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OEDIPUS COMPEX IN THE WORKS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND D.H. LAWRENCE

Abstract: It can be noted that the Oedipus complex is very complex and that it is the subject of psychoanalysis, but also the subject of artistic processing, starting from ancient tragedians. A comparative analysis of this psychological motive in the works of D.H. Lawrence and Tennessee Williams was made in this work. Genre design is different, since Lawrence opted for a novel, and Williams for the genre of drama. However, this fact is less important. It is important in what way and through which literary premises both authors enter the complex psychological structure of the characters.

Key words: Oedipal complex, psychoanalysis, comparison, novel, drama, genre

Introduction

Introductory considerations about the literary topic of Oedipus complex should shed light on it from the angle of Classical Greek literature having in mind that it was processed in tragedy of one of the greatest playwrights – Sophocles.¹ Many centuries after the performance of Sophocle’s tragedy there comes to psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud,² based on this phenomenon as Freud studied and analyzed it, naming it finally after the Sophocle’s drama. More precisely, Jung who continued Freud’s theory used the term *complex* and he added it to research and thinking of his great predecessor. From this data, we can see how far ahead were the writers in their opinions and literary works as opposed to the scientific researchers and achievements. Oedipus complex is highly

¹ Brief content of this tragedy shows how Sophocles developed the tragic motif; however, it did not stay within the scope of his interest only as many other Greek tragedians were utilizing this complex problematic theme later, such as Aeschylus. Namely, with Sophocles incest is the product of ignorance when Oedipus and his mother share the tragic blame, but the tragedy does not end there, however, tragic guilt is passed onto their descendants as seen in the tragedy of Antigona, her sister, as well as her tragically divided brothers.

² More on this complex in: Sigmund Frojd: *O seksualnoj teoriji*, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 1976, also in: “Dostojevski i oceubistvo”, *Iz kulture i umetnosti*, MS, Novi Sad, 1976, p. 235-261, as well as in: *Tumačenje snova*, Book 1, MS, Novi Sad, 1976.

complex psychological relationship tied to the period of childhood, especially for the age from 3 – 5. Complex or conflict takes place when child is showing favor toward the parent of opposite sex, while it is negating, even hating, second parent. Phenomenon of Oedipus complex can be manifested as mother's possessive love toward her children, especially, the male ones, which reflects an array of various other composite mental problems and relationships in the magical circle of family happenings.

In literature, it is not easy to process this theme because it is one of the most complex topics in psychoanalysis, partly because it was also a taboo theme that a few authors wrote about. It is known that the founder of psychoanalysis and his doctrine were subjected to condemnation and denials on one side, while on the other, many were praising his ingenious discoveries in domain of psychology.

When the English speaking world and American literature are in question (Anglo-American literature), there are two writers that devoted their works to these subject, processing it by way of various stylistic procedures/approaches and genre destinations. Older of them two, a playwright, David Lawrence (1885-1930) processed the topic of Oedipus complex within his well-known novel „Sons and Lovers“ (1913), the work with many autobiographical elements, as well as his collection of short stories „Princess and other stories“; the latter work consists of twelve stories, half of them was published during the last eight years of author's life, while the rest was published posthumously.

Habitat in which the story of „Sons and Lovers“ is happening is the same as the habitat of Lawrence's childhood and early youth. Namely, it is the mineworkers town with little education around, while life span is tied to hard earning for basic existence. Author's father was the only literate miner but the alcoholic too, same as the father in the novel. Lawrence's mother³ was an educated woman that felt hardship of living in the miners' town.

