

## Module-3

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### Unit-1 □ D.H. LAWRENCE: *SONS AND LOVERS*

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#### 3.1.1 Introduction

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Published in 1913, *Sons and Lovers* is D.H. Lawrence's third novel, and one of the landmark novels of the twentieth century. In the forty odd years between the publication of Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), the last novel that you studied, and *Sons and Lovers*, the English novel developed in certain major respects. It would not be enough to only point out that Hardy was a Victorian novelist while Lawrence was modern. While that is true, what we also need to remember is that there are some striking continuities that we may detect between Hardy and Lawrence and again, there are certain aspects in which Lawrence brings something fresh and new to the English novel. Both Hardy and Lawrence are concerned with the 'undefinable', the 'unanalysable' and the 'unresolved'. However, changes in attitudes, in society, in science, in beliefs in these forty years brought about many innovations in the form and content of novels.

*Sons and Lovers* is an intense and emotionally charged account of the coming of age of the novel's hero Paul Morel, drawing heavily from Lawrence's own experiences. Apart from being a vivid rendering of personal relationships, *Sons and Lovers* is also famous for its depiction of working class life in the mining town of Bestwood, Nottinghamshire, a thinly disguised portrait of Lawrence's own hometown Eastwood. Like many of Lawrence's other writings, this novel too depicts the abject conditions of the small mines of Nottinghamshire and is informed by Lawrence's denunciation of industrialisation and his nostalgia for an older pre-industrial England. In the following pages, we will try to explore the various facets of Lawrence's first major novel and attempt to arrive at a better understanding of the text in its various aspects as a **bildungsroman**, a **family chronicle**, and a **psychological examination of love and sexuality**.

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### 3.1.2 The Novel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: An Overview

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As you know, despite the popularity of poetry, it was the novel which was the most dominant form of literary production in the Victorian Age. Novels were the chief source of entertainment for the burgeoning middle class of England. It is interesting to note here that during the Victorian Era, the population of England more than doubled, from 14 million to 32 million.

For this ever growing population, many different varieties of novels were written during the Victorian Age, for instance the novel of manners by William Makepeace Thackeray, the humanitarian and reformist novels of Charles Dickens, novels relating to social problems by Elizabeth Gaskell, romantic and Gothic novels by the Bronte sisters, novels exploring the genre of nonsense by Lewis Carroll, adventure novels by Robert Louis Stevenson, crime novels by Arthur Conan Doyle, the bildungsroman and exotic novels by Rudyard Kipling and Oscar Wilde and so on. A detailed study and analysis of these writers is important to understand the breadth and variety of the Victorian novel but is beyond the scope of this brief account.

While the early and mid Victorian novels are characterised by a dominant sense of moral and social ethic and an identification of the authors as observers of the particular age to which they belonged, the late nineteenth century is characterised by movements like realism, naturalism and aestheticism. The influence of certain major

nineteenth century thinkers like Charles Darwin (1809–1882), Karl Marx (1818–1883), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) led to sweeping social and intellectual changes and laid the foundation of the modern age. The powerful ideas of these thinkers led to a questioning of several social, economic and religious beliefs that had hitherto been entrenched in the Victorian mindset.

The Victorian era also witnessed some significant improvements in technology. The Industrial Revolution changed in a big way how people lived, worked, and traveled. These improvements in technology provided a number of unprecedented opportunities to the English people but they also led to a major upheaval in terms of how people lived and dealt with the world around them. This change was complicated further by the growth of the working classes. The growth of industrialism led to the creation of spectacular wealth but it also created an unbridgeable schism between the haves and the have-nots. These transitions from a predominantly pastoral lifestyle to one dominated by the urban milieu of the city, coupled with the changing dynamics between different social classes became one of the chief concerns of many writers including Lawrence.

With regard to the novel, the last decades of the nineteenth century are dominated by Thomas Hardy. Hardy was a Victorian realist whose important novels include *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895/6). All his novels were set in the fictional region of Wessex and explored the themes of fate and suffering. He was a trenchant critic of many Victorian social institutions. In one of Hardy's most controversial novels, *Jude the Obscure*, the author provides a dramatic depiction of the stranglehold that the outdated divorce laws can have on people. In the same novel Hardy also criticizes the exclusivity of university admission norms and their discrimination on the basis of class.

**With relation to Lawrence, the important point to remember about Hardy is the fact that he is often considered to be Lawrence's spiritual father and many of the tendencies he explored in his novels find full maturation in Lawrence's works.**

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### 3.1.3 D.H Lawrence: His Fictional World

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Novelist, poet, playwright, critic, painter and travel writer, David Herbert

Lawrence rose from very humble origins to become one of the most influential as well as controversial literary figures of the twentieth century. Lawrence was born on September 11, 1885, in the small mining town of Eastwood in Nottinghamshire, the fourth child of his parents. His father, Arthur John Lawrence, worked as a coal miner in one of the many small mines that dotted the Nottinghamshire landscape, whereas his mother, Lydia Lawrence née Beardsall belonged originally to the middle class and was a former school teacher. When her fortunes fell after her marriage, she began supplementing her husband's income by working from home as a lace maker. It is from his intellectual and ambitious mother that Lawrence inherited his love for books as well as his desire to rise above his working class origins. As a child, he was a shy, reserved boy, a misfit among his social peers, but was academically good enough to be first boy in the history of Eastwood to win a County Council scholarship to the Nottingham High School. Thus we may bear in mind, as Raymond Williams points out that the important thing to remember about Lawrence's social responses to industrialization was that he was not merely a witness to it as a child, but someone who was caught in its processes, and it was no small miracle that he was able to break out of its shackles and fashion a literary career for himself, though it might have seemed obvious enough in retrospect.

Lawrence began working as a clerk for a surgical goods manufacturer in 1901, but quit soon after, following his brother Ernest's sudden death due to a skin disease. This was followed by his stint as a student teacher at the British School in Eastwood. It was here that he met a young woman named Jessie Chambers, a farmer's daughter who became his close friend and intellectual companion, and who was controversially portrayed as Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*. Jesse encouraged Lawrence to pursue writing seriously and submitted a collection of his poems to Ford Madox Ford, who subsequently published them in the *English Review* in 1909. In 1911, Lawrence's first novel *The White Peacock* was published, a year after his mother's death. By this time Lawrence had passed out from Nottingham University College and was writing frequently. In 1912 he met Frieda von Richthofen, the wife of his professor Ernest Weekly, and fell in love with her. Frieda left her husband and three children, and they eloped to Bavaria and then to Austria, Germany and Italy. They were married on July 13, 1914.

He published his first play, *The Daughter-in-Law*, in 1912. A year later, he published his first volume of poetry: *Love Poems and Others*. In 1912, Lawrence's second novel *The Trespassers* also appeared, and then in 1913, his first major novel,

the heavily autobiographical *Sons and Lovers* was published. Lawrence was very confident about this third novel of his, about which he asserted in a letter to his publisher Edward Garnett, “It is a great tragedy, and I tell you I’ve written a great book. It’s the tragedy of thousands of young men in England .... Read my novel – it’s a great novel. If you can’t see the development – which is slow like growth – I can.” (Letters I, pp.476-77).

