

## Understanding Oedipal Complex in Reference to Twentieth Century British English Literature

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Psychoanalysis, initially used to treat neuroses, later expanded into different fields, and its application to literature emphasizes the writer, the reader, and the literary character. Psychoanalytic criticism, a popular form of literary criticism, has established a relationship between English literature and Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis. The British English literature of the twentieth century was influenced by World War I and II, and the modernist movement introduced modern poetry and drama, which expressed themes like individualism, absurdity,

and symbolism. One of the significant concepts in psychoanalytical theory is the Oedipal Complex, first introduced by Freud in "Interpretation of Dreams" in 1899, which is a crucial stage during the developmental process. The Oedipal Complex is the primary source of conflict in the human psyche, functioning as the central focus for competing urges, dreams, anxieties, and defense mechanisms. This paper aims to identify the 20th century British English literature where the Oedipal Complex is used as an element. The methodology for this study

involves the use of secondary data of related literature. The analysis of the study includes the exploration of the Oedipal Complex in “Sons and Lovers”, “The Rainbow” by D.H Lawrence, “To the Lighthouse” by Virginia Woolf. This study sheds light on the significance of psychoanalytical interpretation of literary texts

and its contribution to understanding the complexities of human behavior and experience.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, British English literature, twentieth century, oedipal complex

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Psychological analysis of literary texts was developed in the early twentieth century, using concepts advocated by sociologists such as Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank and the pioneer of it was Sigmund Freud. Freudian Psychoanalysis was initially used to treat neuroses but later on expanded on to different fields (Hossain, 2017). Psychoanalysis has put emphasis on people rather than on texts (Holland, 1993). Therefore, when the psychoanalysis is applied on literature, it is applied on the writer, the reader and the literary character (Holland 1964). Freud used literature in a very combative manner, he was also acutely aware of the writer’s “innermost secret”, which is their capacity to transmute subconscious dreams into communally shared experiences (Freud 1907, as cited in Reed, 1982).

The English Literature and Freud’s theory of Psychoanalysis is related through a form of literary criticism popularly known as Psychoanalytic criticism (Barry, 2009). Works of literature investigates people and formulates details on every aspect of their lives as literworks are also manifestation of particular psychological state (Yimer, 2019).

### 2.0 Conceptual Framework:

#### 2.1 British English Literature in twentieth century

The literature in twentieth century is influenced by the world-war I and II. Modernist movement also had some influence in the British English literature which introduced modern drama, modern poetry. Modern poetry became a bridge from Victorian age to the twentieth century. Authors have developed new way of seeing the

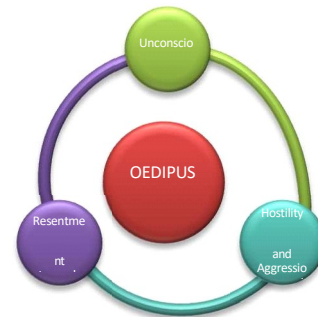
world and expressing themselves which made a difference in the major works of that time (Malicse, 2014). Themes like individualism, absurdity, symbolism were followed in the literary works (Patrick, 2021).

### 2.2 Oedipal Complex

Sigmund Freud has compiled many concepts in Psychoanalytical theory and the concept of Oedipal complex is one of them. The building of Psychoanalysis is a conception created to explain the many phenomena of behavior and experience (Stevens, 2008). Freud (1899) in the book ‘Interpretation of Dreams’ explained thoroughly about the Oedipal Complex stating that it is a crucial stage during developmental process when a desire for sexual involvement with parent of opposite sex and treating same sex parent as the rival develops.

The Oedipus complex has been identified as the primary source of conflict in the human psyche, functioning as the central focus for competing urges, dreams, anxieties and defense (Britton et al., 1989). Moreover, Freud (1913 as cited in Blass, 2001) has supported the theory by informing that the sons “hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too. After they had got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred” (p.143).

Figure 1.



