

A DEFENCE OF D.H. LAWRENCE'S METAPHYSICS OF 'BLOOD CONSCIOUSNESS' AGAINST FEMINIST CRITICISM

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Abstract

D. H. Lawrence's novels portray female protagonist as truly empowered in their own rights. He was not a male chauvinist. He envisages multifaceted women who do not conform to any fixed pattern or predominant ideologies of the society. These characters defy the male assertion for their individual choices. The paper is a counter-argument to various critical readings offered against Lawrence such as the arguments provided in Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. It further explores the author's view on marriage, sex, Oedipus complex, psychoanalysis, individuality and fundamental notions about the man-woman relationship to form a defence against the claims of Lawrence being a sexist. The emphasis is put on the woman characters portrayed in the novels like *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to argue against the impartial and incomplete depiction of the feminine celebrated in the feminist critical readings. Neither Paul Morel or Oliver Mellors are representative of 'indifferent males' who are trying to impose their supremacy on the female. Rather than promoting the woman as a negation of the male, Lawrence depicts the woman in their true unique essence.

Keywords: Feminism, Relationships, Individualism, Industrialism, Primitive.

Ursula Brangwen, Miriam Leiversand Constance Chatterley are revolutionary figures who fight for their freedom by making their own choices to live their life by trusting their own body's instinct. They refuse to submit to the shackles of industrialized society, unlike their lovers and husband. The fight to create their own identity against the imposed gender roles of the society and family is admirable.

They decline social pressure by remaining true to their own authentic selves. The characters break the false ideologies that bound them to a set of values and customs. The female protagonists are not portrayed as benevolent angels, sacrificing ladies, pleasing heroines, meek and ideal lovers to represent the stereotypical patriarchal notion of how a woman should be. Lawrence is not a male chauvinist. He is not obsessed with male supremacy over female. He tries to show the shimmering nature of human instincts without judging them. Unlike traditional romance, their only aim is not restricted to falling in love with the male. Lawrence hardly comments or scrutinizes the choices made by his characters through the 'male gaze'. There is no over-emphasis on female purity and virginity. They reject to be confined to the domestic only. Miriam is one of the bravest characters who loves Paul till the end despite his troubled childhood. Clara is the queen bee who rejects Paul as he is unable to give himself completely to her. Lawrence is one of the first male writers to speak openly about women's sexuality by breaking the conventional rules of Victorian morality. In the essay "Give Her a Pattern" Lawrence discourages the idea of trying to fit a woman into patterns. He protests against the inhumaneness of these ideologies imposed on a woman which reduces them to objects. He believed that art should not judge or force patterns.

Modern woman isn't really a fool. But modern man is. That seems to me the only plain way of putting it. He makes a greater mess of his woman than men have ever made. (Lawrence, *Late Essays and Articles* 164)

Both Miriam and Clara are more sensible than Paul. They could understand him much better than himself. Miriam is not just the "spiritual mistress" (Millett, *Sexual Politics* 252) of Paul. Neither is Clara a "sexual one" (252). Miriam could not stand discrimination. She fought with her brothers because of the verbal abuse they inflicted on her. Her fight for education and economic independence in the discouraging circumstances of home makes her a rebel against domesticity. Despite her mother's "the other cheek" doctrine, Miriam cannot stand the people who try to devalue her. She is confident in her own inner essence. Unlike Paul, she never suffers from emotional bankruptcy.

She could love the cosmos with all her intensity. The irresistible attraction that nature holds for her cannot be explained in concrete terms. Paul's inability to love her didn't stand as a

barrier in her loving him as a man. She is hypersensitive to the suggestion of intercourse due to farm and mother. Still, she decides to lose her virginity to Paul. Her love is more noble and brave. Till the end, she remains brave to her instincts and emotions of the body.

Millett accuses Lawrence of promoting “sexual sadism” (253) when Paul throws the pencil at her while teaching her algebra. According to her, even though Paul is abusive, Miriam does not leave him. But the intimacy of Miriam to the living beings around her threatened Paul’s inability to connect to others completely. Paul could not stay away from her because it is her who could understand him. In the next chapter “Strife in Love”, Lawrence comments that “He was afraid of her love for him. It was too good for him, and he was inadequate. His own love was at fault, not hers. (Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* 266). The anger was not towards Miriam but to his own self because of his inability to love Miriam with the same ardour as she does.

