Sons and Lovers

Coming to the Being

The appearance of *Sons and Lovers* in May 1913 decidedly marked an outstanding landmark not only in the fictional domain of Lawrence but also in that of twentieth century. It is a unique, memorable masterpiece, for in it Lawrence is noticed to have broken with the stereotyped conventions and long-established taboos observed by his predecessors and given a new turn to English fiction.

Before coming to the main issue of our discussion let us go through a slight sketch of the novel. The first part of the novel focuses on Mrs. Morel and her unhappy marriage to a drinking miner. She has many arguments with her husband, some of which have painful results: on separate occasions, she is locked out of the house and hit in the head with a drawer. Estranged from her husband, Mrs. Morel takes comfort in her four children, especially her sons. Her oldest son, William, is her favorite, and she is very upset when he takes a job in London and moves away from the family. When William sickens and dies a few years later, she is crushed, not even noticing the rest of her children until she almost
loses Paul, her second son, as well. From that point on, Paul becomes the focus of her life, and the two seem to live for each other.

Paul falls in love with Miriam Leivers, who lives on a farm not too far from the Morel family. They carry on a very intimate, but purely platonic, relationship for many years. Mrs. Morel does not approve of Miriam, and this may be the main reason that Paul does not marry her. He constantly wavers in his feelings toward her.

Paul meets Clara Dawes, a suffragette who is separated from her husband, through Miriam. As he becomes closer with Clara and they begin to discuss his relationship with Miriam, she tells him that he should consider consummating their love and he returns to Miriam to see how she feels.

Paul and Miriam sleep together and are briefly happy, but shortly afterward Paul decides that he does not want to marry Miriam, and so he breaks off with her. She still feels that his soul belongs to her, and, in part agrees reluctantly. He realizes that he loves his mother most, however.
After breaking off his relationship with Miriam, Paul begins to spend more time with Clara and they begin an extremely passionate affair. However, she does not want to divorce her husband Baxter, and so they can never be married. Paul’s mother falls ill and he devotes much of his time to caring for her. When she finally dies, he is broken-hearted and, after a final plea from Miriam, goes off alone at the end of the novel.

From this slight sketch it is clear that *Sons and Lovers* has a structure rigorously controlled by an idea; an idea of an organic disturbance in relationship of men and women, a disturbance of sexual polarities that is first seen in the dissatisfaction of mother and father, then in the mother’s attempt to substitute her sons for her husband, and finally in the sons’ unsuccessful yet relentless struggle to establish natural manhood.

Let us proceed with Gertrude and Walter and the role played by libido in this relationship. In the very beginning of the novel we are introduced to Gertrude Morel, one of the central figures of the novel, a woman depressed and tired, no longer loving her husband, and sustained only by her children.

Her son and her little girl slept upstairs; so, it seemed, her home was there behind her, fixed
and stable. But she felt wretched with the coming child. The world seemed a dreary place, where nothing else would happen for her—at least until William grew up. But for herself, nothing but this dreary endurance—till the children grew up. And the children! She could not afford to have this third. She did not want it. The father was serving beer in a public-house, swilling himself drunk. She despised him, and was tied to him. This coming child was too much for her. If it were not for William and Annie, she was sick of it, the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness. . . . And looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive.¹

We have, after that a retrospective account of her earlier life and what emerges from it is her superiority, both personal, and, by descent at least, social: “She came of good old burgher family”. A measure of ‘foreignness’ is also indicated. Though of Nottingham stock, she had spent her child-hood and youth in the south and had been educated there. Lawrence establishes from the beginning those
qualities or temperament and upbringing that differentiate her and make it unlikely that she being as she is, her marriage can be a success with the sort of man she married; this is hinted at by the mention of a young man whom she had known at Sheerness (‘And she still had the Bible that John Field had given her’) who, we gather, would have been suitable.

Walter Morel who attracted her into marriage is introduced in the course of this reminiscence; and throughout there is the emphasis on his simple, abundant vitality: A list of the words and phrases used to describe him is revealing: ‘well set-up,’ ‘erect and very smart,’ ‘vigorous,’ ‘ruddy,’ ‘red moist mouth,’ ‘rich ringing laugh,’ ‘colour and animation,’ ‘pleasant non-intellectual,’ ‘warm,’ ‘natural, joyous, exultation, glamour,’ ‘the flower of his body,’ ‘the dusky golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life.’ These qualities suggest us the spontaneous, instinctive and simply sensuous man who appeals to his antithesis 'the puritan, like her father, high-minded and stern'. In fact, Lawrence has great “power to translate passion into words”.

This fundamental sensuous attractiveness is a real and in some ways lasting influence on the relationship between them. It is left for Paul to comment on it later in the novel:
“Yes; but my mother, I believe, got real joy and satisfaction out of my father at first. I believe she had a passion for him; that's, why she stayed with him. After all, they were bound to each other…. That's what one must have, I think”—the real, real flame of feeling*⁴ for another person—once, only once, if it only last three months. . . .”⁵

Though Paul’s subsequent attempts to define this kind of passion are not completely satisfactory, enough is said for us to realise what is meant: there must be an experience of libido and its fulfillment which, however brief it may have been, can illuminate a whole life, a moment or period of complete and spontaneous union that can never be forgotten, whose existence serves as a bond between those who shared it even when the passion itself is long dead. And this experience Morel and Mrs. Morel had had; brief though the statement of their short married happiness is, it is enough. It should be set against the 'innumerable statements of Mrs. Morel's contempt for her husband, the vivid depiction of the hatred between them, and the reiterated theme of Mrs. Morel's economic dependence on Morel ‘for the children's sake'. The economic
reason and the passionate reason can co-exist, just as a sense of union can co-exist with hatred and contempt.

