

Sons and Lovers



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF D. H. LAWRENCE

David Herbert Lawrence was born in a mining community in Northern England. Lawrence loved the countryside surrounding his home and spent a great deal of time outside as a child. After school, he became a clerk in an office in the town but came down with pneumonia a few months later which forced him to leave his position. During his recovery, Lawrence spent a great deal of time at a nearby farm where he became friends with Jessie Chambers, the inspiration for Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*. He studied at Nottingham University and then got a job teaching at a university in London. He received recognition for his fiction when Chambers sent some of his work to a literary journal edited by the poet Ford Maddox Ford, and Lawrence then began to pursue writing as a career. He published his first novel, *The White Peacock*, in 1910 shortly before the death of his mother. Lawrence was deeply affected by his mother's death and based *Sons and Lovers* on this experience. In 1912, Lawrence eloped with a married woman, Frieda Weekly, and the pair left Britain to travel Europe. They returned to England in 1913 and became involved with the London literary and intellectual scene. Lawrence took an anti-war stance to the outbreak of WW1 in Europe. This made him a controversial figure and he was accused of obscenity because of sexual content in his novel *The Rainbow*, which was banned in the UK. His 1920 novel, *Women in Love*, and his 1928 novel, *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, were also banned on obscenity charges. He eventually left England with Frieda in 1917 and moved to the United States. He was forced to return to Italy for the sake of his health in 1925 and died from tuberculosis in 1930.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sons and Lovers is set in the early decades of the twentieth century in an industrial mining community. The housing estate the Morels live on is typical of the mining communities which sprung up across the north of England during the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. These areas were entirely reliant on the coal mines for work because they were generally rural and slightly removed from the large, northern manufacturing towns, like Nottingham, where Paul gets a job in the novel. In the early twentieth century in Britain, miners were considered working class people and, like Mr. Morel, were generally uneducated and would work in the mines their whole lives. There was a noticeable shift throughout the twentieth century, as young people gravitated away from these types of hard, menial jobs to take advantage of education and employment opportunities in the growing towns and cities. This

often led to class divides within generations in the same families, a subject which is loosely touched on in *Sons and Lovers*, as the children of miners would often progress into the middle class. Britain in this period had a strict culture of convention and propriety which was based in class and which held considerable sway over how people lived their lives, whom they married, and their social reputation. The novel is set in a period when there is growing interest in women's rights, with the rise of the suffragettes, who protested frequently for the right to vote, and a public interest better labor laws and better conditions for workers. There is a brief reference in the novel to the possibility of war in Europe. This demonstrates political tensions at the time which would gradually escalate and erupt into WW1, which broke out shortly after the novel was published.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Sons and Lovers relates to the work of the French realist Emile Zola in novels such as *Germinal* from 1885, which describes the day to day life of a mining community in rural France. It is also similar to novels, such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and [Jude the Obscure](#), by the English novelist Thomas Hardy, which deal with subjects such as industrial poverty, nature, gender, and lifestyle changes between the lower and middle classes at the turn of the twentieth century. The non-linear use of time and meandering structure of *Sons and Lovers* is similar to experimental modernist novels, such as [Mrs Dalloway](#) by Virginia Woolf from 1925, which examines themes of human psychology in an industrial, urban setting. Lawrence's use of symbolism through images of nature and his use of pathetic fallacy links *Sons and Lovers* to novels such as [Howards End](#) and *Maurice* by E. M. Forster. These novels also explore sexual taboos in early twentieth century Britain. *Sons and Lovers* is also similar to several of Lawrence's later works. His novel *The Rainbow* charts the history and development of a farming family across several generations, while novels such as *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterly's Lover* examine transgressive sexual relationships against the backdrop of British propriety. Later British novels, such as *Stars Look Down* by A. J. Cronin or *How Green Was My Valley* by Richard Llewellyn, which tackle the subjects of coal mining and familial struggle, are reminiscent of Lawrence's work.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Sons and Lovers
- **When Written:** 1913
- **Where Written:** London, Germany, and Italy

- **When Published:** London
- **Literary Period:** Modernist
- **Genre:** Literary fiction
- **Setting:** Northern England
- **Climax:** Mrs. Morel, who has an unusually close bond with her son, Paul, dies from cancer and leaves Paul lost and disorientated
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Jessie Chambers. Lawrence closely modeled the character of Miriam in *Sons and Lovers* on his real-life friend Jessie Chambers. Chambers took an active interest in Lawrence's literary career and the pair had a brief sexual relationship. Jessie was so hurt by Lawrence's portrayal of her as the zealous Miriam in his novel that she never spoke to him again after reading a draft of the work.

Utopian visions. When Lawrence moved to the United States with Freida, he had plans to set up a communist utopia with a group of friends on land that they bought in New Mexico, near an artist colony at Taos. This was a place where creators and bohemians congregated and mingled, and Lawrence spent several years here and documented his experiences in a series of short stories called *Taos Quartet in Three Movements*. Although Taos was supposed to be a place of utopian collaboration and peace, the atmosphere among the group was often strained and tempestuous.



PLOT SUMMARY

Gertrude (soon to be Mrs. Morel), an intelligent young woman from a middle-class English family, meets a young miner, Mr. Morel, at a country dance. Although Gertrude has a religious and ascetic temperament, she is attracted to Walter Morel's vigorous nature and thinks he is very handsome when she sees him dance at the party. The pair are married a few months later and soon Mrs. Morel becomes pregnant. The first few months of their marriage are happy, but Mrs. Morel finds that she cannot really talk to her husband and that, despite their initial attraction, the couple have little in common. She discovers that Walter is not as wealthy as she believed and that they do not own the house they live in, but rather rent it from Walter's mother. She dislikes life in the mining community and does not get along with the other women, who find her haughty and superior. Mrs. Morel gives birth to a son, who she names William, and she adores him immensely. Although she and Mr. Morel are still friendly with each other, she has lost interest in him and the rift between them widens after the birth of the child. One morning, when William is a toddler, Mrs. Morel comes downstairs and finds that Mr. Morel has cut all the boy's

hair off. Mrs. Morel is horrified, and this action drives a wedge between her and her husband. She focuses all her love on her son and delights in planning for his future and watching him grow up.

Mrs. Morel has a second child, Annie, and then gets pregnant with a third. One day, not long before her due date, a fair comes to town and Mrs. Morel reluctantly goes along to please William, who cannot enjoy the fair without her. While she is there, Mrs. Morel sees that Mr. Morel, who has taken to drinking frequently, is in the beer tent and she is not surprised when he returns home drunk that evening. A few weeks later, there is a public holiday and Mr. Morel uses this time to go out drinking with his friend Jerry Purdy, whom Mrs. Morel cannot stand and who is a misogynist. When Mr. Morel comes back that night, he is very drunk and the couple fight. Mr. Morel locks Mrs. Morel out of the house and she calms herself down by looking at the [moon](#) and the [flowers](#) in her garden. When she returns, Mr. Morel lets her back in but goes to bed without talking to her.

Mrs. Morel gives birth to another boy. One night, shortly after the birth, when she has taken the children out of the house to avoid Mr. Morel's temper, she sits and watches the sunset on a nearby hill and decides to name the baby Paul. As she looks down at the little infant, she is overcome with guilt and sadness. She thinks that the baby looks sad because she did not want him while she was pregnant. Paul grows into a serious and thoughtful child. William, meanwhile, is very active and charming. Mrs. Morel gives birth to a third son, Arthur, whom Mr. Morel is instantly fond of. When William is old enough, he gets a job as a clerk and is very successful and well-liked. He is offered a position in London and gleefully accepts. Although Mrs. Morel is proud of William, she is devastated to see him leave home. At first, William visits home a lot and sends money to his family. However, as time goes on, he begins to get caught up in city life and spends his money on his fiancée, Louisa Lily Denys Western. William brings the young woman home to meet his family and they are disappointed to find that she acts superior to them and treats them like her servants. As their relationship goes on, William comes to despise his fiancée, but he will not end the engagement. Mrs. Morel is shocked and depressed when, during another visit, William is openly cruel to Louisa. Not long after this, William contracts pneumonia and dies, leaving Mrs. Morel heartbroken.

Paul, meanwhile, grows into an intelligent young man and takes a job as a clerk in Nottingham. He enjoys the work and gets along well with his colleagues, but the long hours take a toll on his health. Mrs. Morel continues to grieve for William, and Paul, who is also very close to his mother, is desperate to bring her out of herself and to win her attention back. When Paul is struck down with pneumonia, Mrs. Morel realizes, to her horror, that she has neglected him. She does everything in her power to nurse him back to health. Paul recovers well and from

then on, Mrs. Morel is committed to him and pins all her hopes for the future on him. During his time off work after his illness, Paul begins to visit a nearby farm owned by Mr. Leivers. He strikes up an unusual friendship with the Leivers' daughter, Miriam, who is very timid, religious, and intellectual. Mrs. Morel dislikes her and feels that she is bad for Paul. Although Paul and Miriam get along well, there is a physical awkwardness between them. They are both immature and neither understands that they are attracted to each other. Mrs. Morel watches their relationship closely and wishes that Paul would break things off; she is jealous of the time he spends with Miriam. Paul returns to his job at the factory after a while, but his hours are shorter and he has more time to work on his painting, which is his real interest. During this time, Miriam realizes that she is in love with Paul, but she feels ashamed of this physical attraction because it clashes with her religious views. Miriam does not tell Paul about her feelings. The family goes on holiday to the seaside and Miriam goes with them. Paul spends most of his time with Mrs. Morel, however, and only sees Miriam in the evenings.

Around this time, Paul wins a prize for his painting in a Nottingham exhibition. One night, he meets Miriam at the exhibition along with a young woman called Clara Dawes. Clara is married to a man named Baxter, who works in the same factory as Paul, but the pair have separated. Paul thinks Clara is snooty and believes she is a "man hater" because she is involved with the suffragettes. He also dislikes Baxter, who was rude to him on his first day at the factory. Miriam and Paul continue their platonic relationship, but it puts a strain on them, as they both wish to become a couple but do not know how to do so. Paul resents Miriam because he feels she is too spiritual and that this hampers him from behaving physically, or being "ordinary," with her. Miriam is hurt and confused, but she continues to maintain that she is good for Paul and that he "belongs to her." One night, when Paul is out with Miriam, Mrs. Morel is taken ill. When Paul returns, Annie berates him for neglecting his mother. Paul tries to break things off with Miriam, but he still visits the farm often because he is friends with her brother, Edgar. One afternoon, Paul is invited to Miriam's house to have tea with Clara Dawes. Although Paul still dislikes Clara, he finds her impressive and attractive.

Not long after this, Paul delivers a parcel to Clara's house, which is near the factory where he works. He learns that she lives with her mother, Mrs. Radford, and that she is desperately unhappy. Paul gets Clara a job in the factory, but still finds her haughty and reserved at work. Her presence irritates him and he goes out of his way to annoy her. During the summer, Paul and Miriam get engaged, but Paul breaks off the engagement several weeks later. He strikes up a relationship with Clara but continues to see Miriam often. Baxter Dawes finds out about Paul and Clara, and Baxter and Paul get into a fight in a pub. Baxter later attacks Paul in the [dark](#), while he is walking back

from Clara's house. Paul is not seriously hurt and feels a strange bond with Baxter after this incident.

During this period, Mrs. Morel's health begins to decline. While she is on holiday in Sheffield, staying with Annie, she falls ill and is diagnosed with cancer. Paul is horrified at the thought that his mother may die. He stays in Sheffield to nurse her and, while he is there, learns that Baxter is in the hospital nearby, recovering from typhoid. Paul goes to visit him, and the two men become friends. After a few weeks, Mrs. Morel is able to travel home, but it is understood by everyone that she will not live very long. Although Paul is still in contact with both Miriam and Clara, he finds that he no longer cares for them and he dedicates all his time to caring for his mother. Mrs. Morel dies gradually and painfully; Annie and Paul, who care for her, can hardly bear the strain. Finally, after Mrs. Morel has grown unbearably ill, Paul poisons her with the painkillers he has been given by the doctor. She is buried alongside William, and Mr. Morel can no longer bear to live in the house that he shared with his wife. He and Paul move out and take separate lodgings in Nottingham.

Not long after Mrs. Morel's death, Paul goes on a trip to the seaside with Baxter and invites Clara to join them. He has lost all interest in her, and in life generally since his mother's death, and he is suicidal with grief. He believes that Clara wishes to reconcile with Baxter and arranges things so that he leaves them together in the cottage. Clara is angry with Paul for manipulating her, but she does forgive Baxter and agrees to return to him as his wife. For a long time after this, Paul wishes to die and feels he has no connection with life. One night, he sees Miriam outside church and invites her back to his house. Miriam is sad to see that he has deteriorated and suggests that they get married. Paul rejects her, and Miriam decides that she will never see him again. After she has gone, Paul catches a car out into the country and walks across the fields in the dark. He calls out to his mother and wishes to end his life so he can be with her. He is determined not to die, however, and knows he cannot kill himself. Miserable yet resolute, Paul walks back across the dark fields, in the direction of the town.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Gertrude Morel – Mrs. Morel is the wife of Mr. Morel and the mother of William, Paul, Annie and Arthur. She is born into a middle-class family and marries Mr. Morel after she meets him at a country dance. Mrs. Morel is reserved and religious, but she is also an extremely practical and determined woman. Although she dislikes drink and is generally ascetic in her lifestyle, she is capable of passion and sensuality and this leads her to marry Mr. Morel, to whom she is instantly attracted. Mrs. Morel strives to make the best of her poverty and is proud and

prepared to defend herself when her husband is abusive to her. She is never broken down by his temper, although he makes her fiercely angry—throughout their marriage she tends to dominate and overshadow him, as she is really the stronger of the pair. Mrs. Morel loves her children deeply and is genuinely well meaning towards them. Unfortunately, the strength of her love for her sons leads her to become jealous and possessive and she inadvertently restricts them as they try to develop their own lives; they have such a strong relationship with her that they feel guilty if they share their affection with another woman. Miriam, Paul's long-term girlfriend, often feels that she must compete with Mrs. Morel and that he is under his mother's influence. Overall, Mrs. Morel's life is hard and unhappy, and the reader gets the sense that she has not been given the opportunity to use her full potential. She is an intelligent, organized and industrious woman, but the restrictions of her class and gender mean that Mrs. Morel misses out on opportunities in work and education that later generations of women would benefit from.

Mr. Walter Morel – Mr. Morel is the husband of Mrs. Morel and the father of William, Paul, Annie and Arthur. Mr. Morel is a coalminer and works in the mines from the age of thirteen onwards and for the rest of his adult life. He is a sensuous, physical man but he is not inclined towards conversation and does not have the patience for serious ideas. He is uneducated, like most miners in this period, and does not know how to read or write well. He is extremely “handy” around the house and is at his most content when he is at work or engaged in some practical task. He finds, after a short period of marriage, that he is incompatible with Mrs. Morel and that he clashes with her severe, disciplined approach to life. In response to this, Mr. Morel takes to drink and spends much of his time in the pub. He is unable to communicate well or explain his emotions and takes out his frustration on his wife and children. He feels hurt and rejected when Mrs. Morel pays more attention to the children than to him and believes that he is not appreciated as the breadwinner of the family. From time to time, he flirts with misogynistic ideas, encouraged by his friend Jerry Purdy, and attempts to dominate Mrs. Morel. He finds, however, that he is a much weaker character than her and, though he is violent towards her and, on one occasion, threatens to leave, she always seems more in control of the situation than he does, although she is financially reliant on him and he is physically much stronger than her. Mr. Morel is a cowardly man and never takes responsibility for the wrongs he has done to his wife. Instead, after her death, he “dismisses” her by telling himself that he always “did his best by her,” although this is not completely true.

William Morel – William Morel is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Morel and the elder brother of Annie, Paul, and Arthur. He is a cheerful, popular, and athletic child and is his mother's favorite. William is extremely close to his mother as a child and cannot

stand it if she is ill or hurt. He often spars with his father and, on one occasion, almost fights him when his father hits Mrs. Morel. Although William grows into a sociable and energetic young man, he has a fierce temper and is emotionally volatile. He is often unsure about his own opinions and relies on his mother to temper and inform his ideas. William is very ambitious and determined to get on in society. He takes a job in London and shows himself to be capable of a great deal, both intellectually and professionally. However, Mrs. Morel questions William's motivation as he pursues a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle and it seems clear that William has little direction in life and does not understand his own behavior well. He is cruel and spiteful in his relationship with Louisa Lily Denys Western, whom he openly considers to be stupid and shallow. Despite this, he will not break up with her and seems to hold her responsible for the fact that he dislikes her. This shows that William has learned some of his father's abusive behaviors and this disappoints Mrs. Morel. William's reckless and self-destructive behavior eventually brings about his own demise, as he dies young after ruining his health for the sake of money and prestige.

Paul Morel – Paul Morel is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Morel and the brother of William, Annie, and Arthur. Paul is a serious and reflective child and Mrs. Morel worries about him extensively because she feels he is fragile and because he is prone to “fits of depression.” However, despite Mrs. Morel's fears, Paul grows into a vigorous and intelligent young man. Although he is not as athletic as Mr. Morel or William, Paul enjoys physical activity and likes to “lose himself” in it. He loves to be outdoors in nature and feels a sensuous connection to the natural world. He is very interested in art and ideas and is a talented painter. He is successful and popular at work and is attractive to women. However, his tendency towards abstract thought and his introspective temperament sometimes lead Paul into trouble. Although he is a deep thinker, he is not able to easily recognize his emotions or understand what he wants or needs from a situation. He is accidentally cruel to his lovers, Miriam and Clara, because he cannot decide what he wants from them and he tends to be self-absorbed and think about himself before he considers their feelings. He feels uncomfortable about sex and is deeply ashamed of his desires. This often makes him hate his lovers because he blames them for causing his shame. Paul is extremely close to Mrs. Morel, especially after William's death, and wishes that he and his mother were not related so they could be lovers rather than mother and son. He plans his life and career around pleasing and supporting his mother and prioritizes her over his girlfriends, of whom she is very jealous. Paul is devastated by his mother's death and loses all interest in life or his own future. He feels that his mother was his real companion and has no desire to go on without her. Despite this, however, Paul is a determined character and his love of physicality and the material world push him to survive even when he is left desolate at the novel's conclusion.

Annie Morel – Annie Morel is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Morel and the sister of William, Paul and Arthur. She is a practical girl and grows into a mature and sensible young woman. Annie takes a job as a schoolteacher and marries a good-natured young man called Leonard, who has a good position at work and of whom the family are fond. Annie sides with Mrs. Morel against Miriam, Paul's girlfriend, whom both the women dislike. Annie, like Mrs. Morel, feels that Miriam is overly spiritual and refined and is a bad influence on Paul. Annie feels that Miriam takes all his attention away from the family, where his real loyalties should rest, and she blames Miriam for distracting Paul when Mrs. Morel first becomes ill. Annie helps Paul care for Mrs. Morel towards the end of the novel, when Mrs. Morel is dying. Annie is close to her mother and feels that, if she had been at home during the early stages of Mrs. Morel's illness, her mother would have confided in her and she could have helped her get proper treatment. However, Annie's relationship with Mrs. Morel does not have the intensity of the relationships between Mrs. Morel and William and Paul. By the time of Mrs. Morel's death, Annie is worn out with her care and the strain of constantly seeing her mother in pain and is relieved when Paul decides to poison his mother to end her suffering.

Arthur Morel – Arthur Morel is the youngest child of Mr. and Mrs. Morel and the younger brother of William, Annie, and Paul. Arthur is a happy, lively child and, out of all the Morel children, he gets along best with Mr. Morel. He grows into an energetic young man who is often careless in his pursuit of fun and is constantly getting into scrapes. Mrs. Morel worries about Arthur and finds him tiring to be around because he is so active and extroverted. Arthur takes a job in a factory but is unhappy there. One day, on a whim, he and a friend join the army. Arthur regrets this decision immediately and asks his mother to pay his way out. This shows that Arthur is irresponsible and does not expect there to be consequences to his actions. His time in the army disciplines him, however, and brings the optimistic and determined side of his nature to the surface. He makes the best of his circumstances and, when he is at last discharged, he marries Beatrice Wyld and becomes a hard-working and responsible husband and father to their child. Arthur is very comfortable in his body in a way that Paul is not. It is insinuated that, unlike Paul, he is not ashamed of his physical and sexual prowess and, instead, shows his body off when he is with Beatrice, before they become lovers.

Miriam Leivers – Miriam is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers and the long-term girlfriend of Paul Morel. Paul meets Miriam when she is fourteen and continues to spend time with her into her early twenties. Miriam is a deeply self-conscious and spiritual girl. She is extremely religious, loves to feel pure, and is afraid of physical sensation and experience. Her emotions tend to be very extreme and close to the surface and she has trouble making light of situations and being friendly

and familiar with people. She reads a lot and resents her life on the farm. She wants to have an education and has an extremely romantic view of herself as a literary heroine who has been trapped in a life of manual labor. She and Paul have a deep intellectual connection and spend many hours together discussing books, art, and religion. Although she is in love with Paul, Miriam despises sexual contact and disapproves of physical love outside of marriage, which she is afraid of and feels too young for. She views sex as a "sacrifice" and is willing to sacrifice herself for Paul, in order to give him pleasure. Throughout her relationship with Paul, Miriam is convinced that Paul is the best and most soulful version of himself when he is with her. She feels confident that, in the end, Paul will choose her over the other women who compete for his affections: his mother and, later, Clara Dawes. At times, Miriam tries to manipulate Paul into staying with her, but generally she is confused by his erratic behavior towards her and is hurt by his frequent rejections. Despite this, Miriam is stronger than Paul and often dislikes him because he is so easily swayed by his mother's opinion. Miriam, on the other hand, genuinely thinks for herself. She is hated by Mrs. Morel, who feels that she would "suck the soul" from her son, and by Annie and Clara, who find her insipid and needy.

Clara Dawes – Clara Dawes is the wife of Baxter Dawes, the daughter of Mrs. Radford, and Paul Morel's lover. Clara is estranged from her husband Baxter, whom she married young and found that she could not get on with. She is a friend of Miriam (who introduces her to Paul) and she lives with her mother. Clara is a suffragette and is bitter and resentful about the way her marriage has worked out. Paul believes that she is a "man hater" but, as he gets to know her, feels that she is deeply sensuous and "needs a man" to feel loved and that her single life makes her depressed. Clara treats Paul's claims contemptuously and insists that Baxter was cruel to her and that this is the reason she left him. Paul and Clara have an extremely passionate and physical relationship, although they do not have much in common intellectually. Clara is a strong, active woman, but is very reserved and finds it hard to fit in with the factory girls when Paul gets her a job at Jordan's. She gets on well with Mrs. Morel, however, who prefers down to earth Clara to the saintly Miriam. She gains confidence through her affair with Paul, but will not divorce her husband, whom she still feels sorry for. Clara is independent and single minded because she is willing to live separately from her husband despite the social disapproval this causes. By the end of the novel, Clara is sick of Paul's dithering between her and Miriam and feels that he is unmanly because he has played with her and failed to commit to their relationship. She gets her pride back after her failed marriage and, in her new confident, independent state, is able to reconcile with Baxter, who has been humbled and who now intends to treat her with respect.

Baxter Dawes – Baxter Dawes is the husband of Clara Dawes

and Paul Morel's rival when Paul becomes Clara's lover. Baxter and Clara are separated (she left him because he cheated on her) and Baxter is self-destructive and miserable in the wake of her departure, despite the fact that he now lives with his mistress. Paul and Baxter hate each other even before Paul goes out with Clara. Baxter is a manual laborer and Paul finds him rude and "common" and looks down on and despises him. Baxter, in turn, hates Paul for being snobbish and above himself. At the same time, Paul feels drawn towards Baxter and Baxter is reminiscent of Mr. Morel and mirrors the emotionally distant father figure in Paul's life. Paul and Baxter's rivalry reaches a crisis when Baxter attacks Paul one night and the pair have a brawl. After this, however, the two become friends when Paul visits Baxter in hospital, where he is sick and depressed. Baxter is a physical and proud man, but his pride and confidence are shattered by his failed relationship with Clara. He feels sorry for himself and regrets what has happened. After he recovers from his illness, he realizes that he does not want to die and is humbled by the experience. This experience also matures him, and he grows more responsible and emotionally communicative and is able to reconcile with Clara, with Paul's help, at the novel's close.

Louisa Lily Denys Western – Louisa Lily Denys Western is a secretary in London and William's fiancée before his death. Louisa is a shallow, immature girl, who has been spoiled by her indulgent upbringing. She comes from a wealthy family and, though she only has low-paid secretarial work, she feels superior to William's family and treats them like servants when she comes to visit. Louisa is an extremely careless woman who spends extravagantly and often loses expensive items that William provides for her. William treats Louisa badly because he finds her stupid and vain. He will not leave her, though (he feels sorry for her because her parents have recently died), and he believes that she cannot manage without him. At the same time, however, he believes that she would forget him immediately if he were to die. This suggests that Louisa is not hopeless without William, but that William enjoys controlling her and enjoys the fact that she relies on him because she is irresponsible and lazy and does not like being independent. Louisa gives the impression, however, of being harmless and oblivious; she does not mean to take advantage of William but does not seem to know how to act otherwise. Mrs. Morel even feels sorry for her because William is so unkind to her and calls her stupid to her face. After William's death, Louisa makes an effort to stay in touch with the family for a short period but, as William predicted, she quickly loses interest and marries another man.

Mr. Leivers – Mr. Leivers is married to Mrs. Leivers and is the owner of Willey Farm. He is the father of Edgar, Miriam, Geoffrey, and Maurice and is a virile, handsome, and practical man. Mrs. Morel admires Mr. Leivers and thinks that, if she had a fine husband like him, it would be a pleasure to help him on

the farm. She feels that Mrs. Leivers, who is a frail, delicate woman, is not suited to her husband, although the two women are friends.

Mrs. Leivers – Mrs. Leivers is the wife of Mr. Leivers and the mother of Edgar, Miriam, Geoffrey, and Maurice. Mrs. Leivers is a deeply religious and highly refined woman. She is gentle and kind-hearted, but very serious and intellectual. Physical activity tires her and she is frail. Mrs. Morel complains that, although Mrs. Leivers is poor, she does not make the best of it and takes no pride in her appearance. Mrs. Leivers, however, is not interested in worldly things and does not care about clothes or the way she looks. She gets on well with and is very kind to Paul.

Edgar Leivers – Edgar Leivers is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers and the brother of Miriam, Maurice, and Geoffrey. He is a serious and intelligent young man and strikes up a deep friendship with Paul Morel. Edgar is very different from his sister, Miriam, who is very spiritual and interested in personal ideas. In contrast, Edgar is rational, scientifically minded, and practical.

Mr. Heaton – Mr. Heaton is the minister of the parish where Mr. and Mrs. Morel live. He is a widower and friends with Mrs. Morel, whom he often visits when Paul is a baby. Mr. Heaton is a gentle and spiritual man and Mrs. Morel helps him write his sermons so that they are down to earth and will not go over the heads of the congregation. Mrs. Morel feels sorry for Mr. Heaton because she thinks that, since his wife's death, he has a lack of love in his life. Mr. Morel is hostile towards the minister because he thinks that his wife puts on airs to impress him.

Mrs. Radford – Mrs. Radford is the mother of Clara Dawes. She works as a lace maker and is a hard but kindly woman. Paul Morel meets Mrs. Radford when he stays at Clara's after their night at the theatre and he enjoys her sharp wit and harsh, teasing banter. Mrs. Radford tries to prevent Paul and Clara from sleeping together (which she knows they are trying to do) because they are not married. She is a conventional woman and sits up with them so that they cannot go to bed together. However, she is also practical and finally resigns herself to her daughter's relationship and takes herself off to bed. Although Mrs. Radford seems rough on the surface, it is implied she is good hearted and lenient underneath.

Mr. Jordan – Mr. Jordan is the manager of Jordan's, the factory where Paul is offered a job. Mr. Jordan is a working-class man who has made his way in the world through manufacturing. This reflects growing social mobility in the early twentieth century when the class one was born into gradually became less suffocating. Paul thinks Mr. Jordan is "common" but he is a kindly man underneath his businesslike veneer, and Paul believes that Mr. Jordan feels the need to assert his authority *because* of his lower-class status. He is an indulgent boss and treats his workers well.

Mr. Pappleworth – Mr. Pappleworth is Paul's superior at

Jordan's. He is a clerk and a friendly, sociable man. At first, Mr. Pappleworth tries to assert his superiority over Paul by shouting at the factory girls in his presence, but Paul can tell he doesn't mean it and the girls even tease him about it. After this, Mr. Pappleworth does his best to make Paul welcome and treats him as an equal at work. When he leaves the factory, Paul is promoted to Mr. Pappleworth's position.

Fanny – Fanny is a “hunchback” and works at Jordan's as one of the “spiral girls” on the sewing machines. She is very sensitive and has had a hard life. She often believes the other girls are making fun of her, although they insist that they are her friends. She is very taken with Paul and goes out of her way to arrange a present for his birthday. She particularly dislikes Clara when Clara comes to work at the factory.

Jerry Purdy – Jerry Purdy is a miner and a friend of Mr. Morel's. He is a misogynist and believes that men should have supreme rights over their wives, who should live to serve and obey them. Mr. Morel is impressed with him for a time and, under his influence, tries to bully his wife. Mrs. Morel despises Jerry and hates that he is friends with her husband.

John Field – John Field is man with whom Mrs. Morel is friends as a young woman. She encourages him to follow his passion and go into the church, but John Field insists he must follow his father's wishes and go into business. He gives Mrs. Morel a Bible that she keeps her whole life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Geoffrey Leivers – Geoffrey Leivers is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers and the younger brother of Edgar, Miriam, and Maurice. Geoffrey is a serious and reserved boy and, like all the Leivers children, he struggles to make friends.

Maurice Leivers – Maurice Leivers is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers and the brother of Edgar, Miriam, and Geoffrey. He is a quiet, somewhat sullen boy and finds it hard to interact with people outside of his family.

Polly – Polly is the secretary for Paul's department at Jordan's. She is a young woman but is kind and motherly towards Paul and heats up his lunch and dinner for him every day, which Mrs. Morel gives him to take from home.

Minnie – Minnie is Mr. and Mrs. Morel's maid.

Limb – Limb is a local farmer.

Hose – Hose is a man who employs the local women to mend stockings and other garments.

Beatrice Wyld – Beatrice Wyld is a friend of the Morel family and eventually marries Arthur Morel. She is a bright, quick, and witty young woman and a faithful wife to Arthur.

Agatha Leivers Miriam's sister, and a teacher. Agatha has rejected the Leiver's family's general lack of concern about worldly affairs and, in protest, is deeply focused on status and

appearance—ideas that seem trivial to Miriam.

Leonard Annie Leivers's fiance and, eventually, husband. He is good-natured and well-liked.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



FAMILY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers* examines the emotional dynamics of the Morel family and charts the gradual decline of the middle son, Paul Morel, as he navigates tensions between his romantic life and his family life. Many of the conflicts in *Sons and Lovers* are driven by underlying psychological forces, which even the characters themselves do not understand. This makes it difficult for them to respond in ways that help, rather than worsen, their situations. Lawrence was interested in psychology and loosely incorporates aspects of Freud's Oedipus complex into the plot of the novel. The Oedipus complex is the theory that infant children are attracted to their parent of the opposite gender and that they become jealous of the parent of the same sex. Lawrence's blend of family drama and psychology suggests that people's unresolved childhood pain and confusion can, unfortunately, lead to lives in which many of their emotional needs remain misunderstood and unfulfilled.

The Morel family is defined by conflict and division, which begin with the unhappy marriage of Mr. Morel and Mrs. Morel. Mrs. Morel, a young English woman from a “good family,” marries Mr. Morel after she meets him at a country dance. She soon finds, however, that she and her husband have little in common and that the life of a miner's wife is one of hardship and poverty. Their relationship quickly becomes volatile and Mr. and Mrs. Morel never emotionally reconcile. Their children side with their mother against their father, and the rift within the family foreshadows the conflicts that the children, especially William and Paul, will psychologically inherit. This legacy of conflict and division is continued by William and Paul in their relationships with women. Both William and Paul rely on their mother well into adulthood for emotional guidance, psychological support, and personal validation. When they try to build relationships with women their own age, they are divided within themselves because they feel disloyal to their mother, who often resents these women. This split is most clearly represented in Paul's relationships with Miriam and Clara, which are depicted as a “battle;” Miriam, on one side, feels she owns “Paul's soul,” while

with Clara he experiences physical passion. This divide between body and soul, which Paul can never reconcile, stands in for the most significant psychological tension in his life: his strong attachment to his mother. The force of their bond means that Paul constantly feels that he must choose between her and his lovers and, because of their deep familial connection, Paul ultimately sides with his mother and eventually casts off Miriam and Clara, which leaves him rootless and alone after Mrs. Morel's death. The repetition of such toxic psychological patterns throughout the novel suggests the power of early familial bonds and implies that these forces often direct decisions made in later life. If these early familial experiences are divisive or volatile, Paul's experience indicates, this can lead to the continuation of disruptive or unfulfilling relationships in adulthood.

What's more, many of the psychological conflicts in *Sons and Lovers* take place unconsciously and are not obvious to the characters. Paul and Mrs. Morel are driven by underlying needs and desires rather than explicit knowledge of themselves. For example, throughout his relationship with Miriam, Paul is often confused as to why he cannot fully "give himself" to her. Paul is even hurt when Miriam displays insight into his psychology during one of his many attempts to break up with her. Miriam says bitterly that their whole relationship has been Paul "fighting her off"; Paul feels that Miriam has "always known" and understood his emotional condition, while he himself has not, and that she has spitefully concealed the truth from him. This suggests that it is sometimes easier to gain insight into others than it is to examine oneself, especially when one has inherited psychological confusion from a tumultuous family life. Similarly, Mrs. Morel does not consciously know that she prevents her sons from being successful in love because her love for them is so possessive. Indeed, Mrs. Morel believes that she wishes Paul would marry "a nice girl" and is never aware that she is the aspect of his life that stops him from doing so. Her lack of awareness implies that, while it is often easy to speculate on psychological problems in others, it is harder to address conflicts in one's own emotional life.

