

# An Analysis of *Sons and Lovers* from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

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**ABSTRACT:** *Sons and Lovers* is a semi-autobiographical novel by D.H. Lawrence, written during the early 20th-century rise of feminism. This novel is analyzed from an ecofeminist perspective to argue that men, women, and nature should coexist harmoniously. Ecofeminists believe nature and women are oppressed by patriarchal values and anthropocentrism. Solving ecological problems and building a harmonious society requires challenging these systems by combining feminist and ecological movements. This thesis introduces Lawrence and *Sons and Lovers*, reviews scholarship, then deepens understanding through ecofeminism. It analyzes men's domination over nature and women, their resistance, and finally explores the ideal harmonious relationship between the three.

**KEYWORDS:** *Sons and Lovers*, ecofeminism, men, women, nature

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## I. INTRODUCTION

David Herbert Lawrence, one of Britain's greatest writers, produced nearly 50 volumes of fiction, poetry, and drama. His works consistently explore the relationship between men, women, and nature, and have been widely reprinted and translated. *Sons and Lovers*, a semi-autobiographical novel published in 1913, is now regarded as his earliest masterpiece. Zhao Xiaoli and Qu Changjiang (1989) noted that it "established Lawrence's place in the history of modern British literature and even modern world literature." It is also considered the first great novel depicting English working-class life.

### 1.1 Research Background and Related Researches

When it debuted in 1913, *Sons and Lovers* was less acclaimed than today. William Heinemann remarked that "the degradation of the mother, supposed to be of gentler birth, is almost inconceivable" (Boulton 1979). Another critic complained, "it has no particular shape and no recognizable plot; themes are casually taken up, and then as casually dropped" (Lascelles 1913). Over time, however, its brilliance has been widely recognized. Recent scholarship offers varied interpretations: Gu Hanyi (2016) examined Lawrence's ecofeminist ideas; Chao Dun (2016) explored the theme through Lawrence's pursuit of "the true life and the integrated self"; Zhang Jing (2015) applied feminism to analyze the tragic fates of the three women; Lu Yu and Xu Dan (2022) used Freud's personality structure theory to explain Miriam's imbalance. Moreover, the novel invites a dystopian reading. Ibrahim (2022) argued that its dystopian elements—corruption, absolute evils, repression, killing, poverty, and disease—emerge through the interplay of themes and characters. Collectively, these perspectives affirm the novel's artistic value.

## 1.2 The Ecofeminist Theory

Ecofeminism, emerging in the 1970s and developing in the 1990s, combines environmentalism and feminism. It analyzes ecological issues through gender, opposing anthropocentrism and androcentrism. It seeks to change the notion of man controlling nature, rooted in man controlling man, and challenges values leading to suppression and exploitation.

Coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974), ecofeminism links the exploitation of nature to the oppression of women. It emphasizes connections between humans, non-humans, and the Earth. Despite criticism in the 1990s for potential essentialism or supporting patriarchy, it expanded to include intersectional analyses (e.g., labor rights, animal rights).

Ecofeminism advocates rebuilding society based on feminist and ecological principles, highlighting life's interdependence and parallels between social and ecological oppression. It argues that improving the status of women and nature are interconnected; patriarchy causes oppression of both. This thesis analyzes *Sons and Lovers* using this framework, relevant amidst growing ecological and feminist movements.

## 1.3 Significance and Structure of the Thesis

This thesis applies ecofeminism to *Sons and Lovers*. Lawrence depicts nature's trauma, women's repressed lives, and resulting male hurt, expressing ecofeminist beliefs and hope for gender equality and human-nature harmony. This reading enhances the novel's literary and thematic depth.

This study employs an ecofeminist lens to analyze D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. The investigation commences by introducing Lawrence, situating the novel within relevant scholarship, and establishing the foundational ecofeminist theoretical framework. Building directly on this foundation, then critically examines the novel's portrayal of patriarchal domination, specifically analyzing how male characters exert parallel control over both nature and women. Then investigates the consequential resistance depicted within the text, scrutinizing the diverse ways both nature (through environmental forces and disasters) and female characters revolt against this male-centric oppression. Progressing towards a constructive vision, it explores the ecofeminist ideal of harmony, probing the potential for balanced and non-exploitative relationships between women and nature, men and nature, and ultimately, men and women, as suggested by Lawrence's narrative. The study culminates by synthesizing Lawrence's unique ecofeminist expression in *Sons and Lovers*, evaluating its significance in critiquing patriarchal structures and envisioning ecological and gender equity.

## II. MEN'S DOMINATION OVER NATURE AND WOMEN

Ecofeminism opposes androcentrism and anthropocentrism, rejecting values enabling exploitation. It argues men's oppression of nature and women stems from patriarchal worldviews.

### 2.1 Men's Domination over Nature

During industrialization, nature was exploited as a resource. *Sons and Lovers* depicts this through Bestwood's transformation. Once pastoral, its environment degraded due to coal mining: the railroad spoiled natural beauty, Hell Row burned, and new miner housing appeared superficially fine but was filthy.

Paul's workplace in Nottingham is described as "gloomy and old-fashioned" and filled with "ominous words" (Lawrence, 2013, p. 102), contrasting sharply with his hometown's initial beauty. Industrial cities like Nottingham suffered virulent pollution. Industrialism, driven by the desire to dominate nature, ruined habitation, employment conditions, and natural beauty through noise and air pollution.

### 2.2 Men's Domination over Women

Victorian women faced limited education and career options, relying on men financially and socially, leading to domination. The novel's three women exemplify this.