When we first see the Morels, however, the period, of disillusionment has lasted for years, and a fifth of the novel is largely given to tracing the last stages of spiritual intimacy between them. We are shown the various “critical moments”; Mrs. Morel's discovery of her husband's deceitfulness about money is the first; the second and crucial one is the cutting of the year-old William's hair-- an event trivial enough, one which in earlier and lesser novels could have been an excuse for vintage domestic sentimentality; here, it becomes really important:

But she knew, and Morel knew, that that act had caused something momentous to take place….This act of masculine clumsiness was the spear through the side of her love for Morel.6

This is worthy of close attention, and the details must be noted, carefully. The reference in the metaphor is of course to the Crucifixion. Mrs. Morel's love for her husband is the implied Christ of the image; but Christ's side was pierced only after his death. The cutting-off of William’s hair is the act that proves the death of that first love; after this—that is, for practically the whole
novel—Mrs. Morel has ceased to love her husband vitally: “Now she had ceased to fret for his love: he was an outsider to her.”

But Mrs. Morel cannot lapse into the easy-going indifference that could have made their lives so much more tolerable, and which would have been so welcome to Morel:

    Nevertheless, she still continued to strive with him. She still had her high moral sense, inherited from generations of Puritans. It was now a religious instinct, and she was almost a fanatic with him, because she loved him, or had loved him. If he sinned, she tortured him. If he drank, and lied, was often a poltroon, sometimes a knave, she wielded the lash unmercifully.

At this stage she is an expression of his own Puritanism. In a letter to Edward Garnet, Lawrence suggests that the problem with Gertrude is that she is a woman of refinement but goes to the lower class, and no satisfaction. In the scenes that follow the casting-off of Morel, there is very little sympathy, and Morel is presented reasonably enough in a bad light, since his actions are disgusting. Besides being an account of the transference of Mrs. Morel's love from her husband to her son, the first quarter of the novel is also an
account of the degeneration of Morel, and of Mrs. Morel’s bitter triumph in the midst of misery:

The pity was, she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he was; she would have him the much that he might be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She injured and hurt and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth. She also had the children.\textsuperscript{11}

In this objective summary of the situation, the responsibility for Morel’s decline is ascribed unequivocally to Mrs. Morel, even though the provocation comes from Morel.

There is direct statement; after the incident in which Morel locks his wife out of doors, Lawrence comments:

\ldots there was a slight shrinking, a diminishing in his assurance. Physically, even, he shrunk, and his fine, full presence waned ... his physique seemed to contract along with his pride and moral strength.\textsuperscript{12}

He is seen as increasingly empty, and increasingly futile in action; there is the shaming anticlimax of his blustering-departure
from the house with his little blue bundle and his ignominious
return the same evening, on which there is this comment:

As Mrs. Morel saw him slink quickly through
the inner doorway, holding his bundle, she
laughed to herself; but her heart was bitter,
because she had loved him.\textsuperscript{13}

It is shortly after this that her love for him finally dies. In
his illness she never quite wanted him to die. Still there was one
part of her that wanted him for herself, but during his convalescence
the final change made by the birth of Paul asserts itself, and Mrs.
Morel realizes the direction in which her feelings are set:

Now, with the birth of this third baby, her
self no longer set towards him, helplessly, but
was like a tide that scarcely rose, standing off
from him. After this, she scarcely desired
him.\textsuperscript{14}

And with this withdrawal comes a measure of indiffer-
ence; Morel has lost the power to hurt her; from this time on her
concern is with, the children, and Morel's behaviour is only
important to her if it affects the children. The effect on Morel’s
inner life is disastrous, even though, after his return to strength he
goes on very much as before, working, drinking and bullying his family. But as far as his personal life is concerned, he is a beaten man:

His wife was casting him off, half regretfully, but relentlessly; casting him off and turning now for love and life to the children. Henceforward, he was more or less a husk. And he half acquiesced, as so many men do, yielding their place to their children.¹⁵

In fact, he has ceased to be of any account in the life of his family, and when this is remembered, his violence inside the home, and his search elsewhere for comfort and consolation can be seen as empty gestures of assertiveness, attempts to impose his presence on these withdrawn people of his flesh as a reality. These pathetic attempts make his children hate him, as they fear him, and are made uncomfortable by him; in this section of the novel, we see him and his relationship with his wife through the children's eyes, not through Mrs. Morel's—he is no longer important to her:

Paul hated his father so. The collier's small, mean head, with its black hair slightly soiled with grey, lay on the bare arms, and the face, dirty and inflamed with a fleshy nose and thin,
paltry brows was turned sideways, asleep with beer- and weariness and nasty temper.\textsuperscript{16}

This is a figure far removed from the young man of super-abundant life and charm and vitality whom we saw at the beginning of the novel. A sort of ‘blood intimacy’ is altogether absent so far as his relationship with Mrs. Morel is concerned.

Here, in this context of almost withered relationship between Morels, it should be noted that Lawrence wants all experience to be corroborated by the dictates of the blood. Lawrence’s views on his concept of blood intimacy find best expression in his oft quoted letter of 17 June 1913 to his friend Ernest Collins:

My great religion is a belief in the blood, and flesh, as being wiser than intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true.\textsuperscript{17}

In this regard Lawrence negates the intervention by such extraneous factors as the rational mind and conventional morality.

