

Sons and Lovers Study Guide

Sons and Lovers by D. H. Lawrence

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Introduction

Initially titled "Paul Morel," *Sons and Lovers*, published in 1913, is D. H. Lawrence's third novel. It was his first successful novel and arguably his most popular. Many of the details of the novel's plot are based on Lawrence's own life and, unlike his subsequent novels, this one is relatively straightforward in its descriptions and action. The story recounts the coming of age of Paul Morel, the second son of Gertrude Morel and her hard-drinking, working-class husband, Walter Morel, who made his living as a miner. As Mrs. Morel tries to find meaning in her life and emotional fulfillment through her bond with Paul, Paul seeks to break free of his mother through developing relationships with other women. The novel was controversial when it was published because of its frank way of addressing sex and its obvious oedipal overtones. The novel was also heavily censored. Edward Garnett, a reader for Duckworth, Lawrence's publisher, cut about 10 percent of the material from Lawrence's draft. Garnett tightened the focus on Paul by deleting passages about his brother, William, and toning down the sexual content. In 1994, Cambridge University Press published a new edition with all of the cuts restored, including Lawrence's idiosyncratic punctuation.

Sons and Lovers is also significant for the portrait it provides of working-class life in Nottinghamshire, England. Lawrence's disgust with industrialization shows in his descriptions of the mining pits that dot the countryside and the hardships and humiliation that working families had to endure to survive.



Author Biography

David Herbert Richard (D. H.) Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, England, on September 11, 1885, the son of coal miner Arthur Lawrence and schoolteacher Lydia Beardsall. A novelist, critic, and poet known for writing about the conflicts between men and women, Lawrence derived much of his material from his childhood, which was fraught with tension. His mother resented his father's hard drinking and lack of ambition, and the two bickered and quarreled regularly. Lydia Beardsall eventually succeeded in turning her five children against their father, and she developed an especially close bond with David, after having nursed him back to life from a bout of double pneumonia during childhood. When she died in 1910, Lawrence's illness returned and almost killed him. After recovering, he quit his teaching post at the Davidson School in Croydon, terminated his romantic relationships, and flung himself headlong into his writing career, abandoning his middle-class desires and adopting a bohemian lifestyle. In 1912, he eloped with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the wife of a professor at the University of Nottingham, who left her husband and three small children to be with Lawrence.

A prolific writer, Lawrence published four novels, a play, a collection of poems, and a collection of stories before he turned thirty. His first real success came with the publication of his third novel, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), a fictionalized autobiography of his relationships with his mother and Jessie Chambers, a love interest from his youth, and a social portrait of provincial life in Nottinghamshire. The novel describes Paul Morel's fixation on his mother, and how that fixation informs his other relationships. Much of Lawrence's writing addresses the intersections between sexual desire and class identity and the consequences of denying the wants of one's animal self. Subsequent novels and criticism cemented his reputation as an enemy of bourgeois morality. Some of his better-known works include *The Rainbow* (1915); *Women in Love* (1920); *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921); *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922); *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923); *St. Mawr* (1925); and *The Plumed Serpent* (1926). Lawrence's most controversial novel, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (1928), was accused of being pornographic, and its publishers were taken to court.

Lawrence's restless, peripatetic existence—he and Freida traveled constantly—came to an end on March 2, 1930, at Vence, in the south of France, when he finally succumbed to tuberculosis, which had plagued him for most of his life.



Plot Summary

Chapter 1: The Early Married Life of the Morels

The first chapter of *Sons and Lovers* introduces the Morel family and describes the story's setting, a neighborhood called "The Bottoms," where the miners live. Mrs. Morel is pregnant with her third child, which she does not want because she has fallen out of love with her husband and because the family is poor. When her husband comes home from working at a bar, the two argue over his drinking.

This chapter also contains a flashback to the time when Mrs. Morel met Walter at a Christmas party. She was twenty-three, reserved, and thoughtful; he was twenty-seven, good-looking, and outgoing, and very different from Mrs. Morel's father. They are married by the following Christmas. Less than a year into their marriage, however, Mrs. Morel discovers that Walter is not the man she thought he was. He does not own his house as he said he did, and he is in considerable debt.

Two key events occur in this chapter. The first is when Walter cuts his son's hair while his wife is sleeping. Mrs. Morel views this as a betrayal, and the image of William, her favorite child, standing in front of his father with shorn locks on the floor, stays with her. The second event occurs when Walter comes home drunk late one night and fights with his wife. Walter locks his pregnant wife out of the house, letting her in later, after he has slept off part of his alcohol.

Chapter 2: The Birth of Paul, and Another Battle

With the help of Mrs. Bower, a midwife, Mrs. Morel gives birth to a son. Walter arrives home, immediately asks Mrs. Bower for a drink, has his dinner, and then goes upstairs to see his wife. The arrival of Paul increases the tension in the house, as the couple continues to bicker and fight. Walter does not like to be around his family, and the estrangement between the two adults grows. In one scene, Walter drunkenly pulls out a drawer and throws it at his wife, hitting her and cutting her above the eye. He is ashamed of his actions, but tells himself it is her fault. He spends the next few days drinking at a bar. Toward the end of the chapter, Walter steals money from his wife's purse, and then denies it when she confronts him. He stalks out of the house with a bundle of his belongings saying that he is leaving, but he returns home that night.

Chapter 3: The Casting off of Morel—The Taking on of William

In this chapter, Walter falls ill, but his wife nurses him back to health. Mrs. Morel, however, is devoting more and more of her attention to the children. She tolerates her husband, but does not love him. In the period after Walter's illness, the couple



conceives another child, Arthur, who is born when Paul is one and a half years old. Arthur becomes Walter's favorite child and is like him both physically and temperamentally.

Walter and his wife fight over how to discipline their children and plan for their future. Mrs. Morel vetoes her husband's suggestion that William work in the mines; she finds him a job at the Cooperative Wholesale Society instead. At nineteen, William takes a job in London, much to his devoted mother's chagrin.

Chapter 4: The Young Life of Paul

This chapter focuses on Paul's childhood, and all of the events narrated are in relation to his character. Mrs. Morel and her husband still fight, and Walter drifts further away from the family, even though they have moved from "The Bottoms" and into a new house. There are also moments when the family bonds, and Mrs. Morel encourages the children to share the events of the day with their father. But overall, Walter is more alienated than ever from his wife and children, especially Paul. A significant event occurs when Paul breaks his sister's doll and then experiences hatred for the doll. This echoes his father's own behavior toward his mother.

Chapter 5: Paul Launches into Life

In this chapter, Walter injures his leg, causing anxiety in his family and guilt in Mrs. Morel, who is concerned for her husband's health but guilt ridden because she no longer loves him. Paul, now fourteen, hunts for work and lands a position with Thomas Jordan, a manufacturer of surgical appliances, as a junior clerk. William, still in London, is now dating, and sends his mother a photograph of his girlfriend, Lily Weston. His mother is not impressed.

Chapter 6: Death in the Family

In this chapter, Arthur leaves home to attend school in Nottingham, where he lives with his sister, Annie. Paul visits the Leivers's farm where he meets Miriam Leivers. The "Death" in the chapter title refers to William's death. He dies after a short illness, and his mother is devastated. Paul falls ill with pneumonia, but his mother nurses him back to health, and the two develop an intense emotional bond.

Chapter 7: Lad-and-Girl Love

Paul develops a close relationship with Miriam, who aspires to transcend her working-class roots through education. She takes care of Paul when he is sick and falls in love with him. Paul, however, remains ambivalent about the relationship and struggles to define what he feels toward her. Mrs. Morel does not like Miriam, because she believes that Miriam is taking Paul away from her.



Chapter 8: Strife in Love

The key events in this chapter include Arthur's enlistment in the army and events illustrating Paul's struggle to define his feelings for Miriam while at the same time remaining emotionally faithful to his mother. Paul also sees Clara Dawes, whom he tells Miriam he likes.

Chapter 9: Defeat of Miriam

This chapter details Paul's recognition that he loves his mother more than Miriam and would never marry and leave her. Compounding his love for his mother is his awareness that she is old now and not well. He breaks off his relationship with Miriam, who remains angry with him for being so influenced by his mother. However, Paul continues to visit the Leivers's farm, where he later meets Clara again, but he tells Edgar, Miriam's brother, that he does not like Clara because she is so abrasive. He is both attracted to and repelled by Clara's dislike of men.

Annie marries Leonard, even though neither of them have much money, and Mrs. Morel buys Arthur out of the army. Arthur returns home and promptly marries Beatrice Wyld.

Chapter 10: Clara

One of Paul's paintings is sold for twenty guineas to Major Moreton. Paul discusses his success with his mother, who expresses her desire that he settle down with a woman and make a better life for himself. Paul visits Clara and meets her mother. He revises his opinion of Clara and secures a job for her. The two grow closer, and Clara discusses her failed marriage with him.

Chapter 11: The Test on Miriam

Paul returns to Miriam, convinced that the "problem" between them stems from the lack of sexuality in their relationship. He tells her that he loves her, and the two sleep together. However, the relationship deteriorates when Miriam tells him that she feels they are too young to marry. Once again, Paul breaks off the relationship, and the two become bitter toward each other.

Chapter 12: Passion

Paul spends more time with Clara, telling her that he has split up with Miriam. The two are extremely passionate with each other, and Paul invites her to meet his mother. Paul later invites Clara and her mother on a trip to the seaside.



Chapter 13: Baxter Dawes

In this chapter, Paul encounters Clara's husband, Baxter Dawes, numerous times, and the two fight once, with Dawes injuring Paul. Paul remains torn between his love for his mother and his desire to bond with other women. He realizes that he will not be able to marry while his mother is still alive. At the end of the chapter, Paul discovers that his mother is ill with a tumor.

Chapter 14: The Release

In this chapter, Gertrude Morel dies, after Paul—who cannot bear to see her suffer—and his sister give her an overdose of morphine in her milk. Paul befriends Baxter Dawes, who is ill with fever, and eventually facilitates his reconciliation with Clara.

Chapter 15: Derelict

Paul is despondent after his mother's death and contemplates suicide. Miriam meets him for dinner and proposes that they marry, but Paul turns her down. Clara returns to Sheffield with her husband, so she is also now out of Paul's life. Walter Morel sells the house, and he and Paul take rooms in town. The novel ends with Paul's recognition that he will always love his mother, and he decides to stay alive for her sake.



The Early Married Life of the Morels

The Early Married Life of the Morels Summary

Sons and Lovers is D.H. Lawrence's novel about Paul Morel, the son of Gertrude and Walter Morel, and their lives in a mining town in Nottinghamshire, England. Paul is the protagonist of the novel and the story spans the period of his childhood through early adulthood and his futile attempts to escape his mother's obsessive love and find satisfying love with a woman of his choice.

The story begins in a neighborhood called The Bottoms in a mining town in Nottinghamshire, England in the year 1885. The Bottoms is a neighborhood of row houses filled with the miners and their families, including Walter and Gertrude Morel and their children, William and Annie.

Mrs. Morel is thirty-one years old and has been married to Morel, who is thirty-five years old, for eight years. The first six months of the marriage were the only ones she was happy. Morel is a miner and drinks heavily to forget his miserable life, which adds to the family's money difficulties and lack of harmony in the home.

Soon after the Morels move to The Bottoms, Mrs. Morel discovers that she is pregnant with her third child and wishes secretly that she were not, not only because of the financial burden but also because she no longer loves her husband.

Mrs. Morel remembers meeting Morel at Christmastime nine years ago and that she admired him for his easy laugh and casual manner, which was so different from her father's stern demeanor. Mrs. Morel and Morel marry by the next Christmas and, by their third Christmas together; they have a son, William.

After six months of marriage, Mrs. Morel discovers that Morel is deeply in debt and does not own the house in which they live although he claimed that they did. Mrs. Morel approaches Morel's mother in her despair and receives no comfort because her mother-in-law thinks that Mrs. Morel has an easy life and should not complain.

Mrs. Morel's attitude toward Morel changes that day because of his deception about their financial situation. The birth of William adds some love to Mrs. Morel's life and she dotes on her new son. One day, Morel cuts William's golden curls while Mrs. Morel is napping and Mrs. Morel cannot forgive him for defiling her perfect William.

The story transitions to the present and Mrs. Morel is expecting her third child and is not pleased at the prospect of one more person in this already strained family. Mrs. Morel is revolted by the sight of her drunken husband one night and claims that she wants to leave. Morel is happy to accommodate her and throws Mrs. Morel out of the house and bolts the door. Morel lets his wife back into the house only after he has slept off some of his drunkenness.



The Early Married Life of the Morels Analysis

The story is told from the third person omniscient perspective, which means that the narrator is able to relate actions in the plot, but cannot know the emotions and feelings of the characters. The narrator is simply relating what an observant person would be able to see and understand.

The author uses the literary technique of similes and metaphors, for example, in the section where Mrs. Morel discovers that Morel has cut William's hair. The author says, "and standing between his legs, the child - cropped like a sheep, with such an odd round poll - looking wondering at her; and on a newspaper spread out upon the hearthrug, a myriad of crescent-shaped curls, like the petals of a marigold scattered in the reddening firelight."

The author also uses the dialect of the area for the characters to make the story authentic. For example, when Morel shows frustration for his bosses at the mine he says, "Th' gaffer come down to our stal this morning, an' 'e says, 'You know, Walter, this 'ere'll not do. What about these props?' An' I says to him, 'Why, what art talkin' about? What d'st mean about th' props?' 'It'll never do, this 'ere,' 'e says. 'You'll be havin' th' roof in, one o' these days.' An' I says, "Tha'd better stan' on a bit o' clunch, then, an' hold it up wi' thy 'ead. So 'e wor that mad, 'e cossed an' e' swore, and' t'other chaps they did laugh."



The Birth of Paul and Another Battle

The Birth of Paul and Another Battle Summary

Morel feels bad about shutting Mrs. Morel out of the house and tries to make small gestures such as bringing her tea in bed but Mrs. Morel will accept no apologies from her husband who will just be repeating his drunken behavior again tonight.

The time comes for Mrs. Morel to have her baby and she sends for the midwife, Mrs. Bower, who delivers a baby boy. Morel is exhausted from his day in the mine and eats dinner and rests for a while before going upstairs to see his wife and his new son, Paul.

The new baby does not alleviate the tension in the house and Mrs. Morel finds her only civilized companionship in the form of the minister, Mr. Heaton, who also serves as Paul's godfather. Mrs. Morel, who did not want this new child, looks at her new son and vows to make up to him somehow the fact that he had not been wanted.

A few nights later, Morel comes home exceptionally drunk and Mrs. Morel, disgusted at the sight of him, enters into yet one more verbal battle. Morel is enraged at her insolence and throws a bureau drawer at her injuring her head. Morel spends the next two days alternately in bed and at the pub to avoid Mrs. Morel after the altercation, which he blames on her.

Mrs. Morel's disgust with Morel increases when she discovers that he has stolen money from her purse to go drinking and then lied about it. When confronted, Morel threatens to leave and packs his belongings in a big handkerchief. Mrs. Morel is torn by her feelings about the possibility of Morel leaving and although it would be a relief to be free of his oppressive nature, she knows that she cannot support her three small children and needs Morel to stay, which he does.

