

Psychoanalytical Perspective in John Steinbeck's of *Mice and Men*

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Abstract: Literature is the place of confluence where different fields of a human life meet and in order to have a better analysis of such creation of author; rich in matter and composition of various fields, mere usual perception of analysis is not enough, so therefore what we require are special tools, which help us to dig deep into the realms of literature. One among such special tools is application of psychology to literature where we dig deep into the minds of literary character, which help us to unfold the mysteries of thinking pattern not only of the literary character but also indirectly of human beings. Here in this paper we are going to apply this psychological tool, specifically Sigmund Freud's Id, ego and Super Ego, Libido and sexual psychic theory of Psychoanalysis to John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and have a cross sectional analysis of the characters of novel, which will ultimately highlight the psychological richness of this work.

Keywords: Id ego and Superego, Literature, Psychoanalysis, Psychology, Sigmund Freud

I. INTRODUCTION

Psychology is the science of the mind and behavior. The word "psychology" comes from the Greek word *psyche* meaning "breath, spirit, soul" and the Greek word *logia* meaning the study of something [1]. It is the branch of science which uses human behavior as a means to understand the working and functioning of our minds. John Steinbeck the Nobel laureate of 1962, "a giant of American letters"[2], is one among those writers, who portrays common men and presents plot and narrative with such expertise that it puts a compulsion spell on the reader to place itself in character's shoes and ponder "why is it so?", "what is going in the minds of the character that it acted in such a way" and so on. Basically having a image of writer of the era of Dust Bowl and Great Depression, Steinbeck depicted the struggle of working class around California. His works like *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) etc, are the best examples of such depictions and thus are examined as referential materials for understanding the lives of people of that time period, but the aspect which has remained untouched from analytical point of view is the is psychological one, which is universal in all human beings and is the problem statement of this paper. So in order to pursue the problem statement, a cross sectional study of novel shows that it is a creation by mind(Author), of minds(characters), for minds(Readers) and when Freud's psychoanalytical criticism is applied to it, characters of the novel come out as Freud's id, ego and superego characters. Likewise the Freudian libidinal and sexual richness is being evident in the behavioral pattern and conversation among the characters.

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied here is qualitative research, in which firstly a close study of the primary source i.e. *Of Mice and Men* has been done, in which emphasis has been laid more on character study and narrative, secondly followed by study of secondary sources. This literature review led to the finding of the research gap. Thirdly psychoanalytical criticism specifically Freud's theory of id, ego and superego and theory of sexuality with libido as main concern has been applied. Finally the conclusion has been drawn.

III. HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY

History of Psychology finds its pioneer in hands of Aristotle specifically his 4th century BC definition of tragedy in his *Poetics* where he defines tragedy as the mixture of emotions of pity and fear which bring about the final conclusive stage of Catharsis. But the actual seed which was sown in the field of psychology was by Plato; teacher of Aristotle, who gave the concept of "Psyche"; "a word used to describe both the mind and the soul, to develop a rough framework of human behavior, reasoning and impulses" [3].

IV. SIGMUND FREUD AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

4.1 Mind divided into conscious, sub conscious and unconscious

Sigmund Freud stands as a significant name in the field of psychology, who gave the concept of Psychoanalysis. Various postulates have been given by him in this theory. Of which the basis of all is the comparison of human mind to that of an "Ice berg". Just as a smaller portion of Ice berg lies above the sea surface but a huge part of lies beneath the sea surface, similar is the state of human mind. According to Freud, It is basically divided in three parts i.e. conscious; actions or mental processes of which we are aware and are in full control, sub conscious; of which we are not aware of directly but can retrieve with some effort and unconscious; the larger portion of psyche where desires, thoughts and socially unfit emotions are repressed or blocked. It's the unconscious which finds its escape in perverse ways.

4.2 Freud on id, ego and superego

Freud also divided the mental functioning in three topographical areas of id, ego and superego. According to Charles Brenner [4],

" id comprises the psychic representatives of the drives, the ego consists of those functions which have to do with the individual's relation to his environment, and the superego comprises the moral precepts of our minds as well as our ideal aspirations"

Id is the psychic representative of the basic drives, driven always by pleasure principle. It doesn't bothers about social perceptions. Superego forms the conscience part, it's driven by morality principle and concerns about social perception, thus constrains behavior unacceptable to society. Thus due to opposite nature of the two, "*the psyche is in constant struggle*". Ego is the logical part, which is partly conscious, and is the mediator between the two trying to pacify the struggle in order to bring the psyche in balance.