The novel's overall theme of twisted family psychologies is most prominent in the somewhat ambiguous relationship between Paul and his mother. Although there is no explicitly sexual relationship between Paul and Mrs. Morel, their relationship nonetheless reflects Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. Paul and Mrs. Morel do not consider their relationship incestuous, but there are several incidents which suggest that their relationship makes other suspicious. For example, it is noted that they often "sleep together" in the same bed and when Mr. Morel walks in on them kissing, he complains that they are "up to their mischief." Incidents like these imply that their relationship is Oedipal in a Freudian sense and contains elements of inappropriate desire. This parallel is further implied by Paul's relationship with Clara and her estranged husband,

Baxter Dawes. Paul is drawn to Baxter and, even though he dislikes him, he craves his respect. Baxter is very like Paul's father and Clara is similar to Paul's mother. After the death of his mother, Paul loses interest in Clara and encourages her and Baxter to reunite. This sequence of events suggests that Paul acts out his parents' reunion, which never actually occurred, through Clara and Baxter. The ending, in which Paul leaves Clara and Baxter together and goes off by himself into the night, symbolizes Paul being forced at last to progress beyond the Oedipal phase of his childhood in which he was trapped while his mother was alive. Just as Mrs. Morel transferred her love from her husband onto her sons, Paul transfers his desire to sexually fulfill his mother onto Clara and Baxter. However, just like his mother, this does not help Paul; it only leads him to confusion and desolation at the novel's end. Through Paul's fate, the novel suggests that one must gain psychological insight into oneself, rather than making one's problems external and seeking resolution through others.



CHRISTIANITY, PROPRIETY, AND PHYSICALITY

Christianity was an important aspect of life in Britain in the early 1900s, when *Sons and Lovers* is set, and Lawrence uses frequent references to Biblical stories to underpin much of the action of the novel. However, when paired with social notions of propriety (which were standard in this period in Britain and which encouraged celibacy outside of marriage), Christian beliefs disrupt the lives of the characters by discouraging them from exploring their physical urges and desires. Lawrence believed that physical sensation was a manifestation of the divine, and that through bodily experiences human beings could achieve spiritual transcendence which united them with God. Accordingly, the novel argues that Christian belief, when it discounts the importance of the physical world in favor of the purely spiritual, is a source of confusion and emotional pain rather than fulfillment.

Although Christianity might seem like a source of insight, in the novel it is symbolic of false revelation and confusion rather than guidance. Paul, Mrs. Morel's second son and the main protagonist of the novel, is associated with the Biblical figure of St. Paul. This association begins when Paul is a baby and Mrs. Morel lifts him up to show him the sun. This parallels St. Paul's revelation on the way to Damascus, when he was struck temporarily blind and received a revelation from God. However, while in the biblical episode St. Paul's blinding leads to religious understanding, Mrs. Morel holds baby Paul up to the sun because she is worried that he understands too much—specifically, that he already understands the pain of life, which she feels he has learned because of her unhappiness while pregnant. As she looks into the baby's eyes, she feels that he has learned something which "stunned" a part of his soul and

she holds him to the light to dazzle this revelation away. This moment reverses the meaning of the biblical episode and signifies the beginning of emotional confusion, or blindness, in Paul's life. The image of the blinding light is repeated later in the novel, when Paul sees the orange moon when he is at the beach with Miriam, his lover, whom he is striving unsuccessfully for sexual connection with. He knows that Miriam, who is very religious and averse to sex and physical sensation, expects him to feel a moment of spiritual connection with her at the sight of the moon. Paul, again, is "struck" by the image but cannot understand the emotion he feels – his desire is sexual, and therefore Miriam rejects it. Paul cannot connect with Miriam through spirituality alone and yearns for physical connection. Therefore, the restrictions of religion obstruct Paul's attempt to form a bond with Miriam and takes him further away from emotional and spiritual clarity, rather than towards it.

In contrast to Christian ideals, physical connection is a source of clarity and relief; it often provides spiritual meaning within the novel. While Paul has the capacity to be a deep thinker and has spiritual tendencies which come out in his art, he is acutely aware that "painting is not living," and he often finds comfort in the material world rather than in the nuances of abstract thought. Paul enjoys his intellectual discussions about books and art with Miriam, but his relationship with her always leaves him unfulfilled because he cannot share a mutual enjoyment of physical life with her. Miriam admires Paul's physicality – his ability to completely "lose himself" to the motion of the swing in her yard, as well as his physical grace and quickness – but she cannot enjoy physical activity herself because she is naturally cerebral and can never let herself go. In contrast, Paul finds that he is physically satisfied with Clara, although their relationship leaves him intellectually unfulfilled. Clara, unlike Miriam, is robust and strong and enjoys the sensation of sport and vigorous activity. When Clara and Paul have sex on the canal bank, Paul feels that he "almost worships" Clara, as though she extends beyond herself into something abstract and spiritual. He feels that their passion is not separate from, but rather "encompasses" the grass they lie on and the birds they hear overhead. This moment frames sexual contact as something spiritual *and* physical.

Lawrence is antagonistic to social conventions that reject the possibility of physical connection outside of marriage for the sake of propriety and Christian convention; through the novel's events, he shows how the repression of physical urges does more harm than good. It was considered improper for people to have sex outside of marriage in this period, as shown when Mrs. Radford determinedly sits up half the night with Paul and Clara to prevent Clara sneaking into Paul's room. Mrs. Radford tries to prevent this because Clara is married to Baxter Dawes and to have sex with a man who is not her husband would be considered improper and shameful. Similarly, Miriam's aversion to sex is not driven purely by her religious tendencies, but also

by her belief that sex is sinful outside of marriage. At the end of the novel, when Paul refuses to marry her, Miriam firmly tells him that there "can be nothing between them" if they are not married, even though they love each other. Paul, however, in another discussion with Miriam, suggests that to be so pure and averse to physical sensation may be more offensive to God than impurity itself. He suggests that purity is a rejection of the world that God has created—a world which is not entirely composed of the spiritual plane but is also material and tangible. Through scenes like these, Lawrence implies that it is not spirituality, or Christianity, which conflicts with physical pleasure, but rather social convention. As something man-made, this convention is not a true reflection of the divine; rather, it often obstructs genuine religious transcendence.



WOMEN'S WORK AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Throughout the novel, Paul's attitude towards women is defined by his love for his mother, Mrs. Morel, which leads him to compare his female lovers with her. Since Paul's love for his mother is rooted in idealism and not in reality, the other women in his life, Clara and Miriam, cannot compare with Paul's romantic idea of how women should be, and they find themselves cast aside by Paul as they fail to live up to his impossible expectations. The story is set in the early twentieth century, during a period in which rights for women and societal expectations placed on women were gradually changing. Paul's inability to understand the women in his life mirrors society's failure to respect women during this period. Through Paul and his relationships with women, the novel suggests that social attitudes need to change so that women can find fulfillment in life and equality in society and relationships.

Paul believes that his mother has lived a fulfilling life and that, because she has dedicated her life to the domestic sphere of childrearing, she has been happy. Paul's experience of his mother is defined by her devotion to him. Mrs. Morel "casts off" her husband, Mr. Morel, early in their marriage, when he cuts her older son William's hair without her permission. After this event, Mrs. Morel turns her affections solely onto her children, and almost exclusively onto Paul when William dies in his twenties. Since Mrs. Morel shows such affection towards Paul and such investment in the pursuits of his life, he believes that she lives happily *through* him. This belief mirrors social attitudes towards women at the time, which insisted that, rather than cultivating interests or passions of their own, women should be happy to live through their male family members—their husbands and sons—to achieve society's standard of ideal womanhood. While Paul knows that Mrs. Morel does not love her husband, he believes that she has known "passion" with Paul himself and that this has brought her fulfillment. However, although Mrs. Morel does love her children, the consequence

of her lack of passion for her husband is a life of hardship with a man who is abusive and whom she does not respect. The harsh reality of Mrs. Morel's life suggests that Paul's attitude towards his mother, and by extension all women, reflects society's idealized, unrealistic belief that women should be completely satisfied by domestic life.

When Paul does encounter women who differ from this ideal, he is unable to understand them and compares them unfavourably with his mother. Miriam and Clara, Paul's two lovers, are younger than Mrs. Morel and enter society under a different set of social conditions. Although it would be a long time before progress was made in gaining equal rights for women, the early 1900s saw the rise of women's suffrage (women campaigning for the right to vote) and an increase in women entering the workplace and education. This new trend is demonstrated in Miriam and Clara; Miriam is highly intellectual and interested in books, and Clara is a working woman, a member of the suffragettes, and has separated from her husband, Baxter Dawes, because he has been abusive towards her. Although Clara and Baxter do not officially divorce, separation was unconventional and looked down upon in this period. Paul also looks down on Clara because of her interest in the suffragettes. Although he becomes her lover, he blames her for her husband's abuse and, despite their mutual passion, he never fully understands Clara because she refuses to conform to feminine stereotypes. Instead, she asserts her own independence and demands respect from her husband, leaving him after he "bullies" her. Paul's inability to comprehend Clara's behavior suggests that Paul, and society in general, has a misogynistic outlook on women and views those who rebel against gender conventions as unfeminine and unnatural—even when, like Clara, their behavior is totally rational.

Paul's longstanding belief that his mother's life has been happy is challenged by the events at the novel's end: his mother's death and the breakdown of both his romantic relationships. Although Mrs. Morel dislikes Miriam because Miriam is intellectual, Mrs. Morel is highly intelligent herself. She "reads a great deal" and helps the minister, Mr. Heaton, compose his sermons. Mrs. Morel might have wished to pursue a career or education, but she has been denied these opportunities because of her gender; societal pressures stated that men must work, and women must take care of the home. The parallel between Miriam and Mrs. Morel suggests that Paul's rejection of Miriam because of her intellect is a misogynistic convention which his mother has encouraged; this convention is what she has learned and experienced herself, and she feels she has no choice but to perpetuate it.

Mrs. Morel's death causes a crisis of faith in Paul because he sees, for the first time, that his mother has not been happy. While Paul expects her to die gracefully, as someone who has lived a fulfilling and meaningful life, Mrs. Morel's death is actually drawn out, bitter, and brooding, and Paul begins to see

that she considers her life a waste. As her life has been so closely bound up with his, this realization shatters Paul's sense of self and his sense of his own importance as reflected through his mother. Lawrence's sympathetic portrayal of Mrs. Morel, as a woman who is left miserable after sacrificing her life for the sake of convention and domesticity, reveals that the reality of women's work and women's rights is far different than social norms suggest. Meanwhile, his depiction of Paul as a confused and disillusioned young man at the novel's close suggests that old-fashioned and idealized depictions of women are not in the best interests of either women or of men. Paul's story demonstrates how men who expect women to be fulfilled by living vicariously through them, rather than having ambitions and passions of their own, will be left behind by the social changes beginning in this period.



DEATH, GRIEF, AND SELF-DESTRUCTION

Life and death are closely interlinked throughout *Sons and Lovers*, and grief has a palpable and lasting impact on the lives of the characters. *Sons and*

Lovers was concluded in the aftermath of the death of Lawrence's own mother, and his experiences with grief shape the events of the novel. Death is portrayed as an ever-present force in the novel, something which is both terrifying and, at times, terribly seductive. Throughout the novel, Lawrence demonstrates the ways that people often walk the tenuous line between life and death, and the novel argues that fixating on the past (particularly through grief) can turn this constant threat of death into full-fledged self-destruction.

Danger of death was a perpetual threat in mining communities where the book is set, and Lawrence's own experiences inform his portrayal of day-to-day life in this setting. Mining was an extremely dangerous profession in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although conditions did gradually improve, the risk of death or serious injury meant that mines suffered many fatalities and that early death or widowhood was a common concern in mining communities like "The Bottoms." Mrs. Morel often worries about her husband's safety when he is at work or does not return at the usual time. Although she generally assumes that he is out drinking, she worries about what will happen to herself and the children if her husband is killed, since he supports the family financially. This was a typical worry for wives in mining communities. Since industrial mining towns were built for the explicit purpose of housing miners and their families, there was little alternative work nearby, and Paul and William, who do not grow up to be miners, must travel to the nearby cities to find paid work. The dangerous working conditions in the mines therefore caused many potential problems for miners and their families and meant that, even when the coal industry was thriving, death was an ever-present factor in these communities.

Due to the constant proximity of death within the novel, grief

also has a large impact on the progression of the characters' lives. William's death nearly kills Mrs. Morel, because her grief destroys her will to live. It is also insinuated that her health problems begin after William's death, because of the physical toll that grief takes on her. In turn, Mrs. Morel's grief impacts the direction Paul's life takes. Shortly after William's death, Paul is struck down by pneumonia and is close to death himself. During his illness, Mrs. Morel regrets that her grief for William has caused her to neglect Paul; she feels she should have "watched the living rather than the dead." Although this is, of course, a harsh judgement she makes about herself (her extreme grief over her child's death is completely understandable), the guilt she feels causes her to transfer her love for William, whom she loved excessively to compensate for the fact that she does not love her husband, over to Paul. In turn, this transference leads to the development of her close relationship with Paul which, despite Mrs. Morel's good intentions, contributes to his inability to love other women and to find fulfilling relationships. William's death sets off a chain of grief that reverberates for years. Then, just as Mrs. Morel was almost destroyed by William's death, the end of the novel finds Paul reeling from Mrs. Morel's own demise and he ends the novel in darkness, walking across a field at night. This image potently conveys the emotional experience of grief and underscores the ways in which grief has altered the course of Paul's life and made it difficult for him to leave the past behind.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the devastating effects of loss and grief, many of the characters are drawn towards death and self-destructive behavior throughout the novel. For example, when William moves to London, he sacrifices his health to pursue a shallow, hedonistic lifestyle which he does not even really enjoy. This suggests that William is compelled to ruin his life by self-destructive, almost suicidal tendencies. William's carelessness with his own life, which leads him to squander his money and ruin his health, also impacts the course of Mrs. Morel's life and contributes to her own untimely death. This chain reaction demonstrates that self-destructive tendencies often have destructive consequences for others, as well as for oneself.

Paul also demonstrates self-destructive tendencies and, at several points throughout the novel, feels that he wishes to die. When he leaves Miriam one evening after they have fought, he hopes that he will fall off his bike and be killed. Although in this case, Paul wishes to die to spite Miriam, he frequently feels drawn towards the idea of death and self-obliteration; he feels that such experiences may mirror the loss of self he feels during sex. He also becomes suicidal after Mrs. Morel's death and feels that he wants to join his mother. What's more, Paul's and William's unconscious attraction to death is also reflective of their relationship with their mother. By focusing on their love for their mother, rather than moving on emotionally to new relationships, the young men reject the possibility for new life

(through reproduction and child rearing). That is, their futures contains the inevitable loss of their mother, and Paul and William are so fixated on the past and their mother that they reject this future—creating a kind of symbolic death for themselves by refusing to move on. An unhealthy fixation on the past, the novel suggests, leads to a lack of hope for the future, which can cause individuals to be self-destructive and careless with their own lives.



NATURE AND INDUSTRIALISM

Lawrence uses nature and the natural world to represent the inner lives of the characters throughout *Sons and Lovers*, suggesting that human

beings are not separate from the natural world but rather extensions of it. Lawrence indicates that the closer and more harmonious the relationship between humans and the natural world, the happier and more fulfilling human lives will be. The further the characters travel from the natural world, the more unstable and unhappy their lives become, as the links between humans and their environment are weakened by processes such as industrialism, mass production, and the materialism of modernity.

Nature is a source of beauty, inspiration, hope, and human connection in the novel. The characters in *Sons and Lovers* are depicted as being at their best when they are surrounded by nature which has not been interfered with by the modern world. For example, after Mrs. Morel has a huge fight with her husband and has been locked out of the house, she comforts herself by looking at the [moon](#) and by smelling the [flowers](#) that are growing nearby. This suggests that harmony with nature brings harmony within oneself and, after this moment of calm, Mrs. Morel is able to return to her house and persuade her husband to let her back in, thereby making an attempt to heal the rift between them. Another example of nature's role in human connection shows up in Paul's sexual relationships with Miriam and with Clara. Both begin in nature: in the woods with Miriam, and on the riverbank with Clara. What's more, Paul grows up surrounded by nature and is very sensitive and attuned to his environment. This leads him to his career as a painter, as he draws inspiration from the beauty of the natural world. Nature, therefore, is associated with self-expression. The fact that Paul's self-expression as a painter comes in the form of pictures of natural scenes suggests that to express oneself is also to express the natural world, again emphasizing that humans are part of nature and the environment.

Some industrial practices, such as mining, are still closely linked to nature in the novel, even though they represent human interference with the natural world. Although mining is an industrial process and relies on technology and machines, mining is still associated with nature because it is a process which extracts natural resources, and which relies on the land rather than producing something external to the natural world.

The mining communities which the Morels are part of, and which are similar to the one that Lawrence himself grew up in, are totally reliant on natural resources for their own survival. For the miners and mining communities, life is dependent on nature and on natural ecosystems, even if the result of this process is ugliness and pollution. The miners, like Mr. Morel, are also shaped by their environment, in the same way that Paul is shaped into an artist by his contact with nature. Mr. Morel prefers to sit in darkness even in the daytime because he is so used to operating in the natural darkness of the mine. Similarly, the bodies of the miners, which grow gradually hunched over time from crouching in the pits, reflect the idea that people's external environments play large roles in their internal lives.

Finally, those furthest from nature in the novel are people who live in the cities and who work in manufacturing, and these people generally end up alienated and unhappy. For example, Paul and William both leave the mining town and get jobs in the city. William takes a job in London, and Paul gets a job closer to home, in Nottingham. Both contract pneumonia because of the long hours, pollution, and poor working conditions in the cities, and William's death is ultimately associated with his rejection of nature in favor of a materialistic and modern lifestyle. Paul, in contrast, maintains his connection to the natural world and the beautiful countryside he grew up around. Therefore, he recovers from his illness and is eventually able to cut down his hours spent in the city.

The contrasting fates of William and Paul reflect both Lawrence's philosophy—that connection with the natural world is the healthiest and most fulfilling way for people to live—and the real-life conditions in cities in the early twentieth century, in which air pollution, overcrowding, and poor sanitation made for unhygienic and hazardous places to live and work. The novel's argument about the ills of cities is also reflected in the type of work that Paul does at the factory. Although Paul quite enjoys his job in Nottingham, his life at the factory is described as though he is a cog in a machine, and the manufacture of garments (which he oversees in the factory) is broken down into separate parts undertaken by different individuals. The literal nature of Paul's work mirrors Lawrence's belief that modernity and manufacturing jobs alienated people from each other and from their work, unlike the miners who are so defined by their work that they almost become part of the rural landscape. This modern isolation is taken to its logical conclusion through Clara: after she loses her job, she must produce lace alone in her house and is miserable as a result of this alienation from society. Lawrence was deeply opposed to modernity's interest in materialism and the manufacture of consumer goods, which only increased throughout the twentieth century. He favored a more natural lifestyle in which people had a closer bond with the environment and with natural sources of production. Throughout, the novel argues for Lawrence's belief that the further humans travel from their

connection with nature, the more essentially alienated they become from each other and themselves.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in [blue text](#) throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



FLOWERS

Flowers symbolize femininity and female sexuality in *Sons and Lovers*. Women are referred to as flowers or compared with flowers throughout the novel. When William describes his many female admirers to Paul, he describes them as different flowers that live "like cut blooms in his heart." Although this may seem flattering to the women, it reflects the idea that William does not view these women as people, but instead views them as decorations, which offset his own appearance and stature. This attitude is confirmed during his relationship with Louisa Lily Denys Western, whom William views more as an accessory than a partner. Elsewhere in the novel, flowers signify female sexuality and incidents with flowers come to represent the different women in the novel and their attitudes towards sex. When Miriam shows Paul a rosebush she has found, and later a patch of daffodils, she treats the flowers reverently and with devotion, the same way she approaches her physical relationship with Paul. Clara, in contrast, views flowers as "dead things" during the time when she is celibate after she has left Baxter Dawes. Later, when her sexuality is reawakened with Paul, he gives her a flower to wear on her coat and this symbolizes the rejuvenation of her physical life. When the flower is "smashed to pieces," when they lie together on the ground, this suggests that Paul has broken through Clara's external, decorative façade and formed a real connection with her through sex. The shattered flower also has connotations of spoiled virginity and this suggests that, although Paul thinks he is kind to Miriam and Clara, he is really shallow and careless with them, just as William was with the women that he collected like flowers without taking their feelings into account.



THE MOON

The moon is associated with motherhood in the novel and represents the oppressive bond that exists between Mrs. Morel and Paul. When Mrs. Morel is pregnant with Paul, she has a fight with her husband and is thrown out of the house. She goes into her garden and is surprised to find herself bathed in light from a full moon overhead. The presence of the moon soothes her and calms the child, Paul, who is "boiling within her," and this represents the love that Mrs. Morel will develop for Paul and her hopes for the

future that she will invest in him. Later in the novel, this bond between Mrs. Morel and Paul becomes problematic because it infringes on Paul's ability to form a romantic relationship; he is so close to his mother that they are almost like lovers and she possesses him in a way his lovers cannot. This is reflected again using the symbol of the moon in the scene in which Paul sees the large, orange moon above the beach when he is with Miriam and finds himself unable to understand or express the physical desire that she arouses in him. The moon is traditionally associated with femininity and this connects the moon to the idea of motherhood. The moon, however, does not create light but takes light in and reflects it back. This represents the circular and destructive nature of the love between Paul and Mrs. Morel. Paul's bond with his mother does not help him create new life, through reproduction with a partner, but instead flows backwards into his mother, who dies at the end of the novel and with whom Paul can create no future.



DARKNESS

Darkness represents hidden or unconscious desire in the novel. When Miriam and Paul have sex for the first time, Paul leads Miriam into a dark place among some fir trees and says that he "wishes the darkness were thicker." This suggests that, although Paul wants to love Miriam, his true intentions and feelings towards her are unclear to him and he is ashamed of his attraction to her or is ashamed of the way he treats her (as he fails to commit to her on several occasions). Similarly, when Paul brings Clara home to meet his family, he walks her to the train in the dark and is suddenly overcome with rage when she tells him she wants to go home. This suggests that he privately wants to dominate Clara but is not comfortable with this side of himself and will not force her to stay with him. Baxter Dawes hides in the dark when he waits to attack Paul and the fight brings an element of relief to Paul and ends the tension between the two men. The fight, which takes place in the dark, suggests that the men secretly wanted to fight, even though they do not acknowledge this, because fighting allows them to express their emotions and feel release. Finally, at the end of the novel, Paul wishes to die himself after Mrs. Morel's death. Although he is aware of his destructive tendencies, he is not explicitly aware that he wants to kill himself and, instead, walks into the dark, unsure what he plans to do. He ultimately rejects darkness to follow the light back to the town, which suggests that he rejects death and chooses to live instead.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ He was tipful of excitement now she had come, led her about the ground, showed her everything. Then, at the peep-show, she explained the pictures, in a sort of story, to which he listened as if spell-bound. He would not leave her. All the time, he stuck close to her, bristling with a small boy's pride of her. For no other woman looked such a lady as she did, in her little black bonnet and her cloak.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, William Morel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

When William, Mrs. Morel's oldest son, is a young child, a fair comes to town. William is excited to go but he is most excited to show his mother around the fair and cannot really enjoy himself without her.

William's excitement reaches its pinnacle when Mrs. Morel arrives at the fair. Although William is a curious and lively child, he likes things best when his mother is with him because she makes the world real for him. This is reflected in the way that she brings the peep-show to life in his mind by describing the pictures for him as if they are a story. A peep-show, in this context, refers to a series of photographs or pictures which can be viewed through a telescope.

As with most young children, William's mother helps him understand and make sense of the world. Her validation of his ideas and her encouragement are extremely important to him and help him form his own opinions and personality. This is because Mrs. Morel is the most important person in William's life. She is his primary caregiver and takes on most of the childcare duties; Mr. Morel is not close with the children in this way. William is proud and possessive of his mother, and this foreshadows his relationship with her in later life. Although this behavior is normal in a child, when William grows up, he finds that women his own age cannot compete with this idealized image of his mother.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Sons and Lovers* published in 2006.

●● Gertrude herself was rather contemptuous of dancing: she had not the slightest inclination towards that accomplishment, and had never learned even a Roger de Coverley. She was a puritan, like her father, high-minded, and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed from off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Morel, whose first name is Gertrude, first meets Mr. Morel at a Christmas party, where she admires his dancing. Mrs. Morel is stern and reserved and does not dance herself, but she is attracted to Mr. Morel because he is so different from her.

Mrs. Morel has been shaped by her upbringing and by her father's influence. Her father was a stern, religious man, more cerebral than physical, and Mrs. Morel grows up the same way. She is "high-minded" because she dislikes frivolous pastimes, such as dancing, and also dislikes decadent things. This is demonstrated later in the novel by the way she makes the most of her poverty and always looks neat and well dressed. A Roger de Coverley is an English country dance.

Dancing, however, is not just a frivolous but also a sensual and skillful pastime, and Mrs. Morel admires Mr. Morel's grace when he dances. He is the opposite of her because he is not cerebral and is totally comfortable in his own body. He is not physically reserved, as Mrs. Morel is, but seems to blend in with the natural flow of life. In this sense, Mr. Morel is associated with physicality and with the natural world throughout the novel. His life force is described as a candle "flame" because it is unaffected and uncovered; Mrs. Morel, however, feels "gripped"—she is tense and cannot physically relax. She is "baffled" because she overthinks instead of allowing herself to be natural.

●● Afterwards, she said she had been silly, that the boy's hair would have had to be cut, sooner or later. In the end, she even brought herself to say to her husband, it was just as well he had played barber when he did. But she knew, and Morel knew, that that act had caused something momentous to take place in her soul. She remembered the scene all her life, as one in which she had suffered the most intensely.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel, William Morel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis



When their first son, William, is a baby, Mr. Morel cuts off the boy's hair without Mrs. Morel's permission. Mrs. Morel is furious but downplays her anger. She never really gets over the incident however, and it causes a permanent rift between husband and wife.

Mrs. Morel tries to convince herself that she has overreacted and suggests this to Mr. Morel so that he will not feel guilty. She tries to take a realistic approach to the incident and acknowledge that, eventually, William would have to have his first haircut. However, although Mrs. Morel tries to cover up her pain, she is deeply hurt because Mr. Morel has changed William in this way without consulting her. This shows that Mrs. Morel is controlling with her children and foreshadows her possessive love for William later in life. The rift that this causes in her marriage reflects the "momentous" rift which occurs in her soul. This incident kills Mrs. Morel's love for Mr. Morel, and this leads to the breakdown of their relationship, even though they remain married. From this moment on, they live separate lives and Mrs. Morel transfers the love that she had for Mr. Morel onto her son. This, in turn, causes problems for William in later life as he finds himself torn between his mother and his girlfriends.

●● Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time, the child too melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Morel throws Mrs. Morel out of their house during a fight while she is heavily pregnant with their son Paul. Mrs. Morel calms herself by resting among the flowers in her garden and looking at the moon.

Mrs. Morel is able to lose herself and forget about her problems by focusing on the natural world. Nature is a source of emotional nourishment and artistic inspiration throughout the novel. Paul inherits this ability from Mrs. Morel and often seeks to lose himself in nature, or artistic representation of nature, when he becomes a painter. Since Mrs. Morel is pregnant at the time, Paul is physically part of her and, when she feels her identity “melt” into nothingness, Paul dissolves with her. This foreshadows the extremely close, almost merged bond that develops between Paul and his mother in later life.



The moon is often associated with motherhood and femininity, and this too symbolizes the bond between Paul and Mrs. Morel. However, the urge to lose one’s identity can also be used negatively in the novel and stand in for a type of self-destruction. Mrs. Morel wishes to lose herself in this scenario because she is unhappy with her life – she has fought with her husband – and later in the novel, Paul will also seek to escape his problems this way and, at times, become self-destructive and even suicidal.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ His ideas were quaint and fantastic, she brought him judiciously to earth. It was a discussion of the Wedding at Cana. “When He changed the water into wine at Cana,” he said, “that is a symbol, that the ordinary life, even the blood, of the married husband and wife, which had before been uninspired, like water, became filled with the spirit, and was as wine, because, when love enters, the whole spiritual constitution of a man changes, is filled with the Holy Ghost, and almost his form is altered.”

Mrs. Morel thought to herself: “Yes, poor fellow, his young wife is dead; that is why he makes his love into the Holy Ghost.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Heaton (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Heaton, the local minister, visits Mrs. Morel and discusses his sermons with her. Mrs. Heaton’s young wife has recently died, and Mrs. Morel believes that the minister’s sermons are overly spiritual because of this. She helps him make them more relatable for ordinary folk.

Mrs. Morel helps Mr. Heaton plan his sermons because she enjoys the intellectual activity and because she knows that his “fantastical” ideas will go over the heads of the mining congregation. Mr. Heaton believes the story of the Wedding at Cana, when Christ turned water into wine for a wedding party, is about spiritual marriage between lovers more than a literal wedding. He believes that marriage is a purifying act and that lovers are joined, not only physically, but also with God when they are married.

Mrs. Morel, although she is religious, thinks this is overly complicated and that the story will go down better with the miners if it is about a real wedding and real wine, because this is something they can relate to. Mrs. Morel thinks that Mr. Heaton prefers the idea of spiritual union over physical union because his own wife is dead, and he likes to believe they are still together in spirit. His religion compensates for his loss, but Mrs. Morel believes it is a poor substitute, and physical love is a superior expression of unity between man and God.

☝☝ She no longer loved her husband; she had not wanted this child to come, and there it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart. She felt as if the navel string that had connected its frail little body with hers had not been broken. A wave of hot love went over her to the infant. She held it close to her face and breast. With all her force, with all her soul she would make up to it for having brought it into the world unloved. She would love it all the more now it was here, carry it in her love.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Not long after the birth of her third baby, Paul, Mrs. Morel

takes the children out of the house because Mr. Morel has, once again, become violent with her. She sits on a hill with her baby and watches the sunset.

The sunset is an example of pathetic fallacy (when the natural world represents the character's emotions) and symbolizes the death of love between Mr. and Mrs. Morel. She cannot love him because he is cruel and abusive towards her and the children. Mrs. Morel was anxious about Paul's birth and did not want another baby even while she was pregnant; she is trapped in a broken marriage and a difficult financial situation, and the arrival of a new baby is a source of stress for her.

However, now that Paul has been born, Mrs. Morel feels guilty about this because she feels that she has rejected her child. Now that she is faced with the reality of the baby, she worries that her misery during pregnancy has been passed onto him and this is why he "pulls at her heart." Mrs. Morel feels ashamed because she did not want her child, and overcompensates as a result of this. She feels overprotective of Paul, who still feels connected to her—even physically so. She feels unusually responsible for Paul's happiness as a child because she feels she has caused him pain as an infant. Although Mrs. Morel is well-meaning here, her possessive love for Paul causes problems for him in adulthood.


☞ She thrust the infant forward to the crimson, throbbing sun, almost with relief. She saw him lift his little fist. Then she put him to her bosom again, ashamed almost of her impulse to give him back again whence he came.

[...]

"I will call him 'Paul,'" she said, suddenly, she knew not why. After a while, she went home. A fine shadow was flung over the deep green meadow, darkening all.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel (speaker), Paul Morel

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

While she sits on the hillside with Paul and watches the sunset, Mrs. Morel has a sudden urge to hold him up to the light. Afterwards she decides to call him "Paul" and takes the

children home.

Mrs. Morel feels guilty because she did not want Paul when she was pregnant and decides to love him even more now that he is born to make up for this. However, although she consciously wants to do this, unconsciously she is still burdened by his existence and lifts him to the sun almost "to give him back." This suggests that Paul has come from nothing – the setting sun represents non-existence – and that she wishes to undo his birth. She is both drawn to this idea and repelled by it.

Paul is associated with the Biblical figure of St. Paul, who was blinded by a revelation from God on the road to Damascus and became one of Jesus's apostles. Paul's complex relationship with his mother, which begins with her conflicting feelings towards him as a baby, is a source of confusion to him throughout his life and, therefore, he is emotionally and symbolically blind. Paul also struggles with sex later in life, which connects to St. Paul's belief in celibacy. Mrs. Morel's decision to call the baby Paul is a revelation which she does not understand.

☞ "And now," he said, "you'll see me again when you do." "It'll be before I want to," she replied, and at that, he marched out of the house with his bundle. She sat trembling slightly, but her heart brimming with contempt. What would she do if he went to some other pit, obtained work, and got in with another woman? But she knew him too well—he couldn't. She was dead sure of him. Nevertheless her heart was gnawed inside her.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

During one of their fights, Mr. Morel packs his things and leaves Mrs. Morel. Although she thinks that he will not go far, she still worries for the future without him.

Mrs. Morel feels contempt for Mr. Morel because she believes he is only trying to frighten her. She does not think he will really leave but that he puts on this show to bully her into giving him his own way. At the same time, she worries about what will become of her if he does disappear for any length of time. This gives the reader an insight into the amount of freedom that men had compared with women in this period. Men could go out to work and were financially independent. Mr. Morel could find work in another mine

and easily provide for himself. Mrs. Morel, however, like most wives in this period, is totally financially reliant on Mr. Morel and cannot earn enough to feed her children without him. Although more women were entering the workforce during this period, they still generally took very low paid jobs and usually gave up work once they were married. Although men were expected to work to provide for their families, they could leave at any time and start again somewhere else while their family would be left destitute.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ It seemed queer to the children to see their mother, who was always busy about the house, sitting writing in her rapid fashion, thinking, referring to books, and writing again. They felt for her on such occasions the deepest respect. But they loved the 'Guild.' It was the only thing to which they did not grudge their mother: and that partly because she enjoyed it, partly because of the treats they derived from it. The guild was called by some hostile husbands, who found their wives getting too independent, the "clatfart" shop: that is, the gossip shop. It is true, from off the basis of the guild, the women could look at their homes, at the conditions of their own lives, and find fault.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, William Morel, Paul Morel, Annie Morel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

When William, Annie, and Paul are children, Mrs. Morel attends the women's guild and takes classes there. The children are in awe of this and are pleased that their mother is happy, but many of the husbands in the community dislike the guild.

The children associate their mother with housework because this is what she spends most of her time doing. Women were generally considered responsible for all domestic chores in this period. The children are not yet old enough to understand gender roles; they are simply pleased that their mother is happy (because they love her and feel happy if she is happy) and are impressed to see her doing something that they do not understand.

Women's guilds were set up by political activists and women's rights advocates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These operations provided evenings classes on a variety of subjects to married women who

wished to get an education, something which had previously been entirely denied them. The guild is attended by many other women from the community. The husbands dislike the guild because it educates women about their rights within marriage and may lead them to question their husbands' authority. The men try to undermine the work of the guild by suggesting that women only go there to gossip; a pastime which is misogynistically and stereotypically attributed to women to suggest that they are shallow and unreliable.

