

Block**2****Novel (1)****BLOCK INTRODUCTION****02****UNIT 5****The Early Twentieth Century British Novel: Social and Cultural
Contexts****03****UNIT 6****D. H. Lawrence and the British Novel****14****UNIT 7*****Sons and Lovers: Analysis and Interpretations*****25****UNIT 8*****Sons and Lovers: Themes and Concerns*****33**

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In the previous block of this course, we introduced you to modernism and its expression in various genres. In this block, we will be discussing the early twentieth century British novel, focusing on the novel *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence.

Unit 1: The Early Twentieth Century British Novel: Social and Cultural Contexts briefly discusses political and social developments in Britain during this period, as well as the work of intellectuals like Freud and Nietzsche, an understanding of which is important for a deeper engagement with the texts chosen for study.

Unit 2: D. H. Lawrence and the British Novel introduces the writings of Lawrence and discusses in some detail, those aspects of his life which are relevant for an understanding of *Sons and Lovers*.

Unit 3: *Sons and Lovers*: Analysis and Interpretations contextualises this novel in the corpus of Lawrence's fiction and discusses its structure.

Unit 4: *Sons and Lovers*: Themes and Concerns touches upon the autobiographical aspects of the novel, its engagement with the region of the English East Midlands, as well as some of the major theoretical readings of the novel.

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Unit 5: The Early Twentieth Century British Novel: Social and Cultural Contexts

Structure

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5.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to critically analyse:

- the political, social and cultural conditions in early twentieth century Britain.
 - the social, cultural and intellectual contexts of the early twentieth century British novel
 - the achievement of early twentieth century British novelists
- and the broad concerns of their writing

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous block of this course, we discussed Modernism and its representations in various literary genres. As you have already learnt, the Modernists emphasised the importance of breaking away from the past and its cultural values – a fact noted by almost all scholars studying the cultural history of this period. Virginia Woolf's essay 'How it Strikes a Contemporary', makes a clear statement of what it meant to be 'modern' in the early twentieth century:

"No age can have been more rich than ours in writers determined to give expression to the differences which separate them from the past and not to the resemblances which connect them with it. ... the most casual reader dipping into the poetry, into fiction, into biography, can hardly fail to be impressed by the courage, the sincerity, in a word, by the widespread originality of our time" (Woolf, *The Common Reader*).

Chris Baldick in his Introduction to the *Oxford English Literary History Volume 10*, points out how Woolf is emphasising here, a fact of central significance for her and her contemporaries, of

living and writing in a world radically different from the Victorian world of the previous generation. Thus, the tendency to break away from tradition and established literary practices, were very important to the modernist project.

However, even while celebrating the incredible originality of the modernist writers, it is also important to have an “awareness of the mainstream from which they diverged” (Baldick 3). Here, Baldick reminds us that there were several continuities from the previous period into the early twentieth century, which cannot be ignored. Such continuities can be traced from the social and cultural life of late Victorian England, into the Edwardian period and even later.

To truly appreciate early twentieth century British literature and the modernist achievement, we need to understand both the continuities as well as the originality of this literature. In this Unit, we therefore attempt to contextualise the work of early twentieth century British novelists in the complex social and cultural contexts in which they were written. This discussion will be helpful in understanding not only the novels in our course of study, but also early twentieth century British writing in other genres as well.

5.2 BRITAIN IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

On the whole, the early decades of the century, was, for Britain, a period of great changes and transformations – this was especially true in the case of scientific knowledge and technology.

These changes may be summed up thus:

“Taking us from the steam age to the nuclear age, the first forty years of the twentieth century, saw both the consolidation of a century-and-a half’s industrial growth and development, and a decisive transition towards the now familiar modernity of our own technologically advanced, mass-democratic, and mass consumerist society” (Poplawski 470).

The above assessment shows how these years marked the beginnings of the twentieth century world as we know it, characterized by technological advancement, mass democracy and consumerism.

Activity

Before we proceed to take a look at the political, social and cultural contexts in which early twentieth century British literary texts were written, take a moment to consider what in your opinion, are the factors that mark out and distinguish the early twentieth century world from that of the previous century, and write them down.

5.2.1 Political Conditions in early twentieth century Britain:

Scholars like Michael Levenson point out that ‘crisis’ is the central term to describe this turbulent cultural period. It was obvious quite early in the century, that the twentieth century would be “the epoch of crises, real and manufactured, physical and metaphysical, material and

symbolic. The catastrophe of the First World War, and before that the labour struggles, the emergence of feminism, the race for empire, these inescapable forces of turbulent social modernisation were not simply looming on the outside as the destabilising context of cultural Modernism; they penetrated the interior of artistic invention” (Levenson, *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, 4).

Thus quite early in the century, it was clear that it would be a century marked by crises of all sorts. The various labour strikes and struggles, the World War, the competition for colonial supremacy etc. in the early decades of the century, brought about a sense of conflict and crisis, which, as pointed out above, influenced artistic creativity of the time.

5.2.1.1 The Edwardian Period

Queen Victoria died in 1901, bringing the grand Victorian age - a period marked by political stability, imperial glory, and industrial and scientific achievements for Britain - to a close, and was succeeded by her son Edward VII. The dawn of the twentieth century, thus coincided neatly with the beginning of a new period, the Edwardian period, in British history. When Edward VII died in 1910, George V came to the British throne, and reigned till his death in 1936. Though Edward VII ruled only till 1910, the period from 1901 up to 1914, is generally referred to as the Edwardian period. Ian Cawood remarks that though it is often spoken of as ‘a golden age of peace and harmony’, before the disruption created by World War I from 1914 onwards, it was actually a period of great turmoil (Cawood 14).

Paul Poplawski in his study of the contexts of English literature, notes the “general continuities” between the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods (479). In the political arena, says Poplawski, there was an obvious continuity from the nineteenth century, since the Conservative government continued in power in Britain, from 1895 to 1905. The main political issues and debates of early twentieth century Britain, were the same as those of the late nineteenth century: Irish Home Rule, female suffrage, unemployment, trade unionism, distribution of wealth and income, and education. The continuous migration of people from villages into towns and cities, created pressure on politicians to address problems related to urban planning, housing and health. The agitations led by socialists, trade unionists and suffragettes, made labour rights and equality, important items in the political agenda (Poplawski 480).

5.2.1.2 The beginnings of the Labour Party

In 1905, there was a change in the political temper of the British government, when the Liberal party came to power, bringing a decade of Conservative rule to an end. The liberal Government introduced several social reforms during the ten years that it remained in power (1905-1915), which included, as the historian Ian Cawood points out, free school meals, free medical treatment in schools, old age pensions and National Insurance, which were “the first crucial steps towards establishing minimum standards of wealth and health in Britain” (Cawood 33).

Another important change was effected in the political equations in early twentieth century Britain with the formation of the Labour party, which has been a major player in twentieth century British party politics. “The Labour Party was born at the turn of the 20th century out of

the frustration of working-class people at their inability to field parliamentary candidates through the Liberal Party, which at that time was the dominant social-reform party in Britain” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

5.2.1.3 Irish Home rule

Tensions over the political freedom of Ireland had been continuing for several years between England and Ireland, leading to much bitterness and animosity between the two nations, and also formed a major topic of political debates and discussions of the period. You will find references to this issue coming up in your study of the poetry of W. B. Yeats, later in this course.

Paul Poplawski explains how the British government presented a Home Rule Bill in Parliament in April 1912, which was opposed, like earlier bills, by the Protestants of Ulster who resisted attempts to include Ulster within the ‘home’ rule of the rest of Catholic Ireland. “The Irish Nationalists under pressure from Sinn Fein ... refused to support a government amendment leaving Ulster out of the agreement.... At Easter 1916, Sinn Fein attempted a rebellion in Dublin. This was suppressed after five days of fighting and the British then executed fifteen of the leaders. This brutal act turned Irish opinion decisively in Sinn Fein’s favour – as the poet W.B. Yeats suggested, all had now ‘utterly changed’, ‘A terrible beauty is born’(“Easter 1916”)”. In 1920 Ireland was partitioned into Ulster and the South, and finally in 1921, the Irish Free State became a self governing dominion (486).

Activity

Read W. B. Yeats’s poem “Easter 1916” and write a critical note on Yeats’s poetic response to the events of Easter 1916.

5.2.1.4 World War I

The first World War (1914 -1918) was the most cataclysmic event of the first three decades of the twentieth century, in European history. It led to the death of millions of young soldiers, destroyed entire towns and cities, and left permanent scars on the twentieth century psyche. Numerous tensions and power struggles for supremacy among European nations, led up to the war, which proved to be a painful experience for the entire world. World War 1 was such a traumatic experience, that every art form, every literary genre responded to it, and reflected its horrors.

The most agonising fallout was of course, the number of casualties. “The casualties suffered by the participants in World War I dwarfed those of previous wars: some 8,500,000 soldiers died as a result of wounds and/or disease. ... War was increasingly mechanized from 1914 and produced casualties even when nothing important was happening” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). In addition to the appalling loss of life, the War caused other hardships – Poplawski points out how many

families lost their breadwinners to the war, while food rationing, shortages and hardships, and massive expansion in arms industries became common (Poplawski 488-9).

The psychological effects of the war were equally horrendous. Though the early months of the war witnessed outpourings of nationalistic sentiments, patriotic fervour and idealism, soon these gave way to a general sense of weariness, disillusion and disenchantment, and serious misgivings about the whole purpose of 'scientific advancement' and 'progress'. "Dark shadows of horror, loneliness and sorrow, hovered over many of the survivors. It was hard to be as optimistic about the future and the perfectibility of human nature in 1919 as it had been in 1913. The writer George Orwell reflected, "Progress had finally ended in the biggest massacre in history" (270)." (Ellis Wasson, *History of Modern Britain*)

World War 1 in a way effectively brought an end to the sense of optimism that was often pointed out as characteristic of the Victorian outlook. "The First World War in particular represented a shattering end to the nineteenth century's optimistic faith in human progress, and there was a permeating consciousness of the war as a defining reality for modern civilisation. As D. H. Lawrence suggested in 1924, everywhere, it seemed, 'the dead hand of the war lay like a corpse decomposing' (St. Mawr, p 90). Although Lawrence was a non-combatant, his works are symptomatic of that permeating consciousness, especially as it grappled with the moral and spiritual implications of the underlying tendencies which had led to and supported the war and its mass mechanised destruction (Poplawski 507-8).