Here, it is necessary to explain that “Lawrence did not advocate ‘sheer animalism’ or destruction of the mind. He felt that the intuitional and intellectual had fallen into imbalance on the side
of intellectual” and so “in emphasizing our need to revive the emotional values, he was trying to restore the balance.”

It is in this context that Lawrence’s great ‘Religion of Blood’ implies a belief in the life of instincts. And that way he believed the flesh to be wiser than the intellect. In this way we see that the root cause of the failure of Morels’ relationship, which was at a time a vital one, appears to be this ‘imbalance’.

By the time William is entering early manhood, and Paul is a boy, the relationship between Morel and his wife has reached its final static stage. Mrs. Morel is by now largely indifferent to her husband; he becomes less and less important in the home and more and more ineffectual. Not only in Mrs. Morel's life but also in the novel he is replaced by his sons, and in the second half of Sons and lovers he seldom makes an appearance of any importance.

Morel, then, is disposed off as a dominant factor fairly early in the novel, and Mrs. Morel 'turns for love and life' to her children. The first relationship, with William does not make such a powerful impact on us as Lawrence seems to have wished. As we noted in the last section, it is the coming of Paul that precipitates the end of her love for her husband; it is Paul who is symbolically baptized with her blood. William is to be seen as a stop-gap.
Shortly after William's death Mrs. Morel finally transfers her central love to Paul. Mrs. Morel, since the funeral, has withdrawn from life and is herself losing the will to live. But Paul falls ill; his mother lies in bed with him. He wakes, feeling that he is dying:

“I s'll die, mother!” he cried, heaving for breath on the pillow.

She lifted him up, crying in a small voice:

“Oh. my son—my son!”

Mrs. Morel's words are those which she uttered repeatedly at William's funeral; now, she applies them to her living son; she comes back into the world of life, and at last Paul has completely taken the place of his brother, who had already taken his father's place in the mother's heart.

The relationship between Paul and his mother runs through the whole novel; it has various stages, and various degrees of both intensity and stress; all the other relationships are brought into contact with it. It is possible to see them all as subordinate to it. It is also the central expression of the theme of ‘sons and lovers’; everything is ultimately referred to it.

From the very beginning we see the development of a sort of deep attachment and love in all its manifestations, and we are
shown the circumstances outside it that go to strengthen it. Its fluctuations are noted and demonstrated; it is always seen as a living thing, kept constant by the fixity of Mrs. Morel's emotional dedication to it, and wavering only because of the inevitable changes caused by Paul's growing-up and the consequent diffusion of his interests and affections. The course it takes is one from the unquestioning intimacy of his boyhood and early adolescence through the period of strife that is caused by Miriam to the realization by Paul of his mother's central and dominant position in his life, ending only with her death.

Paul, in fact, is for most of the time in a state of ignorance and bewilderment about himself; in capturing this confusion, Lawrence has captured the very essence of adolescence and early manhood. He seldom tries to explain the inexplicable; after all, it can be argued that the novelist's task is to present the problems, not to give the answers. So Paul emerges as a sensitive and intelligent boy and young man, immensely responsive to the world and people round him, confused and uncertain, often unhappy, but determined like his mother to live, though, unlike her, he does not consciously expect happiness.

Paul and Mrs. Morel pass through a companionship which may be termed as a happy one. The first sign of a flawing of this
happy companionship comes when Paul is late home after spending an evening with Miriam. We are first told directly of his mother's uneasiness:

Always when he went with Miriam, and it grew rather late, he knew his mother was fretting and getting angry about him—why, he could not understand.  

Mrs. Morel's conscious reason for her anxiety has been stated:

She could feel Paul being drawn away by this girl. And she did not care for Miriam. “She is one of those who will want to suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left,” she said to herself;...  

But the simpler and deeper possessiveness, something not entirely dissimilar from what she fears in Miriam, comes out in the action put before us. Equally clearly emerges the fact that this strife is not likely to destroy the love between mother and son:

Then he went slowly to bed. He had forgotten Miriam; he only saw how his mother's hair was lifted back from her warm, broad brow. And somehow, she was hurt.
There are further incidents of a similar kind. One, that takes place during the holiday at Mablethorpe, is important because it shows Miriam so plainly as an intruder into the happy intimacy between mother and son. Again, he is rather late; again, there are acid exchanges between them:

And she took no further notice of him that evening. Which he pretended neither to notice nor to care about, but sat reading.

Miriam read also, obliterating herself. Mrs. Morel hated her for making her son like that.

She watched Paul growing irritable, priggish and melancholic. For this, she put the blame on Miriam.23

Matters reach a crisis when Paul returns from taking Miriam to her home after having burned the bread; it is this incident that shows the subject of the next chapter—The Defeat of Miriam—to be inevitable. In the course of a bitter argument Paul stresses the community of ideas and interest that he shares with Miriam and cannot share with his mother. The cause of this conflict is ‘adolescence’ triggering Paul’s libido. Mrs. Morel resents his saying so, just as she resents the truth of the statement, and Paul blunders into a further stupid truthfulness:
“You're old, mother, and we're young.” He only meant that the interests of her age were not the interests of his. But he realised the moment he had spoken that he had said the wrong thing.  

His mother is deeply hurt, and Paul is shocked into realization: “Instinctively, he realized that he was life to her. And, after all, she was the chief thing to him the only supreme thing.” Then follows this most revealing passage:

He had taken off his collar and tie, and rose, bare-throated, to go to bed. As he stooped to kiss his mother, she threw her arms round his neck, hid her face on his shoulder, and cried, in a whimpering voice, so unlike her own that he writhed in agony:

“I can't bear it. I could let another woman--but not her. She'd leave me no room, not a bit of room——” And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly.