4.3. Application of psychoanalysis in literature: its examples

The credit for bringing psychology and literature together goes to Freud because it was his observation that "...the creative faculty draws on drives and fantasies buried in the unconscious, and that they provide the clue to understanding the imaginative mind as well as individual works"[5], where the study of mind includes the tri-polar study of mind of the author, mind(s) of the character of the work and that of the reader. The examples of works which have been most frequently analyzed rather inspired readers and researchers to emphasize on psychological aspect while analyzing literature are Oedipus Rex, Hamlet etc and list of psychoanalytic analysts includes "Ernest Jones –A psychoanalytic study on Hamlet", where he brought forward that it was the Oedipus complex of hamlet which delayed his revenge. Marie Bonaparte who studied Edgar Allen Poe's works in light of Freud's dream interpretation and wrote The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation based on it, wrote "All of Poe's work was charged with anxiety, and its power came from the resulting affects which have reemerged from deep and hidden sources in the unconscious" [5]. Thus we find that applicability of psychoanalytic approach is not a novel act.

V. CHARACTERS AS ID, EGO AND SUPEREGO FIGURES

5.1 George as superego figure

According to Berger, " We can use the concepts of the id, ego, and the superego to help us understand texts. In certain texts, characters may be seen as primarily id figures or ego figures or superego figures [6]. In context to this psychoanalytical approach to Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, this statement fits truly for George Milton as superego and Lennie as the id figure. Just as superego is the moral organ of mind, here in this novella, George is the moral instructor of Lennie. He plays the superego part of Lennie. We evidence it in the very start of the novella, George warning Lennie, "for God' sakes don't drink so much... You gonna be sick like you was last night" [7] and also warning "An' you ain't gonna do no bad things like you done in Weed, neither" [7]. It is similar to our conscience (superego) warning (us) against the fear of punishment or getting into serious trouble or danger, if something being considered as wrong is done by us. George is all the time caring and precautionous for Lennie, trying to make him understand what is good and what is bad. He is morally correct on grounds of humanity, for caring a man like Lennie who couldn't live on his own because of short intelligence and his own superego is evident when we come across his confession, when his one of the practical jokes got Lennie nearly drowned at Sacramento River and from where he stopped doing something like that anymore. Just as our conscience tries to take control of our mind over desire, superego struggles to take charge of mind against id. In Similar way we find George trying to take control of Lennie, while he is doing something unacceptable according to social norms, like the instances when he kills a mice while petting but doesn't wants to leave its dead body's, George throws the dead mice away. He restrains Lennie from having small puppy in the bunk house and orders him to leave it at the barn at its nest with its mother. It was once again George who freed the girl at the weed, out of Lennie's hold and Curley's hand out of Lennie's paw. Thus he has a constraining effect on Lennie, akin to superego over mind against the time when id is not.

There are other instances where George's act of having a foreshadow of the coming danger in future and warning Lennie against such troubles of future such as Curley messing up with Lennie and Curley's "purty" wife becoming a jail bait for him, asking Lennie to avoid both of them, makes him resemble the conscience (superego) part of us, which warns us for coming troubles and tries to not let us get into those traps. But it is the pleasure loving nature and reluctant nature of us; the id, to disobey the things forbidden to do at first place. It is just because it brings pleasure, the same pleasure for which Adam and Eve were punished which they had gained by disobeying God, plucking apple from the tree of true knowledge and having a bite of it and losing their pure innocence, which resulted for their banishment from the Garden of Eden i.e. Heaven.

5.2 Lennie as embodiment of id

We have various instances in the novel where Lennie comes up as personification of id. Although being warned by George, he is reluctant to have the dead mice. He is even warned against not to remain around Curley's wife in any case, but gets easily allured by her and does the mistake of touching her soft hair, causing the death series to start from physical death of Curley's wife and then death of his own, thereby causing death of dreams of himself, George and that of Candy to own a land of their own. Lennie disobeys his friend George (conscience), just because he finds pleasure doing the things that he is fond of. It is his pleasure for touching and petting soft things that ultimately causes to have an end like a dog.

5.3 Lennie's psychic ego

Apart from Lennie's characterization as id figure, we find that his wrong acts are being followed by self realization. Every time he does a wrong thing he repents and excuses that he didn't mean to hurt either when it was Curley's wife or small furry pup or the little mice. It is this point when we come across Lennie's psychic ego, which follows reality principle. After every act of stroking or feeling soft things by touching and causing death of that mice and pup and even accidentally killing of Curley's wife, he is aware of the fact that he has done "a bad thing". His realization of the wrong is the moment, where his psychic ego comes to live, which makes him sorry and helpless and face feeling of guilt which resulted from pleasure driven behavior.

