

Flying beyond the Nets----Comparison Study between Paul in Sons and Lovers and Stephen in A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man

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ABSTRACT. *David Herbert Lawrence and James Joyce are both the most influential writers in twentieth century. D.H. Lawrence's first major work, the famous autobiographical novel Sons and Lovers (1913) is a masterpiece in modernist literature. Joyce's first novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) is also regarded as his semi-autobiography. The two novels tell us the maturing process of the two different protagonists—Paul, and Stephen Dedalus, especially their initiation of spiritual world. By reading and comparing the two novels the writer found that the two protagonists have somewhat similarities during their process of pursuit of normal life. Based on Freud's theory of Oedipus complex, this paper aims to find out the similarities and differences of the two protagonists when they are faced with the Oedipus complex and attempt to provide the readers different angle to understand the two world-known modernists in literature.*

KEYWORDS: *Sons and Lovers; A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; Oedipus complex*

1. A General Review of Two Writers and Their Novels

1.1 D.H.Lawrence and His Sons and Lovers.

David Herbert Lawrence is one of the greatest and most controversial English novelists of the 20th century, and perhaps is the greatest from England proper and from a working-class family. During his life-long literary career, he had written more than ten novels and several volumes of short stories. Besides being a great novelist, Lawrence is also a proficient poet, a combative essayist, an atmospheric travel-writer, and a prolific literary correspondent. Furthermore, he extends his talents to book-reviewing, translation, photographic discourse and painting. But it is in the novels that his true greatness lies, and on them that his reputation rests. Lawrence was recognized as a prominent novelist only after he published his third novel Sons and Lovers,

Sons and Lovers, Lawrence's first major work, was written between 1910 to 1913. With the mining land at Victorian age as its background, much of the story is taken from Lawrence's own early life in the midland coal mining village of Eastwood. It tells about the conflicts in a coal miner's family. The story starts with the marriage of Paul's parents. Mrs. Morel, daughter of a middle class family, is a strong-willed, cool, intelligent and ambitious woman who is fascinated by a warm, vigorous and sensuous coal miner, Walter Morel, and married beneath her own class. Shortly after marriage, she sadly found it was totally different from what she had thought of ideal and harmonious life. The disillusion in her husband makes her lavish all her affection and hope upon her sons. Her overwhelmingly strong influence brings about a splitting personality in her sons, which in turn produces paralyzing effects on her sons love life, even her son's whole life.

Lawrence's first major work, the famous autobiographical novel Sons and Lovers (1913) is a masterpiece in modernist literature. It offers a realistic picture of the pinched, hard life of a coal-mining community in the British Midland. More Henry notes, "There is no novel in English literature which comes so closely to the skin of the life of working-class people." Ever since it was published in 1913, the novel has attracted considerable attention from critics and reviewers. Henry James, ranks Lawrence, on the basis of this book, as "one of the most promising novelists of the younger generation." John Macy, a contemporary writer in 1922 comments, "here is a masterpiece in which every sentence counts, a book crammed with significant thought and beautiful, arresting phrases." Graham Hough, in his thorough study of Lawrence, *The Dark Sun*, agrees that Sons and Lovers is "a catharsis, achieved by reliving an actual experience — reliving it over and over again". In the last decade, critics and readers have approached the book from varied and constructive perspective—religious, biographical, or historical. In my mind, the novel, which begins as Paul Morel, is closely based on Lawrence's own life. Regarded as the first Freudian novel in English, it records a young man's growth to maturity and his close relationship with his mother.

1.2 James Joyce and His A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man

James Joyce is the most influential novelist in the twentieth century. His influence can be compared to, and to some extent, even outweighs Shakespeare. Derek Attridge says: Joyce is the most international of writers in English. He shares with Shakespeare a global reputation, but, unlike Shakespeare, he crossed many national boundaries in his working career, in his outlook, and in his writing—extending his reach further and further until, in *Finnegans Wake*, he attempted to embrace the languages and cultures of the entire human community.

