

# An Analysis of Paul's Search for Self in *Sons and Lovers*

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## Abstract

*Sons and Lovers* is one of the most famous novels of D.H. Lawrence. This novel centers around the predicament of the protagonist Paul during his growth and mental changes resulting from it. During Paul's growth, his strong dependency on his mother produces the twisted Oedipus complex, which eventually leads to his loss of self. This article analyzes Paul's growth through the psychological concept of Oedipus Complex, pointing out the fact that father's absence and the intensive Oedipus complex during his childhood contribute to Paul's loss of self. Although Paul is under the influence of Oedipus complex, he still makes attempts to get rid of his mother's influence, and thus achieve self-emancipation and true independence.

**Keywords:** *Sons and Lovers*, Oedipus Complex, growth, self

## 1. Introduction

*Sons and Lovers* is one of the representative works of D.H. Lawrence. It was once forbidden for its controversial connection between the son and the mother. The novel is closely related to the author's experience, and it has been studied from multiple perspectives.

### 1.1 Introduction to the Author

D.H. Lawrence, an English writer, is a master of psychological fiction. His novels encompass social problems and the relationship between men and women. He demonstrated that the modern industrialization and wars dehumanized all the individuals and broke the balance between men and women (Liu, 2006). As a novelist, his works include *Sons and Lovers*, *Rainbow*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. *Sons and Lovers* is his most illustrious psychological and autobiographical novel. It was adapted by his personal life experience. The novel describes the failure of Mrs. Morel's marriage, the development of the protagonist, Paul Morel, and the twisted love between mother and son. Paul's whole development from teenager to adult is the main plot. That is to say, *Sons and Lovers* is also a traditional bildungsroman. "*Sons and Lovers* is influenced by Freud's theory of psychoanalysis and his Oedipus complex" (Liu, 2006).

### 1.2 Introduction to *Sons and Lovers*

The story starts from the delusion of a happy married life to the disillusion of the same. When the first son William died of illness, Mrs. Morel became a complete control freak. The protagonist Paul is the second son who is the epitome of D.H. Lawrence. He grows under the quarrels and violence of parents and the control of Mrs. Morel. The conflicts between son and mother develop when Paul grows up and becomes acquainted with his two lovers, Miriam and Clara. Owing to Paul's mother, he has never achieved the perfect relationship with his two lovers. Miriam, a farm girl with exceeding dignity, represents the spiritual love of Paul. On the other hand, Clara is a symbol of physical love. Mrs. Morel is the symbol of the third love for Paul, the Oedipus Complex. Under the strong oedipal feeling, Paul gradually lost himself and he couldn't escape from his mother until Mrs. Morel's death.

Paul's development is the reflection of the defeat of industrialization and the twisted Oedipus complex. There is no doubt that Mrs. Morel's obsessive control is the direct reason that causes Paul's loss of self. At the end of the story, Paul became a derelict when Mrs. Morel died of illness. However, Paul also attains freedom and independence. The underlying themes of *Sons and Lovers* are the defeats of industrial civilization, the distorted love between mother and sons caused by the Oedipus complex, the deficiency of the love between men and

women and the loss of self. The dehumanized industrial revolution deprives individuals of their rights to receive education and their nature. The industrial revolution forces children, like Walter Morel, to earn their living by working in a mine ever since their childhood. Therefore, Walter's rudeness and illiteracy rooted in his lack of education, which makes him become an unaccomplished father and husband. Owing to the absence of husband's love and father's love, Mrs. Morel and Paul develop a kind of distorted and unhealthy love and a sense of dependency that ties up their lives. Besides, the Oedipus complex destroys the growth of Paul, especially in his developing relationship with his lovers. Through the whole story, Paul never accomplishes a complete love. All these defeats contribute to the loss of Paul's self.

## 2. The Oedipus Complex and Its Restraint on Paul

The Oedipus complex, first proposed by the famous psychologist Freud, has had a great impact on Lawrence's life and writing. Lawrence himself is the victim of the Oedipus complex in real life. His work *Sons and Lovers* is more like an autobiographical novel. Through this novel, Lawrence adapted his real life into story and revealed his inner thought and Oedipus complex to the public. The protagonist Paul in the novel is the epitome of Lawrence himself.

