



**RELOCATING THE SOUL IN PAULO COELHO’S NOVEL
THE DEVIL AND MISS PRYM**

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ABSTRACT

It is a practice prevalent in literature to draw segregation between classic literature and popular fiction. But we witness in many of the popular fictions the same situations and undercurrents of emotions and the works remain more accessible to public. This paper focuses on the novel *The Devil and Miss Prym* by Paulo Coelho. The psychic struggle of the characters is delineated with the outlining of psychoanalytic theory based on the tripartite model of mind devised by Sigmund Freud giving special thrust on the interplay of the conscious and the unconscious mind of the main characters. The novel *The Devil and Miss Prym* revolves around the title character Prym who was tempted by the devil to choose between good and evil. She was thinking on terms of pleasure principle which switched continuously between the angels and demons in her mind and she ultimately wins over the demon and helps the community also to win over the temptation restoring the moral code.

KEY WORDS: psychoanalytic theory, *The Devil and Miss Prym*

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INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho, (b. 1947-) is one of the most inspiring figures, whose works got translated to as many as seventy one languages. Coelho established himself as a writer of critical acclaim with the novel *The Alchemist*. Among his thirty novels, three of them are autobiographical and the rest of them though fictional are strongly rooted in his own experiences. Many a time the halo of popular fiction limit the scope and wider implications of the work and marginalize them to one genre. His language and style of writing blends with the themes of the novels, using symbols, dreams and archetypes to convey simple but

universal truths and at the same time he allows the characters, a space, to evolve by themselves. This paper focuses on the novel *The Devil and Miss Prym* which spans a week’s time. As Coelho states in the novel:

“I have always believed that in the lives of individuals, just as in society at large, the profoundest changes take place within a very reduced time frame”

In this study Paulo Coelho is relocated in the light of psychoanalysis by uncovering the female unconscious from a social perspective. The paper intends to bear on the literary critical outlining of psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, transition from the pleasure principle (*id*) to the reality principle (*ego*) and morality principle (*super ego*) is the most important progress in the process of evolution of personality, where the *id* will inevitably bow to the reality and morality to achieve a balance of personality. As with the generally conceived notion of human mind, moving from the pleasure principle (*id*) to the morality principle (*superego*), the main character Pym choose to bring forth the *superego*. Through this work Coelho offers to the reader the self realization of the main character as the vision of life attained through suffering and struggle.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Psychoanalytic literary criticism in method is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis begun by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic reading is a literary approach where critics see the text as if it were a kind of dream where the text represses its latent content behind manifest content. Here, the critic analyzes the language and symbolism of a text to reverse the process of the work and arrive at the underlying latent thoughts. Psychoanalytic criticism argues that the mysteries in the literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author or sometimes of the characters. We get the glimpses of the same while Pym narrating her dream:

Occasionally it crossed her mind that the Celts, the ancient inhabitants of her region, might have hidden an amazing cache of treasure there, which one day she would find. Of all her dreams, that had been the most absurd, the most unlikely (27).

Such instances shed light to the intricate mental musings of the character, which helps one to psychoanalyse a particular character within a literary work. The most important part of psychoanalysis is the concept of the unconscious mind as a reservoir for

repressed memories of traumatic events which continuously give effect on conscious thought and behaviour.

In the work *Ego and Id*, Freud complemented his early psychological structure theory and put forth the theory of personality structure in which he divided human's personality structure into three layers: *id*, *ego* and *super ego* (tripartite model).

Id is the source of human's enthusiasm, inherited instincts, desires and habits. Instead of being restrained by all exterior elements such as logic, reason and social conventions *id* is dominated by natural law and physiological law. *Id* performs the first principle of life (the pleasure principle). When Pym think of running away with the gold bar it is the *id* that led her. The instinctual drives of the *id* are regulated by the rational *ego*. *Ego* suppresses *id* in accordance with the demands of the society to achieve a result of taking advantages and eliminating disadvantages. If *id* includes a destructive element the *ego* interferes and makes the behavioral patterns non destructive. As Guerin states, *ego* serves as intermediary between the world within and world without (157). *Super ego* is the moralised *ego* and its major function is to instruct *ego* in oppressing impulsion of *id* and correct behaviours deviating moral criterion. *Super-ego* employs conscience and moral imperative to restrain *id* and administrate *ego* for maintaining social stability. *Id*, *ego* and *super ego* are always in constant interaction and hence it difficult to isolate or separate each other. *Super-ego* instructs *ego* to try its best to restrict the impulse of *id*. The dreams of an individual's existence forgo the lawless *id* and balances on *super ego* by confirming oneself with the laws of the society. As Pym balanced:

"It would all end badly: the gold bar would be confiscated until the courts had resolved the matter, she would get another lift back to Viscos, where she would be humiliated, ruined, the target of gossip that would take more than a generation to die down. Later on, she would discover that lawsuits never got anywhere, that lawyers cost much more than she

could possibly afford, and she would end up abandoning the case.

