



**THE REVERSED AND REVISITED PSYCHE IN PAULO COELHO’S NOVELS
BY THE RIVER PEIDRA I SAT DOWN AND WEPT AND VERONICA DECIDES TO DIE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the female characters in the novels *By the River Peidra I Sat Down and Wept* and *Veronica Decides to Die* both of which spans a week’s time. The study intends to bear on the literary critical 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 *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* revolves around the title character Pilar who was thinking on terms of morality principle which switched continuously between the morality and the reality principle and this weighing ultimately rested upon the pleasure principle. Veronica, in *Veronica Decides to Die*, boldly torn away her indecision, sheds her inhibitions and decides to do things she always wanted to do without caring about the world. By liberating herself from the morality principle and the reality principle that was stamped upon her as social taboos, she felt solace with the pleasure principle which adds a better meaning to her life. In both these novels the female characters overturn the values and mores of the society of which they were a part. As the novels progresses the characters under study strongly cling on to their impulses of their psyche and claim self realization. The psychological subtleties of the characters are unfolded through the eyes of a male protagonist and their lives get intertwined resulting in parallel mind reading.

KEY WORDS: *By the River Peidra I Sat Down and Wept, Veronica Decides to Die, psychoanalytic theory*

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INTRODUCTION

Paulo Coelho, (b. 1947-) World Ambassador to Literature, is believed to be the most understood and limited writer at the same time. He is one of the most widely read writer whose works got translated to as many as seventy one languages. But many a time the halo of popular fiction limit the scope and wider implications of the work and marginalize them to one genre. Paulo Coelho’s writings include the fictional work *The Alchemist* and non fictional cum autobiographical work *The Manual of the Warrior of Light* and many more all of which covers full spectrum of journey predominated by a life

enhancing force. Among his thirty novels three of them are autobiographical and the rest of them though fictional are strongly rooted in his own experiences. His language and style of writing blends with the themes of the novels, allowing the characters, a space, to evolve by themselves. The changes the characters underwent, in course of the novels, traces their childhood experiences and these experiences suggest an explanation for the same. The manifest content of these novels direct the reader to the latent content which is the interplay of the conscious and the unconscious.

In this paper Paulo Coelho is revisited in the light of psychoanalysis by uncovering the female unconscious from a male perspective. This paper focuses on the novels *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* and *Veronica Decides to Die* both of which spans a week's time. The paper intends to bear on the literary critical outlining of psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud. As opposed to the generally conceived notion of moving from the *id* to the *superego* the female characters in these novels moves in the reverse direction. They break away the existing canons and choose to bring forth the unconscious. Through these works Coelho offers to the reader the self realization of the main characters as the vision of life attained through suffering, struggle and sanctification. These novels share the similarity by the actual time taken for the events i.e. seven days, and also by working out as a critique of Freudian model in the development of characters. These novels have the strong under currents of life, love and temptation upon which they are worked on.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Of the two novels under study, *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* (1994) traces the journey of two lovers on a timeless spiritual quest across the Pyrenees. This exhilarating novel discovers the deep secrets of life and love. The next one, *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998) is a moving and uplifting story of life, centred around the days and nights at a mental assylum following the heroine's suicide attempt. In this, she questions the idea of existence and comes to realise that every second is a choice that we all make between living and dying. This analytical study looks into the various realms of psychic struggle of the main characters. As we read the novels we observe that they undergo a mental state where they are torn by indecision. In the novel *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* we see Pilar experiencing the mental agony in taking decisions during various crucial moments of her life. Similar acute psychic helplessness is experienced by Veronica, in the novel *Veronica Decides to Die*, when she realized that the world is full of chaos and she couldn't do anything about it.

Psychoanalytic criticism adopts the methods devised by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts by reading and analyzing. It 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. One may 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. As suggested by Beystehner, psychoanalysis is (1) a method of understanding mental functioning and the stages of growth and development (2) a general theory of individual human behaviour and experience, and it has both contributed to and been enriched by many other disciplines, (3) the complex relationship between the body and mind (4) the understanding of the role of emotions in medical illness and health, and (5) the basis for treatment programs in child psychiatry, family therapy and general psychiatric practice. In addition, Pervin states that psychoanalysis relates to three fields: a theory of personality, a method of therapy and a technique for research (70). Freud claims, psychoanalysis aims at and achieves nothing more than the discovery of the unconscious in mental life.

Psychoanalytic criticism always places individual psychodrama above the social drama and the conflicting forces within the psyche of the character turns much larger in comparison to the social conflicts exist in the works. The embodiment of the psychic context of the work is identified at the expense of social and historical context. This highlights the basic premises of Freud which are;

- 1) The individual's mental processes are unconscious.
- 2) All human behaviour is motivated ultimately by libido which is generally called sexuality.
- 3) Many of the human desires and memories are repressed because of the powerful social taboos.

These basic premises lead us to the three psychic zones as explained in the tripartite model of mind by Freud the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* (Berg, 49).

