

## **Estrangement between the Father and the Son: Causes and Consequences in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments***

*Faten M. Adi, Mahmoud Al-Shetawi \**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims at identifying the nature of father-son estrangement in nineteenth-century British family exemplified in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*. This study departs from the psychoanalytical perspective and examines father-son estrangement in the light of the concept of patriarchal authority and its socio-cultural implications in the nineteenth-century British society. It also focuses on the impact of evolutionary theories on the Victorian society, in the sense that with the emergence of evolutionary theories all taken-for-granted ideas, authorities such as paternal authority, and institutions are put into question. The findings show that in Gosse's novel, the father and the son embody two separate islands; each one adheres to contradictory interests, conflicting principles, and life-choices. While the father tries to refashion his son's life according to the principles of self-denial, repression, and imposition of a religious vocation, the son is imaginative and skeptical; he pushes against his father's system of upbringing and adheres to instincts, imagination, and love of literature. The study also finds out that a life based wholly on self-restraint and life-denying religion is not balanced, because one's desires, instincts, and individual life-choices cannot be eliminated totally.

**Keywords:** Father-son estrangement, Paternal authority, Rebellion, Life-denying religion.

### **Introduction**

Natalie McKnight demonstrates that "fathers are key figures in any cultural period, given their biological and metaphoric significance" (2011). In the first place, fathers are known to be the breadwinners and the guardians of the family where rule and dominance remain central to man's sense of authority. Since the father holds a high status in the family, this suggests that he is associated with different connotations to name a few: law, discipline, authority, and at the same time benevolence, protection, and support. The father anticipates seeing his son following his track and even he intervenes in shaping his life. Understandably, the son, in his turn, is expected to fulfill the filial duty of submission and obedience to his father's authority. Sometimes fathers fail to be on good terms with their sons, thus their relationship is susceptible to tensions and cracks and the statement "like father like son" is relatively true.

The conflict between fathers and sons dates back to ancient times such as in Biblical stories and Greek mythology legends. Franz Kafka states that "The revolt of the son against the father is one of the primeval themes in literature, and an even older problem in the world" (1953). As a literary theme, Sophocles's tragedy *Oedipus the King* (*Oedipus Rex*) is one of the early works of fiction which dramatizes this struggle. This theme continues to fascinate dramatists from the time of Greek drama to the Elizabethan age, for example, William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606) all through the twentieth century. The plays of Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill, and Sam Shepard, for instance, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), and *Buried Child* (1978) respectively depict malfunctioning and strained

---

\* Faculty of Foreign Languages, The University of Jordan, Jordan. Received on 18/06/2017 and Accepted for Publication on 25/03/2018.

father-son relationships. The father-son conflict is not just manifested in drama, but also has been covered in the short story and in the novel by numerous authors from different national literatures to name a few: Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862), Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Ernest Hemingway's "Fathers and Sons" (1933), William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), "Barn Burning" (1939), and Ernest J. Gaines *In My Father's House* (1978). In the above-mentioned novels and short stories, there are different kinds of fathers such as the abusive-alcoholic father, the strict father, the absentee father, and the failed-mentor father. In these family narratives, disagreements and rivalries between parents and their children have ensued due to the influence of generational differences, psychological, ideological, and socio-cultural reasons.

### **Research Problem**

This study aims to examine the nature of father-son estrangement in nineteenth-century British novel namely in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*. This study departs from the psychoanalytic approach which often times interprets the conflict in terms of an Oedipus complex, in the sense that rivalry between the father and the child centers on the mother. The boy-child has sexual desires towards his mother with an accompanying wish for the death of his father. Sigmund Freud calls this love/hate relationship where the son wishes to take over his father's place "the Oedipus complex." The child's death-wishes, however, are repressed due to the fear of literal castration at the hands of his father. The boy then retreats his desires towards the mother and identifies with the father, the subject of the same sex (1900). Although the issue of the father-son conflict has received wide attention in psychological studies, this study provides another interpretation to the conflict in the light of the concept of patriarchal authority and its socio-cultural implications within the family in the nineteenth century British society. It also focuses on the impact of evolutionary theories on the decline and the questioning of all taken-for-granted ideas, authorities such as parental authority, and institutions such as religion.

### **Research Questions**

In our research, we examine the status of the father figure in the British society with particular reference to his relationship with his offspring and the way they are brought up. Thus, this study attempts to answer the following questions: what is the nature of father-son estrangement in Gosse's novel? What are the causes and the consequences of this estrangement or conflict? To what extent the father's interference in the life of his son impacts the development of good ties between the two? Gosse's novel is chosen for the purpose of this study because it demonstrates how a family problem at that time (mid-nineteenth-century) manifests broader social tensions and conflicting opinions exemplified in the conflict between science and religion, and between religion and art. In particular, emergent new ideas influence social structures at large and by extension affect family bonds.

### **Research Significance**

The significance of exploring this complex relationship emanates from the fact that father-son conflict has multifaceted aspects. It is not just a struggle for power, but it has also to do with ideological and intellectual conflicts and filial rebellion against parental control. It can be argued that Gosse writes about this familial troubled relationship in order to provide one facet of the nature of the conflict in the Victorian era. Through the character of Philip Henry Gosse, Gosse shows some aspects of inflexible paternal authority and rigid education. The latter whether based on the denial of

instincts and imagination or the imposition of religion at the expense of other secular elements can lead to the rebellion of sons and even to irreconcilable father-son relationships. This study, therefore, argues that estrangement between father and son in Gosse's novel ensues due to the conflict between the father's religious stiffness and the son's growing adherence and devotion to aesthetic inclinations. As such, the father and the son come to epitomize two antagonistic worlds where the father's strict conduct of his son's life and his dogmatic ideologies conflict with the son's own choices and interests.

