

THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S *DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 21-09-2022 Accepted: 25-10-2022 Published: 31-10-2022 Volume: 6 Issue: 2 DOI: https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v6i2.157	This research was conducted to analyze the Oedipus complex of Eben's in Eugene O'Neil's play entitled <i>Desire Under the Elms</i> . To analyze it, the writers use the psychological approach, especially Freud's psychoanalysis theory. The writers got the main source of the data from the play, while the supporting data, the writers got from literary books, journals of English Literature, and the internet. Data were gathered then they were examined using the descriptive-analytic techniques. The focus of the study was divided into three discussions, namely the factors behind the reasons why Eben had the Oedipus complex, what made him have a rivalry with his own father, and had a forbidden relationship with his stepmother, Abbie. The forbidden relationship between Eben and Abbie is the manifestation of Eben's Oedipus complex and his way to break his father's deep heart as his revenge for his mother's death. The study found out that Eben's Oedipus complex was influenced more by Eben's id than his ego and superego.
KEYWORDS <i>Oedipus complex; Eugene O'Neill; desire under the elms; psychoanalysis</i>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Only O'Neill, an American playwright, has garnered four Pulitzer Prizes and received the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was one of the first American playwrights to use American vernacular and to concentrate on people who were social outcasts, and he introduced psychological and social realism to American theater. (Churchwell, 2012). O'Neill was regarded as the playwright who produced the most works during the first half of the 20th century, and he spent many years experimenting with Expressionism and Freudianism, but in an effort to exorcise the ghosts of his family's past, he eventually went back to a close and recurrent reasonable manner (Li-hua, 2018).

His mother and father, who loved and tormented each other, his older brother, who loved and corrupted him and died of alcoholism in middle age, and O'Neill himself, who was caught and torn between love for and rage at all three, all inspired O'Neill to write plays from an intensely personal point of view. (Gelb. 2012). Carpenter in Singh sees O'Neill as vacillating between the duality of the romantic dream of the early plays and the American reality of the later plays. He is of the opinion that O'Neill converted the raw material of his own life and suffering into the finished material of art (Singh & Yadav, 2012). According to John Gassner in Rashid, O'Neil's play linked the dramatic and theatrical advancements of the first half of the 20th century, conveyed its

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challenging goals toward tragic insights and dramatic vision, and incorporated both the ideals and conflicts of the period (Rashid, 2018).

His play *Beyond the Horizon*, which commercial management produced in New York and performed on Broadway, earned him his first Pulitzer in 1920. Some of his detractors gave him admiration. He won his third Pulitzer in 1928 for *Strange Interlude* after winning his second in 1922 for *Anna Christie*. In 1957 he got his fourth Pulitzer for his *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

O'Neill wrote his first melodramas about subjects that were considered not suitable for presentation on the American stage. His father sent him to study with George Pierce Baker at Harvard. O'Neill's first debut was his one-act sea play *Bound East for Cardiff* which was performed in Provincetown, Massachusetts in 1916. O'Neill was a very productive playwright. He completed 20 long plays between 1920 and 1943.

The bareness of Greek tragedy that O'Neill experienced in his own life was brilliantly evoked in his first full-length play, *Desire Under the Elms* (1924). It dealt with a lusty father, unreliable sons, and an unfaithful wife. The father has a bad relationship with his sons since he treated his late mother cruelly. After the death of his mother, the father got married to a younger woman who is willing to marry him because she wants to get his property. Since she cannot get sexual satisfaction from her husband, she starts to have adultery with her son, Eben, until she got pregnant. She murders her infant son to avoid being known by her husband that she has adultery with Eben. *Desire Under the Elms* tells us about the forbidden relationship of a son with his stepmother. In psychology this phenomenon is called the Oedipus complex, a psychological term used to refer to a love relationship between a young man to an older woman. In *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill explains a recurring motif of shifting enthusiastic desires, an oppressive propensity for property, a depraved energy, and a profoundly distinct father-child question by weaving them together with the most puzzling examples he could find to highlight the relationship between the members of the cursed Cabot family (Krishnan, 2018).

The focus of this research was the father and son relationship between Cabbot and Eben, the relationship between Eben and Abbie, and the Oedipus Complex that Eben experienced with Abbie, his step mother. By analysing the focus of the study above, the authors expected that this research will give a contribution to the body of knowledge, especially to the understanding of the nature of literature. It is expected that it can give students or readers better and deeper understanding on O'Neil's *Desire Under the Elms*, especially in dealing with the Oedipus complex. And it is also hoped that it will increase our way of thinking, and our behavior.