The Birth of Paul and Another Battle Analysis

The author uses the theme of domestic abuse in this section of the story. The gender roles for the time period dictate that a woman serve her husband without question because he is the one who earns the money. There is every reason to believe that Mrs. Morel entered into her marriage with this intent but Morel's deceptions and alcoholism have drastically altered the complexion of the marriage. Now Mrs. Morel feels nothing but disgust for Morel, and the cycle of verbal and physical abuse continues.



The Casting off of Morel - The Taking on of William

The Casting off of Morel - The Taking on of William Summary

Morel contracts an illness and his homemade herbal remedies are not enough to cure him so he is bedridden for some time. Mrs. Morel is overwhelmed with caring for her small children and now her husband. Fortunately, the neighbors and other people in town help with provisions so that the family will not starve.

Morel eventually recovers, and the couple's relationship improves slightly as the tension in the house eases because Morel is no longer drinking. Mrs. Morel conceives another child during this time and the boy, named Arthur, is born eighteen months after Paul. Arthur immediately bonds with Morel who delights in this child more than he did with his other three children.

Soon the children are old enough for Mrs. Morel to leave them to attend Women's Guild meetings in town, and the associations that she makes allows her to find William a job as a clerk in a co-op office. The idea of William taking a desk job infuriates Morel, who thinks that his wife and son both think that William is better than Morel and should not have to work in the mines. Mrs. Morel will not allow William to follow his father's example in any way and fully supports his career.

Before long, William's exemplary reputation spreads and a firm in London offers him a position without even meeting him, and he leaves home promising to send money to his mother whenever he can. Mrs. Morel is heartbroken at William's departure but realizes that this is the best plan for William's future.

The Casting off of Morel - The Taking on of William Analysis

Mrs. Morel further infuriates her husband by positioning William in a better future than his own and the growing pride Mrs. Morel feels for her son swells, so that any affection she may have felt for Morel is severely diminished.

Mrs. Morel continues to be conflicted in her feelings for Morel as she is alternately repulsed by him, and when she remembers the person she once loved, is overcome by the emotions she had in the early days of their marriage. The birth of Arthur is one more unwanted child but at least Morel has some connection with this child that he does not share with the others. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Morel dotes on her sons but little is even mentioned about her daughter, Annie.



The Young Life of Paul

The Young Life of Paul Summary

Paul looks like his mother in his small stature and dark coloring and has an extremely sensitive nature including fits of crying that are not attributed to any particular cause. Paul is the child who is most sensitive to his mother's moods, especially when she has been fighting with Morel. Paul exhibits abusive behavior when he breaks Annie's doll and then sets it on fire to destroy it.

During this time, the family moves from The Bottoms neighborhood rowhouse to a single house on the crest of a hill. The children are frightened by all the space surrounding the house and are sure that terror lurks there, especially at night.

Paul begins to take on his mother's distaste for Morel's dirty drunken demeanor and stays close to his mother most of the time, thinking that he might be able to protect her from Morel. Paul is also sensitive to the family's difficult financial situation and happily leads Annie on expeditions to search for mushrooms and blackberries in season to present to their mother who is always extremely grateful.

Paul takes the responsibility of picking up his father's weekly pay at the company office and stopping at the appropriate places to make rental payments before bringing the remaining money home. Paul is embarrassed by having to stand in line at the office but also feels an allegiance to his mother to make sure that she gets the money before his father spends it at the pub.

Soon it is Christmas time and the family decorates the house with freshly gathered evergreen and holly. Mrs. Morel spends days baking because William is coming home on Christmas Eve. Paul and Annie meet William's train and help him carry the load of presents he has brought from London. The family is blissful being reunited but sinks in deep depression when William must return to London after his five-day holiday.

The Young Life of Paul Analysis

The author uses foreshadowing in Paul's physical characteristics and temperament which are so much like Mrs. Morel's. The bond between mother and son is an important one and the developing stages are critical to note. With the William's absence, Paul becomes Mrs. Morel's adored child and he begins to replace Morel in importance in Mrs. Morel's life.

The family's financial situation improves while William works in town and they are able to move to a house separate from the other miners which further alienates Mrs. Morel from the community that already perceives her as being arrogant making her relationship with Paul even more important.



Paul Launches into Life

Paul Launches into Life Summary

Morel, who has always been a clumsy man, has been injured in the mine and taken to the hospital in the next town. Mrs. Morel packs a few articles and rushes to be with her husband, expecting the worst but hoping for the best. Fortunately, after a week, Morel's leg begins to heal and the family breathes a collective sigh of relief that he will recover.

Once more, the neighbors and vendors in town provide financial support to the Morel family during Mr. Morel's convalescence but Paul, who feels he is the man of the house now, wants to find a job. Paul models his employment letters after those which had been successful for William and is asked to come for an interview at a Nottingham firm called Thomas Jordan which manufactures surgical appliances.

Mrs. Morel accompanies Paul to Nottingham and he is awarded the position of clerk because he is able to translate French, a skill taught to him by his godfather, Mr. Heaton. On the first day of work, Paul meets his new boss, Mr. Pappleworth, who likes Paul immediately. Paul makes friends quickly, especially with the girls working in the sewing room, and delights in telling his mother about his new adventures.

William writes to his mother and includes a photograph of his new girlfriend, Lily Weston. Mrs. Morel is not pleased that the young woman has bare shoulders in the picture. William promptly sends another photo with regrets for offending his mother with the first one.

Paul Launches into Life Analysis

It is important to note the working situation in England at this time when a boy like Paul, only fourteen-years-old, works in a factory for twelve hours each day and then has an hour's train ride and walk home twice each day. England was in the midst of the Industrial Revolution and the cities held many job opportunities, which lured country boys like William and Paul to improve their situations and live better lives than their fathers working on farms or in the mines.

In spite of his love for commerce, Paul retains his aesthetic sensibilities and notes on the train ride home each night "the lights of the town, sprinkled thick on the hills, fusing together in a blaze in the valleys. He felt rich in life and happy. Drawing farther off, there was a patch of lights at Bulwell like myriad petals shaken to the ground from the shed stars; and beyond was the red glare of the furnaces, playing like hot breath on the clouds."



Death in the Family

Death in the Family Summary

Arthur has grown into a quick, impulsive boy much like his father, whom he cannot bear, because of Morel's crude demeanor. Morel seems to take a perverse delight in irritating his children so Mrs. Morel decides that the best solution is to minimize contact between Arthur and Morel and sends Arthur away to school in Nottingham where he lives with Mrs. Morel's sister. Annie is now working as a junior level teacher at a local school and the extra income is very welcome. William announces his engagement to Lily and brings her home to meet his family at Christmas. Although Lily is a working girl, she puts on airs as if she is royalty and makes the entire Morel family uncomfortable in their own home for the duration of her holiday visit.

On several occasions, William admits that he does not love Lily completely, but is drawn to her. Mrs. Morel is concerned about William's infatuation with this ungrateful girl on whom he spends far too much money, and counsels him to wait or to break off the engagement.

William returns to London, and Paul and Mrs. Morel spend more time together visiting friends, the Leiver family, who has moved into a farm not far away. Paul makes friends with the whole family who considers Paul to be like another son. The Leivers are outdoors type people and are struck by Paul's artistic sensibilities, especially the daughter, Miriam.

William and Lily make another visit in the spring and William tells Mrs. Morel that Lily is so frivolous that if he were to die, she would forget him in two months' time. Lily denies it but Mrs. Morel advises William in private to end the engagement since he has these feelings. William contends that he is too far involved to end the situation now.

Two days after William returns to London, Mrs. Morel receives a telegram informing her that William is very ill and she leaves for London. Mrs. Morel locates William's boarding house and he is already delirious when she reaches him and dies from pneumonia in the middle of the night. Mrs. Morel sends a telegram home asking for Morel to come and bring money. William's body is brought home for burial in the village cemetery. The Morels hear from Lily only one time and then she is never heard from again.

Mrs. Morel sinks into a deep depression and barely notices her other children until Paul returns home one evening very ill and it is determined that he, too, has pneumonia. Frantic in her efforts not to lose another son, Mrs. Morel never leaves Paul's bedside and he gradually recovers. This crisis forges an even stronger bond between Mrs. Morel and Paul, who were already very close, and people understand that Paul's illness has actually saved Mrs. Morel that winter.



Death in the Family Analysis

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing in the chapter when William says that Lily would forget about him in a couple months' time if he were to die suddenly. This is a very prophetic statement because William will be dead soon after making this statement and Lily does not attempt to contact the Morel family after the one letter in which she shares the details of a dance she had recently attended. Ironically, it is Paul's brush with death which finally brings Mrs. Morel out of her depression over William's death.



Lad-and-Girl Love

Lad-and-Girl Love Summary

Paul's recovery from the pneumonia is slow but in the spring, he is able to walk once more to the Leiver farm where he and Miriam Leiver become close. Miriam has the same aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities as Paul and she longs to have a different future from the typical destiny of becoming a farm wife. Paul encourages her willingness to learn and teaches her algebra, much to the chagrin of her brothers who think it is time wasted on a mere girl.

Neither Paul nor Miriam has ever had an intimate relationship with someone of the opposite sex and they fight feelings that they cannot explain. Paul sometimes becomes irrationally irritated at Miriam and avoids her for days at a time but is always drawn back to her. Mrs. Morel can sense what is happening between the two young people and tries desperately to keep them apart, to no avail.

Lad-and-Girl Love Analysis

Mrs. Morel once more suffers the classic anxiety of watching her sons engage in relationships with girls who she deems unworthy of her boys. It seems as if Paul is following William's example in choosing an inappropriate girl, but Paul is drawn to Miriam's dreaminess, which is in stark contrast to his mother's industrious nature. The author has created the differences in the two women in Paul's life to show the extremes in character who, ironically, balance out Paul's nature.



Strife in Love

Strife in Love Summary

Arthur begins to exhibit the restlessness that has plagued his father and behaves irresponsibly during his time in the city. Mrs. Morel is perplexed about how to help Arthur mature. She soon receives a letter from him stating that he has enlisted in the army while he was drunk. Mrs. Morel tries in vain to get Arthur released from service but then resigns herself to the fact that this experience may be what Arthur needs in order to mature.

Mrs. Morel relies even more on Paul since he is the remaining son still at the house, even though she is disappointed that he spends so much time with Miriam. Each time Paul invites Miriam to tea at the Morel house, Mrs. Morel is curt in an attempt to dissuade the girl from pursuing a relationship with Paul.

One evening, Mrs. Morel leaves the house to do her weekly shopping in the village and before leaving, asks Paul and Miriam to remove the bread from the oven when it is finished. Paul is distracted by the arrival of Beatrice, a bawdy village girl, and most of the bread burns, which Mrs. Morel attributes to Miriam's presence.

One day, Paul encounters Miriam and a friend named Clara Dawes walking in Nottingham. Clara, a woman of thirty, has left her husband, and Miriam has visited her today to find out more about Paul's place of business because Clara once worked there herself. Paul thinks Clara is attractive, but hostile toward men because of her separation from her husband.

Mrs. Morel's health begins to decline and she is frequently out of breath and does not have much stamina anymore. Paul is more aware of her fragile state than Mr. Morel is and begins to limit the time spent with Miriam in favor of supporting his mother.

Strife in Love Analysis

Paul's relationship with Mrs. Morel has reached a point where it is compromising his own future because his alliance lies with his mother and not Miriam. Mrs. Morel's lack of love and support from her husband has driven her to seek her validation in her sons, especially Paul, who is denied his own free sexual expression with Miriam, limiting the development of his own personal life.

The appearance of Clara Dawes provides some foreshadowing that Paul may break out of this maternal hold and assert his independence.

The author also adds the foreshadowing of Mrs. Morel's compromised health as an indicator of coming events.



Defeat of Miriam

Defeat of Miriam Summary

Paul's obsession with his love for his mother has driven a wedge between he and Miriam and he ultimately ends his relationship with her. Paul continues to visit the Leivers' farm but spends most of his time with Miriam's brother, Edgar. On a few occasions, Paul seeks Miriam out and she hopes that perhaps Paul is returning to her, but he tells her that he cannot marry her and that, knowing this, it is not fair for him to encourage her.

Paul agrees to maintain Miriam's French lessons even though they are now just friends and he limits his visits to the farm. Paul cannot fully invest himself in Miriam, yet cannot bring himself to let her go and he sends books and notes encouraging her studies.

Miriam refuses to believe that Paul does not want her and devises a plan to bring him back. She invites Paul to the farm for a Sunday afternoon when Clara will also be visiting. Paul is attracted to Clara although she gives him no encouragement through her speech or demeanor.

Mrs. Morel's failing health is an ever-present concern to Paul and he takes his mother to the city for a day of sightseeing and shopping for a pleasant diversion. Paul tells his mother about Clara, who is seven years his senior, and Mrs. Morel momentarily wishes that Paul would find the right woman to marry but retracts her thoughts before they are spoken.

Annie marries her beau, Leonard, in spite of the fact that neither one has much money. Mrs. Morel agrees to the marriage because of Leonard's devotion to Annie, something Mrs. Morel never had in her own union with Morel. The wedding is hastily assembled and both sets of parents assist in the outfitting of a small cottage for the newlyweds.

Mrs. Morel is able to pay for Arthur's release from the army and he returns home as if on a holiday and takes up with Beatrice, the bawdy village girl.

Miriam invites Paul and Clara for a Sunday afternoon at the farm and Clara begins to open up, encouraging Paul with little flirtations. Paul's sexual attraction to Clara prompts him to send Miriam a letter breaking off their relationship because he cannot see her in a physical context. Miriam is stalwart in her feelings that Paul loves her and decides to wait for this phase of his life to pass.

Defeat of Miriam Analysis

Lawrence makes a literary reference to Edgar Allen Poe's poem, "The Raven," during a conversation held between Paul and Edgar. Paul is frustrated by Clara's lack of responsiveness to him one day at the farm and Paul joins Edgar, saying, "Came to meet



you. Can't stand 'Nevermore.'" Edgar questions the identity of Nevermore and Paul replies, "The lady - Mrs. Dawes - it ought to be Mrs. The Raven that quoted 'Nevermore.'"

Miriam cleverly devises a plan to have Paul return to her and intentionally puts Paul and Clara together on several occasions. Miriam will prove to Paul that, while Clara may be more sexually available, Miriam is the only woman who can satisfy his longing for love on a higher level. It also seems that Miriam wants Paul to enter into a physical relationship with Clara so that his first sexual encounter will be with someone else, relieving her of that distinction and further disapproval from Mrs. Morel.



Clara

Clara Summary

Paul continues his artistic pursuits and enters a painting in an exhibition in Nottingham. The painting not only receives first prize but also is purchased by a local businessman for twenty guineas, which Paul gives to his mother.

This artistic attention earns Paul many invitations to dinners and parties and Mrs. Morel has one of William's expensive evening suits tailored so that Paul may dress appropriately in his new circle of acquaintances.

Arthur marries Beatrice because she is pregnant and, for a while, resists the idea of marriage but eventually settles down and becomes a family man without much interaction with his own family.

One day one of Paul's new acquaintances asks him to deliver a message to Clara who lives in Nottingham. Paul meets Clara's outspoken mother at the home where she and Clara do lacework to make a living. Clara's mother likes Paul and confides in him, much to Clara's embarrassment, that Clara would like to return to work at Jordan's where she worked before her marriage.