### **Research Objectives:**

Novelists in the nineteenth century such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell covered various themes which ranged from depictions of changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, to class conflict, gender roles, and other socio-political matters. In addition to experimentation with the lives of different segments of Victorian society, they described interpersonal family relationships not just between men and women, but also between the children and their parents. In this respect, James F. Kilroy argues "To an even greater degree the nineteenth-century English novel concentrates on domestic affairs - on courtship and marriage, naturally, but on parent-child and sibling relationships nearly as commonly" (2007). A large body of fiction has been written about the family in the nineteenth century including Dickens's *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*, *Dombey and Son*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. This paper tackles father-son estrangement in Gosse's *Father and Son: a Study of Two Temperaments*. It reveals that the relationship between the father and the son is marked by ambivalent attitudes. It alternates between admiration and hostility whereby the sons' individual desires clash with his father's stern system of upbringing and education. In addition, the publication and the events of both novels correspond with Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The public debate and controversy between religion and science intrude the family circle in the form of conflict between reason and passion, between conformity and rebellion, and between transitions from tradition to modernity.

### **Research Methodology:**

To achieve the objectives of the study, this paper is analytical and critical because by means of close study it identifies the nature of estrangement between father and son which is reflected in their conflicting manners and attitudes towards one another, their opposing ways of thinking and beliefs, and how the son distances himself from paternal authority.

#### **I-The Authoritarian Father in the Nineteenth Century British Family:**

The family during the Victorian era was an "idealized" institution or social unit. Specifically, the middle-class family was the epitome of "morality, stability, and comfort." The father/husband is responsible for the economic and the social welfare of the family and in return the children should be disciplined and obedient. They are also expected to follow the track of their parents and they can pursue independent careers until receiving enough paternal guidance and supervision (Mitchell, 2009). Accordingly, the father's role in the Victorian or the nineteenth-century family is associated with patriarchy, authority, and paternal responsibilities. Likewise, Susan Kingsley Kent maintains that the father figure occupies a key place in the family where he "had complete authority over his children determining their domicile, the extent and location of their schooling, their religion, and their guardianship" (1999), this is the kind of relationship between the father and his son in Gosse's novel.

In "Writing Victorian Lives and Victorian Life-Writing: Gosse's '*Father and Son*' Revisited," Hermione Lee foregrounds that Gosse narrates his childhood story in a tone characterized by "tenderness and comedy, understanding

and resentment” (2003). These contradictory feelings are directed towards his strict parents and devout believers in the Bible whose mission is to remain uncontaminated by worldly temptations so as to nurture their only son on the path of religiosity. In effect, the Gosse’s family household is based on two extremes, the clash between dogmatic religious beliefs and repression of instincts and desires. (2003), consequently the relationship between the two ends in separation. Another study about Gosse’s novel “Heavenly Mother: The Trinity as Structural Device in Edmund Gosse’s ‘Father and Son,’” Nancy Baker Traubitz focuses on mother-child relationship and the significance of mother figures in the life of the protagonist. The three mother figures (the nameless life-giver, his biological mother, and his stepmother) help in influencing the development of the little child and functioning as mediators they help in lessening the father’s control over his child (1976). The scholarship on Gosse’s novel, however, is not numerous concerning father-son estrangement in the light of the concept of patriarchal authority and its socio-cultural implications within the family in the nineteenth century British society. This study also shows that the emergence of evolutionary theories contributes to the decline and the questioning of all taken-for-granted ideas and authorities such as parental authority.

## **II- The Conflict between Religious and Artistic Vocation in Gosse’s *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments:***

In his introduction to Gosse’s novel, James Hepburn points out that he is much recognized as the author of many books in the fields of poetry, biography, literary history, and criticism. Even though he is known for his only novel *Father and Son*, it has its own merits. It is the result “of his revolt against his father; they reflect his choice of this world over the next, his preoccupation with literature rather than religion” (1974). Firstly, the father and the son become at variance because they adhere to contradictory beliefs and different inclinations. Secondly, the father and the son’s different outlooks on life and opposing mindsets do not necessarily mean that they reject one another emotionally, but most of the time ideologically. The novel’s title clearly identifies the narrative’s central concern. The main conflict the novel exhibits is between two different mindsets and contradictory attitudes where the father imposes on his son a way of life and a vocation he finds hard to follow. Gosse opens his novel with an epigraph by the nineteenth-century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer that can be translated as follows “faith is like love: it cannot be forced.” The epigraph alludes to the gist of the story where the mature narrator, Edmund Gosse, looks back at his relationship with his stern religious parents. Then at the novel’s onset, the narrator familiarizes the reader with the nature of antagonism and conflict between the protagonist and his father, Henry Gosse:

This book is the record of a struggle between two temperaments, two consciences, and almost two epochs. It ended, as was inevitable, in disruption. Of the two human beings here described, one was born to fly backward, the other could not help being carried forward. There came a time when neither spoke the same language as the other, or encompassed the same hopes, or was fortified by the same desires. (Gosse, 1974)

This introductory quotation clarifies further the epigraph and sums up the chief source of estrangement which emanates from ideological differences, conflicting beliefs, and interests each character clings to and believes in. Simultaneously, this disagreement does not necessarily mean that the son abhors his father as a person or vice versa, but they disagree over life-choices, principles, and intellectual matters. In other words, the son tries to draw a line between his love and his admiration for his father and his opposition to his stern credos. In this respect, Hempton David argues “what gives the book its peculiar power is that Gosse is able to write about the evils of repressed childhood without appearing to lose all affection for the father who propagated them ... it is the father’s religion, not the father that is the real villain of Edmund’s childhood (2008).

