

D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*: A Study of Abortive Love Affairs

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the theme of love gone wrong in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. It focuses on Paul Morel's entangled relationships with three women: Miriam Leivers, Clara Dawes, and his mother, Gertrude Morel. With Freudian theory and close reading of the novel, this writing illustrates how emotional dependence, inner struggle, and the Oedipus complex prevent Paul from having successful love affairs. All of these experiences—spiritual, bodily, and maternal—are manifestations of different forms of love, yet none of them makes him happier for longer than his sorrow over having loved somebody so lavishly. Lastly, the article exposes that Paul's doomed affair out of love unveils inherent deficiencies in his sense of self, independence, and emotional maturity.

Keywords: Connections, Psychodynamics, Conflicts, Infatuation, Oedipalism, Freudianism, Hamletism

INTRODUCTION

Sons and Lovers is a masterpiece of D.H. Lawrence that explores the complexities of love through the experiences of its protagonist, Paul Morel. Lawrence reveals the intricate psychological intricacies, individual challenges, and societal limitations that impede the characters' quest for enduring satisfaction in their romantic endeavors. Through deeply exploring the nuances of unsuccessful love, he exposes the obstacles and boundaries inherent in the human pursuit of love. In examining Paul's relations with Miriam Leivers, Clara Dawes, and her mother, Gertrude, the paper discovers the underlying factors contributing to these love stories' failures. It focuses on three kinds of love and their connections to the three main characters, and how it shows that the characters are fragile.

One of the central romances in *Sons and Lovers* is the relationship between Paul Morel and Miriam Leivers. Miriam, with her ethereal beauty and spiritual spirit, symbolizes the idealized image of love in Paul's imagination. But their relationship becomes a battlefield of contradicting wants and needs. Miriam's religious upbringing and inability to express what she wants affect the two of them. Paul, though, is sensual and craves a sexual connection. This tension between the physical and the spiritual is a major theme of the novel which highlights the inconsistency of these contrasting factors within a relationship.

Another important love affair in *Sons and Lovers* is Paul's obsession with Clara Dawes, who is trapped in an unhappy marriage. Their love has a taboo quality, a desire to avoid social constraints. Clara is independent and prudent, which is in direct opposition to the instruction that Paul's mother gives. Their relationship is touched with passion and freedom, but with Clara's touchstone, but the presence of Clara's separated husband and Paul's increasingly mixed feelings hold them back, and compromise their chances for togetherness and long-term happiness. Moreover, neither of them were able to express their full love for one another, due to the society and practical morals of their time further emphasizing the perception that lovers who go against society do not have a successful future. Paul Morel's relationship with his mother in *Sons and Lovers* is a complex exploration of the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex, introduced by Sigmund Freud, describes a child's unconscious desire toward the opposite-sex parent and feelings of rivalry with the same-sex parent. Paul's relationship with his mother, is marked with a strong emotional bond that approaches unhealthy and narrow-

minded. Paul, from a very young age, becomes emotionally involved with her, finding comfort, and guidance, and much of his validation, through Gertrude. The bond he has with his mother is idolizing and dependently emotional, an obsession that goes beyond the physical boundaries of a mother and son.

Gertrude, on the other hand, finds comfort and fulfilment in Paul's attention and adoration. She becomes emotionally dependent on him, seeking validation and a sense of purpose through their close bond. The lines between maternal love and romantic desire blur as Gertrude's unfulfilled marital expectations and emotional dissatisfaction drive her to seek emotional fulfilment through her son. The tension between Paul and Gertrude is made even more complex by the absence of a paternal figure in Paul's life. Gertrude is supported not by Mr. Morel, her husband and Paul's father, who seems irresponsible as a husband. His lack of intellectual and emotional depth, as well as his alcoholism, creates a gap in Gertrude's life, which Paul fills.

