

REPRESSION TO SUBLIMATION: AN EVOLUTION OF CHARACTER IN PAULO COELHO'S ADULTERY

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Abstract

Human psyche is a most puzzling area which can neither be easily predicted nor easily understood. Over the years, many scientists have analyzed the workings of mind but have never succeeded in graphing a clear sketch of the human mind. Psychodynamic approach to literature believes that all behaviors have a root cause; a cause that is often because of some unconscious motive. These inner motives evoke behaviorism and determine the formation of character in individual people. Paulo Coelho's *Adultery* is one such story, which deals with the dynamics of a woman's psyche. The protagonist's evolution of character from the boredom of normal routine, to a passionate affair to the mental sufferings she undergoes and finally to the way she resolves everything to go back to her normal is beautifully traced by the author. This paper attempts to interpret the sub-conscious level of the protagonist's mind and trace her evolution of character through psychoanalytic theory.

Keywords: Psyche, Behavior, Psychodynamic, Character, Motives.

"A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other" (Dickens, 13). Humans have always wondered about the mysteries of creation, foremost among them being Man himself. In particular, the working of the mind has, and still is a mystery to be unraveled. Over the years, many scientists have analyzed the workings of mind but have never succeeded in graphing a clear sketch of the human mind. Human psyche is a most puzzling area which can neither be easily predicted nor easily understood. Paulo Coelho's novel *Adultery* has a woman protagonist, who begins to question the routine and predictability of her days. She can no longer bear the effort to fake happiness when all she feels in life is enormous apathy, boredom and depression. Coelho presents an excellent exposure of her psyche and her emotions over-ridden by passion. This

paper attempts to interpret the sub-conscious level of the protagonist's mind through psychoanalytic theory.

Linda, a thirty-year-old woman is the protagonist of the novel *Adultery*. In everybody's eyes, she lives a perfect life, married to a rich businessman, and a job as a journalist. However, she begins to question her daily routine. She feels that only a few achieve the ideal life they dream of. Once, in an interview with a writer, he says, "I haven't the slightest interest in being happy. I prefer to live life passionately, which is dangerous because you never know what might happen next" (A 2). This answer fires up the impulsive nature in the heart of Linda. It paves a path to choose a life of passion and fantasy, deviating from her regular life of boredom. She is unable to share her inner feelings with her rich husband who is a busy businessman in Switzerland. Soon her passions and suppressed desire started to play an active role in her life. She meets her ex-boy friend in an interview, Jacob Kiong, who is a successful politician in Geneva. She has a passionate affair with him and lives her sexual fantasy through him. However, at the end she understands that time does not change people but instead 'Love' is responsible for everything. She ends her affair and turns to her husband with a new hope of getting back his love.

Feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness are reserved in the unconscious mind. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. 'The unconscious continues to influence our behavior and experience, even though we are unaware of these underlying influences' says Freud in his psychoanalytic theory of personality. Psychodynamic approach to literature believes that all behaviors have a root cause; a cause that is often because of some unconscious motive. Some of the psychological motives are 'Repression', 'Regression', 'Projection', 'Rationality', 'Displacement', 'Identification', 'Fantasy', 'Compensation' and 'Compassion'. These inner motives evoke behaviorism and determine the formation of character in individual people.

Linda, the journalist protagonist, is not satisfied with the humdrum routine life that she leads. Eventhough she is pleased with her husband's generosity and love, she misses a life of passion which she has always longed for. In her heart, she feels, "I want to change. I need to change. Today at work I got ridiculously uptight, simply because an intern took longer than usual

to find the material I wanted. I'm not normally like that, but I'm gradually losing touch with myself"(A 12).As R.C. Fair notes, "Extramarital affairs occur because of lack of variety in an individual's life which leads them to seek satisfaction from other lovers besides their spouse" (46).She longs to be passionate with her husband but he does not understand her. She says, "After I shower, I lie down beside him, I begin stroking his chest, and he immediately becomes aroused. We make love as we haven't done in a long time. When I moan a little too loudly, he asks me to keep the nose down so as not to wake the children, but I tell him I don't want to, that I want to be able to express my feelings" (A 30). These are words from her inner suppressed thoughts.When one is humiliated to express one's feelings, it often results in isolation of relationship