The protagonist is brought up in a “Plymouth Brethren”<sup>\*</sup> family by religiously dogmatic parents whose faith in Scripture is the sole moral guide whom they believe in and depend on to manage their entire social life. T.L. Jarman maintains that “organized religion” was of central importance in Victorian Britain both to the society in general and the family in particular. He says “In the private house... family prayers were the rule, certainly among the upper and middle classes. Sunday itself was completely given up to religion, for no games, sports or entertainments were allowed. Even reading was confined to religious works, the Bible itself, or serious books ... produced for Sunday reading” (Gosse, 1974). In the same manner, religion is the main pillar of the Gosses’ system of education and life and through which they train their only son to be a devout child of the Lord. As such, Edmund argues that his mother wishes him to be “the Charles Wesley of [his] age”<sup>\*</sup> (Gosse, 1974). Indeed, it is Edmund’s mother, Emily Bowes, who first initiates the way how he should be raised by keeping him “unspotted from the world” (Gosse, 1974) and by looking cautiously after his intellectual and spiritual development.

In the Victorian middle-class, domesticity is not just based on a secured family atmosphere from outside influences and maintaining socio-economic well-being but also focuses on “moral probity, religion, and affection. Particularly in the first half of the century ‘serious religion’... was important to middle-class home culture” (D’Cruze, 2004). These precepts apply to the Gosses household especially the practice of “serious religion.” To raise their child in a perfect religious environment, the Gosses make their household like a temple or “a paradise so carefully guarded” (Gosse, 1974) where only faith, prayers, and readings of the Bible are prevalent. Their belief in the corruption and in the evil of the outside world leads them to live in seclusion and to cut off social ties with external influences. Confined in such restrictive atmosphere which is devoid of entertainment, freedom, and sociability, the little child is denied the pleasure of a normal childhood. The mature narrator/author then lists the following attitudes which characterize the life of his parents:

[P]erfect purity, perfect intrepidity, perfect abnegation; yet there was also narrowness, isolation, an absence of perspective ... an absence of humanity... My parents founded every action, every attitude, upon their interpretation of the Scriptures, and upon the guidance of the Divine Will ... They lived in an intellectual cell, bounded at its sides by the walls of their own house. (Gosse, 1974)

The Gosses’ entire submission and dedication to a life-denying religion which rejects secular activities affect their social life. Under this “strange household” (Gosse, 1974), therefore, Edmund is nurtured and whose ordeal is to conform to the religious conduct of his parents who dedicate their lives entirely to the service and to the will of God.

The Gosses’ strong attachment to religion makes them believe that whatever issue should be laid before the hands of God and accept His judgment without questioning. In this respect, constant references to an Omniscient God led Edmund to mistake his father with God in the sense that he has an infinite insight; he is all-knowing and all-seeing (Gosse, 1974). In another occasion, Edmund describes his father as a “fortress that requires to be stormed” (Gosse, 1974) because of his extreme scientific and religious views, his literal belief in the word of God, and his lack of imagination. Henry Gosse devotes much of his life to the study of natural history, maritime research, writing, and at the same time to missionary service and religious preaching. A critical moment in the life of Henry Gosse occurs during the year 1857. He attempts to settle down “the intellectual ferment” (Gosse, 1974) taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century through

---

\* A religious faction established at the beginning of the 19th century in England and takes its name from the city of Plymouth in Southern England. This brotherly fellowship or “Brethren” rejected an ecclesiastical arrangement and focused instead on the individual’s direct relationship with God. The major principles of faith are to be found in the Bible.

<http://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/about/>

\* Charles Wesley (1707-1788) is a Methodist preacher and among the most acclaimed hymn writers in the eighteenth century. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/charleswesley\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/charleswesley_1.shtml)

reconciling science with religion. In other words, Henry Gosse's dogmatic beliefs make him believe of a possible compromise between religion and science or between scripture and geology. Unlike evolutionary theories which suggest the mutation of species, Henry Gosse believes in the "fixity of species" (Gosse, 1974). His theory, however, has been a disastrous failure neither receives the approval of scientists nor that of religious men. This incident even leads him "to be angry with God" (Gosse, 1974) and to cling more to his narrow-minded views.