The Oedipus Complex, according to Lauren Dolloff, is when a son or a daughter develops an attachment to the parent of the opposing sex and exhibits violent behavior toward the parent of the same sex. These could occur as a result of their concern over receiving criticism or punishment from parents who share the same sex (Dolloff, 2006). Both the modern Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex and the myths of ancient Greece are referenced in the play *Desire Under the Elms*. O'Neill's plays' exploration of the subconscious, which was motivated by his research into Freud's theories, is a crucial component of his portrayal of human nature and well worth reading (Fathima, 2015).

According to Bogard in Jing and Feng-Chun, the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, in which the monarch Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother, is where Freud got the idea



for the Oedipus Complex. "We are dealing with a serious case of psycho-sexual fixation on the mother, with its accompanying feature-hatred of the father," the psychiatrist wrote appalled. (Jing and Feng-Chun, 2015). This theory influenced many modern writers, for example, D.H. Lawrence's *Son and Lovers*, and Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*.

Psychology has closed relationship with literature. We can use psychology to understand three possible minds, the author's mind, the characters' mind, and the audience's mind. In this research the authors use the psychology to understand the characters' mind, especially the Oedipus complex of Eben. As the study analyzed the psychology of the characters, researchers applied the theory of Freud's psychoanalysis, dealing with the id, the ego, and the superego. Tyson stated that psychoanalysis focuses on the personality of human being, helps us understand human behavior better, and helps us to resolve our psychological problems that are often called disorder or dysfunction. The focus is the patterns behavior that are destructive in some way (Tyson, 2006).

According to Rahim in Ahmed, it is essential to look at the foundation of Freudian psychology or psychoanalysis in order to better understand and study the Oedipus complex. Freud begins his work in psychology by treating hysteria, which he claimed was brought on by sexual desire (Ahmed, 2012). According to Gurin in Sumarsono, there are three underlying assumptions in Freud's psychoanalysis: first, that most individual processes are unconscious; second, that all human behavior is driven by sexual energy; and third, that due to the influence of social taboos associated with particular sexual impulses. Freud called his three zones the id, the ego, and the superego. Many of our desired memories are suppressed. (Sumarsono, 2013). All drive energies originate from the id. To help people deal with reality, the ego emerges from the id, and the superego stands in for the moral side of our nature.

Any motive that drives us to approach specific environmental stimuli and participate in actions with them that give us a relative gain in immediate pleasure, including alleviation from discomfort, is referred to as desire. (Hofmann & Nordgren, 2015). And according to the theory of psychoanalysis, all human desires are driven by the human psyche.

Adultery is a sexual relationship that somehow or other breaches the marriage relationship. It exists when one spouse rejects the other by entering into a personal sexual relationship with any other person. Adultery is one of the primary causes of divorce. People tend to see women's adultery as a more serious problem than man's adultery. Adultery is seen as a violation of society's moral and religious norms. Sussman in Meyer states that there are some reasons why people commit adultery, for example, one of the parties or both the husband and wife feel that they cannot get the emotional connection anymore from their partner that they were looking for, one of them or both do not really care to each other, or they are not in love to each other anymore (Meyer, 2021).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To analyze the Oedipus complex of Eben in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, it is important for the writers to read the previous studies that other writers have done. Ahmed Hashim Abbas wrote about the unfulfilled desires in *Desire Under the Elms* in which he found out that all the characters were destroyed by their desires. Cabot, the father who has many desires is refused by both his sons and his new wife. Eben is violated by his love relationship with his father's wife.



He also forgets his hate for his father's wife and is infatuated by her beauty and coaxing behavior. The worst is that he falls in love with her, his previous enemy which makes them want to crush Cabot and capture everything. Abbie, Cabot's new wife has desires to get secure life and husband, but she forgets all her previous desire because she does not get them from Cabot, so she wants a child, land, and love from Eben. These unfulfilled desires have destroyed her (Abbas, 2019).

