

A Critical Approach to Sons and Lovers from Point of View the Oedipus Complex Theory

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Abstract

Oedipus the Rex theory refers to son and mother relationship psychologically. The idea of the Oedipus Complex is derived from Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus which Oedipus learnt that he was cursed to kill his father and sleep with his mother. Inspired by Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and his analyses of his own and patients' psychological behavior, Sigmund Freud developed the Oedipus complex. Freud believed that dreams are suppressed oedipal urges, and that these urges are universal to humankind. Opposition to the theory's name is common, since many believe that Oedipus Rex has a profounder meaning than Freud asserts. Through the content of the play, Sigmund Freud supports his complex by shining light on Oedipus's tragic, yet inevitable prophecy. The Oedipus complex was developed by the famous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. The complex describes Freud's theory of psychosexual stages of development in children, particularly boys. It denotes a boy's feelings of lust and desire for the mother, and jealousy and envy for the father. The boy views the father as a rival for possession of his mother's love and affection (Cherry). Likewise, the Electra complex, a term coined by Freud's student Carl Gustav Jung, describes a similar idea that young girls compete with their mothers for their father's attention (Wiesen). Freud, however, despised this term since it "seeks to emphasize the analogy between the attitude of the two sexes" (Cherry). Instead, he refers to the female variant of his theory as the "feminine Oedipus attitude" and or the "negative Oedipus complex" (Freud,

Sigmund

Schlomo).

Freud also delves into sibling relationships concerning his theory. He believes that sibling relationships do not have an independent purpose outside of the Oedipus complex. Siblings of opposite sexes act as *doppelgängers* of their parents, where a son can desire his sister in place of his mother and vice-versa, whereas same-sex siblings become rivals of each other, vying for their parents' affection. When Freud was about one and a half years old, his mother gave birth to a second son, Julius. Freud recalls feelings of resentment of his younger brother who was consuming his mother's attention. Less than a year later, Julius passed away, leaving Freud with a lingering sense of guilt throughout the rest of his life. According to Freud, the Oedipus complex arises in the third stage of his five psychosexual development stages; the phallic stage, which occurs between the ages 3-6. Out of the five stages – (i) the oral, (ii) the anal, (iii) the phallic, (iv) the latent, and (v) the genital — the phallic stage primarily focuses on the genitals. The child unconsciously desires the parent of the opposite sex; however, boys fear that the father will punish them. This fear, termed castration anxiety, helps the boy to suppress his desire for his mother, and the young male eventually moves into the fourth stage; the latent stage. In this stage, the boy begins to identify with his father as a means of vicariously possessing his mother. On the other hand, a young girl experiences “penis envy,” in which she blames her mother for her perceived castration.

Keywords: Sigmund Freudian Psychology, Relationship between Sons and Mother, Oedipus Complex.

Introduction

Sigmund Freud and his Oedipus complex are among the most often discussed critical and contentious issues of modern psychology and literature. Freud has brought lot of controversies in the field of modern psychology and literary trend through his theory Oedipus complex. Contrariwise, in some other assessor's notions his concept of Oedipus complex deserves a great deal of appreciation. Nonetheless, prominent English novelist D.H. Lawrence is one of those modern writers who are greatly influenced by Freudian theories and have been promoting Freud's notions through their works. His “sons and lovers” are considered as one of the most modern as well as controversial novels of the twentieth century. In this fiction, the protagonist Paul's extremely emotional dealings with his mother are the illustration of Doctor Freud's psychological theory Oedipus complex. Nevertheless, this paper aims to critically analyze the facts lying with the hallucination of Oedipus complex as it is presented in “Sons and Lovers”. The evaluation is conducted liberally and objectively as well as through comparisons between

the central characters of Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers" and Sophocles' King Oedipus. This attempt also tends to judge the universality of Freud's claim particularly sexual theory with the help of modern biological experiments and the result of relevant laboratory tests, conducted by eminent psychologists and psychiatrists. In short, the critique ultimately endeavors to find out a factual solution for the controversies, raised by Oedipus complex, with the help of logic, fact and scientific researches.

Psychoanalysis is a psychological approach that focuses on the concepts of Sigmund Freud and helps us to understand human behavior. D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers (1913) is a text that cries out for a psychoanalytic interpretation. One of Freud's most famous theories is the Oedipus complex, which deals with a child's emerging sexuality. Freud used the story of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex to help illustrate his theory. In the story, Oedipus unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. According to Freud, all male children form an erotic attachment to their mother and are jealous of the relationship the father has with the mother. The male child fears he will be castrated by the father so he represses the sexual desire for the mother and waits for his own sexual experience. However, if the boy does not fulfill these steps, then he will carry the oedipal complex with him into adulthood (Dobie 52-53). As a result, having this complex makes it very difficult to form adult relationships with others. In other words, if the child never grows out of this type of behavior, he will be dysfunctional in adulthood.