Poplawski goes on to explain how modernist art represented the war through its fragmented forms and its symbolism, pointing out T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), as the classic example of this (Poplawski 508-9). Almost all major writers of the period engaged with the theme of war, some directly, others in more oblique ways. In the next unit, we will see how D.H. Lawrence brings in the deadening effects of the War on the inner lives of people, in novels such as *Women in Love*.

While the Modernist writers expressed the sense of disillusion and the general angst regarding the dehumanising effects of war through the use of fragmentary language, images and symbols, other writers, such as the group of 'War Poets' also registered their responses to the traumatic experience: "Rupert Brooke caught the idealism of the opening months of the war (and died in service); Siegfried Sassoon and Ivor Gurney caught the mounting anger and sense of waste as the war continued; and Isaac Rosenberg (perhaps the most original of the war poets), Wilfred Owen, and Edmund Blunden not only caught the comradely compassion of the trenches but also addressed themselves to the larger moral perplexities raised by the war." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

Check Your Progress 1

1. Write a short note on the political conditions in early twentieth century Britain.
2. Discuss how World War 1 has been represented in early twentieth century British literature.

5. 2. 2 The Social and Cultural Contexts

5. 2. 2.1 Economic changes

During most of the nineteenth century, Britain was an industrial powerhouse, and a rich and powerful nation with control over the resources of a large empire. Historians of the period agree that at the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain was at the peak of its imperial power and economic might. According to Ellis Wasson, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain “continued to prosper”. Access to abundant energy sources, expanding sources of raw materials and markets in colonies, ensured growth. Industry became more productive and efficient, and a commercial culture of entrepreneurship developed. (220) (*History of Modern Britain*: Ellis Wasson). Ian Cawood, while noting that “Britain in 1900, was still the richest and most powerful country in the world. Much of her wealth was based on the British empire, which made up roughly a quarter of the earth’s surface” (Cawood 2), also adds that, this was also a period of “unprecedented industrial unrest”, and witnessed several strikes by shipbuilders, dockers, railway workers, and miners (Cawood 40).

5.2.2.2 Women’s rights

The early years of the twentieth century were significant for the movements for women’s rights, especially for voting rights. The figure of the ‘New Woman’ who defied socially accepted constructs of gender roles, and had gained much prominence during the later years of the nineteenth century. The 1870 Education Act had made elementary education accessible to large sections of society.

Ian notes how both middle class and upper class women benefitted from expansion in educational provision; working class girls usually learnt cooking, needlework etc. which would prepare them for domestic service, while some middle class girls studied subjects like Mathematics and Science, and went on to university. Working class girls usually found low paid unskilled work, such as domestic service, while nursing, teaching etc. were opening up new opportunities for middle class women. Women had some voting rights in local elections, but were still demanding the right to vote in the national elections, at the beginning of the century (Cawood 8).

Though women taxpayers won the right to vote in municipal elections during the later nineteenth century, and later to sit on county and city councils, they were still denied the right to vote in national parliamentary elections. Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst were the prominent leaders of the movement for women’s suffrage. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Many suffragists became involved in increasingly violent actions as time went on. These women militants, or suffragettes, as they were known, were sent to prison and continued their protests there by engaging in hunger strikes....When World War I began, the shifted their energies to aiding the war effort, and their effectiveness did much to win the public wholeheartedly to the cause of woman suffrage. The need for the enfranchisement of women was finally recognized by most members of Parliament from all three major parties, and the resulting Representation of the People Act was passed by the House of Commons in June 1917

and by the House of Lords in February, 1918. Under this act, all women age 30 or over received the complete franchise” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

Perhaps one of the most enduring statements of resistance to patriarchal cultural values during the early twentieth century, was Virginia Woolf’s essay “A Room of one’s Own” (1929). The character of the ‘New woman’ was a common one in early twentieth century literature. In D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers*, the character Clara is a suffragette, and there are some references in the novel to the women’s movement. Ursula Brangwen in Lawrence’s novel *The Rainbow*, is a ‘New Woman’ who seeks to be independent and enters the world of work as a school teacher.

Check your progress 2

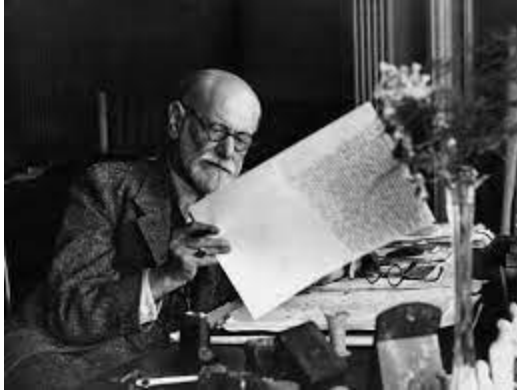
Discuss how early twentieth century British literature has engaged with the issue of women’s rights and the women’s movement.

5.3 INTELLECTUAL CONTEXTS:

As Fiona Becket observes, “Many radical positions within modernism are derived from revolutionary thinkers, chief among them, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, iconoclasts and innovators whose work encouraged a revaluation of social, political and personal ‘certainties’” (14). In an article on ‘Intellectual Currents’ in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (<https://www.rem.routledge.com>), Vincent Pecora, notes the iconoclastic character of the intellectual culture of the early twentieth century. Pecora also identifies a certain violent quality in the intellectual character of the period.

Colonial atrocities, political revolution, a massive war, economic disasters — “all contributed to a sense, registered by some major works of modernist art, that (in W.B. Yeats’s famous words) “the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” Even if many did not share T.S. Eliot’s subsequent verdict that culture in the twentieth century had become a Waste Land, ...his sense that the period represented wholesale decay, could not be ignored even by the optimists.”

Having identified violence and anarchy as major elements marking the life of this period, Pecora goes on to identify its positive achievements: the significant achievements included the discovery of the germ theory of disease, ‘perhaps the single most significant public health event in history’; discoveries in astronomy and physics that ‘radically altered the perception of space, time, motion, matter, and the universe itself’; and studies in the origins of civilization which demonstrated the similarities between that so-called primitive, myth-oriented societies and modern, scientific societies. Again, Freud’s theories of the human psyche and his elaboration of the unconscious mind led to a new understanding of emotions. Karl Marx’s predictions and Nietzsche’s radical ideas “turned the entire Western moral tradition upside down” (Pecora, Vincent, “Intellectual Currents” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*). Thus many scholars have identified Freud, Nietzsche and Marx as some of the key intellectual influences of the time.



Sigmund Freud

Source of image: www.flicker.com

One figure who dominated intellectual discourse of the early twentieth century was Sigmund Freud, “the great theorist of the enigmas of the human mind and founder of psychoanalysis” (13, Elliot, Anthony, *Psychoanalytic Theory: an Introduction*). Through his writings such as *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) *The Ego and the Id* (1923) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1923), and his lectures, he expressed ideas that would radically alter the understanding of the workings of the human mind and deeply influence twentieth century theories of social and cultural behaviour. Freud’s pathbreaking ideas included his study of the ‘unconscious’, of ‘repression’, and his interpretations of dreams. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* notes how many of his concepts have become universally familiar in a simplified form, eg. the Oedipus complex, the death wish, the family romance, and the formulation of the division between the ‘Id, the Ego and the Superego’ (369).

Freud’s ideas had a profound impact on literary studies as well as social and critical theory. “The result of Freud’s work on dreams, ... was to heighten awareness among modernist authors of the importance of unconscious over conscious mental processes ... Many of the new techniques developed by later modernist writers were attempts to articulate the power, both creative and disruptive, of the unconscious. Lawrence’s development as a major writer is inseparably bound up with his attempt to integrate what he had gathered of psychoanalysis with wider traditions of romantic creativity. The new prose of *The Rainbow* (1915), and *Women in Love* (1920), like the stream of consciousness techniques of Joyce and Woolfe, and the symbolist methods of Eliot and Pound, were attempts to utter an unconscious which had been defined in part by Freud” (Poplawski, *Encycl of Literary Modernism* 335)

Early twentieth century intellectual discourse was profoundly influenced by another European thinker, the German philosopher Nietzsche (1844 -1900). Nietzsche’s first book *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), focused on the tragic tradition in Greek classical culture, and in his work *Thus Spake Zarathushtra*, Nietzsche made his famous pronouncement that “God is dead.” According to Vincent Pecora, “Nietzsche turned the entire Western moral tradition upside down. ... Like Marx’s, Nietzsche’s ideas percolate throughout the era” (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* also notes that through his ideas such as the affirmation of the ‘Superman’, the rejection of Christian morality, the doctrine of

power, and the ‘revision of all values’, Nietzsche. challenged the accepted tradition of classical scholarship (699).

Another major influence on the intellectual life of the early twentieth century was James Frazer (1854 -1941) regarded as one of the founders of modern anthropology, author of *The Golden Bough* (1890) and *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910). *The Golden Bough* was “a vast and enterprising comparative study of the beliefs and institutions of mankind, offering the thesis that man progresses from magical to religious to scientific thought. Its discussion of fertility rites, the sacrificial killing of kings, the dying god, the scapegoat etc., and its analysis of the primitive mind, caught the literary imagination, and its influence may perhaps be seen more lastingly in the works of D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Pound and others” (*Oxford Companion to English literature*).

Check Your Progress 3

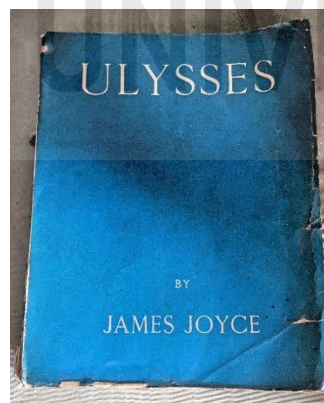
Discuss the radical influence of the writings of Freud and Nietzsche on the intellectual life of early twentieth century Britain.

5.4 THE BRITISH NOVEL IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY



Statue of James Joyce in Dublin

Source: commons.wikimedia.org



The early twentieth century is generally associated with the modernist writings of James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. However, realistic fiction which could trace its roots to the great nineteenth century realists, was flourishing simultaneously, though criticism has focused

more on the brilliant innovations of the modernists. The “great Victorian tradition of realistic fiction, devoted to the study of ordinary lives, within carefully specified social environments, survived vigorously into this period. Modernist fictional experiment has commanded more critical attention, but the mainstream of the English novel still lay here, inheriting from George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, conventions of realism and its emphases on local community and social change” (Ox. Eng. Lit. history Vol 10,171). Arnold Bennett, Hugh Walpole, Mary Webb, Eden Phillpotts, J. B. Priestley and John Galsworthy, are instances pointed out here. Modernist novelists such as Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner introduced new forms of writing that radically altered the contours of the English novel in the early twentieth century.

