

# The Exploration of the Rhetorical Motives in *Sons and Lovers* through the Perspective of Dramatic Rhetorical Criticism

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**Abstract:** The dramatism paradigm proposed by the famous American rhetorician, Kenneth Burke, is widely favoured in the field of contemporary rhetorical criticism. Based on Burke's theoretical framework of the "dramatic five-position", this paper analyzes the five elements of the three stages of self-formation, self-exploration and self-reconstruction of the protagonist, Paul, in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and their relationship ratio, revealing the repressed nature and complex psychology of the low and middle class in late nineteenth century in England. Paul's reverence for primitive human instincts and the pursuit of freedom criticized the aberrant emphasis on material civilization in industrial Britain at that time, invisibly exposing the writer's rhetorical motivations for his work.

**Keywords:** Five elements of dramatism; Rhetorical motives; *Sons and Lovers*; Primitive instincts; Aberrations

## 1. Background of the Study

The history of Western rhetoric can be traced back to the ancient Greek period, while rhetorical criticism has been on the historical stage for only 80 years. Contemporary rhetorical criticism presents a blossoming multiplicity of paradigms, among which there are more than ten well-known paradigms, such as neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, cognitive rhetorical criticism, dramatist rhetorical criticism, sociological rhetorical criticism and metaphorical rhetorical criticism. <sup>[1]</sup> Of these, dramatism is one of the most popular paradigms and is often used to analyse the rhetorical analysis of advertising interviews, news broadcasts, product launches and so on.

*Sons and Lovers* is a long semi-autobiographical novel written by the famous 20th century British novelist David Herbert Lawrence, based on his own experiences growing up. It is a thorny rose in the world of British modernist literature, and despite being Lawrence's most famous work, it was once banned as "indecent". It revolves around Paul's self-discovery of his upbringing and his perverse love affair with his mother and two lovers, reflecting the spiritual, moral and psychological transformation of the protagonist from ignorance to maturity. At a deeper level, it presents the contradictory conflicts between nature and civilization, countryside and industry, sexual instinct and social morality brought about by the alienation of human nature in the industrial society of late nineteenth century England.

This essay focuses on Lawrence's long novel *Sons and Lovers* through the perspective of Burke's dramatist rhetorical criticism. Admittedly, there are numerous studies of this classic modernist novel that have received mixed reviews. Yet it is more constructive and creative in its theoretical and practical implications than previous studies. Theoretically, the use of dramatist rhetorical-critical analysis has been limited to advertising, political speech and product launches, and there is a relative lack of research on the long and short story genres at home and abroad. This paper, however, extends the paradigm to the new field of the Anglo-American long story and offers new perspectives for subsequent scholarly studies of *Sons and Lovers*. The use of dramatic rhetorical criticism can intercept a long novel into a series of dramatic fragments, and the reader can enjoy the fragments while greatly distancing himself from the writer, thus gaining a more thorough understanding of the author's time period. In addition, this paper adds the theoretical framework of the "five elements of dramatism", which is undoubtedly a bold inheritance and innovation of the rhetorical analysis of dramatism.

## 2. The Five Elements of Dramatism

In the 20th century, Kenneth Burke, a leading figure in the field of rhetoric in the United States, drew on the essence of the rhetorical theory of Aristotle, the originator of rhetoric, and proposed that "rhetoric is the use of language as a symbolic device to induce cooperation in people who are by nature capable of responding to symbols"<sup>[2]</sup>. Burke then proposed the five elements of drama: Act, Agent, Agency, Scene and Purpose in his *Grammar of Motives*, arguing that "life is a stage, and all forms of human action and experience are dramatic forms. Dramatic rhetorical criticism aims to identify the hidden rhetorical motives behind discourse through a dramatic analysis of discourse, a way of thinking about and commenting on language or symbolic action as drama."<sup>[3]</sup> The "dramatic pentad" analysis has become one of the most commonly used paradigms of rhetorical criticism.

