

THE INFLUENCE OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS ON SARAH SCHULMAN'S NOVEL EMPATHY

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Abstract

This article explores the employment of the Freudian concepts of psychoanalysis, listening, the theory of personality and the theory of Iceberg, defense mechanisms and dream analysis in Sarah Schulman's novel *Empathy* and shows how a personality is set right by bringing the unconscious level to the conscious mind using psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, the uncrowned emperor in the empire of psychology, founded psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic approach for examining psychic phenomena and treating emotional illnesses that include treatment sessions in which the patient is encouraged to open up about personal experiences, particularly early childhood and dreams. He marked three levels of mental life in an individual: the conscious mind, the preconscious mind and the unconscious mind. The personality can be moulded by gaining insight through making conscious one's unconscious thoughts and motivations. The royal road to unconscious mind is dream. Entering into the unconscious mind through dreams will help one to see how the unconscious operates through defense mechanism and how to bring it to the conscious mind to set it right. Sarah Schulman's novel *Empathy* is a psychoanalytic novel. One can dig out Freudian concepts of psychoanalysis, listening, theory of personality and theory of Iceberg, defense mechanisms and analysis of dream by analysing the words and deeds of the characters in the novel. The analysis opens before us the window of knowledge to see that the unconscious mind plays a major role in forming a person's personality and how a person's life can be reset by informing the conscious mind about the operation of the unconscious mind.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Listening, Personality, Iceberg, Defense mechanism, Dream.

INTRODUCTION

This article excavates the use of the Freudian concepts of psychoanalysis, listening, theory of personality and theory of Iceberg, defense mechanisms and dream analysis in Sarah Schulman's novel *Empathy* and shows how a personality is set right by taking the unconscious level to the conscious mind using psychoanalysis. Freud pointed out three levels of mental life in an individual: the conscious mind, the preconscious mind and the unconscious mind. The personality can be formed rightly by obtaining insight through making conscious one's unconscious thoughts and motivations.

The gateway to unconscious mind is dream. The findings open before us the door of learning to witness that the unconscious mind plays a major role in forming a person's personality and how a person's life can be reorganised by informing the conscious mind about the operation of the unconscious mind.

Psychoanalysis is a method of probing into a person's innermost thoughts and feelings. Literature also strives to unravel the ravelled realities of the lives of the people. "One popular view of psychoanalysis is that it aims at self-knowledge" (Szabado 692). Socrates, the Greek philosopher, famously remarked that life

without examination was not worth living. When asked to summarise all philosophical precepts, he said, "Know Yourself." Psychoanalysis helps one to know oneself. Psychoanalysis was founded by Sigmund Freud. Quoting Freud, Paul Endo in his article *Freud's Psychoanalysis: Interpretation and Property* states that "Psychoanalysis is an art of interpretation" (459). Psychoanalysis is a collection of psychological ideas and therapeutic practises that originated with Sigmund Freud's work and beliefs. The concept that everyone has unconscious thoughts is at the heart of psychoanalysis. Freud believed personality defects could be cured by making conscious their unconscious thoughts and motivations, thus gaining insight. A person can find relief from psychological pain through this procedure. The following are the major tenets of psychoanalysis. The unconscious urges of a person impact their actions. Conflicts between the conscious and unconscious mind are often at the foundation of emotional and psychological issues like despair and anxiety. Early childhood events have a significant impact on personality development. To defend oneself against knowledge hidden in the unconscious, people employ defense mechanisms. Using psychoanalytic procedures such as dream analysis and free association, skilled analysts can assist a person in bringing specific elements of their unconscious mind into conscious. After establishing that Sarah Schulman's novel is a Freudian novel, a glimpse into Freud's personality theory, Iceberg theory, theory of dreams and theory of defense mechanisms will help one to understand psychoanalysis better.

Sarah Schulman's novel *Empathy* is a Freudian novel. As Ruth, the heroine of the novel, enters in her parent's room, she sees "two rows of books by Freud" (38). The influence of Freudian psychoanalysis on Doctor, the protagonist, is clear from the following passage.