Lawrence continued to write furiously, and in 1914 was published his critically acclaimed collection of short stories entitled *The Prussian Officer*. His fourth novel, *The Rainbow* was published in 1915, describing the experiences of two sisters growing up in the north of England. The character of Ursula Brangwen was partly based on Lawrence’s teaching colleague in Nottingham, Louis Burrows, with whom he was briefly engaged. The novel explicitly dealt with sex and was banned on the charges of alleged obscenity. These were trying times for Lawrence as about a thousand copies of his novel were burnt on a magisterial order and his paintings were also confiscated from an art gallery. This was also a time when Lawrence and his wife were unable to obtain passports as Frieda was not only German but also a cousin of the famous “Red Baron” Von Richthofen, and was thus viewed with great suspicion. They were suspected to be spies for the Germans and were expelled from Cornwall in 1917. The Lawrences were not permitted to emigrate until 1919, after which they travelled many parts of the world. Still, in spite of such hardships, Lawrence published four volumes of poetry during this period - *Amores* (1916), *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1919), *New Poems* (1918) and *Bay: A Book of Poems* (1919).

In 1920 was published his next major novel, *Women in Love*, considered to be a sequel to *The Rainbow*. This novel additionally grapples with the theme of homosexuality too, and it is around this time that Lawrence is alleged to have had a homosexual liaison with a Cornish farmer named William Henry Hocking. In a letter written during 1913, he writes, “I should like to know why nearly every man that approaches greatness tends to homosexuality, whether he admits it or not ...” He goes on to recollect, “I believe the nearest I’ve come to perfect love was with a young coal-miner when I was about 16.”

In the 1920s Lawrence and Frieda travelled extensively around Europe, New Mexico, and Mexico in a period he later described as his “savage pilgrimage”. He continued writing prolifically, but it is only with *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928), his

last major novel, again heavily censored and censured for its erotic subject matter, that he approached the fame and reputation of his acclaimed earlier novels.

Following various bouts of illnesses including malaria, Lawrence died of tuberculosis on March 2, 1930, in Vence, France.

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### **3.1.4. Locating *Sons and Lovers* in the Lawrence canon**

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*Sons and Lovers* (1913) is Lawrence's first major novel. Initially titled *Paul Morel*, it is a deeply autobiographical novel that traces the unhappy marriage of Paul's parents, the "warm and hearty, but unstable" Walter Morel, and the "clever, ironical, delicately moulded" Gertrude. (Letters I. p.190), and the effect it has on the children, particularly on Paul. As he grows up, he is inevitably and unconsciously drawn towards his mother and, simultaneously, develops a hatred for his father. This close bond with his mother gradually assumes Oedipal overtones and stunts Paul's emotional response towards other women in his life, thus leaving him unable to have fulfilling relationships with them, though he does attempt to break free from his mother's emotional prison.

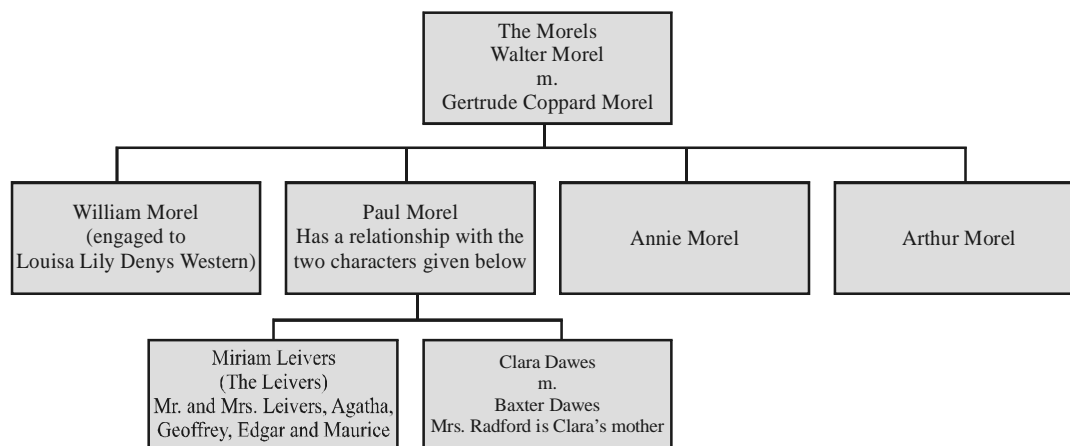
The actual process of writing the novel proved to be difficult and full of interruptions for Lawrence. He began working on it in September 1910, coinciding with the closing stages of his mother's illness, only to discontinue it. In March 1911, still grieving his mother's death, he resumed a new draft which was also abandoned. He tried yet again in November 1911, and it was almost a year later, in late autumn 1912, when, after having met Frieda, and after extensive revisions suggested by his editor Edward Garnett, he finally finished the novel and changed the title from *Paul Morel* to the more meaningful *Sons and Lovers*. The deeply personal and disturbing nature of his work was evident to him and he wrote to Garnett, "It's the tragedy of thousands of young men in England," (*Letters i.* 476).

*Sons and Lovers* marks a culmination of Lawrence's early phase as a novelist and along with *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1921), it remains one of his mostly highly regarded works. In terms of his style, this is a novel where we find a coalescing of the realistic narration of the traditional novel with the nuanced approach of the modern psychological novel.

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### 3.1.5 Characters: A Sneak Peek

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### 3.1.6 Chapter-wise Critical Summary

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#### ➤ **Book –I: Chapter – 1: The Early Married Life of the Morels**

Chapter-1 introduces the Morels – Walter and Gertrude, and their two children William and Anne. Gertrude is pregnant with her third child. We also get a glimpse of an unhappy marriage. Gertrude had married beneath her, and the stark differences between her and Walter are now beginning to crack open their relationship. Walter is spirited and physical, while Gertrude reserved, puritanical and intellectual. This chapter also gives the book its sense of place – Bestwood, a little Nottinghamshire town that is a thinly veiled representation of Lawrence’s own native village of Eastwood. The opening lines – “‘The Bottoms’ succeeded to ‘Hell Row’” – create the ambience of a domestic and pre-industrial mining town. The strong maternal bond that William has with Gertrude is highlighted when he is proud and happy that his attractive mother accompanies him to the wakes, but when she leaves, though he still stays back, somehow he doesn’t feel as happy anymore. Later he brings two egg cups that he won as prize, as a gift for her. The chapter ends with a violent quarrel between the Morels that crystallizes their mutual hatred.

