

Analysis of Paul's Self-realization in Sons and Lovers with Winnicott's Object-relation Theory

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Abstract: "*Sons and Lovers*" is a modernist autobiographical novel that delves into Paul's psychological development, which is divided into three phases: absolute dependence, relative dependence, and the quest for independence, consistent with object relations theory. Absolute dependence involves a "good enough" mother; relative dependence includes a supportive environment and transitional objects; and independence is related to the perception of death. This paper analyzes Paul's development through Winnicott's theory, highlighting the critical role of "good enough" mothers and nurturing environments in child development, and revealing a key principle: true self-actualization can only be achieved after going through the entire process of absolute dependence, relative dependence, and the pursuit of independence.

1. Introduction

D. H. Lawrence is not only a gifted writer in the history of English literature but also a pioneer of modern literature in the 20th century. His exquisite brushwork, unique perspective and bold exploration of the relationship between men and women have established his unparalleled position in the western literary world. *Sons and lovers* is the third novel written by Lawrence, which marks the mature stage of Lawrence's novel creation. *Sons and Lovers* is a psychological novel in the form of semi-autobiography. By portraying the mental confusion and identity crisis the protagonist Paul encounters in the growing process, the novel reflects the author's early- life experiences, emotional conflicts and psychological processes[1].

It's obvious that his works have been the focus in the literary critical field at home and abroad. Many researchers analyze this work from the perspective of Oedipus complex, Mirror Stage theory, feminism. For example, Gan Xueting does some research on the Oedipus complex, such as *On the Social Content of the Mother-Children Love in Sons and Lovers* (Gan Xueting 2013)[2]. Some discuss Mirror Stage theory employed in this novel. Miao Yu does some research on Mirror Stage theory, such as *Paul's Pursuit of Self: Interpretation of Sons and Lovers from Lacan's "the Mirror Stage Theory"* (Miao Yu 2012)[3]. Interpretations of the novel and conclusions differ in thousands ways. However, few people analyze Paul's self-realization in the novel, so it will be analyzed from the aspect of self-realization of modern men. Winnicott's object-relation theory will be applied to illustrate Paul's growing-up to clarify that one can achieve self-realization only when he goes

through the three stages including absolute dependence, relative dependence and towards independence completely.

2. Introduction of Winnicott's Object-relation Theory

Donald Woods Winnicott is an outstanding representative of the theory of object-relation theory in Britain (independent of the Clyde school and Anna Freud school), whose child psychoanalysis is unique in the field of Psychoanalysis, leading to the shift of object-relation theory and guiding people to consider children and the environment with a new perspective. He is concerned about the great importance that "good enough mother" in early infant-mother relationship play in the development of children's personality[4]. He also emphasizes the interaction between infant-mother and environment, which makes him different from other object-relation theorists who pay attention to the inner conflicts of children.

Winnicott thinks that "There is no such thing as a baby." (1964:88) A baby is not an isolated individual, and without a mother's care, there is no baby, and this is the mother and child support pairing that Winnicott is concerned about. He believes that the psychological development of children is a development of relationships between people, people and the environment, and it manifests itself in three stages, from total dependence to relative dependence, to independence. Only when he does through the three stages can one achieve self-realization[5].

2.1. Absolute dependence

In the first days or weeks of a baby's birth, the infant is completely dependent on the mother who is in the state of primal maternal concentration, providing the infant with the love and environment needed. The infant is fully integrated with the mother, even unaware of the mother's support and its dependence on her.

2.2. Relative dependence

The transition from absolute dependence stage to relative dependence stage symbolizes the important development of object relation ability. The baby begins to realize that it is dependent on its mother and is anxious about the dependence. It's a process for a baby to diminish dependence on the mother and gradually adapt to frustration. This frustration is healthy and necessary for infant development[6]. The mother also grows up, and she begins to withdraw from the original maternal focus, and becomes more and more concerned about her own comfort. This is also necessary for babies. Moderate care and unconcern are essential to the child's mental development. The more the mother is able to give the child a proper intimate relationship, the more the child is able to separate from the mother, smoothly entering into the stage of independence.

2.3. Towards independence

If the first two stages of dependence develop well, children will establish a healthy and solid inner world on the basis of experience. This stage describes the toddler and the young people struggling to develop themselves whose internal and external realities continue to interact during the growth, which gradually tends to be socially accepted.