He had been born a Freudian. His parents were psychoanalysts and so he had done his internship and residency simply by growing up. Doc had been raised in psychoanalysis much the same way that other children are brought up in a protestant church, or communism. Of course, in some ways, Freudians are a cult because they have both a reductionist vocabulary and a spiritual leader. They do not have a universal appeal. Like all structuralists, Freudians have a

system of thought that explains everything...Freudians have managed to penetrate culture and affect it in silent and unspecified ways. They have managed to be bizarre but seem objective. (10)

"Listening is a cardinal feature of psychoanalytic work" (Stein 387). This psychoanalytic aspect of listening is affirmed in the novel *Empathy*. The novel is an invitation to have empathetic listening. Doctor correctly observed his parent's way of listening in psychoanalysis. "All his life Doc watched his patents calmly listen to people who were out of control. A lot of people would come over when they were very upset" (61). Doctor also had his first experience in psychoanalysis by listening. "The whole time Doc sat, listening and making it possible for Shmul to talk. It was his first experience in psychoanalysis"(61). An insightful meaning of listening is stated in the novel. "Listening means not having something to say back until after they've told everything" (88). The psychoanalyst has to listen so keenly to know what is happening with the counselee. One has to read the intention behind the words. "She didn't listen to the intention behind the vocabulary"(113). In psychoanalyst's view, the reason for failure of relationship is lack of listening. Doctor tells the woman in white leather "I am leaving you because you don't listen" (90). Jo's complaint to Doc about Sam is that "I wasn't listened to" (150). Listening is not only part of psychoanalysis but also part of human responsibility. Herr K asks to Doctor "Isn't listening a human responsibility and aren't people responsible for their own behaviour despite all the excuses our culture has invented?" (139)

In the novel *Empathy*, Doctor tries to bring into conscious mind the unconscious level in Anna. To know about the unconscious, one has to refer to Freud's Personality theory and the Iceberg theory which are intertwined. Human behaviour, according to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality, is the outcome of the interaction of three components of the mind. The first component is id which is the pleasure principle. All of the unconscious, basic, and primal urges are stored in the id. The id, according to Freud, operated on an unconscious level. The ego is the second facet of a person's personality. It is reality principle. This part of the personality deals with the demands of

reality. It aids in the regulation of the desires of Id and encourages us to act in realistic and acceptable ways. The ego also aids in achieving a balance between the Id and the Superego. In contrast to the id, the ego acts in both the conscious and unconscious mind and follows the reality principle. The superego is the third component of personality and is known as morality principle. It contains our ideals and values. The superego acts as guidance for making judgements. The superego is guided by the values and ideas that our parents and society instil in us, and it attempts to make us act in accordance with these standards. Freud's theory of personality and Iceberg are intermingled. Freud's idea on three levels of mental life is known as Iceberg theory. "In all of his formulations Freud assumes the existence of the unconscious and its dynamic influence on the conscious" (Beeley 15). The conscious, preconscious, and unconscious layers of the mind were described by Freud with the analogy of iceberg. On the outside, there's consciousness, which is made up of the ideas that are currently occupying our attention, and this is considered the tip of the iceberg. The preconscious comprises of everything which can be recovered from memory. The unconscious is the third and most important part. Here are the mechanisms that are at the root of the majority of human behaviour. The most significant portion of the mind, like an iceberg, is the bit that no one can see. The unconscious mind serves as a storehouse for primal desires and impulses that are kept at bay by the preconscious mind. The core tenet of Freudian thought is that the unconscious mind has a bigger influence on behaviour. "To interpret and to modify the unconscious is the main purpose of the psychoanalyst" (Beeley 15). The Iceberg Theory is connected to the Personality Theory. Ego is comprised of consciousness and some amount of preconscious. Id exists in the subconscious and some layers of the preconscious. At all three levels, the Superego is active.

The conflict arises when the demands of the three components of personality and the demands of the three levels of mental life collide with each other. Unconscious has a major role in it. Doctor tells to Anna "You're suffering from Empathy, you must have some unresolved past experience" (31) in the unconscious. The unconscious forms a world of one's own. Anna's dialogue with Doctor is a witness to it.