☝ Paul was treated to dazzling descriptions of all kinds of flower-like ladies, most of whom lived like cut blooms in William's heart, for a brief fortnight.

Related Characters: William Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

As William grows up, he turns into a handsome young man and is very popular with women. He has many girlfriends, although he loses interest in them quickly, and he describes these women to his younger brother Paul.

William describes his girlfriends as "flower-like" because William is only interested in their beauty and is not interested in getting to know them on any deeper level. Flowers are symbolic of femininity and sexual desire throughout the novel. Flowers are also part of the natural world, suggesting that sexual desire is healthy and natural. However, William's behavior with the women is unnatural because they are described as "cut blooms"—William dehumanizes his girlfriends because he is only interested in their beauty and, therefore, he objectifies them.

Flowers, when they are cut from their stems and separated from nature, will not go through their natural life cycle but will die. This suggests that William hurts these women when he loses interest in them so rapidly; his desire for them wilts as flowers wilt when they are kept indoors and cut from their stems. He does not stop to consider that these women may develop feelings for him but, instead, sees them as beautiful conquests which he collects and then shows off about for the sake of his ego. This suggests that William has a shallow, selfish attitude to desire.



Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ He watched with wicked satisfaction the drops of wax melt off the broken forehead of Arabella, and drop like sweat into the flame. So long as the stupid big doll burned, he rejoiced in silence. At the end, he poked among the embers with a stick, fished out the arms and legs, all blackened, and smashed them under stones.

“That’s the sacrifice of Missis Arabella,” he said. “An’ I’m glad there’s nothing left of her.”

Which disturbed Annie inwardly, although she could say nothing. He seemed to hate the doll so intensely, because he had broken it.

Related Characters: Paul Morel (speaker), Annie Morel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

When Paul is a child, he accidentally breaks his sister Annie’s doll. Paul persuades Annie to burn the remains and calls this a “sacrifice.” Annie is confused and disturbed by her brother’s behavior.


Paul wants to destroy the doll because he is the one who has broken it. This makes him feel guilty and ashamed and, rather than face these feelings, Paul decides to take them out on the doll and sacrifice it for his own sake. Although Paul is just a child, his behavior mirrors misogynistic attitudes that were common in this period and reflects the attitudes of the adult men around him. Mr. Morel blames Mrs. Morel whenever he has hurt her, and William objectifies his lovers.

The doll sacrifice also symbolizes Paul’s relationship with Miriam later in the novel. Miriam falls in love with Paul but is very afraid of and averse to physical contact. This means that she struggles to fulfill Paul’s physical needs, because she dislikes acting on them, but she does so because she is willing to sacrifice herself for Paul and plans to make an “immolation” of herself (immolation refers to a sacrificial burning). This reflects general social attitudes to women in this period which suggested that women should put their own needs aside to meet the needs of men, and allowed men to place the responsibility for their own feelings onto women rather than dealing with them themselves.

☞ Then Paul fished out a little spray. He always brought her one spray, the best he could find. “Pretty!” she said, in a curious tone, of a woman accepting a love-token. The boy walked all day, went miles and miles, rather than own himself beaten, and come home to her empty-handed. She never realized this, whilst he was young. She was a woman who waited for her children to grow up. And William occupied her chiefly. But when William went to Nottingham, and was not so much at home, the mother made a companion of Paul. The latter was unconsciously jealous of his brother, and William was jealous of him. At the same time, they were good friends.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, William Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Paul walks miles to find flowers to take home for his mother. William is Mrs. Morel’s favorite child, however, and she does not notice the effort that Paul goes to for her.

Paul tries very hard to please his mother and to win her affections. It is significant that Mrs. Morel accepts this present like a “love-token,” as this symbolizes her relationships with her sons as they get older. She is not as interested in her children when they are young and “waits for them to grow up” because she pins her hopes and ambitions on them and wants to see how they turn out in life.

When Paul is a child, William is Mrs. Morel’s favorite son because he is the eldest. Since Mrs. Morel does not love her husband, she transfers her love onto her sons as they grow into young men. Although she and William are not literally lovers, there is an Oedipal dynamic to their relationship. Mrs. Morel transfers this dynamic onto Paul when William leaves home because she is lonely and looks for a companion who is not her husband. Paul is jealous of William because they are in competition for Mrs. Morel’s affections, even though they do not realize this. This supports the idea that the boys are more like suitors, who try to win Mrs. Morel’s heart, than her children.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ Mrs. Morel wondered, in her heart, if her son did not go walking down Piccadilly with an elegant figure and fine clothes, rather than with a woman who was near to him. But she congratulated him, in her doubtful fashion. And, as she stood over the washing tub, the mother brooded over her son. She saw him saddled with an elegant and expensive wife, earning little money, dragging along and getting dragged in some small ugly house in a suburb.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, William Morel, Louisa Lily Denys Western

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis



William takes a job in London and writes to Mrs. Morel often. He tells her about his life in the city and his girlfriend, Louisa, who he loves to show off. Mrs. Morel worries that William is more interested in showing off than he is in the woman herself.

Mrs. Morel worries that William cares more about his appearance and social status than he does about the woman he has committed to. When she reads his letters, she does not get the sense that he has formed a strong emotional attachment to this woman. She is concerned that he is being shallow and that he will not find real satisfaction in life because he is looking in all the wrong places. She worries that William has selected this woman because she is rich and fashionable rather than because he loves her, and she does not wish her children to repeat her mistakes and end up in unhappy relationships.

Mrs. Morel is also concerned that, if William marries this girl, he will ruin himself to keep his wife in the lifestyle she is accustomed to. She wants William to have a successful career and to become a respectable member of middle-class society, because this is the life that she would have liked for herself.

☝ The mother and son walked down Station Street, feeling the excitement of lovers having an adventure together.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Morel accompanies Paul to Nottingham where he has a job interview for a position in a factory. The pair enjoy each other's company and have become very close since William, Paul's older brother, left home.

Mrs. Morel has an extremely close bond with her sons, and they love to spend time with her. Paul is the second son that Mrs. Morel has sent out into the world of work. She is very invested in their professional success and, now that William has moved away, she turns her attention to Paul. Although Mrs. Morel wants her sons to succeed, however, she also enjoys spending time with them as companions. She is hurt when they leave home, even if this is to further their careers, as is the case with William.


Paul and Mrs. Morel's excitement here suggests that Mrs. Morel is lonely in her marriage and that she longs to have someone to share the world with. After William's departure, Mrs. Morel is not content to simply watch her children succeed from afar, but transfers her affections entirely onto Paul and treats him a substitute for her husband. Paul is complicit in this dynamic as well, and seems to harbor Oedipal tendencies towards his mother.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ Mrs. Morel was one of those naturally exquisite people who can walk in mud without dirtying their shoes. But Paul had to clean them for her. They were kid boots at eight shillings a pair. He however, thought them the most dainty boots in the world, and he cleaned them with as much reverence as if they had been flowers.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

One day, when Paul has some time off work, he and Mrs. Morel go for a long walk through the countryside up to Mr. Leiver's farm. Mrs. Morel fusses about her outfit and Paul admires the way his mother looks.

This is a very idealized description of Mrs. Morel. The idea that she can walk in mud without dirtying her shoes implies that she is pure, almost saintly, and that although she

spends her time on worldly tasks, she is not common or ordinary and puts other women to shame. This description reflects Paul's attitude towards his mother and the pride he feels in her. He feels that other women cannot compete with her, and this impacts his relationships with other women later in the novel, as he always prefers his mother over them.

Paul cleans Mrs. Morel's boots both literally and in the sense that he worships her and will do anything for her; he is totally in her power. This is an unusual way to describe mother and son, and is more like a description of lovers than relatives. The reference to Mrs. Morel's boots as flowers also suggests hidden desire and unconscious urges because flowers are linked with sexuality throughout the novel.

●● He waited grimly, and watched. At last Miriam let the bird peck from her hand. She gave a little cry, fear, and pain because of fear, rather pathetic. But she had done it, and she did it again.

Related Characters: Paul Morel, Miriam Leivers

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

While at the Leivers's farm, Paul meets Mr. and Mrs. Leivers's daughter, Miriam. Miriam is scared to feed the hen and her brothers make fun of her. Later, when Paul finds Miriam alone at the hen coop, he encourages her to overcome her fear and let the hen peck food from her hand.

Paul feels grim because he is put off by Miriam's physical timidity and cannot relate to it. Miriam is extremely sensitive, emotionally highly strung, and afraid of physical pain and intense physical sensations. She cowers away from the bird because she fears that it will hurt her hand with its beak. Paul finds her efforts "pathetic," which shows that he is not very impressed by her and finds her rather pitiable. Miriam is impressed with herself, however, because for her, this is a big deal and she has gone outside of her comfort zone.

This dynamic between Miriam and Paul foreshadows the development of their relationship. Miriam's aversion to physical sensation includes an aversion to sex, which she views as impure and unpleasant and which clashes with her religious beliefs. Paul is also slightly repulsed by sex but does not like this side of himself and does not like to be

reminded of it in Miriam. Despite this, the pair are drawn together, and their relationship is one of grim struggle and conflict throughout.

●● William opened his eyes and looked at her. In his gaze was a certain baffled look of misery and fierce appreciation. "Has he made a sight of me?" she asked, laughing down on her lover. "That he has!" said William, smiling. And as he lay he continued to look at her. His eyes never sought hers. He did not want to meet her eyes. He only wanted to look at her, not to come together with her in her gaze. And the fact that he wanted to avoid her was in his eyes like misery.

Related Characters: William Morel, Louisa Lily Denys Western (speaker), Paul Morel

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 158-159

Explanation and Analysis

William brings his fiancée, Louisa, home for a second visit. He and Louisa go out for a walk with Paul and Paul puts flowers in Louisa's hair. He is curious about her relationship with his brother.



William feels trapped by his physical attraction to Louisa. Although he does not like her personality and finds her shallow and stupid, he will not leave her because he finds her so physically attractive. William is hypocritical because he blames Louisa for being shallow but also stays with her because he likes the way she makes him look; he can show her off in public. William is miserable because he cannot connect emotionally with Louisa and, therefore, does not find his relationship with her fulfilling.

William does not know that he wants to connect with Louisa, or any woman other than his mother, on an emotional level. He is very misogynistic and only views women as beautiful objects to be admired and kept, rather than as his equals in terms of intellect. He does not meet her gaze because he is not interested in how she feels and does not care to read her expression. However, this lack of connection makes him sad because he knows, unconsciously, that something is missing in their relationship, although he doesn't know what. William does not seek emotional intimacy with women his own age because, like Paul, he is committed to his mother and

idealizes her to the point that other women cannot compete.

“If you want to say these things, you must find another place than this. I am ashamed of you, William. Why don’t you be more manly. To do nothing but find fault with a girl—and then pretend you’re engaged to her—!” Mrs Morel subsided in wrath and indignation.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel (speaker), William Morel, Louisa Lily Denys Western

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

William constantly criticizes Louisa and is cruel to her in front of his family. Mrs. Morel is ashamed of him and berates him when he makes Louisa cry.


Mrs. Morel is unusually severe with William, who has always been her favorite child. She is disappointed with the way that he has turned out and feels that he has not become the successful and honorable young man that she hoped he would be. She finds his treatment of Louisa “unmanly” because William does not take responsibility for himself. He dislikes Louise but he will not break off his engagement with her and, instead, continues to lead her on.

Mrs. Morel suggests that William “pretends” he will marry Louisa because she feels that, even if they do get married, it will be a sham of a marriage—because William does not love Louisa. Rather than admit this and hurt Louisa in the short term, William cowardly will not admit that he has made a mistake by getting engaged to her. His mother sees, to her horror, that he is selfish and that he only thinks of himself and not of Louisa.

Paul was in bed for seven weeks. He got up white and fragile. His father had bought him a pot of scarlet and gold tulips. They used to flame in the window, in the March sunshine, as he sat on the sofa chattering to his mother. The two knitted together in perfect intimacy. Mrs. Morel’s life now rooted itself in Paul.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel, William Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

Paul falls ill for several weeks after the death of his older brother, William. Mrs. Morel has almost been destroyed by her grief for William, but she is brought back to herself by the necessity to care for Paul during his illness. As Paul grows stronger, the pair become closer.

The flowers in the window signify Paul and Mrs. Morel budding relationship, which blooms afresh in the aftermath of Paul’s illness. It is ironic that Mr. Morel has provided these flowers for Paul’s sickroom because it is Paul’s recovery that further displaces his father. Paul is presented as his father’s rival for his mother’s attention throughout the novel.

Mrs. Morel has been totally devastated by the loss of William and, for a while, stopped caring about her own life entirely; she feels that she has lost all her hope for the future, which was tied in up William and her dreams of his success. Her renewed “intimacy” with Paul gives her hope for the future again, because she now has Paul’s future to look forward to rather than just her own. In this sense, their fates become “knitted together.” The use of the word “rooted” again suggests that her relationship with Paul brings new life to Mrs. Morel, just as new plants spring from roots.

Chapter 7 Quotes

They were both brown-eyed and inclined to be mystical, such women as treasure religion inside them, breathe it in their nostrils, and see the whole of life in a mist thereof. So, to Miriam Christ and God made one great figure, which she loved tremblingly and passionately when a tremendous sunset burned out the western sky; and Ediths and Lucys and Rowenas, Brian de Bois Guilberts, Rob Roys and Guy Mannerings rustled the sunny leaves in the morning, or sat in her bedroom, aloft, alone, when it snowed. That was life to her.

Related Characters: Miriam Leivers, Mrs. Leivers

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Miriam is very like her mother, Mrs. Leivers, who is also a



mystical and deeply religious woman. Miriam struggles to care about the physical world or the demands of everyday life, and views the world as though she is a character in a literary romance.


Miriam “breathes religion in her nostrils” which suggests that her Christian beliefs are extremely important, almost as important as air, to her. Breathing is also a physical process, suggesting that Miriam often replaces physical desires with spiritual ones. She is not in touch with the material world and struggles to see reality beyond the veneer of romance and mystery that she feels constantly surrounds her. In this sense, Miriam lives in a “mist” or a daydream and is cut off from practical concerns and physical sensations, which do not interest and, instead, alarm her.

Nature inspires religious feeling in Miriam, as she sees this as God at work within the world. However, she also believes that *human* nature is sinful and disapproves of sensual pleasure. The names listed are the names of characters from Miriam’s favorite novels and romances. Rob Roy and Guy Mannering are both heroes from Walter Scott novels who remind her of Paul.

☛ She wanted to show him a certain wild-rose bush she had discovered. She knew it was wonderful. And yet, till he had seen it, she felt it had not come into her soul. Only he could make it her own, immortal ... By the time they came to the pine-trees Miriam was getting very eager, and very tense. Her bush might be gone. She might not be able to find it. And she wanted it so much. Almost passionately, she wanted to be with him when she stood before the flowers. They were going to have a communion together, something that thrilled her, something holy.

Related Characters: Paul Morel, Miriam Leivers

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Miriam and Paul develop a very spiritual friendship which is based on their long conversations about books, art, and religion. One night, when they are out walking, Miriam takes Paul to see a rosebush that she has found in the woods.

Miriam feels that Paul gives the world meaning for her. She admires his opinions and his artistic approach to nature and

feels as though she cannot understand the physical world unless Paul explains it to her. This is because Miriam has an extremely spiritual temperament and always feels as though she is at a distance from life. She cannot stand strong physical sensations because she is so sensitive. Instead, she understands the world through symbols and ideas, rather than practical common sense and experience.

Miriam is attracted to Paul but does not realize this because she finds it so difficult to process her emotions. Instead of understanding that she loves Paul, she wants to show him the roses, which unconsciously symbolize her love for him. She wants to experience Paul’s emotional response to the flowers, which she knows will be strong because he loves natural beauty. To her, this is like sharing physical passion with Paul.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☛ Spring was the worst time. He was changeable and intense and cruel. So he decided to stay away from her. Then came the hours when he knew Miriam was expecting him. His mother watched him growing restless. He could not go on with his work. He could do nothing. It was as if something were drawing his soul out, towards Willey Farm. Then he put on his hat and went, saying nothing. And his mother knew he was gone. And as soon as he was on the way, he sighed with relief. And when he was with her, he was cruel again.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel, Miriam Leivers

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

Paul and Miriam begin a relationship, but Paul is very changeable and feels that he is both drawn to and repelled by Miriam and that he cannot escape her influence even when he wants to. Mrs. Morel worries about him and dislikes Miriam because of this.

Paul’s mood is affected by the seasons. He has a powerful connection to nature and feels “cruel” and “intense” during spring, a season of great change and upheaval. This suggests that Paul is part of nature and that nature is part of him.



Paul dislikes Miriam because he feels unfulfilled by her, and although they get on intellectually, their physical relationship is awkward. Rather than end the relationship, however, Paul resents Miriam because he is unhappy and blames her for his negative emotions. At the same time, he


feels drawn to Miriam as though she owns his soul. This is because Miriam understands Paul so well emotionally and he can talk to her about intellectual ideas which he cannot bring up with his family. In general Paul does not think for himself but allows people in his life to influence and control him. Although Paul is cruel to Miriam, she has power over him and psychologically battles for Paul's affection with Mrs. Morel, who is the other strong influence in his life at this point.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ Her big brown eyes were watching him, still and resigned and loving; 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 ... She was very quiet, very calm. She only realized that she was doing something for him. He could hardly bear it. She lay to be sacrificed for him, because she loved him so much. And he had to sacrifice her. For a second, he wished he were sex-less, or dead. Then he shut his eyes again to her, and his blood beat back again.

Related Characters: Paul Morel, Miriam Leivers

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 333-334

Explanation and Analysis

Paul and Miriam try to have sex, but it is an uncomfortable experience. Paul has to close his eyes in order to go through with it.

Miriam “gives herself up” to Paul, like a “sacrifice,” because she is disgusted by sex but is prepared to sleep with Paul for the sake of his pleasure and her love for him. Miriam is very detached from her body and is able to see it as separate from herself and unimportant. This is how she stays “calm” despite forcing herself to do something she does not want. She cannot lose herself in physical sensation the way that Paul can, and does not care about physical pleasure.

Paul cannot stand to hurt women and feels uncomfortable having sex with Miriam when she does not want to. Although he understands that she is willing to let him, he finds her extremely unsettling because she clearly does not want sex and is only willing to put up with it for his sake. Paul recognizes that this is not healthy or fulfilling for either of them, but he does not understand his feelings on a

conscious level. He sees her like a “creature,” not a woman, because she is so different and separate from him. Paul would rather be dead than hurt Miriam in this way, and does not want to be responsible for her pain. He can only go through with it with his eyes closed; when he is willfully blind.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝ His mother looked at him. He had turned to her. She thought what a man he seemed, in his dark, well-made clothes. He was pale and detached-looking, it would be hard for any woman to keep him. Her heart glowed. Then she was sorry for Clara.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel, Clara Dawes

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 365

Explanation and Analysis

Paul starts dating Clara Dawes, and invites her over for tea one weekend to meet his mother. Mrs. Morel examines the young couple and watches them interact. She is extremely proud of her son, who is handsome and well-dressed. This demonstrates Mrs. Morel's investment in Paul; she pins all her hopes for success and satisfaction on him and how he performs in the world. She is pleased that he looks so smart and handsome because she views him as an extension of her and a representation of her that is out in the world, where she cannot be because she is trapped in a life of married domesticity.

Mrs. Morel is also in competition with Paul's girlfriends for his affections, but does not realize this consciously. Her “heart glows” when she notices that he looks “detached” from Clara because this suggests that, although Clara is his date, he is not invested in his relationship with her. Mrs. Morel is pleased with this and pleased that it will be hard for a woman to “keep” Paul, because this means that no woman will take him from her or beat her in the battle for Paul's love. At the same time, because Mrs. Morel does not realize this is what she thinks, she feels sorry for Clara, who she thinks will be disappointed by Paul.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☹☹ He had a life apart from her—his sexual life. The rest she still kept. But he felt he had to conceal something from her, and it irked him. There was a certain silence between them, and he felt he had, in that silence, to defend himself against her. He felt condemned by her. Then sometimes he hated her, and pulled at her bondage. His life wanted to free itself of her. It was like a circle where life turned back on itself, and got no further. She bore him, loved him, kept him, and his love turned back into her, so that he could not be free to go forward with his own life, really love another woman.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 389

Explanation and Analysis

Paul contemplates his relationship with Mrs. Morel and wonders why he feels trapped and stifled with her, even though he willingly tells her everything and keeps her as his closest companion.

Paul, understandably, does not tell his mother about his sex life. However, their relationship is very close, and Paul feels that she possesses him. It makes him feel guilty to keep this information from her, even though she does not want to know this. On an unconscious level, Mrs. Morel does not want to know about Paul's sex life because she is jealous of his girlfriends and cannot be happy for Paul when he is in a relationship. Paul feels as though Mrs. Morel tries to get information out of him, even though she does not, because of the "silence" between them. He feels guilty keeping anything from her and the "silence" makes him feel that he has done something wrong.

Paul senses that his relationship with his mother prevents him from moving on with his life. His love for her is depicted as unnatural, turning back in on itself, because it cannot progress and change. They cannot progress onto the next stage of a relationship (sex, marriage, etc.) because their bond is already complete; they are mother and son.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☹☹ He worked away again mechanically, producing good stuff without knowing what he was doing. Sometimes he came in, very pale and still, with watchful, sudden eyes, like a man who is drunk almost to death. They were both afraid of the veils that were ripping between them. Then she pretended to be better, chattered to him gaily, made a great fuss over some scraps of news. For they had both come to the condition when they had to make much of the trifles, lest they should give in to the big thing, and their human independence would go smash.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 429

Explanation and Analysis


Mrs. Morel is dying of cancer and Paul takes care of her. They are both very afraid of her impending death and try to avoid the subject with each other.

Paul feels as though he is going through life "mechanically," or like a man who is "drunk," because he is devastated by his mother's illness and it makes it difficult for him to function normally. He is "watchful" because he anticipates her death but is afraid of its coming. The "veils ripping" suggest that they are forced to face the reality of their relationship and realize that they are the most important people in each other's lives, and dependent on each other in an unhealthy way. This is very frightening because it inevitably means that Paul is going to be left alone.

Both characters try to avoid this realization and the reality of their situation by focusing on small talk and bits of trivial conversation. This is a way to make the situation seem mundane and ignore the fact that it feels like both their lives are ending. The only thing that really occupies them though, "the big thing," is the fact that Mrs. Morel will die, and that Paul will have to manage without her.

☹☹ Sometimes, when it was lighter, she talked about her husband. Now she hated him. She did not forgive him. She could not bear him to be in the room. And a few things, the things that had been most bitter to her, came up again so strongly, that they broke from her, and she told her son. He felt as if his life were being destroyed, piece by piece, within him.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Mr. Walter Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 430

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Morel slowly dies from cancer and, during her last weeks, she looks back bitterly on her life and complains about it to Paul. Paul is upset because he thought his mother was happy.

When Mrs. Morel's pain is "lighter" she is able to talk. She feels that her husband has ruined her life and, although she has made the best of her situation, she cannot forgive him because now she sees that her whole life has been taken up by him. She feels as though her life has been wasted on an unhappy marriage and she cannot bear to see her husband because he reminds her of this.


Mrs. Morel tells this to Paul to unburden herself. She does not notice that she hurts Paul, though, because she is consumed with physical and emotional pain herself. Paul has always assumed that his mother is happy because she loves him and is happy with him, and he is also essentially self-absorbed. However, now he learns that his mother has focused so much attention on him because she is unhappy in her marriage, and she uses him as a substitute for Mr. Morel because she is lonely and unfulfilled. He also realizes that, despite his love for Mrs. Morel, he has not really succeeded in making her happy or truly knowing her.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ The realest thing was the thick darkness at night. That seemed to him whole and comprehensible and restful. He could leave himself to it. Suddenly a piece of paper started near his feet and blew along down the pavement. He stood still, rigid, with clenched fists, a flame of agony going over him. And he saw again the sick room, his mother, her eyes. Unconsciously he had been with her, in her company. The swift hop of the paper reminded him she was gone. But he had been with her. He wanted everything to stand still, so he could be with her again.

Related Characters: Mrs. Gertrude Morel, Paul Morel

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 454

Explanation and Analysis

Paul is devastated by his mother's death and cannot find any meaning in life after she has gone. Sometimes he forgets that she is dead and feels that he is with her.

The darkness feels "real" to Paul because it reflects his emotional state. He does not care about anything in the world without his mother, and so is happiest when the world appears to be gone, in the darkness. Paul feels at peace when he thinks about the world vanishing, suggesting that he is suicidal in the wake of his mother's death.

The physical reality of the paper blowing down the street reminds Paul that, although spiritually and emotionally he is with Mrs. Morel, physically she is gone. Physical love is superior to spiritual or religious love in the novel, and so Paul cannot be happy with his mother's memory alone but yearns for her literal presence. This suggests that religious ideas about an afterlife or soul connection are poor substitutes for tangible human connection.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

“The Bottoms” is a housing estate for coalminers, built on the site of an old estate which was called “Hell Row.” “Hell Row” burned down and was replaced when the small mines, or “gin-pits,” closed and the large mining company, Carston, Waite, and Co., took over the area. This company opened six large coalmines, all connected by the railway, which loops around the surrounding countryside.

“The Bottoms” sits in the valley facing Selby and has “twelve houses in a block” and six blocks altogether. It lies at the foot of the hill underneath the larger, finer houses of Bestwood. The front of the houses in “The Bottoms,” which face out onto the street, look pretty and the gardens are neatly kept and full of [flowers](#). The back doors, however, open onto a grimy alley facing the “ash pits.” The kitchens are at the backs of the houses, facing onto the alley, and the people who live there spend most of their time in these kitchens.

Mrs. Morel is not pleased when she is forced to move from Bestwood to “The Bottoms.” At thirty-one, she is pregnant with her third child and married to a miner. Although she and her husband find a house at the end of a row, she worries about how she will get on with the local women. They have lived there for three weeks when a fair comes to town. Mrs. Morel worries that Mr. Morel will “make a holiday” of it, but the children, William and Annie, are extremely excited.

On the day of the fair, William can hardly contain his excitement and rushes out after lunch, as soon as the “wakes” are set up. Mrs. Morel follows later with Annie, but she is unsettled by the noise and bustle of the fair. William is delighted to see Mrs. Morel and seems to enjoy the fair even more when she is there. He shows her a pair of eggcups he has bought her as a present and feels proud that his mother looks like a lady, in her bonnet and shawl. He is disappointed when, just after four o’ clock, she decides to go home.

During the Industrial Revolution (a period of rapid industrial and technological expansion which took place in the nineteenth century) many new coalmines were opened in the north of England. Coal was an essential source of energy for industry and a source of light and heat for the country’s population. Increased demand for coal during the Industrial Revolution meant that large companies took over old mines and rejuvenated them. Lawrence’s novel is set towards the end of this period, in the early twentieth century. The railways connected these mines, which were often rural and located some distance from the cities.



Mining was considered a working-class profession and miners often earned low wages and lived in poor conditions compared with those in middle-class jobs. Despite their poverty, the mining families make the best of what they have and keep their gardens neat and tidy. This suggests that they are proud and want to disguise their poverty. However, the “ash pit” outside, filled with smog and pollution from the mine, reflects the reality of life for miners and their families: one of hardship, hard labor, and unsanitary conditions.



Mrs. Morel is from a middle-class home and has grown up in better conditions than those she finds in “The Bottoms.” She has compromised her middle-class lifestyle to marry her husband. Mrs. Morel worries that Mr. Morel will use the fair as an excuse to drink.



“Wakes” is a regional word for festivities and refers to the tents and stalls set up for the fair. William is deeply attached to Mrs. Morel. This is normal for child of his age and suggests that, as with most young children, his identity and interests are partly shaped by his mother. William is proud that his mother dresses nicely and makes herself look wealthy, even though she is not. This shows that William has already learned about class divides and that poverty is looked down upon in his society.



As Mrs. Morel leaves the fair, she passes the bar tent, the “Moon and Stars” and, hearing the men drinking inside, she fears that her husband is in there. William returns to the house for his dinner and seems exhausted after his day out. He tells Mrs. Morel that he saw his father, Mr. Morel, serving in the bar tent. Mrs. Morel knows that her husband has no money, and that he is working for drink.

Mrs. Morel puts the children to bed and then goes into the garden and watches people pass on their way home from the fair. She notices that most of the women and children are alone and that many of the men who go past are drunk. She feels “heavy” and burdened by her pregnancy and wonders how her life has reached this point. She is not looking forward to having the child, or to her future, and she worries that they cannot afford to keep the family.

Mrs. Morel goes back inside to wait for her husband’s return. When he finally arrives home, he is affectionate and maudlin and has brought presents for the children. Mrs. Morel accuses him of being drunk but Mr. Morel denies it. Eventually, Mrs. Morel tires of his excuses and his “chatter” and goes to bed without him.

Mrs. Morel comes from an industrious, middle-class family. Her father was an engineer but was poor and bitter because of this poverty. Mrs. Morel remembers him as an “overbearing” man and she disliked the way he treated her mother, who was a kind, gentle soul. Mrs. Morel was an intelligent and “proud” young woman and remembers being given a Bible by a young man called John Field, who grew up in the same town with her.

Mrs. Morel and John Field were friends and he wanted to be a minister. Mrs. Morel encouraged him in this, but John insisted that he could not go into the church and that he must go into business instead. Mrs. Morel thought that “being a man” meant that John Field could do whatever he liked. Now, as a married woman, she realizes that “being a man” is “not everything.”

Mrs. Morel's worry suggests that Mr. Morel is a heavy drinker and that she does not trust him to behave responsibly. It is implied that he works for beer because he has run out of money.



The women and children are alone because their husbands have stayed behind to drink. It was common in this period and society for men and women's roles to be separate, even in marriage. Women were considered responsible for domestic chores and childcare, while men went out to work and could do as they pleased in their spare time. Wives were financially dependent on their husbands and if their husbands spent money on drink, the wives and children would be left with little.



Mr. Morel has spent money on presents and has not considered the family's money worries because he is drunk. He will not admit he is at fault, either because he does not realize how drunk he is or because he does not like to be questioned by his wife. Mrs. Morel struggles to respect Mr. Morel.



Class was not based solely on wealth but also on education and profession in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although Mrs. Morel's father was “poor,” she is a different class from her husband because she has been educated and expects better prospects in life. Middle-class people could improve their situations through learning and profession, whereas a miner would rarely change jobs in his lifetime.



Mrs. Morel perceives that men have a great deal of freedom compared with women. Although John feels pressure to make money, he is still free to choose his profession. As a woman in this period, Mrs. Morel is expected to marry and raise children. Married to Mr. Morel, Mrs. Morel now sees that men are also limited by class, education, and temperament.



Mrs. Morel met Mr. Morel at a Christmas dance when she was twenty-three and he was twenty-seven. She was attracted to him because he was lively and vigorous and not at all like her own father, who was “rather bitter” and intellectual. Walter Morel, in turn, admired Gertrude (Mrs. Morel) because she was the opposite of him; she was religious and reserved. She watched him dance and was flattered when he approached her. She was attracted to his strong, Northern accent, in which he “thee’d” and “thou’d” her, and she was fascinated by the fact that he was a miner and put his life in danger every day to go down the pit.

Walter and Mrs. Morel are married not long after this meeting and, for the first few months, they are very happy. However, as the months go by, Mrs. Morel begins to feel restless and find that, when she tries to talk to her husband about anything serious, he shuts down. Although she clashes with his family, who believe that she thinks herself too good for them, she still feels secure and content in her marriage.

Walter is a very practical man and Mrs. Morel loves how “handy” he is around the house. However, she is shocked when she discovers that the home they live in – which he told her was his own – really belongs to his mother and that they are still paying her rent. Mrs. Morel objects to this arrangement and finds herself growing cold towards her husband. Although she is tolerated by the neighbors, the local women feel she is “superior” and laugh at her when she says that Mr. Morel does not drink.

Two years into their marriage, Mrs. Morel gives birth to their first child, a son called William. She is ill for a long time after his birth and feels lonely and disconnected from her husband. She dotes on her baby, however, which makes Mr. Morel jealous, and she is frustrated and abandoned when he begins to spend more and more time away from home. The couple begin to “battle” with one another and it becomes clear that, although they are married, their personalities clash.

Mrs. Morel is extremely proud of her son and loves his long, blonde hair. Mr. Morel is affectionate with the boy when he is in the right mood, but often he is rough and even hits the child. One morning, Mrs. Morel comes downstairs and is horrified to find that Mr. Morel has cut William’s hair off. She is furious with her husband and this incident finally turns her completely against him and ends her love for him.

Mrs. Morel is drawn Mr. Morel because he is so different from her in terms of class and experience. He is strong and physical rather than cerebral and enjoys pursuits like drinking and dancing, which Mrs. Morel’s religion and sense of propriety prohibit. This suggests she is attracted to him because she knows she should not be. His accent marks him as working class because he speaks in a regional dialect. She is also impressed by his bravery, as mining was an extremely dangerous profession.



Mrs. Morel wishes to connect with her husband emotionally, but he is not open with his feelings and does not like to talk. Although Mrs. Morel is very physically attracted to him, she discovers as time goes on that she wants more from the relationship. Mrs. Morel feels that Mr. Morel will side with her against his family and that they do not need their approval.



Mrs. Morel finds that she cannot trust her husband and that he lies to her, and she loses respect for him because of this. The neighbors are working-class women and clash with Mrs. Morel because of the difference in their backgrounds. Although Mrs. Morel learns later that Mr. Morel does drink, it is implied that, early on in their marriage, he lies to her and tells her that he does not. The local women, who knew Mr. Morel before his marriage, laugh at Mrs. Morel because she has naïvely believed him.



Mrs. Morel does not love her husband and, to compensate for the lack of love in her life, she gives all her time and attention to her son. Rather than try to connect with his wife and revive his marriage, Mr. Morel retreats from the situation and leaves mother and son alone.



Mrs. Morel sees her husband’s act as a betrayal because he has done it behind her back and altered something that she loves. This incident parallels the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah. Delilah seduces Samson, who has superhuman strength, and cuts off his hair, which is the source of his strength. Mrs. Morel transfers her love from her husband to her son after this incident. This prevents William from forming relationships with women later in life, however, so she thus accidentally saps him of his vitality.