The second step in dramatic rhetorical criticism is to analyse the relationship between the five elements of drama, that is, to analyse the 'relational pair' (ratio). Because of different motivations, people have completely different ways of combining the five elements of drama in their speeches or discourses, so that they can express different attitudes and thus produce very different actions. The second step, therefore, is the core of the dramatist rhetorical-critical paradigm, which is to analyse how the rhetor has combined the five elements of drama. In different combinations, the five elements of drama can form ten basic pairs of relationships: scene-action, scene-actor, scene-end, scene-means, action-actor, action-end, action-means, actor-end, actor-means and end-means. If the positions of the two factors in each relational pair are swapped, another ten relational pairs can be generated.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 3. The dramatic five-position analysis of Paul's self-discovery process in *Sons and Lovers*

The novel begins with a description of the harsh conditions in the mines where Paul's family live, which in turn sets the scene for the dull nature of the lower and middle classes in England at that time and the repressive social context, setting the stage for the following narrative of Paul's struggle and the release of his nature. Whether it is the unfortunate marriage of Paul's parents, the Oedipus complex that haunts Paul's heart, or the tangled love affair between Paul and his two lovers, it is all due to the lack of spirituality in people's lives due to the confinement of the social environment.<sup>[5]</sup> The three female characters in *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs Morel, Miriam and Clara, are all guides on Paul's journey of self-discovery and self-redemption. The author's choice of characters is so precise and clever that if one of them had not succeeded, the trajectory of Paul's life would have been altered and his self-redemption would have failed.

### 3.1. Self-growth Stage

Mrs Morel's love for Paul is aberrant, which leads to a reverse aberrant love for Paul. As a result of the misfortune of her marriage, which was based entirely on a physical union, Mrs Morel pinned her absolute hopes on her own children, which became particularly evident after the death of her eldest son, and her high hopes for her second son, Paul, slowly evolved into possession and control of him. Paul, who has been indoctrinated as a child into the world of celebrity, begins to feel suffocated and desperate to break free of his mother's repressive love as he develops a sense of self.

Example one:

"Shall we go, Mum?" He said.

Mrs Morel stood up as the waitress passed by.

"Currant tart, please." Mrs Morel said meticulously. The waitress looked around rudely.

"Right away." She said

"We've waited long enough." Mrs Morrell said.

In a few moments the girl brought the pie and Mrs Morel coldly asked her to settle the bill. Paul wanted to burrow into the ground; he admired his mother's toughness. He knew that the years of struggle had taught his mother to rise up in anger for her few rights, otherwise she was as timid and fearful as he was.

<i>Terms</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
<i>Scene</i>	<i>Mother and Paul sit in a seemingly cheap restaurant and are neglected by a waitress</i>
<i>Actor</i>	<i>Paul</i>
<i>Act</i>	<i>Witness Mother's strength and try to break free</i>
<i>Means</i>	<i>Paul feels embarrassed and even humiliated at the Mother's checkout</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Leave the restaurant quickly</i>

*Figure 1: Dramatic Five-position (Example one)*

The above is a short clip of Paul when he is just entering society. In *Figure 1*, it is easy to see that one of the five elements of dramatism, 'purpose', is particularly important. Paul appears to admire the toughness with which he witnesses Mrs Morrell dealing with the waitress and sympathizes with his mother's constant struggles in her marriage and life over the years. More than anything else, however, he is disgusted by his mother's rudeness and brutality, and therefore wants to "go under the ground" and "thank God for being outside". As a child, he would have thought his mother was great, but as he grew older and more self-conscious, he resisted her overbearing temper and longed to break free from her, so his aim was clear: to get out of the restaurant as quickly as possible. With the help of the "purpose-action" pair we can easily derive Lawrence's rhetorical motive: through the small everyday scene of a mother and son ordering food in a restaurant, it is mapped onto the domestic chores of the British industrial society at that time, making the reader appreciate the confinement and stubbornness of people's minds at that time, and highlighting his mother's The restraint of the mother is the trigger for Paul's two confusing love lives, which drives the development of the plot.

