

THE RE-EXPLORATION OF THE ESSENCE OF FEMINISM IN D.H. LAWRENCE'S *SONS AND LOVERS*

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ABSTRACT

D.H. Lawrence's novel Sons and Lovers can be viewed through the lens of feminism where Lawrence pays more attention of the wretched condition of women like Paul Morel's mother. Besides, how patriarchy works violently over women in the society and how 'male gaze' plays a crucial role in the 20th century – can be reflected through this novel. Patriarchy always thinks woman's body as an object of sexuality and uses them for their own physical pleasure. This article focuses on how gender and sexuality become a central issue in the 20th -century society and it reflects Lawrence's attitude towards them. It also shows the women's realization under the impact of 'otherisation' and 'marginalization'.

KEYWORDS: *Gender, Sexuality, Patriarchy, and Otherisation*

INTRODUCTION

"Never trust the artist, but trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it"

D.H. Lawrence in *Classic American Literature* (1923)

Feminism is both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a platform to demand equality, rights, and justice. Feminism's key assumption is that gender roles are pre-determined and the woman is trained to fit into those roles. This means that roles like 'daughter' or 'mother' are not natural but social because the woman has to be trained to think, talk, act in particular ways that suit the role.

Feminism's key political and theoretical stance is this: the inequalities that exist between men and woman are not natural but social, not pre-ordained but created by men so that they retain power. Religion, the family, education, the arts, knowledge system are all social and cultural 'structures' that enable the perpetual reinforcement of these inequalities. These structures are effective means of reinforcing male domination because they do not appear oppressive. They retain power because, with their ability to persuade, the structures convince the woman that she is destined to be subordinated. Cultural structures are, therefore, ideological: providing a system of beliefs that seek and attain the woman's consent to be subordinated. The feminist theory works to unpack these ideologies of dominance.

Feminist literary criticism is the critical analysis of literary works based on feminist perspective. In particular, feminist literary critics tend to reject the patriarchal norms of literature that privilege masculine ways of thinking/points of view and marginalities woman politically, economically and psychologically. Some critics find that feminist criticism makes space for and listens to women's voices previously muted or drowned out by dominant patriarchal literary-critical practices. In other words, what the text leaves out says much about the writer, literature in general, and society as a whole. By using this 'hermeneutics of suspicion' literary critics hope to reveal how women are marginalized in the language of literature.

Beginning with Virginia Woolf's revolutionary plea for social justice for women in 'A room of one's own' and stimulated by Simone de Beauvoir's classic polemic 'The Second Sex', there has developed, especially in the years following the publication of Kate Millet's 'Sexual Politics', an identifiable political school of feminist criticism. Virginia Woolf explored gender relation in her essay. She develop's a woman-centric notion of reading and education. Woolf argued that the patriarchal education system and reading practices prevent women readers from reading as women. They are constantly trained to read from the men's point of view. Beauvoir argued that women were always the negative of men, where a man was the idea, the norm and the woman the deviant or the other, who sought perfection by trying to be as much like them as possible. Women are measured by the standard of man and found 'inferior'. This is the process of 'Othering' where women will always be seen, not as independent our unique as a variation and flawed version of the Men. Men and Women are therefore, constantly engaged in this subject –Other relation where the man is the subject and the woman the other. De Beauvoir's major insight was that there is no 'essence' of a woman, a woman is constructed as such by man and society. As she puts it ".....One is not a woman but becomes one".

It would be difficult to think of any other writer who wrote his life into successive texts of his fiction as Lawrence did; he habitually confronted his tale with a new experience, and new interpretations of the past. Sons and Lovers is a great novel because it has the ring of something written from deeply felt experience. The past remembered it conveys more of Lawrence's own knowledge of life than anything else he wrote. His other novels appear something artificial beside it. One of the fascinations of D.H. Lawrence's fiction is the fact that many of his most vividly memorable characters female. Frequently women serve as his protagonists, as in such work as The Plumed Serpent, St. Mawr, and Lady Chatterley's Lover. Lawrence has even been credited with having created (in Ursula Brangwen of the Rainbow) the first "modern" women in English fiction. Norman Mailer, for his part, went so far as to observe that "it is not only that no other man writes so well [as Lawrence] about women, but indeed is there a woman who can ?"

