

## **In Sons and Lovers, The Reader's Response was Analyzed in Feminist Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates reader responses to the classic literary work "Sons and Lovers" by D.H. Lawrence using a feminist perspective. Through a literary analysis approach, this research explores how readers respond to feminist aspects in the novel, particularly in the context of resisting patriarchal views. The article provides background information on D.H. Lawrence's life and how his personal experiences are reflected in this work, with an emphasis on feminist elements within the narrative. The research methodology involves in-depth textual analysis and a survey of reader responses to understand how women in the story challenge patriarchal norms and how readers, especially from a feminist perspective, perceive and interpret the involvement of female characters. In the context of feminist theory, this research discusses how "Sons and Lovers" presents a portrayal of power dynamics and gender inequality, as well as how female characters in the novel attempt to resist or adapt to existing social norms. The research findings are expected to provide insights into the impact of feminist theory on readers' understanding and responses to literary works, particularly in the context of "Sons and Lovers. In conclusion, this research delved into the exploration of D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" through the lens of reader-response theory, revealing the pivotal role of the reader's experience, knowledge, and cultural background in shaping their perception of the literary work. The initial section provided a contextual backdrop by elucidating Lawrence's personal and societal milieu, emphasizing the autobiographical aspects intertwined with the broader human experience.

**Keywords:** *Reader Response, D.H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers, Literary Analysis, Feminist Interpretation.*

### **Introduction**

D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" marked a peak in 20th century literature by presenting an in-depth look at family life and the dynamics of human relationships.<sup>1</sup> This novel, first published in the early 20th century, brought about a paradigm shift in the

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<sup>1</sup> La Muhiddin, "Characterization in The Novel Entitled Sons and Lovers By DH Lawrence," *LINGUA : Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya* 12, no. 2 (September 1, 2015): 187–200, <https://doi.org/10.30957/lingua.v12i2.27>.

depiction of everyday life and the complexity of human emotions.<sup>2</sup> It has since become a focal point of in-depth academic study in the literary world. Previous research on "Sons and Lovers" has tended to highlight conventional elements such as characterization, plot, and theme. Such analyses provide valuable insights into Lawrence's skill in constructing a compelling narrative.<sup>3</sup> However, in an era that increasingly emphasizes the role of the reader in shaping literary meaning, recent research tends to delve more into aspects of reader response.

In delving deeper into this literary work, it is important to look at D.H. Lawrence's life background and personal influences. How are the author's personal experiences and values reflected in "Sons and Lovers"? Questions like these provide a richer perspective to our understanding of the text.<sup>4</sup> In addition, an approach that is gaining increasing attention is through reader response theory. Why do readers respond to "Sons and Lovers" in a certain way? How do their experiences, knowledge and cultural background affect their interpretation of the work? By stretching the analysis from the reader's perspective, we can open a window into the diversity of interpretations and meanings that can be drawn from this work.<sup>5</sup>

As literary studies have evolved, it has become increasingly clear that a work does not only live in its own pages, but also in the dynamic interaction between author, text, and reader. Therefore, further discussion of "Sons and Lovers" not only provides us with a richer understanding of the work itself, but also enriches our introduction to the complexities of reading literature in the contemporary era. The importance of the reader's role in shaping the meaning and interpretation of literature has become an increasing focus in modern literary studies. Along with the development of literary theory, awareness of the reader's contribution in creating literary meaning has replaced the more traditional paradigm that places the author as the sole determining authority of a work's meaning. In this context, this article explores this dimension further through the lens of reader response theory to D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers".

Reader response theory emphasizes that each reader brings unique experiences, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds to the reading process.<sup>6</sup> It means that two different

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<sup>2</sup> S. M. Ogene, "Psycho-Analysis in Fiction and a Study of D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers," *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1 (2013): 95–116, <https://doi.org/10.4314/laligens.v2i1>.

<sup>3</sup> Oskar Persson Brunsell, *A Mother's Failure : An Analysis of Mrs. Morel in D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers*, 2020, <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hig:diva-31474>.

