



Paul Morel's Oedipus Complex in *Sons and Lovers*

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Abstract

The oedipus complex is a term that proposed by Freud, who was a psychologist in Italy. After detailing the source of the Oedipus complex and the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex, it can be seen that the 20th century British writer Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* is the strong evidence of the Oedipus complex. The protagonist of the novel, Paul, whose behaviors reflect the Oedipus complex. Lawrence explores the twisted human nature and soul in this novel, and criticized that Modern western industrial civilization destructs natural instincts of human beings.

Key words: Oedipus complex; *Sons and lovers*; Tragedy of life; Abnormal love

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INTRODUCTION

Oedipus is the protagonist of *King Oedipus* written by ancient writer Mr. Fox, he was the son of a king. Finally, he inadvertently killed his father and married his real mother. Austrian psychologist Freud named this kind of psychological symptoms, Oedipus complex.

In psychoanalysis, a child, especially a male child has a subconscious sexual desire, for the opposite sex of parent, at the same time, usually has hostility to the same sex of parent. If it is unresolved naturally, this complex may result in an inability to form normal sexual relationships when they become a man or a woman.

Freud thinks that boys have a kind of psychology of loving mother and hating father from childhood, this kind of psychology would gradually disappear with growth of the age. Because of mother's preference for sons, boys produce a special kind of tender feeling towards their mother, taking mother for his own possessions, at the same time, regarding father as their enemy and wanting to take place in the position of father. Therefore, Oedipus complex is also called "Mother Fixation". In the 20th century, the work *Sons and Loves* aroused a great sensation in the literature world.

D. H. Lawrence, an English writer of the 20th century, is one of the most important people in English literature. He tried his best to pursuit man's soul in his works, which have been paid great attention in the literary world. *Sons and Lovers*, containing many autobiographical details, is Lawrence's masterpiece. It tells the story of a miner's family-the Morel family. Mrs. Morel was disillusioned with her husband, who was a miner drinking heavily. Therefore, she paid all her attention to her sons, especially Paul, and as Paul growing up, this relationship developed abnormal, and also influencing Paul's affection with another two women. Because of the strong abnormal maternal love from his mother, Paul has the Oedipus complex, and so Paul's life became a tragedy.

This article discusses Paul's abnormal love with his mother, a variety of factors, and the enlightenment to readers. Firstly the term "Oedipus complex" is interpreted; secondly is the performance of Paul's Oedipus complex and describes three factors which produced the Oedipus complex; thirdly, it shows the influence on Paul's love and life, then reveals the root of Paul's life tragedy and

the enlightenment to readers; And then the conclusion tells the readers Oedipus complex makes mother be the son's lover, son is fully rely on his mother in affection, which makes relationship between man and woman can not achieve harmonious unity both in mentally and physically. Serious Oedipus complex will produce a series of negative effects, young people should learn a lesson, and learn to avoid the Oedipus complex, building a harmonious family and society. Otherwise, it will inevitably lead to tragic life.

1. PAUL'S OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Paul is more sensitive and delicate than any other boys; he has pale faces, and looks older than the other boys at the same age. When he was a child, he walked all day, went miles and miles to look for blackberries which his mother liked. When he was not at home, he looked forward to getting home as soon as earlier because he did not want his mother was alone. In Paul's eyes, his mother was an elegant, undisturbed and beautiful young girl. In order to help his mother to manage the household, Paul got a job in Nottingham, his main purpose was to help his mother. He stood by his mother to be opposed to his father; even he hated his father very much.

Paul was very conscious of what other people feel, particularly his mother. His attention seemed always to be paid to her, when he was together with his mother, his love and his inspiration constantly appeared. They told each other their feelings which were deeply hidden in their mind, and also shared the happiness and sorrow with each other. When Mrs. Morel had cancer and was dying, Paul was so sorrowful. He missed his mother after his mother's death for a long time, he lost the sunshine and power of life.

Paul always worried about his mother's feeling when he got along with other women because of the effects from his mother. He could not control himself in love and deal with his affection successfully because his Oedipus complex was serious; he lost the normal ability to make a relationship with other women. The woman who would stay with him in his mind was only his mother. In his life, his mother is the woman that he really loves.