H. G. Wells, one of the most popular British novelists of the early twentieth century, remarked in his novel *Tono-Bungay* (1909), that the ‘present colour and abundance’ of Britain was only ‘October foliage before the frosts nip down the leaves’. He was reminding his readers that though everything looked colourful and bright at the moment, decay would soon set in. The early twentieth century novel in general reflected such a sense of disillusion and disenchantment. “On all sides though, the optimism and faith in progress that had characterised the Victorian period had given way to something approaching a crisis of confidence – and it was a crisis that through various forms of disillusioned critique, was given acute expression in much of the literature of the period. Even as early as 1902, for example, the symbolic title and narrative of Joseph Conrad’s modernist masterpiece, *Heart of Darkness* registered a growing sense of malaise over Britain’s and Europe’s imperial adventures (Poplawski 483).

Check your progress 4

What were the major characteristics of British fiction written in the early twentieth century? Write short notes on the works of any four British novelists of this period.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the political, social and cultural conditions in Britain in the early twentieth century. This discussion will help us to contextualise the writing of all the authors whose work we will be studying in this course. In the next unit, we will discuss the writing of D. H. Lawrence, one of the major writers of early twentieth century Britain.

5.6 GLOSSARY

1. suffragette: member of a womens’ organisation of the early twentieth century that fought for women’s right to vote in public elections.
2. ‘The New Woman’: A phrase coined in the 1890s, to describe a new generation of women who believed in women’s rights, educational opportunities for women etc.
3. Angst: a feeling of anguish, anxiety and dread.
4. Cataclysmic: a violent upheaval
5. Non-combatant: not actively involved in fighting the enemy

6. Malaise: sickness
7. Iconoclastic: attacking or breaking long-held beliefs and traditions
8. Constructs: ideas or conceptions
9. Oblique: indirect

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Unit 6 D. H. Lawrence and the British Novel

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 D. H. Lawrence: a Brief Biographical Sketch
- 6.3 Early Novels
- 6.4 Later Novels
- 6.5 Other Writings (Poetry, Stories, Plays, Travel Books and Essays)
- 6.6 Lawrence and environmentalism
- 6.7 Criticism of Lawrence
- 6.8 Let us sum up
- 6.9 References
- 6.10 Glossary

6.0 OBJECTIVES:

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

1. Critically analyse D. H. Lawrence's achievement as a novelist
2. Contextualise the writing of D. H. Lawrence in early twentieth century British literature
3. Contextualise *Sons and Lovers* within the corpus of Lawrence's fiction

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 1 of this course, we discussed various aspects of the Modernist movement. In the previous unit, (Unit 5, which is the first Unit of Block 2) we looked at the political, social and cultural contexts of early twentieth century British literature. In Unit 6, we introduce you to the writing of D. H. Lawrence, one of the most powerful British novelists of the early twentieth century. Lawrence wrote novels, short stories, plays, essays and poems – all of which have attracted critical acclaim; however, in this unit, we will be focusing on his work as a novelist, so that we are equipped to read and analyse the novel *Sons and Lovers* in the next two units.

D. H. Lawrence, says Fiona Becket, was “one of the most prolific of the English writers to dominate the high period of literary modernism even whilst he appeared to inhabit its margins, an intellectual who was deeply suspicious of the mental life, and an important critic of his culture. His legacy is a vast corpus of work in practically every major literary genre, he also painted. Lawrence was one of England's most controversial figures” (Becket,1). This assessment by Fiona Becket touches upon the various aspects of Lawrence's creative endeavours and his unusual mastery of an entire range of literary genres; we learn that Lawrence was a major figure of the modernist movement and that he produced a huge body of writing in various genres. We also learn that many of his writings created controversies when first published.

Lawrence was one of the earliest British novelists to write convincingly about working class life. His novels capture the transitions in contemporary British society – the tensions between classes,

the movement for women's rights, the upheaval caused by industrialisation, which is why F. R. Leavis remarks that "as social historian, Lawrence, among novelists, is unsurpassed" (*D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 173). At the same time, Lawrence's writing is deeply involved with the inner lives of people, and plumbs the depths of the workings of the conscious and unconscious mind. Lawrence was a champion of the instinctual life, and as Fiona Becket says in the passage quoted above, suspicious of the life of the intellect. His writings also reveal a strong sense of the ecological interconnectedness of human life and culture with the natural world, and is now celebrated for its ecological vision.

6.2 D. H. LAWRENCE: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Herbert Lawrence was born on 11th September, 1885, in Eastwood, a mining village near Nottingham, as the son of Arthur Lawrence, a miner at the local Brinsley Colliery, and Lydia Lawrence. We will go into some of the details of his early life, since they will be of interest while studying *Sons and Lovers*. This novel, like much of his early writing, draws upon his own early life in the East Midlands, growing up as a miner's son in a colliery village that was being transformed completely by industrialization. Arthur Lawrence and his wife had very different educational levels and social aspirations and Lawrence grew up in a family where the relations between the parents were strained. Andrew Harrison in *The Life of D. H. Lawrence*, notes how Lydia Lawrence never felt herself to be part of the colliers' community, and tried to stay aloof from it. "Lydia's sense of identity was invested in a determined resistance to the outlook and values of her working-class neighbours" and "with her interest in religious and intellectual matters, insisted on looking above and beyond Eastwood for her fulfilment, fully intending to lift her children out of their present circumstances. Lawrence grew up then in a family riven by profound divisions ... speaking received pronunciation inside the house and the less respectable dialect outside it" (Harrison, 2016: 4-6).



D.H. Lawrence's birthplace at Victoria Street, Eastwood. (Source of image: commons.wikimedia.org)

After attending Beauvale Board School as a child, Lawrence won a prestigious Nottinghamshire County Council scholarship to Nottingham High School in 1898 – “an extraordinary achievement for the son of an Eastwood miner” (Harrison, 2016:7). Lydia Lawrence was continuously goading her children to ‘get on’ and move into more ‘respectable’ stations in life. The family’s move from a small terraced house with a large shop window in Victoria Street, Eastwood, to a larger house in ‘The Breach’ with a garden, to a house in Walker street with a view of the valley below, and finally to Lynn Croft on the hill top, represented the improvement in the family’s fortunes.

Lawrence’s religious and moral education was received from “the large Congregationalist community of Eastwood which by all means reproduced and re-inforced his mother’s values of education, self-improvement and self-discipline” (Becket, 10). The Chapel at Eastwood was in fact “one of the central influences on the development of Lawrence’s early intellectual life” (Harrison, 2016, 8). The Mechanics’ Institute Library in Eastwood provided books and other reading material for the young Lawrence. “The boy Lawrence was, by all accounts, hungry for knowledge and his predilection for reading and nature study, combined with his formal schooling, gave him a sound foundation. His youth seems to have been characterised by bookishness and an intense interest in the arts” (Becket, 10).

His childhood friend Jessie Chambers (on whom the character of Miriam in *Sons and Lovers* is based) shared his passion for books and imaginative literature. Together, they read novels by Walter Scott, Fennimore Cooper, R. L. Stevenson, George Eliot, and Dickens, and discussed the poetry of Blake, Longfellow, Tennyson and Swinburne. Historical romance and adventure

feature strongly in Lawrence's reading at this time and this was probably responsible for the "powerful, often overlooked romance elements in his early poetry and prose fiction" (Harrison, 2016, 11 -12).

Lawrence began work as a pupil-teacher at the British School in Eastwood in 1902. Later, in 1906, he joined University College, Nottingham, to study for a Teacher's Certificate. In 1908, Lawrence took up a job as a teacher in Croydon, near London. However, the strain of a full-time teaching job, combined with the stress of his literary pursuits, had serious effects on his health and he was forced to give up teaching. From that time, his main source of income came from writing: "He supported himself thereafter by writing... From his earliest years till his last days, Lawrence wrote" (Becket 5). Lawrence met Frieda Weekley in 1912. Frieda was married at the time to Ernest Weekley, Professor at Nottingham University, and had three young children. She left her husband and children to live with Lawrence. They left England together and went to Europe - "for Lawrence it was in many ways, a leap into the unknown" (Harrison, 2016, 76). Lawrence and Frieda travelled to and lived in different parts of Europe, Australia, and America, until Lawrence's death in 1930 at Vence, in France on 2nd March, 1930.

(Sources for the section 'D. H. Lawrence: a brief biographical sketch':

John Worthen: "Biography of D. H. Lawrence" (1997) (www.nottingham.ac.uk):

Andrew Harrison: *The Life of D.H. Lawrence* (2016) and Fiona Becket: *D .H. Lawrence* (2002))



Brinsley colliery near Eastwood, where Arthur Lawrence worked as a miner

Check your progress 1

After reading *Sons and Lovers*, discuss the autobiographical elements in that novel with reference to the details about Lawrence's life given in the above section.

6.3 EARLY NOVELS

Lawrence's earliest writings were poems. John Worthen in his short biography of the writer, points out that Lawrence wrote his earliest poetry in 1905; "he began writing with a strong sense of the oddity of his ambition. "What will the others say? That I'm a fool. A collier's son a poet!" he remarked, scathingly, to Jessie Chambers" (Worthen,1997). Lawrence was aware that in the class-conscious society of early twentieth century Britain, the literary efforts of a writer from a working class background, were likely to be ignored.

His friend Jessie Chambers who greatly admired his work sent some of his poems to Ford Madox Hueffer, an influential editor. Hueffer was impressed with Lawrence's writing and published it in *The English Review*, and this brought Lawrence in touch with the London intellectual circles. He soon began his first novel *Laetitia*, the novel which was later published as *The White Peacock*. It was Hueffer who encouraged Lawrence to write about his own region and the mining community with which he was familiar. Lawrence's plays *A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* and the short story "Odour of Chrysanthemums" were written at this time.