“And I've never—you know, Paul—I've never had a husband—not really---”
He stroked his mother's hair, and his mouth was on her throat.

“And she exults so in taking you from me—she's not like ordinary girls.”

“Well, I don't love her, mother,” he murmured, bowing his head, and hiding his eyes on her shoulder in misery.

His mother kissed him a long fervent kiss.

“My boy!” she said, in a voice trembling with passionate love.

Without knowing, he gently stroked her face.26

This is in many ways a central passage. Technically, it shows Lawrence's mastery of the impassioned scene of strong and complex emotions; the mother's desperate fear of losing her son, her sense of a frustrated life, the intensity of her love, the son's misery and his equally strong love for his mother, the complete absorption in feeling and emotion are all conveyed with a straightforward directness. But besides this, it establishes two vitally important elements in the theme of the novel; we see now that Mrs. Morel recognizes a similar intensity of possessive emotion in Miriam: she
realizes that she and Miriam are fighting for the same thing, the possession of Paul's soul; and it establishes her real supremacy in Paul; when he is put under pressure, his choice, he realizes, is already made; he must turn to his mother.

It should be noted that all this is expressed quite deliberately in terms of erotic love ('his mouth was on her throat', long, fervent kiss') and Mrs. Morel explicitly says, 'I've never had a husband—not really'. This stresses the intensity of the link between mother and son, and shows its completeness; it has within itself a capacity for passion, that is generally associated with the relationship between man and wife, or lovers. Indeed, the significance of the title *Sons and Lovers* becomes obvious; there is a way in which the sons are seen as lovers. Though so much of this is expressed in terms of the senses, the total effect is not one of sensuality; the senses, and the language of the senses, are used to express a much more complex spiritual passion. The completeness of the mutual passion between mother and son explains why Mrs. Morel must oppose Miriam, who is seeking the same thing; why she is indifferent to Clara, from whom Paul's soul is safe: why Paul can never love another woman completely while his mother lives—he is too far committed spiritually already. Paul's complex emotions
and his ultimate submission to his mother are summed up at the end:

He pressed his face into his pillow in fury of misery. And yet, somewhere in his soul, he was at peace because he still loved his mother best. It was the bitter peace of resignation.27

The relationship between Paul and Miriam is in many ways the most difficult in the novel, partly because of the psychological and emotional complexities in it. From the very beginning of the relationship, before Mrs. Morel's hostility is aroused, and before Paul is deeply involved, it is clear that there are going to be difficulties. Many of these lie in the personality and temperament of Miriam herself.

When she is first introduced (it must be remembered “she is about fourteen”28), Lawrence is concerned to establish her timidity; her brothers call her ‘mardy-kid’ and her feeding of the hen states without undue emphasis characteristics which persist through the novel. She finally forces herself to offer grain in her hand to the hen: “At last, Miriam let the bird peck from her hand. She gave a little cry—fear, and pain because of fear—rather pathetic.”29
Fear, pain, and pathos are to form a large part of Miriam's association with Paul, and, as is foreshadowed here, so much of it comes from her own over-refined susceptibilities, her readiness to be hurt.

Her timorousness is closely linked with her inability to surrender herself to the moment and to take a risk. Paul has been swinging: 'He was swinging through the air, every bit of him swinging, like a bird that swoops for joy of movement'. Miriam reluctantly takes her place on the swing:

She felt the accuracy with which he caught her, exactly at the right moment, and the exactly proportionate strength of his thrust and she was afraid. Down to his bowels went the hot wave of fear.30

He leaves her to herself, and she sways gently, safely, 'scarcely moving'. It is not merely fear: 'She could never lose herself, so, nor could her brothers'. Clearly, the swinging here is symbolic of the capacity for instinctive living; Paul can give himself up to the moment, spontaneously; Miriam, though she recognizes this power in Paul, and warms to it, cannot naturally act in the same way. The difference of temperament is fundamental,
and much of the difficulty of the relationship is caused by this deep dissimilarity.

This is brought out in the overture to the relationship; when it properly gets under way, in the chapter 'Lad-and-Girl-Love', other characteristics are emphasized. We are told of her romantic nature, of her mysticism, of her 'treasuring religion inside her', of her passion for learning, and of her piqued idealization of Paul, who 'scarcely observed her'. It is, relevant to her later attitudes that, after Paul's illness (she is now sixteen) she rejoices in his weakness –“then she would be stronger than he. Then she could love him”.31 In her way, she wants to be dominant: it is not Mrs. Morel's way, but there are points of similarity. And yet with the desire for dominance goes a shrinking hesitancy, and what Lawrence describes as 'proud humility'32 she at once retires, and wishes to assert mastery. And this wish to mastery negates all possibilities of a relationship of ‘balanced polarity’.

Very early in the course of their acquaintance, a characteristic that is to be most important in their life together is introduced. Paul has already noticed the way in which Mrs. Leivers 'exalted everything . . . to the plane of a religious trust'; Miriam resembles her mother in this, and many of her early meetings with
Paul are concerned with establishing this quality of intensity. Paul starts to teach her algebra. He is not a good teacher:

He was quick and hasty . . . he questioned her more, then got hot. It made his blood rouse to see her there as it were, at his mercy, her mouth open, her eyes dilated with laughter that was afraid, apologetic, ashamed.\(^{33}\)

Irritation with Miriam is an important ingredient in Paul's attitude towards her, irritation that hurts her and makes her cringe. In her earnestness, she makes the learning of algebra more important than it is, and brings to it a disproportionate emotional intensity:

“What do you tremble your *soul* before it for?” he cried.