<sup>4</sup> Cengage Learning Gale, *A Study Guide for DH Lawrence's " Sons and Lovers"* (Gale Cengage Learning, 2016), [https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=G6GpDAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT32&dq=%22Sons+and+lovers+analysis+artwork&ots=DBHka-5vzk&sig=D9\\_pj2SRn4U4QAWyw2UZWEiOuls](https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=G6GpDAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT32&dq=%22Sons+and+lovers+analysis+artwork&ots=DBHka-5vzk&sig=D9_pj2SRn4U4QAWyw2UZWEiOuls).

<sup>5</sup> Cagri Mart, "Reader-Response Theory and Literature Discussions: A Springboard for Exploring Literary Texts," *The New Educational Review* 56, no. 2 (2019): 78–87.

<sup>6</sup> Elena Spirovskaya, "Reader-Response Theory and Approach: Application, Values and Significance for Students in Literature Courses," *SEEU Review* 14, no. 1 (July 1, 2019): 20–35, <https://doi.org/10.2478/seeur-2019-0003>.

readers can have different interpretations of the same work. "Sons and Lovers" as a research subject provides an interesting opportunity to observe how these factors can affect the way readers perceive and interpret literary works.<sup>7</sup> Readers' personal experiences can shape their perspectives on the characters, plot, and themes in the novel. For example, readers who have had family experiences similar to those depicted in the work may perceive the story in a different way compared to readers who have not had similar experiences.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, readers' cultural knowledge and background can enrich their understanding of the nuances and references that may be present in the text.

In the face of the complexity of "Sons and Lovers," where autobiographical elements and family dynamics take center stage, reader response theory emerges as a powerful tool to explore the variety of interpretations and meanings that can be generated by diverse readers. Therefore, this article aims to bridge the gap between the text and the reader, recognizing that literary meaning is not static, but dynamic and formed through dialogue between the author and the reader. As such, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into the diversity of readers' interpretations of classic literary works. Therefore, D.H. Lawrence's life background and personal influences provide a foundation for understanding the context in which "Sons and Lovers" was written, while an understanding of reader response theory provides a framework for analyzing how readers respond to and interpret the novel. By combining these two approaches, this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how readers respond to and give meaning to "Sons and Lovers".

### **Background Information on Reader-Response Reading**

The reader-response movement arose in the 1930s as a reaction to other critics' movements that required a denial of the reader's role in constructing meaning from the textual structure. It became a formal concept of new criticism that dominated critique practice in the 1940s and 1950s. They think that the meaning is wholly contained within the text and that it is not a product of the author's or changes in reaction to the reader's response. As a result, the reader-response movement arose to refute the assumption that the reader's response plays a minor part in developing textual meaning. In other words, the famous "effective fallacy" that was formerly ascribed to the reader's participation in meaning creation has been debunked.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that reader-response criticism is a literary critical theory that claims that the way work is read determines its meaning. In other words, the social and cultural context has a significant impact on how the text is interpreted. In other words,

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Harkin, "The Reception of Reader-Response Theory," *College Composition and Communication*, 2005, 410–25.

<sup>8</sup> Wanda Brooks and Susan Browne, "Towards a Culturally Situated Reader Response Theory," *Children's Literature in Education* 43, no. 1 (March 2012): 74–85, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-011-9154-z>.

<sup>9</sup> Norman N. Holland, "Reader-Response Criticism," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 79, no. 6 (1998): 1203.

the relationship between the text and the reader is highly appreciated since fish claims that the reader's pronoun (I) adds a tone to the text. As a result, text cannot exist without the presence of a reader. According to the idea, the interpretative communities are a key component in shaping the path to textual meaning. According to Fish, several critics believe that some parts in every text are more important than others.<sup>10</sup>

Theorists that use the reader-response lens argue that as a reader reads the exact text in various contexts or occasions, the meaning of the text changes. In a larger sense, the reader's experiences and knowledge are crucial in providing many purposes at different phases of their life. Modern variants of the idea contain a psychoanalytical viewpoint on the reader's behaviour and a socio-historical perspective on the text or an author's cultural background. So, despite their differing perspectives on the reading process, reader-response theorists share two beliefs: 1- We cannot overlook or dismiss the reader's involvement in our literature comprehension. 2- The reader can actively propose or generate meaning; nonetheless, readers from various socio-cultural backgrounds may interpret the exact text differently.<sup>11</sup>

Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and Hollands are among the many reader-response theorists who have surfaced. Stanley Fish's concept of "effective stylistics," which focuses on how a specific style suggests meaning, was one of the most influential critiques. According to Fish, the text and the reader have a very intimate relationship, and the text does not exist unless the reader and the text are linked. He also claims that the reader and interpretative community judge the literary work. This procedure breathes life into the text.<sup>12</sup>

New critics have assessed texts without considering the reader's reaction; nevertheless, Fish believes that this is impossible since, in interpretation, the reader's preferences will always favour some features of work over other. Readers may decode these meanings, but they can also construct or encode new ones (Wales, 1989). According to Fish, reader reaction is a new kind of criticism that ignores the author's aim by judging how well the author succeeds based on the acceptance of the author's works by various interpretative groups. The play of words and subtleties of convention in which the reader is enmeshed is where the meaning of the text is ambiguous. As a result, critics are searching for places when unconventional language choices elicit a response from the reader that goes beyond the mere meaning of the line. Furthermore, they are examining how this change in sense affects the work's overall impact.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1970): 123–62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/468593>.

<sup>11</sup> Lois Tyson, *Using Critical Theory: How to Read and Write About Literature* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Ruzbeh Babaei and Iraj Montashery, "Stanley Fish with Respect to the Reader," *International Journal of English and Literature*. Vol 3, no. 2 (2012): 18–24.

<sup>13</sup> Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Routledge, 2013), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315835358/reader-guide-contemporary-literary-theory-peter-brooker-peter-widdowson-raman-selden>.

For Iser, her viewpoint is similar to that of a fish in that the text provides instructions to the reader, who then interprets them. As Tyson observes, "literary works tend to build up certain readers' expectations, only to upset these expectations as the reading progresses," as Iser highlights. As a result, the reader's perceptions of the text constantly change. According to Iser, the reader fills in any blanks or gaps in a text-based on his knowledge, experiences, and disposition. Filling in these gaps is a kind of communication between the reader and the text. These signals assist the reader in orienting themselves inside the text. The substance of literary works, according to Holland, corresponds to human illusions, which he defines using typical Freudian categories. In summary, literary form transforms the threatening material of unconscious fantasy into a form that the ego may engage comfortably and enjoyably. This metamorphosis, which is the reader's result, will be determined by the types of defensive mechanisms and coping techniques used by particular readers.<sup>14</sup>

### **Reader-Response Reading as a Concept**

Reader-response, the concept of readers' interpretative actions, rather than the author's aim or the text's structure, is sustained by criticism. It may assist in understanding the relevance and aesthetic aspects of a book; it also addresses how the author reacts to criticism. It's worth noting that a writer may reply to feedback from friends, reviewers, critics, or biographers who are tasked with analyzing these replies. They may assist in explaining how and why the writer's style, ideas, goals, or forms developed.

In reality, when we read and interpret any text, we rely on a variety of factors, including: 1- Background in feminist thought: It clarifies the role of women in the text. "Feminist critics would favour texts that complement feminist thinking—feminine imagery can be more interesting than exclusively male ones," says fish. As a result, feminist critique rejects all male-centred and controlled critical and ruling ideologies as superior. It thinks that gender is a cultural construct rather than a natural consequence; as Fish puts it, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".<sup>15</sup>

For example, consider the feminist factor of sons and lovers: -

"He sat and waited, grimacing. Miriam finally let the bird nibble at her hand. She let out a little scream of terror and agony due to her fear—rather pitiful ". 6.351).

2- Psychoanalytic criticism: It discusses the psychoanalytic motivations for a certain kind of literary interpretation. As an example: "Recklessness is practically a man's way of exacting vengeance on his wife. He believes he is unappreciated. Thus he is willing to stake his life to avoid being deprived entirely ". Lawrence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Holland, "Reader-Response Criticism."

<sup>15</sup> Babae and Montashery, "Stanley Fish with Respect to the Reader."

<sup>16</sup> David Herbert Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers: DH Lawrence* (United Kingdom: Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1913).