Still, because Mrs. Morel is a religious woman, she does not give up on her husband but strives constantly to make him a better man. He begins to drink regularly and spends most of his evenings and weekends in the pub. He begins to get into trouble at work because he does not like taking orders and cannot keep his opinions to himself; his wages are low as a result of this. In the slow summer months, when the mines often close early for the day, Mr. Morel earns very little and the family are poor. In the winter, when he earns more, he spends all the extra money in the pub.

At the time when the fair comes to town, Mr. Morel is not earning much, and Mrs. Morel is trying to save money for the new baby. After the fair, there is a public holiday for two days and the mine is closed. Mr. Morel plans to walk to Nottingham with his friend, Jerry Purdy, whom Mrs. Morel hates. She knows that Jerry's wife, who died recently, hated him too, and Mrs. Morel despises him because he believes that men are superior to women. Mr. Morel is pleased to go out for the day but tries to conceal this from his wife until the two men are away.

The men walk across the fields, stopping to drink at pubs along the way. Mr. Morel sleeps for a while on the ground, under the hot sun, and feels strange when he wakes up. The pair go on to the city and, when they arrive, continue to drink and start to gamble. Meanwhile, Mrs. Morel passes a miserable day at home, caring for the children in the oppressive heat.

Mr. Morel and Jerry catch an evening train back to "the Bottoms" and go to another nearby pub where they continue to drink. Mrs. Morel spends the evening at home; she prepares dinner and waits irritably for her husband to come home. Eventually Mr. Morel appears. He is very drunk and in a foul mood because he still feels odd after sleeping in the heat and because he must go back to work the next day. Mrs. Morel snaps at him because he is drunk, and he flies into a rage.

Upset, Mrs. Morel shouts back at her husband and tells him that she would have left him long ago if it weren't for their children. Enraged, Mr. Morel turns her out of the house and Mrs. Morel finds herself alone, outside, in the dark. After forcing her out, Mr. Morel slumps into his armchair and falls unconscious after a few minutes.

Mrs. Morel is persistent with her husband because she thinks he can be redeemed. However, this only pushes him further away. Mr. Morel forces his wife into unnecessary hardship because he does not think about her, or the children's, needs. Instead, he squanders what little money he earns without considering that this is the only money that Mrs. Morel gets to live on.



Mr. Morel does not seem to care about saving money to provide for the new baby and, instead, spends money on an outing for himself. He behaves selfishly and is irresponsible. Mrs. Morel hates Jerry Purdy because he is a misogynist and in his opinion, she should be totally subservient to her husband. Although this was still a widely held belief at this time, there was also a growing interest in women's rights.



It is implied that Mr. Morel contracts mild sunstroke by sleeping in the heat. While Mr. Morel goes out and has fun, Mrs. Morel is left at home, heavily pregnant, to do all the housework. Although Mr. Morel feels he has earned his pleasure because he works hard the rest of the time, working class wives in this period never had a day off from household chores or from childrearing.



Mr. Morel makes himself ill with the long walk in the heat and by drinking too much. Rather than take responsibility for this, he takes his discomfort out on his wife when he gets home.



Although it is summer, Mr. Morel's drunkenness threatens Mrs. Morel's safety when he locks her outside in the middle of the night while she is heavily pregnant.



Outside, there is a huge pale moon. Mrs. Morel is shocked by the sight of it and wanders blindly down the lane, replaying the fight in her mind. She feels the baby moving inside her and tries to soothe herself by walking among the flowers in her garden. In the light from the moon, she begins to feel calm as she breathes in the scent from the lilies. Her spirit seems to leave her body and mingle with the countryside around her. Eventually, she feels strong enough to return from the house, and she knocks on the window to try to wake Mr. Morel up. After several attempts, he hears her and opens the door. When he has let her in, he rushes from the room and up the stairs without speaking to her.

Nature has a calming and rejuvenating influence on Mrs. Morel. Her anguish after the fight is connected to Paul's anguish later in life; it is suggested that Paul inherits this pain from his mother, and this supports the idea that they have an unusually close bond. The moon is associated with motherhood, and flowers with love and femininity in the novel. Mrs. Morel feels as though she merges with nature and becomes an extension of it. Later in the novel, Paul experiences this as well.



CHAPTER 2

After his drunken outburst, Mr. Morel is contrite and ashamed. He soon forgets about the fight, but the incident dents his confidence, and he seems to “shrink” and become less sure of himself. He stops staying out in the pub every evening and, instead, returns home straight after work. He takes care of himself during the week, preparing his own lunch and rising early to leave for work before Mrs. Morel is up. He loves to walk across the fields to get to the mine, but he is so used to his work that he is equally content in his long days underground. Although they spar over the housework, Mr. Morel helps Mrs. Morel round the house as her due date approaches.

Mr. Morel is afraid of himself and what he is capable of when he is drunk. He knows that he has wronged his wife and tries to make amends without outwardly admitting fault. Mr. Morel is associated with nature because he literally works in the earth. He has been completely shaped by his environment and experience as a miner and sees the mine as an extension of the natural world.



Mrs. Morel appreciates that she is luckier than many of her neighbors to have a husband who helps her with the chores. One day, when she is out in the lane, a man named “Hose” passes through and Mrs. Morel watches as this man pays her neighbors for pairs of stockings that they have darned for him. Mrs. Morel goes inside, contemptuous of the low wages “Hose” pays the women.

Women were generally viewed as responsible for domestic work in this period and so, despite Mr. Morel's flaws, he is more considerate than the average husband in this sense. This is a job that women could take on to supplement the household income and sewing was generally considered women's work. Mrs. Morel feels that she is above this type of labor and that the women are being exploited. She looks down on the women because they publicly show their poverty by taking this type of work.



One morning, not long after this, Mrs. Morel goes into labor and calls her neighbor to send for the midwife. She gives birth to another son. This time the child is fair with blue eyes. Mr. Morel stays late at work and arrives home to find his wife has given birth. He reluctantly goes upstairs to see her and meet the baby, but Mrs. Morel senses his reserve and there is a restraint between them that stops them from being affectionate with each other.

In this period children were generally born at home, with the assistance of a midwife or doctor.



While she recovers from the birth, Mrs. Morel lies in bed and daydreams about her children. She feels she has “no life of her own” and all her hopes and dreams revolve around the children and their futures. She is extremely close to her eldest son William, to the point where, if she is ill or in pain, he becomes upset. Mrs. Morel is amused by this but finds it touching. William is not impressed by his baby brother and complains that he looks “nasty.”

The young minister in the village, Mr. Heaton, sometimes comes to visit Mrs. Morel during this period and she enjoys his company and hopes that her husband will not interrupt them. Mrs. Morel feels sorry for Mr. Heaton, whose young wife has recently died, and helps him plan his sermons so that they are not too “fantastical” and will be relatable for the congregation of the mining town.

One evening when the minister is there, Mr. Morel comes home early. He is disdainful of Mr. Heaton’s profession and postures in front of the young preacher, suggesting that Mr. Heaton does not know the meaning of hard work. He makes a point of sitting at the table in his pit clothes, dirtying the nice cloth Mrs. Morel has spread out for the minister, and complains about pains in his head. William, who is watching the scene, is silently disgusted by his father’s uncouth behavior.

Sensing he is unwelcome, Mr. Heaton leaves, and Mr. and Mrs. Morel are left tense and angry together. Mrs. Morel complains about the dirty tablecloth and snaps at William, who grows sullen and kicks over a chair. She has been undermining her husband’s authority for some time and knows that the children take her side against him. When he tries to take back control of the household—egged on by his friend Jerry Purdy, who encourages Mr. Morel to put his foot down and dominate his wife—Mrs. Morel simply laughs at him. Mr. Morel takes his revenge by rationing the money he gives her and spends more time out drinking.

One evening, after one of their fights, Mrs. Morel takes the children out of the house because Mr. Morel has lashed out at William. She sits on a hillside near the house and watches the sunset with the baby on her lap. As she looks down at the child, she feels guilty because, although she loves him, she did not want him throughout her pregnancy, and she thinks that he looks sad because of this. She feels overwhelmed suddenly and holds the baby up to the sun, almost to “give him back.” She fears for the child’s future and decides, on impulse, that she should name him Paul.

As a woman at this time period, Mrs. Morel is unlikely to go on to have a career after she is married and has children. Although she loves her children, Mrs. Morel does not feel satisfied with her marriage or her domestic life and feels she has nothing to look forward to, except more of the same. William is jealous of the new baby and worried he will take his mother’s attention away from him.



Mr. Morel gets in the way of Mrs. Morel’s enjoyment, which shows that, though they are married, they have different interests and lead separate lives. Mr. Heaton has complicated intellectual ideas about religion, but Mrs. Morel is very practical and realizes that the miners and their families are generally uneducated and will not understand or relate to this point of view.



Mr. Morel is insecure and wants to show off in front of the minister, who he knows he can physically intimidate. He feels inferior to Mr. Heaton, because Mr. Heaton is educated and he is not, and reacts by spoiling the effort that Mrs. Morel has gone to on Mr. Heaton’s behalf. William sides with his mother, who respects Mr. Heaton, and looks down on his father.



Mr. and Mrs. Morel are locked in a power struggle. Mr. Morel wishes to control his wife and gain the respect of his children, but he has lost their respect through his past behavior and cannot win it back by forcing them to obey him. Mrs. Morel shows him that she finds his efforts pathetic when she laughs at him. Mr. Morel then abuses his power over his wife (she is financially reliant on him) and deliberately makes her position difficult.



Mrs. Morel is overwhelmed. She struggles to manage the household and feels guilty because, even though she loves the baby, the extra work that he makes for her is a source of stress. Although she feels guilty, her action (when she holds the baby up to the sun) demonstrates that she does not want him and wishes he had not been born. Paul’s name is associated with the Christian saint, St. Paul, who was blinded on the road to Damascus. This mirrors the dazzling of the baby as he is held up to the light.



Mr. Morel is unusually bad tempered during this time and stomps about the house. One night, Mrs. Morel loses her temper with him and he storms out to the pub. She sits up waiting for him with baby Paul and thinks bitterly about her situation. She wishes she could control her anger with her husband but knows that if he comes home drunk, she will not be able to keep her mouth shut.

When Mr. Morel does arrive home, he is very drunk and demands that Mrs. Morel behave like a proper wife and make him dinner. Mrs. Morel refuses and, in his anger, Mr. Morel pulls the drawer out of the table and throws it at her. The drawer cuts her head and stuns her, and Mr. Morel is immediately contrite. She scornfully allows him to help her clean the wound. As he does this, Mr. Morel notices that blood drips onto the baby, whom Mrs. Morel still holds against her breast.

The next morning, Mrs. Morel tells the children that she bumped her eye on the edge of the coal bunker. Mr. Morel sulks in bed all day. He is wracked with guilt because of what happened and cannot cope with this; instead of facing what he has done, he blames Mrs. Morel and convinces himself that she drove him to it. When he does get up, he is sullen and quiet and rushes out to the pub as soon as possible.

A week later, Mrs. Morel notices that Mr. Morel has begun to steal from her; he takes money from her housekeeping purse. She is disgusted that her husband would sink to these depths and “sneak” behind her back and eventually confronts him about it. Mr. Morel is furious, packs up his things, and tells her he is leaving her. For a moment, Mrs. Morel panics and wonders how she will provide for the children if he is gone; she knows deep down that he will not go far, but the incident upsets her deeply.

When William comes back from school, he is upset to find that his father has left. He and Annie begin to cry, and Mrs. Morel tiredly berates them. As the evening wears on, Mrs. Morel grows anxious. Her fears are allayed, however, when she goes to get coal and notices Mr. Morel’s bundle of things – which he had taken with him – stowed behind the door of the “coal-place.” Mrs. Morel tells the children and tells them to leave the bundle where it is. William is elated that his father has not really gone, and Mrs. Morel laughs every time she thinks of the little bundle stashed away.

Mrs. Morel does not want to provoke her husband, because he may become violent, but she is proud and knows that she is being treated badly. She knows her sense of self-respect will drive her to call her husband out for his disrespectful behavior.



Mr. Morel refers to the misogynistic belief that a wife should unquestioningly obey her husband. Although this belief had been widely held in previous centuries, attitudes towards marriage and the treatment of women were changing at this time. Although Mr. Morel wants his wife’s respect, he loses it further by resorting to violence.



Mrs. Morel hides the truth from the children to protect them and so that they do not turn against their father. This is noble of her considering how Mr. Morel has behaved. Mr. Morel is a coward and blames his wife for his emotional outburst rather than taking responsibility for his temper.



Mrs. Morel is consistently disgusted by her husband’s dishonesty. She is totally financially reliant on him, however, and, even if she could find work, would not earn enough to support her children. This shows that, although Mrs. Morel cannot respect her husband, he has a great deal of power over her simply because she is a woman.



Mr. Morel never really intends to leave and only implies this to try and frighten Mrs. Morel. This shows that he does not care about her feelings, because he makes her worry all day, and only thinks about himself. He wants to frighten her so that she will appreciate him, but his behavior does not earn her respect. Mrs. Morel merely thinks her husband is laughable and pathetic.



Mr. Morel comes back later that night and tries to make Mrs. Morel feel grateful that he has returned. She softly remarks that the children can bring his bundle in the next morning. Hearing this, Mr. Morel “slinks” out to collect his belongings and then creeps back inside and goes to bed. Mrs. Morel is amused by this but feels “bitter” because this is the man she has married.

Mr. Morel tries to abuse his power over Mrs. Morel because he knows she will be financially helpless without him. His plan backfires, however, because Mrs. Morel is more intelligent than he gives her credit for and understands what he has done. Although she wins the fight, Mrs. Morel is disappointed that her husband is so cowardly and dishonest.



CHAPTER 3

Over the next few weeks, Mr. Morel falls ill, and Mrs. Morel must nurse him and care for the household and the children alone. The neighbors make food for her and help where they can, and Mr. Morel’s colleagues put aside money for her from the mine’s profits, but it is a very hard time in her life. This period softens Mrs. Morel towards her husband slightly, but, in general, her affections for him have completely waned and she is able to tolerate him more because she has become indifferent to him. Instead, she begins to focus all her energy on William. Mr. Morel feels himself alone and abandoned while Mrs. Morel plans joyfully for William’s future.

Mining communities were close knit and communal. This is demonstrated by the fact that the neighbors support Mrs. Morel while her husband is unable to work. Mrs. Morel no longer cares about her husband and this makes it easier for her to tolerate him. She no longer tries to change him or to make him respect her; she simply accepts him for what he is and no longer thinks about him.



Although Mr. Morel returns to his old self after a while, he feels that his “authority” in the home has dissipated. Mrs. Morel hardly notices him even when he tries to assert himself. Paul, who is a toddler now, is afraid of his father and will not let Mr. Morel hold him. This upsets Mrs. Morel, who is pregnant with another child. She gives birth to another son, called Arthur, and this child immediately bonds with Mr. Morel.

Mr. Morel is aware of the change in Mrs. Morel, and unconsciously knows that he has lost her respect and her love for good. She will no longer listen to him or fight with him because she no longer cares for his opinion at all.



Domestic life continues as usual for the Morels. Paul grows into a rather wan, delicate child, who occasionally has “fits of depression.” One afternoon, when Mrs. Morel goes out to buy yeast from a man who is selling it in the lane, she is harassed by one of her neighbors who claims that William has ripped her son’s collar. As the yeast man passes, he recites passages from the Bible to the fighting women. Mrs. Morel confronts William, but William explains that he tore the boy’s shirt by accident. When Mr. Morel comes home, he too has heard about the incident from the neighbors and is ready to beat William as punishment. Mrs. Morel gets between them and fiercely defends her son.

Paul’s unhappiness supports Mrs. Morel fear that he will have a sad life. It is ironic that the man recites Bible verses to the women because Christianity is based on ideas of forgiveness and charity and the women are being uncharitable and fighting with each other. Mrs. Morel takes her son’s side against her husband’s. This further emphasizes the divide between them and foreshadows the divide between the children and their father as they grow up.



Around this time, Mrs. Morel joins the “women’s guild” in the town. She enjoys this because of the intellectual work it gives her to do and the children like it because it makes their mother happy. Some of the husbands in the community object to this organization because it leads the women to criticize their lives and how they are treated at home, but the Morel children love to hear about the guild meetings from their mother.

The women’s guild was a social organization which provided educational classes for married women and mothers. The existence of this organization reflects the growing appetite for changes in the way women were treated by society. Mrs. Morel feels fulfilled by intellectual activity, suggesting that women are just as capable of intellectual work as men. This was a relatively new idea in the early twentieth century, as women were broadly believed to be most fulfilled when they focused entirely on the needs of their husbands and children.



When William is thirteen, Mrs. Morel gets him a job at this Co-op. Mr. Morel objects to this and complains that he went down the pit when he was around William’s age, but Mrs. Morel is adamant that William will not grow up to be a miner. William is a bright, athletic lad and Mrs. Morel is proud of him. When he is seventeen, Mr. Morel makes a drunken bet that William could beat anyone in the village in a bike race and, although Mrs. Morel is horrified and anxious about the race, William returns victorious and presents the prize to her.

Mrs. Morel wants a better life for William than the life of a miner. Although Mr. Morel is proud of his profession, mining was considered common and working class. Mrs. Morel wants her children to have middle-class professions which require literacy and education. William gives the prize to his mother, which symbolizes that all his efforts in life are for her sake. She in turn lives vicariously through his achievements.



On top of his job, William works as a tutor and schools his pupils at home. He is an extremely impatient teacher, however, and rages when his students make mistakes. As he grows into a man, William remains close to his mother. They flirt playfully together, and William teases Mrs. Morel about the job she has done sewing up one of his work shirts. She claims that he looks as handsome as King Solomon, but William complains that people will be able to see through all the patches.

William inherits his father’s volatile temper and struggles to control his emotions. William and Mrs. Morel enjoy each other’s company and show this through their playful teasing.



William grows into an ambitious young man. He gets to know all the wealthy people in the town and socializes often at dances and billiard games. He has many girlfriends, whom he compares to [flowers](#) and describes to his younger brother Paul, whom he nicknames “Postle.” Mrs. Morel disapproves of these girls and sends one away, believing she is a “brazen hussy,” when she comes to the house looking for William. She dislikes William’s social life and the fact that he loves dancing. At Halloween, when William buys a costume and dresses up as a Highlander, Mrs. Morel refuses to see him in it and, unknowingly, hurts her son’s feelings. Although he carries on with his night and has fun, William had been most excited about showing the costume to his mother.

William describes his girlfriends as flowers because he finds them beautiful and decorative. However, he does not connect with any of them as people and, therefore, is careless about their feelings and forgets that he hurts them when he leads them on. Paul’s nickname “Postle” again aligns him with the figure of St. Paul the Apostle, who was blinded on the road to Damascus and who became celibate and discouraged marriage. Mrs. Morel is jealous of William’s girlfriends because they compete with her for his affections.



As William grows up, Mrs. Morel begins to worry about him and wonder if he will be as successful as she has hoped. She frets about this a lot because her hopes and dreams are tied up in her son's future and her belief that he will become a great man. William begins to study languages and loses some of his youthful vigor. Although he is pursued by many girls, he never has a real relationship and, by nineteen, he has become quite a serious young man and seems to be growing restless in the town. Finally, he accepts a job in London and prepares to leave home.

Mrs. Morel has no professional ambitions of her own, because the rest of her life will be spent as a wife and a mother, but she longs to make her mark on the world and hopes to do this through the activity of her son, who has been influenced by her and represents her point of view. She worries that he cannot seem to settle on anything permanent.



Mrs. Morel is devastated by the news of her son's departure. She loves to take care of him at home, watching him progress into adulthood, and she feels that her whole life is bound up with William's fate. She conceals her misery from her son, who is bursting with excitement about his new life, and the family spend William's last day at home together.

Mrs. Morel lives through William and so his departure feels like she is losing a part of herself.



Mrs. Morel bakes him a cake as a leaving present and, while she is cooking, William shows Paul his love letters from all the various women who have fallen for him. William brags that, despite all this attention, he has never yet been tied down. Mrs. Morel warns him that, one day, he will find himself attached to a woman whom he cannot break away from. William dismisses this idea, however, and leaves home the next day.

William comes across as self-absorbed and vain. He has collected women, but not cared for any one of them or for their feelings. He sees them and their letters as tokens of his own success rather than human beings who have developed feelings for him.



CHAPTER 4

Paul is a quiet child who looks like his mother. As a small boy, he is very close to his older sister, Annie, and follows her around, joining in her games. Annie's favorite toy is a doll with a china face, which Paul accidentally breaks one day when he lands on it after jumping off the sofa. Annie is heartbroken, but she agrees when Paul suggests they burn the doll as a "sacrifice." Although Annie does not know why, she is slightly "disturbed" by this, and feels that Paul seems to hate the doll because he had destroyed it.

Paul's reaction to the broken doll mirrors his father's treatment of his mother. When Mr. Morel abuses Mrs. Morel, he cannot face the shame and guilt he feels and, instead, blames Mrs. Morel and places the responsibility for his behavior onto her. This in turn reflects broader, misogynistic attitudes towards women. Annie, as a young girl, unconsciously perceives this although she does not understand it.



Although none of the children are close to their father, Paul particularly dislikes Mr. Morel and always sides with his mother. He remembers coming home from school one day and finding his mother with a bruised eye and his father and William about to fight. Mr. Morel tried to taunt William into a brawl and only stopped when Mrs. Morel finally intervened.

Paul's early memories of his father's violence turn him against Mr. Morel. William tries to fight Mr. Morel to protect Mrs. Morel from his father's violence.



When William was a child, the family moved to a new house, and so Paul grows up in a house which overlooks the valley and has an old tree outside. He has an enduring memory of lying in bed in this house, listening to his mother and father fight downstairs and the noise of the wind in the tree branches outside. He was always terrified when the argument fell silent because he wondered what his father had done to his mother and what he would see the next morning. These memories stay with him into adulthood and always torment him.

As a child, Paul prays for his father's death and hopes Mr. Morel will be killed in a mining accident. If Mr. Morel does not come home on time, however, the evenings in the house are unbearably tense because Mrs. Morel worries, and the children pick up on her anxiety. Usually Mr. Morel comes in late, very drunk and angry, and upsets the atmosphere of the home even more. When Paul wins a prize for his painting, Mrs. Morel encourages him to tell his father, but Paul finds it impossible to connect with Mr. Morel and struggles to hold even a simple conversation with him.

The only time that the children feel comfortable and happy with their father is when he fixes or builds something in the house; he lets them help and tells them stories about the pit and the other miners, which they love. One winter, Paul is ill for several weeks with bronchitis. Although his father tries to soothe him, he is aggravated by Mr. Morel's presence and will only be comforted by his mother, who often sleeps in the same bed with him. Mrs. Morel feels guilty during Paul's illness, as she never expected him to live when he was young and didn't want him when he was a baby.

When the family is short on money, the children love to help by foraging berries for their mother. Paul walks miles to find these berries so that he will not let Mrs. Morel down, because he cannot stand to disappoint her. The children find it very satisfying to find what they need in nature and to use nature to provide for themselves.

Once William and Annie have both found jobs, it becomes Paul's responsibility to go to the public house and collect Mr. Morel's wages. Paul hates to do this and feels mortified as he waits for his name to be called, amid the wives, children, and miners who are also squashed in to wait for their pay. When he finally makes it up to the counter, he is too embarrassed to count the money he is given and the "butty's" and the other miners tease him about his education at the "Board school." He does not feel like himself again until he is on the walk home.

Paul is afraid that his father will accidentally kill Mrs. Morel because he cannot control his temper. He is afraid of the silence because he thinks that Mrs. Morel may be dead, and he worries that they will find her body the next morning. These early experiences have a lasting impact on Paul's life.



Mining was an extremely dangerous profession and the risk of accident or injury was high. Paul's wish shows the strength of his hatred for his father. Although Paul prays that his father will die so he can no longer torment his mother, this is complicated by the fact that he wants his mother to be happy. Mrs. Morel will not be happy if Mr. Morel dies because the family is financially reliant on him.



The children naturally want to connect with their father but find it difficult because he is so violent and distant. He is a very practical man and is only relaxed when he is engaged in some physical task because this is what he excels at and feels comfortable with. When Mrs. Morel shares the bed with her son rather than her husband, this signifies the transference of affection from her husband to her children.



Nature is a source of nourishment in the novel. The family rely on coal, a natural resource, and Paul later relies on nature for emotional comfort and for artistic inspiration, just as the children rely on it for sustenance when their parents are poor.



The miners' wages are divided up out of the collective earnings and portioned out to the workers at the end of each week. Paul goes to collect the money on his father's behalf, but he is extremely self-conscious and hates to be singled out. The miners look down on and tease him about his education because it makes them feel inferior and inadequate, since they themselves are not educated.



When Paul gets home, he complains to his mother about this and tells her that he will not collect the money anymore; he hates to be among “common” people. Mrs. Morel gently placates her son, but she is surprised by his anger because Paul is generally placid. Paul counts the money for her at home and, through this, Mrs. Morel can see if her husband is keeping money back or not.

On Friday nights, Annie and Arthur go out with their friends, but Paul prefers to stay in and wait for Mrs. Morel to return from the market and show him what she has bought. In the winter, when it gets **dark** early, the Morel children play with the neighbor’s children under the lamp post at the end of the street, which overlooks the dark valley. Paul likes to see the **moon** rise and, one night, when he has fought with the other boys, he remembers a Bible story about the moon “turned to blood.”

In the summer months, the mines often close early and the miners are sent home to their wives, who grumble about the closure. Mrs. Morel is frustrated to have Mr. Morel under her feet all day. William, who is away in London, begins to write regularly to his mother and Mrs. Morel delights in these letters. He tells her that he is coming home for Christmas and the family go into a frenzy of preparation as the holiday approaches.

On Christmas Eve, the children walk down to the station to meet William from the train. Mrs. Morel waits at home, excited but tense in case something should prevent William from coming. The trains are late because of the season but, finally, William arrives, with armfuls of presents, to the delight of his siblings. Mrs. Morel is amazed when she sees that William has turned into “such a fine gentleman.” The holiday is a wonderful success, and everyone is heartbroken when William must return to the city.

However, William stays in touch with his family and continues to write to his mother. He has the chance to go on a cruise around the Mediterranean during his two weeks break later that year, but, much to Mrs. Morel’s relief, William returns home for the holiday instead.

Paul feels rejected and out of place among the miners, because he is more educated than them, and, in response, lashes out and calls them “common.” This makes him seem like a snob. Mrs. Morel does not trust her husband to be honest about his pay and, instead, gives this responsibility to Paul.



Paul is so close to Mrs. Morel that he prefers to spend time with her than to make friends his own age. Paul feels very connected to the natural world and feels that the moon reflects his own emotions. This is an example of pathetic fallacy, in which the natural environment symbolizes the internal state of the character.



The wives are annoyed about the early closures because it means they will have less money to live on. Their husbands will also be restless at home and will keep them from their chores.



William uses his success to provide for his family. Mrs. Morel is delighted that he is generous in this way and feels proud that he is moving up in the world. This reflects increased social mobility during this period, in which people were no longer tied to the class into which they were born but could progress through the social ranks with education and hard work.



Mrs. Morel feels that William’s allegiance is still to her and the family because he turns down the cruise.



CHAPTER 5

Mr. Morel is careless and accident prone and Mrs. Morel is never shocked when he is sent home from work with some minor injury. One day, however, a young boy arrives at the house and tells Mrs. Morel that her husband has been taken to the hospital because he has smashed his leg. Mrs. Morel catches the train to the city, where her husband is being nursed, and returns to the children that evening. She assures them that their father won't die – although Mr. Morel believes he will die from the pain – and, although she feels deeply sorry for him in his pain, she still cannot muster any real love for him in her heart.

While her husband is in the hospital, Mrs. Morel travels back and forth on the train to visit him and Paul helps her with the housework at home. Paul takes pride in being the man of the house and is almost sorry that his father will come home again. Paul realizes that, soon, he must find a job, but he does not know what he wants to be. He is not suited to physical work and enjoys painting, but he cannot rely on art to make money and so he is resigned to take any position where he can make a living.

William still writes to his mother, but the tone of his letters has changed, and she begins to worry about him again. He has been very successful in the city, has a job in a law firm, and is constantly socializing. However, Mrs. Morel notices that he never sends any money and, on top of all the socializing, he must manage his studies so that he can advance his career. He has met a beautiful woman, who he claims is highly sought after by other men, and he parades her around the town. Mrs. Morel fears William has been seduced by the lavish London lifestyle, but tries to comfort herself with the thought that she has always been a worrier.

After he has sent out a few applications, Paul is offered a job in a factory which makes elastic stockings and wooden legs. He accepts this, even though the thought of a business “run on wooden legs” is faintly disgusting to him. Mrs. Morel goes with him to Nottingham to meet Mr. Jordan, the factory owner, and Paul is pleased to have his mother with him and thinks of her almost like “a sweetheart” with whom he is having “an adventure.”

Mining was very dangerous, and miners were often injured or killed in cave-ins, tunnel collapses, and explosions from the poisonous gases which collected underground. Mr. Morel is a very physical and vigorous man and is not afraid of using his body or being physically hurt; this makes him prone to accidents.



Paul takes Mr. Morel's place while he is in the hospital; he almost acts as though he is Mrs. Morel's husband and takes an equal share in the running of the house. He wishes to replace his father, and this supports the idea that Paul harbors Oedipal desires towards his mother. Freud's Oedipus complex is the theory that male children secretly desire their mother and wish to usurp their father's position.



Mrs. Morel worries that William overworks himself and that he wastes money on shallow things rather than using his time and his earnings sensibly. He seems to care more about pursuing pleasure than helping his family. He has chosen his girlfriend because she is popular with other men in order to show off and make himself look impressive. This makes Mrs. Morel worry that he has become shallow and is not living a principled life.



Manufacturing and the production of consumer goods became a huge business during the Industrial Revolution and provided a great deal of work in factories. Paul, who has grown up surrounded by nature, is put off by the thought of industrialism and the idea of profiting from people's misfortune by selling wooden legs.



When they arrive, the pair explore the town together and Paul grows nervous about his interview, afraid he will be rejected. It takes them a while to find “Jordan and Sons,” which is hidden beyond an ugly, dingy courtyard. Once inside, however, the factory appears pleasant and clean and Paul and Mrs. Morel are invited to talk with Mr. Jordan, the curt, snappish manager of the place. He asks Paul to translate some letters for him from French and, when Paul – greatly embarrassed – does so more or less correctly, Mr. Jordan offers him the job.

Mrs. Morel is delighted, but on their way out, Paul complains about how “common” Mr. Jordan seems. Mrs. Morel assures him that he will likely not see much of the manager, and the pair go out for dinner to celebrate. They eat in an expensive restaurant and wait a long time to be served part of their meal. Although the waitress can see them, she ignores their table and flirts with the wealthy patrons. Mrs. Morel is not used to eating in nice places, and is not spending much, so she feels too uncomfortable to complain. Eventually, she insists their food be brought out and the waitress contemptuously serves them.

After they have eaten, Paul and Mrs. Morel take a leisurely walk around the shops. Mrs. Morel is delighted by the front piece of a florist’s shop and finds a beautiful **flower** that she would love to take home. She and Paul joke, however, that the delicate plant would die in their dingy kitchen. They return home on the evening train and Paul feels he has had a “perfect” day “with his mother.”

Paul buys a “season ticket” for the train the next day, so that he can travel back and forth to Nottingham. It is expensive, and Mrs. Morel complains that William never sends her any money. Paul gripes that William spends a fortune on his own pleasure and Mrs. Morel agrees that he spends it all on his girlfriend, for whom he has recently bought a “gold bangle.” Paul thinks if the woman is wealthy, she should spend her own money, and he is irritated when his mother has to break into her savings to pay for his ticket.

William sends Mrs. Morel a photograph of Louisa Lily Denys Western, the woman he is having a relationship with, but Mrs. Morel dislikes the picture and thinks the girl looks “indecent” because she has bare shoulders in it. William then sends her another picture of Louisa in evening dress, but Mrs. Morel is dismissive of this one even though she supposes she “ought to be impressed.”

Although Paul dislikes the idea of the factory, he is pleasantly surprised when he arrives and hopes to get the job.



Paul and Mrs. Morel are snobbish about Mr. Jordan. It was common in this period for people to look down on business owners, especially those who had come from the lower classes and become wealthy. It was considered vulgar to make one’s fortune in this way. Paul and Mrs. Morel are then subject to snobbery themselves when the waitress ignores them because she knows they are poor.



The flower symbolizes Mrs. Morel’s femininity and sexual passion, which has withered in the dingy and unsatisfying life she leads with her husband. Although this passion is partially restored through her interaction with her son, they cannot experience the true, healthy passion of lovers.



Paul judges William because he feels that William has been disloyal to the family, and to Mrs. Morel, and that he cares more about his girlfriend than about them. Paul feels guilty because his mother must spend money on him.



Mrs. Morel is jealous of William’s relationship with Louisa; she wants to be the most important woman in William’s life. Mrs. Morel will not admit that Louisa is attractive because her jealousy prejudices her against the girl.



The day for Paul to start his new job arrives, and he sets off for the train station on a beautiful, sunny morning. On his walk there, he thinks that he would rather be out in the countryside. Mrs. Morel watches him set out and feels proud that she has sent two young men out into the workforce; she feels that her own life is being lived through them. Paul arrives at his office early and is greeted by a clerk, who shows him to his department in “Spiral” and sends him to “fetch the letters.” When Paul has done this, his boss, Mr. Pappleworth, arrives.

Mr. Pappleworth is a youngish man who is older than Paul and quite friendly. He gives Paul the job of copying out the letters, which contain orders for stockings and other items, but finds that Paul works slowly and holds up the factory girls. Mr. Pappleworth takes over from Paul and then shows him how to make up the orders. He then takes Paul through into the factory, where the girls work. They are greeted by the receptionist, Polly, who is irate about the orders coming in late, and they move into the sewing room where there are several “spiral sewing machines.”

In the “spiral” room, the factory girls stand together talking. Mr. Pappleworth is curt with the girls and tells them to start work on the orders. He takes Paul back to the office and gives him paperwork to do for the rest of the day. Mr. Jordan, the manager, appears briefly and complains about Paul’s writing speed, but Paul thinks that the man’s terseness is all for show. He discerns that Mr. Jordan is not a gentleman and, therefore, feels like he must make a show of authority to remind people that he is in charge of the factory.

