JacquesLacan's interpretation of the Oedipus complex and its application to the family dynamics depicted in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*

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Sons and Lovers, D.H. Lawrence's famous second novel, may be read as an interesting case study to which Jacques Lacan's reinterpretation of Sigmund Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex can be applied. The congruence of the psychoanalytic theory and the novel is made evident at many levels by the dynamics of the multiple family relationships depicted in the novel, but in this paper attention will be focused almost exclusively on the relationship between Paul Morel, the protagonist of the novel, and his mother, Gertrude. Other characters in the novel will be discussed only insofar as the intersection of their roles with those of mother and son may shed light on the relationship between the latter two. Nor need we consider, therefore, the difference between the unfolding of the Oedipal process in girls rather than boys, which will be by-passed altogether. And since the most extensive, and possibly the most mature and enlightening, remarks of Lacan on the subject of the Oedipus complex are found in the manuscript privately circulated under the title of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V (1957-1958)*—particularly in Seminars 9 and 10, conducted in January, 1958—here we shall be guided principally by this work.

Among the concepts that govern Lacan's psychoanalytic system, perhaps the most basic is that of the three "orders" that describe the three principal levels at which psychic processes can take place, the "real," the "imaginary," and the "symbolic." Distinguishing among them is important, because the psychoanalytic significance of the same given event cannot be properly assessed unless account is taken of the "order" to which it belongs. Thus, the three "orders" provide, in effect, "the fundamental classification system around which [Lacan's] theory turns" (Evans 132). The system gains added complexity, however, especially in what pertains to the Oedipus complex, because the psychic processes that constitute such complex are divided in turn into three different "times," each of which is marked by triadic configurations which are integral components of each "time." A highly condensed account of Lacan's interpretation of the Oedipus complex would therefore be approximately as follows.

The fundamental triangle of the family—mother, child, and father—exists, to begin with. as a kind of pre-oedipal experience; however, the "first relationships to reality take shape between mother and child" (Lacan 155.) This dyadic relationship grows out of the child's experience of the mother's care and comfort, and is symbolized, at a primitive stage of development, by the child's cry for attention, food, and comfort, associated primarily with the breast. As the child grows, becomes mobile, and acquires some language, it also becomes aware that the mother "comes and goes," and seems to have other objects of

interest and desire besides the child. It is at this time, according to Lacan's suggestion, that the child's first "symbolization" takes place: "he separates out his effective dependence on her desire from the pure and simple living experience of that dependence" (Lacan 156.) In other words, the child's desire "is not simply the craving for her care, her contact, even for presence [sic], it is the craving for her desire [for him]" (Lacan 156).

The developmental process eventually moves to the "imaginary order" for the second "time." The child attempts to become the "object of the mother's desire [for him]" by trying to please the mother; thus, he becomes the mother's "phallus." At this point, however, the "imaginary" father begins to play an essential role that involves "the three planes of castration, of frustration, of privation exercised by the father," which, if successfully navigated by the child as he develops, will lead to "the identification of the child to the father" (Lacan 159.) In the final stage the father "prohibits (interdit) the mother" (Lacan 145) and establishes the "law of the father," namely, the prohibition against incest. This involves a twofold privation/castration: the mother is deprived of the child as the "object of her desire" (and is thus, symbolically "castrated" by being deprived of her symbollic "phallus"), while the child is subjected to an imaginary castration (and is thus, deprived of his mother as the "object of his desire"). On the one hand, therefore, the child's father becomes that object, because he *has* the phallus; but on the other, frustration is experienced by the child, as he unconsciously views his father as a rival.

The third and crucial "time" determines the lasting outcome of the Oedipus complex, which will mark the child's personality thereafter. First, according to Lacan, the real father becomes the "paternal metaphor;" that is, "the father [becomes] a signifier substituted for another signifier," i.e., the mother (150). However, this is not the end of the process; for there remains a final step, which Lacan describes as "the inverted Oedipus complex" (146). Although the child has experienced the father as a prohibiter—the one who has established the "law of the father" and the one who has deprived him of his role as the mother's "phallus"—he must now identify with his father if the dissolution of the complex at puberty is to take place. As part of this process, "the component of love for the father cannot be avoided" (Lacan 146). This love is what fosters the identification of the son with the father, which in turn allows the child to assume his own masculinity. As summed up by Lacan, the result is as follows:

> The father in so far as he is revealed—he is revealed in so far as, he, [sic] "has it"—is the way out of the Oedipus complex ... in so far as the identification with the father happens at this third moment ... It is an identification that is called the "ego-ideal", and which appears at this level in the symbolic triangle ... at the pole where the child is, and in the measure that it is at the maternal pole that everything that from now on will be reality begins to be constituted. And it is at the level of the

father that everything that from now on will be the "super-ego" begins to be constituted (168).

