

Repression: Rethinking the Relationship between Creator and the Creation

Roopalakshmi. V

School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, India.

Dr Rajasekaran. V

School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai, India

Abstract-

Psychoanalysis is one of the most prominent literary theories used in modern interpretations, to explore the deeper meanings of a text and its characters. The purpose of psychoanalysis is to unveil a person's repressed emotions and experiences, making their unconscious conscious. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, aids in knowing more about the natural assemblage of a writer's personality from birth to becoming an author. Thus, this paper aims to identify the conglomeration of the author's collected emotions and their representation in the chosen novel. The paper's finding reveals that Vegas is the place that emoted the author's repressed memories that have turned into a story. Therefore, an attempt is made to analyze the characters' actions and bridge the fictional characters and the author's personal experience using Freud's tripartite hypothesis on human mind structure: Id, Ego, and Superego.

Keywords: Repression, unconscious, creation, pulp fiction, American literature, Tricks

1. Introduction

The early 20th century marks the beginning of modern psychology, and with the pace of this, psychoanalytical reading of literary texts becomes a reality. With the advent of psychological, sociological, clinical, learning, personality, and cognitive theories, doors opened to know more about the psyche of a creator and the shape of fictional characters that provides in-depth knowledge over a literary text. With the series of post-war theoretical waves, psychoanalytic criticism is considered the most influential interpretative theory in literature by having precise premises on the workings of the mind, instincts, and sexuality, developed by the seminal Austrian figure Sigmund Freud. All his concepts, writings, and experiments are his conclusions, which he has come up with while treating the patients. He proposed a new dimension to psychology, saying that humans have an unconscious mental life created by a defense mechanism called 'repression.' Repression, he notes, sprang from the unconscious, is a repository to traumatic incidents, closet desires, fears, and unsettled conflicts. It aims to protect the ego against these psychological threats and the information that disturbs its integrity. In addition, Repression turns out these fears and drives into a force and tries to organize with the current experience named 'Sublimation.' In sublimation, the repressed energies transform into something grand and noble. Thus, taking Repression as a cue, the first part of this article tries to address the creator's repressed events and their reflection by analyzing fictional characters

in the novel *Tricks*. The second half of the paper attempts to apply Freud's structural mind model theory to the characters in the novel. Freud has viewed this ID, Ego, and Superego as the psyche of human mind structure, not as the segments of the brain. The ID, he says, is the immediate basic instinctual part of one's personality where the Eros and Thanatos, resides that responds instantaneously to the instincts. The function of ID remains immature in a person's life until it is connected to the outer world. As the ID functions within the oblivious realm of the brain, it does not get affected by actuality and logic of everyday life and its thinking is always primeval, unreasoned, and fantasy-oriented, without knowing its consequences. The ID tries to fulfil the basic impulses; tries to resolve the tension created by the pleasure principle and provides necessary energy to drive our personality.

On the other hand, the EGO formed due to Id's necessity to negotiate its urges with reality's constrictions. It manages the energy arising from the ID and finds ways to satisfy its desire according to the truth. As a part of the ID, EGO modifies the experience from the external world; becomes a connector between ID and the realistic realm. Thus, Ego functions in correspondence with the reality principle and attempts to create realistic possibilities to fulfill ID's pleasure or cause a delay in satisfaction in order to get away from the unwelcoming consequences of society. It functions based on social realities and etiquettes. The best thing about Ego is, that it takes ID's desires in the rightward route and thus, claims credit at the end as its actions were its own. The essential feature of clinical and social work is to enhance ego functioning and help the client test reality through assisting the client to thin through their opinions.

SUPEREGO, third model in structural mind theory, assimilates the values and morals of the society that are acquired and developed during the phallic stage of psychosexual development. It controls the impulses prohibited by the community and turns ego into a realistic approach – a moralistic one and strives for perfection. It provides guidelines for making Judgments. Freud says it emerges around the age of five. Within the superego, there are two other structures: the 'Conscience' and the 'Ideal Self.' The conscience includes information about the rules and standards for good behavior and action about the things constructed as immoral by both the familial and societal structures. These are approved by the parental or the authoritative figure in the community. Obeying these will lead them to punish themselves through guilt, remorse, punishments, and consequences. The ideal or ego-self is a make-believe picture; teaches how to represent an individual's aspirations, behavior, and to fit in perfectly as a member of society. It also contains the norms and ideals for good behavior. Obeying these will lead to feeling pride, value and accomplishment.