### 2.1 *The Oedipus Complex and Paul's Growth*

The Oedipus complex accompanies Paul's whole life and is the first notch element influencing Paul's growth. This kind of complex results from Walter Morel's absence in the lower class and the mother's distorted love. Walter seldom takes care of Paul and Paul couldn't receive enough education from father. Then he has a strong dependence on his mother.

#### 2.1.1 The Oedipus Complex

The Oedipus complex originates from an ancient Greek myth and this myth illustrates a story that Oedipus couldn't escape from destiny, kills his father, and marries his mother (Qin, 2021). The illustrious psychologist Freud assimilated and adapted this myth and put forward a new concept of Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex refers to the fact that children are born with a desire and special love of possessing their heterosexual parents. They are eager for their mother or father's care and love with jealous emotion for the other parent (Zhang, 2020). In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence happens to have the same view with Freud's Oedipus complex. However, Lawrence presents another different kind of oedipal love in this novel. What differentiates Lawrence from Freud is the source of the Oedipus complex. In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul's Oedipus complex comes from Mrs. Morel's overwhelming love of children (Li & Lin, 2015). She is unsatisfied with her husband and couldn't acquire enough care and love from Walter Morel. Therefore, she turns to her sons and treats them as her lovers. Growth under this kind of profound and overwhelming love lays the foundation for Paul's Oedipus complex, which differentiates Lawrence from Freud. The Oedipus Complex is then no longer the nature of children but the result caused by external factors. When one's Oedipus complex develops up to a certain level, it can destroy an individual and oppress one's nature. Paul's Oedipus complex arises from his unhappy family and Mrs. Morel's influence. His distorted emotion inflicts a defeat on his relationship with Miriam and Clara and forces him to pursue the replacement of his mother.

#### 2.1.2 Father's Absence and Paul's Oedipus Complex

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are filled with industrial civilization. Most of the individuals choose to become workers to earn a living. And this might also become the only choice for those from lower class and poor families. Walter Morel was born in a lower class and grew up as a miner. Since he is old enough to work, he has taken the burden early to earn money. Living in such an industrial age, society deprived him of the right to education. Therefore, Walter turns into a coarse and incapable man. The only thing he has a command of is mining. His wife, Mrs. Morel, is born in a middle-class family. She receives a good education and is eager to become a powerful and independent woman.

At first, Walter and Gertrude fall in love with each other at first sight owing to the intensive passion and impulsion. They get married soon. However, when two people are from two totally different families and with elephantine education divergence, it is destined that their marriage would break and fail. In the novel, their divergence starts from the part that Mrs. Morel found that their house was paid for by Walter's mother. She soon realizes that she got deluded by her incapable husband and she may live a poor life forever. When Gertrude's ideal dream burned to ashes, she treated her husband as a stranger and the one who exists for earning money for her family and she turns all her love to her children. Affected by the patriarchal society and his cruel wife, he becomes more and more abusive and addicted to alcohol for comfort. When Mrs. Morel equips their children with overwhelming love, their children are tightly related to her and become further apart from his father, which

leads to Walter's segregation in the family. His wife and his kids do not tolerate him.

When the second son Paul comes into the world, Walter and Gertrude's marriage totally disintegrated and Walter depends more on alcohol to avoid the reality. Gertrude pours so much attention to her children that all children are obsessed with their mother. Walter often insults the mother in front of his children, which strengthens the hatred of children. And when she has conflicts with Walter, the children will all support her in any way instead of their father. In the novel, when Paul was young, he often prays that his father would stop drinking. Sometimes he even prays, "Lord, let my father die" (Lawrence, 2007). This can reveal the profound hatred inside Paul's mind. On the condition of hatred to father, Paul conceives a sense of dependence for Mrs. Morel and shows great care for her. As day goes by, this kind of sense becomes the base of the Oedipus complex. On the other hand, though Mrs. Morel performs cruelty and no love to her husband, she still cares for him in any way due to her instinct as a competent wife. This instinct and patriarchal mind causes Paul's jealousy to his father. Walter is always drinking late and goes home late, but Gertrude still worries him every day. Paul is unsatisfied with his mother's care for father. During his youth, he seldom shares good news to his father and only shares achievements with Mrs. Morel. Once Gertrude asked him to tell Walter that he won a competition in a child's paper, but Walter didn't say a single word to applaud him (Lawrence, 2007). Walter is an unsuccessful father in his family. Walter's absence in the family induces Paul's dependence on his mother, hatred for his father and jealousy of father. These factors contribute to the Oedipus complex.