“You don't learn algebra *with your blessed soul*\(^{34}\). Can't you look at it with your clear simple wits?”\(^{35}\)

Learning is desperately important to Miriam, and she approaches it with a kind of religious fervour, as she approaches everything; yet her fervour, instead of giving her confidence and certainty, makes her hesitant, unsure and anguished. She makes
complex what with happier dispositions is simple, and imposes her complexities on Paul: “Because of the intensity to which she roused him, he sought her. Then he avoided her, and went with Edgar.”

It is plain that such a relationship can seldom be easy and untroubled; Miriam's very nature demands too much.

Another aspect of Miriam's personality is that her intensity rises to its peak in her attitude before flowers. Lawrence splendidly suggests the repressed libido behind her spirituality, which is indeed a sublimation of passion. She takes Paul to look at a wild-rose bush: “they were going to have a communion together something that thrilled her, something holy.” They stand before the bush, which is made to seem a living power – “Point after point the steady roses shone out them, seeming to kindle something in their souls”. They are united in their response to it, but Paul cannot go the whole way with her:

Paul looked into Miriam's eyes. She was pale and expectant with wonder, her lips were parted, and her dark eyes lay open down into her. Her soul quivered. It was the communion she wanted. He turned aside as if pained.

We need not feel gross and insensitive if we recognise the fact that, to say the least, such intensity is difficult to live with; it
makes easy spontaneity difficult and hazardous, and Lawrence clearly shows the demands it makes on Paul's sensibility. Miriam translates everything into terms of the spiritual, and Paul feels himself, half-reluctantly, half-willingly, drawn into it. Significantly it is just after this incident that Mrs. Morel says of Miriam 'She is one of those who will want to suck a man's soul out till he has none of his own left’, and though we see Mrs. Morel's possessiveness, we must admit there is considerable justification for her feeling. And Miriam's own possessiveness is clearly stated:

He did not belong to her among all these others; he was different then—not her Paul, who understood the slightest quiver of her innermost soul, but something else speaking another language than hers. How it hurt her, and deadened her perceptions. Only when he came right back to her, leaving his other lesser self, as she thought, would she feel alive again.39

By this time, the bond between them is love, love, however, that they will not acknowledge: 'He thought himself too sane for such sentimentality, and she thought herself too lofty'. Besides that, there is the important factor of Miriam's attitude to
sexuality. It would be wrong to call her prudish, and certainly we see her capacity for passion but the passion is etherealized. Miriam is inhibited by her spiritual delicacy:

But, perhaps because of the continual business of birth and begetting, Miriam was the more hypersensitive to the matter and her blood was chastened almost to disgust at the faintest suggestion of such intercourse. Paul took his pitch from her, and they intimacy went on in an utterly blanched and chaste fashion. It could never be mentioned that the mare was in foal.\(^{40}\)

And Miriam, in her bewildered purity, at first prays; "O Lord, let me not love Paul Morel. Keep me from loving him, if I ought not to love him.\(^{41}\)

Inevitably, Paul feels the pull of libido, and in dealing with these early stirrings, Lawrence shows his deepest understanding of adolescence. When Paul and Miriam stand among the Sandhills gazing at ‘an enormous yellow moon', Paul is tormented:

She was slightly afraid—deeply moved and religious. That was her best state. He was
impotent against it. His blood was concentrated like a flame in his chest. But he could not get across to her. There were flashes in his blood. But somehow she ignored them.

The situation is created, and then explicitly commented on; the state described is complex, but the analysis is perfectly clear:

He did not know himself what was the matter. He was naturally so young, and their intimacy was so abstract he did not know he wanted to crush her on to his breast to ease the ache there. He was afraid of her. The fact that he might want her as a man wants a woman had in him been suppressed into a shame. When she shrank in her convulsed, coiled torture from the thought of such a thing, he had winced to the depth of his soul. And now this purity prevented ever their first love-kiss. It was as if she could scarcely stand the shock of physical love, even a passionate kiss, and then he was too shrinking and sensitive to give it.
Miriam's attitude is not a simple one; it is clear that she is not merely chaste because to be chaste is the right and moral thing. In her own way, she is intensely aware of him physically:

She loved him absorbedly. She wanted to run her hands down his sides. She always wanted to embrace him, so long as he did not want her.... He straightened himself. His back was towards her. She put her two hands on his sides, and ran them quickly down.

“You are so fine?” she said.

He laughed, hating her voice, but his blood roused*45 to a wave of flame by her hands. She did not seem to realise him in all this. He might have been an object. She never realised the male he was.46

The growing tension between them is admirably and surprisingly briefly stated. A few incidents are enough to establish it completely. It is made unmistakably obvious that all the inhibition is not on Miriam's side, and that complex as she is, he is even more so. She is not merely passive:
She seemed to want him, and he resisted. He resisted all the time. He wanted now to give her passion and tenderness, and he could not. He felt that she wanted the soul out of his body, and not him, . . . She did not want to meet him, so that there were two of them, man and woman together. She wanted to draw all of him into her.\(^47\)

And immediately afterwards, Paul says:

“If you could only want me, and not what I can reel off for you!” “I” she cried bitterly—

“I Why, when would you let me take you?”