Later on, a girl brings Mr. Pappleworth and Paul a heap of newly made garments and, after examining them, Mr. Pappleworth gathers them up and leads Paul into another sewing room where there is another set of girls. Mr. Pappleworth snaps at the girls because they are singing and takes the garments to a hunchbacked woman, called Fanny, to be redone. Fanny is upset and, although she agrees to mend the things, she hints that Mr. Pappleworth is making a fuss to show Paul that he is in charge. Mr. Pappleworth introduces Paul to the women and tells them not to “make a softy of him.” Fanny seems amused by this and says it is not them who makes a “softy” of the office lads.

Paul resents having to swap his free time in the countryside for a job in the city. Although Mrs. Morel is proud of her sons, it is sad that the pinnacle of her achievement is the success of her sons rather than any type of fulfilment or satisfaction in her own life. This reflects the limitations placed on women in this period. “Spiral” refers to “spiral” sewing machines which are used in the factory.



Mr. Pappleworth is friendly with Paul on his first day and tries to help him understand the job and show him how to get on. Factory work was a common job for working-class men and women in this period. Women often took jobs that involved sewing and embroidery, as these were considered women’s work.



Mr. Jordan is aware that people may not respect him because he is working-class. Although he has been successful as a businessman, working-class people were still looked down upon in this period and earned wealth was not considered as respectable as wealth that was inherited through family connections.



Fanny insinuates that Mr. Pappleworth is the one who makes the office boys soft because, although he pretends to be strict and authoritative, he is generous underneath. He tries to blame this on the women so as not to lose face in front of Paul.



Paul finds the rest of the workday long but not unpleasant. Mr. Pappleworth goes home for lunch and, when he returns, he chats pleasantly with Paul. The workers have dinner at the factory at five and work through into the evening, although the morning is the busiest time. Paul catches a train at twenty past eight and arrives home after nine. He stays at Jordan's and enjoys it, but the long days spent indoors and the tiring workload take a toll on him, and his health declines.

Paul grows to like Mr. Pappleworth and gets on well with the women who work on the machines. He eats lunch and dinner with Polly every day; he knows all the women personally and enjoys talking with them. After his lunch, before Mr. Pappleworth comes back, he often goes and sits with Fanny, the hunchback, who adores him. She is very sensitive and has suffered a lot in life. Paul and the other girls like to hear her sing because she has a beautiful voice, but she often believes they are laughing at her.

When the other girls learn that Paul is an artist, they suggest that he should draw Fanny because she has such lovely long hair. Fanny is quick to take offense and Paul often listens to her troubles and reassures her that she is liked by the others. He enjoys working at the factory and likes the people there. He even enjoys the commute and the long walk home in the [dark](#); he likes looking at the lights from the surrounding villages, shining in the dark landscape. Each night, when he gets in, he recounts the day's events for his mother, and she loves this time between them and loves hearing about his life. Mrs. Morel feels almost as if the things he tells her also happen to herself.

CHAPTER 6

As Arthur Morel grows up, he becomes a handsome and vivacious young man. He is extremely popular but avoids work and loves having fun. He also has a bad temper and his mother finds him tiresome and overly energetic. Arthur used to get on well with his father, but as Mr. Morel grows older, he becomes bitter and antagonistic, and irritates his family by being deliberately crass and bad-mannered. Arthur grows so sick of his father's behavior that, when the chance arises, he transfers to a boarding school and moves out of the house. Annie has already left, and has a job as a teacher, so Mrs. Morel finds that she relies even more on Paul. She tells him her worries and thoughts when he gets home in the evening.

Mr. Pappleworth reveals his true, generous nature and treats Paul like an equal. It was normal for factory workers to work extremely long hours, although there were several social movements during this period which campaigned for improved working conditions. Conditions in cities, where most factories were based, were often unsanitary and bad for people's health because of industrial pollution and cramped working spaces.



The women at the factory mother Paul and like him because he is friendly and because he takes an interest in them. Fanny expects to be ostracized by the other girls because of her disability and, even though they are kind to her, she struggles to believe that they are genuine.



Fanny confides in Paul and trusts that he is genuine in his kindness towards her. Again, Paul usurps his father's position in the home; he comes home in the evening and discusses his day with his mother as if he is her husband rather than Mr. Morel, who rarely speaks to his wife. Mrs. Morel lives through Paul because she is uninterested in her own life and gets pleasure from hearing about his.



Arthur demonstrates that he is an active person because, rather than stay at home where he dislikes his father, he changes his circumstances and leaves. Mr. Morel feels that he is not appreciated or respected by his family and behaves petulantly in response to try and get their attention. Mrs. Morel and Paul grow closer as the other children leave home and develop their own lives separate from her.



William is engaged to Miss Louisa Lily Denys Western and spends a great deal of money on her. He has bought her an engagement ring – something Mrs. Morel resentfully recalls that she did not receive from her husband – and takes her out often to the theatre and to dances, like they are “swells.” He brings her home for Christmas and, this time, does not bring any presents home with him. When the pair arrive at William’s home, Louisa complains that she has lost her gloves and seems slightly amused by William’s family. Annie is so intimidated by Louisa that she acts like “the maid” and offers to help her with her case.

The family are very deferential towards Louisa and she is uncomfortable and does not quite know how to act with them. Although she is polite, she cannot “realize” them as people, and instead sees them as “creatures.” Mrs. Morel has put out all the best things in the house, but Louisa finds the house cold and the atmosphere frosty. Louisa goes to bed early, at William’s suggestion, and the rest of the family follow. William stays up then to talk with his mother.

Mrs. Morel feels pained and slightly embarrassed on her son’s behalf. William asks his mother if she likes Louisa and Mrs. Morel says she does. William complains that Louisa is affected and “puts on airs,” but, he insists, it is not her fault because she has had a bad family life. Mrs. Morel graciously suggests that Louisa is just shy because his family are so different from hers. William seems unconvinced; he laments that Louisa is not a thoughtful woman, like his mother, and that she cannot take things seriously.

The next morning, Louisa sleeps in very late, to the amazement of Mr. Morel, who is always up early. When she finally does come down, William is annoyed that she treats Annie like a servant and that she is haughty and “glib” with his family. Louisa is only a secretary in London, but she acts like a grand lady. Paul, however, is very struck by her, much to the annoyance of Mrs. Morel. When the group go out for a walk, Louisa tries to send Annie back for her muff, which she has forgotten, but William defends Annie and tells Louisa to get it herself.

That evening, William and Louisa stay up late together, and Mrs. Morel waits up in a separate room and insists that she will not go to bed until they do. William eventually sends Louisa upstairs to the room she shares with Annie. He asks his mother irritably if she does not trust them and Mrs. Morel confirms that she does not.

Mrs. Morel is jealous of Louisa because she has William’s affections. She believes that William has grown full of himself and thinks that he tries to conceal his working-class roots. The lack of presents at Christmas symbolizes that William has transferred his affection for the family onto Louisa. Louisa is from an upper-class background and cannot relate to William’s family. She feels that she is superior because they are poorer and less educated.



The class system in Britain was very entrenched and, although social mobility improved during this time, it was often uncomfortable for people to socialize outside of their own class. Louisa feels that the Morel family are like “creatures” because they are poorer and, she thinks, less civilized than upper-class people.



Mrs. Morel is embarrassed for her son because Louisa has treated his family like servants. She feels that William must be ashamed of this. Although William is repulsed by Louisa’s behavior, he feels sorry for her and does not hold her responsible for her actions. This suggests that William has a patronizing attitude to Louisa. He does not see her as an intellectual equal, the way he sees his mother.



Mr. Morel has never interacted with an upper-class person and is surprised by Louisa’s lazy habits; he is always up early because he works most days. Although Louisa has relatively low paid work, the circumstances of her birth determine her attitude and she does not view herself as lower-class. Mrs. Morel is possessive over both Paul and William and resents Paul’s attraction to Louisa.



Mrs. Morel does not want William and Louisa to go to bed together because they are not married. This is in keeping with British notions of propriety, which deemed it inappropriate and socially unacceptable for unmarried couples to have sex.



William comes home again for his Easter break but this time he does not bring Louisa. While he is there, he complains to Mrs. Morel that he does not really like Louisa when he is not with her, but that he changes his mind when they are alone together and, besides, she is an orphan. He still spends most of his money on her and has very little left to give to the family. Paul gets a pay rise at Christmas, however, which helps the family somewhat.

Although Paul likes his job, his health is poor because of the long hours spent indoors. In May he gets a half day off and he and Mrs. Morel decide to walk over to Mr. Leivers's farm to visit his wife, Mrs. Leivers. Paul asks about the family, as he does not remember them, and Mrs. Morel tells him that Mrs. Leivers is a kind woman but rather proud and "soulful." Mrs. Morel complains that, rather than embrace her poverty and manage with what she has, Mrs. Leivers wears shabby clothes and will not try to make herself look decent. Mrs. Morel concedes that Mrs. Leivers has a hard life, however, because she is a frail woman. Her husband, in contrast, is very handsome and robust.

Mrs. Morel fusses with the housework before they set out until Paul teasingly drives her from the kitchen so that she can get ready. She returns wearing a new shirt and Paul flatters and compliments her about how she looks, while she pretends to be cynical about his praise. The pair set out together and Paul feels very proud of how they look. From the top of a hill, they stop and look down at one of the mines and the trucks and wagons going in and out of it. Although these are machines, Paul thinks they look like men because they are controlled by "men's hands."

It is a long walk through beautiful countryside and the pair are not sure of the way. Paul picks [flowers](#) for Mrs. Morel and helps her to climb over stiles. When they arrive at the farm, the first person they encounter is a young girl of around fourteen, who is rather sullen and does not greet them but rushes off instead. Mrs. Leivers comes out then and is pleased to see Mrs. Morel, although she seems a little sad.

Paul waits outside while his mother and Mrs. Leivers catch up and he sees the young girl again, who is called Miriam. He asks her what kind of roses are growing on a bush nearby and she answers him uncertainly. She tells him that they have not been on the farm long, and Paul thinks she has a haughty manner about her as she withdraws again into the house. When his mother and Mrs. Leivers reappear, Mrs. Leivers takes them on a tour of the farm.

William is physically attracted to Louisa and they have a passionate relationship when they are alone. William does not connect to her as an individual, however, and only stays with her because he pities her. Paul's income replaces William's financial contribution to the family and suggests that William's loyalties lie elsewhere.



Mrs. Morel is very different from Mrs. Leivers and cannot understand her. Mrs. Morel feels that Mrs. Leivers is proud because she refuses to disguise her poverty, but it is Mrs. Morel's pride which encourages her to always look smart and make the best of her situation. Mrs. Leivers, in contrast, does not think that physical appearance is important. Instead, she is only interested in spiritual and "soulful" ideas.



Paul and his mother have a teasing, flirtatious relationship, almost as though they are lovers. Paul clearly admires his mother and is very proud to be seen out with her. Although the coalmines are industrial, Paul views them almost as part of nature because coal is a natural resource extracted from the ground by men, in contrast to synthetic or man-made materials which are manufactured in factories.



Paul gives his mother flowers the way that a lover might give a sweetheart a bouquet. Mrs. Leivers seems unhappy with her life on the farm because she is very spiritual in nature and dislikes the hard, physical lifestyle of a farmer's wife.



Roses become a symbolic flower between Paul and Miriam and represent their blossoming romantic relationship.



When they return to the house, Mr. Leivers is there with his son Edgar, who helps on the farm. Not long after, the younger boys, Geoffrey and Maurice, arrive home from school and Paul chats with them about his job at Jordan's. The group go outside, and the lads let Paul feed grain to the chickens, who peck the food roughly from his hand. Miriam comes outside and her brothers tease her because she is afraid to feed the chickens. Paul tries to encourage her to try and tells her that it doesn't hurt, but her brothers tease her and tell Paul that she thinks she is too good to help with farm work.

Miriam is embarrassed and storms inside and Paul follows the boys into the orchard. They climb trees and swing from the branches together, but Paul senses that the boys dislike him and are more interested in each other. He soon returns to the house. When he enters the yard, he sees that Miriam is crouched in the chicken coup and is reaching out to feed the chicken from her hand. She is startled and ashamed when she sees Paul, but he presses her to try to feed the hen.

Gingerly, Miriam reaches forward and lets the bird peck food from her hand. Miriam is startled and shrieks a little with fear, but, once she is used to it, she seems relieved and pleased with herself. She takes Paul back inside, but she is self-conscious and irritated by the thought that Paul may think she is a "common girl" and not an important woman like "The Lady of the Lake." Mrs. Morel is ready to leave, and they walk back across the fields in the dusk. Paul is extremely happy to walk with his mother and Mrs. Morel laments that, if she had a farm and a husband like Mr. Leivers, she would gladly share the work with him, unlike Mrs. Leivers.

William has another holiday from work and brings Louisa home again. Paul notices that William does not talk to her much and only tells her things about himself and his childhood. One day Paul goes out for a walk with the couple and Louisa lets him wind **flowers** through her hair. When William sees this, Paul notices that a strange look of pain comes into his brother's face as he admires his fiancée's beauty.

Although the young couple are "tender" with each other, William, at times, despises Louisa and often snaps at her. He finds that she still treats his family like her servants (one day, she asks Annie to wash her clothes for her, even though she has plenty of spares) and he is irritated by her carelessness (she loses another pair of gloves, which he bought her.) One night, when Mrs. Morel offers Louisa a book to read, William snaps that Louisa has never read a book in her life and that she does not know how to learn or remember information.

Miriam is extremely afraid of physical sensation and avoids anything that she fears may hurt or overwhelm her. Her brothers misinterpret this as pride but, although Miriam does resent her life on the farm, her aversion to the physical world is because of her inability to cope with it easily rather than her deliberate rejection of it.



Although Miriam has been embarrassed in front of Paul by her brothers' teasing, she demonstrates that she wants to try something new, even though she is afraid. Paul encourages Miriam to move outside of her comfort zone. This foreshadows the dynamic which occurs in their sexual relationship, in which Paul pressures Miriam to have sex even though she dislikes it.



Miriam is happy to have gone outside of her comfort zone and gains a feeling of independence and pride from this. "The Lady of the Lake" is a popular romance legend about King Arthur and his interaction with a beautiful nymph. Miriam is clearly very imaginative and thinks about life in romantic, rather than practical, terms. She feels she is better than life on the farm because she is not suited to it and is innately averse to anything physical. Mrs. Morel almost seems jealous of Mrs. Leivers because she would enjoy the work of the farm.



William is very self-centered and does not care about Louisa's opinions. Paul puts flowers in Louisa's hair, symbolizing his sexual attraction to her. William is pained because he finds Louisa so beautiful—he dislikes her personality but feels that he is trapped because he is so physically attracted to her and cannot bring himself to end the relationship. In this way, William, like his father, makes Louisa responsible for his own failings.



William is openly cruel to Louisa and demeans her in front of his family. This suggests that he has no respect for her and that he has learned this abusive and disrespectful behavior from his father. However, he also looks down on Louisa and judges her because she does not live up to the idealized image he has of his mother.



Louisa listens miserably and Mrs. Morel tries to defend her. William feels that he hates Louisa because he is used to running his ideas and opinions by his mother but finds that Louisa is not interested in talking to him like this. The next time Mrs. Morel sees Louisa trying to read, she notices that the girl dislikes the activity and gives up after a page.

In private, William complains bitterly to his mother. He says that Louisa is stupid and relies on him for everything. Mrs. Morel encourages him to break off the engagement but William protests that he cannot leave Louisa to fend for herself. Mrs. Morel feels wounded by this conversation and feels that her hopes are being dashed. Although she has been unhappy with her husband, nothing has made her as miserable as William's unhappiness now.

William continues to be unkind to Louisa throughout the rest of their stay. He claims that she has "been confirmed three times," which Louisa tearfully denies, and says that she does everything for attention and to "show herself off." Louisa begins to cry, and Mrs. Morel berates William for his cruelty. William protests that Louisa does not know how to love and that she has the emotional range of a fly, and Mrs. Morel is angry and ashamed of him because of his heartless outburst.

Mrs. Morel walks to the train station with William and Louisa on the day they leave. On the way, William complains to his mother that Louisa (who is beside them and hears all) is too shallow to love. Mrs. Morel protests but William announces bitterly that, if he died, Louisa would move on almost immediately. Mrs. Morel is horrified to hear him speak like this. When she gets home, she tells Paul that, although she feels sorry for Louisa, she wishes that the girl would die "rather than marry" William.

Mrs. Morel worries about William all summer; she fears that he is about to ruin his own life. Paul tries to reassure her, but Mrs. Morel will not be comforted. William continues to write regularly to her, but his letters frighten her because they are so wild and "exaggeratedly jolly." He comes home for a visit in October and Mrs. Morel is devastated to find that he looks sickly and that he has been ill. William insists that he is better, but he works much longer hours to save up for his wedding. He leaves again on Sunday and seems a little healthier after a couple of days away from the city.

William is very dependent on Mrs. Morel and relies on her to judge and weigh his ideas. This suggests that, although a grown man, William is not emotionally independent but relies on his mother for validation; he cannot think for himself. He expects the same from Louisa although he, selfishly, takes no interest in her perspective on things.



Although William is emotionally dependent on his mother, he cannot stand Louisa being dependent on him. In this period, however, it was considered quite normal for women to rely financially on men. This suggests that William does not wish to take on his part in an adult relationship, as a partner who can be relied upon, but childishly expects Louisa to play the part of his mother and coach him through life. Mrs. Morel lives through her sons and so feels William's failure as if it is her own.



William suggests that Louisa is flighty and unreliable by saying that she has been made a member of the church (confirmed) three times; this implies that she cannot make up her mind whether to be religious or not. He also suggests that she changes her mind so that she can keep repeating the ceremony and be the center of attention. Mrs. Morel feels sorry for Louisa and is disappointed in her son because he treats his girlfriend so cruelly.



William shows no respect for Louisa and talks about her as if she is not there. William's announcement foreshadows his early death from pneumonia. Mrs. Morel feels that William and Louisa's relationship is doomed and hopes that Louisa will die so that William will not have to break up with her, which she knows he is not strong enough to do.



Mrs. Morel feels that William is not content and only pretends to be happy in his letters so that she will not worry. William's life in the city runs him down, but a short spell in the country seems to revive him. This reinforces the novel's view that the city is an unhealthy and stressful place to live, whereas the country is healthy and relaxing.



A few days later, Mrs. Morel receives word from London that William is sick. She travels up to visit him and finds herself in William's dingy London flat where he lies deathly ill. A doctor confirms that he has pneumonia, and William dies later that night while his mother watches over him. Heartbroken, Mrs. Morel remains in London to register the death and make the funeral arrangements. She telegrams home and asks Mr. Morel to join her in London.

Paul goes to fetch Mr. Morel from the mine. Paul cannot comprehend that fact that William is dead and sits, stunned, while he waits for his father to emerge from the pit. The miner seems afraid when he hears the news and timidly makes his way to London to join his wife. The couple return a few days later and Mrs. Morel, who will hardly speak or acknowledge her other children, tells them that William's body is to be brought to the house in his coffin.

Paul and Mr. Morel arrange the furniture so that there will be space for the coffin and William is brought in, carried by Mr. Morel and several of the miners that he works with. Paul is shocked by the size and weight of his brother's corpse. After William's funeral, Mrs. Morel can barely be roused and loses all interest in life. She wishes that she had died instead of her son.

Paul desperately tries to bring his mother back to herself. Every night, while she sits silently by the hearth, he tells her about his day and tries to persuade her to respond. She ignores him every night, lost in her grief for William, and Paul feels hurt and rejected by this. His life becomes dreary without his mother's company. One night, just before Christmas, Paul comes home from work feeling ill. Mrs. Morel is shocked by his appearance and immediately knows that he is sick.

The doctor explains that Paul has pneumonia and Mrs. Morel is furious with herself and wishes she had kept Paul at home and not let him find work in the city. Mrs. Morel tends him ceaselessly through his illness and, one night, when Paul believes he will die, her presence startles him back to himself and brings him out of a dangerously feverish state. His aunt claims that his illness has "saved" Mrs. Morel.

William has been living in poor, unsanitary conditions in the city and has become ill as a result. This was very common in cities in this period, in which the air was very polluted and living spaces were damp and overcrowded.



Paul is disorientated by grief and cannot believe that his brother is dead. Mrs. Morel is profoundly affected by her grief and can barely bring herself to speak or notice the world around her because she is so heartbroken. She was living through William, and so his death is almost like her own.



Paul notices the physical details of William's death (the weight and size of the coffin) which emphasizes the reality of his brother's loss. Lawrence focuses on the practical preparations to suggest that death is a physical as well as a spiritual concern.



Paul is jealous because his mother's attention is still on William, even though William is dead. Paul's relationship with his mother is the closest one in his life and, therefore, her withdrawal deeply affects him. Mr. Morel has not realized how self-destructive she has become; she has stopped living because of William's death and, in her grief, has forgotten Paul.



Mrs. Morel blames herself for Paul's illness because she feels responsible for the course of his life. Although Mrs. Morel saves Paul, Paul's illness also saves Mrs. Morel. Without her need to care for Paul, Mrs. Morel would probably have let herself die because of her grief over William.



Although he is ill for a long time, Paul begins to recover. His mother stays with him through his recovery and, when she sees him getting better, she begins to feel hope for the future again. She hears from Louisa for a while but, just as William predicted, the girl moves on with her life and forgets him and the family. Mr. and Mrs. Morel are kind to each other for a period after William's death and, although Mr. Morel eventually goes back to his old habits, he never walks through the cemetery where William is buried.

Mrs. Morel lives through her sons and all her future hopes are bound up with their lives. William's death makes her lose hope for the future, but this hope is restored when Paul survives pneumonia. From then on, Mrs. Morel is totally invested in Paul's future, rather than her own. Mr. Morel was not close with William, but seems to have his own deep and private grief for his son.



CHAPTER 7

Paul spends a lot of time at Willey Farm with the Leivers family. Although he is friendly with the younger boys, Miriam will have little to do with him and is scornful of him when he visits. Secretly, this is because Miriam disdains her life on the farm and thinks of herself as the heroine in a fairy tale or a Walter Scott novel; a "princess" transformed into a "swine herd." She has an extremely romantic and spiritual temperament and feels out of place with her family and with most people. She keeps her distance from Paul because she worries that he will perceive this and that he will not understand her.

Miriam is so afraid of being misunderstood by Paul that she avoids him. She cares deeply what he thinks because she is attracted to him and wants him to see the best in her. Miriam is not fully aware of this, however, because she has such a refined, spiritual view of life and does not think about things in physical terms. Walter Scott was a Scottish novelist whose romances were extremely popular throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Miriam is also very religious (like her mother, Mrs. Leivers), and is extremely reserved. At sixteen she is quite beautiful and thinks that Paul is handsome, like a hero in a novel. When she hears that he is ill, she thinks that he might fall in love with her because he will be weakened by his illness and she will be much stronger than him. She waits eagerly for his next visit to the farm and, sure enough, when Paul has recovered some of his strength, he rides to Willey Farm on the milkman's cart.

Miriam believes Paul must be in a weak state and, therefore, reliant on her, before he will pay attention to her and take her seriously—essentially, he wants a mother figure to take care of him. She does not want to take the risk of approaching Paul while he is well and decides to approach him when he is vulnerable instead.



Miriam greets him and Paul remarks on some [daffodils](#) which are growing in the garden and which he thinks must be cold in the spring weather. Paul loves the farm and Mrs. Leivers greets him warmly and sits with him while Miriam cooks dinner. Although they are kind to him, Paul finds the atmosphere strange because Miriam and her mother are both so serious and sensitive about mundane household affairs. Miriam burns the potatoes and Mrs. Leivers somberly rebukes her because her sons will be upset. Paul wonders why Mrs. Leivers puts up with them.

Again, flowers are a symbol of the budding relationship between the pair. Miriam and Mrs. Leivers are not practical women and do not see the chores as something which just need to be done. Instead, they regard the housework as something personal and meaningful because this is how they approach everything in life. Mrs. Leivers allows her sons to take advantage of her peaceful temperament.



When the boys return for their dinner, they complain about the food and criticize Miriam. Miriam takes this to heart, but Mrs. Leivers implores her to let them say what they like. She insists that Miriam must be strong enough to bear their complaints and to “turn the other cheek.” Paul thinks it is strange to bring religion into everyday interactions, but Mrs. Leivers seems highly disappointed in Miriam because she trusted her to make the dinner and Miriam did it wrong. Mrs. Leivers is very different from Mrs. Morel, who Paul thinks is “logical” and practical in her approach to household chores.

Paul finds the boys slightly awkward too. Although they are rude and seem to disdain their mother’s religious attitude toward life, they also struggle to make small talk or bond with people over everyday things. Paul is both fascinated and repelled by this intense and complex family dynamic that is so different from his own. At times, he both loves and hates it at the farm.

After dinner, Paul and Miriam walk across the fields with Mrs. Leivers. Miriam admires Paul’s love for nature and the pair look at a bird’s nest together. Both Miriam and Mrs. Leivers are interested in Paul because he is an artist and his artistic approach to the beautiful countryside around them seems to bring the world to life for Miriam. As Paul spends more time at the farm, he grows close to the Leivers boys and finds that they are very genuine and loyal once he gets to know them.

It takes Paul longer to get to know Miriam. One afternoon, during one of his visits, she takes him out to the barn and shows him a rope swing. Paul loves this, and Miriam admires the way he seems to give himself entirely to the motion of the swing and is not physically awkward at all. Paul encourages her to have a go, and pushes her on the swing himself, but she is afraid and asks him to stop. She is almost envious watching him, of the way he can “lose himself” in the physical activity.

As time goes on, Paul becomes good friends with Edgar and with Mrs. Leivers. He often spends time with Miriam because he feels sorry for her (she seems so sad and modest) and the pair share an interest in Paul’s paintings. Miriam loves his work; she finds it meaningful and spiritually charged. However, sometimes Paul feels that he dislikes her because she is never “jolly” or relaxed and is always brooding. He finds her too intense and religious, and it irritates him because she can never be “ordinary” and even her good moods are too extreme.

Instead of telling her sons off for their ungratefulness, Mrs. Leivers allows them to blame Miriam and encourages Miriam to sacrifice her own feelings rather than fight back. Rather than view the dinner as a banal, unimportant affair, as Mrs. Morel would, Mrs. Leivers and Miriam make it personal. This demonstrates a difference between Paul and Miriam and their early familial experiences.



The boys are like their mother even though they don’t want to be. Whereas Paul is proud of his practical, determined mother, the Leivers boys disdain Mrs. Leivers because they see her as weak. Paul is attracted to things which also repel him. This relates to both his veiled attraction to his mother and, later, his relationship with sex.



Miriam feels that Paul helps her understand the physical and the natural world. His artistic approach makes the world feel real to her because it transforms the world into metaphors and ideas; without this, Miriam is totally detached from life, clinging to the spiritual and rejecting the spiritual.



Miriam is attracted to Paul because he is so different from her. Although he is also thoughtful, he can be carried away by physical experience in a way that is impossible for her. Paul tries to bring this reaction out of Miriam by coaxing her to try physical experiences, but it is not possible within her nature.



Paul attaches himself to Miriam because he feels sorry for her, just as William felt sorry for Louisa. This is because Paul and William do not want to rely on any woman but their mother and so can only have relationships with women who they see as not their equals, but who rely on them instead, and who they do not need or rely on in turn.



Still, Paul and Miriam fall into a habit of going for walks together. One day, he asks her if she enjoys living at home and she tells him she hates it because she is a girl and, therefore, she does all the housework for her brothers. She thinks life would be easier if she were a man, but Paul thinks that men have to work harder than women do and have more responsibility. Miriam complains that, if she were a man, she could get an education and do something with her life.

Miriam's bitterness unnerves Paul, and that night, he asks his mother if she ever wanted to be a man. Mrs. Morel answers wryly that she'd be a better man than most are, but she adds that a woman who wants to be a man is probably not much good at being a woman. Not long after this, Paul decides to teach Miriam algebra. He is impatient with her, however, and Miriam is self-conscious and is easily intimidated by sums which Paul thinks are simple.

Although Paul tries to keep his temper, he finds Miriam's slowness infuriating and is often cruel with her. When Edgar takes an interest in the subject, Paul finds he can explain it easily to him and Miriam resents this. She is very different from her brother, who has a very scientific, logical approach to life. She takes no interest in politics or the practical aspects of life, which her brothers, father, and Paul enjoy.

Paul continues to paint during this time and feels most inspired when he works in the evening, while Mrs. Morel sits in the room with him and sews. However, he always takes his paintings to show Miriam when they are finished because, through her eyes, he sees what his work is about.

Paul returns to work at Jordan's, but the workdays are shorter, and he is given Wednesdays off. He and Miriam agree to meet at the town library on Thursday evenings, when Paul goes to collect books for his mother and Miriam goes to fetch books for her family. Miriam is often late, and Paul worries that she will not turn up and that his evening will be wasted. He is always relieved when Miriam does eventually arrive.

Miriam dislikes social conventions that leave women responsible for all the housework. She resents the professional and educational opportunities that her brothers have because they are men. Paul is only thinking about professional work and does not account for the domestic work done by women, which is unpaid.



Mrs. Morel is aware that she is emotionally stronger and more disciplined than her husband and suggests that she would have been better at providing for the family than he is. Mrs. Morel is resigned to her role, however, and feels that, if Miriam is angry about it, then she must know that she is not cut out for the job of being a wife or raising a family, which were women's traditional roles.



Paul is like William in that he is an impatient teacher and does not sympathize with Miriam when she struggles to understand. It is implied that Paul looks down on Miriam because she takes a different approach to life than he does and is more emotional than practical.



Mrs. Morel is Paul's closest companion and he feels most at ease and most himself with her; hence why he is so productive when she is with him. Mrs. Morel is a practical, worldly person, however, and Paul likes Miriam's abstract approach when it comes to his art. Paul does not think for himself, and instead relies on Miriam's opinions just as he relies on his mother's guidance and comfort.



Factories were growing more aware of the needs of workers and there was a growing demand for more leisure time. Paul is clearly attracted to Miriam and likes spending time with her because he anxiously anticipates her arrival and is disappointed if she does not turn up.



One wet night, after checking out their books, Paul walks Miriam halfway home and the pair discuss religion. Paul says that he used to believe every human life was important but now, since William died, he thinks that life is important but that individual lives are not necessarily very special. Paul feels that people like William lose their way in life and that this causes them to die. He tells Miriam that, if a person follows their true course in life, then they won't die. Paul believes he is following his proper course.

Miriam is delighted by Paul's ideas and hurries home feeling inspired and revitalized. Paul, meanwhile, worries that his mother will be angry because he has stayed out so late and he rushes home when he and Miriam part ways. Mrs. Morel disapproves of their evening wanders together, so Paul resolves to leave Miriam earlier in the future, although he enjoys her company

On their next walk together, Paul tells Miriam he must go home at nine o'clock. Miriam dismisses his concerns, however. She is determined to show him a beautiful white rose bush she has found in the wood and is extremely anxious that she will not be able to find it again or that he will not have chance to see it. Paul follows her into the wood and Miriam finds the rose bush. She is breathless with excitement and seems to care passionately how Paul feels about the [flowers](#). Paul thinks the roses are beautiful, but after he has seen them he hurries home; he knows his mother sits up waiting for him.

Mrs. Morel is irritated with Paul when he returns home. She disapproves of Miriam, who she feels will leech Paul's manhood out of him and prevent him from growing up. She says that he and Miriam are too young to "court." Paul complains that Annie has a boyfriend, but Mrs. Morel says that she trusts Annie more than she trusts Miriam. Paul tries to brush off his mother's concerns, but he can tell that – somehow – he has hurt her feelings.

Although Paul and Miriam spend so much time together, they do not think they are in love. Paul believes he is too practical to fall for a woman in this way, and Miriam shies away from any notion of sensuality or physical love.

Paul has been deeply shaken by William's death and now feels that individual life is not important, because people may die unexpectedly at any time. Life itself, however, including the natural and physical world, is something Paul thinks is spiritual and important. He feels that it is an extension of God. Paul implies that, if someone loses their way spiritually, they will destroy themselves because they will not know how to live well.



Mrs. Morel is jealous of the time Paul spends with Miriam—and this makes him feel guilty and he cuts his time with Miriam short. This suggests that, although he likes Miriam, his loyalty is still with his mother.



Miriam leads Paul away from Mrs. Morel's influence by encouraging him to ignore her demands. The rosebush symbolizes the blossoming relationship between Paul and Miriam. However, it is also depicted as something fragile and uncertain – Miriam is not sure she can find it again – which suggests that their relationship is under threat from outside forces, like Mrs. Morel.



Ironically, it is Mrs. Morel who prevents Paul from growing up and developing adult relationships, but she projects this onto Miriam because she does not want to face what she herself is doing. Mrs. Morel is suspicious of Miriam because she does not understand her; Miriam is so unlike Mrs. Morel.



Paul believes he is too rooted in the physical, practical world to fall in love – which is an abstract, emotional thing – whereas Miriam is too cerebral to notice her physical attraction to Paul.



On Good Friday weekend, Paul arranges a walk to Hemlock Stone with Miriam and some of his friends. Miriam's brother Geoffrey and Annie and Arthur go with them. That morning at breakfast, before they set out, Mrs. Morel calls Paul into the garden and delightedly shows him some **flowers** which have grown out of season, under a sheltering bush. The group set out together and reach the monument late in the afternoon.

During the walk, Miriam feels cut off from Paul and finds that she does not fit in with the others. She only feels comfortable with Paul when they are alone together and when he speaks about his deepest thoughts and feelings, rather than when he jokes and natters with the others. At the monument, she and Paul find a small secluded garden and walk around it together and, here, Miriam feels like she knows him again until they rejoin the others. As she watches him walk up the road behind the group, she realizes suddenly that she loves him and feels that this is an "Annunciation" of some kind.

Paul stops because his umbrella has broken, and Miriam goes back to join him. Paul is trying to fix the umbrella, which Geoffrey has broken, because it belonged to William and his mother will see it. Miriam feels a deep connection to Paul and, as they begin to walk along the road, he says that he believes that love always inspires more love. Miriam agrees that she hopes this is true because otherwise love could be terribly painful.

On the following Monday, the group set out again and, this time, take a train up to "Wingfield Manor." The boys eagerly explore the ruin and the group eat lunch in the "banquet hall" of the old manor. After they have eaten, the boys show the girls around the decrepit tower where Mary Queen of Scots is supposed to have been kept prisoner. Paul gathers ivy for Miriam from the side of the tower. Miriam daydreams romantically about the tragic queen locked up there.