Repression is the attempt made by an individual to repel his or her own desires and impulses towards pleasurable instincts by excluding the desires from consciousness into unconsciousness. Despite her inner conflicts, Linda tries to go back to her routine life.She tries to calm herself and with a friend's help tries all kinds of like meditation, inhaling pills and even tries attending Yoga classes. All this she does to escape from her loneliness and from her depression. She says, "Dear Depression, please keep your distance. Don't be nasty. Find some other person with more reason than me to look in mirror and say: "What a pointless existence". Whether you like it or not, I know how to defeat you. You're wasting your time"(A 31).

According to Freud, "There is always a return of the repressed" (Barry, 96). This is exactly what happens to Linda. Her unexpressed passions slowly grew day by day and when one day she meets her ex-boyfriend Jacob, it erupts volcanically. This results in a passionate affair, starting from their first meeting. To quote McCabe, "... unless relationships fulfill basic needs for intimacy and companionship, then an individual is more likely to seek to escape or end the relationship..." (131-132). Since her husband does not satisfy her sexual desires Linda's repressed passions burst out and find Jacob as a substitute to fulfill her longings. This is the Displacement phase where the sexual impulse is redirected into a substitute object. She considers this to be the thrilling adventurous break in her monotonous life where she wishes to satisfy all her passions.She even goes to the extreme of separating Jacob from his wife to get him into her full control and to get satisfied through him."... It's thrilling to fight for a love that's entirely

unrequited”(A 98), she says. Linda justifies herself saying, “... I’m free to love anyone in the world. I can decide who without asking anyone’s permission (A 98).

However, the affair with Jacob was not an emotional bound. Jacob uses her only to satisfy his sexual desire though Linda herself was passionate about it. Once again dissatisfaction arises. The repressed feelings now being spent, Linda begins to question herself. Her Super Ego kicks in and she sincerely regrets her actions. She herself reveals the truth to her husband and to Marianne - Jacob’s wife - in a party. Linda feels sorry for all that she had done. She says, “My sobs are so loud that someone approaches and asks if I need help. I say no and the person walks away. But the truth is I do need help - a lot. I’m plunging deeper into my inner self, into its sea of mud, and I can’t swim”(A 227).

She thinks back about her family and feels ““We’re an emotionally well-structured family. If one of us needs help, the other is always ready to do anything””(A 262). She doesn’t want to lose her husband and children. She believes that in spite of all the confusion, her husband will love her and will accept her back again. Here she knew that genuine care and love would be reciprocated. She wants to regain her husband’s heart, get back the lost love. This would be a fitting for this could be the next “Adventure” (A 263). She says, “Love alone is not enough. I need to fall in love with my husband. Love isn’t just a feeling; it’s an art. And like any art, it takes not only inspiration, but also a lot of work”(A 210). Here she comes to the Sublimation phase. In this phase, the impulses are directed towards a constructive approach which is accepted by the society. Linda knows, “What kills a relationship between two people is precisely the lack of challenge, the feeling that nothing is new anymore”(A 281). Hence Linda decides to channel her passions towards this new challenge of developing the ‘Art of Love’ to her family.

According to Freud, “... the sexual life of adult women is a “dark continent” for psychology” (Gyler, 1). Linda in her varied passions, determinations, wishes and decisions embodies this observation. Her complexity of character and her hard to predict nature itself shows the nuances of the psyche. Though she lets loose her passions she also finds a reasonable solution at the end. She is a remarkable woman who knows very well her own nature: “I can’t control myself, that’s my problem”(A 168). Thus her acceptance and her strong will to lead a

fulfilling life helps her in evolving from the Repression phase to the Sublimation phase into a strong woman.

Abbreviation

A - Adultery

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