

# Women in sons and lovers

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Sons and Lovers, published in 1913, is D. H. Lawrence's third novel. It was his first successful novel and arguably his most popular. Many of the details of the novel's plot are based on Lawrence's own life and, unlike his subsequent novels, this one is relatively straightforward in its descriptions and action. D. H. Lawrence has been always criticized for the content of his novel and his characters. Sons and Lovers is another novel which was even banned for years because of its explicit indications to sexual intercourse and the complex and complicated relationship of mother and sons.

Society has a certain code fixed for a mother but Lawrence attempted to portray the mother figure in a quite different way. In fact, Lawrence puts question that to what extent a mother should care for her children and shows what happens if a mother becomes wife-submissive through the character of Gertrude Morel who is also known as Mrs. Morel. This paper would attempt to explore the character of Mrs. Morel through the feminist point of view. Before discussing Mrs. Morel's character through the magnifying glass offeminism, it is needed to focus what does feminism means and what does the feminist criticism deal with.

The most straightforward definition of feminism says that is a movement for social, cultural, political and economic equality of men and women. It is a campaign against gender inequalities and it strives for equal rights for women. Feminism can be also defined as the right to enough information available to every single woman so that she can make a choice to live a life which is not discriminatory and which works within the principles of social, cultural, political and economic equality and independence.

It is in fact a global struggle for gender equality and end of gender based discriminatory practices against women. Feminism is also related to men in the sense that all gender based equality is in fact a balance between the male and female with the intention of liberating the individual. In that sense the definition of feminism also includes all movements and campaigns that target men and boys for gender sensitization with a goal to end gender based discriminatory practices and achieve gender based equality. Feminist literary criticism is the critical analysis of literary works used on the feminist perspective. In particular, feminist literary critics tend to reject the patriarchal norms of literature that privileges masculine ways of thinking/points of view and marginalizes women 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. Now, in *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs. Morel is portrayed as the victim of the patriarchal society and the stones in Paul's life road to success, to some extent. This paper would try to avoid the normal literary criticism to *Sons and Lovers*, and rather would focus on the analysis of the three tragic women through feminine position, and specially would explore how Lawrence has portrayed Mrs.

Morel with all the issues of female essence (difference). Mrs. Morel, who came from a little capitalist class, aloof and cultured, is a woman of knowledge of a Victorian woman but her character can be read from Marxist-

Feminist point of view. From very young, she has been struggling against patriarchy, fighting for her existence and for women's rights, longing to become an authoritative, independent and responsible man. As the England industrial atmosphere came, in the man-centered family, her husband treated her sadistically, Mrs.

Morel naturally constitute an alliance with her sons to live, she taught them to change their social position and entered the middleclass, through knowledge and will, the children became Mrs. Morel's tools to make her dream and ambition come true. But all these just paint deep tragic color to Mrs. Morel. Because Mrs. Morel chose the road to setting up a union with her son to become hermaphrodite didn't come true. She put her children in her bosom, cast her own dream and life outlook on her children, hoped to fill in her emotion empty because she is a wife-submissive.

Although this abnormal maternal lieu helped her sons become outstanding, hold back free growth of individuality, cause their thought variant and their personalities split. Mrs. Morel's existence is the only support to Paul's life road to become an artist. Through loving his mother, Paul tried to find man's rights even in sleep. She should be responsible for this abnormal love, no matter what position she held in her sons' growth, she got only the colored utilizable repay, she didn't fulfill her emotion's need, and this is her very most tragic thing.

But this is just a simple summary of the whole novel and there are more left for discussion. D. H. Lawrence believed in male supremacy and that is why he wrote that "as a matter of fact unless a woman is held by man, safe within the bounds of belief, she becomes inevitably a destructive force".

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Simone de Beauvoir terms this attitude “ bourgeois conception” and states that Lawrence rediscovers this conception that woman should subordinate her existence to that of man. Thus, Lawrence can be regarded as an anti-feminist.

An anti-feminist writing is not only satirical in tone but it represents women nature intended to conform her to male expectations and tries to decide what she ought to be and what is not her own. Mrs. Morel is presented by Lawrence as a proud woman as she came from an old burgher family and that made her pay higher rent to the landlord which is a way of showing off superiority over other miners’ families. Lawrence defines it as “ a kind of aristocracy”. Mrs. Morel did not take Walter’s earnings into account while they got married but after the marriage it became a huge issue for her.

She could not accept it that her husband was not a gentleman rather he is a miner and ultimately, this became the reason of failure of their marriage life. Though she married Walter knowingly that he earns a little but after a certain period of time, she started hating her husband for being a miner and for not having a respected job. In the first half, Mrs. Morel is shown with sympathy to be the victim of a brutal husband and of an economic system that oppresses her. Later she becomes the over-possessive mother shifting her growing children and thwarting their natural development towards the independence of adulthood.

It can be said that Mrs. Morel became too much authoritative because of her ‘ penis envy’. She knew that though she came from a burgher family, still she is bound to obey Mr. Morel as he is the head of the family according to the patriarchal society. Apart from the issue of penis envy, Lawrence

presented the relationship between man and series of female stereotypes. The mother's disappointment with the father leads to the transfer of her deepest feelings from him to her offspring and particularly, the male offspring, whom, unconsciously she begins to treat as substitutes for her husband.

The mother who has poured her love into her son instead of giving it to her husband does seem, in Lawrence's own cherished meaning of the phrase, 'wife-submissive'. But at the same time, that phrase is a give-away. It sounds an old familiar note. Here is the mother being wife-submissive to her son, says the exasperated voice of Lawrence, when she ought to be preciously that to her husband – a simple case of misdirected energy. It has not been simply misdirected, but distorted as well.

The woman does not feel now, for the first time, as a true wife might feel, nor does the son find her love quite so wonderful as all that. Sexual frustration inevitably follows, and this is excellently diagnosed in *Sons and Lovers*. His mother is far closer to him; she clings to him jealously, fighting against the younger woman's power, and succeeding in holding the pair apart. Paul wants to marry Miriam but Mrs. Morel resists because she wants Paul "to marry a lady". Apart from Paul, she also does the same thing for William. She wants William to be a gentleman unlike his father.

Her possessiveness becomes clearer when a girl comes to meet William and Mrs. Morel replies "I don't approve of the girls my son meets at dances." In this novel, D. H. Lawrence has portrayed women, Specially Mrs. Morel with all he weaknesses (female essence) like nagging, orienting the children against their father, making the sons as husband-substitute, showy in nature and

being over-possessive. Paul partly disassociated himself from the crude gender distinction he is voicing, although he still endorses the idea that women are by nature unfitted to full-time work.

So, Lawrence reveals Paul's opinion of women's inferior capacity for work. After all these discussions, it seems quite clear that Mrs. Morel is the victim of one man and therefore can only live out her life vicariously through the progress made by her sons. Miriam also feels victimized by the men in her family and looks to Paul to help her escape from her servitude. Same thing goes for Clara. All of them, especially Mrs. Morel, are defined by men as their "Other" and thus, marginalized textually as well as socially and sexually.