

CLARA DAWES:

Clara Dawes is the sensuous older woman who comes to replace Miriam as the love interest in Paul's life. It is with Clara that Paul learns the importance of sex as humanity's deepest link with nature and the cosmos.

Clara is depicted as a new twentieth-century woman. She's a feminist before it was fashionable. Determined to be independent, she leaves her husband, earns her own living and has an extramarital affair with Paul. Clara can be viewed as representative of the many post-Victorian women who rebelled against the traditional image of woman as the "weaker sex." Clara is extraordinarily intelligent, with a good critical mind. But you get little demonstration of this aspect of her personality, since the story concentrates on her physical attractiveness to Paul,

Clara, unlike Miriam, is bursting with a lusty, animal passion. She is Paul's match for fearlessness, sensuality, and intelligence. At the same times she lacks Miriam's spirituality and sensitivity. Without these qualities, can she stimulate Paul's work as an artist?

At first Clara acts condescending to Paul. He's convinced she hates all men. She's certainly bitter about male/female relationships. Her husband Baxter brutalized her and was unfaithful. Does this mean that she hates men, or that she's had an unsatisfying married life?

Later, when Paul delivers a message to Clara at her mother's home, you see quite another side of this proud, independent woman. She's humiliated and exhausted by her sweatshop labour, as she and her

mother spend rough hours making lace. Even though they have the 'freedom to work at home rather than on an assembly line at one of Nottingham's many factories, these women are still exploited, underpaid victims of the industrial system.

Paul helps Clara get back her old overseer's job at Jordan's, and they become good friends through his generosity. Their subsequent love affair gives them both a new, expansive sense of life. With Clara, Paul finds the sensual fulfilment he can't have with either Miriam or his mother. Paul awakens Clara's sexuality, something she missed with her husband.

Some readers feel that Clara is the least successful of the major characters in *Sons and Lovers*. They believe she comes across merely as a vehicle for Paul's passion and as a very shallow caricature of the "new woman."

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