#### **Chapter – 2: The Birth of Paul, and Another Battle**

There is a two-directional contradictory movement in this chapter. The marital

discord between the Morels reaches a crescendo, with growing quarrels between them on the one hand, and on the other hand, this chapter depicts the birth of the Morels' third child Paul, who will later of course, become the protagonist of the story. Things come to such a pass between Gertrude and Walter Morel that they both develop a hard bitterness against each other and their relationship reaches a point of no-return. While Walter is clearly the aggressor, and the one who causes so much trouble for his wife, in terms of their spirit however, Gertrude emerges far stronger than her husband. Once when she had left home with her children in exasperation as Walter had kicked William, Gertrude looks at Paul's innocent baby face and realizes, "in some far inner lace of her soul, that she and her husband were guilty." And so, she pledged "With all her force, with all her soul she would make up to it for having brought it into the world unloved."

### **Chapter – 3: The Casting Off of Morel – The Taking on of William**

Morel suffers from an inflammation of his brain due to which he is incapacitated, and for a while, he is unable to go to the mines. During this financially strained period of his convalescence however, Mrs. Morel slowly begins to realize that she can fend for herself even when Morel, the breadwinner of the house, is bedridden and incapacitated. This leads to a subtle and gradual shift in their equation. Thus while the frequent and violent quarrels between them abates substantially, it also means that Gertrude begins to love Walter lesser and lesser. This growing distance between them is coterminous with their first born William growing up into a competent and strong young lad. There is a crucial occasion in the chapter when Gertrude puts her foot down and does not let Walter thrash William on the basis of complaints from a neighbour. This casting off of Walter Morel both in the sense that she no longer felt dependent on him and also her growing fondness and preference for William to fill up her life provides the title of this chapter. But crucially the chapter ends with William having got a job in London and his impending departure from Bestwood. Mrs. Morel's intense and almost passionate dependence upon her elder son foreshadows her relationship with Paul later in the novel. Also, their fourth child Arthur is born.

### **Chapter – 4: The Young Life of Paul.**

The heavily autobiographical portrait of Paul Morel emerges in this chapter. It is a picture of an overly sensitive, artistic boy who has trouble fitting into the coarse environment of Bestwood. He shares an intense bond with his mother, and the oedipal overtones of this relationship are very clearly delineated from this chapter



onwards. He is initially dependent upon his sister Annie, which in a way, foreshadows his dependence upon his mother later in the novel. In fact, this childhood portrait of Paul is significant in its anticipation of many of his traits that will become apparent later on. In a curious incident, Paul accidentally breaks Annie's doll. Instead of being apologetic to Annie, Paul becomes strangely destructive and proposes to burn the broken doll as a sacrificial rite. In a way, Paul will continue to hate those whom he hurts. There is an instance in this chapter where Paul goes to collect his father's salary from the mining company's office but recoils from the masculine physicality of the interaction there. With the money coming in from William at least in these early days, the Morels move out from the Bottoms to a pleasanter house on top of a hill. William arrives from London, laden with gifts, but the domestic harmony is short lived. Quarrels between the Morels continue and at one point William threatens to beat up his father if he touches his mother again. Though this flashpoint is diffused by Gertrude, yet Lawrence succeeds in showing different dimensions of the same event, in that she may seek to control this father-son rivalry for some kind of emotional fulfilment or compensation. Walter Morel realizes his increasing isolation within the family but he reacts perversely by becoming even more coarse than before.

#### **Chapter – 5: Paul Launches into Life**

Walter Morel injures his foot and is hospitalized. With him away, the house seems to be a haven of exceptional peace and harmony for Gertrude and the children. Presently, Paul is fourteen and his mother asks him to search for a job in the advertisements in the local newspapers. Paul and his mother go to Nottingham for a job interview at the office of a surgical appliances manufacturer. Throughout this chapter, there are references to Paul's extreme shyness and oversensitivity. The journey to Nottingham with his mother is satisfying and happy, though there are minor problems. Lawrence hints at the amorous overtones in their relationship. As Mrs. Morel takes money out of her purse, Paul watches her carefully, and the narrator describes how "his heart contracted with pain of love for her". Again, on the train, "he was sensible all the time of having her opposite him. Suddenly their eyes met, and she smiled to him – a rare, intimate smile, beautiful with brightness and love. Then each looked out of the window." And again, even more directly, they "walked down Station Street, feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together." Meanwhile, Paul gets the job and begins working as a "Spiral" – someone who was required to translate French letters of orders and requisitions into English. Though he is very shy to begin with, after a while, he gets along fine and enjoys himself at work, though the long hours and unsanitary working conditions make him sick and pale.

## **Chapter – 6: Death in the Family**

William brings Lily Weston home but it is an unsuccessful trip, as nobody really likes her, nor does she feel comfortable with them. Due to the presence of Lily, there is a change in the equation between William and Mrs. Morel – the latter now relying more on Paul, and feeling more and more distant from William. She seems unable to forgive or accept the presence of another girl in his life. Later, Mrs. Morel proposes to visit Wiley Farm, where the Leivers Live Like Paul, Miriam too is shy and sensitive, but she will bring out a complicated response in Paul later on. William and Lily come back for a second trip to Bestwood, and though William still plans to marry her, there are cracks in their relationship. William prophetically predicts that if he were to die, she would not waste too much time remembering him. Later in October, when William comes home again, alone, his health begins to deteriorate. Within days of his return to London, a telegram reaches Mrs. Morel informing her of William's failing health. He dies suddenly of pneumonia and a skin infection called erysipelas. For the first few months, Mrs. Morel is in a state of shock after such a sudden bereavement and seems to withdraw from life, but when Paul too, falls ill with pneumonia, she is jolted back to life. She nurses him back to health and from now onwards, her life is rooted in Paul.

## **➤ Book –II: Chapter – 7: Lad-And-Girl Love**

This chapter also marks the beginning of Book – II of the novel, a phase where Paul will come into his own and rightfully become the 'hero' of the book. With William's death he becomes the centre of Mrs. Morel's life. At the same time, he becomes closer to Miriam and her mother, Mrs. Leivers. The resultant tension in Paul's characterization where he is pulled in different directions becomes the central focus of the novel, and it is for us to witness what choices Paul makes from here on. Miriam's sexual inhibitions are also explored in this chapter repeatedly. Once when she takes Paul to the family swing, though he soars in freedom, she finds it impossible to let go and surrender herself into Paul's hands. Although Paul will feel inspired by Miriam and also attracted by her, it is this inhibition which will mar their relationship in course of time. Her natural intensity towards most things around her will stifle Paul, and also scare Mrs. Morel that if she does not stop Miriam's growing closeness with Paul, she will not only "suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left" but also, more importantly, usurp her position in his life. During their trip to the Mablethorpe Cottage by the seaside, both Gertrude and Annie scorn her. On

their walk back to the cottage, Paul is filled with desire for Miriam, but he senses something in her that prevents him from kissing her or expressing his feelings for her in any way. Thus while he feels intensely attracted to her, he is also repelled by her and craves to go back to his jolly family that brings out his normal happy self.