"I mean something different in the World than I mean in my world" (111). There were unresolved issues in the unconscious mind of Anna. Psychoanalysis helps in making the unconscious into the conscious and settles the issues. She approached psychoanalyst Doctor to solve the unsolved issues with the aid of psychoanalysis. Anna's and all human existence's underlying difficulty is that each part of the psychological apparatus makes demands that are irreconcilable with the other two. Internal strife is unavoidable. If regulations are broken, for example, the superego can make a person feel guilty. When the id and superego have conflicting aims, the ego must function as a referee and arbitrate the situation. To avoid being overwhelmed by worry, the ego might use a variety of defense mechanisms. One has to know about defense mechanisms to understand how ego uses defense mechanisms.

The defense mechanism theory describes the tactics that the ego employs to shield itself from worry. These defense mechanisms serve as a barrier to prevent unpleasant or upsetting components of the unconscious from accessing one's conscious. When we encounter something that feels overwhelming or even incorrect, our defense systems prevent the information from accessing our conscious, reducing our suffering. Safeguard systems are created by the Ego trying to determine the contention among Id and Superego - with the goal that personality can work in a solid way. Denial, suppression, projection, displacement, regression, sublimation, rationalisation, and response creation are some of the defense mechanisms. The threat stimulation theory suggests that dreaming should be considered as a biological defensive mechanism.

The characters in the novel use different defense mechanisms. Denial is directly presented in the novel as a defense mechanism. Herr K speaks to Doctor about denial. "Denial is actually a chemical condition. People in this state protect themselves from information that they are not equipped to handle. Then they remain psychologically unaware of their own feelings. To keep this information out permanently requires large amounts of interruption" (139). Another defense mechanism employed in the novel is repression. The ego's unconscious protective strategy for keeping upsetting or threatening thoughts from becoming conscious

is repression. Hints to repression can be seen in Anna's words "I'd better stop paying too much attention or I'm going to get alienated all over again" (22). In projection, one ascribes unwanted thoughts, feelings, and motives to another person as a psychological defense mechanism. A person with this tendency sees their own unacceptable desires in other people. There is an incident in the novel where Walter is angry at Irv. Irv says "I know that you're angry at me, and I know you think I have done some bad things and I probably have. But you're angry about something else. Walter – you are right, Irv. I am angry at myself" (54). Walter was projecting or displacing self-anger on Irv. At another spot Doctor projects himself to Anna. "She reminded him immediately of himself as a girl" (29). Sublimation is similar to displacement, but it occurs when we are able to channel our negative emotions into constructive and socially acceptable acts rather than harmful ones. Doctor makes psychoanalysis on Anna about her sublimation. "She was angry at her family. But she tried to avoid it by being superior, by being detached from their prejudice" (57). A rationalization is a defense mechanism that involves a cognitive distortion of the facts in order to make a situation or impulse seem more manageable. Making excuse is a kind of rationalisation. The expressions like "They all prefer to say that they are helpless and can't change other people, i.e. the world" (146) and "To avoid the emotional punishment. I decided to look as straight as I possibly can" (114) are examples of rationalisation.

Dream analysis constitutes an important portion of the novel *Empathy*. According to the dream theory, dreams are a veiled realisation of a suppressed yearning in the unconscious. Sigmund Freud published a book called *The Interpretation of dreams* (Faneli 33). He thought that examining dreams was the simplest approach to comprehend the mind's unconscious operations. Dreams can reveal the unconscious desires and wishes of a person. "Dreams as the royal road to the unconscious and as the guardian of sleep are among the most widely shared concepts in psychoanalytic thought" (Ferro 71). The two aspects of dreaming are manifest and latent content. A dream's manifest content is what the dreamer recalls, while the latent content is the underlying wish. Dream-work is the transformation of underlying wishes into manifest content. The goal of dream work is

to turn a prohibited longing into a non-threatening form, lowering anxiety and allowing one to sleep longer. Condensation, displacement, and secondary elaboration are the three parts of the dream-work process. Condensation is combining more than two ideas or images into one. In displacement, we change something we're concerned about into something else. Secondary elaboration happens when the unconscious mind connects images of wish-fulfilment in a logical sequence in order to obscure the latent content.