The way out of the Oedipus complex is also the way into the "symbolic order", where the symbolic father, the "NAME-OF-THE-FATHER," provides a normative, social, and regulatory structure within which a culture develops and within which an individual can function to his or her satisfaction and to that of others and become a genuine person with his or her own identify. For "to be named is to be placed in a symbolic network that sets one apart precisely as not-being someone else. Kinship relations, sex roles, social status, prescribed obligations and opportunities—all these rest, according to Lacan, on what Claude Lèvi-Strauss called 'the symbolic order'" (Muller 141). If the Oedipus complex is resolved, the child can expect to grow not simply into an adult, but into an emotionally mature adult.

The dynamics of the Morels, the family that occupies centre stage in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, especially the relationship among parents and their third child, Paul, illustrate vividly the development of the Oedipal situation as theoreticaly described by Lacan. When the "moments" or stages in the psycho-sexual development of the child unfold in certain ways, the emotional growth of the child is thwarted, incomplete, or imperfectly managed, with life altering consequences for the child. And this is what happens, in this case, to Paul.

Part I of the novel introduces the early Morel family: Walter Morel, a coal miner; Gertrude, his pregnant and unhappy wife, carrying the soon-to-be-born Paul; and their two children: William, 7, and Annie, 5; a fourth sibling, Arthur, would later follow Paul. Clearly, this is a marriage of opposites: though mutually attracted at first, their union has come to grief. Their hostility towards each other is barely concealed, and they are obviously battle-scarred.

Gertrude—was her name chosen by Lawrence at random?[1]—who was 23 when she met Walter, comes from "a good old burgher family (Lawrence 7). While physically she resembles her mother, "whom she loved best of all (7), her temperament is much like her father's: "proud and unyielding" (7). Although she "hated her father's overbearing manner towards her gentle, humorous, kindly mother" (7), she is not above treating Walter in the same way. She feels cheated of educational opportunities and interesting

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[1] It is not impossible that, either unconsciously or deliberately, Lawrence selected Gertrude's name because the mother-son relationship between Hamlet and his mother is in some respects much like that of Paul and Gertrude. The basic similarity, despite superficial differences in the order of "reality" between Hamlet's family and Paul's suggests that the parallel may not be entirely coincidental. Both fathers are "absent," albeit in very different ways; and both fathers owe their absence to the mother, Gertrude; and in both instances, it is Gertrude who is responsible for the father's having been driven away—one to drink, the other to his death. And both Hamlet and Paul exhibit pronounced ambivalence towards their fathers, though in Hamlet's case the ambivalent feelings are split between the good father and the bad step-father. But then, again, Oedipal situations are not rare in novels and plays, and the choice of Gertrude's name may well be random.

experiences solely because she is a woman, and believes that she has married beneath her. She now "despised" her husband and felt "tied to him." Her world has come to seem "a dreary place" (5); and "looking ahead, the prospect of her life made her feel as if she were buried alive" (5).

And yet, originally she had felt very differently; she had been attracted to Walter's handsome, full "red moist mouth," his "rich ringing laugh," and the "dusky golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life" (9, 10). But upon learning that Walter had deceived her about his financial circumstances—pretending that he owned houses that in fact were his mother's, and owing money for the furnishings in their home—her manner changed: "Something in her proud, honourable soul had crystalized out hard as rock" (13). She became intent on changing him: and "So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. She injured and hurt and scarred herself, but she lost none of her worth. She also had the children" (15). The ill-starred family constellation was complete by the subtractive addition of Walter, who had become an outsider, present at home in body but alienated from Gertrude at all but isolated moments, and feared by his children. He does not understand at all how or why what has happened has happened. And his only solace is liquid, the kind that cannot dissolve tragedy.