### **Chapter – 8: Strife in Love**

Clara Dawes is introduced briefly in this chapter. Paul runs into her and Miriam and is immediately struck by her beauty. Miriam notices his attraction for the older and stronger Clara, but later, Paul evasively criticizes her for being badly dressed. As the title of the chapter suggests, the tension in the Paul-Miriam relationship heightens in this chapter. They are both drawn to each other but are held back by a strange and strong kind of inhibition and are unable to be physically intimate. In Paul's case it is the fierce jealousy and possessiveness of his mother that renders him unable to break free from it. On the evening when Miriam comes to visit him, though Paul forgets the bread in the oven because he was busy flirting with the earthy Beatrice, yet it is Miriam who is blamed for his carelessness by Mrs. Morel. In one of the most overtly oedipal scenes of the novel, Mrs. Morel accuses him of being obsessed with Miriam. Paul pleads by claiming that he only likes to talk to Miriam but does not love her. They embrace closely and Paul passionately kisses Mrs. Morel on her throat, and she kisses him back. Walter Morel enters and sneers at their closeness, and father and son are about to come to blows, which is prevented only by Mrs. Morel's suspiciously timely fit of fainting. This chapter also shows Lawrence's warmth and respect towards the common miners and their activities in the reckoning scene, where Walter Morel and the other miners of his stall divide the money among themselves with utmost honesty despite being poor and needy.

### **Chapter – 9: Defeat of Miriam**

Yet another sequence of events resulting in the same unconsummated passion between Paul and Miriam is recorded in this chapter. Lawrence is possibly trying to show how, whatever might be the reasons, this relationship is doomed. Paul torments Miriam by telling her that they should not meet too often but then the very next week he proposes marriage to Miriam. But she refuses, sensing that he is doing so only under duress, because he is concerned that it may not be socially acceptable to be spending so much time together without marrying each other. This chapter marks the beginning of the end of the Paul-Miriam relationship. In an effort to test Paul, Miriam tempts him by getting him to meet the attractive Clara, because she believes

at heart, that Paul's need for her is greater than such temptations. But their relationship flourishes before her very eyes as they meet frequently at Willey Farm, after Clara's initial haughtiness and Paul's resultant discomfort. After this Paul withdraws from Miriam even more. This chapter also presents Annie's marriage with Leonard and Arthur's courtship of Beatrice Wyld. After Annie's marriage, the Morels are very lonely, leading Paul to feel even more responsible for his mother's happiness and emotional well being.

### **Chapter – 10: Clara**

Paul wins the first prize in the prestigious winter exhibition held at the Nottingham Castle. Mrs. Morel is overjoyed and deems it to be as much her success as Paul's. Mr. Morel too is happy and awed by Paul's success but his feeling of being an outsider in his own family will be compounded after this event, as Mrs. Morel will pull out all stops to push Paul upwards into the middle class. Paul however idealistically believes that it is the working class which has the vital life force and human warmth. Meanwhile Arthur marries Beatrice Wyld after she becomes pregnant. One day Paul visits Clara at her mother, Mrs. Radford's house, and is shocked to learn that Clara is a menial lace weaver. He encounters Clara's vulnerability for the first time and that opens another dimension in their relationship. He insists on helping her get her supervisory job back at Jordan's. But though she becomes closer to Paul, the other shop girls resent her and cut her out of their plans of gifting Paul a box of paints. Clara feels hurt that she did not even know that it was Paul's birthday and later sends him a book of poetry. Paul is deeply moved by the gift, more so because he knows she has gone beyond her means to buy it. Later on one of their walks, Clara confides in Paul about the story of her marriage but Paul sympathises with her husband Baxter as much as he does with Clara. Clara too, on the other hand, tells Paul that Miriam desires him but it is he who never approached her directly for a relationship, and kept her in a limbo of platonic idealism.

### **Chapter – 11: The Test on Miriam**

This is a chapter that brings the sexual incompatibility of Paul and Miriam to the fore. With the advent of spring, Paul is back to Miriam. On a stormy evening, when Paul and Miriam are together, he loves the dark as he feels the individual is dissolved into an eternal being. But Miriam hates it and fears that the damp and cold will make Paul feel sick. Later when they are alone together in Miriam's grandmother's cottage, Paul is transfixed by Miriam's beauty. They play man and wife with gay abandon,

but on each occasion of their love making, Miriam feels as if she should offer her body as an act of sacrifice or duty to Paul because he wants her, and not because she feels any desire herself. Just like Paul, she too is deeply affected by her mother and is reacting as a result of her sexually repressive indoctrination. After this, though Paul feels he should be loyal to Miriam, and that he belongs to her in some way, he sees her less frequently. In a significant and symbolic moment, Paul goes out into the garden and is intoxicated by the smell of the white lilies but he is somehow unable to touch them, analogous to his relationship with Miriam. But he plucks one of the purple irises without much thought and promptly returns indoors and announces to his mother that he is leaving Miriam. They exchange bitter words between them, each feeling utterly let down by the turn of events.

### **Chapter – 12: Passion**

Financially and artistically, Paul is prospering. Emotionally, after leaving Miriam, he goes straight to Clara. Once they go on an outing to the river Trent. Though the narrator does not explicitly describe it, they make love, signaled by the fact that Clara's carnation corsage is crushed. However, despite his relationship with Clara, he still visits Willey Farm, as he feels himself to be a part of their family. Very insensitively, Paul discusses his affair with Miriam without caring how she might be feeling after having an affair with him so recently. They discuss various relationships – Paul believes that unlike Baxter Dawes, he knows how to awaken passion in Clara. When Miriam tries to reason that they may be incompatible just as his own parents were, Paul again flares up and says that even if for a short while, there was passion in his parents' marriage. Later, Clara comes to visit the Morels. Strangely, Mrs. Morel is cordial with Clara, possibly because she does not mind allowing her son's physical needs as long as she controls him emotionally. Suddenly, Miriam also drops in at the Morels'. Both Mrs. Morel and Clara are critical of her, but Paul guiltily tries to be nice to her. A few days after this incident, Paul and Clara are late in returning from the theatre and decide to spend that night at Mrs. Radford's place where Paul watches a naked Clara and shares intense moments of intimacy with her.

### **Chapter – 13: Baxter Dawes**

Paul runs into Baxter Dawes in a pub and the two almost come to blows. The simmering tension continues at work too, where Baxter ends up assaulting Mr. Jordan, who was trying to save Paul. But when Paul is called as a witness in court, he upsets Mr. Jordan by saying that his rivalry with Baxter is due to Clara. After

being initially upset with him, Clara falls even more strongly in love with Paul. But Paul now begins to drift apart from Clara, telling his mother that all women were out to claim his soul. While Clara looks for permanence and commitment in the relationship, Paul's needs are more specifically sexual. Paul encounters Baxter twice more in the chapter and during the latter he is knocked unconscious by Baxter. When Paul regains consciousness, ironically he feels a strange kind of wonderment, almost akin to his feelings after lovemaking. While Paul convalesces with a broken shoulder, both Miriam and Clara visit him, but he seems indifferent to both. After a few days, Paul goes on a vacation with his friend, but when he returns he finds his mother seriously ill with a possibly cancerous tumour in her stomach. Paul is terrified about what the future holds for him.