Paul's sympathy for Clara's situation encourages him to get her a job at Jordan's when one of the girls quits to get married. Clara is unsure of how to act around Paul but Paul is relentless in his drive for a friendship with her and asks her to tea one day. Clara reveals to Paul that she left her husband because he was dirty-minded and abusive.

Clara also speaks to Paul about Miriam, who he finds suffocating, but Clara contends that Miriam only wants to love Paul. Paul believes that Miriam is interested only in a spiritual connection with him when he wants a physical relationship too. Clara advises Paul that he is wrong in his assessment of Miriam's desires for Paul and Paul considers the possibility that he could be wrong about Miriam after all.

Clara Analysis

Lawrence writes again about the theme of class structure that is important in the story. Mrs. Morel's entire life has been devoted to elevating her children to a better class in society because she had lost all status when she married Morel. Morel's deception about his standing and financial status has burdened Mrs. Morel all her married life but she is relentless in her drive to elevate her children. William had made the first entry into society in London, and now Paul's outgoing personality and artistic skills launch him into a new social sphere.

Mrs. Morel is more than anxious to have William's evening clothes altered for Paul so that he can make the correct impression on the important people he meets. Mrs. Morel

makes a mental note, though, that she wishes Paul could find a nice girl to marry, although not anyone above his station because that would create problems like the ones exhibited in her own marriage.



The Test on Miriam

The Test on Miriam Summary

Spring arrives, along with Paul's internal battle over his feelings about Miriam and he decides to go back to her. Mrs. Morel is baffled about Paul's numerous visits to see Miriam again but says nothing as Paul is now a man of twenty-five and is responsible for his own decisions.

One night while Paul and Miriam are taking a walk, he broaches the topic of love and marriage in trying to determine if she wants him. This is the moment that Miriam has waited for. She gives in to her pent-up emotions, and the couple kiss for the first time.

Continuing the walk, Paul pushes for an even deeper intimate commitment from Miriam and she reveals that she is afraid but will soon give herself to him. Paul walks home thinking about how Miriam will think their intimacy to be some sort of religious experience but he knows only that he must have her in all ways.

Paul increases the level of courtship mostly with extended visits to the farm where he and Miriam could walk in the pastures and kiss away from the gazes of Miriam's family.

A short while later, Miriam must leave to care for her ailing grandmother, a task she is pleased to do because there is little work, which leaves her much time to read. After the grandmother improves, the elderly woman visits her daughter in another town for a few days leaving Miriam alone in the cottage.

Miriam invites Paul to spend time with her at the cottage and they delight in playing man and wife as they prepare dinner and walk in the garden. As evening approaches, Paul takes Miriam's hand and they walk back to the cottage and consummate their relationship. Paul spends a week at the cottage with Miriam and is crestfallen when he brings up the topic of marriage and she tells him that she is too young to marry. The pair continues an intimate relationship but Paul is distracted because Miriam will not give herself completely in marriage.

A few days after this, Paul tells his mother that he is going to lessen his contact with Miriam and Mrs. Morel says nothing although she is secretly pleased to hear this. Paul is haunted by the comments that Miriam made about marriage and wanting to run away, finds himself drawn to Clara, but first must make the final break with Miriam.

Miriam is shocked when Paul tells her that he does not want to see her romantically anymore. Miriam had thought that their relationship would continue as it is until she is of the proper age to marry but Paul announces that he has no intention to marry anyone at any time. Miriam feels that Clara's influence has changed Paul's mind, but she decides to accept the circumstances, knowing instinctively that Paul will come back to her.



The Test on Miriam Analysis

Lawrence uses foreshadowing in this section when describing Miriam prior to her first sexual encounter with Paul. As Miriam and Paul walk in the garden at her grandmother's cottage, Paul tells Miriam, "Your face is bright, like a transfiguration." The author wants the reader to realize the full impact of the change Miriam is about to undergo. It is also important to note the word that Paul uses, transfiguration, is a religious term, and one that would appeal to Miriam's sensibilities and the nature of their relationship up until this point.

It never occurred to Paul that Miriam might reject his idea of marriage, especially after they have had sexual relations. Paul finds reasons to soothe his ego and determines that he must break up with Miriam because he, now, is not interested in marriage. Miriam has always viewed her relationship with Paul with a long-term strategy but Paul's artistic temperament and pride cannot abide Miriam's objective of marriage at a suitable age.



Passion

Passion Summary

Paul throws himself into his art and finds that he is able to make money from his talent. In an effort to forget his situation with Miriam, he takes Mrs. Morel on a holiday to the Isle of Wight but is upset when he sees his mother's decline in health and stamina.

Paul launches into a plan to devote more time to Clara to see what relationship might develop. The pair takes walks at dinner breaks and meets for tea and Paul is quite taken with Clara whose air of sensuality becomes an almost painful attraction for Paul. Clara is reserved until she understands that Paul has broken off his relationship with Miriam and then relaxes a little bit, and she and Paul grow closer.

Paul takes every opportunity he can find to spend with Clara and kisses her passionately whenever they find time to be alone. By this point, Paul is quite smitten with Clara. He invites her home to meet Mrs. Morel, who is cautious because of Clara's marital status.

Clara makes a good impression on Mrs. Morel as she joins the family for tea on a Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Morel feels sorry for Clara, because Paul is still so unsettled, and so will probably not stay with her.

While Clara and Paul are chatting in Mrs. Morel's garden, Miriam stops by and interrupts the romantic mood. Miriam quickly discerns that Clara has garnered favor with Mrs. Morel, a feat that Miriam was never able to accomplish in the eight years that she has known Paul.

Miriam cannot help but be hurt that Paul has rebounded from a relationship with her so quickly and in a jealous mode, asks Clara about her own husband. Clara is made understandably uncomfortable by the question and Miriam leaves for chapel armed with her success at humiliating Clara in front of Paul.

Paul and Clara also attend chapel and Miriam cannot help but watch the pair with jealousy and hurt. After the service, Clara tells Paul to walk Miriam home as she herself needs to catch the train back to Nottingham. Paul is interested only in Clara at the moment, finds opportunities to kiss her passionately as they walk toward the train station and feels cheated when Clara must board the train, which is ready to depart.

Soon after, Clara invites Paul to the theater to see Sarah Bernhardt perform and Paul takes his evening suit to work so that he can change afterwards in order to be dressed appropriately. Paul can barely keep his mind on the performance because he is so distracted by the sight of Clara in a revealing evening gown.

By the time the performance is over, the last train has already left, so Clara invites Paul to stay at her home for the night. Paul will have Clara's room and she will sleep with her



mother. Clara's mother is not happy to have a male guest, especially at such a late hour, but provides supper for Paul and Clara.

Paul is not ready for the evening to end and suggests a board game and Clara enthusiastically agrees but her mother is not pleased to be kept awake past midnight. Clara's mother will not go to bed until Paul is ensconced in Clara's bedroom and Clara offers Paul a pair of pajamas, which he accepts, and heads to bed.

Paul intentionally does not latch the bedroom door so that he may intercept Clara on her way to her mother's room but Clara remains downstairs after her mother retires. Paul takes the risk of the creaky staircase and moves downstairs to find Clara in her nightdress warming herself in front of the fire. Paul and Clara kiss passionately but Clara refuses to accompany Paul to the bedroom and he retires alone.

The next morning, Paul is awakened by Clara's mother handing him a cup of tea and teasing him about sleeping all day long. It is not yet eight o'clock and Paul dresses and goes downstairs to breakfast where he entertains Clara and her mother with stories of his recent artistic endeavors. Paul has sold a painting and invites Clara and her mother on a seaside trip with the money he will earn.

Passion Analysis

Lawrence's depiction of sexuality was considered quite brazen for literature of the period but is considered tame by today's standards. There is a quality in his writing, though, that makes the reader feel the physical torment that Paul experiences in his restrained encounters with Clara. With Clara, Paul has the feeling of his blood "thickening," which is to be interpreted as sexual energy.

Paul must physically remove himself from Clara's presence at the theater during intermission when the theater lights are up so that he will not be able to see Clara's skin and form displayed by in her evening dress and behave in an ungentlemanly way.

In contrast, Paul is also capable of what Lawrence calls "a quickening" of his blood, especially with Miriam, which is to be interpreted as his intellectual and emotional side connecting him to Miriam. Added to Paul's inner torment, are his mother's opinions of both Clara and Miriam. His emotional state is volatile trying to balance all the inner demons of a man of twenty-five.



Baxter Dawes

Baxter Dawes Summary

Not long after Paul and Clara attend the theater, Paul encounters a drunken Baxter Dawes in a pub and the two engage in a verbal battle, ending with Paul throwing a drink in Baxter's face. Paul tells Clara about the incident and she advises Paul to carry a gun or a knife for self-protection from the vindictive Dawes but Paul declines. A few days later, Paul encounters Dawes again, this time on the stairs at the Jordan Company where both men are employed. This altercation becomes physical and results in Mr. Jordan firing Dawes.

Paul shares the details of these encounters with Mrs. Morel who wonders about Clara's opinion of the events. Paul informs his mother that Clara is deeply in love with him but that he does not fully love either Clara or Miriam. Clara and Paul still spend time together but Clara instinctively knows that Paul is not giving himself fully to her and withdraws from feelings of hurt.

Paul begins to question his relationship with Clara and wonders if he loves her for herself or merely for the physical part of the relationship. The couple takes a last trip to the seaside and realizes that the relationship is essentially over. A few nights later in Nottingham, Dawes surprises Paul in the dark and beats him severely.

Mrs. Morel tends to Paul's wounds and nurses him back to health. Paul takes a holiday with some male friends after his recuperation and afterward visits the home of his sister, Annie, in Sheffield. Paul is shocked to discover that Mrs. Morel is staying with Annie to visit the doctor there because Mrs. Morel's illness is more than the village doctor can manage.

Paul returns to Nottingham to enlist the services of Dr. Jameson to come to Sheffield to provide a second opinion on Mrs. Morel's illness. Dr. Jameson discovers a large tumor but does not advise surgery because Mrs. Morel's heart is in such a weakened condition.

Paul returns to the family home to tell Morel the news. Morel visits his wife at Annie's home but is clearly out of place and lacks any words of comfort or sentiment for his wife. Mrs. Morel stays with Annie in Sheffield for two months, and when it is determined that her condition is terminal, Paul hires a car and driver to take his mother back home to die.

Baxter Dawes Analysis

Lawrence's writing mirrors Paul's mood as he describes the scene of Paul and Clara's last trip to the shore. "Over the gloomy sea the sky grew red. Quickly the fire spread among the clouds and scattered them. Crimson burned to orange, orange to dull gold,



and in a golden glitter the sun came up, dribbling fierily over the waves in little splashes, as if someone had gone along and the light had spilled from her pail as she walked." The metaphor of someone spilling this glorious light from a pail is in tune with Paul's happy mood at the seashore.

This scene is also important because it is the last time Paul will feel happy and notice anything golden or brilliant, as he will soon find out that Mrs. Morel is dying and with her will go any semblance of brilliance in Paul's life.



The Release

The Release Summary

One night, of Mrs. Morel's doctors informs Paul that Baxter Dawes is in the hospital in Sheffield and Paul visits the man several times over the course of the next few months. Neither man mentions Clara's name and the two men strike up an unlikely friendship. Paul mentions his hospital visits to Clara, who seems moved by the news of her husband's illness.

Paul sinks into his own thoughts of his mother's terminal illness and essentially drives Clara away by his dark moods.

When Mrs. Morel first returns home she is able to sit in the garden or by the fireside but now is too weak to move from her bed. Paul moves his painting supplies into her room and works there at night as she sleeps. On the rare days that Mrs. Morel feels like talking, she and Paul discuss all the trivial details of Paul's daily life in order to avoid the huge subject of her imminent death.

The weeks turn into a few months and Mrs. Morel's condition deteriorates but it seems as if her spirit will not let her body die. Annie and Paul cannot bear their mother's suffering any longer and Paul puts extra morphine in his mother's nightly glass of milk claiming that it is a new sleeping potion prescribed by the doctor. Mrs. Morel clings to life during the night but dies the next morning.

Morel returns from work that day to learn of his wife's death and sits to eat his supper before going upstairs to see her body. Paul thinks to himself that his mother now looks like a young girl because all the care and worry has vanished from her slight frame. Mrs. Morel is buried in the church cemetery during the middle of a rainstorm, and Paul returns to the family home to attend to the guests who have come for the funeral.

Soon after, Dawes is released from the hospital, finds a job and a place to live in Sheffield, and Clara returns to her husband.

The Release Analysis

Paul feels himself to be a bad character because he cannot choose between Clara and Miriam and, at times, has treated both of them cruelly. However, Paul is good at heart and makes hospital visits to Dawes, who had accosted him more than once. Paul also intercedes on Dawes' behalf so that he and Clara may reunite and start their married life again.

Paul's obsessive love for his mother has drastically impacted his relationships with other women and his mother's illness essentially incapacitates him in his grief. The author uses the literary technique of a metaphor to describe this rending of their earthly



relationship when he writes, "Sometimes he came in, very pale and still, with watchful, sodden eyes, like a man who is drunk almost to death. They were both afraid of the veils that were ripping between them." Obviously, there are no physical veils separating Paul and his mother, but Lawrence uses this metaphor to help the reader understand the pretenses instinctively set in place by mother and son to protect each other from grief and loss of the other.



Derelict

Derelict Summary

Naturally, Paul's life changes dramatically after his mother's death. Clara now lives in Sheffield with Dawes and Paul rarely sees them. Morel moves out of the family home to live with some old friends and Paul moves to Nottingham where he attempts to continue his life but is thwarted every day by overwhelming grief.

One night, Paul returns to his rooms, sits motionless for hours, and has an internal battle over the question of suicide. Ultimately, he decides to go on living for the sake of his mother who would live on in him, whether through his children or his artwork.

Paul attends chapel one evening in the hopes of seeing Miriam and he invites her back to his room for dinner. Paul broaches the topic of marriage again and Miriam is positive about marrying him but Paul is too morose to make the commitment. Eventually, Miriam leaves dejected once more but retains in the back of her mind the thought that one day Paul will come to his senses and return to her.

During his walk back after escorting Miriam home, Paul wavers again on the thought of suicide so that he can be reunited with his beloved mother, but is suddenly filled with determination to live and turns away from the darkness and toward the lights of the city.

Derelict Analysis

Sons and Lovers is considered an autobiographical novel in that it mirrors Lawrence's own life. Like Paul, Lawrence was born in a small mining town in England with an uneducated miner for a father and a schoolteacher for a mother. Lawrence also had an affair with a married woman and could never commit to loving one woman out of deference to his mother, whom he adored completely. Having lived the story himself and survived, Lawrence is able to provide Paul with a glimmer of hope as symbolized by the lights of the city, which beckon Paul back to the land of the living.

Stylistically, the book is divided into two parts, the first, *Sons*, being Gertrude's story about her lack of relationship with her husband and all her affection and devotion coming from her sons. The second part of the book is Paul's story of his *Lovers*, with his true love being his mother whose unconditional love allows his mother to live on in Paul's memory.