They walk out across the fields nearby and up the hill to another ruined tower, built on the windy high point which overlooks the surrounding country. As they walk, Paul and Miriam intertwine their fingers through the string of the bag Miriam carries. By early evening, Paul is exhausted and the others are flagging, and the group walks to a nearby station to catch the train home.

Hemlock Stone is a natural standing stone in Nottinghamshire in England. The hidden flowers suggest hidden attractions or unrecognized desire.



Miriam only likes one side of Paul's personality; his thoughtful, artistic side. Paul, however, is also a fun, bubbly youth. Miriam cannot appreciate this because it does not fit with her temperament. Miriam and Paul meet in the garden, which suggests that, while they can be natural and pure with each other, their relationship does not work when the demands of the outside world are involved. Miriam cannot recognize her physical desire in a simple way but views it in religious terms. The "Annunciation" describes the angel's revelation to the Virgin Mary that she is pregnant with Christ.



Paul is afraid that his mother will be hurt if she sees that William's umbrella is broken. Paul's comment about love is proved wrong throughout the novel, as Mrs. Morel's overbearing love for Paul prevents him from finding love elsewhere.



Wingfield Manor is a ruined medieval manor where Mary Queen of Scots was once kept prisoner. Paul's behavior is chivalric and draws attention to the romantic history of the tower, which Miriam is attracted to.



Miriam and Paul acknowledge their attraction to each other for the first time on this outing.



Miriam has a rivalry with her sister Agatha. The girls share a room, but Agatha has a job as a teacher elsewhere. Agatha has rejected the family's general lack of concern about worldly affairs and, in protest, is deeply focused on status and appearance—ideas that seem trivial to Miriam. Both the girls like Paul and watch for his arrival from the bedroom window while they are getting dressed.

Paul comes into the yard and Miriam hears him pet the old horse they keep. As she listens, she is struck by the idea that she is in love with Paul and suddenly becomes ashamed of her feelings. Agatha runs downstairs to meet Paul and Miriam hears the two of them flirting. Miriam falls to her knees and prays to God to stop her from loving Paul. Or, if she must love him, to make him love her. As she does this, she realizes that she is destined to be a “sacrifice” and feels grateful that she will be martyred in this way.

Miriam goes downstairs, but she is so embarrassed to see Paul, after her revelation, that she leaves him with Agatha. After this, Miriam and Paul stop meeting at the library on Thursdays. Miriam still often goes to Paul's house and invites him walking, but as the summer goes on, she becomes convinced that the Morels do not like her, and she decides to break this habit. One evening, one of the last she spends at the Morels' house, Paul takes her into the garden and pins [flowers](#) to her dress. Miriam is amused by this because she usually takes little care over her appearance. Paul, however, is annoyed; he dislikes Miriam's carelessness and is irritated at the sight of her kissing the flowers he picks, as though they are her lovers.

When Paul is twenty, the family can finally afford to go on their first ever holiday. Paul and his mother select a cottage near the seaside for them all to stay in and Mrs. Morel is wild with excitement. Miriam is invited too, as she is still good friends with Paul, and the night before they drive out, she is invited to stay at the Morels' so they can all set out together in the morning. Although the family are friendly with her, she does not fit in among them and her serious demeanor slightly deflates the jolly atmosphere.

They set out early the next morning and hire a cab to drive them to the cottage. They are excited and talkative on the way and are delighted with the little house when they arrive. Paul and Mrs. Morel take charge of the trip – Paul is keeper of the money and Mrs. Morel helps the woman who owns the cottage with the housework – and Paul loves taking his mother out in the surrounding countryside to explore the area with her. In fact, he spends more time with Mrs. Morel than he does with Miriam, and he and his mother act as though *they* are a couple.

Paul is clearly attractive to women, and almost all the women in the novel jealously compete for his attention throughout. Miriam and her family are unconventional and do not care about social status or how they appear to the outside world.



Miriam is ashamed of her love for Paul because it clashes with her religious notions of purity and virtue; she believes she should be physically pure before marriage and dislikes the thought of sex. She is also afraid of being hurt and she prays for Paul to reciprocate her feelings. Although she does not want sex, or to feel rejected, she realizes that she is willing to go through these things for Paul's sake, and thinks that this is her purpose in life.



Miriam's aversion to sex and the shame that her attraction to Paul makes her feel causes her to pull away from him. Miriam's attitude towards flowers symbolizes her attitude towards relationships and love. She does not care how the outside world views their relationship, unlike Paul, who is influenced by his family. Paul dislikes the way she handles the flowers because he feels that she wants to consume them by putting them to her mouth, and that she wants to consume and possess him too.



Miriam is too spiritual and serious to fit with the lively and practical Morels. Her presence is a burden to them because she is too different from them and is awkward in their company.



Paul, again, takes on his father's role and acts like the head of the family on the trip; he takes charge of the money just as men were traditionally controlled the finances in families during this time. Paul neglects Miriam in favor of his mother which, again, shows where his loyalties really lie, and which relationship is more important to him.



Paul only spends time with Miriam in the evenings, while he works on his drawings. They have long discussions about art and Paul tells her that he loves the English countryside because it is flat and reminds him of Norman architecture, which is all “horizontal.” For Paul, these “horizontal” represent human achievement gradually progressing step by step. He says that Miriam has more in common with Gothic architecture, which makes sudden leaps up towards Heaven and cannot be seen amongst the clouds from the ground.

One night, as Miriam and Paul walk back from the shore in the dark, they are startled by the appearance of a huge, orange moon above the sandbanks. Miriam is amazed by the sight and thinks it must have some mystical, religious meaning. Paul feels an urge to clasp Miriam in his arms, but he cannot and there is an ache in his chest. He is immature and feels ashamed of himself because he is physically attracted to her, and this almost makes him hate her.

When they get back to the cottage, Paul feels irritable and is annoyed that Miriam has spoiled his composure. He snaps at his mother when she accuses him of being late for dinner and is gruff and moody all evening. Mrs. Morel blames Miriam for the change that comes over Paul and thinks that she changes his temperament for the worse. Annie agrees with her mother and Miriam’s distance from the family becomes more pronounced. Miriam does not care because she finds the family silly and trivial, but this divide causes Paul pain and he feels as though he struggles against himself.

CHAPTER 8

When Arthur Morel leaves school, he gets a job at the “electrical plant” at one of the mines. Arthur is a boisterous, energetic young man who is always getting into scrapes. Mrs. Morel finds him tiring and worrisome. One day, a letter arrives from Arthur which tells his mother that he has joined the army on a whim and now regrets his decision. The letter asks Mrs. Morel if she will come to Derby and speak to his commanding officer to see if she can have him unenrolled.

Paul is vaguely amused and thinks that this is not so bad for Arthur; it will teach him discipline. Mrs. Morel, however, is furious; Arthur has lost a good job, just as he was starting to “get on” in the world. She complains that being a soldier is a “common” profession and tells Mr. Morel that she must go to Derby immediately. Mr. Morel is ashamed of his son and says that he may never come home again. Mrs. Morel hushes her husband and sets off that evening.

Paul implies that he is practical while Miriam is emotional. He claims that, while he is interested in the gradual progression of day-to-day things, Miriam is only interested in extreme bursts of emotion. He implies that she is not grounded and cannot think about things in everyday terms. However, Paul ironically uses an artistic metaphor to explain this, which suggests that he is not very self-aware.



The appearance of the moon mirrors the incident when Paul is a baby, when Mrs. Morel holds him up to the sun. It relates Paul, again, to the figure of St. Paul—but unlike St. Paul, Paul Morel receives no revelation and does not understand what he feels for Miriam, which is sexual desire.



Again, rather than try and understand his own feelings of shame and guilt, Paul blames Miriam for how he feels and takes this out on his mother. This demonstrates Paul’s misogyny, as he makes the women in his life responsible for his own feelings and hurts them in response to his own emotional confusion. Miriam knows her own mind, but Paul is not strong enough to stand up for Miriam against his family. He feels torn between two sides of himself; his practical, worldly side in his family, and his spiritual, intellectual side in Miriam.



Arthur is irresponsible and does not think about the consequences of his actions. Although joining the army is a significant commitment, Arthur does it on a whim and believes he can immediately take it back with no repercussions.



Although mining is also a working-class profession, Mr. Morel is embarrassed that Arthur has become a common soldier because this is also a profession that is looked down upon.



When Mrs. Morel returns home, she tells Paul that she cannot help Arthur out of the army but, although he is sad to be there, the army doctor told her that Arthur is perfectly suited to life as a soldier. That Autumn, Paul wins two prizes for his paintings in a Nottingham exhibition. Mrs. Morel is immensely proud of him and feels that her hopes for her children and herself will be fulfilled through Paul. Her life of hardship will not have been lived in vain.

One day, when he is walking up to the exhibition, Paul runs into Miriam and a friend of hers, Clara Dawes. Miriam introduces them and Paul thinks Clara is attractive despite her shabby dress and her sullen, slightly contemptuous manner. Paul knows something of Clara because she used to work at Jordan's. Her husband, Baxter Dawes, also works there, but he and Clara are separated, and Paul knows that she dislikes men. Miriam likes to spend time with Clara; it lets her feel close to Paul because of this connection with the factory.

Paul dislikes Baxter Dawes. He met him on his first day at Jordan's and found him coarse and unpleasant. Baxter tried to threaten Paul when he saw him staring, but Mr. Pappleworth defended him. Ever since then, Dawes has hated Paul and Paul equally despises him. Clara has left Baxter and gone to live with her mother. Meanwhile Baxter is now seeing one of the factory girls at Jordan.

When Paul goes to see Miriam next, he asks her about Clara. He wonders why Clara married Baxter Dawes if she was only going to leave him, but Miriam replies sarcastically. Paul suggests that Miriam does not like Clara, or that she likes her because Clara hates men, and Miriam seems sad and confused. Paul has been irritable lately and she hates to see the scowl on his face. It seems to imply a distance between them.

Paul tries to playfully put berries in her hair, but Miriam pulls away. Paul complains that she never laughs at him and that, even when she laughs, he feels somber and tearful when he is with her. Miriam miserably thinks that this is not her fault. Paul, however, feels bitter because he always needs to be "spiritual" with Miriam. He longs to kiss her but cannot kiss her in a pure way and he resents that she does not appreciate his "maleness."

Arthur is strong, physical, and energetic, and therefore will get on well in the army. Mrs. Morel gives up on Arthur, however, because he has taken such a low position, and no longer expects him to be professionally successful in a way that will make her proud. Instead, she turns all these hopes entirely onto Paul.



Women usually left their jobs once they were married and this has likely been the case with Clara. Divorce was extremely uncommon and unconventional in this period and was considered especially shameful for women. Clara has not officially divorced Baxter but has left him. Miriam is clearly very much in love with Paul and essentially uses her friendship with Clara to spy on him.



Baxter hates Paul because Paul has embarrassed him; he is ashamed that Mr. Pappleworth shouted at him for being rude to Paul.



Despite his rivalry with Baxter, Paul automatically takes his side—seemingly just because he's a man—and implies that Clara has been indecisive and disloyal by marrying and then leaving him. Miriam feels that this is ridiculous and implies that Clara had good reason to leave Baxter. Paul suggests that Miriam hates men and implicitly suggests that she is frigid. However, because he has never expressed his physical attraction to her, Miriam is confused and does not know that he lashes out because he feels rejected.



Paul will not break things off with Miriam, but he will not accept her as she is and seems to want to change her. Paul feels wronged because Miriam does not try to seduce him, but Miriam does not know that this is what he wants—because he does not tell her.



When Paul makes to leave the farm that evening, he notices that his bike has a puncture and Miriam watches him fix it. While he works and while his back is turned, she yearns to embrace him. When he is finished, she reaches out and holds his sides, but Paul feels that she is not really seeing *him* and that he might be “an object.” The brakes on his bike are broken and Miriam tries to persuade him to ride home slowly. Paul rides home deliberately fast and thinks that, if Miriam will not “value” him, then he may “destroy himself” as “revenge.”

For a while, before their father rents a family pew, Miriam and Edgar attend church with Paul and Mrs. Morel and sit in their pew during the service. Mrs. Morel is silently resentful of Miriam because she feels that the girl wants to claim Paul’s soul. Mrs. Morel frets that Miriam will not leave any part of Paul for her and that she will keep him all to herself. As the spring approaches, however, Miriam worries that Paul will hurt her because he spends a lot of time with Edgar. The two boys debate endlessly about religion and seem to trample on Miriam’s dearly held beliefs.

Paul still goes out for his evening walks with Miriam, but his mood is ruined because he knows his mother hates the girl and that she sits at home and is miserable without him. This, in turn, makes Paul feel like he hates Miriam, but then he feels guilty for this because he does not know why Mrs. Morel rejects her; he feels torn between them both. Spring affects his mood wildly, and he is often cruel and changeable with Miriam, although he still feels irresistibly drawn to her.

One night, when Miriam and Paul are talking, he tells her that he feels “disembodied” with her, as though she wants his soul and his body is “discarded.” Miriam grows upset, but Paul complains that he wants to be “normal,” whereas Miriam does not. He feels she only wants the things he can tell and teach her, and not him. When Miriam is invited to a party at the Morels’ house, Paul tells her that he will not walk out to meet her because his family are jealous of their relationship. Although Miriam is hurt, she pities and resents Paul because, she thinks, he cannot think for himself.

At work, Paul is successful and well liked; he is promoted when Mr. Pappleworth leaves. Annie has moved back home and is engaged. On Friday nights, the miners divide up the earnings for the week at Mr. Morel’s house. Paul watches his father wash as he gets ready for this and thinks that his father must have been a strong handsome man once.

This suggests that Miriam is physically attracted to Paul, just as he is attracted to her. Paul feels objectified by Miriam because he senses that she is only interested in his mind and not his body; therefore, his body is like an unimportant object to her which she will use to get close to him. Paul is childish and spiteful, but he is also unhappy because he is not satisfied with Miriam and yearns unconsciously to destroy himself.



Families could pay for a bench in church which could be reserved for them. Mrs. Morel senses that Miriam is only interested in Paul’s intellect and not the whole of him. Mrs. Morel is intent on keeping Paul all to herself, although she does not consciously recognize this. Miriam is possessive of Paul too and worries when he spends time with people who think differently from her; she feels that they will corrupt him.



Mrs. Morel makes Paul feel guilty for neglecting her, and Paul, who cannot stand up to his mother, blames Miriam for his guilt. Paul also knows this is not Miriam’s fault and feels that the two women fight over him. Paul is very in tune with nature and the seasons and is emotionally affected by them.



Paul feels that Miriam is using him. Miriam loves the things Paul can teach her because, as an uneducated woman, she has little opportunity for this kind of intellectual fulfillment. Miriam wishes that Paul would stand up to his family for her sake, but she understands that he does not do this because he is weak.



Paul is not as physical as his father and, although his father is growing old, Paul is fascinated by his father’s manly figure and the graceful, effortless way he uses his body.



The miners divide up their money and Mr. Morel slinks out with them when they are finished. Mrs. Morel takes the housekeeping money, which Mr. Morel has left on the table and, grumbling that it is less than she expects, heads out to the market. Paul is left in charge of the bread she has put in the oven to bake. While his mother is out Miriam arrives. Paul shows her a cloth that he has decorated with his own design; it is part of his new interest in “conventionalizing things.” Miriam is impressed but thinks the cloth feels “cruel” in some way, and Paul tells her he plans to sell it and give the money to his mother.

While they are talking, a young woman called Beatrice arrives. She is a friend of the family and is very familiar with Paul. She teases him and makes snide comments to Miriam about the state of her shoes, which are covered in mud. While she and Paul smoke and giggle together, the bread burns in the oven. Beatrice manages to salvage some of it and, half joking, insinuates that Mrs. Morel will blame Miriam if the loaves are ruined. Annie arrives home with her fiancé Leonard, who is kind to Miriam and does not join in with the others when they tease her.

Annie, Leonard, and Beatrice leave together, and Paul gives Miriam a French lesson. Every week, Miriam writes a journal entry in French and shows it to Paul. These entries are all about her love for him and Paul pointedly ignores this as he corrects her grammar and spelling. He resents her love for him, because he feels she is better than him. He is glad that he teased her with Beatrice. He looks into her eyes and sees her “naked love” for him and immediately jumps up to check the bread in the oven.

Paul walks Miriam home and does not get home until after eleven. His mother sits silently in the living room and Paul ignores her and assumes she is angry with him. Annie, however, tells Paul that his mother is ill. Annie found Mrs. Morel sitting in her chair, very pale and exhausted, after carrying home the shopping. Annie accuses Paul of being careless and staying out too late with Miriam. Mrs. Morel then joins in and laments that Paul only cares about Miriam and cares nothing for anybody else. Annie goes to bed, still very angry with Paul.

Mr. Morel sneaks out before Mrs. Morel can notice that he has left her less than her share of the money. Mrs. Morel complains but is evidently used to this. Paul’s interest in “conventionalizing” things refers to his desire to bring art into the lives of everyday people; they will not necessarily buy a painting, but they can buy a tablecloth with a well-drawn, artistic design. This is in keeping with the trend for decorative consumer products that boomed in this period.



Beatrice obviously knows Miriam and has heard the jokes Paul’s family make about her. They think that Miriam is a daydreamer and neglects her dress and appearance. Beatrice knows that Mrs. Morel hates Miriam, and Beatrice teases Miriam about this. This shows that Beatrice is on Mrs. Morel’s side and thinks Miriam brings it on herself.



Miriam is very open with her emotions, but Paul is reserved and feels uncomfortable with Miriam’s confessions of love. He resents her for making him feel uncomfortable, although she does not mean to, and tries to avoid seeing how much she loves him.



Annie takes Mrs. Morel’s side against Miriam and resents Paul for spending time with her. Mrs. Morel is very unfair to Paul, considering that he is very kind and attentive to her and that he gives her a share of his wages. Although Mrs. Morel complains about Miriam, she does not want Paul to share his affection with anyone but her.



Paul sits up with his mother and it is very tense in the room. He is worried about her because she is ill and angry with her for turning on Miriam. Mrs. Morel grows upset and tells Paul that it is not sensible to walk so far at night; she worries he will tire himself out for Miriam's sake. Paul assures his mother that he does not love Miriam, but Mrs. Morel is not convinced. Paul insists that there are things he can talk to Miriam about that do not interest Mrs. Morel because she is older than them, but Mrs. Morel is deeply hurt by this.

Paul pleads with her to believe him and moves over to her chair to kiss and caress her. Mr. Morel comes in at that moment and is enraged by the sight of the mother and son. He helps himself to a pie Mrs. Morel has bought for Paul and she fires up against him. In a drunken fury, Mr. Morel tries to fight, Paul but dodges away before he hits the boy. Mrs. Morel falls into a swoon and Paul cries out to his father to stop the fight.

Mr. Morel falls into a chair and Paul kneels beside Mrs. Morel and brings her back to herself. She wakes up gradually but is faint and unwell. Mr. Morel watches sullenly as Paul begs his mother not to be ill. Finally, he slinks off to bed. Paul sits up with Mrs. Morel until she has recovered. When they go to bed, Paul tries to persuade his mother to sleep in his bed rather than with his father, but Mrs. Morel refuses. Paul is comforted by the fact that he still loves his mother more than anyone else.

CHAPTER 9

Paul is very terse and irritable with Miriam that spring. Although she loves him deeply, she fears for their future and feels that, even if he loved her, her life with him would only be "tragedy, sorrow and sacrifice." Still, she is prepared for this. One day, Paul comes for lunch at Willey Farm and Miriam can tell that he is in a bitter, mean mood. She takes him outside to show him the daffodils which are springing up there. Paul watches as she kneels over the [flowers](#) and kisses them one by one. He bitterly remarks that she is always caressing things and that she cannot leave things alone but must suck the soul out of them.

Miriam is hurt by his words and does not understand them. Paul ignores her through most of the afternoon and then is sulky and bitter when they go for a walk together that night. He would rather be with her brothers, but he cannot bring himself to leave her. Miriam tries to discover what is wrong, but he cannot tell her. As they sit on the hillside together, the farm dog lumbers up to play with Paul and, watching him, Miriam thinks that he wants to be loving but that he does not know how to be; the way he plays with the dog is friendly but rough.

Mrs. Morel is convinced that Paul's time with Miriam will harm him in some way. She does not realize that she causes harm by preventing Paul from exploring adult relationships. Paul tries to defend himself and his relationship with Miriam, but Mrs. Morel makes him feel guilty. It is more like she is a jealous lover than a parent in this situation.



Mr. Morel's reaction suggests that there is something inappropriate about the contact between Mrs. Morel and Paul and that they behave more like lovers than mother and child. Although Mr. Morel threatens to hit Paul, he cannot bring himself to really do it. This scene mirrors the fight that Paul witnessed between his father and William.



Paul cares more about Mrs. Morel's wellbeing than her husband does. Just as Miriam and Mrs. Morel compete for Paul's affections, Paul competes with his father for Mrs. Morel's.



Miriam is prepared to sacrifice her own happiness to be with Paul. She is very intense, and her emotions are extreme and all-consuming; this is symbolized by the way she kisses the flowers. Paul feels trapped and stifled by the strength of her feelings towards him but cannot explain this to her because he does not fully understand it himself.



As Paul cannot clearly explain himself to Miriam, she is hurt because he seems to reject her and pursue her at the same time. Paul feels bound to Miriam, even though he doesn't like this feeling, and he is afraid to hurt her by rejecting her. Miriam recognizes that Paul cannot easily express love and is sometimes cruel when he intends to be loving.



Reluctantly, Paul tells Miriam that he thinks they should not see each other anymore. Miriam assumes that she loves him more than he loves her and wonders if he cannot love her because of something wrong with her. At the same time, however, she feels sorry for him because he seems so conflicted and unsure of what he wants. Paul feels that he hates Miriam and Miriam senses that his family has had some sway over him. She comments on this, but Paul dismisses her and they don't speak again that evening.

Paul is aware that his mother is a driving force in his life and that a strong link still binds him to her. His mother cares about the practical side of life and Paul wants to show her that she is right in this and that he does too. Mrs. Morel hates Miriam, but also hates to see Paul so indecisive and suffering.

Paul does not go to see Miriam for a week and, when he finally does go, he spends the afternoon with Mrs. Leivers and Miriam. Paul has dinner with the family, and, during dinner, he complains that the minister butchers his sermons. Paul then demonstrates how he would have taught a certain passage from the Bible and Miriam, watching, feels she loves the "Disciple" in him, who is at war with "the man."

After dinner, Paul and Miriam return to the same spot on the hillside and Paul again tells Miriam that they must break things off if they do not plan to marry. Paul is adamant this time and Miriam agrees that he should not come to teach her French anymore. Although she loves him, she seems calm and resigned and it is Paul who seems to suffer and be ripped apart by the conflict. Mrs. Leivers is surprised when Paul leaves early that evening.

Paul rides home, very distressed after the evening's events, and does not care if he falls and kills himself. He has been convinced by his mother that it is unfair to keep seeing Miriam if he does not plan to make her his wife, but he finds that he cannot stay away from the farm. He spends a lot of time with Edgar and loves the family, but he tries to avoid being alone with Miriam when he is there. Miriam waits for him, anticipating the chance for them to be alone.

Although Miriam is hurt, she is certain of herself and her feelings for Paul, whereas he is confused and conflicted. This is because he cannot think for himself and is influenced and manipulated by his family (mostly his mother).



Paul wants to prove to his mother that he is on her side against Miriam and decides to reject Miriam's spiritual worldview in favor of Mrs. Morel's practical one. Mrs. Morel wishes that Paul would definitively take her side and break up with Miriam.



Miriam believes that Paul is torn between the intellectual and the physical aspects of his personality. This reference to Paul the "Disciple" again aligns Paul with St. Paul the Apostle, and suggests that, in Miriam's eyes, Paul could be a deeply spiritual person if he rejected the material world.



Paul suggests that it is improper for him and Miriam to spend time together if they do not intend to marry. Miriam is confident in her love for Paul and this gives her strength. Paul is indecisive and tormented because he does not know what he wants, and all the responsibility for the choice rests on him.



Paul is so conflicted that he becomes self-destructive and would possibly hurt himself without realizing that this is his intention. It is Mrs. Morel who reminds Paul of the impropriety of his situation; young couples who spent a lot of time together were expected to get married.



Finally, he is drawn back under her influence. They discuss religion together on their way back from church because Paul needs someone else to approve his opinions before he can believe in them himself and Miriam provides this for him. She believes that he needs her, but she finds that their relationship is strained and that there is an awkwardness between them, which makes her unhappy. When Paul reads to her from the Bible, he leaves out a passage about childbirth.

Miriam can see that Paul is unhappy and that he yearns for something else. She has noticed that he becomes agitated when she mentions Clara Dawes and so, to allow Paul to “test himself,” she invites him to come to the house when Clara is there. Paul finds Clara very impressive and feels that she eclipses everything around her. He arrives early to the farm and Miriam is upset; she knows he has come early because he is excited to meet Clara.

Paul is very courteous to Clara – much to Miriam’s chagrin – and asks her if she has been to “Margaret Bondfield’s meeting.” Clara says she has, and Paul says that he finds Margaret Bondfield “lovable.” Clara is contemptuous of this and sarcastically replies that “this is all that matters.” Paul admits that Margaret Bondfield is clever, but Clara remains disdainful of his opinions and scoffs when Paul says that Margaret Bondfield would be happy to “darn” her husband’s socks.

Eventually, tiring of Clara’s contempt, Paul goes out to meet Edgar, who is at work on the farm. Edgar is pleased to see Paul and Paul helps Edgar unload coal. Paul makes a joke about Clara and Edgar asks if Paul thinks she is a “man hater.” Paul says no, but that *she* thinks she is. The two lads go inside for tea and, over dinner, they talk about women’s rights and whether men and women should be paid equally for their work. Clara argues that they should, but Paul disagrees with her.

Paul complains that men are paid more because they support families and he complains that Clara sounds like a suffragette. He resents being generalized about and thinks that men are blamed for everything in modern society. Mr. Leivers, however, agrees with Clara. After dinner, Mrs. Leivers asks Clara if she is happier without her husband, and Clara says that she is always happy if she is “free and independent.”

Although Paul tries to cut himself off from Miriam, there is an intellectual side to him that cannot be fulfilled by the other people in his life. Unlike Miriam, Paul cannot come to his own conclusions about things and needs her to figure out his philosophical ideas. Paul leaves out a passage about childbirth because it indirectly refers to sex.



Miriam manipulates Paul to test his loyalty to her and see if he can be easily tempted away from her by another woman that he is physically attracted to. Although she orchestrates this, Miriam still feels jealous when Paul is obviously attracted to Clara.



Margaret Bondfield was a women’s rights activist. Paul is patronizing towards Clara and she recognizes this. She sarcastically suggests that men only want women to be lovable and pliable, rather than stand up for themselves. Paul misogynistically insinuates that, despite Margaret Bondfield’s fierce reputation as an activist and public speaker, she would be happier at home fulfilling typical feminine duties, such as caring for her husband.



Paul gets irritated with Clara because she does not seem to like him. However, Paul has not earned Clara’s respect but has instead tried to bait her into an argument and undermined her political views. He writes off her interest in women’s rights as self-delusion because he thinks that she is simply bitter about her marriage breaking down.



Paul does not consider Clara’s point of view on women’s work. Although men support their families in this period, women are financially reliant on their husbands and this leaves them with little power in marriage. If a husband refuses to give his wife housekeeping money, she has no reliable way of finding it elsewhere. Paul’s perspective here is undermined by the reality of his mother’s situation and his own tendency to blame the women around him for his own negative emotions.



After dinner, Miriam, Paul, and Clara go for a walk together. Looking around the beautiful evening in the country, Paul talks about chivalry and how pleasant it would be to be a knight and fight for fair maidens. Clara is not amused by this and suggests it is better to help women “fight for themselves.” Paul disagrees and says that a woman who fights for herself is like a “mad dog barking at a looking glass.” Although Paul thinks he is being witty and entertaining, he realizes that Clara is miserable.

On the way to Strelley Mill, they meet Limb, the farmer who lives there, and he shows them a spot where the Leivers’s horse has smashed his fence. They walk with him towards the Mill, meaning to go on past it to the pond, and they meet Limb’s sister, who lives with him, as she comes out to greet her brother. She has brought an apple for the stallion Limb rides and kisses and speaks tenderly to the horse. Clara and Miriam admire the horse, too, and Clara suggests darkly that the horse is likely “more loving than any man.”

They talk for a few minutes with the woman, who seems intense and grateful for someone to talk to. As they walk away, Paul and Miriam agree that she unnerves them and that she is going mad with loneliness because she lives in such a secluded spot. Clara sarcastically implies that she must “need a man” and walks ahead. Paul wonders what is wrong with Clara and begins to feel sorry for her. He forgets Miriam, who is talking beside him, and Miriam notices this and feels hurt.

They stop to admire a beautiful field full of [flowers](#) and Paul tries to offer some that he has picked to Clara. Clara refuses and says that she does not want to be given dead things; the flowers should be left alone. Paul disagrees and, when Clara stoops down to smell them, he drops the bunch of flowers over her head and says a prayer as though it is a funeral. Clara is confused and walks on without him.

Not long after this, Paul goes to Lincoln on the train with Mrs. Morel. He is excited to show her the cathedral from the train window but, as he does so, he feels that she is drifting away from him and her stoic, resigned expression reminds him of the ancient and enduring cathedral. They eat at an expensive restaurant, which Mrs. Morel disapproves of, but Paul insists upon it because he is taking “his girl” out. They are very merry and playful with each other as they take in the sights.

Paul continues to bait Clara. He invokes chivalry because he knows that it is an idea based on the assumption that women are generally helpless and grateful to be rescued. Paul is very offensive to Clara and suggests that she, and other women who support suffrage, create these problems themselves and then blame men. Clara is miserable because she feels misunderstood and attacked.



The horse symbolizes masculinity, and the women are attracted to this. Lawrence suggests that Paul is wrong about Miriam and Clara, who he thinks are both frigid and “man haters”; they do not hate men, but rather the type of masculinity that Paul embodies, which dismisses their perspective and fails to understand them.



Paul thinks that women will go mad without a man, but Clara feels she is better off without one. Essentially Paul is very obtuse and thoughtless here. He does not see that Clara has been hurt by her husband and is angry about the way she has been treated. Meanwhile, he is also totally oblivious to Miriam’s feelings.



Flowers represent Clara’s attitude towards sex and sensuality. She has been hurt in her relationship and this has caused her interest in sex and love to die; this also causes her to see the flowers as only “dead things” rather than signs of life. Paul unconsciously understands this, and it makes him think of a funeral.



Paul is dismayed because he realizes that his mother is growing old. He relies on her for everything and she is the most important woman in his life. His realization upsets him because he is aware that he will one day have to live without her, and has no idea how to do that.



As they walk up the hill to the cathedral, however, Mrs. Morel struggles for breath and Paul takes her into a bar to sit down. Once she has recovered, they go on to the cathedral and Mrs. Morel is delighted with the view. Paul, however, is moody and depressed. He rebukes his mother for being old and complains bitterly that he wishes he could have a young mother so that she could easily come on outings with him. Mrs. Morel is quiet and sad after this, but the two cheer up when they go to tea by the river and see the boats go past.

Over tea, Paul tells Mrs. Morel about Clara Dawes. He explains that Clara lives with her mother, who is a lace maker, and that Clara is older than him; in her early thirties. Mrs. Morel listens but is unsure; she wishes Paul could find a “nice woman.”

Annie and Leonard get married soon after this, and Arthur travels up for the wedding. Mrs. Morel is sad to see her daughter leave home, but she likes Leonard and is glad he has a steady job. That night, after Annie and Leonard have left, Paul and Mrs. Morel stay up to talk. Mrs. Morel is slightly hurt that Annie has left home, although she knows that this is silly. Paul, hearing this, vows never to get married. Instead, he says, he will live with his mother and they will hire a maid to care for her.

Mrs. Morel dismisses this and tells him that he will marry when he finds the right girl. Paul dislikes this idea and says that, if he does get married, his wife will have to accept that he will always put his mother first. Mrs. Morel sends Paul to bed, but she stays up and thinks about her children. She is worried about Arthur. Although the army has disciplined him, he hates the regimented lifestyle and misses his freedom. Mrs. Morel decides to use her money to pay his way out of the regiment and Arthur moves home and begins to spend a lot of time with Beatrice.

One night, Arthur and Beatrice tussle playfully over a comb, which Arthur has plucked from her hair, and, when Beatrice gets it back, she turns around and slaps his face. Arthur is hurt by this and Beatrice leaves the room to cry. When she comes back, however, they make up and kiss each other and, from that moment on, belong to each other and are a couple.

Paul subconsciously seems to wish that Mrs. Morel was not his mother but his wife. He wants to experience the world with her and does not really want to find another woman to do this with. Mrs. Morel feels similarly and is sad because she feels that she lets her son down, even though she cannot help aging.



Although Mrs. Morel thinks she wants Paul to find a “nice woman,” it is unlikely that any woman would actually be good enough for Paul in her eyes.



There is no Oedipal connection between Annie and Mrs. Morel because they are both women who are attracted to men. It is implied that Mrs. Morel has transferred her attraction to her husband onto her sons, although she is not conscious of doing this. Therefore, her reaction to Annie leaving home is much less intense. Paul completely discards Mr. Morel altogether and almost fills his father’s role by suggesting that he and Mrs. Morel will grow old together.



It is unlikely that any woman will be happy to do this, which suggests that Paul will never find a woman to marry while his mother is alive.



Arthur and Beatrice’s playfight escalates into a real fight because they have developed romantic feelings for each other. While Arthur treats Beatrice playfully, like a sister, Beatrice reacts angrily because she wants him to take her seriously as a lover. They both realize this at the same time and their relationship transitions smoothly.



Soon Paul is the only child left at home and he remains torn between Miriam and Clara, whom he likes for different reasons. One evening, on one of his walks with Miriam, Paul pours out his soul to her and Miriam goes home satisfied, feeling confident in their relationship. However, the next day, Clara comes to the farm and Paul ignores Miriam and jumps haystacks with Clara, who is very physical and strong, and whom Paul enjoys teasing.

Miriam is horrified as she watches this and thinks that she may lose the fight for Paul's affections; he may choose "lesser" over "higher" things. The next time they go out walking, Paul complains that God is not "soulful" and that he is in everything, but Miriam thinks he is making excuses to have his own way.