Gertrude Morel makes a conscious decision to dedicate her life, energy, and love on her children. Through them she hopes to improve the family's social and financial status, and so to surmount the poverty and misery of the coal miner's neighbourhood. At first she concentrates her efforts on the eldest, William, who is brilliant, ambitious, and promising—though somewhat refractory to his mother's attempts to bind him to her. At the age of 23 and living in London, he seems to be successful at his work. But Gertrude's dreams collapse when he dies of pneumonia, and with him her hopes. Paul tries to distract and console her; but she, mute with grief, can only spend her days silently ensconced in her chair.

Three months later, however, she is aroused from her mourning when Paul, now 16, contracts pneumonia and hovers near death. Gertrude nurses him, beside him night and day. As Paul's "consciousness makes a last flare of struggle," he cries out, in his dialect, "I s'll die, mother!" But Gertrude's response, "Oh, my son—my son!." She revives him and "His whole will rose up and arrested him. He put his head on her breast, and took ease of her for love" (135). Momentarily, Paul recovers the maternal breast and regresses briefly to the long forgotten comforting mother-and-infant dyadic relationship. After seven bed-ridden weeks, Paul rises, "white and fragile." And as he and Gertrude chat, the two are "knitted together in perfect intimacy. Mrs. Morel's life [has] now rooted itself in Paul" (135).

The original stage of psycho-sexual development to which Paul regressed on this occasion had originally taken place, of course, many years earlier. Long before William's death, Paul was already on the

way to becoming an alternative version of the son that Gertrude craved; he may have been unconsciouly selected and groomed for the role as more malleable, more reliable material than William. In any event, he was ready to replace William when the occasion arose. At the age of 17 months, Paul, displaced by the new-born Arthur, "trotted after his mother like her shadow." By the age of 3 or 4, "he would have fits of depression." When asked by his mother to explain, he could only reply "I don't know." Although the fits were infrequent, they "caused a shadow in Mrs. Morel's heart, and her treatment of Paul was different from that of the other children." Paul, for his part "seemed old for his years." He was particularly attuned to how his mother felt: "When she fretted, he understood and could have no peace. His soul seemed always attentive to her" (55). And then, during convalescence from bronchitis, Paul was allowed to share his sick bed with his mother, which he relished; he finds "Sleep is still most perfect ... when it is shared with a beloved" (64).

The next stage followed. When Paul brings her a spray and a basketful of blackberries, Gertrude accepts it, playfully, "in a curious tone of a woman acceptng a love token" (65). At the level of the unconscious, striving hard to please his mother and alleviate her poverty, Paul has become, as Lacan would say, his mother's "phallus." Likewise, as Lacan's theory would have predicted, Paul is anxious about his mother's lack of fulfilment, especially because "his own incapability to make up to her hurt him with a sense of impotence, yet made him patiently dogged inside. It was his childish aim." Thus, he accepts the role and he becomes Gertrude's confidant, her life-partner, listening patiently to her musings and worries; and during his father's hospitalization with a broken leg he fancies himself "the man of the house," his father's replacement.

Ideally, according to Lacan, in the second "time" of this stage the imaginary father intervenes and establishes the "law of the father," society's taboo against incest. And yet, Walter Morel has virtually no paternal authority, moral or otherwise, within his family; he is most unlikely to assert his rights as the "possessor of the phallus" and, therefore, the right to be the "object of Gertrude's desire." However, Lacan insists on the importance of noting that the process does not take place in "the order of reality." Absence of real authority in the real father is not indispensable. The prohibition imposing the law is "mediated by the discourse of the mother; in other words, what is important is not that the real father step in and impose the law, but that this law be respected by the mother herself in both her words and actions" (Evans 129).

Unfortunately for Paul's psycho-sexual development, to do any such thing is not in Gertrude's plans: she is determined to live through her children, especially her sons—and Paul most of all. After William's death he is desired by Gertrude not only as a son but as a substitute for her husband. And he responds:

she becomes in his eyes his "fine little woman" (117). The consequences for Paul are serious: the third "time," according to Lacan is crucial , because of its influence on the development of the young boy when he reaches puberty and begins to establish his own sexual relationships. If he is to gain the benefit of the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and assume his own male identity, he must navigate the next stage successfully:

> It is in so far as the father becomes, from whatever aspect, the aspect of strength or weakness, an object who is preferable to the mother that the final identification can be established (Lacan 149).