#### **Chapter – 14: The Release**

Paul visits Baxter in a hospital in Sheffield where he is recovering from typhoid. Despite their bitter and violent past, the two men share a deep unspoken bond. While Baxter sympathizes with Paul about his mother's illness, Paul can feel Baxter's sorrow on losing Clara. Later when Paul tells Clara about the ailing Baxter, she is ridden by guilt and accuses him of never having loved her as much as Baxter did. Meanwhile Mrs. Morel is dying a slow painful death with stomach cancer, though she is contented with Paul's success. Paul though, is deeply distressed to witness his mother's terminal illness from such close quarters. There is a fluidity in the equations shared by the main characters at this point. While Mrs. Morel lay dying, Baxter was recuperating. Clara was getting closer to her former husband and moving away from Paul, and finally, Baxter and Paul were becoming close friends. As the months pass, Mrs. Morel's condition deteriorates rapidly until she only seems to be a pair of large eyes. Unable to bear witnessing her pain anymore, Paul, along with Annie, crush all the morphine pills at home and give it to Mrs. Morel. With Mrs. Morel's death, not only is the anchor of Paul's life gone but also his strongest controlling factor. Paul finally breaks up with Clara, who vows to build a better future with Baxter.

#### **Chapter – 15: Derelict**

After his mother's death and his break with Clara, there is nothing really left for Paul at home, or at work. The Morel household breaks up, Walter Morel leaves to stay with a friendly family in Bestwood while Paul drifts to Nottingham and takes lodgings there. A depressed Paul analyses that only art or marriage and children can bring him back to a certain degree of normalcy. But he is unable to paint anymore

and wonders if there is anyone who would be right for him as a partner in marriage. One day he meets Miriam at church. Though they are old friends and Miriam had been a spiritual anchor for him in the past, he knows now that they are not suited for each other. Miriam still believes that Paul belongs to her and will eventually come back to her but Paul goes away. As Paul walks down in the dark night he is aware of his existence as a miniscule part of a much larger whole. While his tiny presence may not matter much, yet he does exist. Paul remembers his mother and calls out for her but he knows that she has diffused into nothingness now. In an ambiguous movement, Paul quickly turns away from the darkness and heads towards the “faintly humming, glowing town, quickly”. This ending may be read either as one of hope, or of despair, depending upon our assessment of Paul’s character.

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### **3.1.7 Analysis of Major Characters**

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#### **✓ Paul Morel**

Paul is the third of the Morel children in *Sons and Lovers*, and an autobiographical portrait of Lawrence himself. In many ways the chief focus of the novel is the coming of age of Paul Morel, and it has often been alternately described as a *bildungsroman* or a *kunstlerroman*. As a child the sensitive Paul has difficulty assimilating with the rough and tumble of the masculine world of the Bestwood collieries. At home, he is deeply affected by the marital discord between his parents. This leads him to form a strange mixture of sympathy, love and dependence upon his stern, disciplinarian mother Gertrude Morel. But this bond is so very overpowering a presence in Paul’s life that he is unable to sustain independent relationships with other women towards whom he is attracted. It is through Paul that his mother seeks to realise her dream of moving socially upward. Although he begins as a shy child, he gains social confidence as he grows up, particularly after he begins working in an office. This new found confidence, coupled with his growing interest in art, leads him on for intellectual stimulation and company to Miriam Leivers and her mother Mrs. Leivers. But his mother strongly disapproves of his relationship with Miriam, whom she feels threatened by. Faced with a choice, Paul unceremoniously rejects the emotional and spiritual Miriam and falls back upon his mother. With Clara too, Paul shares a predominantly sexual bond. The oedipal theme of the novel is one of its central strands, and one that defines Paul’s character. He feels for his mother as one might feel for a lover, and this streak in him incapacitates him from forging fresh linkages.

His relationship with his father is fraught with bitterness and hatred. Paul squarely blames him for his mother's misery, and even implores her on occasion not to share the same bed with him. It is only after his mother's death that he finds himself bereft of her anchoring presence in his life. Whether he chooses to drown in his sorrow for his mother or whether he moves on to explore a new life has been left open to interpretation.

#### ✓ **Gertrude Morel**

Married to Walter Morel, Gertrude Morel is the mother of the five Morel children. She is intensely attracted to Walter in her youth and marries him for passion. But within months of her marriage, she is contemptuously informed by Walter's mother that he has lied to her and he neither owns the house they live in, nor makes as much money as he has given her to believe. The marriage soon spirals downwards into a mess and Walter turns into an abusive alcoholic. Things come to a pass when in a fit of rage, Walter throws a heavy wooden drawer at his wife which causes a deep gash in her forehead. He immediately sobers and tries to make amends but it is too late by then. Gertrude walks out of her home and though she has no option but to come back the next morning, the night spent outside her home has been epiphanic in that she realises that she should live for her children. Looking at the infant Paul, she realises that it is her duty to look after him and care for him even if she has grave differences with her husband. After this Gertrude gradually and irretrievably withdraws from her husband and devotes all her energies to the upbringing of her children, particularly her two sons William and Paul. She pins all her hopes initially on William, who grows up to be a strapping, handsome young man with all the social vitality and love for dancing of his father. But when he moves away to London, marries and then shockingly dies, Mrs. Morel slowly turns all her energies and affections to Paul. She lives her dreams through Paul and there are several instances throughout the novel that she treats him like a lover. So when he is attracted to Miriam, Mrs. Morel strongly disapproves. Lawrence has interestingly chosen the name Gertrude as it echoes the name of Hamlet's mother, thus once again, suggesting the same erotic overtones as existed between Hamlet and his mother.

#### ✓ **Walter Morel**

Walter Morel comes across as a strong but contradictory character who is alternately brutal and tender with his family. Lawrence's description of the young Walter Morel is of an instinctual and unrestrained handsome man, to whom the



reserved Gertrude is irresistibly attracted. Gertrude describes him as a man whose “flame of life” “flowed from off his flesh like the flame from a candle”. This is the Walter Morel who, as a sensuous young man, is ready and so pleasant with everybody. But as the marriage becomes more embittered, Walter turns increasingly brutal and anti social, resorting to violence, abuse and alcoholism. Consequently, his sons, particularly Paul, is wary and resentful of him and treats him as an outsider. There are instances of Morel’s tenderness towards his family as he potters around the house doing odd jobs. During such times, his children gather around him warmly and these are occasional instances of domestic harmony that the novel is peppered with. One of the keys to Morel’s character is his attitude towards authority, which he found hateful. Thus whenever Morel is left unfettered, it is his natural tender self that is seen. On the other hand, whenever he feels compelled by any kind of authoritarian or controlling figure, he explodes into bitterness and violence. Many of his arguments with Gertrude also take this trajectory. Thus, Lawrence’s attitude towards Walter Morel’s character is ambiguous. While the narrative makes it quite clear that Walter Morel is extremely abusive and brutal, yet it also suggests that there are redeeming shades to his nature, and that his violence often stems from his inability to handle dominating behaviour rather than any innate cruelty.