3- Structuralist criticism looks at the literary conventions that the reader must have acquired, whether consciously or subconsciously. As a result, he will be able to read a specific literary piece.

4- Cultural background: It investigates how our cultural background limits our ability to recognize homoeroticism in literary texts, as well as how readers' attitudes and values influence their responses, drawing on a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including post-structuralist, feminist, anthropological, historical, and Marxist. According to "subjective viewpoints" gained by cultural organizations, all views influence reader reaction. As a result, the reader learns various cultural activities that express cultural identity or challenge social and economic dominance. According to Beach, it is critical for the reader to share a common language and define norms and boundaries for appropriate interpersonal behaviour, as well as recruit, select, socialize, and train members, and allocate authority, power, status, and resources, as well as cope with unpredictable, stressful events.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, all of these cultural factors impact the reader's evaluation of the text. The following is an example from Lawrence's *Sons and Lover* regarding Paul's mother's grip over him. It demonstrates how reading may differ depending on one's cultural background, which will be examined in the paper's third half.

He always travelled with Miriam, and  
It was becoming late, and he knew his mother was awake.  
Why are you worried and upset about him?  
He didn't comprehend... She was aware of it.  
This chick is luring Paul away. She's also  
Miriam was not a favourite of mine.

### Theory of Social Reader Reaction

Fish's study, in which there is no pure meaningful reaction to individual perception, is commonly related to social reader-response theory. The "interpretive community," as defined by Fish, plays a critical role in meaning delineation and represents a kind of viewpoint. For Fish, the meaning of any reader/text deal is a function of the interpretive strategies and conventions adopted by readers as members of an interpretive community. Readers can share particular strategies having specific values by group community, so members of a group may, for example, subscribe to a feminist, Marxist, or deconstructionist approach to their response to "Mushrooms".<sup>18</sup> A complex interpretative community recognizes the importance of its work. This might be seen as a foundation for Marxist theorists. In terms of interpretative tactics, an interpretive community might be considered unsophisticated. This results from a high school

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Beach, "Critical Discourse Theory and Reader Response: How Discourses Constitute Reader Stances and Social Contexts," *Reader* 37 (1997): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Beach, "Critical Issues: Reading and Responding to Literature at the Level of Activity," *Journal of Literacy Research* 32, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 237–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862960009548075>.

instructor telling his pupils that it is normal to read literature and discover the story's secret meaning.

The reader may, of course, ascribe himself to it consciously or subconsciously. Fish says that how students understand the text in the first place is determined by a diversity of community authority based on the variety of interpretative communities to which students already belong. As a result, the reader-response theory does not propose a new method of reading texts or support any existing type of literary criticism.<sup>19</sup> And that no interpretation, and hence no kind of literary criticism, can claim to be able to convey what is contained in work. As Fish points out, arrangements will be confined to a small number of interpretative procedures that may be used at every time in history. We may become conscious of what we are doing when we interpret a book if we comprehend the concepts of social reader-response.<sup>20</sup> As a result, social reader reaction is critical in generating many interpretations of a work. As a result, the following part will demonstrate how the social aspects of the theory contribute to giving a text new meaning when readers read it from various social backgrounds.

## Result and Discussion

Reader-response theory is discussed in Lawrence's *Sons and lovers* in this study. The idea is described as a critical theory that focuses on reader culture and their experience with literary work and their part in constructing new meanings from literary work. In addition, this research attempts to understand the book in light of other social factors that created society's identity and how these manipulations and moulding influenced the novel's identity. The research's restriction focuses on reader reaction to Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and sheds light on the feminist and social class themes. The study is divided into three parts with a conclusion. Section one discusses and debates D.H. Lawrence's background in light of his autobiographical note on his life.<sup>21</sup>

The events in the book are formed by referring to the problems that D.H. Lawrence encounters, which inspires him and reflects on his work. The second section discusses a broad description of reader-response criticism, its historical context, and the tight contact between the reader and the text to develop new meaning based on the reader's history. It also discusses reader-response theorists such as Fish, Iser, and Hollands. In addition, the part includes a detailed description of feminist and social reader-response reading and how these elements affect reader-response reading. Section three elucidates the social and feminist reader response in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* by

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<sup>19</sup> Emrah Atasoy, "From the Text to the Reader: An Application of Reader-Response Theory to Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess,'" *Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 7 (December 15, 2020): 196–209, <https://doi.org/10.46250/kulturder.828951>.