## *2.2 The Impact of Oedipus Complex on Paul*

Paul's Oedipus complex is based on Mrs. Morel's distorted love and his father's absence on Paul's growth. The Oedipus complex is dominant in Paul's growth. Since Paul was a child, he had already been infatuated with his mother, without proper guidance, he couldn't escape from the influence of this complex.

### *2.2.1 Mother's Distorted Love*

Mrs. Morel grew up in a middle-class family and received a good education. She inherits her father's arrogance and aggressive character. She hates her husband's violence, abuse, and addiction to alcohol. But she is also stuck in her religious belief and traditional patriarchal education which teaches her to be an employable wife. Although she knows that her husband always goes home late for drinking, she still worries about his safety. On the condition of lack of enough love and care from husband, she spends all her vigor on her children, especially the boys.

Since Morels' marriage is at a low ebb, Mrs. Morel has thought little of Walter and even ignored his existence. But she is still responsible for the family. She takes good care of their children and cooks for his husband. The only thing she can search for comfort is her boys. During Paul's childhood, Mrs. Morel often complains about her husband in front of Paul. Gradually, Paul seems to provide a place for her to relieve her feelings and dissatisfaction. This kind of complaint arouses Paul's sympathy for his mother and it even transforms into love between a dependent man and an unhappy housewife.

Influenced by her husband, Mrs. Morel makes up her mind that Paul couldn't step into his father's life. She infuses the idea that Paul should work hard and raise himself up to the middle or higher class instead of being a coarse and uneducated coal miner. Therefore, Paul grows up as a well-educated and civilized artist.

Besides, she initiates an idea that she can cultivate her son to become her omnipotent lover. This intention exerts a great impact on Paul's growth, especially when Paul makes acquaintance with his two lovers, Miriam, and Clara. Paul's two complicated relationships prove that Mrs. Morel succeeds in controlling Paul's life and forcing him to become a puppet lover. When Paul gets along with his lovers, Mrs. Morel is jealous and discontent. Mrs. Morel once experienced her first son William's death and is afraid of losing Paul, thus, she takes all the girls who are close to Paul as her enemies and rivals in Paul's love. There is one time when Paul and Miriam go out and come back late, Mrs. Morel then insinuates to speak ill of Miriam. She says, "She must be wonderfully fascinating, that you can't get away from her, but must go trailing eight miles at this time of night" (Lawrence, 2007). All these behaviors enhance Paul's Oedipus complex.

Dating back to Paul's childhood, Mrs. Morel takes the burden alone to take care of all the children in the family. So obviously, all the children including Paul have the nature to remain in touch with their mother. William, as the first son, earns a living for the family early. Then Paul becomes the only boy who is old enough to accompany their mother and has heart-to-heart talks with Mrs. Morel all the time. There is no doubt that Paul is the child that understands Mrs. Morel the most and receives the biggest impact from her. Educated by the mother, Paul reveals the talent for art and despises his father's vulgar job. Under the effect of Oedipus complex, sometimes he would be jealous of William and his father Walter because they take parts of Mrs. Morel's love and attention. When

William goes out to work and Walter breaks his legs and stays in the hospital, Paul feels delighted that he is the only man in the whole family. He can monopolize his mother. On the other hand, he would do anything to please his mother. When he is nineteen, he only earns a few shillings. But as long as it can help the family and please Mrs. Morel, Paul would feel happy.

When Paul grows into an adult, the Oedipus complex upgrades into a new level. When he has affection for Miriam, his Oedipus complex successfully hinders his love. As long as Mrs. Morel shows hatred and jealousy for Miriam, a kind of boredom sprouts in Paul's mind. And when Paul is together with Clara, although Mrs. Morel learnt from Miriam and didn't show much aversion. Paul still can't find himself from Clara because she is different from his mother.

As for Mrs. Morel, she is the potential lover under the effect of Oedipus complex. Paul enjoys the time with his mother. Paul has intimate behaviors and a dubious relationship with Mrs. Morel. In *Sons and Lovers*, for instance, "He kissed her forehead that he knew so well: the deep marks between the brows, the rising of the fine hair, greying now, and the profound setting of the temples. His hand lingered on her shoulder after his kiss. Then he went slowly to bed" (Lawrence, 2007). As an audience, their behavior reveals the forbidden love between mother and son.

### 2.2.2 Paul's Loss of Self

Paul's loss of self is predetermined by his family and mother. The developing Oedipus complex forces him to be obedient to his mother. Everything he did was under the shadow of Mrs. Morel.