The characteristics of Oedipal in *Sons and Lovers* are closely related to the text, reflecting psychological complexities inherent in human nature. One of the central themes of the novel is Paul's struggle to free himself from Gertrude's emotional grip and establish healthy relationships with other women. The progressive realization that he is unable to fully individuate as a man and forge his identity outside of his mother's influence leads to unfulfilled pursuits and failed romances. In-depth exploration of specific relationships aside, the themes of psychological complexity and personal struggle are central to the novel's exploration of why Lawrence's characters struggle to find lasting fulfilment through love. Paul's internal struggles, grounded in his own ambivalence toward his mother, and desires toward her and social standards, mingle in a muddle of emotions that hinder him.

Objectives

The major objectives of this study are to deconstruct the quest for doomed love affairs in D.H. Lawrence's book *Sons and Lovers*, specifically the love affairs of the hero Paul Morel with Miriam Leivers, Clara Dawes, and his mother Gertrude. The study intends to deconstruct the psychological complexities, social constraints, and internal struggles behind the doom of these love affairs. Furthermore, it seeks to examine the three types of love pictured in the novel based on their elusive nature and unattainable positive results.

METHODOLOGY

However, this research uses a qualitative approach, entailing close examination of D.H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*. The study will scrutinize the text, and more specifically, the relationship and interaction between characters involved in failed love affairs. The primary source of data will be the novel itself, and secondary observations grounded on relevant scholarly sources. The literature review will provide an exhaustive report on the research works on *Sons and Lovers*, particularly on the psychological aspects, societal pressures, and distorted perceptions of love in the novel.

The analysis will be thematic in focus, examining Paul Morel's relationships with Miriam Leivers, Clara Dawes, and his mother, Gertrude. The research will take into account the details of these relationships, including the conflicts, desires, expectations, and social pressures that propel them to failure. It will also take into account the three types of love portrayed in the novel and how they affect the characters' pursuit of lasting happiness. The evidence will be clearly stated, giving a glimpse of the themes, characters, and complexities of *Sons and Lovers*. However, the conclusion will summarize the major observations and pinpoint the universalities of failed ambitions and challenges in love affairs.

Miriam Leivers and Gertrude Morel: The Unattainable Dreams

Paul and Miriam's relationship turns into a struggle since they want different things. Paul feels that Miriam is an ideal, almost mythological love—someone who would give him a deep emotional connection. He is impressed with her beauty and religiousness, but he feels something vital is missing between them.

Miriam is afraid of physical proximity because of her strong convictions and fears. She feels that physically being near Paul would take away her purity and make her lose control. This fear puts distance between Miriam

and Paul. Paul wishes to be nearer to him, but Miriam's hesitation irritates him and leaves him incomplete. She desires her love to be clean and spiritual, whereas Paul craves for a passionate relationship. This gap between them is a serious one, and it makes it impossible for them to ever truly bond. Paul wants to be intimate with her, but Miriam is not brave enough to do the same in return. This makes Paul ashamed of his own feelings- "He hated her, for she seemed in some way to make him despise himself" (Lawrence 179).

Paul's relationship with his mother is even more complicated. It is an exploration of the Oedipal complex, where the love and romantic desire of a mother are blended. The absence of a strict father figure serves to further compound these complications so that Paul can never form normal romantic relationships and his desires are never fulfilled. Evi Baiturohmah says that the Oedipus complex can have two extreme forms: the unconscious wish to kill the father or wed the mother. But not all cases exhibit such open symptoms. The development of the complex is mostly dependent on the nature and degree of intimacy between the son and the mother. If the child has huge sexual desires and the most emotionally accessible individual nearby is his mother, then she may be the focal point of his fantasies and arousal. But the absence of overt incestuous desire can be due to the fact that the child's ego does not allow this and there is an idealized fantasy of merely being near the mother without any sexual goal. This trend can persist until puberty, when his general affection will transfer to a second woman. While he still desires the mother, his sexual maturity may not be at the level of viewing her as a sexual object yet (164).