“Then it's my fault,” he said.\(^48\)

These passages demonstrate the lovers difficulties splendidly: attraction and something near to revulsion, libidinal prompting and inhibition, love and hatred, the sensual and the spiritual, are all confused and struggling together; neither of the lovers knows what is the matter. They fail to strike a balance. And for Paul all the time there is the added complication, of his mother.

And why did he hate Miriam,, and feel so cruel towards her, at the thought of his
mother? If Miriam caused his mother suffering, then he hated her—and he easily hated, her.49

In the chapter 'Defeat of Miriam' Paul expresses his irritation, all his thwarted passion in savage anger and resentment:

“Why must you always be fondling things!” he said irritably.

“But I, love to touch them,” she replied, hurt.

“Can you never like things without clutching them as if you wanted to pull the heart out of them? Why don't you have a bit more restraint, or reserve, or something?” . . “You wheedle the soul out of things,” he said. “I would never wheedle—at any rate, I'd go straight. . . You don't want to love—your eternal and abnormal craving is to be loved. You aren't positive you're negative. You absorb, absorb as if you must fill yourself up with love, because you've got a shortage somewhere.”
She was stunned by his cruelty and did not hear. He had not the faintest notion of what he was saying. It was as if his fretted, tortured soul, run hot by thwarted passion, jetted off these sayings like sparks from electricity.50

Mark Spilka’s comment on this situation is:

Thus the chief “split” between Paul and Miriam comes from the abstract nature of their love, not from the mother’s hold upon the young man’s soul. And final responsibility for this split belongs with Miriam.51

But the remarkable point in this regard is that this is not an entirely just view of Miriam; it is a partial one. In fact, comments in anger and frustration, and with a hidden consciousness of failure on his part in. Shortly afterwards, he first suggests that they should ‘break off’:

“I can only give friendship--It's all I'm capable of--it's a flaw in my make-up. The
thing over balances to one side—I hate a toppling balance. Let us have done.”

Here, Paul recognizes his own share in the failure of the relationship. We also see Paul cannot understand himself and his situation. Paul moves from this to his firmest statement of his own incapacity to love. Miriam has said that she cannot understand his attitude towards her:

“I know,” he cried, you never will! You'll never believe that I can't—can't physically, any more than I can fly up like a skylark—’’


“Love you.”

Miriam will not believe it. She knew he loved her and both now and later Miriam continues to love and to hope. This is the moment at which she recognizes fully that besides fighting Paul, she is fighting his mother: “What have they been saying at home?” she asked. “It’s not that,” he answered. And then she knew it was.

Though Paul has gone back to his mother, the struggles in Paul and between his mother and Miriam are not over; rather, even though the ultimate decision has been taken, they are intensified, Miriam goes on fighting for Paul's love, and Paul, who is shown to
have a real need for Miriam’s companionships, unsatisfactory though it is, drifts back to her. He can neither take her, nor leave her alone. He still needs her:

She alone helped him towards realisation.

Almost passive, she submitted to his argument and expounding. And somehow, because of her, he gradually realised where he was wrong. And what he realised, she realised. She felt he could not do without her.\textsuperscript{55}

She is necessary to his intellectual life and to his growing up, but the sexual barrier between them remains, now acutely self-conscious. Paul is reading a chapter from St. John to Miriam:

When he came to the verse, “A woman when she is in travail, hath sorrow because her hour hath come” he missed it out . . . Six months ago he would have read it simply. Now there was a scotch in his running with her.\textsuperscript{56}

It is at this time of frustration that Clara really enters Paul's life, and the situation is complicated further. He has met her before\textsuperscript{57} and has been unconsciously impressed by her physical
presence and something in her personality (“There's a sort of fierceness somewhere in her.”\textsuperscript{58}). Now, he meets her at the farm immediately, she is described in terms of the physical and the sensuous:

Clara sat in the cool parlour reading. He saw the nape of her white neck, and the fine hair lifted from it. She rose, looking at him indifferently. To shake hands; she lifted her arm straight, in a manner that seemed at once to keep him at a distance, and yet to fling something to him. He noticed how her breasts swelled inside her blouse, and how her shoulder curved handsomely under the thin muslin at the top of her arm.\textsuperscript{59}

Here, we are made aware that Clara has the same gift of surrendering herself to sensation and the moment that Paul showed in the much earlier scene of the swing; both have the same capacity for instinctive living, however it may have been repressed and thwarted by circumstances.

Here, as he breaks again with Miriam, comes “the end of the first phase of Paul's love-affair”\textsuperscript{60}; It is marked by an intensification of his sexuality:
The sex instinct that Miriam had over refined for so long grew particularly strong. Often, as he talked to Clara Dawes, came, that thickening and quickening of his blood, that particular concentration in the breast.

It is not simply, a turning from one woman to another; both the women are in his consciousness:

Sooner or later he would have to ask one woman or another. But he belonged to Miriam. Of that she was so fixedly sure that he allowed her right.

This drift towards Clara is caused by something inherent in Paul’s own personality. Although Paul takes his mother’s part throughout the novel, he is a mixture of parental form and substance and therefore has the potential to achieve ‘true identity.’ Paul is small, like his mother, but vigorous, like his father, with the ‘exhaustless energy’. Thus, to find his real self, Paul must separate himself from his mother and exchange his rigid middle class self consciousness for feelings more open to the life beyond those limits; in other words, to become more like his father.
As Paul begins to reject the rigid identity of his mother, he moves from her domestic territory to the outside, the sensual, elemental world of his father. Unlike the younger Paul who was afraid of the wind, the older Paul loves the sea and its “clanging at the land. He loved to feel himself between the noise of it and the silence of the sandy shore.” Paul’s lovemaking with Miriam is unsuccessful partially because he associates her with the confines of home, Willy Farm, and his mother’s middle-class idealism; but Clara reminds him of the “open space sort”, a free spirit, and most of their love making takes place outdoors. The move outside shows Paul’s increasing detachment from family, but more important, it shows Lawrence’s shift of focus from social to individual, away from Mrs. Morel’s “brood” to Paul’s brooding for himself.