<sup>20</sup> Cynthia A. Tyson, "'Get Up Offa That Thing': African American Middle School Students Respond to Literature to Develop a Framework for Understanding Social Action," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 42–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2002.10473178>.

<sup>21</sup> Gale, *A Study Guide for DH Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers"*.

discussing how the concept influences the novel's theme and each character; additionally, it provides an understanding of the feminist element in Lawrence's novel and explains it straightforwardly.<sup>22</sup> The conclusion summarizes what has been covered in the three parts and concludes with a summary of results and recommendations for additional studies.

*Sons and Lovers* is a conventional autobiographical book in which the events in the story are based on the author's life. However, specific incidents in the book are changed, exaggerated, or diminished, but the story's substance is based on the author's life. The novel's central themes are based on actual occurrences, mimicking Lawrence's struggles throughout his youth and adolescence, which are mirrored in the novel's events. D.H. Lawrence was born into a mining family, residing in a vast community called Eastwood, which appears as Bestwood in *Sons and Lovers*, according to Pullin.<sup>23</sup> His town used to be adjacent to Nottingham, an industrial city rich in coal and populated by extensively industrialized and wealthy people. Lawrence is from a poor environment, which leads him to distinguish the class distinction, so he grew up as a rebel with few members of the working-class to escape poverty because the upper class treats the poor and uneducated people so severely and despises them, as Walter Morel does in *Sons and Lovers*. As a result, the only option for him to advance is to be ambitious to earn scholarships that would allow him to attend high school and university. This is evident throughout the literature. According to Allen, Lawrence is "far closer to his characters, much more passionately involved with them," and "the evident urgency of Lawrence's writing brings readers into very personal associations with the people of the books."

Lawrence is not known to be a proponent of feminism or the patriarchy movement. Because his father was a drunk miner who was uneducated and non-intellectual, the novel's tone is described as a non-intellectual reaction to all that happens to his father and mother. He used to be funny and had deep apprehensions about natural existence until he felt emotional marginalization from his family. His mother used to be spiritual, cultured, and intelligent, coming from a higher socioeconomic class. Lawrence's maternal characteristics drive him to write at the end of his life to play a bourgeois superior position. The meeting of the mother and the son is described as "the dusky, having the golden softness of the man's sensuous flame of life, that has flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her" in the first chapter of *Sons and Lovers*.<sup>24</sup> Marriage is portrayed unfavourably in the narrative owing to the socioeconomic level of the characters. For example, after a few weeks of marriage, they

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<sup>22</sup> Claudia Rosenhan, "Euthanasia in 'Sons and Lovers' and D. H. Lawrence's Metaphysic of Life," *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 32/33 (2003): 1–18.

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Harvey, "Feminist Criticism," in *Sons and Lovers*, ed. Geoffrey Harvey, The Critics Debate (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1987), 32–38, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-18507-8\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-18507-8_5).

<sup>24</sup> Susan Reid, "Lawrence's Case of Wagner: The White Peacock and The Trespasser," in *D.H. Lawrence, Music and Modernism*, ed. Susan Reid, Palgrave Studies in Music and Literature (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 53–83, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04999-7\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04999-7_3).



started to fight and grew unhappy in their marriage, and something was murdered in the father. As a result, the children's gaze is drawn to their mother. So, in his fictional work, Lawrence uses expressions to show his closeness to his mother; these expressions could be used to test his early manhood capacity, or before he set up weekly meetings with Frieda, to provide him with a sense of total attachment to mother woman.<sup>25</sup>

Lawrence grew close with the chamber's family when he was a youngster to get away from the despair and filth of his hometown, 'Eastwood.' His alcoholic father's fury and violence, as well as his mother's overprotectiveness and control. In his work *Sons and Lovers*, he became close to a girl called Jessie, who he portrays as Miriam. Lawrence adored Jessie, and they spent much of their time trekking in the countryside together. They would often pause to recite poetry or discuss the newest work by the French novelist and social critic Emile Zola. This was a turning point in his mother's conduct, as she grew envious of her son and despised Jessie. As a result, Lawrence addresses sexual issues.