Similarly, Clara is portrayed as a “loose woman” (254) according to Millett. She is not an exchange between Dawes and Paul. She is never “Dawes’s property” (257). In the chapter “Baxter Dawes”, Clara chooses Dawes herself because she could feel the commonness and the whole of soul that Baxter imparted in some moments in their life together as a family. In the chapter “Baxter Dawes”, we see the subtle difference when Lawrence illustrates that

Her passion for the young man had filled her soul, given her a certain satisfaction, *and eased* her of her self-mistrust, her doubt. Whatever else she was, she was inwardly *assured*. It was almost as if she had *gained herself*, and stood now distinct and complete. (Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* 464)

Clara like the queen bee of the hive rejects Paul as a mate. Paul, on the other hand never gives himself completely to her. The woman is the queen bee to whom the males should submit completely. When Paul asks her about the sex. She plainly says that it isn’t everything to her if the women in her were left out. In the forward to sons and lovers, Lawrence says that it is the woman who receives the man in his true essence. The home and the man become mechanical without the comfort of the woman. The inauthentic existence man lives outside the home is counterbalanced by authentic and unconditional love in the house. Work corrupts the man into an artificial dreading existence.

Lawrence hated anything that took only the mental account of man into consideration ignoring his spiritual nature. He was not fond of Psychoanalysis. Despite this, critics have

accused him of being “determinedly Freudian” (Millet, *Sexual Politics* 246). For him, the psyche of the man is pristine and pure. In the chapter “Passion”, Paul bends down to clean Clara’s boots and playfully says that he is her “boot- boy” (400). He does not treat a woman as mere objects. The tragedy is that he could never give himself to any woman completely. He is caught up in mental consciousness and unable to live life on a physical basis only. He is forced into adulthood because of circumstances in the home. He is a victim of industrialized society.

The constant interference of Gertrude in his life makes him unable to see the other woman as an end in themselves. Gertrude constantly tries to force her views of the world on Paul. She expected human perfection as she is high minded, stern, puritan and. She could not tolerate his drinking which was a necessity for Walter. Initially, the life of miners attracted her and she considered it noble as they risked their lives daily and with gaiety. Unlike her, they were not obsessed with the question of life after death and enjoyed the moment they lived in present. But later it is the same qualities that attracted her made her bitter as she could not accept life in its momentariness. Gertrude could not accept him in his real authentic self. Walter Morel is a deeply sensuous man who takes life as it comes to him. As she refuses to share her life with her husband, she makes Paul as the “go-between” (102) between her and world.” (102).

Lawrence vehemently opposes the mental influences of parents on children which grew up. He wants the experiences felt by the child to be the source of their ideas on good and evil. For him, “Morality is a delicate act of adjustment on the soul’s part, not a rule or a prescription” (Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious* 94). A life lived on just ideals in which there is no space for human errors is miserable. Human beings are not perfect. Instead of imposing morality deprived of ideals enforced on life, we should allow life to flow in its spontaneity. He believes in the essential goodness of the human soul that is spontaneous in nature and free of the pre-determined conception of the world.

The second part of Millett argument accuses Lawrence of showing a “negative attitude” (257) in the character portrayal of Ursula as Millett accuses him of. She is rather shown in heroic dimensions in the novel. Ursula is representative of the clash between the traditional society of blood intimacy and modern capitalistic society of isolating individualists. She is the quintessential modern woman whose frustration and conflict are emblematic of a disruption between the unity of the mind and the body. She experiences the freedom that other Brangwens never could. She is passionate, spiritual and sensual. But she feels the pressure of

material society that tries to confine her and tries to make her a cog in the whole system of inhumanness in form of factories, college, and school. Ursula's response to this unreal society is "We could easily do without the pits" (362). She is trying to make sense in a world which has already left human values behind.

'The power of womb' is being celebrated is a positive attribute of womanhood. He does not reject it in later novels as Millett accuses him of. Both Connie and Anna celebrate its power. Anna is content with the state of her motherhood and with her children. She was never bothered by any sense of duty. But for Ursula home was never enough neither Cosset Hay. She was a dreamer and romantic in her heart. For a greater part of teenage, she lived in the illusion of one sort or the other. For her only happiness was the Sunday world. It was on this day that "her spirit could wander in dreams, unassail" (283). She is also representative of the modern woman who is not satisfied with "babies and muddled domesticity" (285). She wants to create her own distinct identity. Economic independence is very important for a woman. It gives her rights to make her own choices and live a life based on those choices. She slowly gains confidence by taking control of her decisions. She enjoys her freedom.

Unlike Mr Harby, she cannot deal with children as a uniform bunch of machines who have no individual self. For a time, Ursula feels a split in her personality. Apart from her, all teachers were products of the modern education system which has turned the school into an institution. There is no "bitter animosity" (260) against her teaching at the school. Lawrence never condemns her for her choices. He never puts an accusing hand on her for not liking home and domesticity. He never wants to put a woman in a pattern. He is rather sympathetic to her. But even though Ursula tries her best to be like other teachers in school, she cannot be. The impersonal and cold environment of the school makes her miserable.