However, Oedipus complex is an important psychological term that Sigmund Freud coined in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). It refers to a child's emotional attachment to the parent of the opposite sex and competitiveness with the same-sex parent. Paul Morel's relationship with his mother, Gertrude Morel, in *Sons and Lovers* is an excellent example of the Oedipus complex. His passion for her is so overwhelming that it deprives him of successful relationships with other women (123). Gertrude Morel is discontented with her marriage to Walter Morel. She finds him uneducated, lacking in values, and alcoholic. They are completely different from each other in nature, and therefore incessant quarrels break out between them. Though they remain together as husband and wife, they are emotionally very far apart. Gertrude is deeply disillusioned and isolated in her marriage. When she gives birth to their third child, Paul, she identifies with him as the personification of her frustration towards her husband. She decides to love this son more than any other child and hopes that he will love and care for her as she is unable to get it from her husband. Paul is a weak, fragile child and needs special attention, so it makes them cling to each other even more.

Paul is physically expressive and craves physical closeness. He thinks this would cause them to bond emotionally. However, Miriam cannot give him what he needs, and their relationship is a frustrated one. Paul tries to get Miriam to relax by playfully swinging her and asking if he can push her further. Indeed, he is implying that she is too restrained. "Won't you really go any farther?" (Lawrence 151). In her efforts to keep Paul, Miriam finally agrees to become physically close to him. But she is horribly uncomfortable and consoles herself with the fact that losing her virginity is the cost of marriage- "She lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice" (Lawrence 289).

Miriam is a representation of the "unreal love" Paul dreamed of. Their love is made impossible by the idealization he bestowed upon her, and what society expects. Despite loving one another, they are too vastly different to ever be together. Miriam wishes to be pure, while Paul yearns for intimacy. Because of this mismatch, they can never quite fulfill each other's needs, so they are left both wanting something that cannot be had. In fact, Paul ends his relationship with Miriam, in part because he has been disapproved of by his mother. He insists that what he feels for Miriam is not what a man should feel for his wife. In actuality, the only woman he has ever loved as a man should love his wife is his own mother- "I don't think I love you as a man ought to love his wife" (Lawrence 224). Their romance fails because of their different wants and their inability to compromise. In their failed romance, Lawrence looks at the core psychological challenges and social forces that prevent people from enjoying long-term love. The story of Miriam demonstrates the pain of chasing an elusive love, and both Miriam and Paul are left unhappy.

Although Miriam is so important to Paul, Mrs. Morel remains his greatest source of guidance, love, and support. Paul ultimately sends Miriam a firm letter, saying that their relationship has changed for life:

“I can give you a spirit of love; I have given it for this long time but not embodied passion. See, you are a nun. I have given you what I would give a holy nun—as a mystic monk to a mystic nun. Indeed, you esteem it best” (Lawrence 251).

Paul finally turns back to his mother, the only person in his life who has ever been a constant. She gives him a sense of stability in a world that constantly changes.

Clara Dawes: The Forbidden Desire

Paul Morel’s relationship with Clara Dawes is an example of impossible love because of internal conflict and society. Clara is different from the other women Paul has met in that she is smart and independent, unlike his mother who dominates his life. They have a passionate and freedom-based affair, but Clara’s unhappy marriage to Baxter Dawes and Paul’s indecisiveness prevent them from ever actually being truly happy together.

Paul considers Clara to be a refuge from his past emotional struggles. Unlike Miriam, who is devout and virtuous, Clara is sensual and rebellious. Paul convinces Clara to be sexually intimate with him, citing that the two of them have been through much in their previous relationship—him with Miriam and her with her husband, Baxter- “Love should give a sense of freedom, not prison” (Lawrence 360). But even though they are both passionate, their passion is contaminated by guilt and societal disapproval.

Their problem with Clara’s marriage is always a problem in their relationship. She is guilty of getting Paul into a bind and also knows that society disapproves of affairs during marriage. The pressure of these moral and societal expectations makes her feel like their love can never be. She struggles with her feelings, torn between loving Paul and where her marriage stands. Paul, also, realizes that something is not quite right in the relationship. While Clara provides fleshly love, she doesn’t have the deeper emotional and spiritual love that he had thus far looked for in Miriam- “Sometimes, when I’m seeing her just as the woman, I love her, mother; but then, when she talks and criticizes, I often do not hear her” (Lawrence 350).