Lawrence had problems because of the topic he processed in his novel, he was criticized and rejected which led him to travel over the world as he was trying to escape the mournful reality and conservative criticism. During his relatively short life span, Lawrence created the

³ By distinguishing the autobiographical nature of this novel, R. Bugarski notices: "Following the death of her oldest son, author's mother started to devote her full attention to her weak son inciting in him a desire to escape material and spiritual misery and achieve something that was forever unreachable to other members of a family." (Ranko Bugarski: „O piscu i delu“, E: D.H. Lorens: *Sent Mor* „„, „Džepna knjiga“, Sarajevo, 1959, p. 324)

quality literary work, which also was innovative, unusual, unorthodox. He also wrote „The Plumed Serpent“, „The Rainbow“, „Women in Love“, „The Trespasser“, „St Mawr“, „The Virgin and the Gypsy“, and „Lady Chatterley’s Lover“, which also brought him harsh criticism and dissatisfied public. He was obviously interested in unconventional themes as he knowingly developed them, applying psychological elucidation in his popular novels. However, conservative public opinion was not accepting anything more than what was written in the codices. While creating a large literary oeuvre, Lawrence wrote several collections of stories, while his poems were published posthumously. The most important records from his travels are: „Twilight in Italy and Other Essays“, „Sea and Sardinia“, „Mornings in Mexico“. In addition, he wrote two essays – critical studies dealing with issues involving psychoanalysis: „Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious“ and „Fantasies of the Unconscious“, which we relate to author’s literary observation of this topic. This was noted by M. Magarašević: „Lawrence’s essays encompass pretty different themes from several areas: modern psychology, urban sociology, mythoanthropology, pedagogic fallacies’ critics, ethics, botanical metaphysics, eroticism and creative criticism of psychoanalysis.“⁴

Another playwright who processes Oedipus complex theme is the American playwright Tennessee Williams (1914-1984) whose dramas: „A Streetcar Named Desire“, „Cat on a Hot Tin Roof“, „The Glass Menagerie“, „Tattooed Rose“, „Night of Iguana“ were performed on Broadway and then in other theaters in America and the rest of the world, even locally.⁵ These dramatic texts were adaptable / suitable for filmmakers which enhanced their popularity as the film art was more accessible to wider audience. However, as the American society was Puritan, the fear of people in film industry and theaters too was understandable. They threw out some portions deeming that they stand against the public moral of ordered and healthy society. Portions on oddity and homosexuality were especially dangerous, because the very author was a homosexual. Tennessee Williams whose real name was Thomas Lanier William III, got his nickname after his home state - Tennessee. His death was mysterious and the thoughts were that he might have been

⁴ Mirko Magarašević: „Tokovi života u esejima D. H. Lorensa“, u :D.H. Lorens: *Tajne Feniksa*, selected essays, Rad, Belgrade, 1977, p.183.

⁵ „A Cat on a Tin Hot Roof“ is played at Madlenijanum, Zemun, starting June 2009.

killed. He is deemed to be the greatest American dramaturg of 20th century. He won two Pulitzer Prizes for literature.

Oedipus complex and the illusion of love

Unresolved Oedipus complex migrates and reflects in author's work related to drama, and it is very visible in his key drama „A Streetcar Named Desire“. We see that it is not only a literary subject, but a personal experience by applying positivistic approach from his biography; thus we find that he did not have anything in common with his father, their relationship was laden with latent as well as direct intolerance. Boy spent more time with his grandfather who was a priest than with his father, a merchant, who did not have understanding for his passionate love of books. Father wanted to separate son from the books and introduce him to social games but this was a relationship breaker. Misunderstanding leads to other deviant phenomena in the society, as well as in the life of one individual, so we have alienation and violence. This further implies that one man's destiny is preestablished; some people are destined to be in the good graces, while others are destined to suffer and/or do evil. In other words, man cannot change his destiny to a large degree.⁶