The concept of dream is a recurring concept in the novel *Empathy*. Doctor had dreams. "The next morning Doctor awoke from unsettling dreams" (9). Anna, the heroine of the novel also had dreams.

That night Anna had a strange dream. When the radiator knocked, she changed. But it wasn't waking. It was a half space filled with revelations. Each one about the dream. The dream. Convinced she fell back asleep. Compared with memory this was gentle and easy to slip into. But the second time the dream had more power. In it she was astonishingly vague. Trying to think at face value without realising how much that was actually worth. I could give a description of giving head, she dreamed. A head filled with breathtakingly beautiful images cannot pay attention to the radio or laundry, so bleed on me" (23)

In a letter to Doctor, Anna writes: I am attaching a term paper written for a college class thirteen years ago. The issues still plague me and I wanted you to see them from my current point of view. The assignment, which Anna had written, was an interpretation of her dreams in the Freudian way. "Freud claims that a dream is a symptom of a pathological idea. The dream is the fulfilment of a wish that is socially unacceptable" (25). Eleanor was the focus of her dream. In that dream she thought Eleanor represented more than herself. I think she represented a group of people who share similar physical characteristics with me. What Freud calls a composite figure is the thing that appeared in the dream as Eleanor, a place where various trains of thought cross. Anna quoted Freud. "If the objects which are to be condensed into a single unity are much too incongruous, the dream work is often content with creating a composite structure with a comparatively distinct features" (*The Interpretation of Dreams*

p.359). An unacceptable wish she had about relating to women in her dream was recast into a sensual and powerful situation full of symbols. "Freud also notes that dreams are sometimes composed of two different fantasies that coincide with each other at a few points. One of these points is superficial while the other is an interpretation of the first" (27). The superficial or the manifest content is Anna's journey with Eleanor. The interpretation of it or the latent content is Anna's sexual relationship with women. "The most important meaning for me, in the dream is that after accepting these feelings and succumbing to Eleanor's power, my travels became effortless. In other words, my life became easier" (27). It means that bringing her unconscious mind into conscious mind, she is at peace. Despite the fact that Anna was nineteen, she pondered if she would ever be able to accept sexual feelings toward women without becoming feminine first. As Anna had longer hair in her dream than she did in reality, this indicates that she looked more feminine, since what she lacked in real life, Eleanor had in her, allowing her to relate to her on a sexual level. Despite all of this, Anna had always craved conformity to mainstream American social patterns. She concluded her assignment on dream using the psychoanalytic approach. It has been illustrated how the secondary agency twisted an unwanted wish established in the main agency of the psyche in order to make it acceptable to awareness. The second agency applies cultural factors to a person's basically a-cultural mind, demonstrating that the individual is also a social entity, a cultural product. There is also another conversation from the Doctor to Anna where one comes across revealing unconscious. "Now Anna I know that patients often reveal unconscious wishes in seemingly casual anecdotes. So tell me, if you imagined that your family was a movie what would it look like? What would happen on the screen?"(36).

As Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis has stated interpretation is the central technique in psychoanalysis. The counsellor interprets the dreams, the unconscious and defense mechanisms of the client. The client must be willing to participate in the sessions. Anna, the heroine of the novel willingly partakes in the sessions with Doctor. Free association is mandatory. There is free association from the part of Anna, the client. "As Anna began to recite her autobiography, she felt even more

comfortable" (33). A therapist will remain non-judgmental throughout the entire process when a client talks about whatever comes to mind. Anna freely expresses whatever comes to her mind and Doctor remains non-judgmental all throughout the sessions. As a psychoanalyst, Doctor helps Anna to reorient her thinking. It is mentioned in the novel "reorient your thinking" (21).

The effective use of psychoanalysis in the novel *Empathy* shows the creativity of Sarah Schulman in presenting the intricacies of human mind in words. The art of listening, theory of personality and theory of Iceberg, defense mechanism and dream analysis are effective measures in dealing with the psychological aspects of human being. Literary works also successfully present the realities of human personality.

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