrs. Morel.

[...] his ambition as far as this world’s gear went, was quietly to earn his thirty or thirty five shillings a week somewhere near home, and then, when his father die, have a cottage with his mother, paint and go out as he liked, and live happy ever after.(79)

Here he keeps Mrs. Morel at the centre where as neglects his father. Here man himself is putting woman at the top of hierarchy. So, Gertrude Morel is successful in invalidating the patriarchal male-dominated tendency.

Lawrence seems nowhere to support male’s supremacy nor idealizes women in the novel for the characterization of female. But here in this novel, it goes in a different way where Mrs. Morel performs the masculine roles as she protects her sons from getting married and takes him into her own side. In front of his mother, Paul is again blind to his mother’s loving influence and expresses his deep feeling toward her:

‘I never will see. I’ll never marry while I’ve got you – I won’t.’

‘But I shouldn’t like to leave you with nobody, my boy,’ she cried.

‘You are not going to leave me. What are you? Fifty-three! I’ll marry a staid body. See! (214)

Here, Paul’s role does not seem under the traditional category of masculinity but he is acting as a traditional female. So the stereotypical notion on gender is questioned here with the feminine performance of a male.

Paul is unable to forget his mother even in the absence of her or in the moments when he is with his lover, Miriam. As he says:

Yes; but my mother, I believe, got real joy and satisfaction out of my father at first. I believe she had a passion for him; that’s why she stayed with him. After all, they were bound to each other.’

‘Yes,’ said Miriam [...].

See, my mother looks as if she’d had everything that was necessary for her living and developing. There’s not a tiny bit of a feeling of sterility about her.’

(276)

Without Mrs. Morel, Paul can do nothing because of his fearful and ambiguous nature and it is a feminine quality under traditional belief. After Mrs. Morel’s death Paul finds no worth of his romantic affair with his two lovers, Clara and Miriam. For him they are like stars of the sky of which Mrs. Morel is the moon. So, in absence of moon he finds no value of stars that is why he leaves them after all. He does not precede his relation with Miriam and he aborts his relation with Clara. He helps to make the misunderstanding clear between his girlfriend Clara and Baxter. And in such, he farewells to them:

‘Ay – well – ‘said Dawes.

‘Goodbye,’ she said to Clara.

‘Goodbye,’ she said, giving him her hand. Then she glanced at him for the last time, dumb and humble. (355)

The expressions which are contingent constructions are produced and regularized by the normative discourse. Butler admits, “Gender acts, gestures, enactments generally constructed are performative in the sense that essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express be fabrication manufactured and sustained through corporal signs and other discursive means” (173).

Those discursive fabrications are constrained or compelled in the service of gender coherence by the practices of normatively as Judith Butler has argued, “The substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysic of substance, gender proves to be performative - that constitutes the identity it is purported to be” (33). In other words, gender is the matter of performance. How a person performs his/her behaviour determines the gender of the person. So it is not predetermined that who has got masculine roles and who has got the feminine.

Lawrence ended his novel is Paul’s whispering for death of his mother who held him up and desires to be closer with his mother. Moreover, he takes no direction of his life after her death because he becomes trackless:

‘Mother!’ he whispered – ‘mother’

She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this [...]. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her.

But no, he would not give in. turning sharply; he walked towards the city’s gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not

take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly. (366)

The novel, ending with Paul's uncertainty after Mrs. Morel's death, shows women's gender roles over man and it also indicates behind the trackless life of man. So that Paul becomes blind and passive throughout his life only depending on his mother and when mother dies he becomes careless, trackless in his life. Here, the traditional gender role is challenged and reversed. In traditional belief, if a man dies a female becomes helpless. But in the novel, it is exactly reversed that in the death of a female, a male is feeling difficulty for living. The very soft nature of Paul here subverts the traditional notion that gender is fixed and predetermined. A male here does not have masculine roles but it is with a female.

Through the novel, different characters perform their gender roles regardless of their sex in various ways. First of all, Mrs. Morel performs her role as a beautiful lover, capitalist and charming lady and becomes a wife of conventional and drunkard husband. She also performs her roles as inferior woman than man in her house. Likewise, Mr. Morel performs his role as a coal miner, conventional man, irresponsible husband and a careless father. Later, Mrs. Morel comes at the centre due to her education, knowledge, minute understanding of her surrounding and also of her middle class origin. She performs masculine gender roles against and by challenging her irresponsible husband and conventional patriarchal male dominated society.

She attacks her husband's position in her house and preserves good and loving relationship with her children due to her well known behaviour. In this novel, it is shown that female characters can also be active and decisive who even can control and regulate male members. Mrs. Morel's relations with those male characters like William, Paul and Mr. Morel can be taken as the evidence for the abovementioned

statement. By making depiction of these patterns of relation, the novelist shows women who are being capable of subverting traditional patriarchal gender roles with their merciless, selfish, seductive and opportunist natures. For example, Mrs. Morel's roles can be said masculine when she manages her house with little amount of money and becomes more successful in such activities in comparison to her husband.

In the same way, Mrs. Morel's performance of her role is more forward than her drunkard and irresponsible husband in providing good guardianship to her children and in running the family properly. Moreover in the case of necessity, she is able to fight, defeat and keep her husband on proper track. She can keep her sons William and Paul within her control and make them move around her commands and desires. Hence, the novel *Sons and Lovers* presents the gender performativity through the characters tasks, functions, behaviours and roles attributed to man and woman in society.

All in all, if gender is considered as the repeated stylization of the body, a kind of becoming or activity and even a sort of corporeal style, then these character's identities both as a masculine and a feminine are constituted by the regularized and constrained repetition of conventional masculine and feminine gender norms. The repetition those gender norms congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance or materiality of these characters' masculine and feminine gender roles. Thus, Gender roles do not base itself on the sex of a person but rather it is just the depiction of the behaviour a person performs and demonstrates among society people as it is happened in D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*.

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