



“David Herbert Lawrence truly a misogynist? - An insight into Sons and Lovers”

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Abstract

It becomes extremely obvious for a writer to be captivated in an image or a title about his writing style and his basic approach towards life portrayal of his/her character alongside of storytelling. For D.H. Lawrence, his readers were divided into the dwell of him being a strong patriarchal contender or a misogynist, profusely him discussing the lead female characters of his novels to be living their life in their own terms basically ignoring the societal norms and sipping the comfort of their own skin.

The criterion of being tagged into a certain norms of writing is most of the times beneficial for the author as it allows him/her to spot its target readers and cater their needs in his own perception, which the mob is already eager to accept, but at times when an author wants to pen down a change or revolution in the society through his written scripts there he/she finds enormous flak of his creativity due to misrepresentation of his thoughts. D.H. Lawrence was one such author who was often mistaken for many such ideologies which, were not being delivered by him directly as an author but was created indirectly by the readers having a set profound perspective of a certain character, behaving certain way, due to set norms of society or say societal pressure.

"Sons and Lovers," a novel by D.H. Lawrence, presents its female characters as strong, complex individuals who significantly influence the protagonist's life and the narrative. Gertrude Morel, the protagonist's mother, is depicted as a dominant and influential force. Her intense, controlling love shapes her sons' destinies, particularly Paul's. Clara Dawes, another pivotal female character, is portrayed as an independent and passionate woman who challenges societal norms and expectations. Despite their struggles and vulnerabilities, both women exhibit strength and resilience, asserting their individuality and impacting the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery and emotional independence. Through these characters, Lawrence explores themes of maternal influence, love, and the quest for personal freedom

Index Terms - Misogynist, Social Ideologies, Influential, Critique, Patriarchy, Complexity, Oedipal, Empathy

Introduction

Year 1913 has been the subject of extreme literary discussions and criticism as D.H. Lawrence's novel "Sons and Lovers" was published. The novel is truly a masterpiece dealing into the intricacy of familial relationships, personal identities and co-relation of human behavior among different social dimensions has sparked furious talks over Lawrence's portrayal of women. The tag of being a misogynist was deliberately given to Lawrence for his uncompromised presentation of women in making strong choices for individually themselves. Unlike every important perspective even then Lawrence had also a group of people supporting his approach towards the female characters explicit behavioral choices amid strong societal impact on women to behave in a certain way. This paper is an attempt of weighing the notion of Lawrence not being an exact misogynist rather representing an approach of sketching the character of a women from an inner aspect of her choices as an individual, whether this side of Lawrence being father to all of his literal character can be termed as a patriarch or as not considering the role of women in the society or restraining it to the mere a provider of certain biological needs. The process of proving the notion shall be executed by examining the complexity of his female characters, the referral of his personal relationships, and the broader socio-cultural landscape the early twentieth century.

Complex Female Characters, "Sons and Lovers" features several prominent female characters, most notably Gertrude Morel and Miriam Leivers.

Gertrude Morel, the protagonist's mother, is portrayed as a strong, intelligent, and deeply influential figure in Paul Morel's life. Her complex relationship with her husband, Walter Morel, and her intense bond with her sons, particularly Paul, are central to the novel's narrative.

Gertrude's character is multifaceted, embodying both nurturing and controlling aspects. She represents the sacrifices and frustrations of women constrained by their domestic roles. Her dissatisfaction with her marriage to the unrefined Walter Morel leads her to seek fulfillment through her sons, particularly Paul. This dynamic creates a powerful yet problematic bond that stifles Paul's emotional independence.

Miriam Leivers: Miriam Leivers, Paul's love interest, is depicted as a deeply spiritual and intellectual woman. However, her relationship with Paul is fraught with tension. Paul perceives Miriam's intense need for emotional and spiritual connection as suffocating, reflecting the internal conflict between his desire for independence and his feelings of obligation and affection.

Critiques of Patriarchy Lawrence's portrayal of these women can be interpreted as a critique of the societal norms that limit their roles and opportunities. Gertrude's frustration with her domestic life and Miriam's struggle for emotional fulfillment highlight the broader issues faced by women in a patriarchal society. By presenting these characters with depth and empathy, Lawrence offers a window into the challenges and limitations imposed on women.

Ambiguity and Contradictions:

Despite these sympathetic portrayals, Lawrence's work also contains elements that can be seen as reinforcing traditional gender roles. His depiction of Paul's relationships with women often reflects a sense of superiority and detachment, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of misogynistic attitudes. This ambiguity and contradiction in Lawrence's writing complicate the interpretation of his stance on gender issues.