Despite this misfortune, Henry Gosse never gives up whether his scientific research or his severe conduct of his son's life. Edmund's tenth year, in particular, poses a great worry and concern to his father. He tightens and stiffens more his religious education in order to secure his son's spiritual and intellectual growth. Edmund comments on his father's efforts to raise him on the principles of godliness and incorruptibility as follows "He wished to secure me finally, exhaustively, before the age of puberty could dawn, before my soul was fettered with the love of carnal things ... if I could now be identified with the 'saints', and could stand on exactly their footing, a habit of conformity would be secured. He wished me ... to be received into the community of the Brethren on the terms of an adult" (Gosse, 1974). For Henry Gosse, the only way to bring up his son on the path of religiosity is to adopt him into the community of the Brethren after being baptized and passed the examination of membership into the communion of "saints." Ultimately, Henry Gosse's strictness does not soften; his interference in his son's life aims to bring him up properly so as to be a good "professing Christian" (Gosse, 1974) to emulate.

In patriarchal societies, the father's involvement in the life of his children is a common tradition. Being the head of the family, the father has the authority to supervise the education, the discipline, and the career of his children. Julie-Marie Strange also suggests that "Intrinsic to paternal authority was the duty, and right, to discipline children" (2015). Yet, extreme discipline and repressive education lead sometimes to a confrontation between the two. Since it is natural that the children long to be independent, the parents can neither eliminate their freedom nor monopolize their instincts and desires. With regard to Edmund's upbringing, his dedication to the service of the Lord starts in cradle, but it seems too hard for a little child to endure such a mighty burden. Disconnected from the outside world and deprived of secular entertainments, Edmund finds himself enchained by his parents' religious beliefs and subjected to their rigid indoctrinations. For instance, Mrs. Gosse bans story books and fiction on the basis that telling stories is a "sin" (Gosse, 1974) and they are "not true" (Gosse, 1974). Fed with the idea that inventing stories is a sin and imagination might impede her from doing her prayers, Mrs. Gosse tries doing the same with her son. With an embittered tone the mature narrator/author recollects how he is denied the pleasure and the ecstasy of being told a story before going to bed like every normal child. He says, "Never, in all my early childhood, did any one address to me the affecting preamble, 'Once upon a time!' I was told about missionaries, but never about pirates; I was familiar with humming-birds, but ... never heard of fairies" (Gosse, 1974). The Gosses treat their child as a full-grown man, rather than leave him to enjoy the thrill of childhood; they try to monitor and to control his mind and his imagination.

The death of Mrs. Gosse does not halt her husband from taking charge of his wife's "Promised Land" (Gosse, 1974), Edmund's tutorship and dedication to God. At the beginning of their relationship, Edmund becomes his father's sole friend and disciple. He enjoys accompanying him in his scientific studies and his excursions. But regarding the teaching of religion and similar to his wife's conduct, Henry Gosse enforces on his son the study of religious books and other subjects such as some natural history, astronomy, and geography which are beyond his age. This narrow range of books does not reflect the taste of the child whose mind is still unripe and immature. The parents teach their son and load his mind only with the books which appeal to their own interests. Henry Gosse tries very hard but fails to make his son memorize hymns, psalms, and chapters of Scriptures at the age of four years old. He says, "My father's religious teaching

to me was almost exclusively doctrinal... He was in a tremendous hurry to push on my spiritual growth, and he fed me theological meat which it was impossible for me to digest” (Gosse, 1974). Edmund’s religious cultivation is done through stuffing his head with religious books such as “Epistle to the Hebrews” and the “Book of Revelation” whose language and ideas are beyond his intellectual understanding. Besides, his readings are done mechanically and superficially; he reads just for the sake of reading and skimming through pages, thus he lacks will and enthusiasm to understand such unfavorable books. The severe and the inflexible upbringing of Edmund have parallels with some stories written by Authors like Dickens, Austen, Meredith, and Samuel Butler.

Edmund’s strict religious life has much in common with the lives of Samuel Butler’s characters Theobald Pontifex and his son Ernest in *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). The novel chronicles the family history of the Pontifexes especially the troubled relationship between the fathers and the sons throughout different generations. Theobald Pontifex has been induced by his father to be a clergyman and without any attempts of opposition; he succumbs to his father’s wishes. After becoming a father himself, Theobald expects his children to be dutiful as he was to his father. The Pontifexes use coarseness and strictness to raise their children mainly with the eldest son Ernest “so that from the first he might have been kept pure from every taint of evil” (Butler, 1933). Like Edmund, he is denied pleasurable things for the sake of rearing an upright and a perfect religious son. Kilroy argues that in the Pontifex family, the family rather than provides safety, tenderness, and mutuality among family members; it turns into a suffocating and confining “area of oppression” (2007). Both the Gosses and the Pontifexes are concerned with how to model pious sons without considering their sons’ feelings and inclinations. From an early age, they have been trained to do various religious activities so as to be prepared for carrying out their religious profession. In addition, what contributes to the social and the spiritual confinement of these characters is the narrow- mindedness of their parents who just believe in the word of God or the wisdom of the church without questioning.