In his key drama „A Streetcar Named Desire“ Williams performs a miracle in only eleven scenes, describing family drama, failure of one's intentions with respect to life and a total collapse of young people's illusions. Action takes place in New Orleans in the family of American Pole Stanley Kolakowski. Everything there is a daily routine between husband and wife until their home is not visited by Blanche DuBois, Stella Kolakowski's sister. Brother-in-law is intolerant toward the third person entering their life who, in addition, presents self with genteel manners. She has lost family's fortune offering an excuse that she was taking care of disabled parents and that she had to pay for their funeral. Sister believes her, brother-in-law doesn't. Growing bomb of intolerance between them is waiting to explode, while Stanley and his pregnant wife physically clash with each other. Brother-in-law investigated Blanche's past which brought forth some unpleasant findings. Following death of her parents and fiancé, for whom she also feels some remorse, she continues on with wanton life style. She worked as the English professor

⁶ Teaching represented in Calvinist philosophy which was adopted in America in the form of Puritanism, which is fine with the advancement of young bourgeois. Gaining treasures is not a sin, it is the matter of God's mercy. According to religious reformer Jean Calvin (1509-1564). According to: *Mala enciklopedija*, Book .2, Prosveta, Belgrade, 1978, p.175.

but was kicked out of school as well as the city for having affair with seventeen year old student. She was able to act manners in her sister's place and attract Mitch, a single guy whom she was able to charm as he decides to marry her. His friend Stanley prevents that from happening and tells him all about Blanche. He also tells his wife. When she was in labor, he told Blanche everything into her face, and raped her. Sister comes back with a baby and Blanche makes call to some friend of her, a Douglas millionaire, who wants to take her to cruise. But, all her illusions and imagination end. She ends up tragically as she is taken to mental asylum.

Oedipus complex in this drama was rendered from two aspects. First off, it is found in the relationship between Mitchell and mother; that we do not see directly as mother does not come onto stage, we only hear his accounts. Namely, while talking to Blanche he mentions that his mother is sick and that she will not live very long. His mother is further afraid that he will be left on his own. Therefore, he gets married because his careful mother wanted so, not because he was in love. In fact, she knows that her end is near and she only wants to find another mother for her son. He will marry just to please mother, so she is not afraid for his future. Mitch's voice is shaking as he vouches that he loves his mother but that no woman would care for her. What has not been said stands as the fact and it is that he was not able to say yes while his mother was alive. In addition, we see that he spoke to his mother about Blanche and that he was not able to tell her age even though mother was interested in it. He reported many things to his mother trying to obtain her opinion as he could not think on his own. Finally, he will tell Blanche that she is not clean enough for their house where his mother lives. At any rate, Mitch's appearance and his actions do not match well. He is a giant with naive and childish heart. He believed everything Blanche told him, but when he finds about the truth, he retreats. He is now deeply disappointed with her and by fact that he was easily duped.

Another aspect when the complex is manifested is visible in Blanche's confession near the ending when she realizes that she was caught lying, when she is sure that brother-in-law knows everything about her shady past. Following her eccentric fiance's suicide, she flees from the tumultous and tragic reality trying to find her peace of mind in new relationships. Without control, she runs in and out of relationships, only to finally get intimate with a boy, her pupil. Although to the public, this superficial relationship is a secondhand report by Stanley, in it as well as in the Blanche's story we find Oedipus complex formed on her part as the reflection of her neurasthenic nature and shaken security. Love for the individual that has not matured is her recollection of a young boy that she

used to love and whose death she feels like a blame. Fleeing from the truth, from the self, she enters a mentally fatal labyrinth. She lives in some bunglesome space between her life and illusions. According to literary observation of Tennessee Williams, dark impulses surface from the depths of inner beings of all individuals that had experienced some misfortune in life or from those that are not sure of themselves. These impulses are taking over the control over them, which leads them into a sure disaster.