The East Midlands landscape that inspired most of Lawrence's early writing

Lawrence's first novel was *The White Peacock* published in 1911. Like much of his early writing, it is set in the East Midlands region. Fiona Becket points out how this early novel - the only Lawrence novel with a first person narrator, (Cyril Beardsall), shares the preoccupations of the more critically acclaimed later novels, and set the standard for later fiction, with its preoccupation with relationships. "It is his particular treatment of these themes developed in considerable detail in *The White Peacock*, which establishes Lawrence's differences from his literary predecessors, and his modernity" (35-41). Lawrence's next novel *The Saga of Siegmund*, later given the title *The Trespasser*, was completed in 1910 and published in 1912. As Becket points out, though Lawrence himself later saw this novel as juvenile, it has ideas relevant to his later work. The novel, which draws heavily on the life of his friend Helen Corke, writes a romance, while critiquing romantic love (Becket 42) Lawrence published *Sons and Lovers*, his third novel, and the one which firmly established his literary reputation, in 1913. We will be discussing this novel in detail in the next two Units.

In 1913, Lawrence started writing *The Sisters*, which later became two separate novels, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*; the former novel was completed before World War I and the latter, during the War. Many of Lawrence's novels were controversial when first published, perhaps the case of his last novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is the best known. *The Rainbow* was suppressed soon after publication following allegations of 'obscenity' and its publisher 'Methuen' was prosecuted.

The Rainbow (1915), like most of the earlier writings, including *Sons and Lovers*, engages with the East Midlands, though on very different terms. The novel is placed or located mostly within the East Midlands, with brief shifts to other places in England and the continent. The first paragraph locates the first cycle of the novel 'in the meadows where 'the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire' (*The Rainbow*: 9). The novel follows the lives of different generations of the Brangwen family, who had traditionally farmed the marshy land between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. *The Rainbow* deals with some of the central developments in the intellectual, social and economic history of the nineteenth century. F. R. Leavis took note of what he called the 'historical depth' of *The Rainbow*, and expressed the view that as social historian, Lawrence is unsurpassed (Leavis 173).

One of the most notable aspects of the novel is the introduction of the character of Ursula Brangwen, the 'new woman'. Fiona Becket considers *The Rainbow* to be Lawrence's "first properly modernist novel", and praises it for employing a "radically new language," and for the ways in which Lawrence represented characters. The novel also shows Lawrence's developing interest in the 'unconscious' (Becket 49-56).

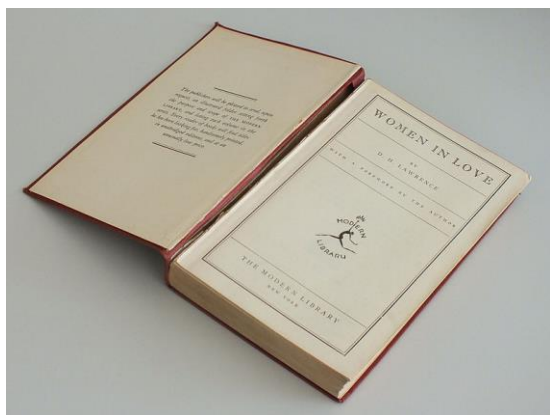


Cossall church near Eastwood, which figures as Cossethay church in *The Rainbow*

Women in Love (1920) was also a revised version of a part of *The Sisters*. Lawrence wrote in the foreword that this novel “took its final shape in the midst of the period of war, though it did not concern the war itself.” *Women in Love* carries forward the story of Ursula Brangwen from *The Rainbow*. Ursula, who has a relationship with Rupert Birkin, and her sister Gudrun, who is involved in a relationship with Gerald Crich, are the “women in love”.

The novel shifts from the Midlands landscape to London and the Continent, “to depict many facets of a dying culture... Against a background of actual and symbolic landscapes, he establishes the complex personal lives of his characters and the psychodramas which play out between them... *Women in Love* is a novel underpinned by violence” (Becket, 57). The novel depicts, says Becket, “the end of culture... and the psychical and spiritual breakdown in individuals which accompanies it” and “is a powerful document of British modernism”(65).

Paul Poplawski also considers *Women in Love* to be Lawrence’s “outstanding modernist novel”, which clearly reflects the pressures created by war on individuals and society. The novel conveys this through its ‘fractured, episodic structure, its sudden outbursts of violence’, and its ‘language of emotional and sexual conflict’. The novel does not contain any explicit reference to the war, since Lawrence’s aim in this novel, was not to record the external circumstances of war, but rather to analyse its ‘internal’ consequences for the individual and society(Poplawski 508-9). This is therefore a novel that clearly depicts the psychological damage inflicted by the World War on contemporary society.



Source: commons.wikimedia.org

6.4 LATER NOVELS

Among Lawrence's later novels, *The Lost Girl* (1920) again returns to the East Midlands landscape and tells the story of Alvina Houghton, her life in Woodhouse (a fictional village based on Eastwood), and her journey to Italy. Lawrence's next novel *Mr. Noon*, which was unfinished, also begins in a Midlands setting. As pointed out by Fiona Becket, *Aaron's Rod*, which Lawrence completed in 1921, challenges the focus on relationships between men and women in earlier novels such as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, and shifts the focus to the solitary male and 'singleness'. *Aaron's Rod* is his first attempt at a political novel, and through the character Aaron Sisson, this novel expresses Lawrence's rejection of marriage (66-67). *Aarons Rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923) and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), form a group of novels focused on the leadership theme.

Lawrence wrote *Kangaroo* and *The Boy in the Bush* after his visit to Australia in 1922. Through the character of Benjamin Cooley (nicknamed 'Kangaroo'), the leader of a right-wing group called the 'Diggers', the novel *Kangaroo* explores ideas of political power, democratic ideals and manliness. In a Chapter of *Kangaroo* entitled 'The Nightmare', Lawrence writes: 'It was in 1915, the old world ended. In the winter of 1915-16, the spirit of the old London collapsed, the city in some way perished, perished from being a heart of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears and horrors'. According to Poplawski, this passage reflects Lawrence's view that the World War brought about 'a fundamental debasement of humanity' and represents 'how human relationships had internalised the conditions of war-torn modernity' (Poplawski 507-8). Thus, this novel not only interrogates the leadership theme, but also expresses Lawrence's reflections on the effects of the World War on the inner lives of people.

The Boy in the Bush (1924), is a revision of an earlier novel *The House of Ellis* by the Western Australian writer Mollie Skinner. Skinner wrote *The House of Ellis* partly based on the life of her brother Jack Skinner (who becomes the protagonist Jack Grant in the novel). The novel is set in the 1880s, which was a late period in the settlement history of Western Australia. In his revision of Mollie Skinner's novel, Lawrence focused on the psychological development of Jack Grant. The psychological possibilities offered by Skinner's Jack Grant are worked out, against the character's journey into the Australian bush.

The Plumed Serpent (1926) reflects Lawrence's interest in primitivism; the novel focuses on an Irishwoman Kate Leslie and her involvement in the revival of a Meso-American Quetzalcoatl cult. Fiona Becket sees this novel as part of Lawrence's search for "an alternative, a more impersonal, unconscious mode of being in his evocation of a pre-Columbian culture." (75). Commenting on the novels of the early 1920s, Neil Roberts says that this was a period in which Lawrence was constantly travelling, and that all the work that he produced then, "is profoundly marked ... by the narrative motif of the journey". In novels like *Women in Love*, *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent*, the influence of the travelling protagonist is vital, as compared to novels like *Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow*, which are more or less confined to a region (130-131). Lawrence's last novel, and perhaps his most controversial, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), based on the relationships between Lady Constance Chatterley and the gamekeeper Mellors, once again goes back to the English East Midlands. The novel was banned in England and America, and the full text published in England, only thirty years after his death (in 1960) after a long trial.

Check your progress 2

Write a note on Lawrence's later novels, discussing how they differ from the early novels.

6.5 OTHER WRITINGS (POETRY, STORIES, PLAYS, TRAVEL BOOKS AND ESSAYS)

Lawrence's poetry collections include *Look! We have come through!* (1917), *New Poems* (1918), *Tortoises* (1921), *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), *Pansies* (1929), and *Last Poems* (1932) published posthumously. Helen Sword remarks that "although he is remembered and celebrated today primarily as a novelist and a short story writer, Lawrence first saw publication as a poet, wrote poetry throughout most of his life, and granted a privileged status to poetic language and vision" (Sword, 119).

Lawrence's novellas include *The Captain's Doll* (1923), *The Fox* (1923), *The Ladybird* (1923) *St.Mawr* (1925), *The Princess* (1925) and *The Man who Died* (1929). Lawrence wrote several short stories, collected in volumes such as *The Prussian Officer and other Stories* (1914); *England, my England* (1922), and *The Woman who Rode Away* (1925). Coroneus and Tate observe that "Lawrence wrote more than sixty tales...The remarkable achievement of this body of writing is often overshadowed by Lawrence's novels" (Coroneus and Tate, 103).

Lawrence wrote several essays collected in volumes such as *Study of Thomas Hardy* (written in 1914), *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (1925); *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921); *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922); and *Studies in Classic American literature*. Lawrence is also acknowledged to be one of the outstanding travel writers of the twentieth century. His travel writings are collected in volumes such as *Twilight in Italy* (1916); *Sea and Sardinia* (1921) *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) and *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (1932). Lawrence's plays include *A Collier's Friday Night*, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, *The Daughter-in-law*; *The Fight for Barbara*, and *The Married Man*.

6.6 LAWRENCE AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

Lawrence is acknowledged to have had a deep and intuitive sense of ‘place’, which is evident in almost all his writing. John Worthen points out how the places where people work and live are significant in the reading of Lawrence’s work. Lawrence is the first writer to use the phrase ‘spirit of place’, suggests Worthen, and considers how his usage differs from the use of the term ‘genius loci’ by his predecessors (1997: 28 -32). According to eco-critics, Lawrence’s sense of place and of the natural environment, reveal his awareness of the ecological interconnectedness of human beings with non-human life. Del Ivan Janik remarks that Lawrence ‘saw man as part of an organic universe... In this sense he stands at the beginning of the modern post-humanist tradition and of the literature of environmental consciousness’ (Janik, quoted in Garrard 89-90).

6.7 CRITICISM OF D. H. LAWRENCE:

Some of the earliest criticism of Lawrence’s novels appeared immediately after his death. These included *Son of Woman* (1931) by John Middleton Murry; *Savage Pilgrimage* (1932) by Catherine Carswell (1932); and *D. H. Lawrence: a Personal Record* (1935) by Jessie Chambers. Lawrence is a writer whose literary reputation has fluctuated over the years, often going from one extreme to another. In the 1930s, he was attacked by T. S. Eliot, the most influential critic of the time. In his study *After Strange Gods* (1934), Eliot stated that “Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution ... and suffered from a lack of intellectual and social training.”