Behaviors in Oedipal Complex *Source*. The data for the behaviors are from “[ Psychology Snapshots]” by Dr. Mark Hatala. Copyright 2023 by Mark Hatala (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6sM2xl-5Ik>)

Unconscious fantasy: Unconscious fantasy has been linked to the idea of the unconscious (Freud, 1899 as cited in Litowitz, 2007).

Resentment: The reason for resentment towards father is due to jealousy as the child wants his mother, all for himself (Freud, 1899 as cited in Litowitz, 2007).

Hostility and aggression: Hostility and aggression is present in the child and he is willing to kill the father as a result of resentment. (Freud, 1899 as cited in Litowitz, 2007).

### 3.0 Theoretical Background:

#### 3.1 Psychoanalytical theory

Sigmund Freud is the pioneer of Psychoanalytic theory. According to Freud, the human personality has three distinct parts- (Freud, 2005 as cited in Voncken,2015)

Id- It is totally unconscious and operates on pleasure principle.

Ego- It is a mediator between Id and Superego and operates on reality principle.

Superego- It acts as an moral police as it operates on moral principle.

### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study is

-To interpret Oedipal Complex in reference to twentieth century British English literature.

### 5.0 METHODOLOGY

The investigator for the study has used secondary data of related literature.

### 6.0 ANALYSIS

#### 6.1 Title- The Conclusion of 'Sons and Lovers': A Reconsideration

Author- Mortland

Year of Publishing – 1971

Findings- The author had studied the novel 'Sons and Lovers' and enunciated that the protagonist, Paul, has *Oedipal Complex* which is projected by his mother. As a result, he is detached to any relationship (with Miriam and Clara). As any other relationship would feel as threat to the oedipal fixation with the mother. Toward the end, he overdose his sick mother with morphine which symbolizes his unconscious way of setting himself free from the Oedipal complex.

#### 6.2 Title- A Study of Oedipal Dynamics in *To The Lighthouse*

Author- Dipendra Pokhrel

Year of Publishing- 2008

Findings – The author has proclaimed that Virginia Woolf, the writer of 'To the Lighthouse' has introduced a character, Lily, to the novel unconsciously. Through her, she channels her own lewd sexual desire to her father. The desires which are trapped in unconscious mind comes out through creative writing (literature works) and the same has happened to Virginia Woolf. James, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay sees the lighthouse as a symbol for his mother's love and wants to go

there meanwhile his father objects that he cannot reach there because of wind which upsets James and hatred towards his father starts from there on.

#### 6.3 Title- Daughter's in Love: Reflection on a Woman's Education in *The Rainbow*

Author- Brigitte Macadre - Nguyen

Year of Publication- 2016

Findings- The author studied the novel '*The Rainbow*' and delivers that two unusual bonds can be found of Tom-Anna and Will-Ursula in the novel. Tom builds a better connection with his step daughter Anna and becomes the reason for the alienation of her from everyone else. The same is with Will and Ursula as Ursula wanted education though her father's influence made her doubtful about it. In the end, when she becomes a school teacher she ponders about her father again.

### 7.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, since the early twentieth century, there has been a strong connection between the study of the literature and Oedipal complex. Many psychoanalytical techniques have been used to analyze literary characters, readers, and writers in literature. The Oedipal Complex was first discussed by Sigmund Freud, the father of Psychoanalysis. He mentioned about it in his book 'Interpretation of Dreams' published in 1899. The complex is about the development of desire where the child is attracted to the parent of opposite sex and treat the same sex parent as their rival. The *Oedipal Complex* has been

identified as the primary source of conflict in the human psyche, functioning as the central focus for competing urges, dreams, defense mechanisms. Several studies have explored the *Oedipal Complex* in literature, such as D.H. Lawrence's 'Sons and Lovers', where the protagonist, Paul, is trapped in the *Oedipal Complex* projected by his mother. Moreover, there are characters such as, James and Lily in the novel 'To The Lighthouse' who are also mentioned to be suffering from the complex though James overcome the complex when he starts to accept his father.

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