Paul writes Miriam a letter for her twenty first birthday in which he says that she is a "nun" and that, although she is very important to him, they cannot marry because they cannot be ordinary together. Paul writes that he might one day marry someone else; someone he can be "trivial" with.

Miriam is deeply hurt by his letter. She writes back to say that they could have had a beautiful love affair, if it were not for one small misunderstanding. Paul sends her another letter, which vaguely admits that he has treated her cruelly and that he has wrestled with himself over it. Their relationship grinds to a halt and Paul turns all his physical attraction on Clara Dawes. Miriam, however, remains convinced that, in his soul, Paul belongs with her.

CHAPTER 10

When Paul is twenty-three, a letter arrives one morning which tells him that he has won another prize for one of his paintings and that a customer has bought this piece of work for twenty guineas. Mrs. Morel is ecstatic with pride and Paul begins to grow ambitious as an artist. Paul insists that he will share this money with his mother. Mr. Morel is proud when he hears, although he obviously wishes it were more money, and laments that William would have been just as successful by now.

Paul gets an invite to a dinner party at Mr. Jordan's and Mrs. Morel gets William's old suit tailored for him to wear. He is very excited to tell her all about the party and the other guests and would like it best if he could take her along. Now that the family have a little more money, Mrs. Morel can afford to dress better and everyone in the family seems to have "come along," all except Mr. Morel, who has not changed.

Paul has not moved on and cannot progress with either woman. He is stuck because he does not understand himself and does not know what he wants from a relationship. Miriam represents Paul's soul and intellectual nature, whereas Clara symbolizes his practical, physical side. He is unable to unite the two.



Paul wants to unite body and soul and have a relationship in which he is both intellectually and physically compatible with his lover. He thinks that the physical world can also be divine. Miriam, who is very religious, does not believe that this is true.



This is a very inconsiderate birthday present. Although Miriam is religious, she is physically attracted to Paul and, although she is afraid of sex, Paul has never given her the opportunity to explore a physical relationship. Instead, he dismisses her as too pure for this.



Paul misunderstands Miriam because he believes she will not have sex with him. Miriam is attracted to Paul, but she is afraid and feels that she will have to compromise her beliefs to have sex before marriage. She is willing to do this for Paul, however, but he does not want her on these terms.



Mr. Morel still always thinks about himself. He hopes that Paul will win more money so that he can have more money.



Mr. Morel does not change because he has no ambition or desire to change. He has been a miner since he was a child and does not think of it as a lowly profession; it is the others who are ambitious and feel inadequate with their lot in life—not Mr. Morel.



Paul is no longer as religious as he once was and is more interested in life than what happens after death. However, he still insists to his mother that real life and spirituality are to be found among the “common people,” whereas the middle classes have intellectual ideas. Mrs. Morel says that this is nonsense because there is just as much life and just as many ideas in all the classes. She worries that Paul seems snobbish and is concerned that he still hankers after Clara, who is still married to Baxter Dawes.

Mrs. Morel tries to convince Paul to meet a younger woman; someone his own age who is uncomplicated and unattached. Paul despises this idea and says it is typical of a woman to take the easiest route in life. Mrs. Morel protests that she has not had an easy life and Paul says that this is a good thing, as it has given her substance. Mrs. Morel says that she dislikes seeing Paul struggle so much and only wants him to live a happy life. She sees that he does not care about himself or his own life and she is afraid that he is looking for ways to kill himself slowly. On some level, she blames Miriam for this.

Paul, however, spends very little time with Miriam now. Arthur and his wife have a baby and Arthur gradually settles into his responsibilities as a father. Paul falls in with a group of young people interested in politics and knows several suffragettes through his acquaintance with Clara. One day, he is asked to deliver a message to her by one of these friends and he arrives at her mother’s house in Nottingham where Clara lives.

The house is small and dingy, and Paul is invited in and offered a drink by Clara’s mother, Mrs. Radford, a formidable but generous woman. Clara blushes when Paul is shown in and he sits in the kitchen with the two women and watches them make lace. Mrs. Radford asks Paul if he still sees Miriam. Paul evades the question and Mrs. Radford says that she likes Miriam but that she finds her a bit haughty and spiritual.

Paul asks if making lace is hard work and Clara answers that all women’s work is hard. Mrs. Radford shushes her daughter and says that women bring it on themselves when men mistreat them. Clara carries on quietly with her work. Paul asks her if she would like her job back at Jordan’s, and Mrs. Radford snaps at her daughter and tells her she would be lucky to have that job back because she has got so far above herself.

Paul romanticizes the working class because he wants to reject intellectual pursuits entirely and prove to himself that he is a physical, pragmatic person and that he has done the right thing in casting off Miriam. Mrs. Morel, however, does not believe that class or social background is an indication of intelligence.



Paul idealizes his mother and ignores the reality of her life. He likes to believe that she is fundamentally different from other women. He does not see that Mrs. Morel has simply made the best of her circumstances and that she would not have chosen the life she has. Mrs. Morel recognizes Paul’s self-destructive tendencies, as she recognized William’s. She blames Miriam for Paul’s problems, just as Paul himself blames the women in his life.



Paul develops a social life apart from Miriam and Clara. There was a lot of interest in political groups and social reform in this period and Lawrence himself was a member of several intellectual and political circles in his youth.



Lawrence’s mother was a “lace maker” and the detailed descriptions of this process reflect Lawrence’s own experience. Paul tries to align himself with Clara over Miriam when he criticizes Miriam to Mrs. Radford.



There is a generational difference between Clara and her mother. Mrs. Radford blames women for their own misfortune, which ignores misogynistic and patriarchal constraints faced by women. Clara, however, is part of a generation of women who are beginning to discuss these larger societal problems and who realize that women are treated unfairly.



Paul realizes that Clara is extremely miserable living with her mother. Although he has found her very proud, he thinks she seems like a prisoner in her home. A few weeks later, he hears that one of the Spiral girls at Jordan's is to be married and that she must, reluctantly, give up her job. Paul goes to see Clara as soon as possible to tell her about the opening at the factory. Clara tells him that she will apply as soon as she sees the advertisement.

Clara gets her job back at the factory. She is naturally reserved, and the other girls do not like her much. She spends the afternoons with Paul when he is painting. He despises her opinions about his work, which she often criticizes. Paul is irritated by Clara and sometimes dislikes her. At the same time, he feels drawn to her and feels as though she is always very close to his body when they are in the same room.

Clara has gained an education through her association with the women's movement and Paul sometimes finds her superior and is annoyed by her lack of interest in him. He catches her reading French at work and expresses his surprise that she can read another language. Clara barely acknowledges him and, when she does, she is scornful. Paul swears at her because she has ignored him and because he believes that she thinks herself too good to work in the factory.

At work, Paul teases and abuses Clara. When he sees her wearing a [flower](#), he reminds her about her rule not to wear dead things. Clara is confused and does not know why he harasses her. He then challenges her knowledge of French poetry and makes a joke about her past, which Clara responds to coldly. To apologize, Paul brings chocolates into the office for her. She does not eat them, and they are left out overnight. When Paul sees this the next day, he pointedly throws them out of the window in front of Clara.

Later that day, he buys more chocolates and offers some to Clara. She timidly accepts but is generally confused by his behavior. The other girls love Paul but, like Clara, they are often startled by his erratic moods or afraid of his temper. On his twenty-third birthday, Fanny gives him a set of paints paid for by all the Spiral girls except Clara and gives these to him early in the morning before the others arrive.

Paul takes pity on Clara because he can see she is unhappy. Women were generally expected to give up work when they got married so that their husband could provide for them and they could raise children. Lawrence demonstrates that, although this was seen as normal, women were not always happy to do this.



In contrast to Miriam, who always praised Paul's paintings, Clara is very practical and cannot see anything in them. Miriam is very imaginative and responsive to art because it appeals to her emotional nature. Paul feels Clara's presence physically because he is so attracted to her, even though they do not have much in common intellectually.



Political and activist circles were responsible for educating a large number of working-class women in this period. These groups set up night schools and evening classes which married women could attend, and this was hugely important in the overall development of the women's movement. Paul dislikes Clara because he thinks he is more intelligent than her and yet she is not impressed by him.



Paul constantly tries to provoke a reaction from Clara. He does not approach her in a mature way, because he is emotionally immature, and instead torments her. Clara does not know how to take his behavior and is confused. He tries to make her feel guilty for not accepting the chocolates by throwing them out of the window so that no one can have them.



Paul feels guilty about how he treats Clara and makes another peace offering. As usual, Paul struggles to communicate his emotions. Fanny implies that Clara has refused to contribute to Paul's present.



At dinner time, Paul is surprised to find that Clara has not gone home to eat as she usually does, and he invites her to talk a walk with him. They walk up to the Castle and look down across the town from this high point. Clara laughs at how small the people look, milling about below, and says that the trees look much bigger and more important. She says that she is pleased the town is small because it is like a “sore” on the land, and she looks longingly out towards the country beyond. Paul thinks she looks like a tragic, fallen angel.

Clara complains bitterly that the town is “unnatural” and that unnatural things are always ugly and unpleasant. Paul asks her what she means, and she replies that “everything man has made” is unnatural. Paul counters by saying that women made men and Clara seems sad and pensive. Paul asks if Baxter Dawes was “unnatural” and, although Clara is taken aback by this reference to her ex-husband, she indulges Paul because he seems so young and careless. Paul thinks that Baxter is perhaps “too natural” and Clara agrees. She feels her mood lift as she looks out over the view.

Paul asks Clara what is bothering her and Clara replies that she feels left out by the other girls in the factory; they do not include her in their schemes and rub this secrecy in her face. She cannot stand it and it makes her feel like an outsider. Paul tells her about the secret birthday present and takes Clara’s hand as they look out from the parapet. He thinks that Clara wants someone to hold her hand even if she pretends not to. Peering down at the little town and the country beyond, Paul thinks about all the minute human struggles which take place below.

The same week, Clara sends Paul a book of poetry as a birthday present. After this, the pair become friends and often go out walking together. Paul likes talking to Clara, but the conversation is not intense as it is with Miriam. One afternoon, as they sit on a gate and look out across some fields, Clara tells Paul about her marriage to Baxter Dawes. She married him young, she says, and never really cared about him. She says that she left him because he was cruel towards her and tried to bully her into caring for him. When this pushed her away, he cheated on her.

Clara is very bitter because she has been so hurt in her marriage. She thinks the town is ugly and prefers the natural world because she is a very physical person and prefers laboring tasks to manufacturing work. Paul believes that Clara is flawed in some way and that this has ended her marriage. However, he does not know the circumstances and can only make assumptions.



Clara implies that human beings are inherently corrupt. This is broadly in keeping with the Christian doctrine of original sin. Paul says that, if men are fallen, women are to blame for this because women give birth to men. This also relates to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, in which Eve persuades Adam to disobey God with her. Paul suggests that Baxter is too volatile and cannot control his emotions.



Clara has not refused to pay for Paul’s present—she was not told about it at all. Paul realizes that Clara is not reserved because she is haughty but because she is afraid to admit that she needs people in case they hurt her.



Paul and Clara do not have the same intellectual connection that he and Miriam have. Clara admits that she was immature when she married Baxter and, possibly, did not love him enough to go through with the marriage. However, rather than try to compromise with or understand her, Baxter has been aggressive and tried to dominate her.



Paul feels slightly lost during this conversation and asks Clara if she ever let Baxter get close to her or if she really gave their marriage a chance. Clara seems despondent and distracted after this and, as they have tea in a nearby teashop, she plays absently with her wedding band. Although Paul spends so much time with Clara, he does not realize that he is attracted to her. The sight of her body fills him with warmth, but sex has become an overcomplicated idea in his mind, and he does not understand it. He still spends time with Miriam, but Mrs. Morel is pleased because he sees less of the girl.

Miriam, meanwhile, is still convinced that Paul will return to her. She feels that he will grow tired of Clara and that she has a stronger connection with him. Clara does not seem to be jealous and Paul tries to explain his relationship with Miriam to her. He says that, although he knows Miriam loves him, he cannot give himself to her and rejects her whenever she tries to claim him. Sometimes he hates her because she is kind when he is cruel. He wishes that their relationship could be normal, like his and Clara's, but Clara says that this is not what love is like and suggests that he has not tried to love Miriam.

Paul does not understand Clara's point of view. He still insists that the separation between her and Baxter is her fault. Although he hates Baxter, he automatically sides with him simply because Baxter is a man. Paul does make Clara consider her position in the relationship, however, and this helps her develop emotionally. Paul is still immature, though, and so does not understand that he has done this. He thinks about sex in terms of religion and shame, rather than as a physical and pleasurable act.



Miriam feels that emotional connection is more important than physical connection and so expects Paul to choose her. Paul is cowardly because he will not commit to Miriam, but neither will he fully reject her and allow her to move on. Once again he blames her for his own flaws. Clara recognizes that a relationship without emotional connection cannot really be love.



CHAPTER 11

As the spring comes around again, Paul feels himself once more drawn towards Miriam. He wishes that he wanted to marry her, but he feels as though he is fighting his own sense of purity and his own aversion to sex, even though he is attracted to her. He knows many other young men his own age who have the same problem; they have rough, loutish fathers who hurt their mothers and they cannot bear to hurt women who remind them of their mothers. They would rather reject physical intimacy entirely than hurt women.

One afternoon, as Paul watches Miriam sing while Annie plays the piano, he feels that she looks like a saint singing to God and he is horrified by his need for "the other thing" from her. He feels that it will destroy her and that this is not fair because she has the quality of an eternal maiden. Mrs. Morel is shocked that he seems to have gone back to Miriam and their relationship sours a little as Mrs. Morel watches Paul brood and dither over the girl. She worries because his behavior reminds her of William.

Although Paul thinks Miriam is too pure, he also struggles to conceive of sex as something that is not sinful or shameful. Paul's closest bond is with his mother and it's implied that, because he cannot have sex with her, he is disgusted by sex in general. Since he is disgusted by sex, it makes sense that his closest relationship is with a woman he cannot have sex with. Paul is so afraid of hurting women that he hurts them unintentionally by leading them on and then failing to commit.



Paul feels guilty because he thinks that Miriam is pure and that he should be satisfied with this. He is disgusted by his need for a physical relationship and ignores the possibility that Miriam might want one too—Paul simply makes this decision for Miriam. He does not give her the opportunity to explore her sexuality with him.



During an evening at Willey Farm, Paul tells Miriam that he hopes to get married when he turns twenty-five. Although he says he cannot marry her right away because he has no money, Paul suggests that he and Miriam belong to each other and know each other well enough to marry. He complains that they have been too pure with each other and that this degree of pureness might itself be sinful.

Miriam is shocked by his words. She dislikes physical contact, but she goes to him nonetheless, willing to make a sacrifice. Paul begins to kiss her, but, when he sees the look in her eyes, his desire is quenched. They walk back to Paul's house together and, in the [dark](#), Paul kisses her and feels his passion grow once more. Miriam, however, pulls away with a cry of horror and cannot explain what frightens her and makes her sad. She is determined, however, that Paul shall have her, and he hears her call after him in the dark as he jumps the stile and races home.

Miriam broods all summer and struggles with the thought of accepting Paul's proposal, even though she loves him. Paul acts like a lover to Miriam and tries his best to keep his passion for her alight. He is dismayed, however, because she always wants to look into his eyes, while he would rather lose himself with her. He wants to push her away and tell her to "leave him alone."

One evening, at Willey Farm, Paul climbs into the cherry tree at sunset and watches the sky change color as the branches rock and sway in the wind. Miriam comes out from the house and Paul teasingly throws cherries at her. He stays in the tree until the sun sets and then he and Miriam walk into the woods nearby in the gathering dusk. He leans against a tree and kisses her, and she gives herself to him despite her terror.

Afterwards, they lie together under the trees, and Paul feels very forlorn. He knows that Miriam has been separate from him "all the time." He feels, lying there, as though he is extremely still and that he understands death—as though it reaches out to him. He wants to lose himself in it. He tells Miriam this and she is startled and does not understand.

That summer, Miriam's grandmother is ill, and Miriam goes to look after her. When her grandmother recovers, she goes to visit her daughter and Miriam stays behind in the cottage for a few days. Paul cycles over to see her, and the pair make dinner together. After dinner, they go to bed and Paul is excited by Miriam's beauty. However, when he looks into her eyes, he feels that she does not want him and that she is "immolating" herself; this causes his desire to die off. Again, as he rides home, he thinks about death and how comforting it would be to die.

Paul suggests that, contrary to Miriam's religious beliefs, God is in the physical world as well as the spiritual one; to reject the physical world in favor of the spiritual world might be offensive to God.



Miriam does not agree with Paul, but she is willing to go against her religious beliefs for him, even if this means she is damned. Although sex itself was not considered sinful, sex outside of marriage was taboo in this period. Paul cannot bring himself to impose his desire on her. He can only be honest with himself in the dark because he cannot face his sexuality in a conscious and open way. Miriam, too, is afraid of her physical desire for Paul.



Paul does not want to emotionally connect with Miriam if she is going to be his physical lover. He cannot join the two sides of his desire (the desire for sexual fulfillment and emotional connection), and rejects Miriam when she tries to make him do this.



Paul feels very at home in the tree because he can lose himself in nature. Paul finds it easier to be sexual with Miriam in a natural setting and in the dark because he does not feel like himself here, and can give into desire that he does not like to admit consciously.



Although Paul wants to separate emotional and physical connection, when he achieves this with Miriam it leaves him unfulfilled. Paul is drawn to places where he can lose himself; he does not really like himself and subconsciously wants to destroy himself or die.



Paul and Miriam play at being married. However, they are not married, and so Miriam cannot enjoy sex with him; to her, it is very sinful. Paul is aware that the relationship doesn't work but, instead of facing this, he wishes that he would simply die so that he would not have to deal with it.



The pair spend the rest of the week together, but their relationship grows strained. At the end of the week, Paul presses her to tell him why she never wants passion between them, and Miriam says that her mother always told her that marriage is wonderful, except for one thing which one must put up with. Miriam insists that this is not how she thinks but that she cannot enjoy sex or have children with Paul until they are married. When Paul suggests they do this, Miriam shrinks from the idea and says they are too young. Things are “a failure between them.”

Paul returns home and tells Mrs. Morel that he will not see Miriam much anymore. Mrs. Morel does not ask questions, but she is concerned to see how bleak and unhappy Paul looks, and it reminds her of his sad expression when he was a baby. Although Paul tries to love Miriam, he never gets back his strong feelings for her. He has not seen much of Clara all summer, since he has been with Miriam, but sometimes, at work, he draws her hands and arms while she is sewing.

Paul does not break things off with Miriam entirely, however, and they remain together another year, although he is sick of her and she makes him feel guilty. One night, when he is sitting up with Mrs. Morel, he is drawn outside by the smell of the lilies drifting in on the breeze. Paul goes outside and looks at the moon. He finds a patch of irises growing beneath the lilies and is startled by the strength of their smell.

When Paul goes back inside, he tells his mother that he is going to end things with Miriam. Mrs. Morel thinks this is probably for the best. On Sunday, he goes to tell Miriam and meets her after church. Miriam is shocked and hurt when Paul ends the engagement; he tells her that he cannot marry her because he never wants to get married. Miriam complains that he has often asked her to marry him and it is she who has refused. Paul feels guilty about this and it makes him hostile towards Miriam.

Eventually Miriam accepts that he is serious and believes that he is, unconsciously, under the influence of Clara. She complains that this has been their whole relationship, him fighting against her, and Paul feels bitter and furious that she has known all along something he has only just discovered in himself. Miriam pointedly asks him when he will tell Clara, and Paul tells her that he will do so soon. He tells her that their engagement has failed because she does not have faith in him, and Miriam is bitterly amused by this.

Miriam does not know what to expect from sex and has always been told that it is an unpleasant and frightening experience. This reflects many British attitudes, which believed that women did not enjoy sex but that they must have sex to please their husbands and to have children. Lawrence demonstrates that this belief is damaging and untrue. Miriam uses the expectations of social propriety to avoid having sex with Paul.



Mrs. Morel feels responsible for Paul's suffering, just as she did when he was a baby. Paul is obsessed with Clara's body, as demonstrated when he draws her repeatedly.



Miriam makes Paul feel guilty because he knows that he treats her badly; he does not want her, but he will not let her go. The moon symbolizes motherhood and the flowers symbolize love and desire. Paul is drawn to his mother and this is the real, hidden desire which underpins and destroys his relationships with other women.



Miriam feels cheated by Paul because he has pressured her for marriage and now, when she has finally agreed, he changes his mind. Paul knows that he has been unfair to Miriam but cannot face this, and takes it out on her as a result.



Miriam understands that Paul has always resisted falling in love with her. Paul, however, does not know this because he does not examine his own emotions. Instead, he blames her for the failure of the relationship. He feels as though Miriam has kept something from him, but if he could really think for himself, he would have realized this on his own. Miriam knows that Paul blames her and knows that he is too weak to admit fault.



Miriam leaves and Paul watches her go. He feels that a large part of his life has been made meaningless. Paul wanders home and, on the way, stops in at a pub for a drink. He flirts with some women who feed him chocolates and then returns home to his mother. Mrs. Morel listens to his story about the pub, but she is aware that he is putting on a brave face and that he is horrified by what has occurred with Miriam.

Over dinner, Paul tells Mrs. Morel that Miriam has not been disappointed because she never thought that it would work out. He worries that she will not let the relationship go, however, and will wait for him to come back. Mrs. Morel warns him to stay away from Miriam and Miriam is left alone, wondering if Paul will return to her.

CHAPTER 12

Paul does well with his painting and his designs and believes that he can be a success as an artist. He sells his designs to a department store to be printed on upholstery and furniture. He often teases his mother about how rich they will be, and how she will need to learn to manage servants and let them do the housework (which she still does much of despite employing a maid), and he likes to work while she is in the room with him. While on a holiday to the Isle of Wight, Mrs. Morel suffers another bad fainting fit and, for a while, is ill. She recovers but Paul often worries about her health.

As soon as he has broken up with Miriam, Paul begins to spend time with Clara. He flirts with her at work and then, finally, kisses her in the street one evening before he catches his train home. They arrange to go for a walk together on Monday afternoon and Paul finds the weekend torturous as he waits for Monday to come.

When Monday finally arrives, Paul rushes down to the spiral room to see Clara and confirm their date. She tells him she will probably meet him that afternoon. Paul feels as though he is moving at a great distance from life and as though he will faint with anxiety. Eventually, he can stand it no longer and tells Clara to meet him at two o'clock in the town. She agrees but Paul is nearly mad with dread because she is five minutes late.

When Clara arrives, Paul buys her a red [flower](#) to wear in her coat. They catch a tram out towards the castle. Paul feels tense but excited being close to Clara as they sit together. It is a wet day and the river almost overflows. They walk into the woods, which are muddy and dripping with rain, and take the path along the riverside. Clara asks Paul why he ended things with Miriam and Paul struggles to explain. Clara says Paul has treated Miriam unfairly and Paul acknowledges this.

Paul has gained insight into himself, through Miriam, which has deeply disturbed him. He has learned that Miriam thinks he is incapable of love, when all the time he thought she was the one who could not love him.



Paul is bitter about Miriam but knows that she still has power over him because she knows him so well.



Paul's work reflects the growth of consumer markets in this period and the popularity of cheap, fashionable items with which to decorate one's home. Mrs. Morel is used to running her own house and does not like to hand over control to the maid.



Paul is very physically attracted to Clara and cannot stop thinking about her when they are not together.



Paul is clearly very invested in the idea of meeting Clara and is extremely worried that she will change her mind or that something will get in the way of their walk.



The flower signifies the revival of Clara's romantic life, which she has thought of as dead. The river and the dripping forest reflect the idea that Paul and Clara overflow with passion and sensuality. Rain and water also symbolize baptism and cleansing; her relationship with Paul ideally means a fresh start for Clara.



As they trudge along under the soggy canopy of trees, Clara asks Paul if he ever wants to get married. He says no, and she asks how old he is; he is twenty-five and she is thirty. They climb over a stile together and Paul kisses Clara's face. They continue through the woods and Paul asks Clara why she hated Baxter Dawes. She does not reply but leans over and kisses him.

Although Paul and Clara are together, there is an implicit barrier between them because Clara is still married. Paul can tell Clara that he does not want to marry without disappointing her because Clara cannot plan for marriage the way that a single woman could. Although women could get divorced and remarried, it was very rare in this time period.



Paul asks Clara if she will climb down to the water's edge with him and she agrees. They scramble down the steep, muddy bank, clinging to the trees as they go. When they reach the riverbank, they find that the swollen river has eaten away the path and that there is not much space to stand. Paul drops Clara's parcel, which she has given him to carry, and it falls into the river. Clara only laughs, however, and the pair decide to traipse on along the crumbling path.

Clara is active and brave and not afraid of physical exertion or messing up her clothes. She is suited to Paul in this way because she loves being outdoors and feels comfortable in her body, which allows Paul to in turn feel comfortable with himself.



They are almost at the spot Paul has chosen when they come across two fishermen. They slink past the men but find that there is no way back up the path because of the mud and the swollen river. Paul leads Clara to a secluded patch in the trees where the pair lie down together. When Clara gets up again, the [flower](#) on her coat has been shredded to pieces. Paul worries that Clara seems sad, but she kisses him tenderly and dismisses his concerns.

Paul has chosen a place on the riverbank to have sex with Clara. They try to hide from the men because Clara is married, and she will be judged if people hear she is out with another man. The battered flower suggests that Paul has broken down Clara's walls and emotionally connected with her.



They hike back up the hillside to rejoin the path. Paul stoops in the road and cleans Clara's boots of mud. They stop for tea in a cottage and the old lady who serves them is charmed by their cheerful manner. They laugh pleasantly together and think, "if only she knew." On the walk back, Paul asks Clara if she feels guilty. Clara says no, but Paul suggests that Eve enjoyed her guilt in the garden of Eden.

Paul and Clara think the old lady would be horrified if she knew they had just had sex. Paul insinuates that Clara should feel guilty because she enjoys sex and likens her to Eve, who was seen as responsible for tempting Adam to sin and disobey God, just as Clara has "tempted" him.



That night, Paul tells Mrs. Morel about his walk with Clara. Mrs. Morel rebukes him and says that he should have thought of Clara before he went. Paul dismisses his mother's concerns because he does not care for other people's opinions and, besides, Clara is a suffragette. Mrs. Morel objects that Clara is married, but Paul insists that his mother would like Clara and tells her what a fine woman she is. He asks if he can invite her to the house for tea during the weekend and Mrs. Morel agrees.

Mrs. Morel thinks of Clara's reputation, which Paul has not considered. Paul has the freedom not to care about people's opinions because he is a man and will not be judged as harshly as Clara. Paul suggests that Clara does not care what people think because she is suffragette. The suffragettes were considered anti-establishment before the movement for women's rights became more mainstream.



Paul still sees Miriam after church and often walks home with her. That weekend, he tells her about his walk with Clara and Miriam berates him because she says that he forfeits Clara's reputation. Paul is blasé about this, but Miriam says that he does not understand the position women are in. Another day, Miriam asks Paul about Clara's situation with Baxter Dawes and Paul tells her that he thinks Clara treated Dawes badly. He thinks that she felt superior to him and did not take him seriously.

Paul is certain, though, that Clara and Baxter Dawes had "real passion." Miriam asks if it was like his mother and father and Paul says yes; he believes their love was real. Miriam wonders if Paul has felt passion with Clara, but she is resigned to let him have this if it is what he needs before he returns to her.

Paul tells Miriam that Clara is coming to meet his mother on Sunday and Miriam feels bitter about this because Mrs. Morel has always disliked her. On Sunday, Paul can hardly believe that Clara is coming and is convinced that she will not arrive. He goes to the station to meet her and before the train has even come in is almost angry with her for failing to turn up.

Clara does arrive on the train and is just as apprehensive and excited as Paul. They have a lovely walk through the fields and, when they arrive at the house, Paul introduces Clara to Mrs. Morel. Clara is slightly intimidated because she has heard so much about her from Paul. Mrs. Morel is friendly with Clara and chats happily with her about a mutual acquaintance. She watches Clara and Paul together, but thinks Paul is a little detached. Clara feels quite at home, however, as Paul shows her around and tells her about the family. She is greeted warmly by Mr. Morel and seems to fit in perfectly with the household.

After tea, Clara helps Mrs. Morel wash up. Paul wanders into the garden and Clara feels confined and strained to be left in the kitchen without him. It is a relief to her when the dishes are put away and she follows him outside. He shows her the [flowers](#) in the garden and, while they are flirting, Miriam arrives.

Paul does not care that he may hurt Miriam when he tells her about Clara. Miriam, like Mrs. Morel, is immediately concerned for Clara's reputation and calls Paul out on his thoughtlessness. Paul still automatically takes Baxter's side and feels that Clara must have treated Baxter badly.



Although Mr. and Mrs. Morel's relationship began passionately, it quickly became abusive and dysfunctional. Paul idealizes his parents' relationship because he does not want to face reality. Miriam thinks that Paul will get bored of Clara because she has nothing to offer him but passion.



Paul plays Clara and Miriam against each other but does not seem to realize that he is doing this. Paul is sure that Clara is going to let him down; he still struggles to love and trust people.



Clara and Mrs. Morel get on well because they are both down-to-earth and practical, unlike Miriam. Mrs. Morel suspects that Clara will not really satisfy Paul, though.



Clara is very drawn to Paul and is tortured by the distance between them. Paul does not seem to feel this to the same extent.



Paul is not surprised to see Miriam and does not feel awkward as he walks the two women round the garden. Miriam asks if she can borrow a book and Paul goes inside to get it. His mother asks tersely why Miriam is outside and she is shocked that Paul invited her. Paul tells his mother not to nag and returns to give Miriam his book. Back outside, he asks her again to come in, but Miriam says she is on her way to chapel and will see them there. She takes the book and leaves, a little bitter to see Clara accepted into the family where she has not been.

Paul sees Miriam off and then heads back to the house. As he enters, he hears Mrs. Morel and Clara discussing Miriam. They both agree that they dislike her “blood hound quality” and that it “makes them hate her.” Paul is irritated with them for talking this way about Miriam, who he believes is extremely good. He and Clara attend the church service and Miriam watches as Paul helps Clara find the right hymn in the book, just as he used to with her.

After the service, Paul feels slightly guilty as he says goodbye to Miriam. At the same time, however, he feels glad that she will see him walk away with Clara, who is very good looking. On the way home, Clara asks if Paul will stay friends with Miriam and turns cold and silent when he says he will. Paul is irritated by this and kisses Clara roughly. They walk up the hills in the **dark** and look at the stars and down over the coal pits.

Clara asks about the time – she wants to catch her train – and Paul reluctantly tells her. He is annoyed that she wants to go but, when she insists, he runs with her to the station so that she will just make the train. She jumps on without time to say goodbye to him and he walks home, very sullen and angry.

Mrs. Morel is surprised when he arrives home in this state and thinks he has been drinking. He asks his mother if she likes Clara and Mrs. Morel says that she does, but that she knows Paul will grow bored of her. Paul goes to bed and weeps with rage. He is angry with Clara and treats her coldly when he next sees her at work.

Paul does not consider Miriam and Clara's feelings at this exchange. Mrs. Morel cannot understand why Paul has invited Miriam; it seems so thoughtless and insensitive to the young women. Miriam has visited to see how Paul and Clara get along together, so that she will know if Clara is really her rival or not.



Mrs. Morel and Clara imply that Miriam is needy and possessive. She is also meek, however, and this makes more confident women, like Clara and Mrs. Morel, despise her. Paul does not understand that Clara and Mrs. Morel are jealous of Miriam's hold over Paul and does not consider that Miriam may be jealous of Clara. He seems oblivious to the women around him and only thinks about himself.



Paul tries to elicit a jealous reaction from Miriam, which suggests that he loves her more than Clara. Paul does not understand Clara's jealousy and disregards it, even though she has good reason to be jealous. It makes him angry because it implies that he has done something wrong and Paul does not like to admit this.



Paul is irritated that he does not get his own way when he tries to persuade Clara to stay overnight. He reacts very petulantly and blames her for not doing what he wants.



Paul is angry because Clara has not fulfilled his desire; she has not had sex with him. She also has not given him the type of emotional connection that Miriam provides (which Mrs. Morel points out.) This is very unfair and confusing for Clara, who does not know what she has done to upset him.



Not long after, Paul invites Clara to the theatre. He buys tickets and arranges to wear a suit for the performance. His mother is slightly snooty about this, but Paul says that it is not very often he does these things. Paul meets Clara and her friend, one of the suffragettes, just before the play starts. He thinks that Clara looks very beautiful in her evening gown. During the performance, Paul struggles to focus on the play and is tortured with desire because Clara is so near to him. It almost makes him hate her because he feels that she is the cause of his pain. When he can no longer resist, he leans down and kisses her arm.

Paul misses his train and plans to walk home, but Clara insists that he should come and stay at hers and that her mother won't mind. They enter Clara's house and Mrs. Radford appears in the lounge and greets them suspiciously. Clara explains what has happened and her mother wryly invites Paul to join Clara for supper. She gives him what's left of the meagre meal. When Paul and Clara take off their coats and reveal their fine costumes, Mrs. Radford makes several sarcastic jibes.

Clara eats quietly, embarrassed by her mother, but Paul spars with Mrs. Radford and gradually placates her to a slightly friendlier tone. Clara goes to fetch Paul some pajamas and Mrs. Radford makes no sign that she is going to go to bed. Paul feels tense and hostile towards her and the atmosphere in the room is bad. Mrs. Radford says it is time they went to bed, but Paul says that he wants to play a card game. Mrs. Radford says this is fine by her and sits up determinedly as Paul and Clara play.

Finally, Mrs. Radford says that they should go to bed and Paul gives in, hiding his hatred of the woman. Paul is sent upstairs to Clara's room; Clara will share with her mother. He finds a pair of Clara's stockings in the room, puts them on and sits on the bed in them, listening. He hears Clara tell her mother that she will stay up a bit and she asks Mrs. Radford to undo her dress. Mrs. Radford wearily agrees that her daughter may stay up and then lumbers upstairs to bed. Paul tries to sleep but finds he cannot. He is mad with desire for Clara.

He sneaks downstairs and shuts the door to the kitchen loudly, so that Mrs. Radford will not come down, then he creeps into the living room. Clara is crouched before the fire, naked. Paul approaches her and finds that she looks ashamed. Paul strokes her shoulder and the pair begin to kiss and embrace. They hold each other for a long time but Clara refuses to follow Paul upstairs. Back in bed, sometime later, he wonders why she will not defy her mother.