Lawrence says that if the son-lover marries, there will be a flaw in the life process; for example, his wife will want his sons to be lovers. As a result, her partner may be present in her house. Lawrence wished to portray in *Sons and Lovers* the influence of a mother's love on her sons, who are unable to love as they grow up due to their mother's control over their souls. Mrs Morel's growing envy of Miriam's influence on Paul demonstrates this. Many reviewers and psychoanalysts see the work as a pervasive examination of the sexual dynamics of son/mother love and how much love may ruin a man who fails to pass such sentiments to his partner. Because the tale is based on their close connection, Jessie Chambers supplied numerous details while Lawrence was writing on *Sons and Lovers*.<sup>26</sup>

Lawrence finishes the manuscript while grieving the loss of his mother. At the same time, he is influenced by Frieda, his future wife, who has a personality similar to Paul Morel's previous love, 'Clara Dawes.' In the story, Jessie is depicted as 'Miriam,' who is ugly and has broken up her connection with Lawrence to defend herself from the dead-end of her relationship by writing her account of the relationship. It has been noted that *Sons and Lovers* have become a well-known and successful critical work, with both good and negative responses. As Ghent points out, it is positive.<sup>27</sup>

This section aims to look at Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* from a social and feminist reader's standpoint. At the same time, according to Fish's approach to literature, there are actual impacts linked with social and cultural elements. The individual's social background comprises his knowledge, cultural background, and function in society. According to social theories of response, unique social 'literacy events' influence the

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<sup>25</sup> Gerald Doherty, "D. H. Lawrence's 'Sons and Lovers' and the Culture of Sacrifice," *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 34/35 (2010): 5–24.

<sup>26</sup> Seolji Han, "The Ethics of Melancholic Subjectivity in *Sons and Lovers*," *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 41, no. 2 (2016): 7–25.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Harrison, "I Tell You It Has Got Form — Form': Plot, Structure, and Meaning in 'Sons and Lovers,'" *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 39, no. 2 (2014): 11–24.

meaning of responses. The quality of an event is determined by how participants sense responsibility or the degree of social engagement in an event. The community heavily influences the way people react to the text. The following facts are shown in an excerpt from the novel: "Mrs Morel was born into an ancient burgher family, legendary independents who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson and were staunch Confederate supporters. Her grandpa had gone bankrupt in the lace-market when so many lace-makers in Nottingham had failed."<sup>28</sup>

Lawrence depicts a distinct social and class structure prevalent around the turn of the century in Britain. Lawrence's style was affected by various social, religious, and economic concerns in British society, mainly when he wrote *Sons and Lovers*, which dealt with themes like severe class structure and the weight of traditional traditions that existed at the time. As a result, the novel's most thematic structure, which gives it depth and gravity, is the class difference. The class divide influences Mr Morel's marriage in *Sons and Lovers* since she is from the middle class and her husband is from a lower social level; he is often inebriated. As a result of these conditions, their marriage is difficult to maintain, with many arguments between them. Mr Morel aspires to achieve a greater cultural and social standing than their birth position.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, she clutches her kids close to her, constructing virtual pictures of themselves in their minds, instilling ideals such as upward mobility from meagre beginnings. However, Mr Morel's objectives are wrong since they produce disputes with her spouse. It is shown that Mr Morel expects her boys to work as hard as she does and be positive for them to rise in society and become honourable men. In Lawrence's day, mothers' hopes were tempered by a sense of reality, but they silently wished for the happiness and prosperity of all their children. Mrs Morel also seeks to elevate the status of her boys emotionally or mentally, which Paul exemplifies. Paul and his mother, in particular, want to climb above the din of life in Bestwood's lower-class by pushing toward their views and obstacles in their relationship; this problem is regarded as symptomatic of a psycho-social ascent to the slightly bigger aspirations of the middle class. Miriam and Clara are both in this situation. Furthermore, Lawrence has tackled topics of class struggle, consciousness, and ambition in this work in the ultimate analysis. The illustrations of the class structure features serve as a reminder of how these social dynamics affected human lives throughout the book.