Characters

Baxter Dawes

Baxter Dawes is thirty-two years old and a big handsome man. He is Clara Dawes's estranged husband. He is a smith at the same factory as Paul, with whom he fights when Paul begins to spend time with Clara. Dawes is moody, argumentative, and defiant and is fired from his job after fighting with his boss, Thomas Jordan. Later, Dawes falls ill with typhoid fever. Paul visits Dawes in the convalescence home, and the two become friends. Later, Paul tells Dawes that Clara has always loved him, and he helps Baxter and Clara reconcile.

Clara Dawes

Clara Dawes, the estranged wife of Baxter Dawes, is a childless, full-figured, blonde-haired, and sensuous woman, and a friend of Miriam Leivers. She is proud and haughty, a supporter of women's rights, and is attracted to Paul's animality. Clara and Paul have a passionate love affair, but she eventually returns to her husband, nursing him back to health after he falls sick with typhoid fever. Although she was deeply attracted to Paul, she never felt truly connected to him.

Mr. Heaton

Mr. Heaton is the Congregational clergyman who visits with Gertrude Morel after Paul is born. He is Paul's godfather and tutor.

Thomas Jordan

Thomas Jordan owns the factory where Paul and Clara and Baxter Dawes work. A strong-willed capitalist, he fires Baxter Dawes after fighting with him. He eventually takes Paul under his wing and introduces him to middle-class social life.

Miriam Leivers

The daughter of the family at Willey Farm, Miriam meets Paul when she is sixteen. She is serious, self-conscious, somewhat spiritual, and does not like sex, though she sleeps with Paul, hoping that it will make him love her. Miriam is like Paul's mother in that both of them are morally prudish and strong-willed. Even though Paul makes it clear he will not marry her, Miriam believes that their souls will always be together.



Annie Morel

A bit of a tomboy, Annie is Paul's older sister, and the two spend much time together in childhood. She becomes a junior teacher at the Board School in Nottingham, and marries her childhood friend, Leonard. When their mother lies dying, she helps Paul give her an overdose of morphine.

Arthur Morel

Arthur is Paul's younger brother and the favorite of Walter Morel, whom he resembles both physically and temperamentally. He joins the army but hates it. After his mother buys him out of the army, he returns home and marries Beatrice.

Gertrude Coppard Morel is the first protagonist of Lawrence's novel. Refined, intellectual, and deeply moral, she comes from a family of professionals. Her father was an engineer and her family long-time Congregationalists. She marries Walter Morel when she is twenty-three years old, attracted to his swarthy good looks, humility, and animated personality. After the birth of her first child, she falls out of love with her husband and begins to actively despise him, looking for fulfillment in her relationships with her children, particularly her sons, William and Paul. The intensity of her emotional bond with these two makes it difficult for them to develop romantic relationships. She dislikes William's girlfriend, Lily Weston, and is jealous of Paul's friend, Miriam Leivers. After William dies, she pins her hopes for the future on Paul. She wants him to be successful and to escape a working-class miner's life. Though she is deathly ill, she hangs onto life, because she cannot bear to part from her son. Paul eventually helps her die by giving her an overdose of morphine.

Paul Morel

Paul Morel is the protagonist in the second half of the novel. Although his mother regrets being pregnant with him because she does not believe the family can afford another child, she grows to love and protect him after he is born. Paul is frail, sensitive, and artistic and develops a very close bond with his mother, hating to disappoint her. The women he courts, Miriam and Clara, can never replace the bond he feels with his mother, and when she dies, Paul feels their souls will be forever bonded. Paul's search for identity is tied up in his capacity to separate himself from his mother, and to understand the extent with which he is shaped by his family and community life.

Walter Morel

Walter Morel is Gertrude's husband and a coal miner. He is rugged, handsome, sensuous, and very practical, deriving much of his joy in life from working and being with his fellow miners. Although he pledges not to drink, he begins to after the birth of their first child. The Morels quarrel regularly, often over Walter's drinking. Gertrude



grows to loathe not only Walter's drinking but his crude and unsophisticated behavior as well, and she enlists her children in hating their father. After his wife dies, he becomes a broken man, full of regret and fear.

William Morel

William Morel is the first son, and Gertrude Morel's favorite child. He is smart, beautiful, and popular with other children. When he turns 13, his father suggests that he work in the mines, but his mother finds an office job for him. Later, he moves to London, where he finds a good job with a good salary. Like Paul, he cannot develop a satisfying relationship with a woman because he is so close to his mother. He dates and then breaks up with Lily Weston, a pretentious and helpless woman. When William dies, in his early twenties, his mother becomes withdrawn and reclusive.

Jerry Purdy

Jerry Purdy is Walter Morel's best friend and drinking buddy and is very much disliked by Mrs. Morel.

Mrs. Radford

Mrs. Radford is Clara Dawes's mother. She is refined and stately-looking, yet pushy. She convinces Paul to find a job for Clara at Jordan's.

Louisa Lily Denys Weston

Lily is an attractive yet intellectually-limited girl whom William courts in London. She acts helpless and makes many demands on William, but she behaves as if she were royalty. Williams grows to dislike her, and she forgets all about him shortly after he dies.

Beatrice Wyld

Beatrice is a flirtatious girl who marries Arthur when he returns from the army.



Social Concerns

In *Sons and Lovers*, D. H. Lawrence depicts the harrowing struggles of William and Paul Morel—two workingclass sons of a coal miner and his socially and morally superior wife—to achieve maturity, financial independence, and a sense of fulfillment in life. (This great novel was so shocking and revolutionary that it was not published in Lawrence's full text until 1992.) While turn-of-the-century England offered increased educational opportunities and the consequent hope of upward social mobility for bright sons of the working class, the Morel boys are hindered in their efforts for a better life by the unhappy marriage of their parents, which causes Mrs. Morel to have an overly possessive love of her sons, a substitute for the marital love she lacks.

Part of the originality of the book is Lawrence's genius for linking the internal struggles of family life to outward striving, including the desire to find a profession and a mate. Social institutions— marriage, church, and government— and the social conventions that buttress them, fail to provide the spiritual, psychological, and physical sustenance that the characters require to become both self-sufficient and happily connected to others.

William, the older brother finds a good job in London, where he also succeeds socially, only to become engaged to the vacuous Lily, aptly nicknamed Gyp, because he is subliminally unable to date a serious woman who might be a rival to the mother. His death in London from pneumonia exacerbates his mother's psychological problems: She sinks into a deep depression and then with redoubled conviction latches on to the surviving son, Paul, whose efforts to make his way in life become the central subject of the rest of the book.

The social disparity between the parents, Walter Morel, the collier, and his wife, Gertrude, is widened by their different personalities and religious and ethical values. She is from a formerly wealthy family which has gone bankrupt when the Nottingham lace market declined. A Congregationalist, her puritanical standards conflict with his open, spontaneous nature. He is a good dancer and story teller; she dislikes and disapproves of dancing. He has a generous, open nature; she a refined and deliberate one. He practices an ethic of convenience, which justifies his not paying the furniture bill and not telling his wife about the "slip."

His laxness about money and his tendency to squander his pay on drink tax both her managerial expertise and her patience. These differences ultimately cause friction, leading to her hatred of him when the bungling Walter chops off the baby William's golden curls. Morel increasingly turns to the bottle for solace, and when drunk he strikes both his children and his wife. At one point, during a drunken rage, he locks her out of the house; at another, he throws a chair at her.

Domestic violence is matched in the novel by the psychological and physical violence of the world of work. Morel's tendency to drink can be mostly attributed to the tedium and the hardship of his job in the mines. His frank nature offends his boss, who



consequently assigns Morel a more difficult location in the mine with thinner veins of coal. Owing to what the narrator calls "his heedless nature" he is involved in several serious accidents, one of which leaves him lame for life. Both Paul and William suffer physical hardship getting to and from their jobs, and from overwork; trying to better themselves, they study at night after grueling long workdays. Paul's job at Thomas Jordan's surgical appliances evokes the crippling and maiming of industrial accidents as well as wars. The work is tedious—he copies letters.

Paul's passion is his painting and his increasing success at it, even when he is quite miserable in other respects, offers a solution to his problem of adjusting to the work world. Unlike the satisfaction he derives from painting, his fulfillment with a woman is never resolved, but it does not seem as hopeless as some critics have asserted. As in most autobiographical novels there is a tendency by critics to see the protagonist as so thinly disguised a version of Lawrence himself that they confuse author and main character, even to the point where episodes from the author's life are read back into the novel as if they held some mysterious key to the problems raised in the fiction.

It is certainly true that because Paul was fixated on his mother he was bound to have problems with women, first with Miriam, then Clara. There is also ironic interplay in the relationship between Miriam and his mother Gertrude; each accuses the other of trying to possess Paul in a suffocating way. All three women and Paul himself attempt to thwart commonplace social and family values. Gertrude obviously makes excessive demands on her sons by using William as a substitute for her husband. William's tragic death could have been a bridge to deeper mutual sympathy for the parents, but Gertrude turns to Paul, compounding the damage to her husband and her son by making him both a substitute lover and a surrogate for William (much of the William story was cut from the 1913 edition). Paul, afraid to commit to a full relationship with Miriam, who is so much like his mother, does not marry her. She then submits in an all too sacrificial way to an affair with another man, which is reprehensible not so much because of social taboo, but because it denies any sustaining social context for Paul's love for her. Their romance becomes degraded and unfulfilling.

Paul turns to Clara Dawes, who provides a temporary safe haven for Paul from having to confront his problem:

She does not really want to marry him and ends up going back to her husband Baxter, who, after all, beats up Paul for sleeping with his wife. (An indifferent husband would not bother.)

Paul must achieve one objective before he can hope for emotional recovery: identifying the problem with his mother, by now a death wish, and put it behind him. This is precisely what he is doing in the final paragraph: "But no, he would not give in ... He would not take that direction to the darkness to follow her.

He walked toward the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly." Although some critics see Paul's effort here as next to hopeless because he is so fixated, the final word emphasizes his desire to live.



Techniques

It is hard to speak about Lawrence's techniques without mentioning his expanded field of inquiry in his characters' personal, psychological, and sexual lives was regarded as overtly sensational upon the novel's publication in 1913. Critic Julian Moynahan argues that *Sons and Lovers* (1913 edition) has three formal orders or matrices which blend with each other, and enrich one another.

The first matrix is conventional historical narrative "articulated in terms of historical sequence," and practical cause and effect, more or less the one that develops the plot line. The second is based on Freudian psychology, which explains the reasons for Paul's inhibitions in trying to love Miriam. The statement by the narrator about Paul's relationship with Miriam, "He wanted to give her passion and tenderness, and could not," participates as a statement of fact in the first matrix, but also in the second because Paul's inhibition is a neurotic symptom described by Freud in 1912 (including the Oedipal complex). Moynahan goes on to use the example of Walter's reaction to Gertrude's death as encompassing all three matrices. He refuses to look at Gertrude either while she is sick or laid out, then, with tears streaming down his face, brags to her relatives about what a good husband he has been.

Later on, he is troubled by nightmares.

These are two "ordinary sequences," one in the first matrix—Morel acting according to his character—and in the second, his anxiety during the aftermath of his wife's death. But Moynahan continues: "the same sequence in the vital context. . . leads to a severe judgment upon Morel." He quotes this passage from the novel as an example of the "vital context":

And that was how [Walter Morel] tried to dismiss her. He never thought of her personally. Everything deep in him he denied. Paul hated his father for sitting sentimentalising over her. He knew he would do it in the public houses. For the real tragedy went on in Morel in spite of himself.

The "larger indictment" against Morel is that he denies the life within him . . .

In the other contexts these are his experiences. In the vital context, the experience violates sanctions that may be mysterious but are also specific and real. The violation is a form of self violation and is a tragedy, according to the firm, although compassionate, view of the narration.

Applying this analysis to the progress of Paul through the novel, Moynahan says:

Paul is a passionate pilgrim whose every action and impulse is a decision for or against life and accumulates to a body of fate that quite literally spells life or death for him.



In the novel's problematical ending, the second, deterministic Freudian matrix spells death, but the vital context spells life. He refuses to join his dead mother and walks toward the town, which represents life. However, the town is not utopia and will probably provide the scene for the continuation of the same struggle.

He is "on a quest for health and relatedness" that Lawrence's later novels will thematically address. Lawrence embeds in a seemingly realistic narrative psychological concerns that other novelists like Proust and Joyce would write about in a more dreamlike mode.

Another noteworthy technique is Lawrence's use of the natural world to balance and extend his characterizations, sometimes with a positive, sometimes with a negative spin. He seems prompted in this direction by predecessors such as Thomas Hardy and even George Eliot.

His renderings of nature are particularly vivid and compelling. Walter Morel's special being and integrity, for example, are revealed first as he eats breakfast and then as he chews a stalk from a hedge as he enjoys his early morning walk to the pits. At other times, natural images signal strife or separation among lovers, as when Paul notices the "brutal scent" of the purple iris right after he has decided to call off his relationship with Miriam.

Later, right before his breakup with Clara, he sees the swimming woman as "temporary as a bubble of foam." Furthermore, successive slightly varied encounters between both sets of lovers fill out the dynamic of the rise and fall of their relationships so that Lawrence enriches his narrative with a sense of the process of human love.



Thematic Overview

The quest for mature identity and personal fulfillment leading to a meaningful life in an imperfect world—where rapid social change and economic crisis have created great difficulties for all the characters—is the dominant theme of *Sons and Lovers*. The world of the novel is difficult for the initially generous, warm hearted Walter Morel and his refined, highly principled wife, who sees her life sinking into poverty and whose successive pregnancies become more and more burdensome. The domestic strife of the embattled Morels takes its toll on all the children, and impedes their efforts to take their places in society and in a marriage.

It is an imperative in all Lawrence's work for any character he cares about to find a meaningful connection, not just to the superficial social world, but to some ultimate world, often suggested by images from nature. Marriage, as in all his early work, is the crucial relationship which permits maturation, and it is the defense against dehumanizing forces in the social and political world. Paul's constant and often misguided strivings can be looked upon as efforts to mend the marriage of his parents. The Morels' lack of fulfillment thwarts not only Paul's but also William's efforts to find happiness with a woman. William's very successful efforts to rise above his station in life are ironically thwarted when he ends up with Lily, or Gyp, whose empty brain and lust for fine clothing and jewelry take a financial and psychic toll on him. The materialistic Gyp is a mirror opposite of spiritual Miriam, suggesting that the sons choose divergent paths but in reaction to the same sense of maternal over possessiveness. William's tragic betrothal is canceled only by his death from pneumonia, which appears to be partly occasioned by the stress of his relationship with Gyp.

Although the free-spirited romantic side of Lawrence rubbed against the grain of social convention, the novel reflects a deeply religious sensibility and the desire to feel a part of the universal whole. As with many artists, the fabric of connections between the everyday and the sublime is crucial to Lawrence, and even in this early novel spirituality that sacrifices the everyday world is deeply suspect.

Miriam's otherworldly spirituality is an other reason, besides Gertrude's possessiveness, for her failed relationship with Paul. That sort of spirituality, to be critiqued at length in *The Rainbow* (1915; see separate entry), is also the cause of Paul's increasing dissatisfaction with the church. At one point, Paul talks to Miriam endlessly about his love of horizontals: How the great levels of sky and land in Lincolnshire meant to him the eternity of the will:

Just as the bowed arches of the church, repeating themselves, meant the dogged leaping forward of the persistent human soul, on and on, nobody knows where: into contradiction to the perpendicular lines, and to the Gothic arch, which, he said, leaped up to heaven and touched the ecstasy and lost itself into the divine. Himself, he said, was Norman, Miriam was Gothic.