Incestuous love fate

In his novel „Sons and Lovers“, realistically and persuasively, Lawrence describes life in the family of a mineworker. However, this 1913 novel, is only realistic if we examine it superficially, underneath a real psychological drama is boiling inclusive of the relationship among mother and sons; Oedipus complex is processed there as it can be paralleled in Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis research while D. H. Lawrence’s novel gave it a thematic framework. What makes this voluminous novel stand out from classical realistical procedure is the lack of fabulousness. Lawrence has accomplished the original style of narration which looks realistic while in essence it is highly modern for its unusual and rare theme which he accomplishes utilizing subtle style and persuasiveness. When he spoke about the future of a novel, Lawrence highlighted the fact that novel’s theme must be challenging: “It must present new, truly new feelings, an array of feelings to take us out from the emotional rut. Instead of complaining on what is, what has been and giving the new twist to old models, one must unblock the path same as the hole on the wall. Public will be furious and call blasphemy as, of course, when you have been pushed against the wall for a long time and when you are used to discomfort and repression you may find it even muffledly pleasant, all of a sudden, you will be outraged to see another hole and light shining through the wall that previously was your humble support.”⁷

Although he was contemporary with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf who created at the same time, Lawrence did not favor the essence of the creation of these 20th century authors. Internal monologue used by early 20th century writers to follow up inner lives of their heroes is not important with Lawrence. Out from the conscious and unconscious actions of his heroes, Lawrence reveals their mental states and inner lives.

⁷ Dejvid Herbert Lorens: “Hirurški zahvat romana ili – bomba”, u: *Radjanje moderne književnosti. Roman*, (arranged by :Aleksandar Petrov), Nolit, Belgrade, 1975, p. 195.

There are not many characters in the novel „Sons and Lovers“. Walther Morel, a miner, is the head of a family. Roots of his wife Gertrude are not compatible with their present home ground. When they met, it was the case of „opposite attracts“. He was a passionate and good dancer while she did not know how to play. She deemed dancing to be a lower class value. She was educated, not obtrusive, tender, and of brittle built – a total opposition to jolly, playful, and flimsy miner with curly black hair and large mustaches. When after seven months the thrill was gone, their differences came to light and the gap between them was larger and larger. Young woman was crushed after she had learned that their house was not their property. After some time, Gertrude Morel begins to find out what kind of shallow man her husband truly is. Son William’s birth is a joy for her. She turns to her son completely. When older son dies, mother turns to younger Paul. Her possessive love reaches a climax. Regarding this, S. Koljevic writes:“Logic that makes Paul return mother’s love is fatal and tragic too, the same logic that makes the primordial love – love of the son for his mother – become the fate of Paul’s youth. Tragic of this love lies within its nature – it is the love wherein one blindly and fruitlessly seeks a fateful fulfilment as its physical consumation is not possible, though at the same time, this love is unavoidable product of two life situations and two closely connected human beings.“⁸

Mother does not have anything nice to say about girlfriends of her sons. In the beginning, when William mentioned some girlfriend, she said that the only thing she saw in him was a dog that needs a collar.

After another girl Clara had visited younger Paul, he told mother that Clara was a bother; when Mirriam came, he said that he was careless about these girls. Paul’s loyalty to mother can be seen in their short dialogue, as well as the infinite love, attachment and fear before the fact that her favor may be betrayed. On the other hand, mother pretends to be sorry for his careless relationship with the girls, which relieves her from the responsibility; the truth is – she makes him more bound and dependent on her. Such type of love will only disappear when at least one party dies. Following the living logic of things, mother dies. Son is at home, takes care of her. She has got an incurable disease. In this novel, son pours some venom into her milk trying to end her pains, which only speaks how destiny often turns the tables in various situations and circumstances according to its likes.

⁸ Svetozar Koljević: „Lorensov roman“, preamble u : D. H. Lorens : *Sinovi i ljubavnici*, Prosveta, Belgrade, 1966, p. 14.

Dialogues in this novel show that author's is up to the highest skill of dispersing dialogue as the form of expression. It looks as if dialogue was taken over from immediate conversation, it is highly persuasive, as if real – not literary – people are represented in reader's consciousness and imagination. Most times they are stingy, but the essence is told with a little words. Mother exchanges short sentences with Paul, sometimes one word is enough for them to understand each other. In addition, the closeness of these two beings is exceptional. They think as one. More precisely, younger Paul is part of her being, her view on living, opinions, etc. Tragedy of Paul's personality lies there. Fatal connection to mother created his inability to make his own decisions and to have his emotional life. Attempts with the girls, Clara and Mirriam, ended unsuccessfully as in his consciousness there was an idea that by loving a girl, he will lose the love and loyalty of the mother.