Naturally, Lawrence's novel has been a major focus of feminist interest. And not only Lawrence's representation of women in his novel has been admired by many but also has been highly criticized for its prejudiced male perspective. In Son of Woman, John Middleton Murray first points out the issue where Lawrence's attitude to women and to his own sexuality has flawed due to excessive influence that his mother exerted on him during his lifetime. But, it Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1953), where she is the first feminist critic to attempt to politicize the reader's response to what she regarded as Lawrence's faith in male supremacy, his feeling that a woman's role is primarily sexual, and his fear of modern woman's raised consciousness; and notoriously, Katen millet's sexual politics (1970), Lawrence's fiction increasingly drew fire from feminist critics. Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women (1968), Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch (1971), and Carolyn Heilbrun's Towards a Recognition of Androgyny (1973) offer a representative sampling of early feminist criticism which, in varying degrees, faulted Lawrence's "phallogocentric" treatment of women.

In a letter to Edward Garnett written in 1912, Lawrence provided his own description of *Sons and Lovers* :

A woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has the passion of her husband a, so the children are born of passion and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up, she selects them as lovers-first the eldest, then the second. These sons are urged into life by their reciprocal love of their mother- urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they cannot love, because their mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them As soon as the young man comes into contact with women there is split. William gives his sex to a fribble and his mother holds his soul. But the split kills him because he does not know where he is. The next son gets the woman who flights for his soul- flights his mother. The son loves the mother –all the sons hate and are jealous of the father. The battle goes on between the mother and the girl, with the son as the object. The mother gradually proves the stronger, because of the tie of blood. The son decides to leave his soul in his mother's hands, and like his elder brother, go for passion. He gets passion. Then the split begins to die. The son casts of his mistress attends to his mother dying. He is left in the end naked of everything with the drift towards death.

Sons and Lovers described Mr. Morel's unhappy marriage. It seemed that it had little to do with the topic, but, in fact, it made good preparation for the latter fight. As a matter of fact, anything related to Mrs. Morel was worth studying, because she was the most important person in Paul's life. She was Paul's mother. Mrs. Morel's marriage and family life was indeed a good example for us to study, especially her relationship with her son and her husband. Mrs. Morel had no position in the home, her name Gertrude Coppard appeared only twice in his book. Most of the time, she appeared to be her husband's attached property- Mrs. Morel. Even if she was hit by her husband, she had too much for her husband. Furthermore, she did not know exactly how much her husband earned. Because according to the habits, a woman must go out when man counted money in the room. This was only one side of Mrs. Morel's tragedy, like all the other women, she was the sufferer of the Victorian morality. And Mrs. Morel's another tragedy was that she was not a pure housewife, "she went into the front garden, feeling too heavy to take herself out, yet unable to stay indoors. The heat suffocated her. And looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive ". When other women were accustomed to their position in the home, even were satisfied with it, her emotion was influenced by her living environment and was the depressed both inside the home and outside. Mrs. Morel, who came from a little capitalist class, aloof and cultured, was a Victorian woman who had knowledge. When she was very young, she had been struggling against the patriarch, fighting for her existence and for women's rights, longing for becoming an authoritative, independent and responsible man."If I were a man, nothing gonna stop me". As the England atmosphere came, in the man –centered family, her husband treated her sadistically, in order to live, Mrs. Morel naturally constituted an alliance with her sons. She taught them to change their social status and enter the middle class through knowledge and will, so the children became Mrs. Morel's tools to make her dream and ambition come true. But, as Millett responses that Paul kills or discards the woman who has been of use to him. By adolescence, he has grown pompous enough under the influence of maternal encouragement to proclaim himself full of a 'divine discontent' superior to any experience Mrs. Morel might understand. And when his mother has ceased to be of service, she quietly murders her. When she takes an unreasonably long time to die of cancer, he dilutes the milk she has been prescribed to drink: "I don't want her to eatI wish she 'd die...." By a nice irony the son is murdering her who gave him life, so, that he may have a bit more himself. This was Mrs. Morel's life.