The Oedipus complex theory attracted attention in 1910 when psychoanalyst Ernest Jones published Hamlet and Oedipus. Freud had already applied his theory to literature, but this was the first time the Oedipus complex had been emphasized in a major literary work such as Hamlet. The character of Hamlet shows signs of having a repressed Oedipus complex in the relationship he has with his mother (Guerin 161-162). In Sons and Lovers, Gertrude Morel has a dysfunctional relationship with her two sons, William and Paul. Therefore, the text is conducive to this type of analysis because the Oedipus complex and other psychoanalytic concepts are displayed so vividly in their relationships.

The beginning of the Oedipus complex appearing in William and Paul is exemplified in the relationship between the parents. The boys witness an abusive marriage in which Walter Morel often comes home drunk after squandering the family's income gambling. All of this causes the boys to hate their father and be sympathetic and protective towards their mother.

In their mother, the children see someone who is good and pure. She, in turn, keeps her sons all to herself and sheltered from their father. By this act, Gertrude Morel is unconsciously molding her sons into what she wants, so eventually they can take the place of her husband. She is clearly unhappy in her marriage, so she tries to live vicariously through her sons. This is the stimulus

that allows the oedipal attachment to form in the two boys.

William is the oldest son and the mother's favorite. He does everything he can to please her. Sibling rivalry exists between William and Paul as they compete for their mother's affection. Mrs. Morel becomes jealous of William's female companions and he eventually moves to London. William's moving to London was his unconscious way of trying to break free from the oedipal attachment to his mother. In London, William meets a girl by the name of Lily. They become engaged but William is not happy. He has a misogynistic attitude towards her. It is very clear Lily does not possess the good qualities he sees in his mother and it angers and frustrates him.

William exhibits classic symptoms of displacement. When William voices his dissatisfaction with Lily, his mother asks him to reconsider marrying her. He responds, "Oh well, I've gone too far to break it off now (Lawrence 130). These conflicted feelings that William is experiencing are a sign of his apparent struggle to rid himself of the oedipal fixation and the reader is not surprised when William eventually gets sick and dies.

After William dies, Paul takes his place as his mother's favorite. By her actions, one would think she thought of him as a suitor. This is evident when she accepts a bottle of perfume spray from him. "Pretty!" she said in a curious tone, of a woman accepting a love-token (Lawrence 69). As Paul reaches adulthood, it is quite evident the Oedipus complex has taken him over. His relationship with his father is strained and he becomes jealous of him. He even asks his mother not to sleep with the father anymore (Lawrence 215).

Paul meets Miriam Leivers and although he likes her, he repeats the same misogynistic behavior as William did with Lily. He feels he would be betraying his mother by being with her. However, the idea that Paul is interested in someone other than his mother shows an attempt to break the oedipal fixation he has. But, the mother foils this attempt by making him feel guilty for wanting to be with Miriam. She says, "I can't bear it. I could let another woman – but not her. She'd leave me no room, not a bit of room. And I've never -- you know Paul -- I've never had a husband, not really" (Lawrence 212).

This same behavior the mother exhibited with William, by being jealous of his female companions, is now being inflicted on Paul. She reinforces the Oedipus complex that is within Paul by suffocating him and in a subtle way asking him to replace her husband. Paul's relationship with Miriam is reduced to friendship. He has to repress any romantic feelings that he might have for her, so she will not replace his mother. Later in the novel, Paul does become physically intimate with Miriam, but it is short-lived

because Paul will not marry her. This also shows that Paul suffers from a fear of intimacy as he continues to remain emotionally detached from Miriam. Once again, Paul succumbs to the oedipal attachment for his mother. However, Paul does have an affair with a married but separated woman by the name of Clara Dawes. Paul allows himself to have this relationship because he knows that realistically this relationship can never go anywhere. She would never divorce her husband. Therefore, Clara is not a threat to Paul's oedipal fixation to his mother. There is no danger of her taking his mother's place.

Paul's mother becomes ill. Since she is bedridden and in pain, Paul gives her morphine. However, he administers an overdose of morphine to her, which leads to her death. While this might be seen as euthanasia, it seems equally likely that killing his mother was Paul's unconscious way of releasing himself from the Oedipus complex once and for all. Her death leaves Paul devastated and alone. Although much time has passed, Miriam still wants to be with Paul, but he refuses. It is clear that even after his mother's death, he is still not free from his attachment to her because he chooses to remain alone. The dysfunctional relationship with his mother is still present in Paul's life and it appears the Oedipus complex is still intact.