Consequently, another important theme is the effort to restore the spirituality of everyday life that Lawrence believed the Church denies.

The issue of sexuality is another crucial theme. The orthodox view of sex as a means to an end is a doctrine that Miriam's mother has instilled into her, and even though at times it seems that Miriam wants to shake this view, it interferes with her relations with Paul, who is portrayed as guilty of not doing more to break down this barrier. It is obvious that Lawrence provides no coherent view as to the role of sexuality in human life, neither in the depiction of Miriam nor Clara. Yet there is revealing irony in that Clara and Baxter Dawes are the only reconciled couple at the end of the novel, occasioned not by Clara's bowing to social convention, but her knowledge that Baxter loves her more steadily and truly than Paul. The Dawes's relationship suggests that Paul has neither achieved the maturity necessary to a genuine marriage, nor met the right woman.

Relations among men are also of consequence in the book. William, socially suave and charming, is a foil to the more reserved Paul, but the social climbing quality of his relationships contrasts with Paul's quest for more fulfilling relations with men. Paul is fascinated by, and reaches a genuine friendship with Miriam's brothers, at first just the younger two, and then the more reserved Edgar.

He is cordial with the men at his work place. Upon the death of his mother, he seeks the fellowship of men in bars. The most interesting relationship with a man, however, is the one between Paul and Baxter Dawes, who has beaten him up, but later in the novel falls on hard times, is hospitalized, and then visited by Paul, who gives him money. In fact, Paul is the agent for reuniting Baxter and Clara, for he tells Clara of her estranged husband's whereabouts.



Themes

Free Will

Lawrence addresses the issue of free will in his novel, asking to what extent his characters' environment influences their characters' choices. Lawrence makes this explicit in his descriptions. For example, when Paul begins to look in the newspapers for work, the narrator writes, "Already he was a prisoner of industrialism . . . He was being taken into bondage. His freedom in the beloved home valley was going now." The modern industrial world, specifically as it manifests itself in the effect mining culture has on the Morel family, shapes the characters' desires. Mrs. Morel, who believes she is morally better than the miners, is disgusted by what mining has made of her husband, and she pushes her children away from that work. She finds jobs for both Paul and William so that they will lead better lives than their father. The sons have difficulty making choices of their own. They are so driven to please their mother that they sacrifice their own pleasure and needs to satisfy hers. Neither can develop emotionally healthy relationships with women, and both struggle to balance their own wants with those of their mother. Another character who suppresses her will for the needs of another is Miriam Leivers, who sleeps with Paul to please him, even though she feels little sexual passion for him.

Sexuality

By explicitly depicting human sexuality in his novel, Lawrence flouted the moral conventions of the genre and of society, and his notoriety grew. At least one publisher refused *Sons and Lovers* because of its sexual content. Lawrence's theories about human behavior revolved around what he called "blood consciousness," which he opposed to "mental and nerve consciousness." Lawrence contended that "blood consciousness" was the seat of the will and was passed on through the mother. This is obvious in Paul and William's bond with their mother and in Paul's tenacity and emotional volatility, which his mother also shares.

Lawrence argued that modern society had somehow come to be dominated by mental consciousness and so was largely unconscious of its own desires. He wrote about his theories of human behavior in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922), along with his theories about male-female relationships. His controversial novel, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (1928), was accused of being obscene and pornographic, and its publishers were taken to court. Lawrence also flouted moral conventions in his personal life, eloping with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the wife of a professor at the University of Nottingham.

Some critics have argued that Paul's relationship to his mother illustrates Freud's Oedipus complex and have characterized both Paul and Lawrence as being sexually tortured and repressed by the degree of their emotional intimacy with their mother.

Class

Lawrence's characters illustrate the class contradictions at the heart of modern industrial society. Capitalism pits classes against one another and even pits individuals of the same class against one another. Lawrence develops this theme by depicting conflicts among various groups and characters. For example, William feverishly climbs the social ladder, only to discover that he is more alienated from his family the further up he climbs. His girlfriend, Lily, a pretentious and snobbish Londoner, holds herself above the working class and condescends to the Morels, treating them as "clownish" people and hicks. Even Mrs. Morel, a former teacher, has contempt for the work of her own husband and is disgusted by his miner friends, whom she considers lowly. The starkest contrast between classes, however, is illustrated in the relationship between Thomas Jordan, the capitalist factory owner, and his workers, whom he patronizes and quarrels with.

Style

Sons and Lovers is structured episodically. This means that the novel consists of a series of episodes tied together thematically and by subject matter. Structuring the novel in this manner allows Lawrence to let meaning accumulate by showing how certain actions and images repeat themselves and become patterns. This repetition of actions and images is part of the iterative mode. By using this mode, Lawrence can blend time periods, making it sometimes difficult to know whether an event happened once or many times. Lawrence is using the iterative mode when he uses words such as "would" and "used to."

Point of View

Point of view refers to the perspective from which the narrative is told. *Sons and Lovers* is told mostly from a third-person omniscient point of view, as the narrator has access to the thoughts of the characters and moves back and forth in time while telling the story. The first half of the novel focuses on Gertrude Morel and the second part focuses on Paul. However, although Lawrence strives to create a narrator that is impartial and presents material in an objective manner, the narrator occasionally makes editorial comments on the action, as he does in the first part of the novel after Mrs. Morel has been thinking that her life will be one of continued drudgery. The narrator intrudes, saying, "Sometimes life takes hold of one, carries the body along, accomplishes one's history, and yet is not real, but leaves oneself as it were slurred over." Lawrence alternates between showing and telling in the novel. When he shows, he simply describes the characters' action and lets them speak for themselves. When he tells, he summarizes scenes and sometimes comments on them. The narrator's presence is most evident in the latter instance.



Historical Context

Lawrence's novel begins in 1885 and ends in 1911, roughly following the outline of Lawrence's own life. During that time, British miners battled their capitalist bosses for better pay and safer working conditions. However, large swings in demand for coal contributed to industry instability, and it was common for miners' unions to be rewarded a raise one year and presented with a cut in salary the next. As the rate of industrialization increased, so did the gap between rich and poor. Nowhere was this gap more apparent than in the difference between how the miners lived and how the owners of the mines lived. Lawrence's father, on whom Walter Morel is based, began working in the mines when he was ten years old. A typical week for him consisted of six twelve-hour days, with only two paid holidays a year. One way out of the danger and poverty of the mining life was through education. The Education Act of 1870, which attempted to provide elementary education for all children, gave hope to the parents of many working-class children. The act allowed local school boards to levy and collect taxes. Elementary schooling, however, was not entirely free until the 1890s, when "board" schools could stop charging fees. Before that, parents were expected to pay between one and four pence per week per child. William, Paul, Clara, and Miriam all went to school, which significantly increased their chances of finding better work.

At this time, there was also a difference between public and private schools. Public schools were more expensive than private schools, as private schools often received their funding from an endowment or from a corporation, which ran them or hired a board of governors to do so. Social class was, and remains, intricately entwined with education. Schools not only provided students with the basic skills to obtain jobs, but they also offered students the chance to form friendships and alliances with other students and their families. Gaining admission to the better schools, however, depended on the student's family's resources and connections.

As a result of the Education Act, industrialization, and urbanization, more positions in skilled and semiskilled labor became available during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The number of clerks, for example, quadrupled between 1850 and 1900, with the British government, particularly the Post Office, employing the bulk of them. Vocational schools gradually replaced apprenticeships, and quasi-professional fields such as photography, bookkeeping, and librarianship emerged, providing additional choices for those with the desire or wherewithal to make better lives for themselves. There were more opportunities for men; however, women, especially unmarried women, found work as typists, secretaries, and telephone operators.

While Lawrence was lambasting industrialization and the loss of humanity's bond with the land, rural people were pouring into cities throughout the nineteenth century, seeking a better life. The agricultural depression of the 1870s further depleted the number of farmers, and by the turn of the century more than 80 percent of Britain's population lived in cities. The "faintly humming, glowing town" toward which Paul walks at the end of the novel is full of telephones and buses, trams, automobiles, and subway trains.

Critical Overview

In general, reviewers praise *Sons and Lovers*, though when doing so, they just as often point out its shortcomings. A writer for the *The Saturday Review*, for example, gives the novel this backhanded compliment: "The sum of its defects is astonishingly large, but we only note it when they are weighed against the sum of its own qualities." A reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review* has reservations with the novel's style, writing in an essay titled "Mother Love," "It is terse—so terse that at times it produces an effect as of short, sharp hammer strokes." However, the same writer calls the book one of "rare excellence." Writing almost a decade later in 1924, in her essay "Artist Turned Prophet" for *The Dial*, Alyse Gregory asserts that Lawrence is at his very best in *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, and *Twilight in Italy*. In these works, Gregory argues, Lawrence's "febrile and tortured genius flows richly and turbulently. Every passing stir upon his sensitiveness is passionately or beautifully recorded."

Predictably, the novel also caught the attention of the psychoanalytic community. In his essay "*Sons and Lovers: A Freudian Appreciation*" written for *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Alfred Booth Kuttner uses Freud's psychosexual theory of the oedipal complex to explain the choices Paul Morel makes. This approach, like many of Freud's theories themselves, was later widely attacked as being reductive. More recent criticism of the novel has drawn on the theories of Jacques Lacan, among others. Earl Ingersoll, for example, in his essay, "Gender and Language in *Sons and Lovers*," argues that a Lacanian approach to the novel is more productive than the Freudian psychoanalytic approach critics such as Kuttner have taken. Exploring the relationship between language and the characters' interactions, Ingersoll charts Paul's maturation as a movement from "the text of the unconscious associated with the mother to the empowerment of metaphor associated with the Name-of-the-Father." Ingersoll links highbrow English with the mother and lowbrow with the father.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



Critical Essay #1

Semansky is an instructor of English literature and composition. In this essay, Semansky considers Lawrence's novel as a Bildungsroman.

Sons and Lovers is an example of a *Bildungsroman*, an autobiographical novel about the early years of a character's life, and that character's emotional and spiritual development. The term derives from German novels of education, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, which details the experiences of an innocent young man who discovers his purpose and passion in life through a series of adventures and misadventures. Lawrence offers up a rendering of his own first twenty-five years of life in more or less chronological order, showing how Paul Morel must negotiate the pull of family and culture to cultivate his individuality.

By writing a novel that is predominantly based on people and times from his own life, Lawrence implicitly invites readers to treat the work as non-fiction. This has often led to confusion, however, as some of the events in *Sons and Lovers* have no factual basis in Lawrence's life but rather are symbolic dramatizations of his key emotional struggles. The character in the book that has occasioned the most controversy is Miriam Leivers, whom Lawrence based on Jessie Chambers, a friend from his youth. Chambers encouraged Lawrence to rewrite the novel after he had sent her a draft. She was disappointed in the revision as well, because she felt it did not accurately portray their relationship. Chambers attempted to tell the "real" story of her relationship with Lawrence in her own memoir, *D. H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*.

The relationship between Paul and Miriam that Lawrence describes fulfills the conventional criteria of the *Bildungsroman*, which often includes a detailing of the protagonist's love affairs. Critic Brian Finney is even more specific in his description of the genre's criteria in his examination of the novel *D. H. Lawrence: Sons and Lovers* when he writes, "Normally, there are at least two love affairs, one demeaning, and one exalting." In this scheme, Miriam, of course, represents the "demeaning" relationship. Although she gives herself to Paul sexually, she does so reluctantly, sacrificially, and without passion.

Finney describes other criteria of the *Bildungsroman*:

The child protagonist is usually sensitive and is constrained by parents (the father in particular) and the provincial society in which he or she grows up. Made aware of wider intellectual and social horizons by schooling, the child breaks with the constraints of parents and home environment and moves to the city where his or her personal education begins—both in terms of discovering a true vocation and through first experiencing sexual passion.

Paul certainly fulfills the criterion of being sensitive. Lawrence describes him as "a pale, quiet child" who "was so conscious of what other people felt." However, the primary constraint on his development is his mother, rather than his father. It is Mrs. Morel that



Paul resembles and loves and who forms the psychological barrier that Paul repeatedly comes up against in his drive to know himself. Mrs. Morel, though, is also a facilitator in Paul's development, as she attempts to shield him from her husband's vulgar habits and rescues him from a life in the mines.

Mrs. Morel also attempts to mitigate the effects that the society in which they live have on her children. Bestwood, a thinly-veiled version of East-wood, where Lawrence was born, is the setting of the novel, and in the opening chapter Lawrence recounts the history of the Midlands countryside, Mrs. Morel's childhood, and the time when she met and married Walter Morel. This narrative strategy of describing the factors that contributed to Paul's conception allows Lawrence to foreground the influence of Paul's environment and family life on the development of his character. Paul was born in "The Bottoms," a six-block area of housing for miners. Life in "The Bottoms" is largely one of ongoing despair. After a day in the mines, the men drink and cavort, while their wives tend to domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. Mrs. Morel is unlike the other wives in that she comes from a higher social station and had expectations for a better life. In *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Kinglsey Widmer describes Mrs. Morel primarily as a destructive figure in Paul and William's lives, writing:

Her Protestant ethos of self-denial, sexual repression, impersonal work, disciplined aspiration, guilt, and yearning for conversion-escape, not only defeats her already industrially victimized coal-miner husband but also contributes to the defeat of several of their sons.

Paul's "defeat," however, is only possible because Paul knows the difference between success and failure. Without his mother's sour but demanding presence and her daily disillusionment with the world, Paul might not have developed his love for painting or his desire to transcend his provincial roots. Paul's tortured relationship with his mother actually allows him to develop his own ideas about the meaning of individuation and fulfillment. By having to balance his need to please her with his need to have a healthy sexual and emotional relationship with a woman, Paul arrives at an understanding about himself and what he can and cannot control.

This self-understanding, a crucial phase of character development in a *Bildungsroman*, entails the knowledge that there is less in life that Paul can control than his mother has taught him. Mrs. Morel believes that through hard work, will power, and self-denial one could move up the social ladder and find contentment. What she does not grasp is the extent to which the self suffers from such desires. Paul discovers through his relationship with Clara that the temperament he has inherited from his mother is destroying him. He comes to realize that attempts to deny passion or to manage the contents of his consciousness are doomed to fail. Critic Helen Baron claims that Lawrence embeds his own understanding about human consciousness not only in Paul's character but also in the very style of the writing. In her essay, "Disseminated Consciousness in *Sons and Lovers*," Baron writes that Lawrence tests readers' assumptions that the will can control what the body feels and the mind thinks, claiming Lawrence represents consciousness as something that cannot be contained.

"Lawrence's exploration of consciousness," Baron writes, "is so strongly embedded in



the narrative tissue that the very words themselves are treated as cells with permeable boundaries."

In addition to Paul's "education" in the ways of love and human consciousness, he also develops his talent for painting, even selling a few paintings. Paul's passion to paint stands in for Lawrence's own passion to write, and, by describing Paul's growth as an artist, Lawrence participates in the literary tradition of the *Kunstlerroman*, which is a novel that describes the early years and growth of an artist. James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is another such novel that is both *Bildungsroman* and *Kunstlerroman*.