A feministic reading of a novel would be thoroughly incomplete if one was to center around Mrs. Morel alone and avoid the rest of the female character since the exposition of the rest of in juxtaposition of Mrs. Morel would reveal the position and situation of women in Lawrence's time and perspective. Paul's first lover, Miriam was a beautiful and shy girl. Although living in a country village which was controlled by her father and brothers who looked down upon her, she was irreconcilable to mediocrity. Miriam did not want to follow the same old disastrous road of average village girls; she looked forward to making life meaningful. But in reality there was no such room for her to exist; what she had was just the freedom to imagine. Paul's appearing made Miriam have her own idol, but this love soon added pain to her life because of her religious zeal. Since she was very young, Miriam sincerely believed in religion which played a major role in her life. She thought "God was omnipotent, and he knew everything in the world" (Miller, 1980, p. 256). So even her love to Paul may request the permission of the God: "O'Lord, let me not love Paul, Morel. Keep me from loving him, if I ought not to love him." We can see that under religion's control, Miriam's emotion severely depressed.

She was only a doll, without any her own Idea, Miriam consciously built their intimate relationship on imagination, namely spirit on love, not flesh on love. We can say man – centered family atmosphere and sincerely believing in religion were just like undershirt firmly bound Miriam's spirit would, formed her first tragedy. Paul is indeed enviable in his rocklike self-sufficiency, basking in the reverence of the bevy of women who surrounded him, allegor to serve and strock – all disposable when their time comes. The sight of Miriam suffering or humiliated is very essence of her attractiveness to him, but his response is never without an element of hostility and sadism. His reaction here is typical: 'In spite of himself, his blood began to boll with her. It was strange that one has made him in such a fury. He flared against her. Once he threw the pencil in her face. There was silence'. Of course, Miriam was not angry, for one doesn't get angry at God. Millett states that Miriam's aspirations are not respected; her failures are understood to be due to the inferiority of talent. The problems, she finds, lies in the second part of the novel is that Lawrence 'is so ambivalent here that he is far from being clear, or perhaps even honest, and he offers us two contrary reasons for Paul' rejection of Miriam. One is that she will' put him in her pocket'. And the other. Totally contradictory is the puzzling excuse that in their last interview, she failed him by not seizing upon him and claiming him as her mate and property'

There is little that, Mrs. Morel can do to change the fundamental condition of her life. But with Clara the position is different. Clara has left her husband because of his cruelty and unfaithfulness. She is an 'advanced woman' and, through her Paul gets' into connexion with the Socialist, Suffragette, Unitarian people in Nottingham'. But Clara is an individualist to, and her feminist has led her, not to identify with another woman, but to separate herself from them – 'she considers herself as a woman apart, and particularly apart, from her class". Her feminism begins by intriguing Paul, but later it comes to seem an irrelevance, and towards the end of the novel we hear less about it. Eventually, the novel implies that Clara's dissatisfaction has nothing to do with a woman's oppression. Her affair with Paul is only a therapy, enabling her finally to returned to her husband. Because the novel betrays little appreciation of the relationship between the personal and the political, the character of Clara lakes coherence; her feminism, one of the major characteristics through which she is first defined for us, ultimately has no real function. Kate Millett has remarked on this shifting center of Clara's character:

Clara.... Is the portrait of two people, the rebellious feminist and political activist whom Paul accuses of penis envy and even man-hating, and who tempts him the more for being the harder conquest, and at a later stage, the sensuous rose, who by the end of the novel is changed once again – now beyond recognition – into a 'loose woman' whom Paul nonchalantly disposes of when he has exhausted her sexual utility.