The conflict of father and son, the incest theme, the relationship between the stepmother and stepson, the mother's sacrifice of the child, the use of myth and archetypes, and the adoption of the structure of classical tragedies are among the most in-depth explorations of O'Neill's perspective on the ambivalence of love and hate. *Desire Under the Elms* can be considered a classical tragedy in the modern sense because of the son's rebellion against his father, his love for his mother, the haunting past, and the mother suffocating his kid in the classic plays (Madran, 2006). Eben exhibits various Freudian traits associated with the Oedipus Complex. This was initially made clear when Eben started having sex with Minnie, a prostitute who had previously been his father's mistress. Then, as we can see, he engages in incestuous behavior with his stepmother in order to get revenge on his father (Shameem, 2013).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study described the Oedipus complex of the character Eben in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* which is examined by using the qualitative method. In analyzing this play, the writers conduct some steps starting from the identification of the problems, the collection of the data, the analysis of the data until the drawing conclusion of the story. To achieve the goal of the study the psychological approach since psychology has a close relationship with literature. Literature as the product of the human mind and the product of human psychological makeup contains the psychology of the writer and the psychology of the characters. That is why to understand the psychology of the characters, we need the help of psychology, in this case, psychoanalysis, especially the theory of the id, the ego, and the superego. The analysis was focused on the Oedipus complex that was experienced by Eben. The researchers examined the influence of the id, the ego, and the superego on Eben's personality and actions.

Data come from two different types of sources. The primary source for the data is Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, while the secondary sources are books, essays, and periodicals of literature. To collect the data, firstly, the authors read books and article reviews and searched the Internet to get more information about the psychological background of the characters. Secondly, taking notes and highlighting is done. The authors sort and filter the data to obtain the main data. The last step is classifying the data according to the focus of the study.

In analyzing this research, the authors analyzed the objects of the study using the theory of the id, the ego, and the superego. The results are then displayed and presented in the form of text and sequenced the data based on the order of the focus of the study, and the final step is for the researchers to make the conclusion of the study.



4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Eben's Oedipus Complex

Eben Cabot experiences the Oedipus complex. As a son who has the Oedipus complex, he loves his mother very much, but hates his father since he thinks that his father is his competitor. Eben's hatred to his father gets bigger when his mother died caused by his father. His love for his mother is expressed by his relationship the prostitute Minnie, his father's mistress. He is substantially younger than Minnie. Despite the fact that she is supposedly forty, Eben thinks she is still young and attractive. Due of his affection for his mother and desire to experience love from an older lady, Eben loves older women. Eben's making out with prostitute Minnie and subsequently having a relationship with her is incestuous in that Minnie was once his father's girlfriend. And it becomes much clearer when Eben has an affair with his stepmother, Abbie. At 35 years old, Abbie is described as a stunning and seductive woman. Both of these incestuous relationships can be conceptualized as manifestations of the Oedipus complex in terms of psychology.

A youngster or man with an Oedipus complex will, as was already stated, adore his mother and harbor envy for his father. Eben is bitterly resentful of his father and also loves his late mother very much. Therefore, his urge to seek revenge on him may be due to his enmity toward his father and his Oedipus complex. The two distinct motivations that influence Eben's thoughts are the yearning for love and the desire for revenge against his father. Practically all of his acts are dictated by his love drive when it takes control of him. He expresses his love to Abbie because he thinks she will feel the same way about him that his mother did about her.

Eben's Oedipus Complex can possibly occur because since he was a child, he has had an improper relationship with his father, but he was very close with his late mother. His love for his mother makes him think that his father is his competitor. That is why he does like his father. Moreover, that he believes that the death of his mother was caused by his father who has slaved her, makes his hatred to his father is getting increased.

4.2. The Influence of the Id, the Ego, and the Superego on Eben and Cabbot's Relationship

The three fundamental structures of personality—the id, the ego, and the superego—are configured by a certain amount of psychological energy, in accordance with Freud. At various levels of the mind, each of these three structures performs a distinctive set of jobs and tasks. All these three, the id, the ego, and the superego, influence every action done by anybody. Among the three major systems, the id is the one that makes human behavior more destructive. The id serves as a metaphor for the unconscious, a repository for libido, and the source of all drive energy, including that which fuels aggressive, sexual, and life-and-death instincts. The id is more focused on satisfying forbidden impulses of all kinds, including the need for food, sex, entertainment, and power. Most of the wants prohibited by social convention, social and religious norms make up the id.