It seems clear that Gertrude Morel is not prepared to allow this to happen and that Walter can do nothing to change the course of events that will follow. Walter has already ceded his role to Gertrude and she, for her part, is ever more strongly determined to bind Paul to her as the repressed "object of her desire." And yet if in the end the incestuous Oedipal feelings should prevail, the third "time" will not have for its outcome the creation of the "symbolic" triangle that constitutes the functional family environment, in which identification with the father creates the child's "ego-ideal," the mother becomes the pole around which reality begins to be constituted by the child, and the father is the pole around which the child's "super-ego" crystallizes (Lacan 168).

Commenting on Freud's case of "Little Hans," Lacan finds that it has a "flawed outcome," because "this third movement is essential and is also missing." A problem is generated "in so far as the position of the father is put in doubt by the fact it it is not his word that lays down the law for the mother. Like Gertrude, Hans's mother "encourages him to hold on to the function of imaginary object" (Lacan 166), i.e. the mother's "phallus". Lacan concedes that Hans, aided by his phobia, eventually experienced a "flawed outcome," but also predicts that Hans "will have a love life that is completely marked by a paticular style, an imaginary style" (Lacan 167). Indications abound that Lacan's prediction applies also to Paul, as his developing relationship with his mother bears upon his attempts to deal with his sexual responses to women younger than she.

At 14, Paul must seek work; or rather his mother will seek it for him at a factory; for he has no particular life-goal in mind other than "to earn thirty or thirty-five shillings somewhere near home, and then, when his father died, have a cottage with his mother, paint and go out as he liked, and live happy ever after" (Lawrence 85). At this point in Paul's early adolescence, Gertrude's overriding emotions are still focused on William; but Paul is becoming "more and more significant" in her life" (116). This, as noted above, was soon to change when the double trauma of William's death and Paul's brush with

mortality solidifies Gertrude's determination to hold on to Paul; her youngest son, Arthur, has proven to be too much like his father to be a repository of her hopes for the future. However, Gertrude's designs are about to be challenged by Miriam Leivers and Cora Dawes.

Paul first met Miriam Leiver when he was nearly 16 and she about 14, during a visit to the farm worked by her family as tenants; neither this nor many subsequent occasions that brought them together sparked much mutual interest in them for some time. He preferred her brothers' company and she put him in the same category as her brothers: brutal and uncouth. In her imagination she saw herself as a drudge, a "swine-girl" who, underneath her stained rags was a "princess" (136). She was a romantic at heart, longing for wider experience: "she was mad to have learning whereon to pride herself" (137). She notices Paul, yet tries hard "to scorn him." Eventually she is attracted to "The boy's poor morsel of learning" (137), but she feared he saw in her only the swine-girl, not the princess; in fact, he scarcely noticed her at all. However, in the Leivers's home Paul discovered a sort of tranquil, functional family life he had never known thereto. He learned about hoeing, milking, sowing, and harvesting; best of all, he was loved and admired for his art work, which his mother cared little about. What she wanted was "his achievement ... The Leivers kindled him and this made him glow to his work, whereas his mother's influence was to make him quietly determined, patient, dogged, unwearied" (142).

Miriam's and Paul's love blooms slowly; its progress is largely unacknowledged; Paul insists he is merely her teacher and friend. To complicate matters, Paul feels a good deal of anger and anxiety over the sexual feelings she arouses in him. When he is teaching her, he is impatient—a derivative of his repressed Oedipal feelings towards his mother and his consequent repressed guilt. Gertrude, for her part, recognizes in Miriam a threat, a rival for Paul's affections. She frets to herself: "She will never let him become a man; she never will;" though she directs her wrath at Miriam, she could well be speaking of herself. When Gertrude berates him for "courting," Paul tries to defend himself: "We only talk." He accuses her of not liking Miriam, which she denies: "I don't hold with children keeping company, and never did." To placate her, but disguising his true motive as pique over Miriam's refusal to to call for him at home, he breaks the planned weekly trips to the library with Miriam, a meeting that was pleasurable to both. And since he has repressed his feelings for his mother, his attraction to Miriam must be repressed also—or at least rationalized: their intimacy was "kept so abstract, such a matter of the soul, all thought and weary struggle into consciousness, that he saw it only as a platonic friendship" (164). Even her slipping her arm in his results in "violent conflict in him. His consciousness seemed to split." Miriam, silent and tentative, is often just as artificially remote as he, lost in religious thoughts of sacrifice, suppressing her true feelings and fearful of even the thought of sexual intercourse. Neither is able to speak

frankly even to themselves, much less the other.