The nature of these two subgenres almost demands that they follow the literary tradition of realism, which Lawrence does as well. Realistic novels portray character, setting, and action in a recognizable and plausible way. They are located in a specific time or historical era and in a specific cultural milieu. Authors of realistic novels often rely on the use of dialect and concrete details of everyday life to compose their stories, and they make clear the motivations of characters' actions, emotions, and thoughts. Often, such novels depict the working class. Although written just a decade into the twentieth century when literary modernism was emerging, *Sons and Lovers* belongs to the tradition of nineteenth-century realism in its attention to detail and locale, and its attempt to accurately depict a way of life.

Because it has straddled the border between fiction and fact, *Sons and Lovers* has become a lightning rod for a number of Lawrence critics seeking insight into the writer's growth as an artist. As a *Bildungsroman*, the novel offers clues as to how Lawrence viewed his emotional and aesthetic maturation. Like Lawrence, Paul has to overcome the death of his mother and enter a world he has to remake in order to survive. Fighting the impulses to destroy himself, Paul sets his mouth tight and marches off to town to start anew.

The year after this novel was published, Lawrence married Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the upper-class ex-wife of a university professor; Lawrence had been involved with her since 1912. Like Paul's mother and Lawrence's own mother, Lawrence chose a mate outside of his own class. The two would remain together until Lawrence's death.



Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Hayman discusses what makes Sons and Lovers a successful novel.

D.H. Lawrence's first and most conventional novel, *Sons and Lovers*, is already the work of an accomplished writer. Grounded in the novelist's autobiography, it is in the fullest sense a sentimental education. Unlike his other works, this novel has a fully integrated plot, relatively little sermonizing, and characters with firm flesh over their analogized bones. If they stand for something, as Lawrence's characters always do, we are not told what. On the other hand, many of the qualities we have learned to associate with this writer are already present: the lavish descriptions of natural phenomena; the use of epic tags as a powerful rhythmic device to establish the resonances of the personae; the erotic thrust of the language; the tendency to refresh images by inverting their conventional charge; the quirky psychology; and the nervous episodic shifts. Add to this the writer's occasionally embarrassing use of naive hyperbole.

Most striking is Lawrence's use of the double or interlace plot so reminiscent of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, though here the pattern is far less mechanical than it is elsewhere. The novel's basic plot line concerns the powerful oedipal attachment developed by Paul Morel's clever, sensitive, frustrated mother, a coal miner's wife tied to a coarse, strong-willed, and occasionally brutal man. A major strand relates to the story of that marriage and her attempts to achieve fulfillment through, first one, and then a second son. Significantly, the novel begins with a full treatment of the pre-Paul experience, her courtship and early disillusionment, the nurturing of her first two children in the dingy miner's house and the devolution of Morel into what is too readily perceived to be a drunken brute. Lawrence is too subtle to indulge in crude typing here. Both the disappointed wife and her husband emerge as complex figures at once internally consistent and capable of surprising shifts in mood and behavior. Her story dominates, however, delineating among other things her efforts to raise her children above the life imposed by the miners' existence.

The mother's life is poised against the well-articulated maturation or *Bildung*, of her physically fragile and sensitive second son, Paul. It is this boy who, after the death of his brother William, captures his mother's imagination and becomes the focus for her affections and ambitions. The novel recounts how the boy gradually extricates himself from his engagement with her. To accomplish this Lawrence resorts to a complex shifting perspective, brief scenes, and frequent bald statements of attitude. This enables him to give appropriate time and the right valence to each of the many protagonists and, more importantly, to phase out the mother as the center of Paul's creative and amorous life.

Anything but reticent, Lawrence combines the flat statement of emotion and attitude with a vividly impressionistic system of reactive prose vignettes. Thus we have the astonishing moments of affinity through nature which characterize some of the more vivid scenes: e.g., Paul's communion with his mother over some flowers and the painful



botanical encounters with his first girl, Miriam. Though generally grounded in physical circumstances, the action of this "psychological" fiction is detailed with extraordinary clarity and mood-making precision. It is developed precisely through personal encounters that tend to be highly formulaic, conveyed through the reciprocal awareness of two dueling or communing characters: "[Miriam] suddenly became aware of his keen blue eyes upon her, taking her all in. Instantly her broken boots and her frayed old frock hurt her." If, on occasion, this laying bare of nerve endings grates, in the long run, the novel succeeds because it records not only minute shifts in the mood of its personae but also because, by locating the action on the level of human interactions, it traces the vicissitudes and motivates the development of Paul's spirit. Only Tolstoy has been willing and able to do this on so broad a scale, though Tolstoy is capable of more objectivity than Lawrence.

If at times we may feel that less would be more (as it is in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*), we may still find Lawrence's slow accretion of poignant detail and his rhythmic reiteration of personality and physical traits effective. Furthermore, the short scenes enable the writer not only to shift mood and pace, but also to move from emotional intensity to analysis. What makes this tale of a man and three women convincing and engrossing is undoubtedly Lawrence's ability to convince us that shadings of attitude, the minimal signals to which characters respond, are indeed important. Lawrence makes us sensitive to the impact of casual remarks, glances, gestures, their capacity to signal turning points in a relationship.

Ultimately it is the anti-oedipal thread wound by Mrs. Morel's two younger rivals that saves Paul, that and his mother's pathetic death. In Miriam, he finds a generous but unsatisfactory surrogate, a young woman willing to sacrifice herself on the altar of his sensibility. This is the rival his mother forcefully rejects. By contrast, the older and more self-reliant Clara Dawes, for whom Paul must battle the brutal Dawes, defines Paul's sexual and emotional freedom without challenging his mother's role. Together, these women set him on the road to the "faintly humming glowing town" of his maturity.

Paul's relationships are all tense and experimental, and though he is clearly the focus of much of the action, neither he nor any of the women is unambiguously admirable or even completely adequate to the moment. It is to this excruciating balance of tensions set against the everyday world of a working-class family that *Sons and Lovers* owes its success, to this and to its meticulously honest and painfully engaging chronicle of Paul's identity crisis.

Source: David Hayman, "Sons and Lovers: Novel by D. H. Lawrence, 1913," in *Reference Guide to English Literature*, 2d ed., edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick, Vol. 3, St. James Press, 1991, pp. 1862-63.



Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Beards examines Sons and Lovers within the context of the Bildungsroman, finding this approach best suited to understand the novel's literary aspects and theme of alienation.

There are two traditional approaches to *Sons and Lovers*, one of which treats the novel as a psychological study, emphasizing particularly Paul's Oedipal complex; the second of which focuses on the autobiographical, exploring the many passages where Lawrence seems to be retelling his own experience fictionally (the scenes of family life, the mining background, Paul and Miriam's relationship.) While the first approach risks reducing the novel to a case history, the second has the danger of undermining *Sons and Lovers'* effectiveness as fictional vision, turning it instead into a confessional autobiography, and vitiating Lawrence's achievement with plot, symbol, dramatic scene, and invented character. Moreover, these two approaches often join forces, so that autobiography is used to support the claims of psychological analysis, psychological generalizations cited to strengthen the autobiographical critique—especially where there are gaps in what we know of Lawrence's life. An example of the latter treatment is the attempt to clarify the at best hazy identity of the original for Clara Dawes (Louie Burrows? an unidentified Nottingham mistress? Frieda, later Lawrence's wife?) by referring to what psychology calls "the reaction formation," in particular Lawrence's attempt to escape his mother's domination by drawing close to an opposite. Both of these approaches, the autobiographical and the psychological, lead to interesting questions and cruxes in the novel, offering the student opportunity to consider two kinds of critical literature. On the one hand he gets to study a literary rendering—and a superb one—of the Oedipus complex; on the other, he can absorb the facts of Lawrence's life as they are recorded in his letters, in autobiographical sketches and in memoirs about his "Sons and Lovers" period.

It is my contention in this essay that seeing *Sons and Lovers* against the pattern of the traditional *Bildungsroman* illuminates many of the literary aspects of the novel about which neither the psychological nor the autobiographical approach cares and that this view does justice to one of Lawrence's best artistic achievements. In addition, because the *Bildungsroman* emerges in the nineteenth century and continues into our own, its focus on the conflict between an alienated individual and the cultural forces (family, neighborhood, class, religious and ethical milieu) against which this individual seeks to establish himself relates directly to the lives of our students. Moreover, the kind of conflict I have outlined comprises the real plot of *Sons and Lovers*, expressed jointly in Paul's struggle to free his soul from his mother and to become an artist where economic necessity all but rules out such a possibility. Paul's movement toward self-realization is expressed symbolically in his rejection of adjustment to the everyday (an adjustment made by his brother Arthur and sister, Annie) in favor of the starry night in which he finds hope at the novel's end; in his attraction to cities (first Nottingham, then London, and ultimately perhaps even Paris) instead of "The Bottom" or, later, the houses on Scargill Street; and in his refusal to make life for himself in terms of provincial possibilities. But



before an examination of the specific details of *Sons and Lovers*, it would be wise to review some of the general characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*.

The *Bildungsroman* ("novel of self-development" or "apprenticeship novel" are the best English equivalents) features a protagonist, an apprentice to life, whose goal is to master it so that he can achieve an ideal or ambition, fulfillment of which will heighten his sense of self. A look at related types of fiction may serve to clarify the *Bildungsroman* itself. Close to the confession and the autobiography, the *Bildungsroman* is often a first or second novel which fictionalizes its author's growing up. It is also similar to the picaresque novel, though in the *Bildungsroman* the journey through life has been internalized; adventures are important principally for their effect on the protagonist's psychological development and sense of self. The *Bildungsroman* protagonist is usually more passive, reflective, intellectual and artistic than his picaresque counterpart, probably because the author, himself introverted and creative, has fashioned his character out of himself. Still another type of related fiction is the initiation story or novel, though here the focus is a single moment of vision where the protagonist accepts either the code of his elders or the hard facts of life itself, or both (e.g. Faulkner's "The Bear," James' "The Lesson of the Master," Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage"). Compared to the initiation novel, the *Bildungsroman* compounds the choices which the central character is called upon to make, forcing him to define separately but in a continuous process his values in regard to four crucial concerns: vocation, mating, religion, and identity.

All of these decisions must be made without the aid of formal education, for whenever schooling is depicted in novels of self-development it is shown to be sterile and hopelessly anachronistic, if not downright farcical (e.g. *Pendennis*, *Great Expectations*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*). One sometimes suspects that the impetus for a fictional sub-genre which shows protagonists designing and shaping their own lives is the need to respond to a culture where the educative institutions (schools, churches, family and class traditions) are in chaos. While the college teacher understandably will feel a bit defensive pointing out the *Bildungsroman's* typical assessment of formal education—*Sons and Lovers* doesn't even bother to mention Paul's schooling—it should be noted this decision results from wider forces than mere pedagogical incompetence. It is no accident that the *Bildungsroman* emerges strongest in the nineteenth century, for it is during this epoch that the traditional class society and its heavily class-weighted institutions and values, in effect since the Renaissance, undergo pressure and serious erosion. It is in this century too that for the first time a young man who was not born a gentleman could choose to ignore the social status and even the particular work of his father without necessarily facing near-suicidal odds (see, for example, Robinson Crusoe's regrets and guilt over ignoring his father's advice). While large numbers of the more intelligent and energetic members of the lower and middle classes sought to rise above their inherited stations in life, the educational system continued to reflect an outmoded society where class determined the content and quality of one's education. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* illustrates perfectly the disparity between its stonecutter hero's ambitions and the educational opportunities available to one of his class. In *Sons and Lovers* Paul Morel's education is casual rather than institutional; he is tutored in French and German by the local minister, Mr. Heaton; coached in composition by his



brother William; encouraged in his art by his mother; and self-taught when it comes to literature, Miriam serving in both of the last two instances to inspire Paul to his best.

The same independence which characterizes Paul's education helps to prevent his capitulation to the economic and social outlook of his elders and peers, though his mother's distaste for her husband and the way of life he stands for certainly stiffens her son's resistance. Like many of his nineteenth-century predecessors, Paul shows considerable pluck, resilience and idealism in pushing his way toward an artist's future, though the usual stress laid by critics on his Oedipal conflict undermines our sense of Paul's consistency and force of character. Persistent belief in his future as an artist accounts for Paul's refusal to accept provincial goals and expectations. Surprisingly, economics plays a much larger role in *Sons and Lovers* than is often recognized, partly because it bears little if any relationship to Paul's psychological emergence, nor much more to Lawrence's own personal experience (though his letters reveal considerable concern over his finances, Lawrence never allowed making a living to interfere with his writing).

Simply expressed, the economic question in *Sons and Lovers* sets earning against creating. Four times in the novel the reader gets detailed accounts of the coal miner's finances: how pay is divided in the family, pp. 17-18, pp. 69-72 (collecting wages at the company office), p. 87 (compensation when Morel is injured) and pp. 198-201 (dividing the pay among four butties). Obviously, Lawrence is recalling these details from his own experience and such scenes help to establish the realistic depiction of turn-of-the-century life among Midlands miners for which *Sons and Lovers* is justly famous. But beyond this relationship to realism, these scenes fit the money or wage motif of the novel on the whole, a motif which sounds a relentless and unavoidable bass note against which Paul's lyric fantasies of artistic fruition must compete. Each time Paul receives a raise at Jordan's or moves up in the hierarchy there, we are told about it. Likewise, William's mercurial rise to something like gentleman's status in London law office circles stands both as exemplum and warning to Paul; William's record is more than merely that of an older sibling, for he was Mrs. Morel's first son—and "lover"—though he has escaped only to die prematurely. Later in the novel, when Paul seems to believe he can have art and money too, imagining himself a popular and therefore well-to-do artist, the alliance between art and income seems a romantically founded and improbable one. In a scene which follows a passage where Mrs. Morel angrily denounces her husband for leaving her too little money for the week ("a measly twenty-five shillings!"), Paul shows Miriam his designs for "decorating stuff, and for embroidery." "With a touch of bitterness" he explains, "I did it for my mother, but I think she'd rather have the money." Later, in the first paragraph of Chapter XII, "Passion," we are informed that Paul is beginning to earn a living through his textile and ceramic designs, while "at the same time, he laboured slowly at his pictures." Furthermore, Paul's integrity as an artist (he has to accept less money for a commissioned painting because he will not paint what is demanded of him) and the peculiar subject of his painting, luminous figures "fitted into a landscape," don't promise the kind of success Paul imagines for himself. Regardless, however, of his probable future, Paul here faces a problem which confronts all protagonists in self-development novels—how to make a living. If we fail to consider the vocational and economic issue in Paul Morel's



development, we thin out and over-simplify his struggle toward self-realization. Knowledge of the typical *Bildungsroman* protagonist alerts us to this aspect of Lawrence's novel.