By applying psychoanalytic criticism to Sons and Lovers, one can gain a better understanding of the text. What may at first look like unbelievable behaviors can be understood and recognized by using this type of criticism. Psychoanalysis adequately explains the relationships within the Morel family. It also allows us to see the Oedipus complex, which is so blatant throughout Sons and Lovers.

Conclusion

To sum up, we may safely be said that "Oedipus Complex" is a phrase. It means the excessive affection of a child for the parent of the opposite sex to him or herself. Actually, it is a theory invented by a modern psychologist, Sigmund Freud. In other words, it means that a mother's love for her son and a son's love for his mother are fundamentally based upon the attraction between opposite sexes. According to an ancient myth, a man called Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother. But in the case of that myth, Oedipus had performed both those deeds in complete ignorance of his relationship with the man whom he killed and the woman whom he married. In the final moment, we come to know that the man he killed was his father and the woman he married was his mother. The nature of Paul's relationship with his mother reflects "Oedipus Complex" in this novel.

William had been Mrs. Morel's favorite son. She had been lavishing all her love and affection upon him. She had been cherishing high ambitions about his future. She had been feeling very proud of him. Especially she had felt proud when he got a job in London on a decent salary. She felt a little disappointed when he fell in love with a superficial girl, Lily Western. William had loved his mother deeply too. He London had been very fond of her. That is why; when he had gone to London he kept writing loving letters to her. Now, the love between William and Mrs. Morel was not a case of ordinary love between a mother and her son. The William's as an example of "Oedipus Complex".

After the death of her oldest son, Paul becomes the focus of her life. But Paul has a love relationship with Miriam. Mrs. Morel does not tolerate (bear) the absorbing nature of Miriam. Mrs. Morel thinks that she is becoming neglected by her son Paul because of his relationship with Miriam. Paul's mother cannot bear it in any way. At that time, Paul tries to console his mother by telling that he loves his mother not Miriam. His home with his mother is the real centre of attraction. But his mother cannot understand it. She again and again tells that she cannot bear it at any cost. Even she says that she can let another woman for her son but not Miriam because she leaves no room, but a bit of room for Mrs. Morel. Here this extract shows the Oedipus complex. Here Paul's love with Miriam is neglected by his mother because his mother does not let it and cannot bear it. About Miriam Mrs. Morel says:

"I can't bear it. I could let another woman- but not her-she'd leave me no room, not a bit of room."

Paul's excessive love for his mother and her excessive love for him did not mean that there were no differences of opinion between them and that there were no conflicts of any kind between them. A complete identification between any two human beings is impossible. The major difference between Paul and his mother related to Miriam. Paul had fallen in love with Miriam but his mother did not like her. On various occasions Paul asked his mother why she could not bear Miriam. His mother always told him that Miriam was not the right kind of girl for him. This answer would not satisfy him. On such occasions he would therefore begin to hate her mother. This fact would not be ignored. It was a part of "Oedipus Complex".

Similarly, Mrs. Morel's love for Paul had an element of anguish in it, because she was all the time feeling uneasy over the thought that Paul was wasting his time and energy over the wrong girl. Later, Mrs. Morel wanted Paul to give up his friendship even with Clara because Clara was a married woman. Paul had developed a sexual relationship with Miriam; but he could not

discuss this matter with his mother. At the same time, he had developed a sexual relationship with Clara; he could not discuss the subject with his mother. It was another part of “Oedipus Complex”.

There is another touch of “Oedipus Complex” in Paul’s love relationship with his mother. His love for her even proved an obstacle in the way of his loving any other woman in a normal manner. When she felt ill, he again showed extraordinary devotion to her. During her illness he had no peace of mind at all. Tears would flow from his eyes when he saw her suffering. And she would always urge him not to shed tears. He spoke to Clara about his mother’s lingering illness. The longer the illness continued, the greater was Paul’s misery. All day long he was very worried about his mother. It was a long pain which made him feel feverish. He often addressed his mother as “Pigeon” and “my Little”, as if she were his sweetheart and sweet lover. The phrase “Oedipus Complex” correctly describes Paul’s attitude towards his mother.

Thus the days passed, the weeks, and the months. When his mother died, Paul felt that his life is empty and meaningless. It was with a great effort that he was able to persuade himself that his mother was still alive, though she was now living in another world. It was because of the feeling that his mother was still sharing his life that he was able to reconcile himself to his existence. It was because of this feeling that he was able to make up his mind to strive to achieve something. It was this feeling which saved him from despair and from suicide.

“Oedipus Complex” is a leading theme of this novel. In this novel, the novelist has concentrated his attention largely on the relationship between Paul and his mother. Actually, the novelist has not invented this relationship; he has only described his own experience with his mother. Paul is D H. Lawrence himself; and Paul’s mother is Lawrence’s own mother. So we may say that the central theme of *Sons and Lovers* may best be described as “Oedipus Complex”.

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