The first phase of Paul's life is tightly connected with Mrs. Morel. Before Paul is together with Miriam, there is no thought in his mind to fight against Mrs. Morel. According to Chinese scholar Zhang Zhenbo, "In Paul's childhood, Paul needed a model to receive the power to grow, so he turned to his mother, at first he did everything for entertaining his mother" (2016). When Mrs. Morel wants Paul to study art and literature; he soon shows great fascination with painting. When Mrs. Morel hates Miriam and doesn't want Paul to stay all the time with her. These details all reveal the fact that Paul never makes his own decision and all the decisions he used to make are guided by his mother.

When Mrs. Morel gives birth to Paul, she and her husband are in a pinch. Their relationship is totally broken and may never be fixed. The absence of a father and husband traumatizes everyone. Paul is the one who gets closest to Mrs. Morel. He is influenced most by his mother. Therefore, he grows a stronger Oedipus complex than William. Under Mrs. Morel's twisted love, Paul becomes more dependent on his mother.

## 3. Paul's Pursuit for Independence

Paul's search for independence embodies the pursuit of love and the need for economic independence. It begins from his relationship with Miriam. And it develops after the relationship with Clara. Except for the external reason, Paul also devotes himself to painting to be an independent individual.

### 3.1 Platonic Love Between Paul and Miriam

Miriam is a farm girl living next door to the Morels. She is a pious Christian and thinks highly of herself, although she knows that she is just a farm girl. She admires Paul's talent and is attracted by Paul. However, she is too afraid of losing Paul and doesn't want Paul to hold the view that she is a normal girl like others. Sometimes she even thinks that she used to be a princess. From her inside, she despises other frivolous and libertine women. And she doesn't want Paul to despise her just like her father and brothers. Paul is an educated and cosmopolitan man in Miriam's mind, which is different from her rude and illiterate brothers. Thus, she fell in love with him. Her spiritual need is fully achieved when she is together with him. Owing to the strong sense of dependency for Paul, she desires to possess and control him. Lawrence depicts in *Sons and Lovers*, "Then he was so ill, and she felt he would be weak. Then she could love him. If she could be mistress of him in his weakness, take care of him, if he could depend on her, if she could, as it were, have him in her arms, how she would love him" (2007). That is to say, Miriam is obsessed with possessing Paul, especially in the spiritual aspect. She wants to be totally connected with Paul's soul. Their love has never been fully physical. Every time when Paul tries to get body contact with her, she always avoids and refuses due to her strong religious beliefs. Also, Paul is restrained by the powerful Oedipus complex and feels confused about their relationship. Their love is always being attacked by various reasons, Miriam's religious belief forces her to be an innocent and noble one. Paul's Oedipus complex leads to his disorder of love and the different value of love breaks their relationship.

Miriam is the lover who has most in common with Mrs. Morel. She was nearly the soulmate for Paul. Miriam and Mrs. Morel both desire to occupy and control Paul. When she is together with Paul, Mrs. Morel felt intimidated by Miriam and spoke ill of her to let Paul get away from Miriam. Paul couldn't figure out the reason

why Mrs. Morel is fed up with Miriam but he doesn't want his mother his mother depressed so he starts to keep distance from Miriam.

For Paul, Miriam is the substitute of his mother. In the book, Miriam shows her great control of her five-year-old brother. She holds her brother tightly in order to express her powerful love, which is similar to the fact that Mrs. Morel is obsessive with controlling Paul's life. Although Mrs. Morel and Miriam both have a sense of arrogance and they both desire for possessing Paul, Paul can easily sense the loss of freedom when they are together. As Xie Jingjing and Huang Lin harbor the idea that Paul and Miriam's relationship is not equal. Miriam admires Paul's talent and she is frightened that Paul may disdain her just like her brothers. And in the case of supercilious religious belief, Miriam and Paul only unite in spirit. They never admit the fact that they are lovers. It is Miriam who compels Paul to revolt against his mother. She broke the amicable relationship between Mrs. Morel and Paul. Paul starts to conceive a thought to question his mother's control. He definitely loves Miriam, but every time they become closer to each other, Paul gets hesitant, because the woman in front of her causes his mother's dissatisfaction. On the other hand, Miriam exerts great impact on Paul's art. They have the same hobbies to communicate with each other. Miriam can also provide some inspiration for him.