### **3.2. Self-exploration Stage**

Paul is still a young boy, newly initiated into the world, with a repressed life and the perverse love of his mother, Mrs Morel. He is overwhelmed by the first love of his life. He and Miriam, who is supposed to be a perfect match, drift apart because of her spiritual quest to be like Mrs Morel. Paul also chooses a lower-class woman named Clara in his second love affair, and the physical satisfaction that he has never had with Miriam is echoed in her in an orgiastic way.

Example two:

The Thursday night meeting at the farm was equally valuable to her and to him, yet it ended without a hitch. He painted himself instead. Mrs Morel snorted with satisfaction at this. He did not admit that the two were lovers. They were close, and that closeness had been maintained on a spiritual level. So he felt smugly that this was purely a platonic friendship. Thereby denying that there was anything beyond friendship between the two.

"We're not lovers, we're just friends." He said to her, "We know ourselves just fine, let them talk nonsense." Sometimes the two would walk together and she would coyly hold him. But he was always unhappy about it, which she understood, because every time it happened he was conflicted. It was as if he had heard his mother's raw scolding too.

<i>Terms</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
<i>Scene</i>	<i>appointment at Willie's Farm</i>
<i>Actor</i>	<i>Paul</i>
<i>Act</i>	<i>Reject Miriam's indirect advances and state that they are just friends</i>
<i>Means</i>	<i>Upset that Miriam is holding on to him</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Maintain their friendship and keep his mother from reprimanding</i>

*Figure 2: Dramatic Five-position (Example Two)*

After meeting Miriam, a like-minded person, Paul's feelings for her are beginning to unfold. However, Paul tries to maintain a simple friendship with Miriam in order not to disappoint his mother with the misconception that he is about to be lost. With Miriam's platonic advances on one side and his mother's monstrous love affair on the other, Paul's inner conflict has reached its peak. The choices he makes at this turning point in his formative journey will certainly change the course of his life.

In this case, shows in *Figure 2*, the setting is cleverly chosen, Wylie's Farm, a social environment removed from the industrial context of England at the time, with its few big capitalists and mass machinery. The alienation of industrial civilization brought about countless victims, including Paul's

father, an ordinary worker who toiled like a mole in the darkness of the coal mines. The choice of the farm implies the essence of the relationship between Paul and Miriam, namely the rejection of the material and the pursuit of the spiritual world, which runs counter to the views and values of the Morel women and the wider context of the times.<sup>[6]</sup> Paul treats his hazy love affair with an inner yearning, while the aim of avoiding his mother's reprimand and disappointment makes him choose to reject Miriam's advances. By combining Paul's conflicting psychological feelings with the two relational pairs of 'scene-purpose' and 'purpose-action', Lawrence's rhetorical motive is revealed: through Mrs. Morel's control of Paul's The twists and turns of the love affair between Paul and Miriam under the control of Mrs. Morel's mind highlight the resistance to Platonic love and the rejection of spiritual civilization in English industrial society, and to a certain extent also satirize the limitations and stagnation of the times.

Example three:

When they reached the hill of Penichech, Clara leaned on him. The two walked close to each other. His hand slid over and wrapped around her waist. Her body swayed in his arms with the pace. Gradually, the tension that Milan had brought to his chest disappeared and the hot blood rushed back. He held her tighter and tighter.

Then, calmly, she said, "You're still seeing Milan."

"Just talking. Otherwise we would have been married long ago. But it's over!"

His voice was suddenly filled with intense hatred.

"If I were with her, I'd be talking about some religious odyssey right now, not as happy as I am with you!"

<i>Terms</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
<i>Scene</i>	<i>The Rendezvous at Penichech Hill</i>
<i>Actor</i>	<i>Paul</i>
<i>Act</i>	<i>Intimate gestures towards Clara</i>
<i>Means</i>	<i>Complain that Miriam can only communicate with him spiritually</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>The pursuit of physical pleasure</i>

*Figure 3: Dramatic Five-position (Example three)*

Paul's first love is stifled by both his mother's disapproval and self-doubt. With expectations of his mother, or resentment towards his girlfriend Miriam, Paul's spiritual search fails and he tries to regain his life in the flesh. He finds Clara, who is also in need of physical comfort, and the tenderness of this lower-class woman gives Paul a pleasure he has never experienced before. But it is also through his encounter with Clara that Paul has a true epiphany in his relationships and in his life.