When Miriam comes to tea, Gertrude makes clear her dislike for Miriam, but Paul pretends not to notice. At chapel, as Miriam sits in the same pew as he and his mother, he fantasizes, finding it "wonderfully sweet and soothing to sit there for an hour and a half, next to Miriam and near to his mother, uniting his two loves under the spell of the place of worship" (183). But the peace of his delusion does not last long: coming home from walks with Miriam he pelts his mind with questions. Why is he so confused? Why does his mother suffer? Why does he hate Miriam? Unable to answer, he projects his guilt and blames Miriam; his repressed feelings do no allow any insight to rise to consciousness. Meanwhile Gertrude vents her anger at Miriam: "She wants to draw him out and absorb him until there is nothing left of him, even for himself. He will never be a man on his own feet—she will suck him up." The moment is pure irony; it is Gertrude, of course, who wants to absorb him into her.

As if to counteract Miriam's influence, Gertrude accuses him of "liking nothing and nobody else but Miriam" (202). He tries to reassure her: "No, mother—I really *don't* love her. I talk to her, but I come home to you." As he stoops to kiss her goodnight, she embraces him, throws her arms around his neck, and cries on his shoulder while he writhes in agony at the sound of her whimpering voice: "I can't bear it. I could let another woman—but not her" (203). And she explains, barely concealing her expectations of who, instead of Miriam, should have him for a husband: "I've never—you know Paul—I've never had a husband—not really." He stroked his mother's hair, responding to her advance, and his mouth was on her throat. As he hides his misery burying his head on her shoulder, Gertrude "kissed him a long, fervent kiss. My boy! ... in a voice trembling with passionate love." Responding, but "without knowing, he gently stroked her face." When Walter arrives on the scene, drunk and spiteful, but with the dim yet accurate instinctive perceptiveness of a suspicious cuckold, he taunts her: "At your mischief again?" And she, defiantly, at the semi-conscious cost of implicitly admitting the semi-veiled charge, throws back at Walter: "At any rate, it is sober."

Paul and his father almost come to blows as Paul rises to his mother's defence, though precisely what she is being defended from remains unacknowledged by all. Gertrude faints, and tears run down Paul's face as he tends to her and revives her. The father, now calmer and resigned, removes his boots and stumbles off to bed: "His last fight was fought in that home" (204). He has been emotionally evicted once for all. Paul sees Gertrude to her room and "on the landing ... kissed her close." He is "full of misery. And yet, somewhere in his soul he was at peace, because he still loved his mother best. It was the bitter peace of resignation" (205). The ambivalent ending of this powerfully sexual scene underscores the degee to which Gertrude and Paul are locked in a destructive relationship: she will not relinquish him as the

"object of her desire."

That thereafer Miriam becomes once again the target of Paul's anger and confusion—generated by Gertrude's success in convincing Paul that he must renounce Miriam—is not surprising. Miriam's physical beauty, their long friendship, and above all his unacknowledged sexual desire for her can be tolerated only if he blames her, instead of examining his own ambivalence, self-absorption, and repressed feelings—which, though disguised, persistently break through, but soon are banished from, his consciousness. Determined to "have done" with Miriam, yet suggesting to her at the same time that they might become engaged, Paul rationalizes his position with a stunningly ironic stroke of self-deceit: "You see ... [he tells her] with me — I don't think one person will ever monopolize me — be everything to me — I think never" (214). But what is his relationship to his mother, if not precisely this?

Not long after the break with Miriam, Paul's attention is drawn to Clara Dawes, to whom he is introduced by Miriam, who wants to test her theory that she, Miriam, is Paul's "chief need in life" (218). Clara, older than Paul and married, but separated, is an independent, outspoken woman, who arouses, to the point of obvious undeniability, a "thickening and quickening of his blood" (240). She will raise his ire, but he will be intrigued by her: "She was to him extraordinarily provocative, because of the knowledge she seemed to possess, and gathered fruit of experience he could not attain" (252). Paul, 23, and a virgin, has as little understanding of the causes of the confused feelings Clara arouses in him as he had of those evoked by Miriam—the detachment of his desire from a true relationship, and the overwhelming feeling that he cannot conceive of marrying at all.