Their affair burns intensely for a short time but cannot last. Lacking an emotional or spiritual connection, their passion slowly fizzles out. In the end, Clara realizes that their love cannot be and goes back to her husband, ending their affair. In Clara Dawes, D.H. Lawrence depicts the difficulties of illegal love and the heartbreak it often generates. Their love shows the battle between personal wishes and social demands. It also shows that love outside conventional standards has a tendency to result in heartbreak. Clara’s story serves as a reminder that certain relationships, no matter how passionate, are simply not meant to be, leaving both her and Paul wanting something they can never have.

Psychological Complexities and Personal Struggles in *Sons and Lovers*

D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* is more than just a love story; it explores the inner psychological issues that hinder its characters from achieving long-term happiness. The novel revolves around Paul Morel’s psychological struggle, which is an outcome of his romantic involvement with his mother, Gertrude Morel. His emotions are mixed in passion, love, and social norms, and hence cannot establish normal romantic relationships. Nisha Kumari explains that this novel may be understood employing Freud’s psychoanalytic perspective. Psychoanalytic perspective considers conscious and unconscious wants, ideas, sexuality, love and repression in the family and psychodynamics between family members, between husband, wife, and children. Psychodynamics of Lawrence’s family is mainly described in his novel (37).

Paul carries the burden of his mother’s high expectations, which creates a deep psychological conflict within him. He fears disappointing her and feels pressured by society’s standards. These struggles prevent him from experiencing love freely. His emotions are in constant turmoil—he wants to break away from his mother’s influence and establish his identity, yet he remains emotionally dependent on her.

Lawrence can capture Paul’s internal world and how his insecurities and unresolved issues impact his relationships. Paul’s perception of love is also skewed, fueled by his past and internalized fears. As such, his

love life is punctuated with unfulfillment and lost opportunities. Indeed, *Sons and Lovers* characters are tormented by the past. Past loves, family disputes, and earlier psychic injuries influence their current relationships. These unresolved wounds show up as fears of intimacy, insecurities, and being unable to trust other individuals completely.

Paul's relationships with Miriam and Clara are cases in point. He is not able to commit himself to either of them due to the overpowering presence of his mother in his affections. His romantic life is a series of broken relationships, repeating the novel's theme of abortive love—love that never comes to fruition. Paul's love for Miriam was platonic. He enjoyed sharing his ideas and creations with her. Nisha also explains that though he did once think of marrying Miriam, he believed their physical closeness to be immoral. Paul was swayed by his mother when he thought Miriam only wanted his soul, not his whole self. However, Paul's affair with Clara was physical and passionate. Clara's femininity and warmth attracted him. She, unlike Miriam, fulfilled his physical desires. Paul felt free with Clara to give way to his sensuality (39).

The narrative of *Sons and Lovers* is haunted by the past. The characters' present relationships are defined by unrequited love, domestic disputes, and emotional scars. The unresolved past manifests itself in the form of insecurities, fear of intimacy, and inability to trust anyone completely. Paul, for example, feels ambivalent about his mother. He both desires her affection but despises her for playing games with him. The war creates an inner psychological conflict that makes it difficult for him to establish normal relationships.

Lawrence defines love based on unresolved family affairs as resulting in nothing but unhappiness and discontent. Paul later finds out his mother is the source of his relationship issues, yet he cannot get away from her. He even goes as far as to wish at one point that she would die as a means of freeing himself emotionally:

“She's got such a will; it seems as if she would never go—never!” (Lawrence 388).