The first girl falling in love with Paul is Miriam; she had many similarities with Paul's mother. Since Paul regarded Miriam as the substitute of his mother, he could not have a normal affection with Miriam. When he stayed with Miriam, he always missed his mother. His true love and affection belonged to his mother, which he did not realize. When Paul knew that the date with Miriam had hurt his mother, he regretted his behavior and could not bear, so that he decided to separate from Miriam.

The second woman in Paul's life was Clara who was a married woman. Clara was a sexy woman; Paul was attracted by her enthusiasm. But Paul's heart belonged

to his mother. In fact, Mrs. Morel also knew that it is impossible for Paul to interchange with Clara in soul. Clara was still a substitute for passion which Mrs. Morel could not give Paul. As passion going away, Paul would return to his mother again. Finally, Paul was bewildered in the love affair with Clara. Mother directly affected Paul's point of view and attitudes to his girlfriends. His relationships with two girls are incomplete; Paul did not have the ability to love others.

2. REASONS FOR PAUL'S OEDIPUS COMPLEX

2.1 Social Background Factors

Healthy state of mind must be established on the basis of a healthy lifestyle and social system. Paul's Oedipus complex contained the social factors, the abnormal love between Paul and his mother was influenced by the social environment at that time. The whole social environment and social atmosphere were bad. The capitalist industrial civilization caused the workers' misfortune, cruelty of capitalist exploitation and squeezing are the root of workers, and they lived in poverty. Nottingham mining area was dirty. Miners did the inhuman drudgery, risking their lives every time, they gradually became rough and cruel, only the wine could make them temporarily forget the sorrow and fatigue. At home only coarse sound and harsh words can alleviate their anger in mind. Paul's father was just like the other miners, they spent all their time doing their gloomy work, they were completely exhausted. Their wives raised children in small houses, for them, life was nothing more than poverty and dirty, they live in despair and have no hope for life. It was the social background of family conflict of husband and wife, they had a happy time after the wedding, but the poverty of life, hard working and the low quality of the education crushed Mrs. Morel's girlhood dream. Disappointed to her husband, Mrs. Morel poured all her love and energy upon Paul; which caused Paul's abnormal affection for mental and emotion.

2.2 Personal Factors

Mr. and Mrs. Morel were enduring the pain of the marriage without love when Paul was born. Paul was the second son of this family, when he was born, his mother had no love for his father. Delicate Paul lying in mother's arms, his dark blue eyes always stared at his mother as if digging her inner secret thoughts. Mrs. Morel decided to devote herself to love him. When Paul was a boy, he was gentle, delicate, needing much care and protection from the adults. "Meanwhile William grew bigger and stronger and more active, while Paul, always rather delicate and quiet, got slimmer, and trotted after his mother like her shadow"(Lawrence, 1994, p.54). Since Paul's childhood, Paul had been particularly sensitive, he was rich in artistic

expression and fantasy, he became a potential artist which was inspired by his mother's motivation. Moreover, Paul and other children did not like their father, especially Paul, he often woke up at night because of quarrel between mother and father, he hated his father. When his father was sent to the hospital because of industrial injury, he said to mother happily that he wanted to play the role of his father. These characteristics and behaviors were completely beyond a normal boy's mentality.

2.3 Family Factors

Marriage failure caused a series of family conflicts, Mr. Morel was a man from the bottom, he had no education, spoke with dialect, unable to communicate with wife and children in spirit. Mrs. Morel was born in the middle class, intelligent, educated, strong-willed and ambitious. Mrs. Morel realized that she regretted her decision, contradiction and struggle was inevitable. Mrs. Morel once despised the life of her husband, trying to improve his cultural and moral accomplishment, but class difference was not so easy to eliminate, on the contrary, a continuous struggle between husband and wife were deeply influenced on their son's growth. Because of this relationship, mother's love transferred to her son, and started to find spiritual comfort and satisfaction from Paul. Meanwhile, Mrs. Morel blocked the communication between Paul and father. Affected by Mrs. Morel, Paul saw that his father was brutal and savage, he began to despise and hate his father, father's image was destroyed in Paul's heart, father was excluded from this family, mother, of course, became the ruler of her son.