For Kate Millett, Paul Morel is upheld by a “faith in male Supremacy which he has imbibed from his father and enlarged upon himself”. Yet, on the other hand, ideological critique conflicts with her more generous Judgment of the novel’s art. For her, *Sons and Lovers* is a great novel because it embodies profoundly felt the experience and is “probably still the greatest novel of proletarian life in English”. The weakness of Millett’s approach is that her ideological view of *Sons and Lovers* is allowed to override her aesthetic response to it as art. Millett reads sexual politics into such incidents as the occasion when Paul throws a pencil in Miriam’s face during an algebra lesson, which Millett interprets in Freudian terms as an assault with his penis, when in fact at that point in the novel Lawrence seems to be exploring the cultural rather than the sexual gulf between Paul and Miriam. Similarly, she identifies strongly with Clara, who she argues is brought by Paul to regard her feminism as merely a substitute for a satisfied husband is her supreme assertion of independence.

Kate Millett’s influence as a feminist critic is evident in Faith Pullin’s essay on *Sons and Lovers*. She too regards Lawrence as a “ruthless user of woman... the mother, Miriam, and Clara are all manipulated in Paul’s Painful effort at self-identification”. Her main purpose is to demonstrate how Lawrence employs his woman characters to study the male psyche, and in doing so, like Millett, she permits her ideological strategy to blur the distinction between fiction and autobiography. Because she identifies with both the betrayed Jessie Chambers and the rejected Miriam Leivers, she refers to Jessie’s bitterness at having been cast. In the novel as a disciple rather than as an intellectual equal, without acknowledging Lawrence’s creative transformation of life into art – of historical relationship into fictional ones. Pullin follows Millett’s, too, in seeing a brutal insensitivity in Paul’s treatment of lover.

Hilary Simons offer a corrective to earth Pullin’s relegation of the Clara Dawes section of novel, for a she concentrates much for her attention of Clara as a feminist and also the feminist consciousness of Mrs. Morel. Simpson is concerned to suggest a new basis for the discussion of Lawrence’s writing, by examining his treatment of sexual relationship and roles “ in relation to selected aspects of woman’s history and the development of feminism, in *Sons and Lovers* she is particularly interested in Lawrence’s response to the women’s suffrage movement, for as the demonstrates, in his early life Lawrence was surrounded by women who were involved in the campaign. It is clear that for the brief period in his early development as a novelist Lawrence took up the cause of feminism, feeling that his novels would do more for women than the suffran, as he wrote to a friend from Eastwood. It is also plain that while he accepted the traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, he supported the concept of equality between the sexes. Lawrence’s feminism emerges early in *Sons and Lovers*, first in his sympathetic analysis of the situation of Mrs. Morel and in that of Clara Dawes, both of which reveal the oppression of patriarchal society that inspired the woman’s movement.

CONCLUSIONS

Feminist criticism ranges from an appreciation of Lawrence’s understanding of women and of their social and historical situation to a somewhat shrill condemnation of his alleged male Chauvinism. In general feminist criticism has been valuable in opening up *Sons and Lovers* to political interpretation. Gender and sexuality are obviously central issues in the novel and it is important to understand Lawrence’s attitude towards them. And besides all these things we should not forget what Garnett later wrote of *Sons and Lovers* that it was the only novel’ of any breadth of vision in contemporary English fiction that lifts working-class life of middle – class hands, and restores it to its naïve atmosphere of hard veracity’

D.H. Lawrence explores his female characters from multiple perspectives in his novels. He bewildering a lot of his own experiences of in his writing which walking with the issue of male-female relationship, he depicts the image that women held in his time an examination of his novels would display his desire to portray women as 'real' beings rather than consciously created female characters. They and, one hand can be extremely intellectual while show tremendous stupidity in the other; too civilized in juxtaposition with savage fertile sexuality. A reading of *Sons and Lovers* would project Lawrence's sympathy for the female kind and almost depict him as a feminist in his act of portraying the strength and influence they exert but a feminist reading of the novel would divulge into the author's psychology and dissect his ideology to expose the issues and faults of his patriarchal mind.

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