Throughout the novel, Ursula is challenged to keep her fundamental and instinctive honesty as a human being in an impersonal society constituting of schools, factories, and colleges. She is the representative of a modern person who feels trapped in a system as he is a modern man who does not have a sense of what he is doing. He denies his true deep self in favour of the dead. He allows his social self to dominate making him a non-entity.

Unlike Skrebensky, she questions the whole idea of war. Like a soldier or modern man who does not know what purpose it fulfils, her lover has no idea of his real self. He is a member of the society which is inertly meaningless. Creating an identity for one own self is impossible in the modern world without restoring to the ideology of nation and war. Ursula stands against all this and says that "Well if everybody said it, there wouldn't be a nation. But I

should still be myself,” (322). Ursula questions all the notions of civilization which the western world believes in. The autonomy that money guarantees to a woman are one of the first basic stepping stone that provides her with the courage to raise questions against other indiscriminations she faces in the society. She is not emotionally weak to any man and her only aim is not to fall in love with the Skrebensky. Neither is Lawrence “hostile” (257) to Ursula’s feelings.

Lawrence critiques marriage as an institution in a modern world. When we come to marriage in industrial society symbolized by marriage of Tom and Winfred there is no blood intimacy. It is a marriage of convenience without any real communication. For Will “Neither marriage nor the domestic establishment meant anything to him” (Lawrence, *The Rainbow* 366). He was a man who has come to “a stability of nullification” (358). A hatred for abstraction and intellectual perversity drove Ursula away from Winfred. Unlike the previous generation, there is no blood intimacy between the current generations.

It is a marriage of head rather than of the heart. The colliers “believe they must alter themselves to fit the pits and the place, rather than alter the pits and the place to fit themselves” (361). As a result, the pit owns the human and marriage does not mean anything as human beings are “a machine out of work” (362). *Rapid changes in society have transformed society beyond recognition*. The first generation of marriage between Tom Brangwen and Lydia Lensky come closest to complete confirmation in their “entry into another circle of existence, it was the baptism to another life” (99). They had the blood intimacy in them. The impersonal tone in the beginning chapter anticipates the centrality of modernist exploration of time in historical, mythical and personal forms.

But coming together does not mean the loss of individuality. Will and Anna’s relationship slowly evolves. Both of them attain their selfhood. Will Brangwen finally grows up as an individual who “wanted to be unanimous with the whole of purposive mankind” (247). Only when both of them accept the dual nature of their relationship which rose from attraction and repulsion, from intimacy to detachment could they feel fulfilment in their marriage. In the chapter “The Birth of Sex” Lawrence argues that “great purpose of manhood, a passionate unison in actively making a world” (Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* 137). True relationship fulfils the man individually. The relationship between man and woman changes drastically from one generation to another.

Similarly, in the marriage of Connie and Clifford, Lawrence explores the idea of what constitutes the idea of true marriage? Both Constance and her sister Hilda has been “aesthetically unconventional up bring” (38). From an early age, they were absolutely free in

their thoughts and ideas. For Lawrence, it is the woman who actually had power as she can yield to a man without giving her inner self away. Rather than blaming the woman, Lawrence blames the man who could not understand a woman.

Both the sisters were never in love, unless and until they were having “soul- enlightened discussions” (40). Sex was just a “gift of herself” (49). She is different from the traditional heroines as she is not particularly modest, selfless, virtuous or virginal. But later it creates a fear of nothingness in Connie. The words which attracted Connie in the first place became blank as there was no intimacy of body. Lawrence explores the cultural values by which modern society lives. Due to industrialism, there is the alienation of the body from the senses. The modern notion of morality and sexuality disgust Lawrence. Treating one’s partner as merely a sexual object is vehemently opposed to Lawrence’s view of individuality. For him, we can gain our individuality only through others. Instead what Millet propagates is what he would call egoist. He never propagates the idea of males as “domineering individualists” (Millet, *Sexual Politics* 244). Due to industrialization and war, modern man is unable to form a real connection with a woman. Lawrence further extricates the point that it is a connection between two individuals that creates meaning for the life on earth. In the essay “We need one another” Lawrence argues

Modern men, however, have so nearly achieved this Nirvana-like condition of having no real human relationships at all, that they are beginning to wonder what and where they are. What are you, when you’ve asserted your grand independence, broken all the ties, or “bonds,” and reduced yourself to a “pure” individuality? (Lawrence, *Late Essays and Articles* 297)