The net result: no gold and no reputation" (28).

Thus the *superego* represses all the untamed passions of the psyche and the inherent pleasure principle remains latent.

It should be mentioned that, although Freud's tripartite personality structure theory and all of his psychological analysis theories have not been proved completely, the widely recognized marvelous theories could reveal all connotation of human's psychosocial behaviors correctly in some degree. Thus it is helpful for us to grasp all behaviors and psychological activities of characters in detail (Zhu and Bao, 2558). The application of psychoanalytic theory based on the tripartite model of mind devised by Sigmund Freud is investigated in this study giving special thrust on the interplay of the conscious and the unconscious mind of the main characters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Psychoanalysis of the characters of various works in literature using Freud's theory has been conducted previously. Donnelly (2008) dealt with the analysis of the characters' *id*, *ego* and *superego* in the novel *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. Naz (2011) studied Franz Kafka's *The Hunger Artist* for psycho semiotic analysis to explore various dimensions of meanings to discover Kafka's unconscious and subconscious being. Paul (2012) analysed *ego* and *super-ego* which exists in the main characters Elizabeth and Darcy from several aspects in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Zhu and Bao (2012) analysed the Character of Clyde in *An American Tragedy* by Theodore Dreiser using tripartite personality structure theory.

This study is unique and distinct in the sense no previous works used the Freudian tripartite personality approach in analyzing the characters' in the novel under study. The study identifies the woman who holds the titular role in the novel and places her in a new light where the psychic transformations are observed and experienced by the society. This critical analysis also emphasizes the importance of the

partaking role of women in the society in making the right choice. The social canon of equating women with tranquility is reworked by the self realization achieved by female protagonist of this novel. This study with the application of psychoanalysis creates new dimensions by making the psychoanalytical theory more sociable and by bringing the novel into a new perception. In this novel the female character overturn the hopes and desires of the society of which she is a part. As the novel progresses the character under study strongly cling on to her impulses and claims self realization.

The Devil and Miss Prym recounts the struggle between good and evil, an age old concept, which Coelho offered through Viscos making it the microcosm of the world and the emotions, strong and weak, present among the villagers represents the destiny of humanity. The novel is subtitled as A Novel of Temptation. But unlike other works, this novel presents only the temptation without resolving it. A choice between good and bad is set in front of the readers but no definite answer is given. The readers are left with the freedom to make the choice of heaven or hell for themselves. The author has finished the task by making the reader realize that everyone is capable of both. There is saint and demon residing in all of us; whom one wants to keep under control is what makes the difference; that is to make the right choice. As Coelho stated in the novel:

Savin and Ahab had the same instincts - Good and Evil struggled in both of them, just as they did in every soul on the face of the earth. When Ahab realised that Savin was the same as him, he realised too that he was the same as Savin.

It was all a matter of control. And choice. Nothing more and nothing less. (135)

The struggle initially takes place between good and bad, light and darkness and finally it turns out to be one between the society and the individual. A stranger comes to Viscos with the aim of finding out whether

humanity is left with any goodness. He suffered many setbacks in his previous life in which he even lost his family and dear children. The fight between good and evil takes place within his soul also as he hasn't lost complete faith from goodness. He calls himself Carlos and at Viscos he meets the barmaid Miss Chantal Prym, who has high ambitions about life. He shows to her one gold bar kept hidden in the forest and offered that he would give similar eleven gold bars to the villagers if they commit a murder within a week. She was selected as a messenger to convey this offer to the people of Viscos. At first she caused delay in his plan, and finally informs the people about the fortune awaiting them. The society was immediately taken away by the offer and after much debate they reach to the conclusion of executing the murder selecting Bertha an old widow whom they think invalid for the village. Temptation offered to the community justifies their action. In a society virtue consists in adjusting to the herd and vice is to be different but Prym acted bravely against the decision of the society which could have changed the fortune of Viscos. The *superego*, as Freud said, is the representative of all moral restrictions and the advocate of impulse towards perfection, which forced Prym to interfere and convince the villagers about the fate that awaits them. She is able to regenerate the goodness in the minds of the people and the social construction was shattered by the interference of an individual soul firmly adhered to the morality principle (*superego*). The people of Viscos were looking for the betterment of situations at their village that was inverted by Prym's interference. The transformation of a soul from *id* to *superego* is forcefully transferred to the society replacing the common interest restoring the moral code.

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