VI. PSYCHOANALYTICAL SEXUALITY AND LIBIDO IN NOVEL

6.1 Freud : Sexuality and Libido

When we talk about pleasures, what we often come across is sexual instincts which is the source of immense pleasure, which brings about both physiological and psychological satisfaction, which in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis is categorized under 'sexuality'. According to Freud, "*the force by which the sexual instinct is represented in the mind is given the name of 'libido'-sexual hunger*" [8]. In general sense, libido is misunderstood and limited only to sexual relations, where as in actual it has of large diameter, encircling various sensual pleasures and gratifications [6].

6.2 Libido as a cause behind Lennie's love for soft things

In this novella, the libido factor seems to dominate from the very beginning. Lennie is a guy, with fully grown up body but his brain is still stuck to the level of small kid. He is physically mature but mentally immature. Although being capable of copulating, his sexual desires are caged in his childish mind. Thus his sexual energy- the libido, is not finding a way out naturally and thus is the cause of Lennie's love for soft things. As is being presented by Brent D. Slife, Richard N. Williams as, "*All human behavior has a core of sexual motivation is the assertion that the sexual motivation itself arises from the body, rather than from the mind*" [9]. But here in case of Lennie, it is both body and mind acting together persuaded by psychic drive of libido submerged in unconscious, which causes him to love soft things like mice, rabbit, pup, velvet, silk and Curley's wife's hair. This feel of softness brings a compensatory feeling for Lennie's own id, an alternate option for physical sexual pleasure.

Being of childish IQ he is not aware of adult means of quenching his thirst for sex at so called 'cathouses' or it would be more correct he is not aware actually of what physical sex is. Thus it's his mind and body which have found their own means to find relief of that sexual tension. His fingers have replaced his male sexual organs in terms of sensing soft things physically, leading to immense pleasure, rather the surface area of pleasure has increased here as compared to that of phallus and it's the smoothness of hairy skin of mice, pup, rabbit and velvety hair of Curley's wife which has replaced the softness of female or male sexual organs, that he is touching, as we find Lennie's saying "*I wasn't doin' nothing bad with it, George. Jus' strokin' it*" [7].

6.3 Evidences of libidinal driven acts of Lennie and Curley's wife

Also the conversation between Curley's wife and Lennie at barn, where she tries to bring Lennie's attention towards her in context of her soft hair and later fighting back, struggling to get freed from Lennie's grip, when he tries to shut her up of screaming out of fear of George, include such exchange of words, which

during a sexual act occurs between the copulating couple finding pleasure verbally and physically thereby bringing psychological fulfillment of dirty talking during sex. Such words of Curley's wife include "But mine is soft and fine... Here—feel right here... Feel right aroun' there an' see how soft it is..." [7] and find Lennie saying words like "Oh! That's nice... Oh, that's nice" [7] and again Curley's wife screaming "...Don't you muss it up... Look out, now, you'll muss it... You stop it now, you'll mess it all up... Let go... You let go" [7]. Further Lennie's words "Please don't do that... Now don't... Don't you go yellin'" [7] resembles the words that a male says a female, while forcing her into a sexual act, though she doesn't have the willingness to have sex and screams thereof, whose orgasmic end is brought about in a symbolized way by "And then she was still" [7]. This whole symbolism shows an affinity for the libido driven act of Lennie and Curley's wife.

6.4 Words revealing libido of author

One more thing that is remarkable is Steinbeck's use of certain words which do have a textual as well as contextual, direct or indirect connection with sexual symbolism such as "jerks", "jerked", "jerkline" being used combined with girl characters in the novel, "scummy"-having the word 'cum', the word "strokin" used at various places by Lennie, are the visual evidences of the libidinous effect on the author and the character as well. Steinbeck may have used more decent words than that, which are being used in normal context, but his adherence to such words do support the silent release of libidinous energy of mind.

VII. CONCLUSION

Thus *Of Mice and Men* being analyzed based on Freud's psychoanalysis, reveals how artistically Steinbeck has embodied the psychic id as Lennie, psychic superego as George and presented the id-superego mechanism of these two characters as well. Also the dominance of sexuality in human behavior and the deep relationship between id and libido is evident by means of the characters; the selected words used by the author in the novella, in special reference to Lennie and Curley's wife, ultimately proves the merit of application of psychology specifically psychoanalysis to the realms of literature.

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