Mother's character in this novel was presented with several important and characteristic traits, where the dominant ones are egoism and possessiveness. After she had felt that she lives alone next to the husband that is the same as the rest of the miners, as he works to sleep and drink beer in the pub, she fully turned to children tying them up to her. Possessiveness turns to egoism as she does not allow her sons to live their lives. Mother is afraid that she will lose them and remain alone. Her larger than life love toward sons and exaggerated care are superfluous. Possessiveness is even more stronger following the William's death. Loss of older son has fortified mother's fear that she will lose younger one too, so the bonds of love are even more stricter and fatal for Paul⁹.

Theme that started with „Sons and Lovers“ will be developed later in stories that he wrote near the end of his life. In the collection „Princess and other stories“, there is a story „Mother and Daughter“. Mirjana Vasic wrote about it: „This story is about even more bizzare and sicker incestuous relationship between mother and daughter which is a step further from Lawrence's works about the incestuous relationships between the mother and sons.“¹⁰

⁹ Although we are not sure if these were the original goals of the author, the very name Paul comes from the Latin word Paulus, which means small. It can be taken as the name related symbolism. Paul will remain a small boy entire life who is destined to be the center of his mother's protective role. (u: Bratoljub Klaić: *Veliki riječnik stranih riječi*, Zora, Zagreb, 1968, p. 99)

¹⁰ Mirjana Vasić: Simboli i motivi u kratkoj prozi D. H. Lorenza, *Sveske*, No. 91, Pančevo, March 2009, p. 91.

Possessive mother Rachel Baldwin is athletic built and very energetic. She assumes daughter Virginia to be her extended alter ego. Mother is conscious of her powerful influence over daughter and superior relationship against her. Daughter wears mother's shoes only after they had become worn out. Shoes do not pinch then, meaning symbolically that she is stepping in her mother's footsteps. She runs from the paws of her manly mother into the hands of Arnold, whom she marries even though he has many children and is unfit for her. However, he still is the salvation for the young girl as Vasic observes: „His powerful role of father brings balance against the dominant mother, and it is clear that marriage with Arnold severs ties with incestuous mother, even though logical question follows - in what measure this choice was right for Virginia. Although Arnold represents a grotesque appearance, he is also an allegory of father figure and the embodiment of the traditional male role, his consciousness is paternal and tribal.“¹¹

Comparations

Personal experience is crucial and decisive in those authors to present this complex theme, it is a literary and life situation with sign of equality.

Tennessee Williams confirms and achieves Oedipus complex in his characters, subduing his personality into the background of dramatic events. Thus the distance between the author and characters is obvious, while with Lawrence situation is opposite as autobiographic moments are more traceable in his work. Namely, Lawrence's father was a miner, his mother was more of a dominant figure, more educated and intelligent than her husband, his older brother died, while life account of the author may be equalled to the account of boy named Paul in the novel „Sons and Lovers“.

As Oedipus complex is a highly complex matter, it is manifested in two diametrically opposite ways with these two authors: with Lawrence, it is manifested through immeasurable and pathologically strong love for the mother and vice versa, in Williams' work it is manifested through hate for the parent of same sex, that is the father. Even though the image of father is ever present in Lawrence's novel, he is out of reach with respect to the emotional perception of his sons. They are indifferent toward him, showing no signs of love or hate as if he does not exist. Second part of Oedipus complex was abolished, it means that there

¹¹ Same, p. 92.

is a great love toward one parent of the opposite sex, but there is no hate for the same sex parent. Situation is opposite with Williams where emotional life is based on hate. However, both situations are equally fatal if they are overexaggerated, as they come out of natural framework, love and hate boil down to psychopathologic relationships.