Theory and concept such as good-enough mother, facilitating environment, transitional object, the real self and the false self and aggressive behavior are the important content of Winnicott's object-relation theory, which has a far-reaching influence in the psychoanalytic field[7]. Taking Paul's growth process that gets rid of the bondage of mother's love to achieve independence, *Sons*

and Lovers is a typical narrative mode of the growth novel. This plot line is in line with Winnicott's view that mother has influence on children's growth. In the following, this novel will be read with Winnicott's theory to analyze the main character Paul's transformation from dependence to independence so as to make a deeper and more comprehensive interpretation of the story, grasp better the idea of Lawrence and further deepen the understanding of Winnicott's object-relation theory.

3. The absolute dependence stage of Paul's self-realization

When a baby is born, it doesn't know anything about the world. It can't tell what is itself and what is its mother. Out of instinct, it takes the one who brings it to the world as itself too. Therefore, the baby is totally fused with its mother, and it doesn't even realize mother's support and its dependence on mother.

Mrs. Morel was thirty-one years old and had been married eight years when she expected her third baby—Paul. Her husband was a miner. They lived a hard life because they didn't have their own house or any savings. Morel became irritable and was always drunk. "She despised him, and was tied to him." (5) Mrs. Morel had had enough of the struggle against poverty and ugliness and meanness. She didn't want this coming-child for the family could not afford to have this third. However, when the child was born, she thought being the mother of a man is warming. "Her love came up hot, in spite of everything." (33) It is maternal instinct that makes Mrs. Morel abandon her mind that she doesn't want this baby. The maternal instinct drives Mrs. Morel to compensate him for having brought him to the unloved world with all her soul and heart. At the absolute dependence stage, Mrs. Morel was not "a good-enough" mother at first. But her dislike and neglect of Paul had disappeared before Paul was conscious. And later she provided "a facilitating environment" for Paul, so she did not cause traumatic injury to Paul's early growth[8].

According to Winnicott, the absolute dependence stage lasts only a few weeks to a few months and baby at this time hasn't formed the consciousness. Therefore, the negative emotion Mrs. Morel has towards her unhappy marriage doesn't seriously affect Paul's growth. However, if Mrs. Morel keeps maintaining the attitude towards her marriage, her emotion will be passed on to Paul at the relative dependence stage of Paul's self-realization.

4. The relative dependence stage of Paul's self-realization

4.1. Good-enough mother and facilitating environment

Good-enough mother and facilitating environment influence the development of children's personality, which is the core of Winnicott's object-relation theory. Facilitating environment provides the optimum conditions for children's healthy growth. The influence of environment is especially important for children[9]. At the beginning of the life, the individual is like a bubble, if the external pressure actively adapts to the internal pressure, the bubble that refers to the baby's self will be the most important thing. However, if the pressure of the environment is greater than or less than the pressure in the bubble, then it is not the bubble but the environment that becomes the important thing. Bubbles need to adapt to external pressures. Winnicott believes that growth is inseparable from the environment, while the mother is the infant's first environment: "There is no such thing as a baby -- when you see a baby, you must see the mother who takes care of him." (1964:88)[10] If the environment isn't good enough, especially in the first months of life, it can lead to mental health issues. The characteristic of the facilitating environment is to adapt to the needs of children: when the mother is needed, she must be; when she is no longer needed, she must be back

and encourage her children to be independent. In this way, good-enough mother and the facilitating environment she provides are the key to children's healthy growth.

4.2. A bad mother

Mrs Morel was born in a petty bourgeois family. Short in figure, but she inherited his father proud and stubborn temper. As a new generation of Victorian women, she is a cheerful, educated and ambitious woman. But after marriage, she found that her husband was not only lack of education, but also not good at expressing his views. She had no common language and interests with him[11]. And he was simple and rough, which made her fail to transform his husband into a man of her ideal. Then she put all her hopes on her sons. At first, Mrs. Morel was not too attached to Paul. She placed more love and hope on William, her eldest son. The success of William made her proud. After the death of William, she was too sad to pay attention to Paul. It was not until Paul, like his elder brother William, suffered from pneumonia, that Mrs. Morel devoted all her affection to Paul for fear of losing another son[12]. Mrs. Morel sees Paul as a replacement for her successor after William. She took both William and Paul as possessions and shared their thoughts and deepest emotions intimately in the time of their lives. She took his sons as a tool to realize her uncompleted dream. In terms of these, she is not a good-enough mother as Winnicott mentions.

4.3. The growth environment for Paul

According to Winnicott, the growth environment is mostly provided by mother. Since Mrs. Morel is not a good-enough mother, she cannot provide facilitating environment for Paul to help him achieve independence.