His intimacy with Clara grows gradually; for a time, he sees little of Miriam, and more and more of Clara. When she comes to Jordan's at his invitation, they are thrown even more together, and Lawrence traces very delicately the growing involvement. He shows their physical awareness of each other and the defensive sexual hostility that accompanies such awareness. The situation is not realised as intimately, as much from the inside, as the relationship with Miriam; it does seem more to be there in order to confirm a preconceived thesis, but it is amply adequate for its
purpose; Clara's vital attractiveness is well enough conveyed for us to accept it as a fact. Again, Paul does not realise the true state of his feelings towards Clara. At a time when the nature of Clara's appeal to Paul is clear to Mrs. Morel and, Paul can still feel:

But she was a married woman, and he believed in simple friendship. And he considered he was perfectly honourable with regard to her. It was only a friendship between man and woman.66

At this point, Lawrence makes one of his dearest definitions of Paul's state:

Sex had become so complicated with him that he would have denied that he could ever want Clara or Miriam or any woman whom he knew, sex desire was a sort of detached thing that did not belong to a woman. He loved Miriam with his soul. He grew warm at the thought of Clara, he battled with her, he knew the curves of her breast and shoulders as if they had been moulded inside him, and yet he did not positively desire her.67
Because Paul, preoccupied with libidinal thrust as he is, has not yet completely focused his desires on a particular woman. It is possible for him to return to Miriam, in spite of the attraction of Clara. Clara has in a way herself encouraged him; “she has told him that Miriam ‘doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's your own imagination. She wants you.” He goes back this time with fully aroused passions, and still finds himself inhibited from any direct approach to Miriam by the ‘eternal maidenhood’ about her. Paul's return to Miriam causes bitter suffering to his mother. She has not been in the centre of the picture for some time; as Paul is absorbed by interests other than her but now she comes back. In a passage whose significance is often missed, because the main stress for the time being lies on Paul, we are told of her grief and her feeling of defeat. She sees Paul as losing warmth and joy in the course of his struggle with Miriam; she realises he is determined to go to her. Now, for the first time, cannot fight back: “Mrs. Morel was tried. She began to give up at last she had finished, She was in the way.”

The decisions now lie with Paul; his mother no longer has the will or power to act.

Paul makes an effort to break down the barrier of physical reticence between him and Miriam; he tries to bring sexuality to life
between them, so that their union, so close in many ways, can be complete. But Miriam cannot respond; to do so would be alien to her, a violation of her own special integrity. Her timorousness, her inability to yield herself spontaneously to sensation, feeling and passion, come more painfully than ever between them:

He courted her now like a lover. Often, when he grew hot, she put his face from her, held it between her hands and looked in his eyes. He could not meet her gaze. Her dark eyes, earnest and searching, made him turn away. Not for an instant would she let him forget. Back again he had to torture himself into a sense of his responsibility and hers. Never any relaxing, never any leaving himself to the great hunger and impersonality of passion; he must be brought back to a deliberate, reflective creature.71

They do, however, achieve physical consummation, but it remains merely physical; it doesn't bring about the union that both Paul and Miriam desire. It has seemed to Paul that only Miriam's physical withdrawal stood between them; he finds that possessing her body makes no essential difference:
She lay as if she had given herself up to sacrifice; there was her body for him; but the look at the back of her eyes, like a creature awaiting immolation, arrested him, and all his blood fell back.

“You are sure you want me?” he asked, as if a cold shadow had come over him.

“Yes, quite sure.”

She was very quiet, very calm. She only realised that she was doing something for him. He could hardly bear it.... For a second, he wished he were sexless or dead. Then he shut his eyes again to her, and his blood beat back again.

And afterwards he loved her—loved her to the very last fibre of his being. He loved her.

But he wanted, somehow, to cry.72

They have a week of passionate love-making, and the situation is made quite clear. When Paul takes Miriam physically, he has to do so selfishly—‘he had always, almost willfully, to put her out of count’; when they are spiritually together, Paul's desire
has to be laid aside. The spiritual and the physical sides of their love
never fuse together; for Miriam, the physical act of love is a
voluntary sacrifice of herself. Between them, the physical union
gives nothing more than itself; for Miriam, it is not even a
gratification.

Both feel a sense of failure. Paul realises that the act he
had set so much store on as a means of achieving fulfillment and
unity is paradoxically the means of driving them apart.

Gradually, he ceased to ask her to have him.

Instead of drawing them together, it put them
apart. And then he realized, consciously, that
it was no good. It was useless trying; it would
never be a success between them.73

This is really the end for them. Paul has had Miriam's
body, but he has not had her; her spiritual virginity that has proved
to be the barrier, remains; But Miriam is not wholly to blame. In
their last meeting as lovers, Miriam, in a scene of great pain and
bitterness, says;

“It has always been you fighting me off.”

“Not always—not at first!” he pleaded.
“Always,? from the very beginning—always the same!”

Paul, in despair, feels that their whole relationship has been a sham; Miriam is 'full of bitterness'. Their situation is a sad one; but we can see that it is inevitable. They are not 'star-crossed' lovers; they are crossed by their characters, temperaments and circumstances.