Williams manifests Oedipus complex in one, let us claim, indirect fashion, which does not necessarily mean – less successfully. Just the opposite, by using less words, Williams uncovers every dark and murky side of human psyche, especially if it is a sick mind. Mother with Lawrence is placed in the foreground, mother with Williams is absent. He only shows how much this complex has been negatively reflected in the mental life of his hero through the manifestation of insecure son's character. Mitch is not able to estimate the person whom he would marry. He thinks all best about Blanche praising her genteel manners and fairness, while his friend Kolakowski immediately senses that something is wrong with her. More precisely, a person that all of a sudden rushes into the home of her sister and brother-in-law and who also lost her estate must be a victim of some moral collapse.

When selecting genre we find differences. Williams opts for dramatic form of expression, Lawrence chooses a novel. If we judge works by the experience of the world, by the relationship between the traditional and modern in literature, one could say that Williams had an advantage against Lawrence. However, their chosen topic represents the original thematic approach in the literature of 20th century. Oedipus complex theme was exceptionally well processed by both authors, and this thematic achievement is innovative; it was not incited from the outside, it was the reflection of personal experiences, and thus it is impressive, strong and intriguing.

Both writers use dialogue. T. Williams uses it as the basic narrative tool of dramatic expression; Lawrence utilizes it as the part of form of prose expression. What characterizes these two dialogues is minimalism. Skillfully chosen and naturally composed words vouch that quality effect and better artistic expression are possible with minimal wording.

It is characteristic for both works that they do not have a branched plot; writers are focused onto internal life of their heroes because the theme [Oedipus complex] required so. In order to develop this thematic complex composition it was necessary to develop the portion of literary interest related to the ties among characters, psychological fermentations, and complexity of these relationships that escape the framework of what is natural and sound. When they enter these sort of problems, both writers

use little words; with a few skillfully chosen procedures they reveal a lot; shedding light onto the essence of a problem – which embodies the virtuosity of their artistic genius.

Lawrence and Williams belong to 20th century literature, but one can say that their works are close to those of the European naturalistic writers with respect to the presentation of dark impulses of human nature.

Conclusion

Finally we can state that these two writers from the English speaking areas wrote in different periods. Lawrence published his first novel before Williams was born. Regarding theme they both wrote about, they did not influence each other, however, it came as the product of their personal experience. Only a small number of writers chose this complex and hard topic mainly because it was still unresearched from the psychological aspect, while they were entering into the essence of problem with a knowledge of one psychoanalyst. In addition, both authors seemed to challenge the public opinion of English and American society, respectively, as it was conservative and not prone to any sort of novelty. Such relationship toward the reality and themes brought many mishaps and disapprovals as well as the great interest on the part of the public. Besides exceptionally complex and experienced thematic substance – an original stylistic expression is also present in these authors as it tops up the original impression of their literary works. Both writers successfully connected the processes of different literary epochs. Although before all they are modern writers – the writers of 20th century – in their works there are some elements of vanished naturalism and realism. They presented the dark sides of human mind in stylistically modern way which in essence provides a real picture of the reality and relationships.

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РЕЗИМЕ
ЕДИПОВ КОМПЛЕКС У ДЕЛИМА ТЕНЕСИ ВИЛИЈАМСА И Д.Х.
ЛОРЕНСА

Може се констатовати да је Едипов комплекс веома сложен и да је предмет проучавања психоанализе, али предмет уметничке обраде, почев још од античких трагичара. У раду извршена је компаративна анализа овог психолошког мотива у делима Лоренса и Тенеси Вилијамса. Жанровско осмишљавање је различито, с обзиром на то да се Лоренс определио за роман, а Вилијамс за определио за драмски жанр. Међутим, та чињеница је мење важна, битно је на који начин и путем којих књижевних премиса оба аутора улазе у сложену психолошку структуру ликова.