2. Research Question

- ❖ Do a physical landscape have the power to emote one's unconscious repressed emotions?
- ❖ How far can Freud's theory be applicable to read the author's mind to their works?

3. A Critical Overview of the novel *Tricks*

Ellen Louise Hopkins, a renowned American author whose works *Crank*; *Identical*; *Burned*, addresses the modern problems of teen prostitution, drug addiction, and the unsettled psychological imbalance that contemporary adults face. Her 2007 novel *Tricks*, awarded as the bestselling fiction in New York Times, emphasizes that life becomes a survival game when all the choices are taken away from an individual. The novel underlines the story of five teenagers from different geographical backgrounds who are handcuffed to various social, psychological, and domestic issues, and finally, the author unites them all in one landscape. Ellen unveils each characters' story (Eden, Seth Parnell, Whitney Lang, Ginger Cordell, and Cody Bennett) from their point of view in the form of blank verse. Furthermore, a reader can identify that the unorganized narration of the novel reflects the not-so-organized mental life of each character and the author's past life as well. Finally, the creator connects the dots with the introduction of line-up characters helping the previous one.

Eden, daughter of a pastor, falls deeply in love with Andrew, caught and declared by her parents as she was possessed with demons and made to stay in an isolated dark room to seek salvation for her actions. Escaped from Tears of Zion to Las Vegas, she encounters "...guys are freaking sharks. If they smell blood; they'll chew the girls up"¹. Reminiscing all these things on her walk, she suddenly entered a church and met Father Gregory, who reminded Andrew of her and said '... I do need help. Need his help, and God's help, to be saved'¹. He then guides her to a rescue place, run by an ex-prostitute, where she changes her name to Ruth to hide her identity from the world. Seth Parnell, the next character from Indiana, lives with his father, and he hints in the beginning that he is lonely and waiting for someone who takes good care of him because his mother died of cancer. At the age of five, Seth found that he was somehow different from the other kids and identified himself as gay. When his dad wanted him to do factory jobs, he was interested in studying liberal arts, which he did at New Agey University. Brooding over the death of his mother for so long, Seth could not open up his psycho-physical changes and conflicts to his father, who always had a cliché homophobic views: "Bible says God made Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve¹." s This alerted Seth to hide his identity from his father and moved to Las Vegas and met Father Howard, the one who first takes advantage of him. Later, Seth often changes his 'sugar daddy' to survive and satisfy his personal needs.

The third character in the line is Whitney Lang, daughter of a semi-absent father and uncaring, absent mother, fell in love with Lucas, who later abandoned her by uttering,

"When you first told me you were a virgin, I didn't believe you.....but when I figured out you were telling the truth, I totally wanted to pop your cherry. You are my first virgin, and you'll be my last. Because..... sorry; but virgin sex really isn't good¹."

Then she fell in love with Byrn, the man who began to make a fortune out of her by changing her into a drug addict and a prostitute. In the end, she escaped with the help of Ginger, who admitted her to a hospital. On the other hand, Ginger is the daughter of Iris, a drug addict and prostitute who hates being a mother to six children (Ginger; Mary Ann; Poster; Honey; Pepper and Sandy) from five different fathers. Her mother's overinflated sex drive made her want everything in her life as "too much and too many" (too many babies, too many boyfriends, too

many smokes, and too many pills) ¹. Through Ginger's chat with Alex, the girl she liked the most, the readers understand that she did not want her mother and confess that two of her mother's boyfriends took advantage of her. That changed her life as a stripper in Las Vegas. Recently moved from Wichita to Vegas, the final character Cody Bennet began his career by taking up a part-time job at a Game stop to help his mother financially. Cody learned to gamble quickly, which eventually became cocaine to him. After the death of his stepfather Jack, he got arrested by the police for assaulting a woman in a robbery attempt. Finally, he turned into a male prostitute to support his family financially with the help of Misty, a girl he met in his poker game.

4. The City Vegas

Barbara Henning, a renowned author of "Thirty Miles to Rosebud"; "You; Me and the Insects," and "Black Lace" who in an interview entitled 'The Significance of Place' with Rafael Otto made a point that "Wherever I find myself; I am part of that environment and influenced by and speaking with and through it. Moreover, each place has a completely different sensory quality....." ² (Henning, *Infinite Culture*). Thus, 'place' plays a significant role in shaping an individual's identity and creating ways to vent out emotions. Similarly, Las Vegas, a city free from ethical and moral grounds, becomes the triggering point for the author to look back at her repressed thoughts. Thus, the unconscious repressed emotions of the author have taken their shape through the characters in the novel – *Tricks*. In the story, Vegas is described as a strange sin city in the United States of America, is known for its immoral activities, gambling, and sex. A motto says, "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas."¹ The novel pictures Vegas as an entertainment place where anyone can easily find out a show or concert according to their taste, and anyone can do whatever they want, which are restricted in other areas of the country. Moreover, it is a city that never sleeps, and the choices for entertainment indeed leave the image that Vegas is a rocking city where the individual can do any restricted things that are not being encouraged by the United States. When the author moved to Nevada in real life, Vegas has turned out as a driving force to kindle the repressed emotions reflected and refracted through the characters in the novel *Tricks*.