Joyce's strong influence still continues today. One example is the survey carried out by the editorial board of the Modern Library, a division of the Random House on July 20, 1998. The jury is made up of ten writers, critics and editors. The chief purpose is to select one hundred best novels of the twentieth century. The readers of Joyce all over the world can rejoice: *Ulysses* comes up first, soon followed by *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the third position (Rabate p1).

Since its publication, *A Portrait* has been endlessly interpreted from various perspectives. In 1977, Peake thought that *A Portrait* was a book of self-discovery: "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is an image of a young man's recognition of his destiny, a destiny determined by those 'constant traits' of the embryo which preserve themselves through all the apparent changes of nature and purpose until they are recognized as the marks of an artist" (109). In 1982, Richard Ellmann said, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is in fact the gestation of a soul" (qtd in Poupard 245). The common point of these two views is that, though they touched upon the protagonist's psychology, they did not analyze it from the psychoanalytical perspective. Not mentioned compared with *Sons and Lovers*.

2. Comparison Analysis of Two Male Protagonists' Mother-son Relations

2.1 Freudian Theory of Oedipus complex

Psychoanalytically complex refers to a group of related, often repressed ideas and impulses that compel characteristic or habitual patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior. According to Freud, the Oedipus complex is the complex which manifests itself when the child reaches the genital stage (one of the stages in the development of libido). In simple terms, the Oedipus complex derives from the boy's unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother.

Inspired by the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* (legend has it that Oedipus unwittingly murders his father and marries his mother) by Sophocles, Freud's discovery of the Oedipus complex is made during his self-analysis. He first introduces this concept into psychoanalysis in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The Oedipus complex which usually happens when children are 3-5 years old is a characteristic collection of loving and hostile wishes that children experience towards their parents at the height of the phallic phase, which is a very important phase in the development of personality.

If the child cannot smoothly pass through this mental stage, there should occur an 'infantile neurosis' that is an important forerunner of similar reactions during the child's adult life. The superego also has its origin in the process of overcoming the Oedipus complex. Freud considers the reactions against the Oedipus complex the most important social achievements of the human mind.

In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud writes: "Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfillment here transplanted into reality, with the full quantity of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one" (*The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess* 272).

2.2 A Study of Paul's Oedipus complex in Sons and Lovers

Paul is a pale, quiet child who seems old for his years and very conscious of

what other people feel, particularly his mother. When she frets he understands, and can have no peace. His soul seems always attentive to her. When Paul is a baby, Lawrence constantly mentions the physical contact of mother and child-against her bosom, by her side, even asleep with her. "Sleep is still most perfect... The warmth, the security and peace of the soul; the utter comfort from the touch of the other, knits the sleep, so that it takes the body and the consolation Paul feels soul completely in its healing" (P68). The language expresses on the basis of his submission to his mother. "When a child leans its breast against its mother it becomes filled with a primal awareness of her-not of itself desiring her or partaking of her-but of her as she is in herself". As a child, Paul is delicate and subject to bronchitis. When he is sick he never wants to be separated from his mother though his father is often kind to him at such times, it is really only his mother he wants. Indeed, the boy is so devoted to his mother that when he is well and goes berry picking in the summer, he often will walk all day, rather than own himself beaten and come home to her empty-handed.

One vicious bond of sympathy unites all the Morel children: their common hate and contempt for their father. Their feeling poisons the whole family life. Often, of a windy night in their creaking house, the children lie awake listening in terror for his drunken return, his banging fists and the muffled voice of their mother. The strain is greatest upon Paul. Towards evening he grows restless and stays near his mother, waiting for his father's coming and the usual scene of abuse violence. Already at an early age these hostile feelings take definite shape. Mrs. Morel's hatred and aversion for her husband is absorbed by her children almost from the cradle, so that at the age of six Paul prays that his father may be killed. Cut off from companion with his father-and there can be no doubt that a child learns to love with the father large through imitating its mother-Paul abnormally concentrates all his affection upon one parent who loves him with qualifications and purpose that he is not aware.