Therefore, Paul's search of self begins from the relationship with Miriam but this relationship fails because the same possessive desire drives Paul crazy.

### *3.2 Corporal Love Between Paul and Clara*

Unlike Miriam, Clara is a married woman. She is an independent feminist and earns money by herself. The first time when Paul met Clara, he was immediately attracted by her appearance and body. Her husband cheated on her so she departs from her husband. When Paul is together with her, he doesn't have the burden of marrying her. Because Paul and Clara's relationship is based on passion and sex, sometimes Clara refuses to communicate spiritually with Paul, and is cruel to Paul, which makes him worth nothing. Clara symbolizes the freedom of Paul's body.

After Paul broke up with Miriam, he hooks up with Clara and attains corporal need which is never accomplished in the relationship with Miriam. At first, they fell in love because of their passion. Their relationship is just like a new married couple. Clara shows great respect for Mrs. Morel because she knows that Mrs. Morel is vital in Paul's mind. By this time, Mrs. Morel learned from Miriam and didn't express the dissatisfaction of Paul's lovers. Instead, Mrs. Morel secretly competes with Clara. When Clara comes to visit her, she dresses up as if she is going to take part in a splendid party. Mrs. Morel didn't meddle in Paul and Clara's relationship a lot, because she knows that Clara is a profligate woman and would never marry Paul and steal Paul from her.

Clara meets the corporal need for Paul, but they are two different kinds of individuals. Clara can't understand Paul's job and his ambition, while Paul stands on the patriarchal view to communicate with her. As a feminist, Clara has difficulties in matching Paul's soul. The loss of spiritual contacts reminds Paul of Miriam. Sometimes he would show solicitude for Miriam. Paul and Clara's relationship is based on passion and sex. Paul belongs to the day and only in the night he can contact with Clara based on sex. Influenced by Clara, Paul becomes aloof from his mother. He didn't tell anything about his relationship to his mother anymore. That means that Paul is freer than ever before and attempts to keep away from his mother's meddling in his relationship. In the meantime, when Paul speaks of Clara's husband, they always end up quarreling. Although Clara broke up with her husband, she still comes back to her husband and can't get away from him.

In this second relationship, Paul lost the spiritual communication with his partner and they were doomed to fail. During this relationship, Clara not only emancipates Paul's body from Mrs. Morel but also tries to control Paul's body. The control of body also traumatizes Paul and forces him to cherish the memory of Miriam, the one who perfectly matches and imprisons his soul. The comparison with soul and body contributes to their failure. With the communication of soul, Paul and Clara's conflicts emerge as time goes by, especially when Clara comes back to her husband. After leaving Clara, Paul earns the freedom of body.

### *3.3 Devotion to Work*

Paul's devotion to work is a turn in his life. When he is old enough to leave his mother, he can release his body from his mother. When Paul grows up, he gradually develops a thought that he wants to be a responsible man and take the burden of taking care of family.

Paul's first job at the age of 14 is to write letters in a factory. When he earns a modicum of money, he is exuberant that he can help with his mother for the sake of family. The Oedipus complex drives Paul to become an independent folk to help mitigate the family stress and make Mrs. Morel happy. When Paul is together with Miriam, he develops a talent for painting. Miriam would watch and enjoy Paul's paintings, sometimes their

conversation even provides art inspiration for Paul. Through years of hard work, Paul eventually can earn his living by selling his painting. And at that time, he can finally tell Mrs. Morel with confidence that he wants to become a famous artist (Lawrence, 2007). At the age of 20, Paul's little brother and sister both begin to enjoy themselves and leave the family. However, only Paul still accompanies his mother and his soul is still stuck in Mrs. Morel's influence. This gets Paul more depressed about his mother. After the death of Mrs. Morel, Paul liberates his soul and sets out for the cities to live a new life independently.

Paul's two relationships mean he gradually successfully separates his soul and body from his mother. With Miriam, he finds freedom for his soul but his body remains under the control of Mrs. Morel. While with Clara he attains self of body but fails in finding his soul. The two relationships prove the fact that Paul never stops attempting to be independent of his mother, although he always fails. When he begins to earn his own living, he acquires the money to become economically independent. When he is working in a factory and away from Mrs. Morel, on one hand, wants to earn money to support the family to make his mother happy. On the other hand, he breaks his mother's expectation that Paul could get into the middle or upper class to be a famous or decent individual. However, Paul only wants to be a normal man like others and doesn't want to depend on the ethereal relationship with his lovers and mother. And his working in the factory gives Paul a break from his mother's complete control and lets him acquire his transient freedom. Mrs. Morel starts to feel unknown about his son and stops judging Paul's life. He starts to seek independence and a relationship without his mother's impact. Although Mrs. Morel's impact is far-reaching and inseparable in Paul, Paul's value of love still develops and he gets more clearer about what he really wants without his mother. Paul's devotion to work symbolizes the beginning of freedom from his mother.

