

Parental and romantic relationships in sons and lovers



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Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud theorized that as a manifestation of the Oedipus Complex, people tend to choose partners who share physical features and personality traits with their opposite-sex parent. The bond between lovers can only be rivaled by the bond between parent and child; therefore, these two types of relationships are inherently connected. In his novel, *Sons and Lovers*, D. H. Lawrence explores the link between parental and romantic relationships. His characters pick significant others who are different from their parents, challenging Freud's theory. However, each of these characters eventually loses interest in his/her partner, conveying the idea that successful romantic relationships must be modeled after maternal and paternal relationships.

First and foremost, Gertrude's marriage to Walter Morel is a result of her resentment towards her father. Because her father treats her mother poorly, Gertrude believes that she needs a partner whose personality contrasts with his. Lawrence describes the differences between Gertrude's father and husband, stating, "And George Coppard, proud in his bearing, handsome, and rather bitter; who preferred theology in reading. . . who ignored all sensuous pleasure:- he was very different from the miner" (12). Unlike Gertrude's father, Walter disregards religion and embraces "sensuous pleasure." These characteristics are the root of Walter's drinking problem and thus the source of Gertrude's unhappiness. As time goes on, more and more of Walter's traits manifest into problems, as shown by the statement, ". . . for three months she was perfectly happy: for six months she was very happy" (14). Gertrude's relationship with Walter does not resemble the

relationship between her and her father, and as a result, her marriage becomes unfulfilling.

While Mrs. Morel does not lose interest in Mr. Morel until after they are married, their son William loses interest while he is engaged to Gipsy. At first, William is captivated with Gipsy's beauty and class, and he is sure his mother will like her. However, Lawrence foreshadows William's change of heart when his mother disapproves of Gipsy's photo. William's romantic relationship is the polar opposite of his maternal relationship because while his mother has always taken care of him to the fullest extent, Gipsy is so high maintenance that William must now take care of her. Lawrence highlights further differences between Gipsy and Mrs. Morel through William's statement, " You know, she's not like you, mother. She's not serious, and she can't think" (131). While Mrs. Morel values logic and reason, Gipsy is fixated on her outward appearance. Eventually, Gipsy's beauty and class become annoyances to William because she always takes too long to get ready, and she treats his siblings like her servants. He later admits to his mother, ". . . when I'm away from her I don't care for her a bit. I shouldn't even care if I never saw her again" (133). By then, it is too late to break off the engagement, and in a way, William's death saves him from a miserable marriage that parallels that of his parents.

Learning from his mother's and brother's mistakes, Paul never makes a commitment to Miriam. Because Paul values his mother above all else, Mrs. Morel's disapproval of Miriam prevents Paul from marrying her. Additionally, Paul knows he is incompatible with Miriam because she is too different from his mother. Miriam is wild and passionate- she spontaneously bursts into
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song and always walks intensely. However, this type of behavior makes Paul uncomfortable, and he is “ thankful in his heart and soul that he had his mother, so sane and wholesome” (171). Meanwhile, Miriam’s religious faith contrasts with Mrs. Morel’s rejection of religion and love of reasoning. When Paul tells Miriam, “ You can’t learn algebra with your blessed soul. Can’t you look at it with you clear simple wits?” it is evident that her lack of reasoning is infuriating to him (174). Although Miriam loves Paul as much as his mother does, Paul knows that their relationship will never live up to his relationship with his mother.

Freud’s theory of the Oedipus Complex focuses on a child’s fixation with their parent, but Lawrence thoroughly discusses Gertrude Morel’s fixation with her sons. Because she feels distant from Walter, Gertrude seeks fulfillment in her relationships with William and Paul. As a result, her feelings toward her sons are no longer purely maternal. Gertrude often has characteristically romantic thoughts- she is more devastated than proud when William gets a job in London, and she becomes jealous of Miriam for taking Paul away from her. Thus, Lawrence implies that the Oedipus Complex can be reciprocated by the parent.

Work Cited

Lawrence, D. H. *Sons and Lovers*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003.