Under the strain of these relations the boy develops a premature emotional maturity. His childish heart is torn between anguish for his abused mother and a scarcely repressed hatred or his brutal father. Mrs. Morel, her affection for her husband completely atrophied, now turns altogether to her son and deliberately courts his allegiance. He becomes her confidant and her consoler, a quiet, worldly-wise child whose natural initiative is gradually deadened by the burden of this unequal responsibility. At a time when most children already display the first poetic tentative of the mating impulse in ideal comradeships with playmates of the opposite sex, Paul dreams only of running away with his mother and living alone with her for the rest of his life.

Paul's admiration for his mother knows no bounds; her presence is always absorbing. Often, at the sight of her, his heart contracts with love. Everything he does is for her, the flowers he picks as well as the prizes he wins at school. His mother is his intimate and his confidante and he has no other chums. When Morel is confined to the hospital through an accident in the mine, Paul thinks that he is the man in the house. He is happiest when alone with her. By this time the interaction between mother and son is complete; she lives in him and he in her. In fact his whole attitude towards her is but the answer which she gradually evokes from him as her

whole life finds expression in her son. "In the end she shared everything with him without knowing... She waited for his coming home in the evening, and then she unburdened herself of all she had pondered, or of all that had occurred to her during the day. He sat and listened with his earnestness. The two shared lives" (P114). After William's death, Mrs. Morel is paralyzed with grief. She cannot be persuaded to take her old bright interest in life, no matter how Paul tries. The boy, for his part, feels desolate and deserted by his mother, who can only brood on her dead son. Finally, however, Paul becomes dangerously ill with pneumonia and almost dies himself. Thus Mrs. Morel is finally roused from her trance of despair, and her life now roots itself in Paul.

"As his great namesake said, 'Whatever I do, I do it unto the lord', so Paul Morel could say, 'Whatever I do, I do it unto my mother'". She was to live the life of which she had been cheated, through him; he would bring her the spiritual fulfillment she longed for. He had no ambition for himself, but all for her. The emotional correspondence between them is striking. Mother and son are one, however, her ambition that she can live through him could be a destructive force.

2.3 A Study of Stephen's Oedipus complex

Stephen Dedalus was once a budding Oedipus, too. When he is a little baby, he has completely different impressions of his parents: "his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face"; "His mother put on the oilsheet...His mother has a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance" (AP 1). This contrast is typical of Oedipus complex.

More importantly, putting on the oilsheet and playing on the piano the sailor's hornpipe have sexual connotations: "When Stephen's mother does appear, she is putting on the oilsheet after Stephen has wet the bed, and Joyce is surely aware of the Freudian attribution of sexual connotations"; "When he [Joyce] rounds this [opening scene] off by producing the memory of Stephen's mother as she played 'the hornpipe for him to dance,' the chain of sexual associations is continued. For 'horn' is one of the battery of phallic synonyms that Joyce uses in notorious pornographic letters written to Nora" (Kimball 32).

The sexual nature of the Oedipus complex is also implied in the text. When Stephen and his father go to Cork to visit Queen's College, he discovers the word Fetus cut on a desk. This word reminds him of his own sinful desire, he flushes and is shocked: "It shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind" (P.84). Though the text does not explicate what his sinful desire is, Fetus tells the relationship between mother and child: they are one. This fits Stephen's unconscious sexual desire for his mother: to be sexually united with her. The sight of this word brings his desire to the surface. Because this kind of desire is prohibitive, the awareness of it makes him feel sinful.