With both Miriam and Clara, Paul shunned physical contact at first; even kissing or holding hands. It is only when his own desire for each of them becomes intolerable that he is able to have sexual intimacy with each in turn. But the affairs provide no more than an occasion to play-act the role of beloved lover, and yield only momentary satisfaction—not least of all because his usual anger, hatred, and indecision quickly return after their encounters. Neither Miriam, during a week at her grandmother's cottage, nor Clara, when they stayed on the Lincolnshire coast, can bring him more than ephemeral respite. Paul breaks with Mirian a second time, wanting to be free, or at least free not to marry. Stunned, she thinks him "an unreasonable child ... like an infant ... when it has drunk its fill, throws away and smashes the cup" 281). Clara admits to Paul that he has given her more sexual satisfaction than her husband had, but "you've never given me yourself," to which he angrily replies, "If I start to make love to you ... I just go like a leaf down the wind." "And leave me out of count," she retorted, reflecting the implication of what he had said (345). History is repeating itself.

In time, Miriam goes on with her life without him, Clara becomes reconciled with her husband, and

Paul reassures Gertrude, "You know I don't care about them, mother" (350). And so, after much effort, Gertrude has conquered her "rivals," though at the cost of not a little collateral damage to Paul—the kind that never seems to count—and once more is left standing, the sole survivor in a clear field of battle, all to herself. The Pyrrhic victory, however, is now to be followed by the challenge of the last foe, who is about to be engaged. She is terminally ill.

Paul and a friend embark on a brief trip to Blackpool, and Gertrude, instead of remaining at home by herself, goes to her daughter Annie's in Sheffield for a week, where Paul will meet her at the end of his trip. He is carefree and enjoys his vacation; he feels like a new man: "None of himself remained — no Clara, no Miriam, no mother that fretted him" (351). Gay and excited, he arrives at Annie's expecting to see his mother greeting him laughingly in the hall. Instead, he finds her mortally ill; he falls on his knees and cries, "Mother — mother — mother!" It is she who must comfort him, as if he were still a small child. In fact, she has been sick for several months, but Paul had not noticed—one of his customary reactions to many situations being denial. As he leaves Annie's to return to work, "He kissed her again and stroked the hair from her temples gently, tenderly, as if she were a lover" (357). By contrast, Walter, a subdued old man, "a forlorn figure, looking rather as if nobody owned him," comes to see her "kissing her in a hasty, timid fashion."

After two months at Annie's, Gertrude returns home to die. As Paul sits by her bed their eyes meet, hers "warm, laughing with tender love," while the sight of her blue eyes made him shudder with "terror, agony, and love" (367). He loosens and brushes her hair, works in her room, soothes her forehead and holds her hand. At other times he is almost an automaton: both he and Gertrude were "afraid of the veils that were ripping between" (367). But Paul is not one "to analyse or understand" (367) what is happening.

In the final stages Paul and Annie share the nursing chores. Gertrude endures her terrible pain with tight lips and clenched fists, and sometimes when her eyes and Paul's meet it is almost as if Paul is agreeing to die, too. "But she did not consent to die; she would not"(373). To end her prolonged agony, Paul, with Annie's acquiescence, administers to Gertrude all the remaining morphia pills, and settling her for the night they await her death. Upon learning that she was dead, he rushed upstairs, "put his face to hers and his arms around her: 'My love — my love — oh, my love!' he whispered again and again. 'My love — oh, my love!'" (379). And later, when she is laid out, he visits her room, candle in hand, to gaze at her: "She lay like a maiden asleep … like a girl asleep and dreaming of her love" (380). As if to awaken her, "He bent and kissed her passionately … Mother, mother!" (380). There was only the cold response of death.

In the weeks and months that follow, Paul is rudderless; when he speaks with Clara's husband, he describes a world bordering on "the Real:" "It's as if I was in a tangled sort of hole, rather dark and dreary, and no road anywhere" (383). Baxter Daws has Clara now, but Paul can think only of his mother and brood:

> His mother had really supported his life. He had loved her; they two had, in fact, faced the world together. Now she was gone, and forever behind was the gap in life, the tear in the veil, through which his life seemed to drift slowly, as if he were drawn towards death (387-8)

Paul has paid a terrible price for being "the object his mother's desire:" he is not a subject, an independent self with his own identity, ambition and goals; nor does he have the adult maturity to form a lasting relationship. His siblings hold little interest for him; Annie and Arthur are settled with partners, children and homes of their own. As for his father, now living with friends, there "was scarcely any bond between [him and his] son, save that each felt he must not let the other go in any actual want" (390). His usual pursuits—work and painting—neither offer solace nor provide any structure to his existence. To judge from Lawrence's description, it seems as if Paul, who had long lived in Lacan's "imaginary" order, is teetering on the edge of "the Real," yet shrinking back from it:

> Always alone, his soul oscillated, first on the side of death, then on the side of life doggedly. The real agony was that he had nowhere to go, nothing to do, nothing to say and *was* nothing himself. Sometimes he ran down the streets as if he were mad: sometimes he was mad; things weren't there, things were there ... He dared not meet his own eyes in the mirror; he never looked at himself. He wanted to get away from himself" (392-3).

Whence comes his flirting with "the Real order" which until now he had not so much as approached? The reader is not told. Is it perhaps the result of his having summoned the courage and the independence of will and judgment to put to sleep forever the object of his Oedipal feelings? Is it his having cut, in "the Real order," the life to which he had long been joined by an "imaginarily" unsevered umbilical chord? In any event, a chance meeting with Miriam fails to rouse Paul from his torpor. She offers to marry him, but when asked point blank if he wants it, he replies, "Not much." For once, he is telling the truth. As he leaves her at her cousin's door , in the outskirts of the town, "he felt the last hold for him had gone ... he stood alone."

Yet not alone; for he could become separated from Miriam and Clara, but not from the woman who owned his soul. He could not abandon her, because "His soul could not leave wherever she was. Now she

was gone abroad into the night, and he was with her still. They were together" (399). But at the same time, not together; he had remained behind. Should he therefore join her? He is tempted. But as the novel ends he makes his decision:

> [N]o, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly (400).

He walks "quickly," as if fearing he might change his mind. And indeed, he turns away from the night towards the "glowing town." But what awaits him there? What will he find? Paul does not know. The reader does not know. Probably the author himself does not know.

Nevertheless, some of the usual consequences of an unresolved Oedipus complex are known: if it has a "flawed outcome"—and Paul's case is an extreme instance of such outcome—the person can expect, as noted earlier, "a love life that is completely marked by a particular style, an imaginary style" (Lacan 167). We know that Paul has not developed any mature relationship with his father: he is still the child of an absent, emotionally non-existing father. He has remained incapable of understanding his true motivation, preferring to blame others for his feelings of rage and disappointment. And so, his "turning sharply" towards life and away from death in a rare moment of awareness of his independent selfhood may not, but most likely will, be followed by a stumble. Without further therapeutic reinforcement, his insight may well prove transitory and he will revert to type: meeting women to whom he is sexually attracted, having affairs that provide passionate bursts of sexual pleasure (for him at least), but which eventually are broken up when he finds it impossible to form a true and lasting relationship. The repetitive-compulsive pattern might go on forever.

Worse possibilities are not out of the question, since his psycho-sexual development seems to have become arrested at a very early stage. Lacan's theory of foreclosure would suggest precisely this possibility. It proposes "a specific defence mechanism for psychosis" (Evans 65) that is built upon Freud's notion of "repudiation," whereby "the ego rejects [an] incompatible idea together with its affects and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all" (Freud, 1894a: SE III, 58). Lacan's point is that "it is the NAME-OF-THE-FATHER (a fundamental signifier) that is the object of foreclosure" (Evans 65). In Paul's case the fundamental triadic relationship of the symbolic order in which the above signifier is an essential pole is missing, not having been constituted in the first place. Even in the imaginary order, Paul has not experienced symbolic "castration," whereby he would have been deprived of his role as mother's "phallus;" nor was Gertrude willing to accept it, by recognizing" the Law of the Father." Dylan Evans

explains what,according to Lacan, may follow therefrom:

> When the NAME-OF-THE-FATHER is foreclosed for a particular subject, it leaves a hole in the symbolic order which can never be filled; the subject can then be said to have a psychotic structure, even if he shows none of the classical signs of psychosis. Sooner or later, when the foreclosed NAME-OF-THE-FATHER reappears in the real, the subject is unable to assimilate it, and the result of this 'collision with the inassimilable signifier' (S, 3, 321) is the 'entry into psychosis' proper (Evans 65).

Paul, we have been told, turns away from the night and walks resolutely towards the "glowing town." But is it towards a glowing future? Or is it, perhaps, towards an abysmal inner darkness behind a brightly shining light?

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