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Editors

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<i>The Alchemist</i> by Paulo Coelho: Analysis of Santiago's Physical Odyssey in Search of Treasure	182-188
GORAKH POPAT JONDHALE	
VINITA D. BASANTANI	
Feminist Study of Nuruddin Farah's <i>From A Crooked Rib</i> in the Light of Post-Negritude	189-195
HIRVA VORA	
Reprising: A Performance of the Rhizomatic Structure in <i>The Hours</i>	196-200
LAKSHMI K. BABU	
Sisterhood as Cultural Difference and Magical Realism in Amy Tan's <i>The Hundred Secret Senses</i>	201-204
MANJULA M.	
C. GOVINDARAJ	
Women's Wounds and Solidarity in Assia Djebar's <i>A Sister to Scheherazade</i>	205-212
PIYUSH RAVAL	
<i>No Woman's Land?</i> Helen Dunmore's Portrayal of War	213-219
PRABHAVATI A. PATIL	
S. Y. HONGEKAR	
Caryl Churchill as a Modern British Playwright	220-224
ANJANA PANDEY	
RANI SHARMA	
Major Concerns of Shakespeare's Historical Plays	225-228
SHANKAR BHATTACHARYA	
Resisting Traditional Controls: A Case History of Rukhmabai	229-232
SHEELPA MISHRA	
Conflict within the Protagonist in <i>No Longer at Ease</i>	233-237
SOMNATH SOPAN LOKARE	
Oedipus Complex in Lawrence's <i>Sons and Lovers</i>	238-242
SUNITA R. MEHRA	
Thomas Cromwell: A Renaissance Man –A Character Study of Booker Prize Winning Novel <i>Wolf Hall</i> of Hilary Mantel	243-249
MEENAKSHI JOSHI	
"We Want What You Have": Exploring British Multiculturalism and Post-2008 Economic Discontent in John Lanchester's <i>Capital</i>	250-255
RONY PATRA	

Oedipus Complex in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

SUNITA R. MEHRA

Oedipus complex is a concept of psychoanalytic theory given by Sigmund Freud. Oedipus complex refers to a child's unconscious sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent and hatred for the same-sex parent. Lawrence was aware of Freud's theory, and Sons and Lovers famously uses the Oedipus complex as its base for exploring Paul's relationship with his mother. He writes many scenes between the two that go beyond the bounds of conventional mother-son love. Paul is hopelessly devoted to his mother, and that love often borders on romantic desire. Paul (and William, to a somewhat lesser extent) feels bound to his mother, and cannot imagine ever abandoning her or even marrying anyone else. Completing the Oedipal equation, Paul murderously hates his father and often fantasizes about his death. In the novel, Lawrence adds a twist to the Oedipus complex. The mother is saddled with it as well. She desires her sons in near romantic ways and despises all their girlfriends. The relation between the sons and the mother, which should have been a source of inspiration and comfort, turns into a corroding, blighting factor which gradually finishes one of the sons and presents obstacles in the other's life.

Keywords: *Oedipus, psychoanalytic, unconscious, opposite, hatred, exploring, conventional, fantasizes, saddled, despises, inspiration, corroding, blighting, and obstacles.*

Sons and Lovers is undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of the English fiction. Lawrence himself gave it a lot of importance. It seems to be about a family at the surface level but Lawrence made it a novel about the struggle of self and identity in contemporary society. Its appeal is still universal though it is based on Lawrence's own experiences in life. Lawrence was aware of the conflicts, joys, sorrows and dependence of an individual on the other member of the society and the family. These relations are shown in various dimensions, which provide us a peep into the conscious thinking of

the people involved and help us to understanding of the dimensions of relations of an individual vis-à-vis others.

Sons and Lovers is D.H. Lawrence's autobiographical novel, which amply enlightens us to Lawrence's views regarding dynamics of self and society and various dimensions of relations that exist in context of an individual's social interaction. He described his own subject matter as "the relation between men and women...." (Ford 282), this novel as the name suggests, deals with something which was quite untalked of in novels. It revolves mostly around the relationship between Paul Morel and his mother, the influence of mother's excessive hold on her son's life and the efforts of the son to free him from the crippling of mother's hold. The novelist emphasizes the excessive influence of the mother's views on the son's life by basing the son's relation with mother on Freud's theory of Oedipus complex. Paul Morel is the depiction of D.H. Lawrence himself.

In *Sons and Lovers* the mother-son relation is of supreme importance. The unsatisfied mother, excessively indulgent in her sons' life disables them to strike vital and fulfilling relationships with other persons. This abnormal hold and indulgence of the mother is disastrous for the sons as well as the mother. The relation between the sons and the mother, which should have been a source of inspiration and comfort, turns into a corroding, blighting factor which gradually finishes one of the sons (William) and also presents obstacles in the other's (Paul) life.

Gertrude Morel was a woman from an educated family who was interested in discussions regarding religion, philosophy and politics. The natural attraction for the opposite resulted in her marrying Walter Morel who was dispositionally entirely opposite of her. Walter was soft, non-intellectual, warm, a kind of gamboling person, whereas she was curious and receptive, and found pleasure in listening to other folk.