Edmund’s succeeding developmental stages continue to follow the stream of dogmatic theology, conformity, and solitude. To put it best in the little child’s words, his “infancy [was] so cloistered and uniform” (Gosse, 1974) and “without individual existence ... swept on, a satellite, in [his parents] atmosphere” (Gosse, 1974). The lack of any kind of entertainments in the Gosses’ household make Edmund not like the other kids of his own age since his sole predestined future is to serve God. While other children go to playgrounds and play games, Edmund goes to the chapel and associates with grown-up people. Besides, his father imposes on him to do missionary work by accompanying his governess Miss Marks and Mary Grace Burmington in what he calls “pastoral work in the Lord’s service” (Gosse, 1974). Henry Gosse devises this plan to fixate his son on the path of religiosity and to keep him away from any worldly distractions. Edmund says that his father “pin[s] [him] down, beyond any possibility of escape” (Gosse, 1974) whereby he has to conform to the set borders. Since the father is in a position of power and he is a producer of knowledge, the child is destined to perform certain roles and to behave according to his father’s expectations. Though reluctant to do missionary service, what encourages Edmund to participate in these visits are his love of adventure, exploration, and the sights of greenery. Along his way to the cottages, he fancies himself to be a warrior exploring “mysterious” “fairylands” (Gosse, 1974). Therefore, Edmund’s fancies and imagination become the way outs which help him to flee from religious commitments and to enjoy some freedom.

### **III- The Importance of Imagination and literature in Lessening Paternal Repression and Control:**

Jeffrey Meyers’s in “A Case of Religious Mania: Gosse’s *Father and Son*” demonstrates that “Edmund’s intellectual growth ran parallel to his emotional repression” (2009). Despite the censorship, Edmund finds other alternatives through which to get rid of family pressures and to enjoy some kind of freedom. “The Garret” and “the box-room” are the resorts

where Edmund retreats from the conventions of “[their] pious household” (Gosse, 1974) and there he relishes doing his drawings and discovering unknown things like books. In this context, to borrow Virginia Woolf’s phrase “a room of one’s own,” it can be suggested that Edmund seeks to create his own space. “The Garret” and “the box-room” can also be interpreted as Edmund’s ivory tower having aesthetic implications. In “The Ivory Tower: the history of a figure of speech and its cultural uses,” Steven Shapin explains that throughout history, the figure of speech “ivory tower” has taken different meanings. At the turn of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth-century, it becomes associated with the artist’s condition and artistic productions. Artists seek solace and refuge in ivory towers in order to escape from stressed situations and to experience imaginative freedom, contemplation, individualism, and artistic detachment (2012). Edmund escapes to these places in an attempt to express one’s self; especially he has great fondness and passion for literature and reading books. What attracts Edmund to poetry and fiction is the beauty of lyrics and the effect they print in his soul. They leave him filled with romance, ecstasy, and fancy. Edmund’s love of literature, therefore, activates his imagination and makes him more perceptive, critical, and skeptical. The impressionistic and the imaginative thinking of Edmund have close affinities with the sensitive imagination and the romantic orientation of Thomas Hardy’s character Jude Fawley and Dickens’s Philip (Pip). These characters cling to and seek solace in the imagination in order to escape from the harshness of the real world.

The imagination is one of the principles the romantics advocate which set them free from strict rules and conventions. Literature and imagination stimulate in Edmund the growing desire to rebel against his father’s fanatical religious beliefs and to withdraw from his narrow social life. Samuel Clark in “Pleasure as Self-Discovery” discusses the role of pleasure in liberating the child Edmund from intellectual control. Clark maintains that Edmund succeeds to lesson intellectual captivity and social restriction through “delight at a novel” (2012). Though he accompanies his father on his scientific excursions and experiences some happy moments, the rigid lifestyle remains dominant and it affects their future relationship. He compares these cheerful hours with “Little soft oases, in the hard desert of [their] sandy spiritual life at home” (Gosse, 1974). The Gosses’ family-centered and religious atmosphere leads Edmund to look for other relaxing and breathing spaces in the pages of books. The way he reads the Bible differs largely from the way he reads story-books. Whereas religious books and other subjects are indigestible; fiction makes him very enchanted and mesmerized. For instance, when his father sings to him some verses from Virgil, he feels “an unexpected sudden sweetness” (Gosse, 1974), and above all the impact of the beauty of these verses is unique as “[his] prosodical instinct was awakened” (Gosse, 1974). In addition, the discovery of Michael Scott’s “wild masterpiece” (Gosse, 1974) *Tom Cringle Log* marks a turning point in his life. It is called “wild” because its effect is unprecedented. Conversely, incapable to understand a religious narrative, the child says “O how I do hate the Law ... I wished to hit the Law with my fist, for being so mean and unreasonable” (Gosse, 1974). The Law here signifies God the Father and by extension the child’s biological father. Consequently, his resentment implies that he dislikes to be taught religion dogmatically or to be strictly controlled by any kind of authority.

Clark argues that “Gosse’s pursuit of literature is a matter of vital self-expression; it is the delighted release of elements of his nature which had been caged and starved” (2012). This explains that the importance of literature in Edmund’s life emanates from its therapeutic, pleasurable, remedial, and liberating effect. In spite of his father’s instructions to read only the parts that describe the landscape and to bypass “the pages which gave imaginary adventures and conversation” (Gosse, 1974), he does totally the opposite. For him “these latter were the flower of the book ... they filled [his] whole horizon with glory and with joy” (Gosse, 1974). Michael Scott’s novel provides him with multiple perspectives and it opens his eyes to the world. Particularly, it stimulates in him not only the desire to cross and to



transgress family barriers but also to “escape ... from bondage to the Law and the Prophets” (Gosse, 1974). In another incident, a work of sculpture with inscribed statues of Greek gods “attracted [him] violently” (Gosse, 1974). But, when he asks his father to explain to him more about these gods, he recalls that his response surprises and displeases him, “the so-called gods of the Greeks were the shadows cast by the vices of the heathen ... it is better for a Christian not to know” (Gosse, 1974), his father tells him angrily. This incident makes him steadily lose esteem and admiration for his father and no longer considers him “infallible” (Gosse, 1974). While the father criticizes the sculptures of Greek gods using religion as a justification, the son has an aesthetic eye considering them beautiful.