Stephen's Oedipus complex is also demonstrated through his strong emotional dependence on his mother. Elizabeth Wright holds, "the love of the mother remains

dominant in the early formative years" (14). When Wells shoulders him into the square ditch, the slimy water reminds him of his mother (9). Thinking of his mother helps him get rid of the unpleasant feeling of being insulted by Wells. In another case, when sick at school, he misses his mother again and wants her to bring him home: "Dear mother. I am sick. I want to go home. Please come and take me home. I am in the infirmary" (18). His difference from the other boys makes him feel lonely so he appeals to his mother to dispel this loneliness: "All the boys seemed to him very strange. They had all fathers and mothers and different clothes and voices. He longed to be at home and lay his head on his mother's lap" (7). From these instances, one can see that Stephen considers his mother as a harbor that can shield him from the outside uneasiness and sufferings.

In addition, Stephen is strongly appealed by his mother's smell. As a little baby, he thinks that his mother has "a nicer smell than his father" (1). Apparently, this smell pleases him. Under another circumstance, he thinks his mother's slippers "had such a lovely warm smell" (5). Vaguely conscious, he associates sensual pleasure with beauty. This point is proved when his mother kisses him: "What did that mean, to kiss? You put your face up like that to say goodnight and then his mother put her face down. That was to kiss. His mother put her lips on his cheek; her lips were soft and they wetted his cheek; and they made a tiny little noise: kiss"(9). 'Softness' implies both sensual pleasure and beauty. The association of these two aspects is characteristic of aesthetic beauty. Richard Brown holds, "In its ancient Greek roots (and as it was adopted by philosophers in the eighteenth century) the aesthetic did not imply a separate territory of art as opposed to life. Aisthesis denoted those things which can be experienced by the body and through the feelings and emotions" (260). Therefore, in a sense, Stephen's Oedipus complex prepares for his keen perception of beauty.

2.4 Similarities of Two Kinds of Oedipus complex

From the above analysis, we can see that both Paul and Stephen have the Oedipus complex towards their mother. They both hate their father. Their behavior formed when they were young boys. And both of them become the artist at last. Paul is a painting for the sake of his mother, while Stephen becomes an artist for the sake of beauty. The writers of the two novels are both very famous modernist in literature. This is the big and meaningful influence on them from Oedipus complex.

2.5 Differences of the Two Kinds of Oedipus complex

2.5.1 Different Roles of Mothers

In *Sons and Lovers*, Mrs. Morel always cheated herself. In her mind, she identified her son with her lover, which caused the conflict of her persona and her shadow. Her possessive love influenced her son's growing up psychologically. Gertrude Morel is a fascinating compound of faults and virtues. In the course her

intense and passionate devotion to her children and in the process of her making use of them, she arouses in her sons a reciprocal attachment and some sentiments which are essentially unhealthy. She fails to establish then, as a mother should, as self-sufficient and independent mentally healthy individuals capable of living their own lives and loving their own loves. It is Gertrude Morel, who has been driven, by her disappointment in her husband that makes use of her sons to fulfill her own requirements from their earliest childhood. This is her greatest fault. However, as a mother, she also has her own virtues. Hardworking, thrifty, uncomplaining, and most important, possessing exceptional intelligence and strength of will, Gertrude Morel makes the most of the difficult situation in which she finds herself. Her household is coolly competently run despite its shabbiness and the family's lack of money for expensive improvements. Most of all, Gertrude Morel devotes herself passionately to her children, seeing to it that they have every advantage she can give them, making the most of every talent with which they are endowed, relentlessly driving them onward and upward, out of the mire in which they find themselves, into a higher class, a better life. Her selfish motive does bring some positive effects that cannot be ignored.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen's mother, Mary Dedalus, is an accomplished pianist whose life is dominated by the Roman Catholic Church and her husband. Important as she is in Stephen's thoughts, Mary is a shadowy figure. A devout Catholic, Mrs. Dedalus represents to Stephen the warmth and security a mother can offer and also the security offered by the church. According to Richard Ellmann, Joyce's childhood "was dominated rhetorically by his father, but emotionally by his mother with her practicality, her unquenchable indulgence, her tenacity, even her inveterate pregnancy." As a small boy he had gone to ask her to examine his school work; as a young man, the letters from Paris in 1902 and 1903 confirm, he asked her support for his ambitions and ideas. Joyce's confidence went to his mother, not to his father, a man impossible to confide in. A passionate and able musician as well as a writer, Stephen grows up hearing his mother play the piano and for a time aspires to become a singer himself. Apparently, his mother is driving force on his way to being an artist when he is young. However, her mother wishes he became a priest when he grows up, which become an obstacle preventing his pursuit of creation as an artist.