#### **4. Paul's Search for Self**

Paul has suffered from the Oedipus complex for a long time, which leads to his difficulties in realizing the complete self and captivity in his mother's control. Since his childhood, he makes a great deal of attempts to search for himself and never succeeds. Those failures increase his solitude and loss. Then Mrs. Morel's death puts Paul in the vital pinch of searching for himself.

##### *4.1 Mrs. Morel's Death*

Although Paul makes attempts to find himself his whole life, he never succeeds. Until his mother died of a tumor, he can finally get away from his mother.

During Mrs. Morel's last years, she suffered from a tumor and got more haggard day by day. Paul spent most of his time taking care of her and drawing a portrait of his mother which later became his the most satisfied picture. However, Mrs. Morel got worse. As time goes by, on the one hand, out of Oedipus complex, Paul wishes his mother to live, on the other hand, he wishes her to die soon so that he can earn his freedom, so he becomes contradictory to the sickness of Mrs. Morel. But he is also unwilling to watch his mother die. He has been watching his mother suffer from the pain in life and abuse of husband since his childhood. No one in this family understands more of the agony of Mrs. Morel than Paul. Paul is weak and gets sick easily so he tightly depended on his mother during his childhood. Nevertheless, his soul is chained by Mrs. Morel. Only if Mrs. Morel died can he accomplish himself and be an independent and perfect individual. After a struggle in mind and communication with his little sister, he decided to cut the nutrition in Mrs. Morel's food and feed her some hypnotics. Then Mrs. Morel died with a peaceful face. At first Paul lost the will and hope to live. All the things around him become ethereal and meaningless, including painting and his lovers. He felt anxious and depressed all day and couldn't pay attention to painting. He started getting addicted to alcohol just like his father and accosting every woman he meets. He spends his time in vain by achieving nothing. Mrs. Morel was once his whole life's hope and master of Paul's destiny. She broke Paul's life but she also filled the blanks in Paul's life. Without her, Paul lost the only true lovers in his life just like losing his life. He becomes another stranger. No one except Mrs. Morel becomes Paul's hope in life. Clara only wants to possess Paul's body, while Miriam imprisons Paul's soul and she is confident to think that Paul would come back to her eventually because God tells her. Mrs. Morel's death does traumatize Paul but its effect doesn't totally defeat him. He is as stubborn as his mother and wouldn't admit the fact that he is defeated by his mother and reality. His personality and Mrs. Morel's death push him to fight against the agony and reality. He becomes a free bird and can make any decision by himself. His mother's death also lets Paul understand that his two lovers Clara and Miriam both are not suitable for him and both made his life painful just like his mother did.

After the death of Paul's beloved mother, his self almost vanished again and became a derelict. But he also chooses to explore the bright future in a big city.

#### 4.2 Paul's Search for Life

Paul's search for his life never stops when he becomes an adult. In his youth, he is eager to be an independent man to carry the burden for his family. Because under the education of his mother, he doesn't want to be a man like his father but he still breaks the expectation of Mrs. Morel to be in the middle or higher class. When he accomplishes his economic independence, he attains more ways to explore the meaning of life. In other aspects, Paul never stops from seeking for true love. Although his mother is always an obstacle for him in his two relationships with Miriam and Clara, he still got different liberation from his lovers. When he is with Miriam, his soul separates from his mother and goes into Miriam. When he is with Clara, his body is extricated by Clara. Neither of his relationships become fully extricated in soul and body. But they awaken Paul from the ethereal love of his mother. The final relief happened when Mrs. Morel died. Without the Oedipus complex which separates his body and soul, he could make his own decisions and is no longer stuck in his mother's prison.