Mrs. Morel's leading position in the family and her strong domination determined mother's image in the process of Paul's growth. Her personal abnormal affection to her son was the direct factor for Paul's Oedipus complex. Her life centered on Paul, she could not tolerate the relationship between Paul and William. In order to occupy Paul's whole soul, Mrs. Morel even vowed to Paul: "I have never—you know Paul—I have had a husband..." (Lawrence, 1994, p.218) It is mother's abnormal maternity that caters to, even strengthens Paul's Oedipus complex which comes into being naturally and normally when he was a boy. When Mrs. Morel's hostility to Miriam became more and more irrepressible. In a word, mother's abnormal love is the origin and the basic reason of Paul's abnormal feeling.

3. THE CONSEQUENCE OF PAUL'S OEDIPUS COMPLEX

3.1 On Paul's Growing-Up

Because of the influence of the Oedipus complex, Paul was not strong as his brother; his mood was not very stable. He was sometimes passionate, depressive, and hesitant because of his isolation with his father. Paul was

lack of masculinity and because of the influence of his mother; he was fickle and sensitive, very feminine. Paul had little communication with other boys.

Mrs. Morel spent a lifetime in trying not to let Paul do what his father did; Mrs. Morel encouraged children to like nice things such as flowers, sunshine. Paul liked using pencil and drawing, which show his talent. Mrs. Morel was very pleased about that. Adult Paul hated working, he worked just to please his mother and wanted to work at a place not far away from home, earn some money and then after the death of his father, he wanted to rent a room with his mother. When he knew that his mother had cancer and was dying, the queer feeling went over him, as if the sunshine had left him, and he fell into darkness completely. After his mother died, Paul could not afford this kind of loneliness, he felt everything was meaningless. For Paul, losing mother is losing everything. The abnormal love had affected Paul's life and thoughts. Mrs. Morel became the core of his dream and life.

3.2 On Paul's Love With Two Women

When Paul fell in love with Miriam, it was that for the first time in his life to face a mature relationship between himself and another woman. But with the strong bond of his mother, Paul thought that he should be loyal to his mother. To be loyal to his mother, he resisted Miriam's love, yet he could not help being attracted by Miriam, though he loves Miriam, he could not like a normal man to give her a normal affection, this made him come into trouble, also gave Miriam the big spiritual sorrow. In addition, mother also did not agree with them, finally, when Paul returned to her mother, their relationship came to an end.

Paul and Clara's love finally ended, although Mrs. Morel did not hate Clara, they still could not continue. Clara was a married woman, she wanted to have a strong man that could give her a sense of security, Paul had a fear of marriage because of his mother when they talked about marriage, he could give himself to her no more than he did to Miriam, because so his mother's psychic hold on him tightly. Finally, they broke up. In the love relationship with Clara, neglecting the spiritual communication with Clara, Paul consequentially could not achieve the ultimate fulfillment from her, he annoyed that Clara did not belong to him and did not love him completely. Paul's love affair with Clara once again was a failure.

Paul cannot communicate with other woman normally, because of his Oedipus complex. He cannot really love a woman; his emotions cannot get development and sublimation, which led to his suffering and tragedy in love. His mother influences Paul too much, which makes him worse in love affair, when Paul finds a girlfriend, he always unconsciously finds a girl who takes after his mother, not only physically but also mentally. But as a matter of fact, he could not find such

a girl. At last, Paul realized that how much his mother had affected his mind and his life. During the time with two women, his mind and his body were divided into two parts. His mind still stayed with his mother while his body gave to his lovers.

4. THE ROOT OF TRAGEDY AND ENLIGHTENMENT

It is Mr. Morel's coarseness and irresponsibility that cause unhappy marriage and his son's Oedipus complex. Through his misfortune, readers can see clearly the root of this misery. It is the industrial civilization, which deprives Morel's natural instincts. Lawrence believes that it is the prime evil of industrial revolution that restrains and deforms man's natural instincts (Finney, 1990, p.35). Industrialization does harm to human nature and also leading people's morality and spirit to a lower level. And Mr. Morel was such a typical in the lowest class. He was deprived of the opportunity accepting education and worked in dark pits. His vigor and enthusiasm were killed by inhuman hard work and heavy family burden. Thus his spiritual life was pale, which is quite opposite to his wife. This causes conflict between husband and wife, which destroyed a happy family and naturally spiritual development.