In his book *Victorian Literary Critics*, Harold Orel maintains that Edmund Gosse’s constant references to some examples of literary works which have moved him can be explained in terms of its “sensory” impact and to show his parents’ disregard and indifference to “verbal music” or art (1984). As Edmund grows up, his intellectual and social interests become larger whereas his religious dedication no longer remains a priority. The coming of his stepmother diminishes some dullness in their life and her artistic tendencies arouse in him different sensations and impressions. She introduces him to watercolor painting, romantic poetry such as Keats and Byron, eighteenth-century theological poetry, and the poems of Sir Walter Scott which have a lasting effect on him. Likewise, Edmund’s area of concerns is not just limited to poetry and fiction; he comes to know the works of William Shakespeare whose *Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, for instance, make him “in the seventh heaven of delight” (Gosse, 1974). Moreover, the works of Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe are the catalyst which paves the way for Edmund’s travel to London. Henry Gosse considers this poetry immoral and angered at his son, he sends him to lodgings in London. Before moving to London, Edmund tries the last chance by re-examining the Bible and different religious ideas. In doing so, he attempts to understand his father’s temperament and to reconsider his position towards both faith and his father. At this critical stage, Edmund’s soul is at crossroads and influenced by his father’s lesson about the forthcoming of the Lord, he determines to await this miracle in order to choose with which world to side. He describes this event as “the highest moment of my religious life, and the apex of my striving after holiness” (Gosse, 1974). During his waiting he calls the Lord to come:

[Come] now and take me to be forever with Thee in Thy Paradise ... take me before I have known the temptations of life, before I have to go to London and all the dreadful things that happen there!... The Lord has not come... in my heart the artificial edifice of extravagant faith began to totter and crumble. From that moment forth my father and I, though the fact was long successfully concealed from him and even from myself, walked in opposite hemispheres of the soul, with ‘the thick of’ the world between us. (Gosse, 1974)

This passage illustrates two decisive moments. Firstly, Edmund’s beliefs in religion are shattered, thus he turns his back to his ordained religious career. Secondly, the gap between him and his father becomes unbridgeable wherein each one pursues a divergent road.

McKnight clarifies that evolutionary theories have shaken people’s faith in God the Father, by consequence, all kinds of authority. She says “Scientific revolutions during this period, particularly Darwin’s theory of evolution and geological findings that undermined the Biblical account of history, added to changing perceptions of ‘father’ since they eroded faith in God, the ultimate for fathers- father with a capital ‘F’” (2011). People’s loss of faith in the divine God coincides with the diminishing role of the father. The earthly authoritarian father loses his stronghold because he comes to be faced with a rebellious and a skeptical son and this is the case with the characters in Gosse’s novel. Similarly, Claudia Nelson demonstrates that “Although the father’s domestic authority was officially beyond challenge, in practice many Victorians found much to complain about in their father’s approaches” (2007). Edmund no longer takes his father’s ideologies for granted, but he pushes against his way of education because a life based solely on science or religion cannot be

wholesome and balanced. Jarman identifies two forces which cause the decline of religion: science and pleasure. He says "For science opened up a whole new world and a new way of thinking, and pleasure, made possible in new forms and to a greater extent than ever before by the very success of Victorianism, made the strictness of the Victorian way of life intolerable to a younger generation" (1963). Accordingly, the father-son estrangement in Gosse's novel unfolds, on the one hand, the limitations of severe paternal education; on the other hand, shows the ways and the principles the son adopts to distance himself from his father.

Edmund's obedience goes hand in hand with his hostility to his religious vocation. He critiques the way his parents practice religion and he even questions religion itself. Crystal Downing compares Edmund's social and intellectual confinement to an imprisoned fish and how he struggles to get out of "his father's religious aquarium" and "religious 'texts'" (2001). Edmund's defiance to his father's authoritative religious discourse and his critical views toward religion are demonstrated in numerous incidents. Edmund's loss of faith in God echoes his severing of ties with his father. Unlike his fanatical parents, Edmund has a skeptical, a curious, and an inquisitive mind. Jeffrey Meyers demonstrates that Edmund employs "covert rebellion... [to] test, [to] undermine, and [to] mock his father's religious beliefs" (2001). The first assumption Edmund tests the idea that his father is "not as God" or "omniscient" or "infallible" (Gosse, 1974). After this test, he discovers that his father is a normal human being; he can err and never be wholly knowledgeable (Gosse, 1974). In effect, he realizes that he can argue with his parents and not take their views for granted. More important, Edmund's rebellious acts and skeptical attitudes reach their peak when he tries to experiment his father's lesson about idolatry and whether God would be infuriated at any Christian who worships objects but not Him. Rather than saying his prayers to God, Edmund bows to a chair and supplicates to it. After committing this intentional "act of idolatry" or "heresy" and no sign of punishment takes place, Edmund experiences a sense of triumph and challenge to his father's authority (Gosse, 1974).