Lawrence is against the self-centric ego of all men and woman of the modern generation. He is disgusted with the modern notions of cerebral sexuality as portrayed through the character of Michaelis. He relies on display and language to connect to a woman rather through body. (46)

In the “Apropos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, Lawrence says that he is a product of modern civilization who has “lost entirely all connection with his fellow- men and women, except those of usage”(41). Like all his friends, Clifford believed in the “life of the mind” (75). They all reduced, sex to another form of talk. Connie was disgusted with their “cold minds” (80). Without her, the man could not even talk. The images of Renoir painting with his penis adds humour to the whole soulless intellectual talk between the friends. It reaches its height when Clifford asks Connie to have an affair with another man. He refers to the child as “it”(88).

Connie is not “devotional” as Millet accuses her to be (238). Connie does not allow her husband to use her body for lineage. Sex for her is much more than preserving tradition. She refuses to be subjugated by the patriarchal strategies of society which tries to place the

woman under perpetual obligation. She refuses to be subjugated by class infused fixed notions of marriage and obligation to others. She learns to trust her body and primitive self. Her openness to life makes her free from the conventional self. She comes out of the shame the society enforces on a woman who is brave enough to answer the needs of their body. For her, the real man is the one “He leaves me my own mistress entirely” (342). There is no element of dependence on each other. Lawrence never wants a male to dominate woman. He does not propagate “domineering individuals” as Millett accuses of him to be (244).

She questions the system of marriage based on convenience. Simon de Beauvoir in the chapter “The myth of woman” accuses Lawrence of promoting “monogamous marriage in which the wife drives the justification of her existence from the husband”. (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 230). Connie stands against this accusation. *She could not believe in something that her soul does not agree. She is unable to follow the rules and regulations that tend to restrict the spontaneous flow of life of instincts.*

Her youth rebelled against the men who were cold and indifferent to woman's feeling and emotions. Unlike Clifford, she was not a hypocrite. Although he pretended to hate working classes, he still wanted money. She was not a slave of “bitch goddess” (108). She revolted against the man of her class. It was a humiliation for her to bear a child from any mechanical man around her. She was not “scared of life” (114). She could not deny the body. The meaninglessness of mental life drove her angry. She hated all those men who “defrauded a woman even of her own body” (116). She did not blame Clifford as he was a product of the mutilated generation. But her soul rose in contempt for the lack of “warmth” (117) from him. The lack of connection of his words to herself maddens her. She does not allow his words to control him. The language which sucks “all the life- sap out of living things” (139) is unable to subjugate Connie's spirit and mind. Even when Clifford tries to worship her and force her sympathies for him, she is brave enough to stand the weird lies and emotional blackmail.

Mellor, on the other hand, is a creature of woods who stands for instinctual life. When Connie sees him for the first time, he gives the impression of “an animal that works alone “. It is his solitude and stillness that touches Connie's womb. He does not try to impress her with words. Like her, he aches for human contact too. The similarity of heart and emotions drew them together to each other. Mellor's could feel her forlornness in his bowels. Further in the “Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover”, Lawrence arguesthat

The great necessity is that we should act according to our thoughts and think according to our acts. (12)

It is not “female passivity” (240) that Lawrence is enforcing that Millett accuses him of. When they had sex for the first time, Connie is overwhelmed by her emotions. She questions “Was it real?” (164). It is only after losing her shell that she could find herself. She is brave enough to allow her instinct to act as detectors for her life. Connie instinctively knew that “if she kept herself for herself, it was nothing” (165). Human beings feel real only by contact with others. Our essential being gets fulfilled, only by interacting with others. Mellor could feel her “tenderness” (167) against the celluloid woman. He instinctively feels like protecting her. He hates class hierarchy and money as a means of controlling life. Both Connie and Mellor, refuse to confirm. He does not take notice of her class and is “kind to the female in her, which no man had ever been” (170).

Lawrence celebrates the power of sex in rejuvenating the body. He does not impose male superiority by the “Mystery of phallus” as Millett accuses him of. (238). Connie feels reborn as “anotherself was alive in her, burning molten and soft in her womb and bowels”. It is because of this primal connection that she adores Mellor. Lawrence propagates the idea of sex being a primal connection between man and woman. It is a highly physical experience with a spiritual dimension. The man-woman relationship is sacred for him.

The Edens are so badly lost, anyhow. But it was the apple, not the lord, did it. There is a fundamental antagonism between the mental cognitive mode and the naïve or physical or sexual mode of consciousness. As long as time lasts, it will be a battle or a truce between the two.(688)

It is the mental life that does not allow the resurrection of the body. Too many words ruin the spiritual and emotional bond of attached to emotions. Connie does not want Mellor for his class or money. She just “liked his body” (221).