They go their separate ways, Miriam in patient hope (‘she remained alone with herself, waiting’) of Paul's return, Paul to seek fulfillment in Clara.

It is, for Paul, something in the way of an exercise or experiment in passion. This is not to say that Paul's feeling is cold-blooded lust, a simple search for gratification, but we certainly get the impression that there is an element of will in it. Paul is deliberately searching for the fulfillment in passion that he failed to find with Miriam. That he is in love with Clara is made clear enough; Paul's impatience through the long Sunday as he waits for Monday when he will see her again is well described; Clara's physical vitality is thoroughly realised; and we feel Paul's acute awareness of it.
They achieve a simple happiness together at first; both are uninhibited with each other; both are willing to surrender to the moment; both have a capacity for happiness. Ultimately, Paul finds his fulfillment:

But then Clara was not there for him, only woman, warm something he loved and almost worshipped, there in the dark. But it was not Clara and she submitted to him. The naked hunger and inevitability of his loving her, something strong and blind and ruthless in its primitiveness, made the hour almost terrible to her. She knew how stark and alone he was and she felt that it was great that he came to her; and she took him simply because his need was bigger than either her or him, and her soul was still within her. She did this for him in his need, even if he left her, for she loved him. . . . They had met, and included in the meeting the thrust of the manifold grass-stems, the cry of the peewit, the wheel of the stars.77
Their passion is seen to be instinctive and living and natural -- it is included in the natural order of the world, the grass, the peewit, and the stars. It is a revelation to them, a profound experience:

They could let themselves be carried by life, and they felt a sort of peace each in the other. There was a verification they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away; it was almost their belief in life.\(^78\)

Although they could feel this, Clara is not satisfied:

Something great was there, she knew; something great enveloped her. In the morning it was not the same. They had known, but she could not keep the moment.\(^79\)

She feels that she has not fully got Paul, that there is some part of him withheld, not deliberately, but unattainable because of his very nature, just as Miriam could not naturally give herself physically, Paul cannot naturally give himself spiritually. But their passion and their desire for each other continue, and very soon we recognise the true state of affairs:
She knew she never fully had him. Some part, big and vital in him, she had no hold over; nor did she even try to get it, or even to realize what it was.  

She feels surer of her estranged husband than she does of Paul. Paul and she have benefitted each other, she feels; a necessary function has been performed:

But at any rate, she knew now she was sure of herself. And the same could almost be said of him. Together they had received the baptism of life, each through the other; but now their missions were separate.  

She realizes that they will part, and realizes too that they both want permanent relationship; she knows that they cannot give that to each other. Clara, now, can accept her husband because she has gained self-knowledge through passion, and because she can feel secure in Dawes’ affection. In fact Clara is “saved,” restored to realization of herself as woman, and to her husband” by the fire of passion not by Paul as savior.  

Here we notice another development in this relationship between Tom and Clara. As time goes on, even the passion
begins to fail, and they begin to move from the realms of love to those of lust:

Their loving grew more mechanical . . .
gradually they began to introduce novelties,
to get back some of the feeling of satisfaction. 83

The relationship has given Paul something; he has come near his fulfillment in passion; but he cannot give himself, and it has ended as the relationship with Miriam did in failure. And clearly this time, the deficiency is in Paul.

Towards the end of the novel three major events take place. Clara finally goes back to her husband. In between, mother dies and at his mother’s death Paul is very near to his own death, and Paul rejects Miriam’s fresh proposal of marriage:

He felt, in leaving her, he was defrauding her of life. But he knew that, in staying, stifling the inner desperate man, he was denying his own life. And he did not hope to give life to her by denying his own. 84

Now he is all alone. He carries on, mechanically and lifelessly, in anguish and puzzlement:
Always alone, his soul oscillated, first on the side of death, then on the side of life, doggedly. The real agony was that he had nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to say and was nothing himself.”

Here, it should be noted that this sense of ‘nothingness’ has a deeper connotation. It suggests disillusionment and side by side dissolution and shattering of ‘ego’ that, in fact, leads towards ‘coming to the being’.

Paul, on the last page of the novel, is completely derelict. He is alone, wretched, unsure of himself, barely certain even of his own existence, deeply conscious of complete failure. It is this utterly isolated creature who, in the last paragraph of the novel, refuses to admit defeat, and turns his face to life:

But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. 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.
As Harry T. Moore points out, Paul’s return to life hinges upon the final word, “quickly,” which means *lively* rather than rapidly: “The last word in *Sons and Lovers* is an adverb attesting not only the hero’s (Paul) desire to live but also to his deep ability to do so.”

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Notes and References

4. Emphasis added.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
37. Emphasis added.
Emphasis added. It suggests the orgasmic tension caused by the libido.

Sons and Lovers, p. 222.


*emphasis added.

Sons and Lovers, pp. 235-36.


Emphasis added. This ‘thickening and quickening …blood’ is suggestive of Paul’s aggravated libido.

Sons and Lovers, P. 312.


* Lawrence uses ‘brooding’ to suggest self consciousness or unhealthy introspection and except Walter all other characters in the novel ‘broods’.


Ibid., p. 369.

Ibid., p. 370.

Ibid., pp. 437-38.

Ibid., p. 438.

Ibid., p. 438.

Ibid., p. 447.

*Emphasis added.

Sons and Lovers, p. 447.


Ibid., p. 517.

Ibid., p. 509.

Ibid., p. 520.

Life and Works, p. 105.