After Morel's death, Paul couldn't stand watching his mother suffering pain, so he decided to put a great amount of morphine in her milk to help her release from pain. Mrs. Morel's death totally changes Paul's life. Although the mother's death perturbs Paul, Paul finally gets away from his mother and he has more choices to make. He is no longer imprisoned and controlled by his mother. With hesitation, he meets with Miriam again and has thought that he would marry her, but he didn't want to follow the same road. His mother and his Oedipus complex have already broken this relationship with Miriam. If he follows the old road, he may fail again and lose himself again. Paul knows that Miriam is like his mother. If he chooses her, Miriam would be the substitute of Mrs. Morel to control him. Miriam still holds the thought that she possesses Paul's soul and love. He didn't admit the truth that he will be defeated and controlled by another woman again. Therefore, he made up his mind to head for the city to find the true and complete self. Paul wouldn't come back to the darkness again and died from the agony and failure in life as his mother did. He clearly knows that he wouldn't get back to the darkness in his life and he would rather choose to accelerate his pace to a city which is full of brightness and hope (Xie, 2022).

Throughout his whole life, Paul's searching for self always ends up in failure but it is these failures that contributed to his final relief and independence. Every attempt makes him closer to a complete self and cultivates his will.

#### 4.3 Connotation of Paul's Choice

After Mrs. Morel's death, Paul makes decisions to restart his whole life. His choices all reveal his bright future and freedom.

Paul's hesitation about putting a quantity of morphine to release his mother is a choice for him to get away with her. He couldn't be tolerant with the painful look in his beloved mother but he also wanted to escape from her to have a normal relationship with others. Therefore, after an inner struggle, he chooses to release Mrs. Morel. This choice means that he is no longer controlled by his mother and he can revive from the Oedipus complex.

Another decision made by Paul is that he refused to marry Miriam and head for the city to enjoy a new life. Miriam is the embodiment of Mrs. Morel. At first, Paul hesitates whether to marry Miriam and he proposes this idea for her. But when Miriam asked him, he expressed his true thoughts. He didn't want to repave the old way in his life. He also knows that Miriam has an overwhelming sense of possessiveness, which may lead him to losing himself again. In *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence depicts, "Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly" (Lawrence, 2007). Gold phosphorescence symbolizes Paul's bright future. After the two relationships with Miriam and Clara, he picks up the importance of unity of soul and body. Only if he achieves this kind of unity, can he find himself in a relationship.

Through a whole life of failure, Paul gradually understands what he wants. Every day he wanted to leave his mother, although the Oedipus complex tells him to follow his mother and stops him from revolting. Mrs. Morel's death gives Paul a new opportunity to revive, he can restart his whole life in the bright city instead of being stuck in a mining town with his mother. His choice of getting into a city reveals that he gets rid of the influence of the Oedipus complex. His mother's shadow wouldn't accompany him anymore. What happened in Paul's future may be the same as Lawrence's. He will become a famous artist while Lawrence is a famous writer and novelist.

### 5. Conclusion

*Sons and Lovers*, as an autobiographical novel, depicts the Protagonist Paul's search of self through his whole life. Paul is the epitome of Lawrence's whole life. Since Paul's childhood, the defeat of family has brought traumas. The absence of a father in the family and his mother's distorted love contributed to his twisted Oedipus

complex. This kind of Oedipus complex causes Paul's dependence on mother and the cognitive difficulties in his two relationships with Clara and Miriam. Under the Oedipus complex, Paul struggles against his mother and his two lovers. His soul is imprisoned by his mother. All of Paul's behavior and choices can't separate him from his mother's influences. Whenever Paul wants to escape from his mother or fight against his mother, he can't stand leaving his mother alone and seeing depression and agony on his mother. When Paul grows into an adult, he is confronted with searching for himself and his two lovers. When he is together with Miriam, he attaches importance to spirit and soul, he and Miriam are soulmates for each other. However, his mother's jealousy and Miriam's refusal of corporal combination with Paul doom to break their relationship. With Clara, Paul never has contact in soul. They are two different individuals in their world view. They fell in love with each other only for physical aspects. In the end, Clara chooses to go back to her husband which means Paul and his love failed. With the influence of Miriam, he develops a talent with art and painting. With the pursuit of independence, he finally became a professional artist who could earn his living by selling his paintings.

At the end of the story, Paul's choice of ending his mother's life in advance is the result that he wants to get rid of his mother and he doesn't want his mother to keep suffering from the pain of the tumor. Then Paul makes another choice to venture in a big city, which implies his bright future. Without his mother, he can finally choose to be himself. He may have had a normal relationship from then on and wasn't confused by the imbalance between soul and body.

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