A second characteristic of all *Bildungsromane* is that their protagonists must always decide on a suitable mate or at least define the ideal who waits in the near-distant future; the central figures in self-development novels are thus, among other things, apprentice lovers. This aspect of *Sons and Lovers* has received close attention from critics of all persuasions; if the plot of mother-son love itself is not enough, Lawrence's treatment of Gertrude, Miriam, and Clara, and their respective relationships to Paul have aroused heated debate, charge and counter-charge. The way in which the novel appears to blame Gertrude for dominating and almost destroying Paul and to indict Miriam for her near-frigidity and squeamishness has given rise to a great deal of angry discussion almost from the day the novel appeared. In our own time by far the most provocative attack on this aspect of *Sons and Lovers* has been Kate Millett's in *Sexual Politics*. Writing from a Marxist-feminist perspective, Millett accuses Paul (and by implication, Lawrence) of using the three women in his life, then discarding them when they no longer serve his self-centered interests. Millett describes Paul as the "perfection of self-sustaining ego" and states, "the women in the book exist in Paul's orbit and cater to his needs: Clara to awaken him sexually, Miriam to worship his talent in the role of disciple and Mrs. Morel to provide always that enormous and expansive support. . . ." Despite the bluntness and even crudeness of her critique, and the fact that in regard to Gertrude, Millett seems to contradict herself (elsewhere in her discussion she calls the novel "a great tribute to his mother and a moving record of the strongest and most formative love of the author's life"—one must admit some truth to the charge.

Students today are especially sensitive to the treatment of female characters in fiction, particularly where, as in *Sons and Lovers*, there is sufficient development to assess a life pattern or unachieved potential in these lives. Undeniably, Gertrude's life is laid before us; we know enough of her history to see the sources of her aspirations, first for herself, then for herself and her husband, finally for her successive sons. Her sense of entrapment in a deadend marriage to Morel, her envy of Mrs. Leiver's life, her vicarious participation in life through her children—these and other details allow us to know her predicament. And when, in her final illness, Paul administers a fatal dose of morphine, her victimization—by unavoidable pregnancies which bind her tighter to her despised mate and which sap her strength and by a culture which discourages women from working in the world—is made final by her son. Likewise, Clara and Miriam, opposite as they are in character, seem purposeless and incomplete unless they can join in a vitalizing relationship with a male. Clara—listless, cynical and cold (several scenes show her kneeling before a fire, presumably trying to imbibe its warmth)—drifts until she consummates her relationship to Paul, who, when he realizes their relationship is merely physical, brings Clara and her estranged husband Baxter back together again. Miriam's faith that Paul will ultimately return to her, that his spiritual and idealistic side will triumph over his need for sex, seems pathetic finally, in view of her sacrificial sexual surrender to him, her compulsive chapel going when Paul is involved with Clara, and his final dismissal of her: "'Will you have me, to marry me?' he said very low . . . 'Do you want it?'



she asked very gravely. 'Not much,' he replied, with pain."

The tradition of the *Bildungsroman* itself provides an explanation for this apparent male bias, for fiction with a developmental focus always slights characters not of the protagonist's sex, and for that matter, *all* the other characters. One of the distinguishing traits of the apprenticeship novel is the strong central figure for whose experience and development the lesser figures exist, and from whose process of self-realization the novel receives one of its principal unifying elements. Furthermore, the novel of self-development generally is written from a narrowly omniscient point of view, the author standing beside his character, as it were, and most often interpreting experience through his character's mind, senses and emotions. Thus the *Bildungsroman's* customary point of view adds to a sense of the protagonist's egoism and lends emphasis to his seeming exploitation of the novel's other figures.

Because mating plays such a significant part in maturation—and thus in apprenticeship fiction—protagonists, whether male or female, will inevitably use and exploit at least several members of the opposite sex. Thackeray's *Pendennis*, for example, eponymous hero of the novel sometimes called the first *Bildungsroman* in English (1849-1850), is involved several times (with Fotheringay, an Irish actress; with Fanny Bolton, a "poor but honest" girl from the lower classes; and with Blanche Amory, a continental adventuress in the manner of George Sand and her heroines) before succumbing in marriage to his mother's ward, companion and protege, Laura, whom he has all but ignored through most of the novel. Similarly, in Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Ursula Brangwen, a typical *Bildungsroman* heroine, rejects two men who want to marry her, Anthony Schofield and Anton Skrebensky, because, as she thinks to herself after rejecting Anthony, "ultimately and finally, she must go on and on, seeking the goal that she knew she did draw nearer to." Thus Millett's account of Paul's position at the conclusion of *Sons and Lovers* ("Having rid himself of the two young women, . . . Paul is free to make moan over his mother's corpse, give Miriam a final brushoff, and turn his face to the city) is hardly very convincing when one has in mind fictional tradition, in particular, the *Bildungsroman's* tendency to adopt the protagonist's point of view, to maximize for the reader the central figure's sense of self-concern, to give other characters instrumental rather than independent functions.

Ursula Brangwen's goal in *The Rainbow*, "to be oneself . . . a oneness with the infinite," realized in botany lab as she peers down a microscope after her professor had denied any mystical dimension in life, brings us to both of the remaining concerns of the *Bildungsroman* protagonist: his quest for identity and for the right relationship to the transcendent and non-human in the universe. Admittedly, some apprenticeship novels (*Pendennis*, *Pere Goriot*), in their intensive treatment of social reality, largely ignore supernatural and intangible realities. Yet from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834) on, the religious crisis and the more general search for the transcendent meanings of life have typified novels of self-development. For Paul Morel as for Ursula, religious sense and identity are deeply intertwined; this interrelationship has become, of course, a hallmark of Lawrence's mature fictions, where a knowledge of oneness is brought about by an interfusion of the individual and the natural world via sex or a "lapsing out" of consciousness. It is quite easy to misread symbolic scenes in *Sons and Lovers*—and I



think Millett and others are guilty of this—through failing to take into account Lawrence's idea of one's relationship to the infinite. It is possible for instance to interpret Paul's vision of Clara bathing—he sees her as "not much more than a clot of foam being blown and rolled over the sand . . . just a concentrated speck blown along, a tiny white foam-bubble, almost nothing among the morning"—as his belittling of her, preparatory to his terminating their relationship. In fact, Millett evaluates the scene as follows: "Paul converts himself into a species of god in the universe before whom Clara dwindles to the proportions of microscopic life." Other critics have judged Paul lost and despondent in the final paragraphs of the novel because he feels like "so tiny a spark" being pressed into extinction. Both assessments are wrong, for they ignore the implicit paradox in Lawrence's definition of self, where real being requires this feeling of tininess, of being infinitesimal. Millett, in her eagerness to indict Paul's self-centeredness, ignores this essential of the world-view Lawrence establishes in *Sons and Lovers*. An opposite view to Millett's, one which venerates Lawrence's mystical vision where Millett only scorns it, has been recently expressed by Joyce Carol Oates. Acknowledging the irritating challenge of Lawrence's love ethic, Oates declares Lawrence to be, not as Millett would have it, a sexual reactionary, but "too radical for us even today." Lawrence, Oates continues, "goes back beyond even the tradition women are rebelling against, today, to a mystical union based upon the primitive instincts of our species, but carrying us forward into pure spirit." He may well be abrasive, "yet one comes to believe that Lawrence is absolutely right."

Still another recent critic, Calvin Bedient, has effectively argued that for Lawrence the fusion of soul which the author himself felt with his mother transcended the Oedipal, giving Lawrence—and therefore his fictional projection Paul—the sense of a mystical oneness next to which other relationships to women seem ordinary, flat, and merely personal. Only at the peak of physical or sexual exhilaration does Paul experience the infinite; such moments occur when he is swinging in the Leiver's barn, riding his bicycle recklessly home after a strained evening at the farm, making love with Clara on a steep clay river bank or with Miriam in a pine grove. As Paul expresses it after the latter experience, "the highest of all was to melt out into the darkness and sway there, identified with the great Being." Bedient is convincing when he suggests that although Lawrence wasn't aware of it in *Sons and Lovers*, the work conveys rather fully its author's vision of the highest state of being and how that state can be obtained.

In counterbalance to those scenes where Paul lapses out of consciousness, often outdoors and frequently at night, *Sons and Lovers* furnishes occasional comments on its protagonist's changing relationship to traditional religious life and practice; Paul's fall from orthodoxy coincides with the growth of his mystic awareness and his ability to summon it, while, on the literal level, it evidences his growth away from the Morel family's habitual and easy chapel going. At twenty-one, we are told, "he was beginning to question the orthodox creed;" the following spring "he was setting now full sail towards Agnosticism, but such a religious Agnosticism that Miriam did not suffer badly." The term "religious Agnosticism" indicates, I think, the growth in Paul of the mystical sense I have been describing, "agnostic" both because Lawrence speaks of God only metaphorically and because Paul's "religion" has nothing to do with any institutional faith.



Later in the novel Paul clarifies the nature of his religious belief in an argument with Miriam: "It's not religious to be religious . . . I reckon a crow is religious when it sails across the sky. But it only does it because it feels itself carried to where it's going, not because it thinks it's being eternal.' The crow's lack of consciousness, its utter passivity—"it feels itself carried to where it's going"—corresponds to Paul's (and Lawrence's) sense of the religious as opposed to Miriam's.

What *Sons and Lovers* depicts in the way of identity for the protagonist, then, is two-fold; there is the Paul who is second son to the Morel family, a Bestwood provincial aiming for the artist's life, the one whose personal history and day-by-day development the novel charts, and there is the Paul who is increasingly opened up to manifestations of a living natural universe, a speck of which he is and in whose dark precincts his mother exists "intermingled." It is this mystical level of identity that Lawrence illuminates so effectively, for the first time in *Sons and Lovers*; it is indeed hard to think of another novelist who conveys this dimension so convincingly. Thus Lawrence is able to contribute to the *Bildungsroman* and to English fiction generally a deeper interpenetration of the human and the vital natural world than had been previously envisioned—or than has been created fictionally since.

Paul's two-level identity is further clarified by his symbolic association with several biblical and mythological figures. When he is an infant, his mother imagines him a Joseph, though later in the same scene she suddenly declares "I will call him Paul." When he is courting Miriam, Paul himself assumes a special relationship to the constellation Orion: "Orion was for them [Paul and Miriam] chief in significance among the constellations." These connections to astrological and biblical mythology in themselves suggest both the everyday and the vitalistic identities of Paul, the individual myths containing, moreover, details pertinent to all the typical self-developing protagonists in general and to Paul Morel in particular. Paul's similarity to his apostle namesake comes out most clearly in his relationship to Miriam; to her he is a stern moralist and rule-giver, whose irritability presages radical growth, though the principles of Paul's ultimate ethic come close to inverting his biblical predecessor's.

Paul's connections to Joseph are perhaps more obvious; like Joseph, he is a younger and favored son who leaves his father and homeland, and, after a period of bondage, is proclaimed a genius among a foreign people. (The biblical story of Joseph, is, in fact, a prototype of the novel of self-development.) When Walter Morel is injured in the pits, Paul is forced to give up his painting and his fantasies of where his art might take him—"His ambition . . . when his father died [was to] have a cottage with his mother, paint and go out as he liked . . . And he thought that *perhaps* he might also make a painter, the real thing." The scene in which the news of his father's injury reaches home captures beautifully Paul's intense devotion to his art in the midst of family catastrophe; while Mrs. Morel bustles about preparing to see to her despised yet needing mate, Paul continues with his painting. "Bondage" for Paul is explicitly related to the laboring world; forced by his father's mishap to seek a job, he reflects: "Already he was a prisoner of industrialism . . . He was being taken into bondage. His freedom in the beloved home valley was going now." Later, on his way to be interviewed at Jordan's surgical appliance factory, Paul passes through the company yard, which Lawrence describes



as being "like a pit," recalling the pit in which Joseph is abandoned by his brothers. Whereas Joseph ultimately triumphs as the Pharaoh's dream interpreter, Paul's victory is to be an artistic one.

Orion, third of the mythic figures with whom Paul is associated, symbolizes perfectly the progressive, self-achieving element in the *Bildungsroman* hero. Sword raised, feet in bold stride, Orion represents the battle-ready hunter in the process of his quest. It is important to recognize the disparity between the reserved, even diffident Paul and his mythological inspiration in the northern night sky; Orion, like Paul's mother, is, as the novel concludes, a source of inspiration, permanently fixed and shining, not a symbol of the already-achieved. Whatever wounds the death of his mother aggravates in Paul, he imagines her star-like and ever-present, like Orion, the hunter, an encouragement to go on.

The concluding pages of *Sons and Lovers* present several difficult but ultimately answerable question as to Paul's probable future which the apprenticeship novel can help clarify. In an interesting article entitled "Autobiograph in the English *Bildungsroman*," Jerome Buckley argues that because the novel of self-development is highly subjective, commonly fictionalizing the author's own experience, "the novel has frequently an inconclusive or contrived ending," its creator being too close to the experience being retold "to achieve an adequate perspective on (it)." "*Sons and Lovers*," he adds, "scarcely persuades us that Paul Morel at last finds the release from his fixation that Lawrence apparently won, perhaps in the very act of writing the novel." Commenting on the final paragraph of *Sons and Lovers*, Buckley asserts that "nothing has prepared us for so positive a resolution. If Paul is at last free and whole, his victory is not inherent in his story; it is imposed upon it from without." Even with the added weight of Lawrence's own judgment on the ending ("Paul is left in the end naked of everything, with the drift toward death") I would maintain that Paul's triumph *is* "inherent in his story" and that a knowledge of the *Bildungsroman*, precisely in those characteristics I have been discussing, helps us to see the rightness of the final affirmation.

Paul's trajectory all through *Sons and Lovers*, like that of many other *Bildungsroman* protagonist (Ursula Brangwen, Wilhelm Meister, and Augie March among them) has been away from pressure to conform—whether social, familial or economic—and toward the accomplishment of his own ideal. Paul's brother, first William, then Arthur, are foils to his aspiration; William prostitutes his attractive personality for social and business success; Arthur, initially rebellious and impulsive, capitulates to provincial expectations: "He buckled to work, undertook his responsibilities, acknowledged that he belonged to his wife and child." William's life, presented in far more detail than Arthur's, forms a compressed *Bildungsroman* in itself, wherein his mercurial rise to social and financial success, his quick movement from the provinces to London, and his absurd romance with Gypsy Western come close to forming a grim parody of apprenticeship fiction. William's rapid and thoughtless climb contrasts dramatically with Paul's slow, painful, self-conscious struggle toward freedom and self-realization. The dramatic contrast between the two brothers serves to support the promising view of Paul's future suggested by the final paragraph of *Sons and Lovers*; Paul's values are nothing like his



older brother's, and Paul consciously rejects a business career and the social approval and circumstances William is so desperate to gain. Lawrence reflects this difference symbolically when Paul goes to Nottingham to receive first prize for his painting. Dressed in William's altered evening suit, Paul "did not look particularly a gentleman." Moreover, Paul argues vigorously against his mother's advice that he ought "in the end to marry a lady." Having refused to follow William's ambitions, condemned by Lawrence's tone and treatment as well as by the obvious pattern of self-destruction and folly implicit in the older brother's choices, Paul is freed from William's fate.