Edmund's attitudes towards Sunday and the way he practices his prayers have also changed. For him, Sunday is "a very tedious occasion" (Gosse, 1974) and "unbroken servitude" (Gosse, 1974) whereby everything is done mechanically and repetitively and all other secular activities are prohibited. He also criticizes Sunday for its dullness, repression, and its rigid manners. He says "I was hotly and tightly dressed in black... as though ready at any moment to attend a funeral... I used to feel the monotony and weariness of my position... The Plymouth-Brother theology... produced a faint physical nausea, a kind of secret headache" (Gosse, 1974). Edmund is both physically and spiritually unable to follow the track of faith not only because he feels that Sundays are lifeless and tiresome, but also he notices the aridity and shallowness of his prayers. By contrast, the father is still confident to polish and to cement in his son the seeds of religion. Edmund describes his father as "the latest surviving type" (Gosse, 1974) or "the last of disciples" (Gosse, 1974) of Puritanism. Despite that he experiences the most controversy of the age (the clash between science and religion) he does not relinquish his inflexible and dogmatic beliefs. Edmund testifies:

He was still convinced that by intensely directing my thoughts, he could compel them to flow in certain channel... so mournful for saintly men of his complexion, that 'virtue would not be virtue, could it be given by one fellow creature to another.' He had recognized, with reluctance that holiness was not hereditary, but he continued to hope that it might be compulsive... But he refused to see any difference in temperament between a lad of twenty and a sage of sixty. He had no sympathy for youth, which in itself had no charm for him. (Gosse, 1974)

Henry Gosse believes that he can fill in his son's mind with whatever ideas and shape his character in the way he wants. He is unwilling to recognize the change in his son and his different character. For Edmund, however, virtues are not genetic and cannot be enforced because he wants to build an independent self.

The author closes the novel with an epilogue which sheds lights on the closing of the relationship between Henry Gosse and his son. The novel ends as it begins with “the inevitable disruption” (Gosse, 1974) or separation between the two. At the age of seventeen years old, Edmund slams the door at the confining life in Devonshire and another life opens its arms to him in London. It is Edmund’s time to grow and to express himself regardless of his father’s efforts that he will not leave God’s track. While the son chooses to move ahead and to explore the world from his own angle, the father remains static and strongly adherent to his monologic ideologies. He tries all means possible to inject faith and piety into his son. For example, he presses on him to translate and to study Dean Alford’s edition of the “Greek New Testament” and William Page Wood’s “The Continuity of Scripture,” but the son does not get either influenced or illuminated (Gosse, 1974). Rather a kind of magnetic drags him from the Bible which is his impassioned attraction to art books. He says, “My desire was to continue to delight in those sacred pages, for which I still had an instinctive veneration. Yet I could not but observe the difference between the zeal with which I snatched at a volume of Carlyle or Ruskin... and the increasing languor with which I took up Alford for my daily ‘passage’” (Gosse, 1974). Edmund’s soul and heart have not been sincerely devoted to God and he never gets captivated or moved by religious words. Rather, it is the beauty of literature which thrills and makes him “enchantingly spirited” (Gosse, 1974) and its words are more “revealing” (Gosse, 1974) to him than the Bible. In-depth, while literature embodies renovation, imagination, and excitement, the Bible is uniform, rigid, and unappealing.

Edmund transforms from an obedient and a dependent son to a self-reliant and an autonomous mature young man. His character does not remain static as it is the case with his father rather he struggles and resists his religious beliefs and dictates. He chooses a life which he can fit in and a career which reflects his interests and inclinations. Furthermore, at his twenty-one years old, Edmund takes a significant decision. He recognizes that no reconciliation is possible between him and his father. He repudiates the religious vocation, chooses to stand on his own feet, and dedicates his life to himself (Gosse, 1974). More important, Edmund considers “stringent piety” (Gosse, 1974) the catalyst which cuts off the umbilical cord with his father who if not overwhelmed by religious fanaticism, he would have been “a charming companion, what a delightful parent, what a courteous and engaging friend” (Gosse, 1974). As such, Edmund harshly condemns the practice of religion in a rigid and an inflexible manner:

After my long experience, after my patience and forbearance, I have surely the right to protest against... that evangelical religion, or any religion in violent form. It divides heart from heart. It sets up a vain, chimerical ideal, in the barren pursuit of which all the tender, indulgent affection, all the genial play of life, all the exquisite pleasures and soft resignations of the body, all that enlarges and calms the soul, are exchanged for what is harsh and void and negative. It encourages a stern and ignorant spirit of condemnation... it invents virtues which are sterile and cruel; it invents sins which are no sins at all, but which darken the heaven of innocent joy. (Gosse, 1974)

In short, Edmund considers religion practiced in such manner a life-denying religion which censors self-expression, intellectual freedom, and imagination. Adopting those rigid and conservative attitudes, Henry Gosse fails to maintain a friendly relationship with his son. Hence, the estrangement and the final separation between the two do not start from scratch, but they are the accumulation of numerous disagreements, differing perspectives, and conflicting ideologies. Throughout the novel, religion and art are the axes of conflict whereby the Gosses’ restricted social life and religious fanaticism are the primary factors which set both father and son apart.