The scene chosen in figure 3, the Punchbowl, once again shows the subtlety of the choice of setting. The Penchechi Hills, a valley suffused with romance, is at one point in the text considered a symbol of freedom. Inquiring into the purpose of Paul and Clara's love affair, it is easy to conclude that Paul chooses the latter between the spiritual and the physical, and chooses a carnal rather than a spiritual union with Clara out of spite for Miriam. The choice of the 'scene-purpose' pair not only reflects the romantic nature of Paul and Clara's dating and union, but also represents the struggle of young people against the confines of British industrial society and the reverence and pursuit of human sexual instinct. The reasons for Paul's choice of Clara as his physical partner are mainly due to the confinement of social thought and the constraints of his mother and Miriam.<sup>[7]</sup> By means of the relationship pair 'means-action', we can feel the pleasure of Paul, who enjoys the freedom of his emotions, and we can also draw the rhetorical motive of the writer Lawrence in designing this episode: to contrast the process of Paul's relationship with two girls of different levels of emotional pursuit, the former's restraint and constraint, the latter's intimacy and The rhetorical motivation for this episode is to contrast the constraint and constraint of the former with the intimacy and naturalness of the latter.

### **3.3. Self-reconstruction stage**

After experiencing two very different relationships, Paul's self-ideology reaches a real sense of reconstruction and redemption around the time of Mrs Morel's death. Seeing his formerly strong mother so weak and helpless at her bedside, Paul does not want to see her suffer from her illness and secretly injects morphine to hasten her death and the real maturation of her mind. Paul began his true life free from the constraints and control of his mother.

Example four:

He stood and looked out of the window. The fields were covered in snow, a cold and lonely place. He touched her arm, one strong and one weak, as if it were an echo. It was said that such a pulse was only for those who were dying. She let him touch her wrist, knowing in her heart exactly what he was thinking. Her body had decayed to the point of ashes, and her eyes were black with torment.

"Can't you just give her something to eat and get it over with sooner?" He eventually asked the doctor.

Terms	Descriptions
Scene	At the bedside of his dying mother on a snowy day
Actor	Paul
Act	Look out of the window while fidgeting, stroking his mother's wrist
Means	Ask the doctor for Mother's early relief
Purpose	To free Mother from her illness and to start a new life for himself

Figure 4: Dramatic Five-position (Example four)

Above is a snapshot of Paul at Mrs Morel's bedside during her last days. The use of the 'scene' element of the snowy day in Figure 4 creates a bleak and desolate atmosphere, underlining Paul's despondency and sadness at this time, and setting the scene for the following account of his mother's imminent death. This relationship pair also points to the fact that Paul sees his mother, who is no longer strong at her bedside, and pins his best hope on her early release. The mother, who was still so strong, is still an insignificant presence in the face of the illness. Paul realizes that his personal love for his children is very humble in the face of the evolution of nature, so he comes to terms with the monstrous love he once had for his mother, Miriam and Clara, and longs to start living a normal life again. We can also see the author's rhetorical motive, which is to embody Paul's redemption and reconstruction of himself through the rendering of scenes, and to suggest the author's affirmation and praise of the inevitable coming of liberation of the mind in the context of British industrial society.

#### 4. Conclusion

Lawrence's controversial work *Sons and Lovers* has been the subject of mixed reviews by different critics throughout the ages. The text is not obscure, but can be read over and over again with a different flavour. The rhetorical motive behind the analysis from the perspective of dramatist rhetorical criticism can be derived: Lawrence's extensive use of ink to link multiple imagery and the clever choice of scenes, through the depiction of Paul's self-discovery, reveals the confinement of thought and even the lack of sexuality in the context of early 20th century British industrial society, calling for the liberation of feelings and sexuality. Kenneth Burke's dramatic rhetorical criticism applied to the long British and American novel could be considered a new attempt to confirm the theory's utility in exploring the motives behind rhetoric.

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