Eliot’s arguments were countered by the legendary Cambridge critic F. R. Leavis. Leavis says, “as social historian, Lawrence, among novelists, is unsurpassed. Actually, he is in the strict sense, incomparable”, and argues that the two novels *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow*, would by themselves have been enough to place Lawrence among the greatest English writers (*D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 173). Leavis also argued that Lawrence continued the ‘Great Tradition’ of the English novel, in which he had originally included Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Joseph Conrad.

Another important study in the 1950s was Mark Spilka’s *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence* (1955). As Peter Widdowson points out, much of the critical writing on Lawrence up to the early seventies, is celebratory, either following Leavis’s view of Lawrence as the modern continuator of the English ‘great tradition’ or viewing him “as a radical mystic or visionary”, rebelliously challenging the conventions of bourgeois society (Widdowson 4). We will be touching upon some of the theoretical critical readings of Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers* in Unit 8.

Check your progress 3

1. How did F.R. Leavis critically assess D. H. Lawrence as a novelist?
2. Write an essay on D. H. Lawrence as a modernist novelist.

6.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have discussed the most important details regarding the life and work of D. H. Lawrence. We also got an idea about his work in different genres and some of the critical writings about his work. In the next two units, we will discuss his novel *Sons and Lovers* in detail.

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6.10 GLOSSARY

Oddity: being different from the usual or expected

Juvenile: immature

Vortex: something that resembles a whirlpool

bourgeois: middle class, conservative, supporting established values.

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UNIT 7 SONS AND LOVERS: AN INTRODUCTION

- 7.0: Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 *Sons and Lovers*: the major concerns
- 7.3 From *Paul Morel* to *Sons and Lovers*: the development of the novel
- 7.4 *Sons and Lovers*: the structure of the novel
- 7.5 Let us sum up
- 7.6 Glossary
- 7.7 References

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to

Write a critical summary of the novel *Sons and Lovers*

Critically analyse the major themes and concerns of the novel

Before proceeding to study this unit, you should read the entire novel.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Sons and Lovers was Lawrence's first major achievement as a novelist. He himself considered it his "first great book". While critics often praise his later novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* as being his finest work, *Sons and Lovers* is probably the most popular of his novels. It is, as Michael Black points out, "one of the most widely read of all English novels. It is usually the first book by Lawrence that anyone reads; often the only one" (1). Other critics have expressed similar views. Terry Eagleton, says, "Lawrence wrote novels much more original and ambitious than *Sons and Lovers*, but he never achieved anything so superbly authentic, so magnificently free of false notes" (*The English Novel*, 269). In this Unit, we will be taking a look at the structure of the novel and some of its major concerns.

7.2 SONS AND LOVERS: THE MAJOR CONCERNS

Let us first consider the reasons behind the enduring popularity of the novel. During the century following its publication, several generations of readers have found this novel interesting due to its thematic and formal features. *Sons and Lovers* has a **strong autobiographical element**. Since it is clearly set in the English East Midlands, it also falls into the category of the '**regional novel**'. It is also one of the earliest English novels to focus on **working class life**, and it is written by an author who was born into a working class family. The novel also spoke frankly and openly about sexuality. Though *Sons and Lovers* falls within the great tradition of realist English fiction, parts of the novel are also written in highly metaphorical language.

Thus we may say that the enduring popularity of *Sons and Lovers* may be attributed to factors such as: “its clear connections with Lawrence’s own early experiences; its success in writing the East Midlands into the structure of the novel; its focus on the life of the working classes (a focus that extended the frontiers of English fiction which had till then touched on working class experience, only tentatively, if at all); its honest and frank attitude towards sexuality; its turn-of-the-century character reflected in its participation in nineteenth and twentieth century traditions of the novel; its critique of industrial capitalism, which acts as a powerful sub-text; and the exploration of marriage across class barriers and the tensions within family relationships” (Anandavalli, M. 88).

Check your progress 1

In your opinion, what are the reasons for the enduring popularity of *Sons and Lovers*?

7.3 FROM PAUL MOREL TO SONS AND LOVERS: THE STORY OF THE NOVEL’S DEVELOPMENT

Sons and Lovers, published in 1913, was Lawrence’s third novel; the earlier ones were *The White Peacock* (1911) and *The Trespasser* (1912). The writer Ford Madox Hueffer, who helped to get his earliest work published, suggested that Lawrence should write realist fiction. Accordingly, he began to work on a novel titled *Paul Morel*. Andrew Harrison points out how Hueffer encouraged the young Lawrence, “to draw directly on his working class background in his fiction, and particularly on Eastwood, and his knowledge of miners and the routines of a mining community”. This novel which was based “on events in Lawrence’s own early life, and on the lives of his friends and extended family”, was a “kind of provincial working-class fiction” (Harrison, 2016, 40-51). His earlier two novels had been fairly romantic in style, but Lawrence planned to adopt a more realist style in *Paul Morel*. Harrison notes how Lawrence wrote to his friend, that unlike the earlier two novels, which were “consciously literary novels”, *Paul Morel*, would be based on his actual background, and would be “a novel, not a florid prose poem” (Harrison, 2007, 7). Thus, in *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence departed from his earlier romantic style of fiction towards a realist style of writing – in fact, from 1909 onwards, Lawrence had been writing plays and short stories in this style.

Lawrence took around two years writing and revising the novel. There were four drafts and in the final draft, Lawrence changed the title to *Sons and Lovers*. This change of title was significant; it meant that Lawrence wanted to bring a new focus to the novel. According to Andrew Harrison, Lawrence changed the title to move “the emphasis away from his central character and towards the timeless psychological dilemma his situation may be seen to embody” (2007:10). We will be discussing this “psychological dilemma” in detail later, in the next unit.

When Lawrence submitted the manuscript to Duckworth publishers for publication, the editor Edward Garnett, cut out several passages, and censored some of the references. These passages were restored only in 1992, in the Cambridge University Press edition of the novel. (Harrison, 2007, 11). While many scholars criticize Garnett for reshaping an original creative work by one of the greatest English novelists, we have to realise that Garnett was simply making the novel acceptable for publication. Considering the literary tastes of the reading public, and the market

for fiction in the early twentieth century, credit should be given to Garnett's decision; otherwise the novel may not have been published at all.

7.4 *SONS AND LOVERS: THE STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL*

The novel is written in two parts: Part 1 has six chapters which describe the early married life of the Morels, the birth and childhood of Paul Morel, the relationships and tensions within their family, and the death of the eldest son William. Part 2 (nine chapters) focuses more on Paul's relationships with Miriam and Clara and the death of Mrs. Morel, which leaves Paul "derelict". Chapter 1 ("The Early Married Life of the Morels"), begins with the famous description of the mining village of Bestwood (the fictional locality based on Lawrence's own village of Eastwood): "'The Bottoms' succeeded to 'Hell Row'. Hell Row was a block of thatched, bulging cottages that stood by the brook-side on Greenhill Lane. There lived the colliers who worked in the little gin-pits two fields away" (*Sons and Lovers* 9)

The passage goes on to describe the "sudden change" that happened 'some sixty years' before the action of the novel begins. Helen and Carl Baron in their Introduction to *Sons and Lovers* point out that, in time and place, the novel spans the transition in the English Midlands from a predominantly agricultural economy to an industrial one. They note that there is a combination of a geographical survey and a historicist perspective in the opening pages of the novel (SL: xvii). The tone of transition is implied in the very first sentence: 'The Bottoms succeeded to Hell Row' (*Sons and Lovers*: 9) – which clearly suggests the transition of the cultural landscape from rural-agricultural interspersed with small-scale industry to an industrial capitalist one.

This also leads to changes in the spatial lay-out of the town when the 'thatched bulging cottages' are replaced by 'great quadrangles of dwellings' (*Sons and Lovers*: 10). The geographical survey and historical perspective that the Barons mention, are effected in this part of the novel by the way it records changes in the cultural landscape of the region, and in the change of the place through time. Throughout the opening paragraphs the sense of change in the cultural landscape is constantly built up. (Anandavalli 90). The transition that so radically altered the cultural landscape of Bestwood is built up through a series of contrasts. Hell Row with its thatched bulging cottages clearly contrasts with the Bottoms and its great quadrangles of dwellings; the little gin-pits are contrasted with the new mines; the gin-pits were worked with donkeys, while the new mines depend on a fairly extensive system of railways. There is the implication that mining on a small scale had been a traditional economic activity in the area for years without interfering in the local ecosystem (hence the reference to the brook scarcely soiled by the little gin-pits) and generally blending into the rural landscape, merely forming 'queer mounds' and 'little black places' (*Sons and Lovers*: 9). The "sudden change" has led to the little gin-pits being elbowed aside by the large mines, completely altering the landscape which had known hardly any change for years. The railway runs across the wooded countryside and the cornfields, sharply emphasising the contrast between the old and the new. If the miners who earlier worked the little gin-pits lived in little blocks of cottages scattered here and there in the village, the regiments of miners who work in the new mines are housed in the huge blocks of standardised company housing. Throughout this section, the contrast between the 'little gin-pits' and the 'large mines' is suggested, along with the difference it means to the landscape and the lives of the people.

The new cultural landscape, it is suggested, is entirely the creation of the commercial mining company. The changing landscape reflects changing ideologies of economic production and social organisation. The landscape that Lawrence writes about, is one that has been largely created by the company, a landscape that has been altered to suit the projects of the most powerful social groups. Lawrence, in a sense, rewrites the landscape by focusing on those aspects that are significant in making the region what it was in the mid-nineteenth century. By foregrounding the changes in the cultural landscape, Lawrence implies how this change is crucial to the novel's concerns. (Anandavalli, 91-95). Thus *Sons and Lovers* begins by focusing on the place in which the novel is set (the mining village of Bestwood in Nottinghamshire) and the time in which the action takes place (the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). "The purpose of the first Chapter is to establish the rich social context of life for the Morel family in the mining village of Bestwood, Nottinghamshire." (Harrison, 2007:18).



Lawrence's family lived in this house in "The Breach" in Eastwood, for several years. Often called "the *Sons and Lovers* house", many details of this house are recreated in the novel.