According to psychoanalytic theory, Eben exhibits psychologically two distinct emotional drives in his nature: the love drive for his mother and the need for vengeance to his father. From Sigmund Freud's psychological analysis, it is clear that Eben's feelings of love and retaliation may be seen as two different instinctive urges that ultimately help shape his thinking. The internal



development of Eben's intellect can be used to explain his love drive. It is an abstract emotion that naturally emanates from the heart but is mixed with the revenge drive to form a particular organ. Eben's experiences with such disparate traits as love and retaliation might be examined in the context of psychoanalytic criticism. Eben's psychic life consists of two separate components, love and retribution, as has already been established. They represent a dynamic connection to Eben's actual behavior.

Eben's Oedipal complex makes him have a bad relationship with his father. The psychoanalytic theory states that a boy with the Oedipal complex will love his mother very much and hate his father. The feeling of hatred to his father is increasing as caused by his belief that his father Cabot is the one who caused the death of his mother. He believes that his father slaved, neglected, exploited, and crushed her until she died. Eben thinks that his mother's death was caused by the workloads given by Cabot which makes the anger and hatred of his grow in his minds for his father. The id as the destructive system takes its dominant role in Eben's personality and behavior. The id has made his anguish towards his father is always shown since his love and desire for his love for his mother are steadfast and deeply ingrained. The farm that used to belong to his mother, now his father owns it after his mother passed away from being overworked on the farm. The id makes Eben develop a strong and active notion of vengeance towards his father. When he saw his mother's dead body, a conflict arose in his mind that repulsed the idea that he would never again have his mother's love. Due to this strife, he developed a feeling of animosity toward his father and made the decision to take the farm back from him.

PETER—(after a pause—judicially) She was good even t' him.

Eben—(fiercely) An' fur thanks he killed her!

SIMEON—(after a pause) No one never kills nobody. It's allus somethin'. That's the murderer.

Eben—Didn't he slave Maw t' death?

PETER—He's slaved himself t' death. He's slaved Sim 'n' me 'n' yew t' death—on'y none o' us hain't died—yit. (O'Neill, 6).

Eben experiences two kinds of different emotional drives, the love drives toward her mother and the revenge drive or the death drive to his father. The emotional drive to revenge to his father is driven by his id. His id also makes him detest his father and stepbrothers since, in his opinion, they murdered his mother by toiling hard and torturing her mind. Eben also takes issue with his stepbrothers since, despite her devotion to them, they did little to defend his mother from their father's abuse of her. The id drives him to think that his father killed his mother by working her to death. He also thinks that his father stole the property from his mother without her consent and that this is why his father is so proud of it. The id drive makes him become even more resentful against his father when he comes home with his third wife, who will specifically stake a claim to the farm.

Eben—(with a sardonic chuckle) Honor thy father! (They turn, startled, and stare at him. He grins, then scowls.) I pray he's died. (O'Neill, 4)

Eben's ego and superego make him not to kill his father to take a revenge for his mother death., but he has a plan to punish his father. His ego and superego direct him not to kill his father. The



intertwine of the id, the ego and the superego make Eben come to the decision not to kill his father, but he wants to make his father utterly lonely by taking whatever his father has. His going to prostitute Minni is one of the punishments he does to his father. Knowing that his father has a lover, named Minni, Eben takes her from him. He wants to make his father feel lonely, suffer more painfully. When he finds out that his father gets married to his third wife, Abbie, he is so disappointed and his plan to revenge for his father is getting increases. His adultery with Abbie is the other form of Eben's desire for vengeance against his father. His motivation to tell his father that he makes love with Abbie is his way to punish him. The id drive makes him hate his father, and he wants to kill him, but he does not do it. He knows that by killing his father will bring any trouble for him. In this case, the influence of the ego and superego is stronger than the influence of the id. This solution is resulted from the intertwined of the love and the hatred feeling that Eben has.

4.3. The Influence of the Id, the Ego, and the Superego on Eben and Abbie's Relationship

At the beginning of Abbie's present in his family as the new wife of his father, Eben does not have a good relationship with Abbie since he thinks that Abbie gets married to his father because she wants to take the land and the house of his mother from him, but finally, Eben finds a way from Abbie to revenge to his father. Eben manages to build a relationship with Abbie, his former enemy at the time of her first present in the family.