Mrs Morel's unfavourable feelings toward her husband make him spiritually weak and impact his masculinity. When Mrs Morel chats to Mr Heaton, she talks for hours. Her sentiments and emotions are dedicated to her third son Paul. As stated in the following excerpt, she despises her husband:

"The lovely infant rested in her arms.

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*.

<sup>29</sup> Robert L. Caserio, "Beyond Oedipal Psychology in 'Sons and Lovers': Lawrence's 'Foreword' to Being and History," *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 39, no. 2 (2014): 97–115.

Its piercing blue eyes, which are constantly glancing up  
It seemed to lure her in with her unblinking stare... Was  
Is there a hint of resentment in the expression? She had a feeling.  
Fear and agony melted into her bones on the morrow".<sup>30</sup>

Mrs Morel throws her husband out the window. She is separated from him and considers his presence in her life to be insignificant. In the following excerpt, she is dedicated to her son, William, who works in a coal mine:

With the birth of this third child,  
Baby, she's no longer aiming for  
He could no longer set his sights on anything since he was impotent.  
Having such a strong impression of him as a result of her circumstances,  
Could it be that she didn't mind what he did?  
Allow him to be alone.

Because of his dominance over his mother, Paul is a critical son in the novel's subject. Mrs Morel is said to use her marriage to shape Paul's life and destiny. She proposes the necessity of his job in a "surgical appliance" manufacturing enterprise. She even comes along with him. She is aware of his admission to him. When Paul is uncomfortable reading a letter in French, Mrs Morel consults with Mr Jordan, the manager. Paul's mother dismisses his presence in the interview with Mr Jordan:

"Mr Jordan stared at the pallid, bumbling idiot.  
a stubborn adolescent... "And when do you think he'll be able to come?"  
He inquired. "Well," Mrs Morel responded, "as soon as possible."  
Wish. He has finally completed his education.  
He'd want to reside in Best Wood."  
Yes, but he may be there - at the station.  
quarter-past-eight".<sup>31</sup>

As a result, each reader's perception of the book differs depending on their social and cultural origins. Due to the reader's understanding, the notion of feminism and patriarchy may be seen favourably or poorly by those who read the work. This explains the idea of indeterminacy, which is linked to the kind of reader who reads the text.

### **Feminist Reader-Response**

Lawrence is said to have a strong belief in feminism as a universal ideal. He maintains that femaleness is a natural part of a woman's inherent knowledge. According to Lawrence, a woman's capacity to identify and retain her femininity is one of nature's most significant gifts. In the face of a domineering guy, a woman stands up for herself, with a distinct perspective on life and the world. Feminist critique is defined as an endeavour to critically assess literary works from a feminist viewpoint. Feminist literary

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<sup>30</sup> Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*.

<sup>31</sup> Caserio, "Beyond Oedipal Psychology in 'Sons and Lovers.'"

critics, in particular, tend to condemn any patriarchal literary point of view that privileges male points of view while marginalizing women on political, economic, and psychological levels. Feminist critique, according to some critics, is an endeavour to provide a place for and listen to women's voices, which had traditionally been silenced or drowned out by patriarchal literary-critical practices. To put it another way, literature, in general, provides insight into individuals and societies classified as patriarchal. Literary critics attempt to demonstrate how women are excluded in the language of literature by using this "hermeneutics of suspicion." The cultural context plays a significant part in developing the method to react to the text. The following facts are shown in an excerpt from the novel:

"She was aware that she felt a kind of enslavement to him, which she despised since she couldn't control it. She despised her feelings for him the minute they were too powerful for her. And she despised him because she admired his denomination. So, in the last issue, she had tried to keep herself free of him. And she was freer of him than he was of her" (part 2, chapter 2).

"Mrs Morel tells herself that she was to see herself completed through Paul" (part 2, chapter 8).

"That's how ladies treat me," Paul said.