5. Note on Author's Biography

Ellen Louise Hopkins's adopted parents played a huge role in shaping her life as a writer. She learned honesty and hard work from her father and developed a love for language, literature, and reading from her mother. She began to write as soon as she learned the art. Her earlier works mainly included Poetry. Her teachers encouraged her writing professionally after 1992, participated in every creative writing competition, and won. At nine, she published a Japanese-style poem titled "Haiku" in the Palm Springs Desert Sun. Unfortunately, her early married life didn't go well as she expected, and she ended up with tears and failure and faced a financial crisis. She had two children out of her first marriage. Her adopted daughter, Cristal, seems to be the constant inspiration for all her novels because, at her teenage stage, she got into the world of drug addiction, and Ellen had the chance to know about the psychological problems of modern adults, which later instigated her to address in her novels and thus the sequel "Crank"; "Identical" and "Burned" came into being. She then got married to John Hopkins and

moved to Nevada. In 2000 she met her biological mother, Toni Chandler, who was also a prolific poet, and her father didn't accept Ellen as their daughter and simply ignored her.

6. Discussion

"Among these wishful impulses derived from infancy, which can neither be destroyed nor inhibited; there are some whose fulfillment would be a contradiction of the purposive ideas of secondary thinking. The fulfillment of these wishes will no longer generate an effect of pleasure but of UN pleasure, and *it is precisely this information of affect which constitutes the essence of what we term "Repression."*³" (Freud, *The Psychology of the Dream-Processes*, 2010, p. 600) Repression, a psychological act of excluding desires and feelings and finds a place in the subconscious. With the popularization of Sigmund Freud's works in psychoanalytic criticism, repression has been widely known by the term called 'defense mechanism.' However, Repression, on the other hand, is unconscious, and it manifests itself through a symptom, which is sometimes called the 'return of the repressed.' Similarly, Las Vegas has displayed the author's repressed emotions, which got structured through the characters in the novel *Tricks*.

Need is a curious thing until you plant the seed; nurture it; encourage its awakening without knowing it is within you. However, once it germinates, it nudges up to break the ground, and it no longer denies the fact that it is blossoming every day without consciousness. Ellen's need for true love sprang through Eden's character, who is also searching for the same thing and almost fulfilling it in Andrew, whose religious notions have been misunderstood by her parents and are contradictory to their family. Eden's father seems to be the regular preacher in the Assembly of God, whereas for Andrew, "Religion is for followers..... I don't need some money-grubbing preacher defining my relationship with God"¹. Eden's visceral thoughts soon made her fall into an irrevocable love with Andrew by spilling the words that they were rocked by destiny. When Ellen later designed this primitive thought of Eden to meet with reality, she was considered a "demon" in her parents' eyes.

Freedom has become a buzzing word in the contemporary scenario, and if this appetite meets with failure, they start to possess through unacceptable ways of society, and it does change their lives differently. To portray the young generation's complex-delicate way of attaining freedom, the novel highlights Eden's urge for freedom made her seek help from the 'wrong hands' of Jerome, who uses her physically. In addition, she faces the situation of a '.....Unsavoury truck drivers who charge physical actions to drive her anywhere.' Finally, at Las Vegas, a place where "....guys are freaking sharks. If they smell blood, they'll chew the girls up"¹ that deviates her from becoming a prostitute in her life. On the other hand, witnessing her daughter's painful teenage days of addiction to the world of drugs unconsciously made the author construct the character, Whitney Lang, with the sorrowful image of being beaten by her lover and his force to enter into the not so glamorous world, and ended her up in a hospital. Similarly, the character Ginger was created out of her friend's experience with their parents, and she hints at her adopted mother image in the novel through the character Alex (Ginger's friend) when Ginger was asked to leave the world of strippers and tried to bring her back to the Barstow she replied:

"Me and the baby will be just fine. The program will find me a job; help me learn how to be a mom. She vows to be a better mother than her own. I just hope she is better than mine is. I will miss her, of course. She has been the biggest part of me for a very long time. However, the truth is; the biggest part of me; should be me. Just have to find her. Maybe she's even a writer¹." Though she holds a respectable place as a writer in society, in real life, she might long for true love and freedom from her second husband, Kelly, and the Repression is reflected in the character Eden who also craves the same passion and wants freedom from Jerome. Life becomes a 'game of survival' when all choice is taken from you. Generally, the word survival describes the ecological balance between man and nature. In the kingdom of 'survival,' fear holds a very special. When the fear of survival occupied Seth's mind after he got kicked out from his house, "Four letters; two consonants; two vowels; one of them silent..... without meaning"¹ turned him out as a person who cannot live without his 'Sugar daddies' and not to leave Vegas anymore. When the author found her biological parents, she had not been acknowledged as their daughter, and to establish this, Cody Bennet became the mouthpiece to utter the lines:

"Not Damn Sure where my real daddy ran to; if he settled down in some Podunk town or if he fell flat off the face of the earth... No clue who he is or why Mom slept with him seventeen years ago, give or take. Maybe it was rape. No lie. Mom is pretty much a prude..... No complaints about her. Yeah, I've got a step-dad, but he's pretty damn good to us.....my real--scratch that----I mean biological father. Why would I want to? ... no worries¹."

6.1.The Composition of 'ID'

To Freud, ID responds to the pleasure principle aiming to satisfy immediately to all its primal desires, drives and needs. While, on the other hand, the Ego and Superego counteract with these urges and pave ways to meet the urges in correspondence with the demands of reality. If these wants are not get satisfied, the end result would be the state of anxiety or tension. For instance, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. The author's ID in the novel *Tricks* is divided into many parts, like her longing for love, freedom, lack of motherly love, and recognition, which has been expressed through her characters. The characters have taken up the author's ID as their characteristics features or the basic urge that drives them to take up any risks to satisfy these desires, though they get their fulfilment in a corrupted pathway.

Eden's basic urge is to get freedom from her parents, which brings in a situation to sell her own physical body to Jerome to join hands with Andrew, her lover. In addition, to escape from Jerome's physical abuse, she went to the extent of selling her own body to a truck driver who 'charge physical action in order to drive her anywhere'¹. Secondly, Seth Parnell's hunger to know the physical pleasure puts up a personal advertisement on the internet with the disclaimer that he needs a person who has experienced enough to teach him but not humiliates him and finally end up in the hands of the wrong person who uses him for his bodily pleasure and lastly deserted him. But Seth's physical urge doesn't make him stop there, and he again wants to satisfy his urge by choosing a wrong person again who uses him as a sex toy and treats him as an enslaved person. Ironically Seth enjoys all these because he hasn't had any other opinion to

survive than to search for a partner since his father rejected him because of his gender, and he has the cliché notion that God created Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve. Thirdly, Whitney Lang's need for motherly love made her fall deeply in love with Lucas, with whom she thinks she might get the love that she longed for from her mother. But, unfortunately, Lucas loved only her body and ditched her for a reason "when you first told me you were a virgin; I didn't believe you.....but when I figured out you were telling the truth; I totally wanted to pop your cherry. You are my first virgin, and you'll be my last. Because..... sorry; but virgin sex really isn't good¹."

6.2. The Composition of Superego

Superego, the last stage put forward by Freud in the tripartite human mind theory, works towards suppressing the ID' immediate instincts and directs the Ego to behave morally than realistically. The socially and culturally constructed ideals and morals contribute to the formation of the superego in one's personality and it can further be divided into: 'Ego Ideal' and the 'Conscience.' The ego-ideal is often thought of as the image we have for our ideal selves – the way we want to become. On the other hand, the conscience is composed of the rules for which behaviors are considered flawed. When we go with the ego ideal, we feel proud of ourselves, but we experience the feeling of guilt and remorse when we follow the conscience. In *Tricks*, the characters mostly share the conscience, which made them experience the shame that never allowed them to go back to the everyday world from where they come from.