Very soon, the reader is introduced to the dynamics of the Morel family, which consists at the beginning of the novel, of Walter Morel, an uneducated miner, his wife Gertrude Morel, who is educated and had been brought up in a higher social class, and their two young children Annie and William. Mrs. Morel's dissatisfaction with her life in a colliery village as the life of an ordinary miner, her alienation from the neighbourhood, and the uneasy relationships between her and Walter Morel, become evident: "the novel reveals the causes of Mrs. Morel's dissatisfaction very gradually", focusing on her interactions with her family, going back to her family background and her first meeting and marriage with Walter (Harrison, 2007: 19).

The strained relationship between Walter Morel and his wife are built up through various scenes of conflict: in one of these we see Walter cutting off the beautiful hair of their little son William, which infuriates his wife and leads to a quarrel between them. In another well known scene of the novel, Walter comes home drunk one night, and following a furious argument with his pregnant wife, locks her out of the house. "Mrs. Morel, seared with passion, shivered to find herself out there in a great, white light, that fell cold on her, and gave a shock to her inflamed soul.... she went over the last scene, then over it again, certain phrases, certain moments, coming each time, like a brand, red hot, down on her soul" (*Sons and Lovers* 33-34). The suffering of Mrs. Morel and her unborn child, is relieved somewhat, by the moonlit garden and the scent of the large white lilies in it.

The conflicts in the family are built up in the following chapters. Chapter 2 ("The Birth of Paul, and Another Battle"), shows us the daily routine in the miner's life, the daily drudgery in the lives of the colliers' wives, as well as the support they extended to each other in times of need. Paul Morel, the third child is born. Already, Mrs. Morel dreams of what her children would achieve, with her support and encouragement, since she herself "had no life of her own". Mrs. Morel prefers to socialise with the more educated clergyman Heaton, than with the colliers' families. (48-49).

The conflicts within the family are built up further in this chapter. Morel gets close to a group of miner friends, who "discussed the various degrees of subjection in which their wives were held. Morel found his wife not sufficiently subdued" (*Sons and Lovers* 49). Morel's attempts to 'subdue' his wife worsen his family relationships further: "And, by giving her as little money as possible, by drinking much and going out with men who brutalised him and his idea of women, he paid her back" (*Sons and Lovers* 49). Various incidents, such as the scene where Morel hurts his wife by throwing a drawer at her, and the one in which he steals money from her, further trouble the family environment. Morel takes recourse to drink whenever he is disturbed: "Although his actions do greater damage to himself than to anyone else, still Morel refuses to think clearly about his situation, preferring instead to escape to the public house with his friends." (Harrison, 2007:23). Already, in the early chapters of the novel, his older children William and Annie are shown as having a deep sense of hatred towards their father.



The kitchen in the house at ‘The Breach’ where Lawrence spent his childhood. Many details of the interior of this house are recreated in *Sons and Lovers*.

In Chapter 3 (“The Casting off of Morel, the Taking on of William”), Mrs. Morel is seen to finally lose whatever little love she had left for her husband and turn her affections to her eldest son, William. The Morels’ youngest child Arthur is born, who unlike the other children adores their father at first, though in later Chapters he is also seen to despise Morel. William, handsome, clever and athletic, is his mother’s pride. As soon as William is thirteen, his mother finds him a clerical job; Walter wants William to go the mining pit with him, but Mrs. Morel refuses flatly. Her energy is focused on getting her children to escape the mining life, find “respectable” jobs and “move on”. With their mother’s constant encouragement, all the children do “move on” in life: Annie studies to be a teacher, Paul takes lessons in French and German, and Arthur tries for a scholarship. William eventually finds a well-paid position in London and leaves for the city. Mrs. Morel is proud of him, but also apprehensive about some of his social engagements.

In the next Chapter “The Young Life of Paul”, with William gone to London, the focus of the narrative shifts to Paul. As a young child he was close to his sister Annie; he also has a close bond with his mother: “His soul seemed always attentive to her” (*Sons and Lovers* 82). Almost unconsciously, he shares her dislike of Morel: “All the children, but particularly Paul, were peculiarly against their father. Morel continued to bully and to drink” (*Sons and Lovers* 83).

Since their financial situation has improved a bit, the family moves to a better house on the brow of a hill, with a beautiful view of the valley below. The life at home continues to have its frequent disturbances and quarrels. In front of the house was a huge old ash tree, and the shrieking sound of the tree reflects the discord in the family: “To Paul, it became almost a demoniacal noise” (*Sons and Lovers* 84). The children are forever anxious about the trouble that they feared might brew in the household. Mrs. Morel and the children avoid Morel most of the time; except on rare occasions, when Morel was in a happy mood, and told his children stories about life in the pit, “he was shut out from all family affairs. Nobody told him anything... He was an outsider” (*Sons and Lovers* 87-88).

In the Chapter “Paul Launches into Life”, we see Paul as a fairly accomplished artist, who would like to continue with his painting. He realises that would be impossible, since he has to start earning, and painting is not likely to help him do that. Paul finds a job as clerk in a factory in Nottingham, and his mother is extremely proud of him. The job itself is dull and dreary, and the long work hours start to take their toll on Paul.

The Chapter “Death in the Family”, introduces Willey Farm, which Paul grows to love dearly, and the Leivers family, to whom Paul becomes deeply attached. When Paul and his mother walk to Willey Farm for the first time, to meet the Leivers family, Paul finds the change in the landscape quite exhilarating, and contrasting with the dreary and ugly landscape of industrial Bestwood. It is so different that it seems almost foreign: “Just like Canada” (*Sons and Lovers* 153). The contrast between the two landscapes – one wild, pristine and rural, and the other, industrial and man-made - is clearly emphasised. At Willey farm, he meets Miriam Leivers, with whom he develops a very close relationship later.

William brings home his fiancée Lyly to meet his family. She is a frivolous girl and Mrs. Morel disapproves of her. This Chapter ends with the death of William, in London, which leaves the entire family devastated. The Chapter brings part 1 of the novel to a close. Throughout part 1, the theme of social mobility is developed: the family’s move from one house to a better one as their, as their finances improve, represents their move upwards in the social hierarchy. We also learn about Mrs. Morel’s determined efforts to give her children a good education and her resolution that her sons will not become miners, but will move into a more respectable class. The growing rift between Mrs. Morel and her husband, the children’s increasing hatred of their father, the exclusion of Walter from the family affairs, Mrs. Morel’s close bond with William, and later Paul, are all drawn in clear lines in this part of the novel.

“While part 1 dealt with the relationships between Mrs. Morel and her sons William and Paul, part 2 concentrates on Paul’s relationships with Miriam Leivers and Clara Dawes.” (Harrison, 2007:30). In the Chapter “Lad and Girl Love”, the reader learns about Paul’s illness and that he takes time off work to convalesce. Paul develops a strong bond with the Leivers’ family and with the farm, joining occasionally in farming activities: “At mid-summer, he worked all through hay harvest with them and then he loved them” (*Sons and Lovers* 181). Paul and Miriam share a love of books and reading, and their discussions of fiction, poetry and authors, brings them closer. Mrs. Morel fears that this relationship may harm Paul’s personal development and deeply resents Paul’s love for Miriam.

In the Chapter “Strife in Love”, Paul’s relationship with Miriam is shown to be increasingly troubled. Miriam, who is intensely religious begins to find Paul’s unorthodox religious views difficult to accept. Paul begins to achieve more recognition for his artistic work.

In the Chapter “The Defeat of Miriam”, Paul suggests to Miriam that they should not continue their relationship anymore. Miriam sees this as the consequence of the influence of his mother. After drifting away from Miriam, Paul becomes friendly with Clara Dawes, a young woman who has been separated from her husband. In the Chapter “Clara”, Paul becomes closely involved with Clara and learns more about her unhappy marriage with Baxter Dawes. He comes to know about Clara’s difficult circumstances and how she and her mother work for the lace industry, earning very little for their labour. When Paul visits Clara in her squalid home in a Nottingham suburb that is hardly better than a slum, he finds the little rooms of the home smothered in white lace and cotton, and Paul realises that Clara lives a life of drudgery and poverty.

Later, he goes back to Miriam, only to eventually break off with her for good. This break with Miriam, pleases his mother. Paul becomes more successful as an artist, and the financial condition of the entire family improves. They can now afford a servant and an occasional holiday. The Chapter “Passion”, focuses on Paul’s involvement with Clara and their passionate relationship. The flooded river Trent becomes a powerful metaphor for their passion in this Chapter. However, Paul is unable to continue a fulfilling relationship with either Miriam or Clara, and expresses his despair to his mother: “You know mother, I think there must be something the matter with me, that I *can’t* love....I feel sometimes as if I wronged my women, mother.” (*Sons and Lovers* 395).

Baxter Dawes, Clara’s estranged husband attacks Paul and leaves him hurt. Paul is emotionally troubled and does not wish to see either Clara or Miriam. Later, he comes to know that his mother is seriously ill, and is devastated. Clara goes back to Baxter, since she feels she belongs to him, and that Baxter genuinely needs her. With his mother’s death after a period of pain and intense suffering, Paul faces an emotional void. He seems to have lost everything that he has valued in his life, he is truly ‘derelict’, as denoted by the title of the final Chapter: “Everything seemed to have gone smash for the young man. He could not paint. The picture he finished on the day of his mother’s death – one that satisfied him – was the last thing he did. At work there was no Clara. When he came home, he could not take up his brushes again. There was nothing left” (*Sons and Lovers* 454).

At the end of the novel, Paul is lost and faced with a sense of great despondence, but with a great effort tries to avoid the “darkness” of despair. The novel concludes with the famous lines: “But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city’s gold phosphorescence. ... He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly” (*Sons and Lovers* 464). Andrew Harrison remarks: “The ending to the novel in which he walks determinedly towards the bright lights of Nottingham, is an act of assertion in a phase of Paul’s life, when the strongest pull is towards death. These final pages of the novel contain some of Lawrence’s most ambitious writing. ... he is attempting to describe a disturbed state of being in which the mind feels alienated from the world around it” (2007,45).

7.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the structure of *Sons and Lovers* and the story of the novel's development and publication. The reasons for the novel's continued popularity, such as its close connections with Lawrence's own life and its focus on working class life have also been discussed. We also briefly touched upon the major concerns of the novel, which we will be discussing in detail in the next unit.

Check your progress 2

Write a critical summary of *Sons and Lovers*, bringing out its major themes and concerns.

7.6 GLOSSARY

Turn-of-the -century: at the end of one century and beginning of another

Florid: highly decorated

Derelict: an outcast; someone who is not well cared for and is therefore in a bad state.

