

Psychoanalysis Theory in the Twenty-First Century

The ever-changing culture which resides within the Twenty-First Century can be complex. But at the same time, people share one thing in common, and that is a conscious and unconscious mind. It is often questioned by theorists whether psychoanalysis is still relevant in modern day society but the knowledge of its foundations, for instance in the study of the unconscious, proves to be significant today. People in modern culture are constantly faced with issues such as the effects of technology, cinema, social media and mental health without noticing it. The behaviour of people can be acknowledged through the way they portray themselves. A person can display themselves on social media, but this image which they show is only a construct of their superego. In which, a person acts based on their self-conscious but does not reveal their inner selves. This inner self is juxtaposed with the unconscious, which likewise resembles the theories of Sigmund Freud.

Sigmund Freud is the founder of psychoanalysis. The idea of an unconscious mind had been known for years before Freud, however. "Poets and artists have known for long time that there is a powerful unconscious component in human experience [...] But the unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense had yet to be discovered" (Easthope, A. 1999, p.7). Hence, Freud's views can be seen as the creation of psychoanalysis. Freud explores the unconscious through several ways, those in which include the Oedipus complex. Freud's general thesis stems from the idea of the unconscious being directly linked to childhood. Freud believes that a child, more specifically explained as a son, has sexual desires towards his mother, and in return, resents his father. Freud also uses phallic imagery to further explain the mind of the unconscious. As Peter Barry (2009) states, "Freudian theory is often deeply masculinist in bias" (p.93) which can appear to be quite problematic in the less patriarchal world of today. Nevertheless, this theory is examined with girls as well: "[Freud] soon realized that the feminine version was not simply a reverse of the masculine since little girls also direct their first sexual impulse towards the mother." (Easthope, A.1999, p.29) This idea highlights how Freudian theory can be interpreted from the feminine point of view, and therefore appears more multifaceted and contemporary. Freud's theory of castration anxiety, which is that a child fears their genitalia being damaged by the parent of the opposite sex, and the penis envy theory,

which is a female's realisation that she does not have a penis, can both be looked at from the feminine and masculine point of view.

Other significant ideas of Freud focus on the id, ego and superego. These idioms represent the unconscious, consciousness and conscious in a 'three-level' personality. Clearly, Freud's ideas stress the importance of the individual, and this is prevalent in modern day society through the excessive use of social media. Freud's study of dreams and the uncanny (*unheimlich*), which Freud has interpreted from E.T.A Hoffman's *The Sandman* (1816), also represent how the individual can present a bettered version of themselves. The uncanny refers to how a familiar object or person can be altered, and how this is presented in an 'unhomely' way.

Apart from this analogy, the analysis of dreams can be discussed within cinema. It has been described from a psychoanalytical perspective that films appear as a "dream factory" (Marcus, L. 2014, p.179). Cinema is an expanding industry, which produces countless films each year for modern audiences, and therefore influences the minds of consumers. "Dreams and dream-theory have nonetheless retained a privileged role in the 'parallel histories' of psychoanalysis and cinema, just as dreams have a privileged role in psychoanalysis itself" (Marcus, L. 2014, p.179). Though Freud never actively wrote about cinema, psychoanalytic theory can evidently be applied. The connection between film and dreams resides in the projection of one self's own dreams into a creation of art.

Another prominent psychoanalyst is Jacques Lacan. Lacan's ideology derives from Freud's work yet focuses primarily on the study of the unconscious within language. This is relevant when discussing works of literature in the modern day. Lacan states 'how could a psychoanalyst of today not realize that his realm of truth is in fact the word?' (1957, cited in Barry 2009, p.106). Lacan stresses the importance of looking within language as he believes it is in fact the way in which words are structured which unveil the unconscious behaviour of a writer rather than what they initially intended with their writings. Furthermore, this notion highlights that "the view of language offered by Lacan sees it as fundamentally detached from any referent in the world. Accepting this view leads to a rejection of literary realism." (Barry, P. 2009, p.108) With this in mind, it can be said that modernist and post-modernist literature can be analysed from a Lacanian perspective. This is relevant since modernist and post-modernist texts

are still prevalent in modern-day society. For example, Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) and Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999). Both of these texts are post-modernist in nature. It is clear to see how these pieces of literature are influential in today's psychological culture because they illuminate social movements such as female empowerment, reversed gender roles, and awareness for mental disorders.

Apart from modern texts, there are texts written before Freud's establishment of psychoanalytical theory which can be examined under a Psychoanalytical lens. For instance, a psychoanalytic critic would approach *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, R.L, 1886) by looking at ideas of 'The Uncanny', which can help us understand the motivations of the character of Dr. Jekyll, and his alternative persona Mr. Hyde. In brief, Dr. Jekyll's curiosity and melancholy causes him to create a potion which transforms his being into the deformed character of Mr. Hyde, whom Jekyll describes as "the evil side of my nature" (Stevenson, R.L, 1886, p.55). Throughout the story Dr. Jekyll constantly switches between himself and Mr. Hyde. These events occur until he can no longer switch back to Jekyll. As a result, he becomes dominated by his own evil. Using Freud's terminology, Hyde can be defined as Jekyll's id, whereas Jekyll himself can be defined as his superego. Hyde represents Jekyll's unconscious thoughts and behaviours which cause him to do irrational things such as stamp on a girl, and murder Sir Danvers Carew. Hyde's appearance also contradicts with Jekyll's. It is described that "Mr Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation" (Stevenson, R.L. 1886 p.15) and "Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll." (p.55) Thereupon, Hyde resembles the uncanny because he appears familiar to Jekyll, but this familiarity is presented in a distorted manner. As the story progresses Jekyll explains how he "was slowly losing hold of [his] original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with [his] second and worse" (Stevenson, R.L, 1886, p.59). Jekyll marks a clear distinction between himself and Hyde. This statement juxtaposes Jekyll's 'best' versus Hyde's 'worst' which reinforces how different his unconscious and conscious thoughts are. Yet at the same time, the statement heightens how powerful the unconscious is and how it consumes Jekyll.

Moreover, Jekyll uses Hyde as a form of escapism. "If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of more upright

twin" (Stevenson, R.L, 1886, p.53) Jekyll's hypothesis supposes that because of Hyde's persona, he will be able to rid himself of life's horrors. Jekyll's dependency on this idea resembles that of a dream, in which a person may crave dreams in order to escape the awful realities of their life: "Dreams are one way in which the unconscious speaks, 'a particular form of thinking' expressed in a specific form of representation" (Easthope, A. 1999, p.9). Unconsciously the mind desires to expose these dark inner thoughts, though sometimes a dream may be able to relieve them. In addition, Jekyll's desire for escapism reminds one of the symptoms of depression. The oblivious stigma on mental health during the Ninetieth Century is unlike the awareness and knowledge of which we have in today's society. Due to this advanced intelligence, Dr. Jekyll's way of thinking may in fact be more relatable to a contemporary reader than that of a Ninetieth Century reader. Thus the works of Freud have been able to press forward the study of psychology, and add layers to its understanding.

All in all, the study of psychoanalysis proves how important it is to examine the mind, even in the Twenty-First Century. People of all eras in the past and present have battled between their unconscious and conscious thoughts. Whether these thoughts are revealed through dreams or reality, it is up to the individual. Yet how we project these thoughts is determined through either literature, social media, cinema or speech: "My dreams are visual and I assume yours are too. But the moment either of us tells someone about one it isn't an actual dreamed dream any more but a public representation of it in outer speech." (Easthope, A. 1999. p.11).

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