The misfortune of marriage had caused his mother to be depressed for a long time, and all her hopes were pinned on her sons. Winnicott believes that if a mother is depressed and uses her child to maintain something of herself, as a result, the child will live in a passive way. "There is a task that will never be completed. And it is to deal with the mother's mood first. Even if they succeed in completing their current tasks, they are only successful in creating an atmosphere where they can begin their own lives." (Winnicott, 1958: 93) Mother was Paul's only dependence. He had to manage to keep his mother alive. Paul was very conscious of other people's feelings, especially his mother's. "When she fretted he understood, and could have no peace. His soul seemed always attentive to her." (57) The children would tell their mother everything that happened in the daytime. "Nothing had really taken place in them until it was told to their mother." (62) Fear of losing dependence, Paul can only choose to be recognized by being obedient to the wishes of his mother, hoping to create a mother who can stimulate his growth. However, finally he could not distinguish what is the will of his mother from what is the will of himself[13].

Mother was supposed to provide a facilitating environment for the child's growth. But Mrs. Morel holds on to her son and sees him as the hope of her own lives, which results in not only the suffering transmitted to Paul but also the absence of Paul's self-consciousness.

5. The towards independence stage of Paul's self-realization

5.1. Transitional objects

The concept of "transition objects" is another part of Winnicott's object-relation theory. The transitional object cannot be destroyed, otherwise it will destroy the continuity of the children's experience. According to Winnicott, the soft objects and other types of objects that have been used by babies to combat anxiety are called transitional objects. Mom would allow it to be dirty and

would not wash it because she knows it would undermine the continuity of the baby's experience. (Winnicott, 1971: 4) In the eyes of a child, the transitional object symbolizes the caregiver (usually the mother). The child uses it as a temporary substitute for the image of a nurturer to endure more and more separation from the caregivers, thereby preventing depression. Winnicott expands the extension of transitional objects, including games, art, creation and love, faith and dreams. There are also fetishism, lies and theft, the origin and loss of emotion, the drudgery of medicine, and the mania for religion.

In *Sons and Lovers*, Paul's self-conscious is mainly formed by experiencing transitional objects through love, career and status.

5.1.1. Transition through love

Winnicott believes that if a mother withdraws, collapses, or fights back when the child is using the transitional object, the child will sacrifice a complete experience of her own desire. As a result, the child will be afraid of the need and use of his object and suppress the ego desire irrationally. According to Winnicott's observation, sex also needs to be used periodically between objects. Clara is the comfort of Paul's escape from his mother, but she is exactly the type of transitional object that her mother wants to give to Paul. The transitional object cannot be imposed. Therefore, Clara is a wrong transitional object. So Paul soon discovered that his relationship with Clara was unsustainable due to a lack of spiritual communication. For Paul, she has never been more important and inseparable than his mother, which is the essential characteristic of a correct transition object. But Miriam has the features of a transitional object. And she is a congenial companion to Paul, who, like Mrs. Morel, could bring spiritual comfort to Paul. For a period of time, Paul could not help loving Miriam under the circumstance that knowing his mother was sad. However, fearing that his mother (object) would be sad and that Miriam would not be able to accept the sexual desire, Paul broke the continuity of the object experience by sacrificing the full experience of his desire.

Despite Paul's two attempts to get rid of his mother's mental shackles has failed, the failure of using the transitional objects has deepened Paul's understanding that his dependence on his mother is destructive : " And I never shall meet the right woman while you live " (337), which has led Paul's self-consciousness awakened.

5.1.2. Transition through career

The protagonist of bildungsroman usually has a unique talent and social ambition that is beyond the limitation of self-identity. And he needs to discover and develop his talents in order to realize his ambition. Paul liked to draw pictures since childhood, and made continual progress in painting. At the age of 20, he won two first prizes at the autumn student work exhibition, which pleased Mrs. Morrel, "and Paul felt that he had done something for her (181)". At the age of 23, Paul's landscape painting won the first prize at the Nottingham winter exhibition. Then he began to have the ambition of being a famous painter. Paul's own professional consciousness of painting, which is fundamentally different from Mrs. Morel's. His mother is concerned only with the achievement of Paul's painting and the money and social status it brings.

Art creation is a typical use of transitional object for Paul. It provides Paul a private place to arrange himself when he lives in a noisy family. Paul is struggling with the dependence and resistance of his mother, the suffering caused by the failure of love and the suffering of the identity crisis. The proper use of the artistic transition object accelerates the development of Paul's self consciousness. Through painting, Paul built his confidence. Through painting, he met Miriam and had a self-experience of love; Through painting, he formed a professional consciousness of himself;

Through painting, he began to associate with the middle class and gained a new understanding of his identity. Artistic creation, in a certain extent, promotes the growth of Paul's self.