The *id* is the source of all our desires and it seeks to satisfy the impulses for pleasure without regard for ethics or conventions. Purely instinctual gratification is the concern of the *id* without any concern of the consequence. The instinctual drives of the *id* are regulated by the rational *ego*. If the former includes a destructive element the latter interferes and makes the behavioral patterns non destructive. As Guerin states, *ego* serves as intermediary between the world within and world without (157). The *superego* as Freud said in "The Anatomy of Mental Personality" is the "representative of all moral restrictions the advocate of impulse towards perfection, in short it is as much as we have been able to apprehend psychologically of what people call the 'higher' things in human life." (95) Thus, the function and the mental processes that are assigned to the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego* are governed by the pleasure principle, the reality principle and the morality principle respectively. The dreams of an individual's existence forgo the lawless *id* and balances on *ego* by confirming oneself with the laws of the society. The *superego* represses all the untamed passions of the psyche and the inherent pleasure principle remains latent.

Though over a century has elapsed since Freud first proposed his theory, there has been very little comparison between Freudian theory and its links to nonpsychoanalytic academic psychology (De Sousa, 213). Though cognitive psychology has explained many areas unknown to us fifty years earlier, one must admit that no other theorist ever constructed a conceptual and metatheoretical framework like Freud did, in order to understand psychological questions. According to Reiser, no theory developed so far ever proved conceptually superior to Freud's (De Sousa, 213).

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. To justify in terms of the critical theory by exploring the unconscious in the light of the conscious take the novels to a new realm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept revolves around the title character Pilar and her decision purely designed by the pleasure principle (*id*). Pilar was leading the life of a normal girl both socially and academically without much complaint until she received a call from her childhood friend who became a spiritual leader by that time. Without realizing that the call was for her soul and to transform the lives of both herself and her friend in a week's time, Pilar accepted it. She planned to pay a normal visit for a day or two and return to her normal academic schedule. On visiting him she felt him to be on an elevated position which is rather unapproachable or unattainable for her. The potential of her mind to influence her friend and decide the course of their journey was realized only later on. In her boldness to make herself a part of his life is achieved through trials and tribulation of her mind. At first her mind was thinking on terms of morality principle (*super ego*) which switched continuously between the morality and the reality principle (*ego*) and this weighing ultimately rested upon the *id* i.e. the pleasure principle. Her doubts and tears were washed away and turned to rocks in the river Piedra cleansing herself to be a new soul purely lead by the pleasure principle (*id*).

Veronica, in Veronica decides to die decides to commit suicide as everything in the world is a total chaos and she couldn't do anything about it. Her failed suicide attempt brings her to Villette, a mental asylum where among the other mentally disturbed inmates she finds a reason of her own to live on. The doctor reveals to her that she is suffering from an acute heart failure because of the over dose of the pills she took to end her life and is left only with a maximum of seven days time. This fact created a dual feeling in Veronica's mind. At first she was relieved as she would be successful in her decision to end her life at the end of a week's time. But as days passed by the waiting for death turned horrible as she started experiencing the colours and hopes of life. She started to find new meanings of life, love and death and craving for just one more day came from within. The time she spent with the inmates especially with

Zedka, Mari, Eduard and Dr.Igor and the liberal brother hood changed her attitude towards life. She astoundingly discovers the meaning of madness is altogether different from what she thought it to be. The existing social canons about life, death, physique, mind, medicine and madness were inverted and she unflinchingly speaks of her love for Eduard and there by boldly torn away her indecision, sheds her inhibitions and decides to do things she always wanted to without caring about the world . By liberating herself from the morality principle (*super ego*) and the reality principle (*ego*) that was stamped upon her as social taboos she felt solace with the pleasure principle(*id*) which adds a better meaning to her life.

For a long time, authors have been exposing psychology in their novels. Studies on analyzing characters of literary works using Freud's theory have been conducted previously. Leah (2006) did research about the struggle between the superego and the *id* in the human psyche in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery". Donnelly (2008) dealt with the analysis of the characters' *id*, *ego* and *superego* in the novel *The Lord of the flies* by William Golding. Liang (2011) analysed the *id*, *ego*, and *super-ego* which exists in the main character Elizabeth from several aspects in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. A study of feminist concerns in Paulo Coelho on the novel *Eleven Minutes* was conducted by Rakesh (2008).

This study is unique and distinct in the sense no previous works used the Freudian tripartite personality approach in analyzing the characters' in the novels under study. The study identifies the women who share the titular role in the novels and places them in a new light were their psychic transformations are observed and assessed by their male counter parts. 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 these novels. The study of Paulo Coelho's novels with the application of psychoanalysis creates new dimensions by making the psychoanalytical theory more sociable and by bringing

the novels into a new perception. In both these novels the female characters overturn the values and mores of the society of which they were a part. As the novels progresses the characters under study strongly cling on to their impulses of their psyche and claim self realization. The psychological subtleties of the characters are unfolded through the eyes of a male protagonist and their lives get intertwined resulting in parallel mind reading.

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