There are two motifs that Eben has related to his relationship with Abbie. The first one is he makes Abbie as the place where he can express his love for his late mother, and the second one he makes Abbie as his way to punish his father to experience a severe loneliness since he takes Abbie from him. His Oedipus complex makes him have an incestuous relationship with Abbie. He can get what he needs from Abbie and he believes that his mother wants him to pursue Abbie to revenge his father. Eben's instinct of the Oedipus complex can be revealed not only from his sexual relationship with a prostitute named Minnie, once she was a mistress of his father, but also from his relationship with Abbie.

What makes Eben have an incestuous relationship with Abbie until they have a baby? He views his relationship with Abbie as a way to get revenge on his father and, on the other hand, as a stand-in for his mother's affection. Two things that Eben has lost since the death of his mother, are the love and care of a mother and a partner for him. Abbie manages to seduce Eben successfully by promising to be like his mother and his partner. Although, Eben does not like and hates Abbie, finally he falls in love with her. Eben loves his mother, adores her, and wants to have a woman who has the same quality as his mother who loves, cares about him, and always sings for him. It is his id that makes him accept Abbie's love after she seduces him that she will replace his mother's position. His longing for his mother's love makes him accept Abbie and has a feud with his father. Abbie provides Eben's subconscious mind with a different outlet for his conflicting feelings of retaliation, wrath, and lust, which eventually lead to a psychological imbalance between the norm and the anomalous. Eben's mind is influenced by his id, ego, and superego. The id wants to satisfy his desire to have the incestuous relationship with Abbie and to take revenge to his father. Since Eben does not have a good relationship with his father, he lacks his father's love. He also lacks the



social and religious norm teaching, that is why his ego and superego do not develop well as he comes from the uneducated family. When the ego and the superego do not develop well, the role of the id tends to be more dominant in controlling his mind. What he does with Abbie just to satisfy his id drive. He does not care with the social norms or conventions, and the religious norms. He forgets that it is forbidden for a son to have an incestuous relationship with his step mother. All he does is just to fulfil his sexual desire and the desire to punish his father.

ABBIE—(both her arms around him—with wild passion) I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye! (In spite of her overwhelmsing desire for him, there is a sincere maternal love in her manner and voice—a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love.) Don't cry, Eben! I'll take yer Maw's place! I'll be everythin' she was t' ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! (She pulls his head around. He makes a bewildered pretense of resistance. She is tender.) Don't be afeered! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben—same 's if I was a Maw t' ye—an' ye kin kiss me back 's if yew was my son—my boy—sayin' good-night t' me! Kiss me, Eben. (They kiss in restrained fashion. Then suddenly wild passion overcomes her. She kisses him lustfully again and again and he flings his arms about her and returns her kisses. Suddenly, as in the bedroom, he frees himself from her violently and springs to his feet. He is trembling all over, in a strange state of terror. Abbie strains her arms toward him with fierce pleading.) Don't ye leave me, Eben!

His unconscious mind makes him agree with Abbie to continue the forbidden love without considering the effects on the family and the reaction of society. He forgets that Abbie is his father's wife. He commits adultery with Abbie, his stepmother until Abbie gets pregnant. What he does with Abbie is driven by his id which controls his mind more than the ego and the superego do. His id has driven him to express his hate and revenge on his father by having adultery with his stepmother. It is also Eben's id that makes him ask Abbie to kill their baby to prove that she really loves him. He asks her to kill the baby because he thinks that Abbie will use the baby as the way to claim the land and the house. Eben's id has lead him into the destruction in which he loses not only his farm and house, but also his baby and Abbie.

5. CONCLUSION

Eugene O'Neil's *Desire Under the Elms* reflects the Oedipus complex that is represented through the relationship of father and son, and the incestuous relationship of Eben – Minnie, and Eben – Abbie. The Oedipus complex is indicated with the hatred of Eben to his father and the love for his late mother. It is also indicated with his love for Minnie and Abbie, two women who basically much older than him. Eben's rivalry with his father makes him want to revenge to him. The psychoanalytic theory of Freud is proved to be applicable in analyzing the problem. Eben's psyche is more dominantly controlled by his id than his ego and superego. The id leads him to the destruction of his life, and his relationship with his father and step mother. His id has stronger control than his ego and superego. Although his ego and superego managed to prevent him from killing his father, and prefer to choose to steal anything from his father to make him feel lonely, the id has brought him into a serious destruction.

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