#### ✓ **William Morel**

William, the eldest of the Morels, is Mrs. Morel’s first son and lover. As William grows up, Gertrude first pins all her hopes on him. Strikingly similar to his father, William is handsome, athletic, hardworking and social. He works initially as a clerk in the Bestwood Co-operative Society office, but later moves to Nottingham, and then to London, with a lucrative job at a lawyer’s office. In London, William gets engaged to the pretty but shallow Lily. Though he soon realizes his folly, yet he feels obliged to marry her as he is obligated to honour his commitment. This trait in William sets him as a foil to Paul, who will prove himself to be a non conformist, unaffected by social conventions. At such a juncture of William’s life, he suddenly falls ill, and mysteriously dies of pneumonia and the rare disease erysipelas. It is under such circumstances that a shocked and bereaved Mrs. Morel turns all her attention towards her second son Paul, who now takes William’s position in her life.

#### ✓ **Miriam Leivers**

In a certain sense, *Sons and Lovers* may be said to be an exploration of Paul Morel’s relationship with three women who play pivotal roles in his life. The first

of these women is of course Gertrude Morel, Paul's mother. The second woman whom Paul encounters and who has a lasting influence on his life is Miriam Leivers. Miriam is the first young woman Paul is attracted to. She is a shy, sensitive and romantic girl, who lives in the neighbouring Wiley Farm. She is attracted by Paul's intellectual and his artistic talent, which she steadfastly encourages. Paul too feels inspired by Miriam's interest in his art and it leads him to be more confident about his abilities. She is also the first person who causes Paul to move away from his mother. This expectedly causes a great deal of resentment in Gertrude Morel, who feels challenged in her emotional control over Paul, for which she never forgives Miriam. There are obvious repercussions on the Paul-Miriam relationship. Mrs. Morel is openly jealous of Miriam and satirically observes that Miriam seems to want to absorb all of Paul for herself and finds it abnormal. Paul too, almost reflecting his mother's constant resentment of Miriam, feels stifled by her intense spirituality and her emotional over dependence on him. After being interminably confused about Miriam eventually Paul rejects her with a cruelly worded letter where he describes her as a mystic nun, whom he is spiritually aligned to, but with whom he cannot ever be capable of physical intimacy.

#### ✓ **Clara Dawes**

Towards the close of the Miriam episode, Paul begins to turn towards Clara Dawes. This coincides with Mrs. Morel's realisation after Paul's rift with Miriam that it will not be possible for her to hold on to her son's affections exclusively. Clara, Baxter Dawes's estranged wife and a member of the Suffragette movement, she is Lawrence's portrayal of the New Woman. Frankly sensual, forthright and a woman of this world, Clara is diametrically opposed to Miriam. It is due to Clara's influence that Paul is able to shake off his own physical awkwardness. But even with her, Paul is unable to give himself completely, and he confesses as much to his mother when he says that he would never be able to do so completely as long as she was alive. When his mother dies, he realises that has never learnt to live without her, and so, in a sense, he has never learnt to live. The relationship with Clara too inevitably ends. As the feminist critic Kate Millet has pointed out, Lawrence seems to use the women in this novel as instruments to show Paul's growth as a character, and he seems to discard them arbitrarily. If Miriam helped Paul delve into his spiritual and artistic capabilities, Clara freed him from his physical and sexual hesitation. But having served this purpose, Paul seems unable to forge a full-fledged relationship with her, or with any other woman. In the end, unable to find the

commitment she desires from Paul, Clara goes back to her husband, Baxter, with whom she pledges to build a strong relationship.

✓ **Annie Morel**

Paul's older sister. When their mother lies dying toward the end of the novel, she and Paul decide to give her an overdose of morphine.

✓ **Arthur Morel**

Paul's younger brother and the youngest of the Morel sons. He is handsome but immature. He recklessly joins the army only to leave it soon.

✓ **Louisa Lily Denys Western**

Lily is the vain and materialistic girlfriend of William Morel. She comes to visit the Morels and stays with them for a while, but her arrogance puts William off. After his death, she soon forgets about him and moves on with her life.

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### **3.1.8. Human Relationships in *Sons and Lovers***

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Like all of Lawrence's other novels, *Sons and Lovers* too, is essentially a novel of human relationships. From the unhappy marriage of the Morels to the oedipal overtones of the Paul-Gertrude relationship and Paul's resultant inability to successfully handle relationships with other women in his life, the central focus of the novel rests in the minute explication of these personal relationships among its characters. In order to understand the dynamics of the various human relationships that are portrayed in the novel, you must keep in mind some of Lawrence's basic ideas about relationships. For Lawrence a new form of human consciousness could only be achieved on the basis of authentic human relationships. To that end, he had radically different views from the conventional mores of his times. He was a strident critic of traditional Victorian moral and ethical values

Lawrence's depiction of relationships is informed by his understanding of sexuality, religion and philosophy. Drawing his beliefs from his readings of Schopenhauer, William James, Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Ernst Haeckel, Lawrence saw a fundamental duality between flesh and spirit, and he believed that human relationships are hampered by social and religious strictures. In 1915, Lawrence published a volume of six essays entitled *The Crown*, that encapsulated his philosophical ideas about human nature and relationships.

For Lawrence human life is split between a conscious rational essence and an unconscious, biological (natural) existence. Lawrence placed his trust on instinct as the fundamental governing principle of all human relationships and emphasized on the importance of sexual relationship as an important means towards an authentic union between man and woman. It is through a fulfilling sexual relationship, according to Lawrence, that man may attain a sense of human dignity. Thus a fulfilling physical relationship can lead to a sense of self actualization and act as a solution against the dehumanising and impersonal modern civilization.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence not only tackles a Freudian oedipal relationship between Paul and his mother, he also portrays Paul's relationships with Miriam and Clara, on the corresponding planes of spirit and flesh. In his frank treatment of sexuality in man-woman relationships, he was undoubtedly influenced by Thomas Hardy, who broke new ground in Victorian fiction with his articulation of sexuality and the unconscious. While Hardy still employed indirect and veiled narrative strategies, Lawrence took this legacy forward and was much more forthright and direct in his depiction of sexual relationships in many of his novels, including *Sons and Lovers*. In doing so, Lawrence rejected the doctrines of the traditional Christian religion and may be said to be one of the precursors to the sexual revolution of the twentieth century.

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### ***3.1.9 Symbolism in Sons and Lovers***

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A symbol may be defined as a literary device that contains several layers of meaning, often concealed at first sight, and is representative of several other aspects, concepts or traits than those that are visible in the literal translation alone. Symbol is using an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning. As a novelist, Lawrence is known for his deft handling of symbols that imbue his stories with a more complex and deeper meaning, as we may note in this novel too.