Mrs. Morel, from a bourgeois background, married miner Walter Morel attracted by his physicality. He drank excessively, abused her, and once "jerked the drawer... flung it at her" (Lawrence, 2013, p. 44). He drove his pregnant wife out and neglected her during childbirth, demonstrating patriarchal self-centeredness. Disillusioned, she focused on her children's success. Miriam, the only daughter on Willey Farm, endured harsh treatment from

her brothers. Seeking education and equality, she joined feminist groups. Paul, however, asserted patriarchal supremacy, abusing her during lessons: “he stormed at her, got ashamed, continued the lesson, and grew furious again, abusing her” (Lawrence, 2013, p. 168). He ultimately rejected her, blaming Victorian repression of sexuality. Clara, betrayed by her husband Baxter, worked as a lacer. Baxter was “dirty and cruel,” wanting “to bully me because he hadn’t got me” (Lawrence, 2013, p. 291). Paul was attracted by her appearance and indifference, viewing her primarily as a sexual object, ignoring her emotional needs. Paul’s patriarchal view reduced women to symbols of sex or spirit based on his requirements.

### **III. NATURE’S AND WOMEN’S REVOLTS AGAINST MEN**

Men’s domination provoked resistance from nature and women.

#### **3.1 Nature’s Revolts against Men**

Industrialization severely damaged men’s health. Mr. Morel entered mines at ten; his life was likened to a mouse’s. Poor conditions caused frequent illness. An inflamed brain caused untreatable pain. Later, a boulder caused a severe leg fracture requiring hospitalization. This signifies nature’s retaliation for its violation.

William Morel, ambitious in London, died of pneumonia caused by poor air and work pressure. Paul also suffered severe pneumonia from long hours in a “gloomy, stifling setting,” leaving him weak after recovery. Nature revolted through environmental degradation, threatening men’s lives and health.

#### **3.2 Women’s Revolts against Men**

Oppressed women developed feminist consciousness and rebelled. Mrs. Morel punished Walter: “If he drank, and lied, was often a poltroon, sometimes a knave, she wielded the lash unmercifully” (Lawrence, 2013, p. 20). She joined a women’s club discussing social issues, developing independent standards. She defied Walter by ensuring her children entered the middle class, not mining. Miriam questioned authority, defending herself against Paul’s criticism: “You don’t give me time to learn it” (Lawrence, 2013, p. 168). Complaining about home discrimination showed awareness. Ultimately, she became a self-reliant teacher. Clara left her controlling husband—a radical act then. She realized Paul used her for sex and disrespected her; recognizing “There was nothing stable about him” (Lawrence, 2013, p. 429), she left him. She participated in the women’s movement for ten years, becoming educated and self-possessed.

Nature and women’s revolts harmed men physically and mentally, challenging patriarchal control.

### **IV. THE IDEAL RELATIONSHIP FROM THE ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

Lawrence advocated environmental protection, women’s liberation, and harmony between men, women, and nature.

#### **4.1 Women and Nature**

The women lived harmoniously with nature. Mrs. Morel found solace in gardens; flowers comforted her when Walter expelled her. Sitting in a field watching sunset restored her peace. Miriam felt nature was her companion and lover, worshipping it passionately. Clara respected nature deeply, refusing to pick flowers: “she did not want their corpses,” believing people “have no right to pick them.” Ecofeminists link the feminine essence to nature; Lawrence idealized this coexistence.

#### **4.2 Men and Nature**

Men desired domination but also loved nature. Mr. Morel chewed hay to feel connected, distressed by inability to enjoy beauty. Paul was captivated by Willey Farm’s natural splendor—mountains, oaks, lake—and its peaceful life, contrasting with industrial filth. However, industrialization spoiled the countryside. Men harmed nature and faced retaliation. Ecofeminism stresses men and nature are interdependent parts of an ecosystem; harmony is essential. Lawrence critiques environmental damage and urges preservation. Zhang Qingxian and Gong Nan (2019) note: “Lawrence calls on people to respect nature and advocates the harmonious coexistence of man and nature.”

#### 4.3 Men and Women

The novel shows no harmonious male-female relationships. Yuan Shuai (2016) notes the Morels' marriage was tragic: differing class/education led to conflict; Walter's irresponsibility and Mrs. Morel's failed attempts to change him made him an outsider. William married for vanity, lacking love or care. Paul's relationship with Miriam failed due to differing views on physical love; with Clara, it failed because he treated her as a sexual object, lacking spiritual connection. Ecofeminism advocates equality in love/marriage, without oppression, featuring harmonious sexuality and spiritual communication—Lawrence's ideal.

#### V. CONCLUSION

D.H. Lawrence expressed sophisticated ecofeminist consciousness in *Sons and Lovers*, concerned with interactions between men, women, and nature. This thesis investigated these subjects through an ecofeminist lens. Lawrence depicted men's domination over nature and women, and their consequent revolts, demonstrating empathy for the oppressed. His advanced ecofeminism called for harmony: men-nature, men-women, women-nature.

Patriarchy subordinates women and nature to men. Men's dominance provoked revolts: polluted nature threatened men's health (Morel's accidents, William and Paul's illnesses); women sought independence (Mrs. Morel's club/child-rearing, Miriam's teaching, Clara's work/self-respect), threatening male marital/emotional dominance. Women sympathized with nature's destruction; nature comforted oppressed women. Lawrence presented disharmonious marriages (Morels, William) and relationships (Paul/Miriam, Paul/Clara) to advocate for relationships based on equality, close bonding, spiritual communication, and mutual independence. Lawrence's views align with ecofeminism: patriarchy oppresses women and nature; their resistance is linked. *Sons and Lovers* underscores the need to protect women and nature. Re-reading it ecofeministically is crucial amidst ecological crises, inspiring a world where men, women, and nature coexist harmoniously.

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