Biographical Context

Understanding Lawrence's personal life and relationships provides crucial context for his work. Lawrence's complex relationships with his mother, wife, and various lovers influenced his portrayal of women in his novels. His intense bond with his mother, which some critics have described as Oedipal, significantly shaped his views on women and sexuality.

Relationship with His Mother

Lawrence's relationship with his mother, Lydia Lawrence, was intense and deeply influential. Lydia was a strong-willed woman who had a significant impact on Lawrence's development. This maternal influence is mirrored in "Sons and Lovers" through Gertrude Morel's dominant presence in Paul's life. The novel can be seen as an exploration of the emotional complexities and psychological impacts of such a relationship.

Relationship with Frieda

Weekley Lawrence's marriage to Frieda Weekley also provides insight into his views on women. Frieda, an independent and free-spirited woman, defied conventional gender norms of the time. Their relationship, marked by both deep affection and significant conflict, influenced Lawrence's portrayal of male-female dynamics. Frieda's independence and strength can be seen in Lawrence's more progressive female characters.

Criticism and Defense

The feminist critique of Lawrence, notably by scholars like Kate Millett, has focused on the perceived misogynistic elements in his work. Millett argues that Lawrence's depiction of women often reinforces patriarchal norms and diminishes female autonomy. Conversely, defenders of Lawrence, such as F.R. Leavis, argue that his complex and multifaceted portrayals of women reflect a deeper understanding and critique of their societal roles rather than an endorsement of misogyny.

Feminist Critique: Kate Millett's seminal work "Sexual Politics" critiques Lawrence for his portrayal of women as subordinate to men. Millett contends that Lawrence's characters, particularly in their relationships with men, reflect and perpetuate patriarchal values. This perspective views Lawrence's work as reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies rather than challenging them.

Supportive Interpretations: In contrast, scholars like F.R. Leavis argue that Lawrence's nuanced characterizations and exploration of female consciousness reflect a deeper empathy and understanding.

Leavis suggests that Lawrence's portrayals, though complex and sometimes contradictory, ultimately offer a critique of the restrictive societal norms that limit women's autonomy and self-expression.

An Insight into the masterpiece, "Sons and Lovers"

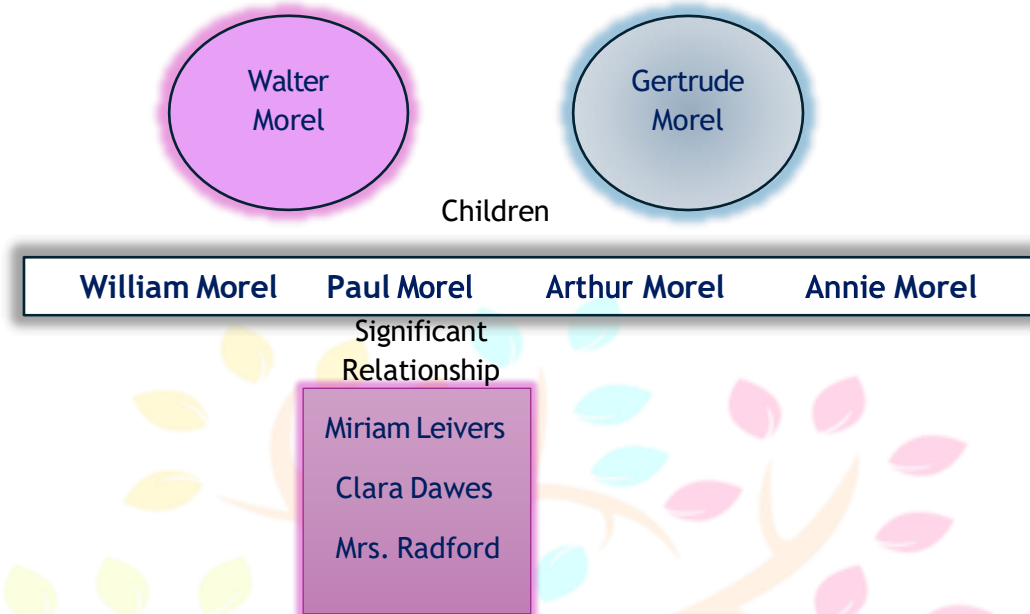


Figure 1

"Sons and Lovers" by D.H. Lawrence features a broad array of characters, both major and minor. While the central narrative focuses on the Morel family and a few significant secondary characters, there are numerous others who contribute to the story's depth and realism.