Mrs. Morel implies that Paul is getting above himself. Paul is tormented by sexual frustration when he is close to Clara. Instead of taking responsibility for his emotions, Paul blames Clara for his discomfort because he sees her as the cause of his sexual frustration. This demonstrates that Paul externalizes his emotions, rather than taking responsibility for them.



Mrs. Radford believes that Paul has missed his train on purpose so that he can spend the night with Clara. She makes fun of Paul and Clara because she thinks that they want people to think they are upper-class in their fancy outfits.



Paul likes Mrs. Radford because he can be rough and familiar with her and is used to this type of teasing in his own family. Mrs. Radford sits up for the sake of propriety, so that Clara cannot sneak into Paul's room to have sex. Paul is angry with Mrs. Radford because she prevents him from fulfilling his desires.



Paul temporarily hates Mrs. Radford because he feels that she has won and denied him his sexual encounter with Clara. Paul wants to be close to Clara and puts on her stockings as a way of feeling near her. This also shows that Paul loses himself and his own identity when he has sex, and is drawn to this kind of sensual self-destruction.



Paul sneaks down the stairs so that Mrs. Radford will not overhear and come out of her room to prevent him. He shuts the downstairs door loudly because he knows that she will not come down if she thinks they are having sex. It is ironic that Paul expects Clara to defy Mrs. Radford when he will not defy his mother.



Mrs. Radford wakes Paul early the next morning by bringing him a cup of tea in bed. Although the older woman teases him, he can tell that she likes him. Clara seems calm and pleased over breakfast and Paul is happy. He tells them that he is to get some money for a painting that day and wonders if they should go to the seaside. Mrs. Radford says that she will not go but agrees to let Clara “do as she likes.”

Mrs. Radford is worldly and cynical and is not surprised that Paul and Clara – who are young lovers – have disobeyed her wishes. She understands that this is normal behavior but keeps up a façade of disapproval for the sake of propriety.



CHAPTER 13

Not long after his night out with Clara, Paul goes to the “Punch Bowl” for a drink and runs into Baxter Dawes, Clara’s husband. Paul is talking about the possibility of war in Europe with his companions. He is not very popular in the pub; he annoys the older men because he is too cocky and quick to give his opinion. Paul know Baxter hates him and he hates Baxter is return, but he also feels strangely bonded to the man because they are enemies. He offers Baxter a drink, but Baxter sullenly refuses.

The novel was completed in 1913, the year before WW1 broke out in Europe. This scene in the pub captures something of the political climate of this decade. Paul finds that the line between love and hate is blurry in his interactions with Baxter, something he has also found with Miriam and Clara.



Paul goes back to his conversation and Baxter makes a spiteful comment about him getting his knowledge from the theatre. Paul tries to ignore Baxter, but the other men begin to join in and tease Paul about going to a play. Baxter hints that he knows the woman Paul spent the night with and the other men hassle Paul to name her. Baxter makes a comment which angers Paul and Paul throws his beer in Baxter’s face. Baxter rushes at Paul but another man intervenes and throws Baxter out of the pub.

Baxter makes it clear that he knows Paul has been out with his wife. The other men secretly dislike Paul because he is artistic and intellectual, and they think that he looks down on them.



Paul does not tell Mrs. Morel about this altercation. He is frustrated because he keeps no secrets from his mother and the only thing that he does not tell her about is his sex life. At times, he feels smothered by her and that his love for her has nowhere to go. He feels it is like a circle where the love she has for him flows back into herself. He and Clara continue to get on well, but Clara is upset when she hears about his feud with Baxter.

Paul is trapped by his relationship with his mother; instead of gradually moving on from her and finding a relationship with a woman his own age, Paul feels that he must remain with her even though she cannot fulfil his adult desires. His loyalty to her prevents him from forging real bonds with women who can.



Paul suggests that Baxter could have been a good man. Clara thinks that Paul blames her for the way Baxter has turned out and insists that Paul does not know Baxter and that he shouldn’t be quick to get into a fight with the man. Paul says that he is not a natural fighter and Clara says that he should carry a weapon. Paul brushes off her fears, although Clara insists that Baxter is dangerous.

Clara insists that Baxter is a dangerous and brutal man. Paul feels that she is overreacting and that she exaggerates Baxter’s brutality because Baxter hurt her feelings.



A few days later, at work, Paul bumps into Baxter on the stairs. Paul apologizes and goes on with his work, but Baxter lingers in the door, shouting things and threatening Paul. Paul insolently ignores him. He tries to get past Baxter in the doorway to go about some business, and Baxter grabs Paul's arm. Mr. Jordan comes out of his office to see what the commotion is about and tries to physically remove Baxter, who is a known troublemaker, from the building.

Baxter shakes Mr. Jordan off and the manager falls and bruises himself. He fires Baxter immediately and has him arrested for assault; Paul must give evidence at the trial. Baxter is dismissed with a warning and Paul worries a little about what will come next. He has had to tell the magistrate about his and Baxter's fight over Clara, and Clara is furious that she has been publicly dragged into the dispute.

Although he and Clara still get on, Paul feels a sense of coldness or indifference for her creep in. He agonizes over this to Mrs. Morel and complains that, although he cares about Miriam and Clara, he feels that he cannot really care about them and that, sometimes, he is cruel to them. He thinks he cannot love another woman while his mother is alive. Mrs. Morel listens quietly and broods over this. Clara is disappointed by Paul's offhand manner with her at work. She is very attracted to him and wants to show him this, but he is often cold and businesslike.

Paul and Clara often spend the evenings together and then they are like lovers and get on very well. One night, however, Paul seems frustrated and tense and Clara asks him what is wrong. He tells her that he is restless and that he wants to go abroad and make something of himself as an artist. He cannot go yet, he says, because he will not leave his mother. Clara asks what he will do if he becomes successful and he tells her that he will buy a nice house for him and his mother to live in.

Although Clara is hurt by his words, she can tell he is suffering. Paul begs her not to plan for the future, but, instead, to live in the moment. He is hurt and she comforts him as they sit together in the **dark** and look out over the canal. They listen to the birds and the sounds of nature all around them and, as Paul looks into Clara's eyes, he feels the immensity of life and of the darkness all around them. He thinks this must have been how Adam and Eve felt, lost in the wilderness.

Paul is not afraid of Baxter. Baxter is clearly troubled and has been in fights at work before.



Paul sees how far Baxter is prepared to go and begins to worry that he may have underestimated the man. Clara feels that her reputation has been damaged because now everyone knows that she is with a man who is not her husband. People would likely side with Baxter over Clara in this situation in this era.



Paul begins to realize that the problem is with him and not with his lovers. He is emotionally distant and cannot connect with women because it makes him feel guilty and disloyal to his mother. Mrs. Morel is disappointed that Paul feels this way and feels that something is wrong with her son. Paul is now cruel to Clara the same way that he is cruel to Miriam, and suddenly loses interest in her when she begins to love him.



Paul makes it clear that he does not plan for a future with Clara and only stays in the country for the sake of his mother and not for her. The future he plans is for himself and Mrs. Morel.



Clara understands that Paul does not want her to plan the future because he cannot progress in his relationship with her. Paul feels lost and in the dark because he does not understand himself and feels cut off from God and all other forms of emotional guidance, just as Adam and Eve were cut off from God after they were cast out of Eden.



The next morning, Clara feels desperately in love with Paul and knows she wants something “permanent.” Paul, however, wakes feeling satisfied and content and feels that, although he has learned something with Clara, it does not have anything to do with her. For a while, Clara cannot keep away from him at work. She always wants to kiss and touch him and follows him around. Eventually, Paul gets annoyed and is frosty with her. He tells her to be more professional and that there isn’t time for love at work. Clara is deliberately distant with him after this.

The next spring, Paul and Clara rent a cottage at the seaside and stay there together for some time. They often go down to the shore in the mornings and Clara swims in the sea while Paul watches the sun rise. He sees Clara’s form in the water, a long way off, and thinks about how small and insignificant she looks from this distance. He wonders why she holds his interest and feels confused and almost afraid of her as she emerges from the water and dries herself.

That afternoon, Clara and her mother go into town and Paul goes out to draw. Clara can sense that he is pulling away from her and Paul finds that, during the day when he is alone, he feels oppressed by the thought of her. Clara only feels that he is really with her at **night**, and she asks him about this sensation. Paul says that he does not want love during the days but insists that he wants to marry Clara.

Pressed by him, Clara admits that she does not want to divorce Baxter because she feels like he “belongs to her.” Paul says that Clara treated Baxter badly because she believed he was something he was not and would not accept what he was. Clara replies sarcastically. Paul complains that women always make him feel trapped and that he should be able to do as he likes. Clara says that, if this is the case, his woman should be able to do as *she* likes, but Paul says that he wants the woman he loves to want to be with him. Clara feels that she hates Paul for a moment.

Overall, though, Clara feels fulfilled by the relationship. She feels satisfied with the passion between her and Paul and has gained back her confidence and self-assurance through the liaison. They are destined to part, however, even if they stay together, because Paul cannot be tied to her.

Paul is satisfied with Clara because they have had sex, and this is everything he wants from her. She has helped him understand himself and, therefore, he feels he has got what he needs from her and does not care that she is now in love with him. He now cruelly dismisses her and does not consider her feelings.



Paul’s spiritual and complex temperament is symbolized by nature in the novel. He looks down on Clara and sees her as insignificant because, compared with his inner life, she seems small. This is very selfish and arrogant of Paul, of course. He is frightened of her because he knows he will hurt her and feel ashamed.



Paul only wants Clara at night, in the dark, because at night and during sex he can lose himself—he does not have to face his emotional fears and can gratify himself with her. In the day, he knows, she wants something more from him; he resents this because he only wants to take from her and not give her anything of himself, which belongs to his mother. He denies this to himself, though, and leads Clara on.



Paul projects his own feelings onto Baxter. Paul unconsciously wants Clara to accept him as he is (so that he can use her to fulfil his own desires and give her nothing in return) but feels too ashamed to ask this of her. Paul is hypocritical because he wants total freedom but expects fidelity from his wife. Clara is disgusted by this double standard.



Clara has gained confidence through her relationship with Paul, and this helps her accept that it will not work between them.



One night, when they are walking through the fields near Clara's home (she and her mother have moved from the town), they pass a man on the road who reminds Paul of Baxter. Paul makes a joke to Clara as the man passes. Paul wonders who the man is, and Clara tells him it is Baxter. Clara calls Baxter "common" and Paul asks her if she hates him. Clara says no and gets angry with Paul. She hates that he accuses her of being cruel to Baxter when he has no idea how cruel men can be to women.

Paul is taken aback, but Clara continues and says that, although Baxter would not let her know him, she feels that Paul knows nothing about *her*. She sometimes feels that he does not care about her but only about the act of sex. Paul is confused but wonders if this is true. When he has sex, he feels as though he becomes one with everything in the world and everything is swept away in his own pleasure. She does not enjoy the sex as much as he does, and they begin to feel embarrassed with each other afterwards. Paul even begins to dislike Clara afterwards, as if it is her fault.

One night, when Paul leaves Clara's and has to rush to catch his train, he is ambushed by Baxter, who waits for him in the **dark** by a stile which is on the way to the station. The two men fight and, even though Paul has never been in a fight before, he almost strangles Baxter with his scarf. He lets go as he realizes what he is doing and Baxter struggles to his feet and begins to kick Paul. Just then, the train goes past in the distance and Baxter sees the lights and thinks that someone is coming. He hurries away and leaves Paul lying on the ground.

Paul lies still for a short while, dazed and bruised after the fight. Eventually, he drags himself up and limps home. His mother is horrified when she sees him and faints with shock. Paul has dislocated his shoulder and comes down with bronchitis the next day. Mrs. Morel nurses him and Miriam and Clara come to visit, but he does not care to see either of them.

When Paul is healed, he begins to avoid Clara and to spend more time with his male friends. Clara is frustrated and pained by the way he treats her, and Paul begins to hate her. Mrs. Morel's health gets worse and Paul worries about her constantly. She has problems with her stomach and her heart. For his next holiday, Paul goes to Blackpool with a friend and sends Mrs. Morel to Sheffield to have a holiday at Annie's.

Paul still fails to understand that Clara does not hate Baxter but is disappointed in him; she believed he was a good man and he has let her down. She feels that Paul always takes men's side against women and does not consider women's feelings.



Clara feels that Baxter has withdrawn from her because he is afraid of being rejected, but Paul seems to care nothing about her. Baxter, on the other hand, withdraws from Clara because he cares too much about her and feels that he isn't good enough for her. Paul, she thinks, feels too good for her. He only uses her for his own sexual gratification, and Clara senses this and becomes uncomfortable. Paul blames her for this.



Paul is unconsciously very angry, and this aggression is unleashed in the fight. The two men fight to deal with their emotions, which they cannot understand or cope with any other way. This is why the fight takes place in the dark and ends when a light is shone on them.



Mrs. Morel's health is fragile, and the shock causes her to become unwell. Paul loses interest in both Clara and Miriam while his mother nurses him.



Paul senses that there is something very wrong with Mrs. Morel and begins to focus all his attention on her and reject his lovers.



At the end of his time in Blackpool, Paul travels to Sheffield to join Annie and Mrs. Morel. He is in good spirits and looks forward to seeing them. When he arrives, however, Annie looks grim and greets him somberly. Mrs. Morel has been taken ill and is in bed. Paul rushes upstairs to see her and breaks down in tears when he sees how ill she looks. She tells him not to fret, but she has a tumor.

Paul hopes that the tumor can be cured but, later, when he has dinner with Annie, she tells him that Mrs. Morel has a huge lump on her side. Annie discovered it when Mrs. Morel fell ill the day before and, when she asked her mother about the lump, Mrs. Morel said it had been there for several months. Paul is shocked; Mrs. Morel has never mentioned this to him and has been often to see the doctor. Annie laments that if she had been at home, she would have noticed the tumor.

Paul goes to speak to the doctor himself. The doctor tells him that the lump may be cancer, but he must do an examination to be sure. When Paul arrives back at Annie's, he carries Mrs. Morel downstairs and feeds her brandy. He is horrified and weeps over how thin and weak she seems, and because she is in so much pain. Paul arranges a consultation with another doctor for Mrs. Morel before he leaves, and then travels home to check in with his father.

Paul finds his father well but thinks that he looks very old and sad as he patters about the little house alone. Mr. Morel asks timidly about his wife and is sorry to hear she is so ill. He hopes she can be brought home soon, but Paul insists that if she cannot travel, Mr. Morel must come up to visit her. Mr. Morel worries about the train fare and the doctor's fee, but Paul says that he will cover these things. He returns to Sheffield that evening to help Annie care for Mrs. Morel.

The next day, Paul must return to Nottingham for work and Mrs. Morel implores him not to worry about her. He tries his best to forget and goes for a walk with Clara to distract himself, but he cries on and off all day. Mr. Morel comes to visit Mrs. Morel at the end of the week, but he is awkward and unhappy in the presence of his wife's illness and Mrs. Morel does not like to have him in the room.

Paul is devastated by his mother's illness. He cannot imagine life (or even a sense of identity) without her.



Annie dashes Paul's hopes that the disease is not advanced and implies that Paul has neglected his mother. Indeed, though Paul is incredibly close to his mother, he is still self-absorbed in his relationship with her just as he is with his lovers.



Paul hates to see his mother in pain, and it profoundly affects him.



Paul is again reminded that his parents are aging and that his father is almost an old man now. There is no love between Mr. and Mrs. Morel now, although Mr. Morel is sorry to hear that she is in pain. Paul's reaction is closer to the reaction of a husband or lover than Mr. Morel's is, and Paul takes responsibility for Mrs. Morel's care.



Paul's whole life is affected by his mother's illness because there is nothing in his life that he cares about or that supports him as much as her. Mr. Morel does not provide comfort to his wife because they are more like strangers than a married couple.



After staying for two months at Annie's, Mrs. Morel travels home. Her health has not improved and has, instead, grown worse, and the family accompany her home in a rented motorcar because she is too sick to catch the train. On the way home, Mrs. Morel is bright and lively, though her body is weak. When the car drives into their street, all the neighbors come out to see her pass and know, from her face, that she will soon die. Still, she is happy to be home and pleased to see her [sunflowers](#) growing in the yard.

Cars were very much a luxury in this period and most people did not own or ever travel by cars themselves. Communities outside of the city tended to be very close-knit, and everybody knew each other's business. The neighbors have all heard of Mrs. Morel's illness and come to see her to show their support—and also out of curiosity.



CHAPTER 14

While Paul is in Sheffield with Mrs. Morel, he hears that Baxter Dawes is in a hospital nearby. The doctor tells him that Baxter has no visitors and, though he is no longer ill, he seems very depressed. Paul says he will go and see him and travels to the hospital. He feels somehow connected to Baxter, especially since their fight, as though they have a close, unconscious bond.

Paul feels sorry for Baxter and feels that he owes him something because the two men have fought. Fighting is its own kind of intimacy, and creates a physical connection between people.



Baxter is sulky when Paul arrives, but he gradually softens up as the pair discuss Mrs. Morel's illness. Baxter has had typhoid but is almost fully recovered. He does not want to go back to work because he doesn't know anybody and is miserable with the world. Paul tells him that he will get Leonard to pop in and give him some newspapers and tries to cheer Baxter up a bit.

Baxter feels that he has ruined his own life and cut himself off from all his connections. Paul tries to build Baxter's confidence and find people to visit him.



Paul rarely sees Clara now and the next time he does, he tells her about Baxter. Clara is frightened when she hears that Baxter is ill and condemns herself for not being kind to him. She says that Paul is right and that she treated Baxter badly. She goes to visit him soon after this and, although they are not friendly towards each other, she gives Baxter some money and [flowers](#) and wishes, in some sacrificial way, to make amends. She also likes that she feels such distance from him at their meeting, and even feels glad that she seems to scare him a bit.

Clara still cares about Baxter even though they are separated. She is willing to set her pride aside and acknowledge that, even if it is not completely her fault as Paul suggests, she played some part in the breakdown of the relationship. She shows Baxter this when she brings him money. She is pleased that he is afraid of her, though, because this suggests that he knows he has done something wrong.



Although Paul and Baxter are still rivals, Paul goes to visit him often and feels a close connection with the man. Mrs. Morel's health, meanwhile, steadily declines. Paul cares for her tenderly but they are timid with each other because they both know that she is going to die but dare not say it. They are afraid of this new, strained intimacy between them and feel that curtains are being pulled away from their eyes.

Paul and Mrs. Morel are afraid because they are now forced to face both the reality of death and the reality of their relationship. They understand now that they are extremely dependent on each other.



Sometimes, Mrs. Morel grows bitter and talks about her marriage. She despises her husband and cannot forgive him for the past. Paul hates to listen to this and feels as though his life is being dismantled. He cries often and cannot concentrate on his work. He sometimes goes to see Clara, but there is a great distance between them. In November, Clara reminds Paul that it is her birthday and the pair arrange a trip to the seaside.

Paul is distant and unhappy on this trip and he talks often of his mother's death. He is horrified by the idea that she does not want to die, and that she is determined to live, even while in so much pain. This thought frightens Clara. Paul cannot bear to see his mother in pain and admits to Clara that he wishes "she would die."

Back in Nottingham, Paul goes to see Baxter and tells him about his trip away with Clara. Baxter says that Paul may "do as he likes," but Paul explains that Clara is sick of him. He tells Baxter that he will go abroad after his mother's death. Baxter mentions the scar on Paul's face while the two men play draughts together. Paul says it happened when he fell off his bike. Baxter says that he attacked Paul because Paul laughed at him when he walked past with Clara, but Paul tells Baxter that he didn't laugh at him.

As he walks home that night in the **dark**, Paul feels that he is walking away from earth and towards death but that this path only ever ends in "the sick room." As he approaches his house, he sees the firelight in the window of Mrs. Morel's room and thinks bleakly that when she passes away, the fire will go out. He goes up to see her and finds her awake and fretful. He does his best to soothe her until she falls asleep.

Paul has a letter from Miriam and goes to see her. Miriam tries to comfort him when she hears about his mother's illness, but Paul finds her touch a torment and pulls away. Annie lives at home with him to care for Mrs. Morel, and in the evenings they often have friends come around, and are very fun and lively to relieve the stress of their days. Mrs. Morel is relieved to hear them laughing but she is in a great deal of pain all the time.

Paul begins to realize that his mother has not had a happy life and regrets her marriage to his father. Paul hates to hear this because his mother is the most important person in his life, and he wants to be the most important person in hers. However, he is part of her pain and regret because she wishes she had not been married. This is also devastating to him because it forces him to confront the fact that he never really knew his mother.



Paul and Clara are terrified by the reality of death. Paul hoped that his mother would be relieved to die because she is in so much pain, and because her life is complete. The fact that she will not die suggests that she has had an unsatisfying life, which is painful for Paul to accept. It also suggests that death is truly horrifying and that there is no afterlife, because Mrs. Morel would rather be in pain than die.



Paul acknowledges to Baxter that he sees no future with Clara and will go abroad. This suggests that, if Baxter wishes to get back together with Clara, Paul will not stand in his way. Paul lies to Baxter about his scar to show that he does not hold a grudge about the fight and that it is forgotten. Paul wants Baxter to know that he respects him and did not laugh at him that day with Clara.



Paul has no hope for the future because his mother is dying. He feels that life is futile because it inevitably ends in death, and he has found no real fulfillment in his relationships with people other than his mother. The fire symbolizes Mrs. Morel's waning life force.



Paul does not want to face his feelings and resents Miriam for trying to bring them to the surface. Annie and Paul laugh with their friends to relieve the tension of caring for their mother.



Paul does his best to comfort his mother, but she remains determined not to die. Sometimes, he looks into her eyes and feels as though he is making an agreement that, if she dies, he will die too. However, Mrs. Morel will not die; her pulse grows weak and she cannot eat or drink, but she endures. As Christmas approaches and Mrs. Morel grows ever weaker, Paul and Annie feel that they cannot cope and that they will “go mad” with the strain. Annie fears that Mrs. Morel will live through Christmas and Paul says that he will give her all the “morphia” that the doctor has sent him if this seems likely to happen.

A few nights later, Paul crushes the remaining morphia tablets into a glass of milk. Annie giggles hysterically when she sees this, and they take the drink to their mother. Mrs. Morel complains that it is bitter but drinks it down. Annie and Paul sit with her and comfort her. She is very small and fragile, like a child. Finally, she falls asleep and her breath begins to come as a long, low rattle. She keeps on like this with difficulty all night while Paul and Annie take turns to sit up with her.

The next morning, she is still the same and Paul sends Mr. Morel to work as usual. Paul is horrified as he watches his mother die and sits with her all day, terrified by the awful sound of her breath. At last, late that morning, Mrs. Morel dies. When Mr. Morel comes home, he does not notice that the blind is pulled down in her window. Paul tells him that she has died, and Morel is shocked for a moment, then eats his lunch in silence.

The undertaker is called, and Paul goes into his mother’s room to wait. He weeps over the sight of her body – she looks young again and peaceful in death – and he feels that he cannot let her go. When the undertaker arrives, Paul and Annie watch over their mother and see that she is treated gently. Paul goes out that night to spend time at a friend’s house. When he gets home, Mr. Morel is still up. Paul registers, with a shock, that his father has been afraid to go to sleep with his dead wife in the house.

Paul goes to Nottingham to see Clara and Clara is pleased to find that Paul is, externally, stoic and resigned to his mother’s death. The funeral is held during a rainstorm and Mrs. Morel is buried with William. After the funeral, Mr. Morel frets and cries to Mrs. Morel’s family that he always “did his best by her.” His behavior infuriates Paul because he feels that his father dismisses his mother. A few nights after this, Paul finds Mr. Morel sitting up by himself, very white and scared looking. He says he has dreamed about his wife. Paul says that he has very pleasant dreams about his mother. Mr. Morel does not answer and stares into the fire.

Paul thinks he would like to die with his mother, but this will not make Mrs. Morel happy. Although she is the reason that Paul is unfulfilled in life, she feels she cannot die because he is unfulfilled, and she wants to stay alive to support him. The pair are thus caught in an unhealthy cycle of dependence. Paul is willing to poison his mother to spare her any further pain—but also to ease his own suffering.



Annie laughs because she is hysterical with grief and stress and is relieved that it will soon be over. This is a tragic and painful but also very human scene.



Mr. Morel takes his wife’s death calmly because there was very little love between them. They lived like strangers with each other and, though he is sad she is gone, the impact on him is nothing compared to the impact of her death on Paul.



Paul struggles to cope with the reality of his mother’s death, which the sight of her body brings home to him. Although Mr. Morel did not love his wife, her death has affected him deeply as well.



Clara knows how close Paul was to his mother, and is worried that her death will drastically affect him. Paul feels that his father is not being honest; he did not do his best for Mrs. Morel and she often had to manage alone on very little money. Mr. Morel will not face his responsibility for this, and Mrs. Morel is now dead and cannot remind him of it. Paul thus feels that his father is getting away with it. Mr. Morel has a nightmare about his wife, though, which suggests that he feels guilty for how he treated her.



Baxter Dawes, meanwhile, has recovered in a hospital in Skegness. Paul goes out to visit him at Christmas. He and Baxter have become close friends and Paul hardly ever sees Clara now. A couple of days before he leaves, Paul tells Baxter that Clara is coming the next day and that he has told the landlady that Baxter's wife will be arriving. Baxter seems a little shaken by this but does not protest. Paul says that Baxter is almost better, and Baxter agrees and says that Leonard thinks he will be able to "get him on in Sheffield."

Paul admits that he feels more lost than Baxter. Baxter assures Paul that he will be alright, and the two men awkwardly discuss Clara. Baxter says that he does not know if he wants her back, but Paul insists that she wants him. He tells Baxter that Clara never really "belonged to him" and that was why she would not get a divorce. Baxter admits that he has been foolish, and Paul says that he will leave the next day. Nonetheless, he feels a sense of rivalry return between him and Baxter and they spend the rest of the evening in silence.

The next morning, Paul walks on the beach and feels that he is "cutting himself off from life." He takes a bitter kind of pleasure in this. He goes to the station with Baxter to meet Clara from the train. She is rather aloof with the two men and sits and looks demurely out of the window when they get to the house. Baxter explains to her that Paul will leave them that night but that they have the house for another day. He tells her that he has a job and a house in Sheffield, and Clara listens thoughtfully.

From time to time, Clara glances at Paul, but she thinks, looking at him beside her husband, that there is something meagre and small about him. She finds him unmanly and thinks that he lacks conviction, unlike Baxter who can at least commit to something. She feels that Paul is fickle and unstable, and that Baxter appears dignified by comparison. She feels that she has a better understanding of men now and thinks that she will not miss Paul when he leaves.

The trio have dinner together and Clara feels irritated with Paul because she feels that he is deliberately absenting himself from the circle and leaving her for her husband. Paul feels forlorn and at a loss without his mother. She has been his support and his true companion and, now that she is dead, he feels as though he yearns for death himself. He does not fear death and feels that Clara cannot support him. He can see that Baxter does fear death and, although he has been careless with his life, he admits now that he was wrong and that he wants to live, and this makes him seem noble.

Paul arranges things so that Baxter and Clara will be left alone together, and the landlady will not question them if they share a room together. He wants them to reunite and Baxter does not object. Paul has helped Baxter find work with his brother-in-law Leonard, who is Annie's husband.



Although Baxter has lost everything, he now stands to gain it back. Paul has lost his mother, however, and now feels utterly alone in the world. Paul is still attracted to Clara, although he knows he does not love her. As soon as Baxter feels that he can win her back, he becomes jealous of Paul and possessive of Clara as though she were his wife again.



Paul wants to die in the wake of his mother's death and takes a self-destructive pleasure in dismantling his other relationships so that there will be nothing for him to stay alive for. Clara accepts the strange situation and waits to see how the men behave with her.



Although Baxter has made mistakes, Clara feels that he, at least, committed to her. She feels that Paul is cowardly because he will not commit to anything. She likes Baxter better now in comparison to Paul.



Clara resents Paul because she feels that he has used her and now has had enough and wants to give her back to her husband. Paul is too grief-stricken to notice, however. He never loved Clara and has now lost the love of his life, his mother, and is suicidal over this loss. Whereas Paul now appreciates nothing in life, Baxter, who nearly died from typhoid, has gained a new appreciation for it and is willing to change.



Paul leaves Clara and Baxter after dinner and goes to catch his train. When he has gone, Clara pours Baxter some tea and Baxter asks her uncertainly if she will leave that night; he says she shouldn't travel in the rain. Clara asks if he wants her to stay and Baxter admits that he does. They hold each other and Clara joyfully pleads with Baxter to take her back. He tearfully asks her if she wants him.

Baxter and Clara behave like a married couple again. Baxter wants her to stay but does not say so outright in case she rejects him. Baxter and Clara have learned to appreciate each other and, now, instead of taking each other for granted, they feel that they would each be lucky if the other one would have them. Their renewed relationship is a marked contrast to the now totally isolated Paul.



CHAPTER 15

Paul feels lost and friendless. Clara is gone, and he and his father part ways and leave the family home. Mr. Morel lodges with a family and Paul takes a room in Nottingham. He tries to lose himself in his work and spends a lot of time in pubs, but he is haunted and miserable. He cannot see the point in life or feel the “reality” of anything around him. The only thing that feels real is the **darkness** at night. One night, when he gets home late and eats no dinner, he wonders what he is doing with himself and a voice from his unconscious tells him that he longs to destroy himself.

Paul cannot stand to be alone with himself now that he has lost his mother, as she was the only person who understood him and made him feel like a whole person. He tries to distract himself from his loneliness, but he becomes self-destructive and only feels good when he is in a situation where he can forget about his life and himself. He is finally forced to understand his own emotional state and he realizes that he is suicidal—and indeed, he has always been self-destructive.



Paul is determined not to die, but he cannot get in touch with life. He feels, since Mrs. Morel's death, that he is nothing and that he has no future and nothing to live for. He no longer cares about painting and he does not want to get married. He struggles to find a reason not to kill himself. He is extremely restless and becomes frustrated when he tries to paint. He drinks and flirts with barmaids, but these interactions mean nothing to him. In his grief, Paul remembers Miriam and wonders if he can go back to her.

All of Paul's hopes for the future revolved around his mother, and so he feels like his future has been snatched away. Everything that previously had meaning in his life is now meaningless to him. In his desperation, he thinks of Miriam because she is a person who understood him and made him feel real and loved.



He runs into Miriam one evening at Church and, as he watches her sing the psalms, he thinks she looks like a saint. Paul approaches her after the service, and she is very surprised to see him. She tells him that she is staying with a relative but will go home the next day. Paul asks her if she must go and she says no. He invites her to dinner at his house with him and she agrees.

Miriam is very spiritual and abstract, and is happiest when she is in church or lost in intellectual thought. She cannot hide her emotions and pretend that she has not missed Paul, and immediately goes to his house when he invites her.



Paul goes to fetch them coffee and Miriam looks around his room. She finds it grim and “comfortless” and feels sorry for him. When Paul returns, Miriam tells him that she has been accepted into college and that she is going to be a teacher once she is trained. Paul is surprised that Miriam did not tell him and is slightly disappointed with the news. Miriam is indignant; she is very excited about her success and proud of her prospects.

Miriam now has a bright and fulfilling future ahead of her and will be an educated and employable woman. This reflects the changes in women's social position which took place throughout the twentieth century. Miriam is upset that Paul cannot be happy for her, but he only wants Miriam to do what's best for him, not for herself.



Paul thinks that it is a waste for her to work. He tells her that while a man can commit himself fully to his work, a woman only uses a small, insignificant part of herself when she takes a job. Miriam is offended and replies sarcastically. Paul thinks that she looks old and he is internally critical of her. Suddenly, Miriam begins to laugh in a cold, cheerless way. She asks Paul if he is still with Clara and Paul tells her he is not. Miriam says that she thinks they should get married. Paul brushes her off again with his usual protests; she would smother him, and he would not be able to bear it. He tells her he will travel abroad.

Miriam sinks to her knees on the rug, crushed by despair. She suddenly knows, inside herself, that if she stood up and drew him to her and told him that he “belonged to her” that he would stay, and they would be married. She is too afraid to move, however; afraid that she will unleash something unknown and that she cannot handle in him if she does so. She remains kneeling there and, eventually, Paul takes her in his arms and comforts her.

Paul feels that Miriam is not strong enough to support and contain him. She is willing to sacrifice herself for him, but he does not want this. She asks him if he wants to marry her and he says no. If they are not married, Miriam says, there can be nothing between them. Paul sits back in his chair and thinks about his mother. Miriam can see that he does not care about her and that he is set on ruining himself. She decides to leave him to it, but she feels sour that he will not accept her sacrifice.

Miriam admires the [flowers](#) on Paul’s table, and he gives them to her. He accompanies her back to her cousin’s house, and she broods resentfully and thinks that, when he is tired, he will return to her. After he has said goodbye to her, he takes a car out into the country. He feels as though he is emanating empty space from his body and that he is becoming part of the [night](#).

Paul leans against a stile and feels himself surrounded by the night. He feels that time has ceased to exist and that, as he is part of the night and the universe, his mother is still with him even though she is dead. He calls out for her in the [dark](#) and knows that he wants to join her. Determined not to give in, however, after a short time resting in the dark, he turns and walks doggedly back towards the lights of the town.

Paul still sees women in simplistic and idealized terms. He believes that all women will be fulfilled by marriage and domesticity, but for Miriam, this is obviously not the case. Paul’s view is old-fashioned and misogynistic, and Miriam sees this. Miriam still loves Paul, though, and feels that he needs her to take care of him.



Miriam is heartbroken because Paul has decided to leave once again. However, she knows that she can persuade him to stay and chooses not to. Deep down she knows that he is emotionally unstable and that she will not be able to make him love her in a healthy or consistent way.



Miriam will not tell Paul that she loves him, but will allow him to claim her as his partner if he wants to. She will not force him to stay for her sake, however. She still loves Paul, and wishes that he loved her enough to willingly stay with her. Again she thinks of love in religious and dramatic terms, as if she is a martyr for Paul’s sake.



Miriam still cannot give up on Paul and believes that he cannot cope without her. She dislikes him, however, because he is too weak to admit that he cannot manage on his own. Paul feels as though he has no reason to live and that he is already dead.



Paul wants to die to be close to his mother. He refuses to kill himself, however, and the image of Paul walking back towards the light suggests the possibility that he will reject death and try to find new meaning in life separate from his mother—or else just keep pushing on in his isolation and pain.



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