Capitalist industrialization makes father into a machine that only to work for day and night, it distorts the human nature and instinct, destroys the harmonious relationship between husband and wife, father and son. Mrs. Morel put all her affection into Paul which makes Oedipus complex of Paul. In this novel, Lawrence strongly condemned the development of capitalist industry, which destroyed social civilization and families. The author reveals the cause of Paul's life tragedy. His father was not an awakening worker of the old industrial society, though he has dissatisfied with the reality, he did not realize that their misfortune was caused by the industrial civilization. The scars of Mr. Morel fully demonstrated that the capitalist industrial civilization does harm to the ordinary families and the whole society. So the root of this tragedy is capitalism as well as industrialization.

5. TO OUR ENLIGHTENMENT

5.1 The Enlightenment on Love

Paul's two failed love show that pure platonic love, happiness likes a bubble that one day will burst. Simple physical love can only give a person temporary satisfaction, and lacking spiritual understanding and communication, so it will not last for a long time.

Love means to respect and to honor the dignity of the person that one loves, and to take the responsibility of

the very person. Love also means accompanying, which is not just simply staying with each other. This kind of company is more difficult to be done, because there should be a willingness to be with each other in times of pain, struggle, and despair, as well as in times of calm and enjoyment. In other words, people in true love should share their happiness and sorrows, and fight for a bright future together. This kind of company may be a short period of time, but is definitely of high quality while they are getting together.

For love, to find a person that suitable for you is difficult, the right attitude to life should be facing the reality of life, tolerating and understanding each other. In love, two beings become one.

5.2 The Enlightenment on Marriage, Family and Life

Love is an activity that each person should take part in, it can make someone mature. Marriage is an extremely effective process that makes love more enduring. So the love between a man and a woman finally steps into the palace of marriage. Marriage means having a happy family, the family produces a good environment for each family member to grow in love and security. So it is reasonable to say that marriage is a bridge linking love and family.

A family is a place that could produce not only happiness but also pain which makes people know about value of affection, they would know about the meaning of life and love. In conclusion, love is the foundation of marriage and family, without love, there will not be marriage and family. A famous person once said that in a world of existence, there is indeed no greater power than the power of love. In a marriage, love needs to be manifested in a cooperative and sharing manner. And with a happy marriage, the family will be happy.

Lawrence used the tragedies of Paul to tell the readers that nothing can be more effective for a family to be harmonious and to fulfill its function than love. Love is the strongest link between a husband and a wife, parents and children. And it is also love between all the family members that can pave a better way for the whole family to go to a bright future.

In life, the correct family education is important on the growth of teenagers. Now, because of one-child policy, there is one child in most Chinese families, elders give all their love to children, some parents love their children in a wrong way. This kind of love is different from Paul's mother, but it is also harmful to children's growth. Everyone has their own lives; too much control destroys the normal growth and life of children.

CONCLUSION

The Oedipus complex and life tragedy of Paul shows that the capitalist industrial civilization makes numerous

abnormal human feelings, Though Lawrence analysis relationship in *Sons and Lovers* so well, people should not ignore his success in conveying the detail of late-nineteenth-century working life. The novel reveals that in the industrialized society, people, especially for the lower classes, life was very difficult for them. Its criticism of industrialization is obvious.

A great writer can create a great work; *Sons and Lovers* is one of Lawrence's best novels. It is not only a great realistic work, depicting the miserable life of British miners of that century, but also a successful psychoanalytical work with a start illustration of the Oedipus complex. In *Sons and Lovers*, excessive love hinders the healthy growth of the son, and the misfortune of the son contributes to the mother's pain. It's just like a vicious circle. Distorted and deformed parents relationship is doomed to cast shadow in a child's heart, which in turn will affect the child's whole life. Therefore, people must learn to stay far away from forming the Oedipus complex, which will have serious harm to man's health both physically and mentally. People who are growing in a kind of nice family environment can avoid abnormal affection, and good social atmosphere makes people grow healthily.

Lawrence believes that Britain's industrial life gave every social members shadow and marks, which is

difficult to wash out clearly, weakening their personality, narrowing their field of vision. Enslaved by machine, such life is a barren in vain. This is also the progressive meaning of the novel. Nevertheless, for the role of family, parents should have their correct position, distorted couple relationship will affect a child's life, this makes the novel thought-provoking, and it arouses the readers to know about the inner world of people who live in modern society.

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