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D. H. Lawrence's  
**SONS AND LOVERS**  
and OTHER WORKS

Sandra Gilbert

D·H·劳伦斯的

儿子和情人  
及其他作品



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## INTRODUCTION

**CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH:** D. H. Lawrence was born in 1885 in Eastwood—the Bestwood of *Sons and Lovers*—a mining town just outside Nottingham, in the industrial Midlands of England. Like Paul Morel, he was the son of a coal miner, Arthur Lawrence, and a strong-willed, refined, middle-class girl, Lydia Beardsall Lawrence, formerly a schoolteacher, who, like Gertrude Morel, had married “beneath her.” In fact, the picture of Paul’s childhood given in *Sons and Lovers* is as accurate and detailed a picture of Lawrence’s own boyhood as any biographer conceivably could draw. Unlike Paul, Lawrence had two older brothers, an older sister and a younger sister (Ada, who was to be the family member closest to him after his mother’s death), but there the differences end. Like Paul, Lawrence was quiet, “good,” rather religious as a boy and intensely attached to his mother. Like Walter and Gertrude Morel, Arthur and Lydia Lawrence fought constantly and, to a child, frighteningly. Arthur Lawrence drank, like Walter Morel, and his children hated him, as the Morel children hate their father. Like Paul Morel, Lawrence early began to paint and to exhibit other signs of creativity and extraordinary intelligence. And like Paul, also, “Bert” Lawrence fell in love with a nearby farm, the Hags (called Willey Farm in *Sons and Lovers*) and half in love with the girl who lived on it, Jessie Chambers, who became the Miriam of *Sons and Lovers*.

**MIRIAM:** In real life, Lawrence’s relationship with Jessie was almost exactly that of Paul and Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*. Indeed, Jessie Chambers herself contributed her own recollections of this ear-

ly and intense relationship to the manuscript originally called *Paul Morel*, in the form of a number of individual narrations which Lawrence, of course, rewrote and revised, but many of whose central facts and points were certainly incorporated into the book. Like Miriam, Jessie was an intense, "spiritual" girl who loved the brilliant young writer with an almost religious fervor. Lawrence, for his part, was quite as dependent on Jessie's judgments and on her encouragement as Paul is on Miriam, and Lydia Lawrence, the writer's mother, felt the same unyielding hostility toward Jessie that Mrs. Morel feels for Miriam. And like Gertrude Morel, Lydia Lawrence finally defeated the girl Jessie in their silent struggle for Lawrence's love. In fact, a day or two after his mother died, Lawrence took Jessie for a walk and told her "You know, J., I've always loved mother." "I know you have," she replied. "I don't mean that," he answered. "I've loved her—like a lover—that's why I could never love you."

**BEGINNINGS OF TWO CAREERS:** When Lawrence was twelve, like Arthur and not Paul Morel, he won a scholarship to Nottingham High School, but unlike Arthur he remained at home, commuting from Eastwood to Nottingham daily. After High School, again unlike Paul, he went to work for several years as an uncertified teacher in Eastwood and nearby Ilkeston (like Ursula Brangwen, in *The Rainbow*) and then (again like Ursula) he went on to take a two year teacher-training course at the University of Nottingham. After completing it, in 1908, Lawrence was appointed as a regular teacher at the Davidson Road School in the London suburb of Croydon. At around this time, however, his "second"—his major—career, as a writer, began, for although he had won several short story prizes as an undergraduate at Nottingham he had until now made no effort to publish seriously. In 1909, though, Jessie Chambers sent some of his

poems to Ford Madox Ford, then the editor of *The English Review*, and Ford, immediately enthusiastic, printed them in the lead spot in the magazine's November issue. Ford, who enjoyed "discovering" and encouraging young writers, was easily convinced that Lawrence was a genius, and through his influence the twenty-four-year old author had his first novel quickly accepted by the London publishing company of Heineman, Ltd. *The White Peacock*, which Lawrence later called "a florid prose-poem," was certainly no masterpiece. But despite its many faults—it was over-written and pretentious—its creator's genius shone through, and with its publication one of the chief literary careers of this century was launched.