Eden, for the sake of her survival and the urge to taste the freedom to live with Andrew, made her go to the extent of selling her body to Jerome and an unknown truck driver but finally couldn't able to join hands with him because her superego conscience didn't allow her to go when Andrew writes "I can't believe it's you..... When can I see you? When are you coming home?" instead ends up with the reply 'Lots to talk about. Just know; now and always I Love You'¹. Been into the world of drug addiction and later dragged to prostitution because of the lack of motherly love, Whitney Lang, finally ends up in hospital after being beaten up by her lover, pimp by profession. At last, when her mother came and said, "I don't know what I would have done. Please; Whitney; whatever reasons for leaving; for.....for..... (weeps). We can work through this"¹, her superego conscience out of guilt didn't have the courage to tell what are the things had happened so far end up with the words 'I'm probably unfixable. But; hey; you never know'¹.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper breaks the general assumption that repressed traumatic events are harmful to mental health by identifying that the author's real-life incidents and places have become the force behind creating characters like Eden, Cody, Whitney Lang in distorted forms. In addition, the paper highlights Eden's longing for her freedom, Whitney for her lack of parental care and Cody Bennet's drive to become financially stable, and his quest to find his biological father seems to be the products of Ellen's unconscious. Using Repression as an idea in the psychoanalytic reading, this paper underlines the modern teenager's conflict of an identity crisis, lack of love, care, parental guidance, and repercussion.

REFERENCES

1. Hopkins, L. E. (2009). *Tricks*. Margaret K. McElderry books, Z-library E-publication
2. Otto, R. (2012). *The Significance of Place: An Interview with Barbara Henning*, 25 October 2012
<https://infiniteculture.wordpress.com/2012/10/25/the-significance-of-place-an-interview-with-barbara-henning-2/> Accessed on 24th July 2021.
3. Freud, Sigmund. (2010). *The Psychology of the Dream-Processes*. In James Strachey (Ed.) *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive text*. (pp. 513-600), Basic Books (Original work published in 1955)
4. Barry, Peter. (2015). *Beginning Theory*. (Third edition). UK: Manchester University Press, pp 90- 101. Retrieved from
<https://www.pdfdrive.com/beginning-theory-an-introduction-to-literary-and-cultural-theory-d158002888.html>.
5. Neu, J. (2006). *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*. UK: Cambridge University Press, pp 86-158.
ISBN: 978-0-511-2254-2.
6. McLeod, S. (2018). Sigmund Freud's Theories. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Sigmund-Freud.html>
Accessed on 6th June 2021.
7. Pun, M. (2018). *The Interpretation of the Unconscious: From Freud to Lacan*. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, vol 7 (1), pp. 48-52.
[https://www.ijhssi.org/papers/vol7\(1\)/Version-1/H0701014852.pdf](https://www.ijhssi.org/papers/vol7(1)/Version-1/H0701014852.pdf).
8. Zhang, S. (2020). *Psychoanalysis: The Influence of Freud's Theory in Personality Psychology*. Atlantis Press
Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, vol 433, pp. 229-232.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200425.051>.
9. Hossain, M. (2017). *Psychoanalytic Theory used in English Literature: A Descriptive Study*. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G Linguistics and Education*, vol 17 (1)
https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume17/3-Psychoanalytic-Theory-used.pdf.
10. Niaz, A & Stanikzai, S. M & Sahibzada, J. (2019). *Review of Freud's Psychoanalysis Approach to Literary Studies*. *American International Journal of Social Science Research* vol 4 (2), pp. 35-44.
<https://www.cribfb.com/journal/index.php/aijssr/article/view/339/565>.
11. Sprake, J. (2019, November 21). *Freudian Analysis*. HNC Creative Media and Film Production.
<https://jasminsprakehnc.blogspot.com/search?q=freud>.
12. Hopkins, E. L. (2004). *Crank*. Simon and Schuster publication.
13. *Psychoanalytic criticism (1930-Present)*.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/psychoanalytic_criticism.html. Accessed on 7th June 2020.

14. Rudnytsky, L. P. (2002). *Reading Psychoanalysis*. New York: Cornell University Press.
ISBN: 0-8014-8825-7
15. Lapsley, K.D & Stey, C. P. (2011). ID, Ego and Superego. *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*.
https://maplab.nd.edu/assets/224926/id_ego_superego_encyclopedia_of_human_behavior.pdf
16. Kurzweil, E., & Phillips, W. (Eds.) (1983). *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press
17. Edelson, M. (1988). *Psychoanalysis: a theory in crisis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
18. Grunbaum, A. (1984). *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Roopalakshmi. V is a Research Scholar at Vellore Institute of Technology in Chennai, India. Her research area of Interest is Psychoanalysis, Environmental Humanities, and Ecocriticism
Dr Rajasekaran. V is working as a Senior Assistant Professor belonging to the School of Social Science and Languages at Vellore Institute of Technology Chennai Campus. His area of interest is English Language Teaching, Trauma narratives, Scriptotherapy, Disability studies, and Ocean studies.