Figure 2

Here is a list of the primary and notable secondary characters:

Primary Characters

- 1.
2. Gertrude Morel
3. William Morel
4. Paul Morel
5. Arthur Morel
6. Annie Morel
7. Miriam Leivers
8. Clara Dawes
9. Baxter Dawes

Secondary Characters

1. Mrs. Radford (Clara's mother)
2. Mr. Leivers (Miriam's father)
3. Mrs. Leivers (Miriam's mother)
4. Edgar Leivers (Miriam's brother)
5. Agatha Leivers (Miriam's sister)
6. Geoffrey Leivers (Miriam's brother)
7. Edgar Leivers (Miriam's brother)
8. Louisa Lily Denys Western (a character who has a brief romantic involvement with William)
9. Beatrice (Paul's friend and Miriam's acquaintance)

Additional Characters

1. Mr. Pappleworth (Paul's supervisor at his first job)
2. Thomas Jordan (owner of the factory where Paul works)
3. Clara's friends and acquaintances
4. Various other townspeople, family members, and workers who appear briefly throughout the novel.

Counting these characters, there are approximately 20-25 individuals mentioned with varying degrees of significance to the plot. This includes the main characters, notable secondary characters, and some additional minor ones. However, this number can vary slightly based on different interpretations of who constitutes a notable character.

Defending David Herbert Lawrence against the charge of misogyny, particularly in the context of his novel "Sons and Lovers," requires a nuanced examination of his portrayal of women and the societal context of his time. Here are several key points that can be argued in Lawrence's defense:

Complex and Sympathetic Female Characters

Lawrence's female characters in "Sons and Lovers" are complex, multifaceted, and central to the narrative.

Gertrude Morel: Gertrude is portrayed as an intelligent, strong-willed woman who seeks a better life for herself and her children. Her dissatisfaction with her husband and her intense bond with her sons, especially Paul, highlight her deep emotional and intellectual capacities. Rather than a one-dimensional figure, she embodies the struggles and sacrifices of women in her social position.

Miriam Leivers: Miriam is depicted as a deeply spiritual and intellectual woman, seeking emotional and spiritual connection. Her relationship with Paul is complex and fraught with tension, reflecting the difficulties faced by women who defy conventional roles.

Clara Dawes: Clara represents a more liberated woman, estranged from her husband and seeking independence. Her relationship with Paul challenges traditional gender norms and portrays her as a strong, assertive character.

Critique of Patriarchal Constraints

Lawrence's work can be interpreted as a critique of the societal constraints placed on women. Through his female characters, Lawrence explores the limitations and frustrations experienced by women in a patriarchal society.

Gertrude's Frustrations: Gertrude's dissatisfaction with her domestic life and her struggle to find fulfillment highlight the restricted roles available to women. Her desire for her sons to achieve more than she could reflects her awareness of these limitations.

Miriam's Struggles: Miriam's intellectual and emotional aspirations are constrained by societal expectations. Her relationship with Paul illustrates the tension between her desires and the limitations imposed on her by society.

Ambiguity and Contradictions Reflect Realism

The ambiguity and contradictions in Lawrence's portrayal of gender dynamics can be seen as a reflection of the complexities of human relationships rather than outright misogyny.

Paul's Relationships: Paul Morel's relationships with women are fraught with ambiguity and inner conflict. His simultaneous dependence on and rejection of his mother, Miriam, and Clara illustrate the complexity of human emotions and societal pressures.

Empathy and Realism: Lawrence's empathetic and realistic portrayal of his female characters' inner lives demonstrates his understanding and sensitivity towards their experiences. This complexity challenges the notion that he was simply a misogynist.

Personal Context and Evolution

Understanding Lawrence's personal context and the evolution of his views can provide a more balanced perspective.

Relationship with His Mother: Lawrence's intense relationship with his mother, Lydia, deeply influenced "Sons and Lovers." The novel can be seen as an exploration of the emotional complexities and psychological impacts of such a relationship, rather than a denigration of women.

Marriages and Affairs: Lawrence's relationships with women, including his wife Frieda Weekley, were complex and often progressive for their time. Frieda, an independent and unconventional woman, influenced Lawrence's views on gender and relationships.

Defensive Interpretations by Scholars

Several scholars and critics argue that labeling Lawrence as a misogynist oversimplifies his work and fails to appreciate its depth and complexity.

F.R. Leavis and Others: Critics like F.R. Leavis have defended Lawrence, suggesting that his portrayal of women, though complex and sometimes problematic, ultimately reflects a deeper empathy and understanding. They argue that his work critiques the restrictive norms of his time and explores the profound emotional and psychological lives of his characters.

Conclusion

While certain aspects of Lawrence's portrayal of women in "Sons and Lovers" can be viewed as problematic from a modern feminist perspective, it is important to recognize the complexity and depth of his female characters. Lawrence's work reflects the societal constraints and personal struggles of his time, offering a nuanced critique of gender roles. Labeling him simply as a misogynist ignores the broader context and the empathetic portrayal of women in his work.

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