In the first chapter, when William proudly gifts his mother the two blue egg cups that he has won in the fair, it is a symbol of his reverential love for his mother and his anxious need to please her. Mrs. Morel is indeed very happy with the delicate egg cups. This is followed soon after by a drunken Walter Morel coming home with a gingerbread for his wife, but it of course leaves her unaffected, thus depicting Morel's inadequacy in pleasing his wife.

Once the Morels move to Scargill Street, the ash-tree beside their house stands for the sinister and dark aspects of life. It is symbolic of the dark, mysterious forces of nature which are the foreboders of tragedy in human-life. It is symbolic of the disharmony that exists between the husband and wife in the Morel family. Although Mrs. Morel is very fond of the ash tree, the children are terrified of it. The persistent bickering of the parents becomes a terror for the children, who lying awake upstairs are unable to coherently apprehend as to what would happen ultimately. The tree becomes a symbol of the inner terror of children who strike and moan inwardly. It also prophesies the future doom which is to beset the Morel family.

The Swing at Willey Farm is symbolic of the vacillating relationship between Paul and Miriam. The forward and backward movement of the swing stands for the moments of their emotional and spiritual union only to be followed by their inability to hold on to each other for a very long time. While Paul enjoys swinging with abandon, Miriam is unable to let go of herself, which seems to suggest a degree of frigidity that Paul will later accuse her of. Miriam's inability to relax is also suggested when she is afraid to feed the hens in Wiley Farm although Paul assures her that it will not hurt her.

Natural images and symbols abound in the novel. One evening, when Paul and Miriam are on a walk together, they witness a large orange moon behind them. Both Paul and Miriam are aroused by the sight of the moon. But though Miriam is also deeply affected, still Paul fails to get across to her. Thus the orange moon becomes a symbol of aroused passion in Paul. Mrs. Morel too once witnesses a "blinding August moon" when she is locked out of the house by Walter just before the birth of Paul. Mrs. Morel feels herself melting away in the moon light along with the child. Later when she is allowed into the house again, she smiles seeing her face smeared with the pollen dust of lilies. The yellow dust is symbolic of Nature's benediction for both Gertrude and the unborn Paul and it also suggests their oneness with the natural order of things.

One of the major symbols in this novel is the ubiquitous use of flowers. Often they are used to prefigure events that will occur very soon after the appearance of the flower. For example, a black flower is described before the death of William, clearly symbolising the death and grief that is about to enter into the Morel family. In the same way, red and white flowers are described usually before romantic moments of physical union. Another important flower symbol occurs in the scene where Clara,

Paul and Miriam are walking together in a field with its many “clusters of strong flowers” which they begin to pick. Paul chooses his flowers scientifically and objectively. He has a spontaneous and direct contact with the flowers. Miriam picks the flowers reverentially yet she seems to suck out the life from them. Her bunches thus lack elegance. But Clara does not pick them at all, boldly declaring that flowers are not to be picked at all because it kills them.

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### 3.1.10 Classifying *Sons and Lovers* as a Novel

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#### ➤ As a Psychological Novel

One of the dominant impressions we form of *Sons and Lovers* is that it is a typical example of both psychological as well as autobiographical fiction. Paul’s oedipal relationship with his mother forms the core of the novel around which the rest of the story is fleshed out. The term ‘oedipus complex’ derives from Sigmund Freud’s theory that the child, especially the male child, is sexually attracted to his mother, but represses this strong emotion. This repression however, is never complete and finds expression later in life. In *Sons and Lovers*, we find Paul being enamoured of his mother Gertrude, as one would be of a lover. In keeping with the autobiographical note in Lawrence’s fiction, this relationship is modelled on Lawrence’s own experiences. In ‘*A Personal Record*’, Jessie Chambers, upon whom the character of Miriam is based, quotes Lawrence as having said about his mother, “I’ve loved her like a lover. That’s why I could never love you”. This is in fact corroborated by Lawrence’s own letter to his publisher and friend, Edward Garnett, where he often wrote about this strong bond with his mother. It is in fact so overpowering an affinity that he is unable to form wholesome, fulfilling relationships with any other women. As a child, Paul is deeply in awe and admiration of his mother. Even when he grows up and feels attracted towards other women, he is in constant need of his mother’s approval. His relationship with Miriam is thwarted chiefly because he does not get this approval. It is different in the case of Clara, since it is chiefly a physical relationship more than anything else. When Mrs. Morel dies, Paul is left unmoored, and finds himself at a crossroads. The open ending of the novel has been variously interpreted in term of either a negation or an affirmation. We might choose to read it as the latter as one of the strands of the novel has been to trace Paul’s emotional crisis stemming from his complicated relationship with Gertrude Morel, and her

death provides him with an opportunity to break free of her psychological stranglehold and redefine his own selfhood and identity. The last lines are positive and affirmative:

“His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the *darkness*, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, *glowing* town, *quickly*.” (Emphasis mine)

These last lines clearly spell out a message of growth, hope and moving ahead for Paul.

### ➤ As a Bildungsroman

Bildungsroman is a German word which means “novel of education” or “novel of formation.” *Sons and Lovers* has been considered to be a classic example of this genre in the twentieth century.

Some characteristics of a typical specimen of this genre are the following:

- the growing child in these novels is often orphaned or fatherless — if not literally, then metaphorically
- the journey from the home is often a journey away from provinciality
- money or financial independence are important factors
- many protagonists are tested not only by their new surroundings, or by money, but also by love — many times a pure love is contrasted to a destructive/unhealthy one
- the central obstacle in many such novels is contained within the protagonist himself
- most protagonists experience some sort of epiphany, where a moment of clarity helps them break through their delusions and changes them, either spiritually or in terms of their conduct, or both
- the ending is often ambiguous, ambivalent, or lacks decisive closure
- many Victorian *bildungsroman* were considered at least partly autobiographical  
(<http://web.stanford.edu/~steener/su02/english132/Bildungsroman.htm>)

Of course, some novels of this genre follow these parameters more faithfully than others. Essentially, a *bildungsroman* is a “novel of formation” or “education” which follows the development of the protagonist’s mind and character in the passage from childhood through various experiences (usually involving a

spiritual crisis) into maturity and the recognition of his/her role in the world. Considered in the light of these parameters, it is clear that the journey of Paul Morel from childhood to maturity follows this trajectory of the bildungsroman.

Paul's struggles are manifold- social, economic, emotional and spiritual. Egged on by his mother, he aspires to break out of the mining town of Bestwood and has no intention of following his father's footsteps in his mining profession. Apart from his school, Paul learns from various sources. 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. But the path to the fulfilment of his desire to become an artist and to seriously earn from it is not easy. He begins by working in a dingy Nottingham firm translating French letters into English, but finds satisfaction in painting. In this he finds ardent support and inspiration from Miriam, with whom he shares his knowledge of and enthusiasm for art and literature. The novel progressively shows Paul's growth and success as an artist and this leads Paul to take himself more seriously in his painting.