The novel depicts love as causing frustration more often than fulfillment. Unrealistic expectations, social pressures, and psychological suffering prevent the characters from achieving happiness. Paul's love relationships follow a cycle of longing, dissatisfaction, and collapse. In fact, *Sons and Lovers* is a tale of more than just love; it is a story of human emotion, psychological conflict, and the effects of unresolved trauma. Paul's life serves to illustrate how inner conflict defines relationships and causes individuals to sacrifice emotional fulfillment. Through rich character descriptions, Lawrence encourages readers to examine their own lives and the dynamics of love, self, and emotional autonomy. “The novel reminds us of Hamlet as he is torn between mind and heart. The fleshly desires and the divine love can also be seen here when we receive the arrival of Clara and Miriam. Fleshly desires can be seen when Clara comes and spirituality can be seen when Miriam comes. Their portrayal is presented in a manner which indicates the way Paul is himself torn between the two of them. He has three women in his life and with none of them he has that bond which an individual would have. He portrays the way in his life he has always existed between heart and mind and further on the sexual as well as spiritual planes” (Dorga 26). However, the work of D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, is centered on the theme of thwarted love in the lives of Paul Morel and three of the principal characters, Miriam, Clara, and his mother, Gertrude. Each of these experiences revolves around differing grounds for love that fails to materialize.

Paul's affair with Miriam shows the struggle between sensual appetite and emotional or spiritual rapport. The struggle does not permit them to achieve a balance, and their relationship collapses. Paul wants to be free from social conventions when he is with Clara and experiences a forbidden love. Theirs is also affected by extraneous circumstances, such as Clara's estranged husband and Paul's inner demons, that do not permit them to be happy together.

Paul's relationship with his mother is even more complicated. It is an exploration of the Oedipal complex, where the love and romantic desire of a mother are blended. The absence of a strict father figure serves to further compound these complications so that Paul can never form normal romantic relationships and his desires are never fulfilled. The novel also talks of three types of love, and all three are presented as being incomplete and not able to lead to lasting happiness. The mental problems, personal issues, and social pressures that the characters have prevent them from finding fulfillment in their relationships. These are the

observations that explain how the theme of aborted love affairs is central to *Sons and Lovers* and show the struggles the characters have in finding love. "*Sons and Lovers* most visibly demonstrates Paul's deep dependence on his mother because his father has been missing and cold with love, so leading to a love conflict, or failure, of relationships. The Oedipus complex is portrayed really effectively by Lawrence in this point. In my knowledge, there will be no problem if parents played active roles respectfully in developing their children" (Reinjaya 16).

By and large, *Sons and Lovers* is a narrative of unreal love relationships between husband and wife, lover and mistress, and mother and child. Mother-fixation is defined within the broader framework of family life. Mrs. Morel, unhappy with her husband, turns to her children for love and living. She loves the children with the fervor of lovers, and the same fervor warps the life cycle of her sons. Lawrence establishes conflicts between the two forms of love, soul love and body love. Paul Morel is dominated too intensely by his mother's over-possessiveness and is not able to attain any satisfaction through love. Lawrence previously believed that body love needs to disintegrate if not reinforced by the soul because there is no separate body from soul. Both should be put in order. Man and woman can be happier by honoring the otherness and uniqueness of the other. Dominance of both partners destroys the relationship of human beings (Neha 6).

Indeed, *Sons and Lovers* is the story of false relations between members of different relations. There are so many conflicted relations; husband and wife, father and sons, body and soul love. Lawrence also intends to convey the idea that physical love without nourishment of the soul is meaningless and disintegrates. *Sons and Lovers* is an analysis of human relations in major part (Punam 6013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In *Sons and Lovers*, the Oedipus complex is what D.H. Lawrence employs to examine the intense and nearly compulsive attachment of Paul and Gertrude. Paul and Gertrude's love is not an ordinary mother-son love, and it goes beyond the boundary dividing family love and emotional attachment. Unloved by her son's father, Gertrude turns to Paul as her emotional comfort, and he becomes the center of her life. "The mother is not meant to recall that she is a mother but rather starts acting like the lover and this is made known when she is introduced to Miriam and Clara. She starts to experience the feeling of jealousy and then she starts interfering in the relationships which the son has" (Dogra 6). Paul, in return, craves his mother's attention and approval. However, this emotional attachment becomes a problem because it prevents him from loving other women freely. His mother's love and influence are so strong that they control his thoughts and decisions. As a result, Paul struggles in his relationships with Miriam and Clara, as he always compares them to his mother. However, as Clara returns to his husband being down by Paul, her love becomes a failed love- "As bodily desire fades away, necessarily this relationship is ended. The conscious or unconscious quest for a relationship necessarily leads to the failure of the above romances" (Xuefei 6).