2.5.2 Different Responses to the Mother-wove Nets

In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul lives his life in the shadow of his mother. The love his mother promised was so powerful that he could not be free to go forward with his life. He expressed his contradictory feeling to his mother. He respected his mother because she helped and encouraged him to be an artist with her interest and will. On the other hand, he hated her. It was his mother's influence that kept him from being an independent man who was capable of living his life and loving his lovers. It seemed that, for long periods of his childhood, the quarrels between the parents dominated his family. Paul grew up with an abiding love for his mother and some dislike for his father. Mother was the focus in his life. Paul scoured the woods to

find the blackberry for his mother. And he could not bear to see his mother empty. He felt that he would have died rather than disappoint her.

When Stephen has committed sin with a prostitute, he turns to Virgin Mary for help. This goes exactly like his appeal to his mother when he does not feel good; Virgin Mary becomes a mother figure for him:

His sin, which had covered him from the sight of God, had led him nearer to the refuge of sinners. Her eyes seemed to regard him with mild pity; her holiness, a strange light glowing faintly upon her frail flesh, did not humiliate the sinner who approached her. If ever he was impelled to cast sin from him and to repent, the impulse that moved him was the wish to be her knight. If ever his soul, re-entering her dwelling shyly after the frenzy of his body's lust had spent itself, was turned towards her whose emblem is the morning star,...it was when her names were murmured softly by lips whereon there still lingered foul and shameful words, the savior itself of a lewd kiss (99)

This quotation indicates clearly that Stephen wants to be the lover of Virgin Mary, while he asks for her help. In this case, Stephen casts himself a role of both son and lover. This kind of relationship resembles that between his mother and him in his childhood. The dependence upon the mother figures prevents him from being emotionally independent. The lifelessness of the director repels Stephen from religion. With this, he turns away from the Mother of the Church: "[he] turned his eyes coldly for an instant towards the faded blue shrine of the Blessed Virgin which stood fowlwise on a pole in the middle of a hamshaped encampment of poor cottages"(156).

By refusing Virgin Mary, he also refuses his mother, for his mother wants him to be a priest: "Yes, his mother was hostile to the idea, as he had read from her listless silence. Yet her mistrust pricked him more keenly than his father's pride and he thought coldly how he had watched the faith which was fading down in his soul ageing and strengthening in her eyes....he was made aware dimly and without regret of a first noiseless sundering of their lives" (158). This marks the end of Stephen's Oedipus complex and more importantly, the beginning of his emotional independence.

3. Conclusion

By analyzing the two male protagonists Paul More and Stephen Dedalus in details from Freudian Oedipus complex perspective, I could draw a conclusion that Paul and Stephen both are suffered by the Oedipus complex during their maturity, but they react differently, and lead a different future life. At the end of the novel, Paul parted with Miriam and Clare partly because his mother was the stronger power in the struggle between his mother and his lovers, with him as object; partly because his lovers lacked the integrated personality, and his mother was dead. Paul realized that his soul was separated from his body. He would not give in. "He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly"(SL, p. 416). Paul was ready to be an independent man in new life.

While in Stephen's diary, we can find that the following entry tells that he feels the call of the European continent and is ready for self-exile: The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We alone-come. And the voices say with them: We are your kinsmen. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me, their kinsmen, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth (247). Self-exile is also necessary for an artist like Stephen. By cutting the tie with Ireland, Stephen is completely free from the suppressive order. Stephen chooses self-exile to pursue his dream with strong determination and the mother-woven love net will never trouble him again.

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