**TRAGEDY AND THE TRESPASSER :** Triumph though the publication of *The White Peacock* might have been for Lawrence, his satisfaction was short-lived, for the book was barely out when his adored mother became mortally ill and died of cancer on December 9, 1910. Within a year after her death, overwhelmed by grief and illness, Lawrence gave up teaching and went back to Eastwood to recuperate. In the meantime he had been working on his second novel, *The Trespasser* (which he later called "a decorated idyll running to seed in realism") and it was published in 1912, to a rather mixed critical reception.

**FRIEDA:** Lawrence was now pretty much at loose ends. Convinced that strenuous teaching of the Croydon sort was undermining his health, he went to see his old French teacher at Nottingham University, Professor Ernest Weekley, in the hope that Weekley might get him a post as an English "Lektor" in a German University. But at Weekley's house, Lawrence—who had all this while been carrying on a number of intense but none too satisfactory romantic affairs—met "the woman of a lifetime," Frieda Weekley, the Professors's thirty-

two-year-old German wife. Married for twelve years to this English academic and the mother of three children, Frieda was the daughter of a German aristocrat, Baron von Richthofen, and up until this fateful meeting with Lawrence, she later related, her adult life had been passed in a kind of domestic half-sleep. But Lawrence, like the "Prince Charming" figure who awakens the "Sleeping Beauty" in so many of his later tales and stories, brought Frieda emphatically back to life and wakefulness. The two quickly fell in love and, painful as it was for Frieda to abandon her children, they decided to leave the country together. After many ups and downs they finally began their new life in Germany, in May of 1912, and two years later, in 1914, Frieda managed to obtain a divorce from Ernest Weekley so that she might actually marry Lawrence, which she did on July 13 of that year. Like many great men, Lawrence was utterly dependent on his wife for his emotional well-being. Though he and Frieda had many very well-publicized fights, their relationship was one of complete honesty, intimacy and love. Frieda tempered many of Lawrence's more extravagant flights of fancy, and much of his mystical earnestness, with her teutonic common sense, her womanly shrewdness and her earthy wit. And Lawrence, whose "gift for life" was unsurpassed, continually opened the doors of perception and experience for her, as she so often testified.

**SONS AND LOVERS** : *Sons and Lovers* was begun shortly after Lydia Lawrence's death in 1910, when Lawrence was staying in Eastwood. His first partial draft of the novel, according to Jessie Chambers, was "flat and tepid," with a melodramatic and over-contrived plot. But at Jessie's suggestion he revised his plan for the book, converting it into a more accurate and detailed record of his actual boyhood experiences. In this, as we have already seen, he was substantially aided by Jessie herself, who even supplied narratives of her own



for him to work from. Later, when he and Frieda were "honeymooning" in Germany, Lawrence took up the book once more, and with Frieda providing "bits" as Jessie once had (especially those dealing with the mother's reaction) plus some helpful letters from Jessie herself, he finally completed this first masterpiece of his.

**LAWRENCE'S PLAN OF THE BOOK:** In a letter to Edward Garnett, who had by now taken the place of Ford as the young novelist's editor and mentor, Lawrence outlined his plan of *Sons and Lovers* in what is perhaps one of the clearest and most succinct summaries of a book ever provided by its author:

... a woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class, and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has had a passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion, and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up she selects them as lovers—first the eldest, then the second. These sons are *urged* into life by their reciprocal love of their mother—urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they can't love, because their mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them. . . . As soon as the young men come into contact with women, there's a split. William gives his sex to a fribble, and his mother holds his soul. But the split kills him, because he doesn't know where he is. The next son gets a woman who fights for his soul—fights his mother. The son loves the mother—all the sons hate and are jealous of the father. The battle goes on between the mother and the girl, with the son as object. The mother gradually proves stronger, because of the tie of blood. The son decides to leave his soul in his mother's hands, and, like his elder brother, go for passion. He gets passion. Then the split begins to tell again. But, almost unconsciously, the

mother realizes what is the matter, and begins to die. The son casts off his mistress, attends to his mother dying. He is left in the end naked of everything, with the drift towards death.