The relationship which was a result of external or superficial attraction was shallow and soon Mrs. Morel realized that Walter Morel lived a life of instincts and not of thoughts. When she tried to have some serious talk with him, "She saw him listen deferentially, but without understanding" (SAL 14). Walter Morel is an allegoric character representing Lawrence's view of "thinking with the blood" (Moore 180). His actions are all guided by instincts. Lawrence describes Walter as "not knowing what he was doing he often did the right thing by instinct..." (SAL 13), whereas Gertrude is a very thoughtful person. These differences between them result in friction and clashes and, in turn, indifference to each other. The unsatiated mother turns

towards her elder son. The emotionally denied person looks and longs for love and comfort and grasps the meekest ray of love that may be coming from anyone or anywhere. Such unsatiated people lead to a chain of abnormal relations as they look for love outside the relationship they ought to be having love from. Paul's mother directs her whole attention and love towards the son who is a source of comfort for her. The novelist describes:

His mother loved him passionately. He came just when her own bitterness was hardest to bear, when her faith in life was shaken, and her soul felt dreary and lonely. She made much of the child and the father was jealous. (SAL 18)

The attention, which is due to be paid to Walter is denied to him and son, like a rival, is chosen for the shower of love and care, which makes the father jealous. The abnormal relations further lead to abnormal conditions in family and society.

The relationship between Walter Morel and Gertrude deteriorates due to lack of understanding and respect of individuality of Walter on Gertrude's part. She did not realize that Walter was a distinct individual who has his own nature and choices. She wants to mould him according to her standards. She is not satisfied with what he was, but always strives to make him what he was not, due to which Walter's vitality and spontaneity suffers. As such, the relation, which could have been warm and cordial by mutual understanding, is marred by quarrels and fights. They are not able to reconcile their differences and this leads to an unconscious void between them, and they, unsatiated and unfulfilled, turn away from each other. Walter indulges in more drinking and Gertrude turns first, to her elder son, William, and then, to Paul. Lawrence narrates it vividly:

This act of masculine clumsiness was a spear through the side of her love for Morel. Before, while she had striven against him bitterly. She had fretted after him, as if he had gone astray from her. Now she ceased to fret for his love, he was an outsider to her. This made life much more bearable. (SAL 20)

Again, the drifting apart is evident from the fact that when Walter gets hurt at the pit, Gertrude feels sorry for him, but internally she feels as if there was something missing in her feeling for him. She feels sorry for him as one feels for a stranger, without true emotions or sadness for him:

She felt indifferent to him and to his suffering. It hurt her most of all, this failure to love him, even when he roused her strong emotions. (SAL 108)

Mother-son relationship is the dominating theme of *Sons and Lovers*, as the title suggests. Intellectual, puritanic and stern, but unsatiated, unfulfilled and despaired mother yearned for love, attention and care, which she could not get from her husband and hence she turns to

her elder son, William. She loves William passionately and the son also reciprocates the same feelings. Since childhood, William is drawn towards his mother. As he starts understanding things between his parents, he hates his father. As he grows up, Gertrude focuses all her attention, care and love on him and feels proud of him: "She saw him a man, full of vigour, making the world glow again for her." (SAL 59)

The mother works very hard and devotedly and improves her son's life. She gets him a job at the co-operative office and tries hard to keep him away from coal pits. William also responds to his mother's intense feelings and works hard at studies and does everything he can to please her. He, like a lover, feels an urge to give happiness to his mother. When he runs a race and wins a prize, he proudly gives it to his mother. As Lawrence writes:

All the decent things that men do-the decent things William did. He could run like the wind. When he was twelve, he won the first prize in a race; an inkstand of glass, shaped like an anvil. He flew home with his anvil, breathlessly with a 'Look, mother!' that was the first real tribute to herself. She took it like a queen. It stood proudly on the dresser and gave Mrs. Morel a keen pleasure. (SAL 66)

This peculiar mother-son relationship is unconsciously like that of a lover and a beloved. William's mother feels jealous of the girls he meets at the dance. She does not approve of Paul's relations with girls whether it is Miriam or Clara and openly expresses her contempt for them. She fears:

If once Miriam was able to win Paul's sex sympathy and service, then he was lost indeed to his mother. Mrs Morel felt that her life was meaningless once her son was really withdrawn from her. She could have given him up to another woman for passion; she could have borne even that he should love and marry some woman weaker than herself, because then she would not have lost him: but that this intense girl, who had set herself with a fervor almost terrible to win the brilliant, blind-eyed lad,-that Miriam, the woman of inaction, the woman of deep, half-swooning rhapsodic dreams, should win the son from her who had fought so heroically all the way through life, was horrible. (Chambers 245-46)

Lawrence has tried to put forward a particular idea by means of this relationship. It is:

an idea of an organic disturbance in the relationships of men and women- a disturbance of sexual polarities that is first seen in the disaffection of mother and father, then in the mother's attempt to substitute her sons for her husband, finally in the sons' unsuccessful struggle to establish natural manhood. (Spilka 17)

Lawrence based this novel on split theory which is about split in the soul and body of a person. William and Paul Morel are unable to affirm their manhood, because of their dominant mother who holds them back. Lawrence in one of his letter to poetess Rachel Annand Taylor wrote:

This has been a kind of bond between me and my mother. We have loved each other, almost with a husband and wife love, as well as filial and maternal. We knew each other by instinct... We have been like one, so sensitive to each other that we never needed words. It has been rather terrible, and has made me, in some respects, abnormal. (Spilka 190)

D.H. Lawrence has presented his own personal life in *Sons and Lovers*. Facts are weaved with art to make it wholly a satisfying work of fiction. His personal dynamics that it would be difficult to reconcile if he presents the facts plainly, is very much evident in this novel. Perhaps he unconsciously feared that it would be difficult to reconcile doing it faithfully, keeping it 'true to life' in Jessie's sense, with the 'idea and feeling' from which he had started out regarding the role of Mrs. Morel.

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