Paul's emotional connection with his mother keeps him trapped in a cycle of unfulfilled love. His inability to separate from her stops him from forming deep connections with other women, causing his romantic relationships to fail. His love for Gertrude feeds the Oedipus complex and prevents him from finding true happiness. Gertrude's presence is so overpowering that it dominates all of his relationships with women. He constantly seeks approval from her and cannot even start living independently. This dependence in the psychological aspect dictates the pattern of relationship failure in that no woman can get anywhere near what he has with his mom. His love life is nothing but frustration and despair as he cannot commit any further to anyone else.

After Gertrude passed away, Paul felt lost and hollow. Even though he knew her love had kept him imprisoned, he cannot imagine life without her. He feels so lonely and even goes as far as considering suicide, hoping death will reunite him with his mother- "She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this" (Lawrence 420). She left him without direction, demonstrating how much he was emotionally dependent on her. In fact, Gertrude Morel's personality in *Sons and Lovers* is a reflection of the deep impacts of the Oedipus complex. Her emotional connection with Paul and their dominating relationship deprive him of fulfilling romantic relationships. The novel explores the inner struggle of an unsettled mother-son relationship and its evolution in Paul's life. His story demonstrates the challenge of finding a balance between love, family,

and personal autonomy. It demonstrates how unresolved emotions can leave long-term impressions, so it's hard to become truly happy and fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Sons and Lovers by D.H. Lawrence comprises three failed romances—Paul and Mrs. Morel, Paul and Miriam, and Paul and Clara—each founded upon some principles essential to each particular relationship but lacking in essential ingredients to its success. The failure of these relationships signifies the idealistic approach to love in the novel and the impossibility of fulfillment on a long-term basis. It is in these love affairs that we witness the interior struggles of the characters, the pressures placed on them by society, and their ill-formed idea of love—all of which push them to fail in their quest for happiness in love affairs. Lawrence's portrayal of these frustrated longings sums up to a common human experience, the emotional and psychological barriers that constantly come in the way of genuine connection.

Paul's bond with his mother interferes with the cycle of the maternal attachment, turning Oedipal when he reaches manhood. This is particularly witnessed when he falls in love with Miriam. Mrs. Morel's intelligence, tenacity, and devotion to her sons are admirable traits, but her love has a possessive and controlling quality that ultimately inhibits Paul's emotional independence. Her grip on him gradually turns into a kind of emotional imprisonment, in which he cannot have a normal relationship with any other female. Paul and Miriam are spiritually and intellectually compatible since they both love art and literature. They do not have passionate love, though, and Paul is emotionally repressed. Miriam's idealistic and repressed nature does not allow them to have physical love. It is this sexual, along with emotional, incompatibility that causes them to fall apart since their love is founded on immaturity rather than equality of partnership.

In comparison, Paul's relationship with Clara is a carnal relationship grounded on fleshly desire and not emotional comprehension. While Paul is drawn to Clara's sensuality, the incompatibility of their being able to communicate and relate emotionally results in a break between them. Paul remains emotionally bound to Miriam, while Clara senses that he is not hers fully. Without the spiritual connection to hold it together, their relationship turns stagnant and unsatisfying. While there is passion between them, Paul's emotional tie to his mother will not allow him to give himself to Clara or to any woman. In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence presents a realistic portrayal of love, and not all love is joyful. But instead of leaving readers in hopelessness, the novel leaves them with a lot to learn about human emotions, self-awareness, and the difficulty of achieving deep connections. It reminds people that healthy love is a matter of emotional maturing, knowing oneself, and a balance of passion, friendship, and individuality.

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