Of course, many critics have pointed out that Lawrence was not quite honest with himself in this prospectus—and that in certain respects he was actually inaccurate. Seymour Betsky, for instance, remarks that “Lawrence’s own words become irony in reverse. He misleads. To say that ‘the mother proves stronger because of the tie of blood’ is to call attention away from the manner in which the novel itself builds up cumulatively the more formidable impression of her strength of character. The ‘tie of blood’ is by far the subordinate impression. . . . Further, Lawrence positively errs. It is clear that the ‘drift towards death’ contradicts the ending of the novel.” Nevertheless, despite its flaws, most readers would agree that Lawrence’s statement is for the most part remarkably sure and clear, and that the author fulfilled his plan remarkably well in the novel itself.

**FREUD AND SONS AND LOVERS:** As Graham Hough has pointed out, “the whole situation (of *Sons and Lovers*) presents the Freudian Oedipal imbroglio in almost classic completeness,” which, of course, raises the question of Lawrence’s familiarity with Freud at the time of its writing in 1912. Actually, we now know pretty certainly that Lawrence had not read Freud at all when he wrote this book, but—and this is a very important “but” indeed—Frieda Lawrence writes in her memoir, *Not I But The Wind*, that before her first meeting with Lawrence she “had met a remarkable disciple of Freud and was full of undigested theories.” In the course of their first conversation she and Lawrence “talked about Oedipus and understanding leaped through our words.” Later, according to Hough, “she wrote that she was a great admirer of Freud when she met

Lawrence in 1912, and that he and she had long arguments about Freud together." "And of course," Hough adds, "the final draft of *Sons and Lovers* was written as strongly under Frieda's influence as the earlier ones had been under Miriam's [Jessie's]. *Sons and Lovers* is indeed the first Freudian novel in English, but its Freudianism is mediated not by a text-book but by a person. . . ."

**LAWRENCE'S LATER NOVELS:** After *sons and Lovers* Lawrence produced, in pretty rapid succession, the two books which are generally considered (cf. the Critical Commentary) his greatest works—*The Rainbow* (completed in 1915) and *Women in Love* (finished in 1916). But though *The Rainbow* was published in September of 1915, it was suppressed because of its sexual frankness by November of that year, and Lawrence could not find a publisher for *Women in Love* until 1920, when it was published privately in New York. His other later novels include *The Lost Girl* (published 1920), *The Plumed Serpent* (published 1926) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (published 1928, in Florence).

**OTHER WORK:** In addition to his novels, which are generally considered his major work as a writer, Lawrence also produced a good deal of criticism, several plays, some wonderful travel books, and a considerable body of poetry which, though uneven, contains some of the finest poems to be written by an Englishman in this century. A complete list of Lawrence's works is given in the bibliography, but the most notable among them include *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (published 1922)—a fascinating statement of Lawrence's occasionally muddled but often incisive philosophy of life; *Studies in Classic American Literature* (published 1923)—a trailblazing study of American writers, which has become a classic in its own right; *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (published 1923)—a brilliant volume of

nature poems, equal in acuteness of observation and lyric intensity to the best modern poetry; and the travel volumes *Twilight in Italy* (published 1916), *Sea and Sardinia* (published 1921), *Mornings in Mexico* (published 1927) and *Etruscan Places* (published posthumously, 1932), which probably contain the finest travel writing to have been produced so far in this century.

**LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH:** After his new life with Frieda began, Lawrence led a nomadic, restless, rootless existence. A complete record of his and Frieda's wanderings would be too complicated to detail here, and the interested reader is referred to *Poste Restante: A D. H. Lawrence Travel Calendar* by Harry T. Moore, or to Mr. Moore's excellent biography, *The Intelligent Heart*. While he was in Mexico, in 1925 (where he wrote *The Plumed Serpent*, which deals with that country), Lawrence became dangerously ill with "malaria" and with a lung infection, which subsequently turned out to be tuberculosis. He had always been delicate and, since childhood, subject to terrible bouts of acute bronchitis and pneumonia, which might have killed a man less vividly alive and less tenacious of life. In the years between 1925 and 1929, though he and Frieda continued to travel as extensively as before, Lawrence's condition gradually worsened until, by the winter of 1929, which they spent at Bandol, on the Riviera, for the sake of Lawrence's health, it was clear that he was a dying man. Two of his most magnificent poems were written at this time, dealing clear-sightedly and profoundly with the subject of death—"Bavarian Gentians" and "The Ship of Death"—for Lawrence was essentially a religious man, who felt an urgent need to come to terms with the mystery that was about to overtake him. Always spiritually vigorous, he continued to write up to the very end with his powers undiminished and his mind unimpaired. The most moving account of his death in 1930 has been given by

Frieda Lawrence herself:

After lunch he began to suffer very much and about teatime he said: "I must have a temperature, I am delirious. Give me the thermometer." This is the only time, seeing his tortured face, that I cried, and he said: "Don't cry," in a quick, compelling voice . . . [later] he said: "Hold me, hold me, I don't know where I am, I don't know where my hands are . . . where am I?" Then the doctor came and gave him a morphine injection. . . . The minutes went by. . . . I held his left ankle from time to time, it felt so full of life, all my days I shall hold his ankle in my hand. He was breathing more peacefully, and then suddenly there were gaps in the breathing. The moment came when the thread of life tore in his heaving chest, his face changed, his cheeks and jaw sank, and death had taken hold of him . . . we buried him, very simply, like a bird we put him away, a few of us who loved him. We put flowers into his grave and all I said was: 'Good-bye Lorenzo,' as his friends and I put lots and lots of mimosas on his coffin.

# **SONS AND LOVERS :**

## **DETAILED SUMMARY AND COMMENT**

### **PART I**

#### **CHAPTER ONE:**

#### **THE EARLY MARRIED LIFE OF THE MORELS**

*Sons and Lovers* opens with a description of The Bottoms, a meagre residential development built for the workers' families by the mining company of Carston, Waite & Co. in the great grimy coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. The Bottoms consists of "six blocks of miners' dwellings, two rows of three, like the dots on a blank-six domino, and twelve houses in a block." From the outside the houses seem quite "substantial and very decent," and in front there are pretty gardens. But the real life of the houses goes on in the kitchens, which open onto a long common alley lined with ash-pits (garbage dumps). "So," Lawrence points out, "the actual conditions of living in the Bottoms . . . were quite unsavoury."

When the story begins, Mrs. Gertrude Morel, one of the two principal characters, is about seven months pregnant. She is a small, slight woman of thirty-one, who already has a seven-year-old son, William, and a five-year-old daughter, Annie. She has only recently moved to the Bottoms from the neighboring village of Bestwood, and she still shrinks a little from contact with the rather vulgar Bottoms women. She herself is obviously a finer type.

On this particular July day, Mrs. Morel's son William is pestering his mother for twopence with which to go to the fair which has just opened near by. Annie, too, is begging to be taken there. Heavy with

child and weary as she is, Mrs. Morel trudges up the hill to the fairgrounds. Her children are delighted by all the wonderful attractions, and proud of their genteel-looking mother, too. Their father is "helping out" at a nearby tavern, but in any case he is a hard drinker with little interest in his family.