Gin pit: a shallow mine that is not very deep

Collier: miner

Phosphorescence: a dim light

7.7 REFERENCES

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UNIT 8 READING THE NOVEL *SONS AND LOVERS*

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 *Sons and Lovers*: autobiographical elements
- 8.3 *Sons and Lovers* as a regional novel
- 8.4 Psychoanalytic reading of *Sons and Lovers*
- 8.5 *Sons and Lovers*: class and social mobility
- 8.6 *Sons and Lovers*: Issues of gender
- 8.7 Let us sum up
- 8.8 References
- 8.9 Glossary

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will be discussing the various perspectives from which critics have approached *Sons and Lovers*. This will give us an idea about the various concerns and preoccupations of the novel. After studying this unit, you should be able to critically analyse the novel from various perspectives.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we discussed how *Sons and Lovers* came to be written, the major concerns of the novel and its structure. In this unit, we will take a look at the ways in which critics have approached and read this novel. *Sons and Lovers* has enjoyed “a canonical status in twentieth century English literature unchallenged by any of his other novels” (Harrison, 2007, 47), and has therefore been studied and researched extensively. As Helen and Carl Baron point out in the introduction to the novel, “*Sons and Lovers* has received a great deal of critical attention, but it resists being pinned down to any single diagnostic account. It has been described in a variety of ways: as a record of working class life, ... an illustration of one or other psychoanalytical theory, a critique of industrial capitalism (xv, *Sons and Lovers*). This variety in critical approaches helps us to realise the multiple layers of meanings within the novel.

8.2 *SONS AND LOVERS*: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS

It is very easy for a reader to notice that the novel clearly uses material and experiences from Lawrence’s own life as a young man growing up in a mining village in the East Midlands. The character Paul Morel draws upon the young Lawrence, that of Walter Morel, on his father, Miriam Leivers on Lawrence’s childhood friend Jessie Chambers, and so on. The setting of the novel is also clearly based on the village where Lawrence was born and grew up; the novel therefore has very clear connections with Lawrence’s early life.

The novel draws upon many personal experiences in Lawrence's life as a young man. For instance, in *Sons and Lovers* Paul loves to visit Willey Farm, a beautiful rural spot which is contrasted with the ugliness of the mining village of Bestwood. Willey Farm is based on the actual Haggs Farm, the home of Lawrence's friend Jessie Chambers and her family. Lawrence loved to visit the Chambers's home, which was different in all respects from his own home. Andrew Harrison notes, "The visit to Haggs farm would mark a watershed in Lawrence's early life; he loved to escape from the ugliness of Eastwood, and the tensions of home, to the startling beauty of the surrounding countryside and the attentions of a family who grew to love him and to appreciate his accomplishments. In *Sons and Lovers*, he would describe Paul Morel walking over the fields to 'Willey Farm' and experiencing the landscape as being 'Just like Canada' (*Sons and Lovers* 153); the phrase captures the young Lawrence's own sense of having discovered a new world, just two miles from industrial Eastwood." (Harrison, 2016, 10).



The beautiful countryside around Eastwood that Lawrence loved and celebrated in his early writing

In fact, considering these connections to Lawrence's own life, many critics have seen this as an 'autobiographical novel'. Helen and Carl Baron point out: "It has been widely thought of as a simply and directly autobiographical novel by an author who invariably included in his fiction his own experiences and portraits of people he knew. Many commentators have assumed that Paul Morel is a direct self- portrait... The many differences have been ignored (xvi *Sons and Lovers*). *Sons and Lovers* is a complex novel, which draws upon autobiographical elements;

however, it is not a straightforwardly autobiographical novel. As Andrew Harrison points out, there is a “deliberate transformation of autobiographical materials. ... Lawrence very deliberately inserts multiple perspectives into the narration, transforming autobiographical elements into a complex work of fiction” (2007: 47- 48). Lawrence makes this very clear, and has stated that he intended the novel to represent ‘the tragedy of thousands of young men’, and not just a personal experience. Helen and Carl Baron explain that Lawrence never intended to write an autobiography, and that by the time he had rewritten the novel and produced its final draft, “he had generalized his material to such a degree that he could call it “a great tragedy, The tragedy of thousands of young men in England.” (xvi).

Sons and Lovers also has characteristics of the ‘Bildungsroman’. “*Sons and Lovers* clearly uses a number of conventions of its period. The first of these is the Bildungsroman, or novel of personal development, which had been a leading nineteenth century form, used for example, by Dickens in *David Copperfield* and George Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss*. ... One particular version of this form was the Künstler roman, a novel about the growth of an artist. In the novel he writes of Paul’s situation as a representative one... and he changed the title from ‘Paul Morel’ to the more generalizing *Sons and Lovers*”(Rylance, 2-3). Andrew Harrison calls *Sons and Lovers* a ‘modernist bildungsroman’; “its psychological emphasis and its focus on the artist and his status as a perpetual outsider suggests comparisons with James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)”(2007,47).

Check your progress 1

Write a note on *Sons and Lovers* as a ‘modernist bildungsroman’.

8.3 SONS AND LOVERS AS A REGIONAL NOVEL

John Worthen (*D. H. Lawrence: a Literary Life* 1989) points out that it could have been advice from Hueffer that made Lawrence write his first pieces of fiction about the coal-mining region. Worthen finds it striking that Lawrence did not write anything similar before being encouraged to meet the great demand in the early twentieth century for authentic projections of the type of life that had never been voiced till then (Worthen 1989: 11-12). Lawrence’s plays, *A Collier’s Friday Night* and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, as well as the stories “*Odour of Chrysanthemums*” and “*Goose Fair*” were written in response to this advice. Lawrence realised “the dramatic potential of using Eastwood speech and dialect in order to draw out the subtle emotional undercurrents of family interactions” (Harrison, 2016, 41).

Sons and Lovers qualifies as a ‘regional novel’ since it is ‘set’ in the mining districts of the English East Midlands and fictionalises the experience of growing up in this region. Bridget Pugh identifies a group of Midland writers – ‘four authors thoroughly of the Midland area’ (1989: 141) – Arnold Bennett, George Eliot, William Hale White and D. H. Lawrence, who share a common involvement with the region. Pugh sees them primarily as realist writers and reads their fidelity to their landscapes in terms of their realism. The real world for them, says Pugh, was the world in which they had grown up (1989: 143-44).

Sons and Lovers is linked in this respect not only to such fictional writings of the Midlands, but also to many of Lawrence's own early writings and some of the later work as well. Like his first novel *The White Peacock* (1911), *Sons and Lovers* is set in the Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire borderland, though in the former, as Michael Black points out, the emphasis is on the natural beauty of the countryside rather than the man-made landscape of the mining areas (1992: 1). Many of his early stories like 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' (1911), 'A Modern Lover' (1934) and 'The Shades of Spring' (1914) and plays like *A Collier's Friday Night* (1934) and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1914) are set in the same region of the Midlands, focusing often on the mining community. It is this deep involvement with the area in most of the early writing that gave Lawrence the reputation of being a 'regional' writer of provincial English life, quite early in his career.

Sons and Lovers appears to be a novel in the realist tradition, because of the careful delineation of the physical setting, as well as the social and communal spaces of the English East Midlands in the late nineteenth century. The novel clearly maps the spatial layout, the occupational structure, significant local institutions, landmarks, places with high imageability, places of work and leisure, provision for culture, socialising spaces and the built environment of the region. The natural environment and the physical features of the East Midlands are also mapped carefully. For instance, the flowers that appear so frequently in the pages of the novel such as lilies, bluebells and crocuses, are those that are commonly found in the actual physical space of the East Midlands, and together with trees such as the alders, beeches, elms, oaks, sycamores, firs, pines, and the ash trees of the region, are important in re-creating the natural environment and physical setting in the novel. The river Trent is a major physical feature of the East Midlands region that is mapped by the novel. Lawrence's mapping of the river emphasises its quiet power and its strong currents. 'The Trent was very full. It swept silent and insidious under the bridge, travelling in a soft body.... The river slid by in a body, utterly silent, and swift, inter-twining among itself like some subtle, complex creature' (*Sons and Lovers*: 351).

The focus on the cultural landscape, as altered by the operations of the mining company in the early sections of the novel, foregrounds the significance of mining in making Bestwood what it was at a particular point of time in the history of the region. Another local occupation which figures in the novel is the hosiery trade. The women in the Bottoms are shown waiting for 'Hose' the hosiery agent. Hose distributes machine knitted pieces of stockings among the local women who stitch the pieces together and return them to him. It is work that demands time and skill and is not well paid, but several women of the Bottoms are shown turning up with their work, apparently glad to make the extra money and to augment the income of their miner husbands. The exploitative nature of the process is hinted at throughout the passage. Mrs Morel, unlike her neighbours, refuses to do such badly paid work and makes her disgust with the work and the hosiery agent quite clear. Arthur Coleman explains how framework knitting at one time equalled and surpassed agriculture as the basic form of employment in Eastwood, but started to decline from around 1800 due to the newly developed coal mines which offered more lucrative and more secure work (52-55). By the time we come to the historic period framed in the novel, framework knitting had ceased to be primarily a cottage industry. The industry had been mechanised and only a minor job was to be done by hand, and it is this part which is performed by the women outworkers.

In Part II of the novel a picture emerges of the drudgery involved in the lace industry, for which the area had been famous in the nineteenth century. When Paul visits Clara in her squalid home in a Nottingham suburb that is hardly better than a slum, he finds the little rooms of the home smothered in white lace and cotton. The initial impression of poverty and squalor that the dwelling conveys is followed by indications of the economic activity that goes on there. The tools of the trade are all over the place: ‘Threads of curly cotton, pulled out from beneath the lengths of lace, strewed over the fender and the fireplace. ...On the table was a jenny for carding the lace. There was a pack of brown cardboard squares, a pack of cards of lace, a little box of pins’ (SL: 301). The farming world of the area is re-created in Willey Farm and Strelley Mill Farm, both of which are significant in the social context, since they represent important aspects of farming activity.