## **Conclusion**

After the analysis of the nature of father-son estrangement, its causes and consequences in the British novel namely

in Gosse's *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*, this study finds out certain important points and results. The novel's events take place in a time of intellectual and ideological polemics causing huge doubt and controversy. The clashes between science and religion, between faith and doubt, and between reason and emotions move from public circles to the family where paternal relationships are shattered and this is the case with Gosse's characters. Henry Philip Gosse is described as a rigid and stern father trying to frame his son's life according to his own model. He censors and suppresses individualism, emotions, and imagination in favor of religious stiffness and self-restraint. In return, the father has been confronted by imaginative, skeptical, and rebellious son. Edmund is caught between devotion to a life chosen by his father or to follow his instinctual tendencies and life choices. Moreover, this study argues that Gosse represents one facet of conservative Victorian fathers whose absolute ideologies are shaken and subverted in the same way evolutionary theories re-questioned and doubted old conceptions and institutions. Though this study attempts to examine father-son estrangement in a nineteenth-century novel in the light of the concept of patriarchal authority and its socio-cultural implications, still the subject may require in-depth investigation and can be studied from other perspectives. In addition, this study suggests the examination of this issue in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries not only in the British novel but also in other genres.

### REFERENCES

- Butler, S. (1933). *The Way of All Flesh*. London: EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY, p 78.
- Clark, S. (2012). *Pleasure as Self-Discovery*. *Ratio*, 25 (3): 260-276.
- D'Cruze, S. (2004) *The Family*. In: Williams, Chris (Ed) *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Britain*, (253-272), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Downing, C. (2001). *The G(losing) of Religion: A Victorian Father and Son*. *Religion & the Arts*, 5(1/2): 155-171.
- Freud, S. (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Joyce Crick (Trans.), (1999). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gosse, E. (1974). *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*. Hepburn, James (ed.) with an introduction, London: Oxford University Press, pp 5-178.
- Hempton, D. (2008). *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Janouch, G. (1953). *Conversations with Kafka*, Introduction by Brod, Max, Translated by Rees, Goronwy, London: Derek Verschoyle Limited.
- Jarman, T.L. (1963). *Democracy and World Conflict: A History of Modern Britain*. London: Blandford Press.
- Kent Kingsley, S. (Ed), (1999). *Gender and Power in Britain 1640-1990*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Kilroy, J F. (2007). *The Nineteenth Century English Novel: Family Ideology and Narrative Form*. New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
- Lee, H. (2003). Writing Victorian Lives and Victorian Life-Writing: Gosse's 'Father and Son' *Revisited*. *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 8, (1): 108-118.
- Mcknight, N. (Ed), (2011). *Fathers in Victorian Fiction*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Meyers, J. (2009). *A Case of Religious Mania: Gosse's Father and Son*. *Anq*, 22, (3): 21- 27.
- Mitchell, S. (2009). *Daily life in Victorian England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Nelson, C. (2007). *Family Ties in Victorian England*. Westport: Praeger Publishers.
- Orel, H. (1984). *Victorian Literary Critics*. London: Macmillan, pp 192-193.
- Shapin, S. (2012). *The Ivory Tower: the history of the figure of speech and its cultural uses*. *British Society for the History of Science*, 45, (1): 1-27.
- Strange, J.M. (2015). *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, 1865-194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Traubitz, N.B. (1976). "Heavenly Mother: The Trinity as Structural Device in Edmund Gosse's 'Father and Son,'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 6, (2): 147-154.

## الخلافا بين الأب والابن: الأسباب والعواقب في رواية إدموند غوس "اب وابن: دراسة مزاجيين"

فاتن عدي، محمود الشتيوي\*

### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على طبيعة الخلافا بين الأب والابن في الأسرة البريطانية في أأب القرن التاسع عشر من خلال رواية إدموند غوس "اب وابن: دراسة مزاجيين". تخرج هذه الدراسة عن المنظور النفسي التحليلي وتتسعى إلى تقصي طبيعة الخلافا والعوامل المسببة له ونتائجه استنادا إلى مفهوم السلطة الأبوية وتجلياتها الاجتماعية والثقافية في المجتمع البريطاني. ويركز البحث أيضا على تأثير النظريات التطورية على المجتمع الفيكتوري إذ مع ظهور النظريات التطورية كل الأفكار المسبقة والسلطات (بما في ذلك السلطة الأبوية) والمؤسسات أصبحت موضع تساؤل. يجسد الأب والابن في الرواية قيد الدراسة عالَمين مختلفين إذ ينتهج كل واحد منهما اهتمامات ومبادئ وخيارات مختلفة ومتناقضة. في حين يحاول الأب صياغة حياة ابنه وفقا لمبادئ نكران الذات والقمع وفرض الحياة الدينية، يصارع الابن ضد نظام الأب ويقاوم الامتثال لمبادئه متبعا غرائزه والخيال وحب الأدب إذ ينأى بنفسه عن السلطة الأبوية لكي يخلق شخصية مستقلة. وقد خلصت الدراسة أيضا إلى أن الحياة القائمة كليا على ضبط النفس والدين المنكر للحياة ليست متوازنة لأنه لا يمكن القضاء تماما على رغبات المرء وغرائزه وخياراته الفردية.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الخلافا بين الأب والابن، السلطة الأبوية، التمرد، الدين المنكر للذات.

\* كلية اللغات الأجنبية، الجامعة الأردنية، الأردن. تاريخ استلام البحث 18/06/2017، وتاريخ قبوله 25/03/2018.