In its core, a bildungsroman consists of a quest for identity. The novel portrays three central relationships in Paul's life – with his mother, with Miriam Leivers and with Clara Dawes. While his mother functions as his emotional anchor, it is with Miriam that he discovers companionship and the pleasure of interacting with someone his own age. But his relationship with Miriam was doomed from the moment his mother became hostile about it. When he meets Clara, he sheds his earlier physical hesitation and achieves sexual consummation for the first time. Each of these relationships takes him further in his spiritual growth. *Sons and Lovers* has been criticised for focussing on Paul's character at the cost of all these other characters, but we may remember here that it is inherent in the format of the bildungsroman to have characters other than the protagonist in 'instrumental' rather than 'independent' functions.

In his essay 'Sons and Lovers as Bildungroman', critic Richard D. Beards comments that there are "four distinct trials which the Bildungsroman protagonist must traditionally master - vocation, mating, religion and identity". He defines these as the four axes through which the protagonist matures. Paul has a distinct sense of religion. He explains 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.

Finally, as the novel concludes, though it is left open ended, yet we may discern that Paul has worked through various emotional and spiritual crises, and that the distant twinkling lights of the city are symbolic of the way ahead for him.

### ➤ **As a Working Class Novel**

Lawrence's novels provide a rare insider's view of working class life in the English Midlands. The backdrop of the pre-industrial small colliery town of Bestwood is portrayed with extraordinary attention to historical and geographical detail, as this was the kind of mining community Lawrence himself grew up in. In fact, *Sons and Lovers* has often been regarded as the first working class novel in English.

The novel opens with a very evocative description of the Bottoms, where the Morels live. Both Although Walter Morel works as a coal miner, his wife Gertrude aspires to break out of this world and dreams that her sons will carve a better future for themselves away from the mines. Having come from the genteel middle class herself, Gertrude has never been able to adjust to her altered conditions, and after the first flush of marriage got over, she has always felt alienated by her surroundings. Walter Morel, on the other hand, stands as a representative of the working classes, embodying many of their characteristic features, such as a robust spontaneity, warmth and physical energy. Lawrence vividly portrays minute details of the typical routine of a miner – there are descriptions of the dire working conditions inside the pits, the food that Morel takes along with him, and of the utter exhaustion he feels after a day's work. He also accounts for the finances of the coal miners – how money was divided within the family, scenes of collecting money at the company office, dividing of the pay among the four butties and of the compensation he receives when he is injured. We may therefore find an accurate description of life in a turn of the century coal mining town that Bestwood was.

Considering the very different backgrounds to which the Morels belong, the outlines of a class battle are drawn within the Morel household and every confrontation between Walter and Gertrude is inevitably also tinged and complicated by this consciousness of mutual difference. Gertrude places all her hopes first on William, and then when he dies, on her second son Paul, and she considers her ambition for her sons as also a kind of vindication for her lifelong struggle in a bitter marriage.

The plot of this novel may thus be seen as operating on a dual plane – one tracing the web of relationships centred around Paul, and the other presenting a faithful portrait of working class life in the Midlands, and of the way some young men strive to break out of their life in the collieries. In the Morel family, William is the first to do so, when he secures a well paying job in London and becomes something of a gentleman. After his death, Paul charts his own trajectory as an artist and the novel concludes with him standing at the crossroads of his small town past and a possible and indeed, probable future in the city.

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### 3.1.11 Summing Up

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- *Sons and Lovers* occupies a unique position in D.H. Lawrence's work as it has variously been considered to be the last of his early novels or the first of his mature works.
- The novel deals with many themes that were considered radical in its time, celebrated most of all for its handling of the **oedipal relationship** between Paul and Gertrude Morel. This attachment takes on such pathological proportions that it affects all his other relationships with women of his own age, and even as the novel ends, Paul knows that he has not been able to break out of this bond that has alienated him and left him incapable of all other relationships
- The novel may also be considered a **bildungsroman** as it depicts the coming-of-age of Paul Morel, tracing his journey from his birth upto his adulthood, when he is ready to step into the wider world.
- One of the aspects of the novel that has unfailingly been pointed out by all critics is the **autobiographical** nature of the novel. Most of the characters have equivalents in Lawrence's own life, with Paul Morel being a faithful self portrait of Lawrence himself.
- But what one must remember is that although Paul acts as the **narratorial mouthpiece** and though the narrator seems to speak from Paul's point of view, there is enough evidence in the action of the novel that complicates and undercuts this privileging of Paul's point of view. One such instance that is often cited is Paul's rejection of Miriam. Though he cruelly breaks off all ties with her saying that she is too spiritual for him, Clara sets him right and points out that Miriam was like any other woman, and it was Paul who failed to take the relationship forward. Also, although Paul is completely sympathetic

towards his mother and the narrative too depicts the domestic abuse meted out to Gertrude, there are enough instances in the story that present the predicament of Walter Morel, who finds himself isolated in his own house by a cold and reserved spouse who does not understand him and of whom he is plainly afraid.

- Thus both the Morels are alternately agents and victims of abuse. It is this **nuanced and layered tonality** the novel has that allows for **multiple perspectives** to coexist in the same narrative. The more we discover these nuances in the novel, the more enhanced our pleasure in reading this text becomes.

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### 3.1.12 Comprehension Exercises

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- **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How can we see *Sons and Lovers* as a working class novel? Discuss.
2. Does *Sons and Lovers* deal with the Oedipus Complex? Justify your opinion with a close reading of the text.
3. Consider *Sons and Lovers* as a Bildungsroman.
4. Write a note on the women characters of *Sons and Lovers*.
5. Discuss *Sons and Lovers* as an autobiographical novel.
6. Comment on *Sons and Lovers* as a novel about human relationships.
7. Write a note on the inter relationship of class and sexuality in *Sons and Lovers*.
8. Write a note on Lawrence's use of symbols in *Sons and Lovers*.

- **Medium Length Answer Type Questions-12 Marks**

1. Write a note on the character of Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*.
2. Why do you think the Morel marriage was so unhappy? Who was more to blame? Discuss.
3. Was Walter Morel a bad man? Give your opinion and substantiate it with examples.
4. Describe Paul's relationship with his mother.
5. Write a short note on the character of William Morel.

6. Write a note on the character of Miriam Leivers.
7. Was the Paul-Clara relationship based on love or passion? Discuss.
8. Would you say Gertrude Morel was a good mother? Discuss.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. What didn't Gertrude know about Walter? Do you think she was sorry she had married him? Why?
2. Why do you think Morel cuts off William's hair? Why does that upset Gertrude so much?
3. Why was Gertrude opposed to William marrying Lily Western? Was she jealous or actually concerned about her son's future life?
4. Would you say Paul was cruel to Miriam? Give instances.
5. Why did Mrs. Morel not approve of the relationship between Paul and Miriam?
5. Describe the death of Gertrude Morel.

**Activity for the Learner**

While the chapter summaries in this Unit provide you an idea of the novel, you must read the full text.

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### 3.1.13 Suggested Reading

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**Primary Text** : *Sons and Lovers*, Worldview Critical Editions. Ed. Ashok Celly Bell, Michael. *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

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