The trip to Lincoln, the various visits to seaside resorts like Skegness and Mablethorpe – all indicate the significance that these places had for a working-class family from Bestwood. The sense of Nottingham as a regional capital is built up throughout the novel. The experience of the city of Nottingham is recreated in several ways: by mapping the city’s suburbs and localities like Clifton Grove, Colwick, Sneinton and the Park; by drawing the physical landscape like the environs of the Trent; by references to actual Nottingham landmarks like the Castle, the Arboretum, the market place, the Theatre Royal or the church of St. Mary’s (described in the novel as ‘a great lantern suspended’ (*Sons and Lovers*: 458); and by visually presenting the perspective from certain vantage points like the Castle grounds. The Hemlock Stone, Lincoln Cathedral, Crich Stand, Nottingham Castle, Wingfield Manor – these are all landmarks in the East Midlands that have imageability and high visibility and are therefore very effective indicators of the sense of the region (Anandavalli, M., 119).

Check your progress 2

In your opinion, does *Sons and Lovers* qualify as a “regional novel”?

8.4 PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF *SONS AND LOVERS*

Several critics have pointed out the ‘Oedipal’ theme of *Sons and Lovers*. According to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, *Sons and Lovers* may be considered to be a classic example of a novel about the Oedipus complex, though Lawrence himself claimed not to have read Freud (369). According to Terry Eagleton, “*Sons and Lovers*, without appearing to be at all aware of it, is a profoundly Oedipal novel” (62). Freud’s theory of the “Oedipus complex”, where he focuses on the relationships between children and parents, which he explained first in a letter of 1897, is one of his most celebrated psychological theories. According to Rick Rylance, such psychological theories were explored by several other writers also: “the dynamics of what Freud labelled the ‘Oedipus Complex’ (after the tragic Greek who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother) became a consistent theme in English writing in the early decades of the century. Plots exploring ‘Oedipal’ situations not unlike that in *Sons and Lovers* feature in works by several of Lawrence’s contemporaries” (Rylance 3).

Many critics have noted common elements between the theme of *Sons and Lovers* and Freud’s writings of the same period. “It is easy to see the connection between Paul Morel’s situation and the conditions Freud describes as ‘universally prevalent in civilized countries’ (Rylance 5).

Andrew Harrison points out that Alfred Kuttner was “the first critic to see in the novel a psychological dynamic between son, mother and father, akin to what Freud had described as the Oedipus complex. He praised the psychological acuity of the novel.” Lawrence disapproved of the way Kuttner “reduced the complexity of fiction to the schematic simplicity of theory”. The classic Oedipal approach sees the novel reflecting the ideas current then in Freud’s writing, which explains Paul’s constant resentment of his father (Harrison, 2007: 46-48).

In an interesting critical study that employs the psychoanalytic approach, Terry Eagleton draws upon the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser “to examine the ways in which Paul’s identity is created in particular social conditions”. Eagleton’s method is different from the classical psychoanalytic approach that sees the novel as a Freudian case. Eagleton argues that attention should be given to the what the text avoids, not just what the text says. The novel has a dimension similar to the unconscious which contains aspects that have been repressed or denied. (1992, 7-8). “In reading *Sons and Lovers* with an eye to these aspects of the novel, we are constructing what may be called a ‘sub-text’ of the work.... All literary works contain one or more such sub-texts, and there is a sense in which they may be spoken of as the ‘unconscious’ of the work itself. The work’s insights, as with all writing, are deeply related to its blindnesses: ... what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meanings” (Eagleton:1992, 66). Eagleton thus employs psychoanalytic methods to arrive at the meanings of the text which are not stated clearly, but form its ‘unconscious’ aspect, and which have to be arrived at through careful reading; in the case of *Sons and Lovers*, such a reading presents Morel in a more sympathetic light.

Check your progress 3

Attempt a psychoanalytic reading of *Sons and Lovers*.

8.5 SONS AND LOVERS: CLASS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Sons and Lovers is, as we have already discussed, one of the earliest novels about working class life; as it was written by a novelist who was born and brought up in a working-class environment, it had a peculiar sense of reality and authenticity. Eagleton says: “Here, almost for the first time in English fiction, are working class characters portrayed as living subjects rather than observed objects. They are fashioned unself-consciously from the inside, rather than patronizingly indulged or exhibited as sociological specimens. Lawrence was an extraordinarily path-breaking author, a courageous avant-gardist in an age of sedate English naturalism” (Eagleton, *The English Novel*, 256). In several parts of the novel, Lawrence uses the local dialect with remarkable ease, and here again we see his ability to convey the realities of working class life. “His prose here manages to be at once imaginative and workaday, vivid and precise without being self-consciously crafted, he can wonderfully capture in this novel the dry sardonic repartee of the English working class” (Eagleton: *The English Novel*, 269).

Social mobility is a key theme in the novel. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “continued expansion in educational provision and the gradual re- structuring of Britain’s industrial base brought about ever greater social mobility and a further increase in the importance and influence of the lower middle classes and sections of the skilled and educated

working classes.” (Poplawski, 480). Thus, unlike earlier decades, there were opportunities for the working classes to acquire education and skills and improve their social standing. *Sons and Lovers* is not just a novel about the working class, but also a novel about social aspiration and the desire to move to a higher social class. Mrs Morel and her children have a keen interest in avoiding the mining occupation – partly because of her bourgeois preoccupation with the idea of “getting on”, and partly because the occupation is dangerous and insecure. Though a fairly clear picture of the occupational map of the region emerges through the novel, the narrative point of view clearly prioritises the world of business. Mrs Morel encourages her two sons towards clerical and office work, since such occupations are the paths to bourgeois security, the way to get on.

Sons and Lovers ends up being a novel about the mining community that avoids mining as an occupation and focuses instead on the kind of middle-class work that interests its central characters – this contributes one of the underlying tensions of the novel.

Graham Holderness points out how, “social mobility through education and moral improvement” operated very powerfully on Lawrence as a young man. In *Sons and Lovers*, the mother, “in an effort to realise her vision of moral improvement, tries to push her sons into the middle class. In fact, however, she pushes them into isolation, separateness, individuality.” (Holderness, in Rylance, 143-144). Holderness argues that in the novel, this ideology of social aspiration and the efforts to move ahead into more ‘respectable’ social positions, is shown as “producing not social freedom, but a generation of displaced, alienated and deeply troubled social climbers” (Harrison, 2007:51).

Check your progress 4

Discuss the themes of class and social mobility with reference to *Sons and Lovers*.

8.6 SONS AND LOVERS: ISSUES OF GENDER

The novel reflects the operation of issues regarding gender and women’s rights in early twentieth century British society. Early in the novel Morel is shown as trying to ‘subdue’ his wife into submission (*Sons and Lovers*: 49). Miriam resents the fact that because she is a woman she is denied a chance of knowing, learning, or doing anything (*Sons and Lovers*: 185). In the course of a spirited discussion at Willey Farm, Clara has a heated argument with Paul on the issue of equal pay for men and women. The recurrence of gender-related issues shows how alive such issues were in the collective thinking of the time.

When Paul visits Clara in her humble home in Nottingham, he finds Clara and her mother busy with their ‘jennyning’ work, which is done for the local lace industry. It is tough work and obviously involves the hard labour of women who are not as well paid as men. The drudgery and mechanical nature of the work and the poor returns that it brings are suggested by the environment in Clara’s house. The gender implications of this exploitative system of economic activity are suggested throughout and strongly voiced by Clara. When Paul asks Clara if she likes jennyning, she replies in a manner that belies her desperate acceptance of her occupation:

“What can a woman do!” she replied bitterly.

“Is it sweated?”

“More or less. Isn’t *all* women’s work? That’s another trick the men have played, since we force ourselves into the labour market”” (*Sons and Lovers*: 303). Clara’s disillusion with her present work is expressed in her embittered attitude and her sense of humiliation that shows through her defiance. Clara is aware of the exploitation of which she is a victim; she is closely involved with the suffragette movement and attends their meetings regularly.

Though Lawrence brings in the theme of women’s emancipation and the suffragette movement in *Sons and Lovers*, he has been criticised by feminist critics as being anti-feminist in this novel. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* accused Lawrence of seeing women in a role subordinate to men. Andrew Harrison points out how Lawrence’s portrayal in *Sons and Lovers* of the struggle for female emancipation “angered the feminists and Lawrence was attacked by Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics*” (Harrison, 2007: 51). “Though Millett admires Lawrence’s refreshingly original depiction of working-class life, and the undoubted passion and energy of his writings, she deplores the way *Sons and Lovers* is centred on Paul’s needs, around which the female characters gather as satellites with no social or psychological existence of their own. Mrs. Morel, for example, ‘is utterly deprived of any avenue of achievement’ and lives only through her male children.... Millett interprets *Sons and Lovers* not as realism, but as a ‘heroic male romance’” (Rylance 9-10).

Another point raised by feminist critics against the novel is the way Lawrence shows Clara as returning to her husband Baxter Dawes, who had clearly abused her earlier.

Let us take a look at how Millett presents this situation: “Clara, meek as a sheep, is delivered over to the man she hated and left years before. The text makes it clear that Dawes had beat and deceived his wife. Yet, with a consummate emotional manipulation, Paul manages to impose his own version of her marriage on Clara, finally bringing her to say that its failure was her fault” (Millett, *Sexual Politics*, quoted in Rylance 122). Millett points out several such instances in the novel. As Hillary Simpson observes, “Clara’s return to her husband at the end of the novel, is singled out by Kate Millett as a particularly glaring example of *Sons and Lovers*’ ant-feminism” (Simpson, 122).

Check your progress 5

How does *Sons and Lovers* engage with issues of gender in early twentieth century Britain?

8.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have looked at the autobiographical aspects of *Sons and Lovers*, and considered the novel as a ‘regional novel’. We have also touched upon psychoanalytic approaches to this novel and also considered issues related to class and social mobility and gender, in *Sons and Lovers*.

8.8 REFERENCES

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8.9 GLOSSARY:

Bildungsroman: "class of novel that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically. The German word *Bildungsroman* means "novel of education" or "novel of formation." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

Kunstler roman: " (German: "artist's novel"), class of *Bildungsroman*, or apprenticeship novel, that deals with the youth and development of an individual who becomes—or is on the threshold of becoming—a painter, musician, or poet. The classic example is James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

Imageability: ability to create a clear mental image

avant-gardist: one who introduces radical changes and innovations

naturalism: "in literature and the visual arts, late 19th- and early 20th-century movement that was inspired by adaptation of the principles and methods of natural science, especially the Darwinian view of nature, to literature and art. In literature it extended the tradition of realism, aiming at an even more faithful, unselective representation of reality, a veritable "slice of life," presented without moral judgment." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

sardonic: mocking, humorous