Further proof that Paul's victory is not as Buckley maintains, "imposed . . . from without," is the evolution in Paul's mystical sense of self, which I've touched on earlier. From those early occasions when we see Paul in a state of natural exhilaration to later scenes when he expresses his positive sense of lapsing out of consciousness after making love to Miriam ("the highest of all was to melt into the darkness and stay there, identified with the great being,") the alert reader is readied for the final vision when Paul sees his mother as "intermingled" with the night: "she had been one place, and was in another; that was all." Even if we discard this momentary hope as rationalization, there is additional evidence—besides the final paragraphs "but no, he would not give in"—to substantiate Paul's vision and final confidence. It is misreading Lawrence to see mere tininess as indicative of weakness and failure; Paul and his mother may, like the stars, be mere grains or sparks, yet they do not disappear. By relating his mother to the stars, Paul is admitting their special separation but not their mystical one; like Orion to Paul and Miriam in an earlier scene, Mrs. Morel is a fixed source of inspiration, the sign to her son of his own divine connection. And certainly, though much has been made of Mrs. Morel's destructive hold on her son, it is important to recognize her role in encouraging and fostering her son's talents as a painter. Few artists in fiction (and probably in life) have had more effective and more positive nurturing than Paul gets from Mrs. Morel (compare, for example, Stephen Daedalus' situation), and therefore it seems reasonable to see this maternal encouragement as ultimately sustaining rather than ruinous.

Paul's movement in the final sentences of the novel toward the "city's gold phosphorescence . . . the faintly humming, glowing town" fits perfectly the province-to-city pattern of most *Bildungsromane*. All through the nineteenth century and into our own time, the city has been the place where the ambitious have sought their challenge, have striven to define themselves. Jude, Pip, Augie March, Eugene Gant, Julien Sorel, Martha Quest. Ernest Pontifex—all seek out the city in search of their imagined and idealized selves. The glow that Lawrence here ascribes to Nottingham symbolizes its hopefulness, for throughout the novel gold and flames have stood for the vital impulse of life. In the opening pages of *Sons and Lovers*, to cite an early example, we learn of Paul's mother's attraction to Arthur Morel, epitomized by the "dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame of a candle...."

It is undeniably true that Paul's life is still in process when *Sons and Lovers* concludes, yet all the signs of ultimate success and of a promising independence are there; Lawrence's next novel, also a novel of self-development, ends with its heroine Ursula, having lived through a traumatic love affair, a pregnancy and a miscarriage,



understanding the rainbow to promise, like the sign of the covenant, new life in a recreated world. Like her, Paul Morel, whose trauma is his mother's death, perceives a vision of unity between the night and the stars, his mother's spirit and his own, which sends him back into the fight—fist clenched—after his temporary depression and withdrawal. Even Kate Millett, openly hostile to Lawrence's art, recognizes Paul's movement toward the world of men, evidenced by her description of him as wishing "to be rid of the whole pack of his female supporters so that he may venture forth and inherit the masculine world that awaits him"; Paul is, she asserts, "in brilliant shape when the novel ends."

More importantly, when we consider, as I have tried to do here, the four distinct trials which the *Bildungsroman* protagonist must traditionally master—vocation, mating, religion and identity—Paul's future, though Lawrence's tone is typically equivocal, seems assured. He knows what he wants to do in life; has realized the dimensions of sexual relationship, even if he hasn't found his ideal mate; has forged a new religious sense; and knows, largely because he's defined these other questions, who he is, and, equally important, what "selves" he has left behind.

Source: Richard D. Beards, "Sons and Lovers as Bildungsroman," in *College Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall 1974, pp. 204-17.

Adaptations

The most acclaimed film adaptation of Lawrence's novel is the 1960 film *Sons and Lovers*, directed by Jack Cardiff and starring Trevor Howard, Dean Stockwell, and Wendy Hiller. The film was nominated for seven Academy Awards. Many libraries and video stores carry the video.

In 1995, Penguin Audiobooks released an audiocassette of Lawrence's novel with Paul Copley narrating.



Topics for Further Study

Compare Lawrence's novel to the film adaptation made of it in 1960 which was directed by Jack Cardiff. How does Cardiff adapt Lawrence's episodic telling of the story to the screen? What information does Cardiff leave out of the film, and what effects do these omissions have on the story? Discuss as a class.

Make a chapter by chapter timeline of the novel, detailing major events and shifts in point of view. Hang the chart in the classroom, and make any necessary changes to it while discussing the novel.

Gather in groups and draw a portrait of Paul's brain, marking off sections according to the thoughts and people that preoccupy him during the novel. How much space would you give to Miriam? How much to his mother? How much to his father? Present the portrait to the class and explain your labeling choices.

In explaining his theory of the oedipal complex, Freud claimed that between two and five years old, during the phallic stage of their development, boys fantasize about being their mother's lover. The boy's sexual interests, however, are soon met with the threat of castration from the father, and the eventual successful resolution involves identification with the father and assuming an active and aggressive social role in a patriarchal society. Discuss how the relationship between Paul and his mother does *not* illustrate or echo the Oedipus complex.

Write a summary of what might happen in a sixteenth chapter. What happens to Paul once he reaches the "faintly humming, glowing town"? Take turns reading your summaries to the class.



Compare and Contrast

1900-1920: In 1912, Sigmund Freud delivers a speech before the London Society of Psychical Research detailing for the first time his theories on the unconscious as a repository of thoughts repressed by the conscious mind. Over the next few decades, psychoanalysis grows in popularity, with thousands of psychiatrists undergoing and then practicing Freudian psychoanalysis.

Today: Though academic interest in Freud remains strong, very few practicing Freudian psychoanalysts remain.

1900-1920: World War I is fought between 1914 and 1918, resulting in tens of millions of casualties.

Today: In 2001, terrorists kill more than 3,000 people by flying jet airplanes into the twin towers of Manhattan's World Trade Center, and President George W. Bush of the United States declares war on terrorism.

1900-1920: In 1917, the world's first mass-produced tractor, the Fordson, is introduced, and farmers quickly produce crop surpluses.

Today: Governments of the United States and Britain regularly offer subsidies to their farmers to *not* grow crops.



What Do I Read Next?

Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow* (1915) follows three generations of a Nottingham family, detailing their love affairs, marriages, and family relationships. This is the first of Lawrence's novels to describe sexual situations in an open manner, and its publication stirred controversy.

Lawrence was also a poet. His first collection, *Love Poems and Others* (1913), contains some of his best-known poems.

Lawrence's idiosyncratic study of American literature, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), has itself become a classic.

Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* tells the story of the banished king of Greek mythology who killed his father and married his mother. A number of critics refer to the Oedipus myth when discussing *Sons and Lovers*.

Daniel Weiss's *Oedipus at Nottingham* (1962) explores the oedipal themes in Lawrence's fiction.



Key Questions

While *Sons and Lovers* was not Lawrence's first novel, it has the autobiographical quality characteristic of first novels, and lays the groundwork for ideas taken up and developed in later novels like *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Chief of these is the inner psychological conflict created in children by the conflict in the marriages of their parents. Lawrence had read the important essay by Sigmund Freud that set forth the theory of the child's sexual attachment to the parent of the opposite sex, and the ensuing rivalry with the same sex parent. The Oedipus complex and the necessity of resolving it before meaningful adult attachments can take place is one problem area for both William and Paul in *Sons and Lovers*. Yet psychological forces like the Oedipus complex, though potent in Lawrence, are not seen as entirely deterministic; the stronger characters attempt to face and get beyond such forces. Indeed, Lawrence's characters can be seen as in a life and death battle not with external forces, but with forces within themselves. At the same time, characters in *Sons and Lovers* must deal not only with the exigencies of everyday life, but with deeper needs for some sense of connection to a larger world. At the heart of the author's treatment of the more vibrant characters is the sense that life itself provides the protection against certain neurotic and suicidal forces.

1. Compare this autobiographical novel to others that have as their central plot line a boy's growth to manhood, such as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). What similarities of class circumstances, character similarities, can you see? How sure in each novel is the outcome for the main character? What differences in narrative method do you notice?
2. Relations with women is a dominant theme in *Sons and Lovers*. What do you see as the cause of Paul's inability to fall in love? Who is more to blame, Paul or the women he courts? What role does Gertrude play in Paul's relations with women? With William's? Do you see any parallels in the two brothers' failures with women?
3. Notice the use of the natural landscape and other details to form the external nature. How do you think Lawrence is using nature to enhance the view communicated about the struggles of human beings? Is nature a positive or negative force?
4. *Sons and Lovers* is set in a time of rapid economic, social, and political change. The characters are in other cases trapped and in some cases liberated by such change. Which characters do you see as the most trapped? Which seem to benefit most from economic and social changes? Are there some characters for whom these changes are a double-edged sword?
5. Why does Lawrence show characters speaking dialect? Does speaking in dialect help dramatize characters, such as Walter Morel? Does Paul ever speak dialect? When?



6. What kinds of jobs are available to the chief characters of *Sons and Lovers*? Are these jobs fulfilling?
7. The 1992 edition of *Sons and Lovers* includes many passages either excised or truncated from the original Duckworth edition. Many of these passages expand William's character. Why is the rendering of William's life important to our understanding of Paul's nature and our knowledge of the relationship of both sons with the mother?
8. What are Walter's faults? Is his character entirely his own fault? What forces have operated to create Morel's shortcomings? What role has Gertrude played? How sympathetic is the narrator to Walter?
9. Look closely at the ending of the novel. Considering what Paul has suffered, both in his relations to women and in dealing with his mother's slow death from cancer, do you think the author sees him as moving beyond these tragedies, or as succumbing to them?
10. Strong characters in this novel may be seen as those who are on a quest to discover themselves and their roles in life; weak characters are those who do not bother to be introspective at all. Rank the characters in *Sons and Lovers* according to this criterion.
11. Paul and Annie choose to end their mother's life by administering in one draught all the morphine that has been prescribed for her. Why do they do this? In what sense is Gertrude Morel's clinging to life when terminally and painfully ill not life affirming? What force do you believe Paul, and perhaps the author, think she is defying by her relentless desire to hang on to life?
12. What parallels do you see between the marriages of Clara and Baxter Dawes and Gertrude and Walter Morel? Do you think Paul, in spite of his fondness for Clara, has an interest in fixing the Dawes's marriage? Why do you think Paul befriends Baxter Dawes?



Literary Precedents

Lawrence is often linked to Thomas Hardy, who set his passionate characters in a vast and sentient natural world. Julian Moynahan compares Miriam to Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* (1878), for instance, and Michael Squires sees both Hardy and Lawrence as expanding "the scenic potential they found in a MidVictorian novelist like George Eliot," but with different outcomes. Hardy's scenic elements are more varied than Eliot's, and follow a pattern of six successive elements: initial rhetorical signal, usually temporal; questions that generate conflict; revelation; accusation; gesture; closure.

Hardy's scenes are usually carried by dialogue, while Lawrence's often show characters interrogating their own psyches. Furthermore, Lawrence "places more stress on the dynamics of marital or pre-marital relationships than does Hardy," and "alternates two kinds of scenes—singular and recurrent—whereas Hardy uses almost exclusively the singular, non-recurring scene." (A notable exception to Squires's judgment of Hardy are the successive encounters Tess has with Alec D'Urberville.) "Lawrence's use of internal and external questions . . . shapes the tension so that it bristles with a double edge."

That Lawrence's serious characters are embroiled in an intense struggle to connect with life gives him an equally strong link to Eliot, whose thoughtful characters are also engaged in questing and introspection, albeit on much different terms.

Eliot's characters are almost wholly taken up with issues of duty to others and rational morality, whereas in Lawrence the moral duty is primarily to oneself. By ignoring his feelings about his wife's death, Walter Morel is creating his own inner tragedy, which then reverberates on other characters, like Paul, who thoroughly hates him at this point. Mismatches may be compared in Eliot and Lawrence: the exuberant Dorothea Brooke's tragic choice to marry Casaubon in *Middlemarch* (1872), who has all the vitality of a limp handshake, may be compared to the Clara-Baxter relationship, to the Walter-Gertrude marriage, and to the William-Gyp engagement. For Dorothea, it is a given that once married, she must be the best possible wife. She keeps herself stoically intact despite bitter disappointment. The ill-advised relationships in Lawrence are seen as capable of destroying both members because Lawrence so thoroughly acknowledges the power of self-violation. Despite such ravages, the Morel's and the Dawes's marriages continue because there has been some vital link in them at some point; William is destroyed by his disastrous union with Gyp: He sees no way to break off and no way to go forward.

What compromise is possible is dictated by inner forces, not by an outward sense of duty.

Given the passionate quality of Lawrence's characters' inner turmoil, another obvious literary precedent are the Bronte sisters, especially Emily, whose larger than life Heathcliffe in *Wuthering Heights* (1847; see separate entry) is the slave of his own inner turmoil. His loss of Catherine Earnshaw, first to Edgar Linton and then to death, embitters him in a perverse revenge plot which is only counterbalanced by the



redemptive love of the next generation, which professed as it is in the conventional morality of Nellie Dean has failed to convince some critics. Inner psychological forces are different, but certainly as potent in Lawrence. Yet Lawrence may be even more indebted to the Brontë's for their incredible richness of fictional detail.

Several critics have noted parallels between Lawrence and Fyodor Dostoevsky: their fusion of fiction and philosophy in opposition to formal narrative codes; their reliance on psychic doublers and division of experience in flesh and spirit, being and personality, male and female, aggression and inertia; and their conception of evil as a function of mechanistic, devouring will.

Lawrence had reread *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; see separate entry) and a chapter from it, "The Grand Inquisitor," several times. He found the most devastating truth of "The Grand Inquisitor" to be the "final and unanswerable criticism of Christ." Paul's talk of churches in *Sons and Lovers* anticipates an even greater battle with Christianity in *The Rainbow* (1915; see separate entry), *Women in Love*, and finally *The Plumed Serpent* (1926).

Critic Mitzi M. Brunsdale notices similarity of content and imagery in the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and Lawrence, noting that in 1911 Lawrence reviewed two collections of German poetry, one containing nine of Rilke's early poems, while recovering from pneumonia. Particularly notable are the themes of artistic isolation and activity springing from conflict, and the contrasting use of "white floral images" countered by images of "blood."

Finally, the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, although not creative art, influenced Lawrence, or at least supported his own thinking on the importance of internal conflict and Oedipal fixation. The seminal essay by Freud is "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life, in which the Oedipus complex is seen as the cause of young men not being able to attach themselves sensually to young women of their own social status and intelligence. Although Lawrence was later to depart significantly from Freud, Freud's essay aptly describes Paul Morel's fixation on his mother in *Sons and Lovers*.



Further Study

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Using Lawrence's experience in America, Cowan produces a psychological profile of the writer. Cowan links Lawrence's deteriorating health with his increasingly dark literary vision.

Goodheart, Eugene, *The Utopian Vision of D. H. Lawrence*, Chicago University Press, 1963.

Goodheart describes Lawrence's social and spiritual development in the context of the times in which he lived. Goodheart's study is focused, engaging, and useful for students of Lawrence's writing and life.

Paglia, Camille, *Sexual Personae*, Yale University Press, 1990.

In this controversial study of sex and celebrity, Paglia explores the sexual impulses of Lawrence's characters, showing how they illuminate the myths surrounding Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and orgies.

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This casebook on Lawrence's novel contains early reviews, critical essays, background material, and a select bibliography of works on Lawrence.

Squires, Michael, and Lynn K. Talbot, *Living at the Edge: A Biography of D. H. Lawrence and Frieda von Richthofen*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

This fascinating biography of Lawrence and his wife draws compelling parallels between the couple's romantic life and Lawrence's novels.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
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- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
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NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

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A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



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□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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