Mrs. Morel's life in The Bottoms is a difficult one, we soon learn. Her marriage is obviously not happy. She despises her brutish, hard-drinking, coal-miner husband, and she is "sick of . . . the struggle with poverty and ugliness and meanness" that is their life. "Looking ahead, the prospect of her life" makes her "feel as if she were buried alive." Her carefree girlhood now seems far away indeed. Originally she "came of a good old burgher family, famous independents who had fought with Colonel Hutchinson and who remained stout Congregationalists." Her grandfather was a lace-manufacturer ruined at a time when many others also failed in the Nottingham lace business. Her father was a "handsome, haughty man," an engineer.

As a girl, Gertrude Morel had had a "young man"—an educated, charming boy named John Field. But when his father's business failed, young Field went off to become a teacher and later married a wealthy widow. Mrs. Morel never forgot—and perhaps never forgave—him. Later, when she was twenty-three, she met Walter Morel at a Christmas party. He was a healthy, good-looking young miner of twenty-seven, with "a vigorous black beard that had never been shaved." Though he was uneducated and a common man, Morel had a curious animal attraction for the proud, reserved, intellectual Gertrude. He loved to dance and flirt; "he was so ready and pleasant with everybody." She, on the other hand, was to him "that" thing of mystery and fascination, a lady." Within a year they were married.

For three months after marrying Walter Morel Gertrude Morel was "perfectly happy; for six months she was very happy." After that, disillusionment set in. Gertrude discovered that the house they lived in, which she thought Walter owned, was actually his mother's property and that he was paying the older woman an exorbitant rent. Furthermore, he was deeply in debt for their furniture, which his wife had thought was already paid for. Not only that, he had been stopping off at pubs for a pint after work, a habit which outraged Mrs. Morel more than any of his other offenses, for she is a teetotaler who forced her husband to sign "the pledge" when she married him. At this point, Lawrence tells us, "there began a battle between the husband and wife—a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfil his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious." And it was amid the smoke of this battle, as it were, that the Morel children grew up.

The coming of children aggravated the already existing tension between their parents. By the time young William was born, Mrs. Morel had been disillusioned by her husband, and she determined to live for her son; he was all that she cared for in the world. When he was a year old, Morel tried to surprise her by crudely cutting the child's hair. "Yer non want ter make a wench on 'un," he explains. But Gertrude never forgave him for "this act of masculine clumsiness" which "was the spear through the side of her love for" him.

As the couple's marriage disintegrates, Walter Morel's drinking becomes worse. Often he drinks up half his wages, leaving his wife with major household debts unpaid, and no means to pay them. At



the time of the fair, Mrs. Morel, who is strenuously saving to help pay the extra expenses of the new baby, is especially bitter that Morel has gone off cavorting with friends, leaving neither time nor money for his family. When he comes home that night, she reproaches him for his drinking, and he, in a rage, orders her out of the house. Though she refuses to go ( "I've got those children to see to," she cries), he pushes her roughly out the door, locks it behind her and falls into a drunken stupor. She walks in the garden awhile, but soon, cold and tired, tries to come in again. Morel is oblivious to her taps and knocks. It takes her an hour to wake him, and when he finally lets her back in again, he disappears guiltily upstairs, without a word of apology.

**COMMENT:** This first chapter provides important background material, without which the central relationships of *Sons and Lovers* would be much harder to understand. Gertrude Morel, one of the novel's main characters, is a "refined," strong-willed, intelligent, ambitious woman, trapped in an unsuitable marriage. Her puritanical aversion to drinking and dancing is exactly the opposite of the high-spirited, easy-going Morel's delight in such earthly pleasures. Her bourgeois detestation of debts and deficits is foreign to her more relaxed, lower-class husband. Her marriage to him seems to have been one of life's accidents, like her father's business failure and John Field's father's failure. "Sometimes life takes hold of one," Lawrence writes, "carries the body along, accomplishes one's history, and yet is not real, but leaves oneself as it were slurred over." So it seems to Mrs. Morel, for certainly her grubby life in The Bottoms doesn't seem in any sense related to her own character. The vulgarity and coarseness of the common life along the alley of ash pits seems to have nothing to do