

Third Prize Winner Division Three (200 and 300 level courses)

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English 225

Paul's Addiction

In society today we are very aware of addictions and the effects they can have on people. There are many types of addictions, ranging from the seemingly harmless (chocolate, caffeine) to what we think of when we think of the potentially life-threatening or altering, such as alcohol and gambling. However, when we think of addictions, we usually think of them in the terms of the adult being the addict, and the children being affected by it. Unfortunately, this is not always true.

In D.H. Lawrence's short story, "The Rocking-Horse Winner," we see a child with many problems. He has a mother who, at the beginning, has no maternal feeling for him and a house that whispers to him of its money problems. However, when we meet Paul, he seems like a happy and fairly well adjusted boy. As the story progresses, Paul's most pervasive problem is revealed. Paul is addicted to gambling—an addiction that will eventually take his young life.

One of the characteristics of a gambling addiction is the desire to be wealthy. It is justified to the gambler by saying "everyone wants to be wealthy" (McGurrin 12). This is a definite theme in "The Rocking-Horse winner", as the reason that Paul starts to

gamble is to stop the house from whispering, “There must be more money!” (Lawrence 76). After Paul’s mother tells him that luck is what makes money, Paul decides that he

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wants luck and sets off on his rocking horse to find it. He wants to find luck so badly that he becomes obsessed with it, and appears mad when he is charging on his quest to find it. “He would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space with a frenzy” all in his quest for luck (Lawrence 76). Eventually, Paul decides that he has indeed found luck, and, when riding his rocking horse, is able to tell the winner of an upcoming horse race. He strikes a deal with the family gardener, Basset, to be his partner, and together they bet on the races that Paul “knows” the winner of.

Together, Paul and Basset form a mutually lucrative partnership, and eventually expand it to include Paul’s uncle, Oscar Cresswell. Uncle Oscar is very pleased that his young nephew has taken an interest in the horse races, and is given the privilege of Paul’s knowledge. As the story progresses, the three partners do very well, and Paul decides that the time has come to share some of it with his mother in the hope that it will stop the house from whispering. Sadly, this only has the opposite affect. Paul’s mother foolishly buys things that the family does not need instead of paying her existing debts. Also, instead of quieting the voices, it simply drives them mad, and they scream, “There must be more money! Oh-h-h, there must be more money” (Lawrence 85). This frightens Paul, and the cycle of winning ends. He no longer knows any of the winners, and so, as with a gambling addiction, he becomes overwrought and unable to sleep for worry about his failure. When his mother suggests that he is not well and that perhaps he should go to the seaside for a vacation, he begs her not to send him and says, “I’ll whatever you like,

mother, so long as you don't send me away till after the Derby." (Angus 86). As is with gambling addicts, he was hoping that with the Derby he would have another chance to

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mother, so long as you don't send me away till after the Derby." (Lawrence 86). As is with gambling addicts, he was hoping that with the Derby he would have another chance to turn his luck around. He tells his mother not to worry, and reiterates this several times trying to convince her that he is fine (Lawrence 87). In Pathological Gambling: Conceptual, Diagnostic and Treatment Issues, it is stated that all gambling addicts believe that eventually their luck will return, and we see this as he is reassuring his mother. Soon we see the reason that Paul feels that his luck will soon return, his precious rocking horse. He feels that this is his secret weapon, and that only with it will luck come riding back to him. As "The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was frail, and his eyes were really uncanny" (Lawrence 87). All of these symptoms that Paul displays are classic signs of what is called a "gambling depression," when the luck turns bad and the gambler grows more and more concerned about getting it back (McGurrin 11).

Many times, the luck never comes back to a gambling addict, and often that is the cause of his or her death. In this case, it is just the opposite. Paul's luck does return, unfortunately, with its return also comes Paul's death. One evening, after a party, Paul's mother returns to find her son "in his green pyjamas, madly surging on the rocking-horse" frantically reaching for the winner of the Derby (Lawrence 88). While on the horse, Paul knows that the winner of the Derby is going to be Malabar. Unfortunately, this knowledge came with a price. As Paul stopped the rocking horse, "he

fell with a crash to the ground,” and was knocked unconscious (Lawrence 88). As Paul lay ill with brain fever, Bassett comes to visit and informs Paul that he was indeed right.

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Malabar had won the Derby. Paul becomes coherent long enough to have a conversation with his mother telling her that he is indeed lucky, and that it was all due to his precious rocking horse. Unfortunately, the night after that conversation, Paul dies leaving his mother eighty thousand pounds.

During the course of this story, luck and gambling are common themes that are very intertwined. They play a large and important role in the story, all the way to the end when Paul dies. While Paul’s desire for wealth may not be for himself, he still displays a great desire for it. His motivation for starting to gamble is for two reasons: To prove to his mother that he is indeed lucky and to stop the house from whispering that there must be more money. He asks his mother what luck is, and informs her that he is lucky. Upon discovering that he can ride his rocking horse and discover the winner of a certain horse race will be, he begins to bet on them, and the real trouble begins. After he initially begins to win, he steadily becomes consumed with it, and shows the signs of being addicted to the irresistible thrill of gambling. He spends most of his time discussing it, bets increasing amounts of money, seems to enjoy it immensely, and becomes almost like a different child when his winning streak falters. As earlier stated in this paper, these are all classic signs of a gambling addiction. Although it must be said that his addiction ended his young life, one should also remember that he started to gamble not for himself, but to help his mother pay off the enormous debts that made his house whisper to him.

He did this selflessly, and although he saved her, sacrificed himself in the destructive process called gambling.

Works Cited

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- McGurrin, Martin C. Pathological Gambling: Conceptual, Diagnostic, and Treatment Issues. Sarasota, FL. Professional Resource Press. 1992.