Connie could not stand the bullying that Clifford inflicted on working class. She could never agree to the superiority of class hierarchy. She vehemently opposes the inequality and suffering in the disguised benevolence of Clifford. She condemns him of being a “dead fish of a gentleman, with his celluloid soul!” (247). Connie threatens the traditional hierarchies of class difference. She is not a victim of sexual exploitation. Her relationship with the gamekeeper is mutual. She was a socialist in the true sense as she has no stereotypical notions for lower classes. When Connie meets Mellor after the separation, “the tension of keeping up her appearances fell from her” (333). She feels like home.

Both Connie and Mellor feel that they are “a couple of battered warriors” (259). Mellor also felt dissatisfied the way he could not express himself completely before his lovers. The cruelty of touch that he expresses is poignant. He believes in the “warm hearted” (261) love and sex.

If there is one thing I insist on, it is that *sex* is a delicate, vulnerable, vital thing that you mustn't fool with. If there is one thing I deplore, it is heartless sex. Sex must be a real flow, a real flow of sympathy, generous and warm, and not a trick thing, or a moment's excitation, or a mere bit of bullying.(223)

Connie chooses him because she feels that unlike others, he did not try to physically and emotionally manipulate her. She becomes free of the taboo and shame associated with the body. She becomes brave enough to tell Clifford that she danced in rain naked. She gains control over her own body outside of the barriers the society impose on it. Nature provides a purity that cleanses her soul from corrupted civilization.

She refuses to listen to higher ideas of Clifford against "life of the body" (291). She believes that "the life of the body is a greater reality than the life of the mind" (291).she questions his values as they are contrary to what she feels.Can one like by mental consciousness alone? In the essay "Pornography and obscenity" Lawrence reiterates this view himself. Sex is not something that you think about. Civilization creates a clash between physical satisfaction and intellectual activity. It is not the physical deformity but the coldness of his emotions that pains her. He forces the moral dilemma of marriage on her. She admires Mellor because of his courage to stand against the corruption of society. Unlike Clifford, he is not a hypocrite. He treats her as a complete human being. He cooks food for her.

Unlike Hilda, Connie refuses to be "a slave to your own idea of yourself" (310). She allows her experiences of the body to shape the mind. She understands real tenderness.For her, the real man is the man who leaves her to be her "own mistress entirely"(333). She chooses Mellor because of his humanity in a world of celluloid beings. "It's the courage of your own tenderness, that's what it is, like when you put your hand on my tail and say I've got a pretty tail" (336). The tail symbolizes the animal instinct as opposed to the barrier of civilization. It creates a barrier to physical touch. There is a split in the consciousness of human being. Lawrence makes the human a part of larger cosmos. Instead of derogating them to tiny isolated beings who have no connection to anything outside them. In a sense, he insists on the "animality" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 225). Animal for him stands for instinctual life.

Lawrence does not transform "macular ascendancy into mystical powers" (238) as Millett accuses him of. The male characters that Lawrence shows in the novel are not perfect. Mellor shoots the cat before his daughter. Paul fights the lovers who are the only ones who understand him. As a result, he becomes completely alone towards the end of the novel.People are so caught up in mental consciousness that they actually ignore the things present around them in real life. Paul is agitated both by Miriam's devotion and Clara's blatant expression of truth.

Lawrence is not showing a man who will “carry forward the banner of life” (Beauvoir, 229). Rather it the woman who is representative of the conflicts of their generation. It is the women who stand against the attacks of modern civilization by following their intuition and instinct. They refuse to be broken down by the inhumanness of people surrounding them.

Human beings need each other to survive. Connie comes out of the emotional and psychological obligations forced on her by her husband and class. The journey of Ursula and Connie to come to full terms with themselves is one of profound wisdom and bravery. To being “but a pole necessary for the existence of the pole of opposite sign” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 226) is not slavery for a woman. Woman are braver and more sensible as compared to the modern man who is broken by civilization.

Thus, Beauvoir's and Millett's conclusions about Lawrence being a chauvinist is biased. Rather than providing “guidebooks for women” (233), his novels bring the woman protagonist to a new understanding of herself and nature of love. Instead of imposing ideas to create order and oppression, he tries his best to offer ideas to create freedom and pleasure. Woman have their own unique essence. A woman feeling through her ‘womb’ is not a devaluation of her humanity. Rather it takes great courage to live a life based on instincts that come from the heart. Man and woman are biologically different. Instead of making both sexes homogeneous, it would be rather wise to rejoice the differences.

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