5.1.3. Transition through status

As Paul made his mark in drawing and began to make acquaintance with the middle class, he gradually became confused about his status. Paul told his mother that he did not want to be a passionate middle class member but a member of working class. "You know, i don't want to belong to the well-to-do class. I like my common people best. I belong to common people."(247) He gradually formed his own opinions on status. Paul holds the view that the difference between people isn't in their class or their education or their manners, but in themselves. Therefore, Paul began to betray his mother's indoctrination about working hard to enter into the middle class. But he faced a dilemma: appreciating the ideas of the middle class, he found that they lack passion; appreciating the vitality of the common people, he believed that common people were working class like his father. Although he inherited the vitality of his father and told Miriam that his mother got passion from his father. Despised by his mother for a long time, he did not want to admit that his father had the virtues he longed for. Paul wants to get ideas from middle class and life itself and warmth from the working class. This identity crisis is a manifestation of Paul's self-conscious growth, which also means his denial of his past self.

5.2. The death of Mrs Morel

The death of Mrs. Morel was a chance for Paul to become independent. But at the beginning of her death, Paul suffered a lot, and "Paul felt crumpled and lonely. "(391), and he hoped that he could go on living by carrying out his mother's wish -- painting and starting a family. Winnicott believes that the use of transitional objects will expand to beneficial area for a healthy person. When depression approaches and the loss of anxiety appears later in life, the early needs and behavior patterns of an object will appear again. However, the transitional objects of artistic creation and love could not be able to help Paul. If he goes on living by carrying out his mother's wish and becomes a continuation of his mother's life, he will finally become a walking corpse. When painting and love failed to ignite his passion for life, Paul thought of suicidal: "She was the only thing that held him up, himself; amid all this. And she was gone and intermingled herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her. "(403).

Mrs. Morel's death was a great blow to Paul. After departing with Miriam, Mrs. Morel became the only pillar of his soul. However his mother was dead, he didn't know what he will live for. The self-consciousness that had formed prevented him from living for his mother's wishes, but he did not find a clear direction for himself. He fell into a self-contradiction.

5.3. The rebirth of Paul

In winnicott's view, suicidal can be seen as a defense through which the false self that tends to be healthy can protect the real self. There is a major concern for the false self: searching for an environment that makes it possible for itself to become the true self. If such an environment is not found, the individual must reorganize a new defense against real self's development. If it is uncertain, the clinical outcome is suicidal. Paul lived almost all his life for his mother. She is his ego (the false self) and survival environment. He had resisted, but as she died, his resistance stopped. Losing his mother, Paul (the false self) also lost the significance of being. However, his true self (the real self) is unclear. Suicidal seemed to be the only option for extremely depressed Paul. But Paul did not choose death: "But no, 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.”(403) The end of the novel clearly shows that Paul has emerged from the threat of death.

Since Paul is dependent on his mother, he should have not be able to survive without his mother. In this way, to get rid of death naturally means getting rid of dependence, living for oneself and becoming independent. By the analysis of the end of the novel, the validity of this understanding can be confirmed. Paul, who was baptized in the death threat, passed through the death, got rid of dependence and went to rebirth. “The city” in the bildungsroman generally stands for places where people with dreams seek challenges and achieve self-realization. The behavior that Paul resolutely went towards the city suggests that he has confirmed his own worth of existence and has got independent self-consciousness. As Winnicott says: “the real self feels real, and the existence of the false self leads to unreal feelings and feelings of worthlessness.”(1965: 148) As a result, Paul's refusal to die clearly means that he begins to realize himself and become independent.

6. Conclusions

Winnicott's object-relation theory is rooted in his own troubled upbringing, the study of hundreds of cases of children in wartime, the clinical experience of 60,000 maternal and child counselling, and the experience of treating adult patients with the false self. His research has cured his mental illness. His theory is of great reference value and practical value to people in today's society and later generations. Lawrence has struggled to reflect on his upbringing when he wrote *Sons and Lovers*, trying to redeem himself by writing about Paul's upbringing. Paul's growth transmutation is the double play of Lawrence and Winnicott's two reborn phoenixes. And it was the voice of young man who has experienced the same growth and confusion as Lawrence and Winnicott in the face of the chaotic world. People on the way to pursue self can feel that self-realization is achieved step by step in Paul. Paul represents the growing-up mark of the generations of young men, including Winnicott and Lawrence. They are eager to grow up and get out of their mother's arms.

In conclusion, the importance of a good enough mother can be seen in children's growing process. And one can achieve self-realization only when he goes through the three stages including absolute dependence, relative dependence and towards independence completely.

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