"They lust for me like crazy, yet they refuse to be my property".<sup>32</sup>

Mrs Morel is portrayed in *Sons and Lovers* as a victim of patriarchal society and, to some extent, an impediment in Paul's path to success. Mrs Morel is from the middle class, cultured as a woman of Victorian society; she has been struggling against patriarchy, fighting for her existence and women's rights, for example, "Mrs Morel said: If I were a man, nothing would stop me" (Lawrence, 1988).

She aspires to be a strong, independent woman with a responsible partner. However, her husband treats her horribly, according to England's industrial culture of the man-centred family; as a result, she turns to her boys to find purpose in life. Mrs Morel, on the other hand, instils ambition in her boys by teaching them how to transform their social status and become the middle class via education and willpower. As a result, she employs her boys to realize her ambitions and dreams. Mrs Morel's presence is seen as a positive since she used to be Paul's sole source of support in his life, as he aspired to be an artist, which is challenging to do without his mother's help; Paul's dream would not have come true. As a result, following his mother's death, he could not sketch. This demonstrates the role of feminism in opening the way for men in society. In actuality, Paul is victimized by his mother's desire for power.

Miriam, who is victimized by patriarchy in this tale, is another victim. She is a lovely, bashful young lady subjugated by her father and brothers, who look down on her. Victorian morals and religion have imprisoned her. Miriam is not interested in following in the footsteps of the other girls in her hamlet. She aspires to have a meaningful life, but

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<sup>32</sup> Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*.

she is ruled by social standards and yearns for independence. She discovers the purpose of her existence when she falls in love with Paul because she has spiritual love for him rather than physical love owing to her religious attitude, which dominates her; as a result, her passion intensifies her suffering, and Paul refuses to collaborate with her. "You are a nun - you are a nun," he says (Lawrence, 1988). These comments wound her and pierce her heart once again. Paul never considers her point of view and makes decisions based on his emotional strength. Clara is another feminist character. Lawrence creates Clara, a persona who is the polar opposite of Miriam. Clara is a materialistic symbol whom Paul loves to fulfil his needs as an amen of Victorian society. Still, he ignores her role in society and her thinking, believing that women must stay at home as housewives, must be calm and silent, and must never leave her husband no matter how badly he treats her. This hurts and limits her since she wants to prove herself and play a role in society as a woman.<sup>33</sup>

As a result, D.H. Lawrence portrays women in the book as flashy and possessive. Mrs Morel, for example, has traits with flaws such as nagging and orienting the children against their father, resulting in the son serving as a husband-substitute. So, after all of this talk, it seems that Mrs Morel is a victim of one guy and that she can only live out her life via her sons' achievements. Miriam senses her freedom from slavery as well, but Paul abandons her. Thus, the work suggests indeterminacy in meaning on literary, social, and sexual levels, based on the character profile and events portrayed.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this research delved into the exploration of D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" through the lens of reader-response theory, revealing the pivotal role of the reader's experience, knowledge, and cultural background in shaping their perception of the literary work. The initial section provided a contextual backdrop by elucidating Lawrence's personal and societal milieu, emphasizing the autobiographical aspects intertwined with the broader human experience. The second section elucidated the tenets of reader-response theory, highlighting how the author's cultural background, age, gender, and societal affiliations influence the critique and evaluation of any literary text. This intricate interplay of factors significantly shapes the reader's judgment of the literary work.

Furthermore, the research comprehensively explored the social backgrounds of Lawrence's characters in "Sons and Lovers," shedding light on the profound impact of social dynamics on human existence. The examination extended to Lawrence's feminist perspective embedded in the narrative, illustrating how the feminist element within his writing serves as a counterforce against patriarchal viewpoints. It showcased women's resilience and strength in challenging the norms of a patriarchal culture, asserting their rightful place in society. Conclusively, the application of reader-response theory emerged as a valuable reading technique, enriching our understanding and enhancing our reading

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<sup>33</sup> Harvey, "Feminist Criticism."

skills by providing diverse viewpoints and perspectives on the intricacies of the world we inhabit. The research not only contributes to a nuanced comprehension of "Sons and Lovers" but also underscores the significance of considering the multifaceted aspects of reader engagement in the interpretation of literary works.

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