



Human Psyche and the Defense Mechanisms in Paulo Coelho's The Devil and Miss Prym; A Psychoanalytic Study

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ABSTRACT

This article encompasses psychoanalytic aspects of the Stranger, one of the leading characters in the novel *The Devil and Miss Prym*. The Stranger is not presented as an evil or malevolent character; rather, he is shown as a psychologically complicated and tormented character. His behavior is disturbed by his past trauma, inner conflicts, unconscious desires, and drives. Through Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly focusing on the id, ego, superego, anxiety, and defense mechanisms, this article concentrates on the Stranger's inner psychological conflicts and how his past trauma shapes his moral values. The research follows descriptive qualitative research illustrating the major traits of the human psyche, core issues, defense mechanisms, and anxiety. The research exposes that the Stranger's inner psychological complexities are the result of his past trauma, internal conflict, and anxiety. This study reveals the Stranger provokes the villagers to commit a crime out of his vengeance. His manipulation of killing an innocent is not a result of wickedness but a psychological response to his past trauma of losing his family and inner conflicts. The Stranger's emotional distance, identity crises, and confusion about taking proper decision is a prominent example of his psychologically disturbed personality. Altogether, the study illustrates that the reason behind the Stranger's malevolence is closely related to his past trauma and his inner psychological conflicts.

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1. Introduction

Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* (Coelho, 2000) portray the perpetual conflict between good and evil, digging deep into the human nature, moral choice and the capacity for both virtue and vice. The story is set in the little, serene village of Viscos, where community traditions and moral expectations prevail. At the outset of the story, a mysterious stranger arrives who is cryptic, ingenious, and captivating. He is a symbolic representation of the Devil. The Stranger longs to spread evil in a society which forces the villagers to murder an innocent that ultimately challenge the inner desires and ethical limits of the villagers. The novel deeply

delves into the conflict between good and evil, the psychological conflict of human nature, and morality. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the Stranger is the mirror of the unconscious, reflecting the villagers' desires driven by the id, while Chantal is the ego caught up in moral dilemmas. It is the combination of psychological insight and moral reasoning that makes this novel so fascinating to analyze, especially in terms of the psychology of evil.

Paulo Coelho (born 1947) is one of the most remarkable, and globally acknowledged Brazilian novelists in the world. Coelho is best recognized for his spiritual and philosophical writing that include the themes of destiny, faith, morality, and the inner conscience of human soul. Coelho does not focus on complex writing; instead, he stresses on the moral dilemma, the psychological struggles, the battle between good and evil, and the spiritual quests. His works often blend realism with symbolism and mystical elements. The psychological element becomes predominantly clear in his novel "The Devil and Miss Prym". This novel concentrates more on psychological tension and the inner conflict of human mind, rather than the physical action or the external crime. The Stranger's malevolent and inner psychological struggles make him an optimal character for interpreting Sigmund Freud psychoanalytic theory, which stresses Id, Ego, and Superego (Freud, 1923).

This study insists on the psychological aspect of the Stranger who is governed by unanswered grief and disturbed unconscious impulses. He is not just the symbol of wickedness or philosophical counterforce. Thus, in the novel the author transforms the Stranger from a banal villain to a psychologically intricate character defined by trauma and unconscious forces.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have examined the moral, ethical, symbolic, psychological, psychoanalytic, allegorical, and philosophical attributes of the novel *The Devil and Miss Prym*. They have not probed deeply into the psychological depth of the Stranger as an individual character particularly on his inner conflicts, his unconscious drives, his anxiety, and defense mechanisms through Freud's structural model of human psyche. These studies have worked on *The Devil and Miss Prym* on various angles including narrative technique, morality, the human nature, and symbolic perspectives thus executed on their respective domains and these studies fail to explore the unconscious drives and the psychological depth of the Stranger. He is often interpreted as the Devil because of his evilness, temptation, and darkness with in every human being, making him a quintessential subject for psychoanalytic study.

Kusumawati, F. (2013) in her article "The personality of the main character as reflected in *The Devil and Miss Prym: A psychological study*", explores the personality of the main character, and the various facets of moral struggle and character traits. The study concentrates on behavioral tendencies and ethical decision making without providing a detailed psychoanalytic exploration of the Stranger. Kusumawati (2013) focuses on how characters react to temptation and moral tests. It does not wholly assess the Stranger's internal conflicts, unconscious desires, anxiety, and defense mechanisms through Freud's concept of human psyche. The study dives into the surface level of moral conflict, but not engaging with the psychoanalytic concepts such as repression, unconscious motivation, and the symbolic role of ethical dilemma.

Similarly, Alfajr and Candraningrum, D. (2020) in their thesis "Human nature is the main character of *The Devil and Miss Prym: A psychoanalytic perspective*" reviews the themes of human nature in the novel deeply. It illustrates the complexities between evil and good in the villagers of Viscos, emphasizing how cupidity, terror, and temptation effect their decisions. This study views the novel through a psychoanalytic perspective and stresses on the general human issue of the villagers, focusing deeply on the broader concept of human nature. It does not explicate on the deep psychological complexities of the Stranger who actually provokes evil and tests human morality. Also, this thesis does not explore the Stranger's inner desires, internal struggles, anxiety, traumatic events, and defense mechanisms.

Ishana Fathima, M., and Virgin Nithya Veena, V. (2023) in their study, "exploring the narrative techniques in Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym*" examine Coelho's narrative techniques including symbolism, foreshadowing, and parable-like storytelling. Although, their work helps in learning the structure of text, however, it does not analyze Stranger's inner deep motivations, psychological trauma, and unconscious desires.

Mustikapurnamasari, A. S. (2017) in his research paper, "Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* as an allegory", interprets the novel as a religious allegory in *The Garden of Eden*. Although, this underlines to the spiritual symbolism and compares the Stranger to the Biblical image of Satan, it highlights the concepts of temptation and evil. However, this research fails to investigate the inner psychological issues, his unconscious desires, anxiety, past trauma, and defense mechanisms of the Stranger.

Deshmukh (2020) discusses the philosophical and moral perplexity in the novel, stressing on free will, ethical commitment and the disposition of evil. This analysis sheds light on the collective morality and fails to explore the psychological depth of the Stranger as an individual character.

Overall, these studies have explored the novel through various approaches including psychological, psychoanalytic, allegorical, narrative, and philosophical. However, these studies do not investigate the Stranger as an individual psychological entity by applying Freud's structural model of psyche. Although, some research works have brought forth psychoanalysis and human nature of the villagers, while others have deciphered the Stranger by means of moral, allegorical, and narrative perspectives. The psychological depth, internal motivations, anxiety, core issues, and defense mechanisms of the Stranger have hardly been discussed. Through Sigmund Freud's concepts of id, ego, and superego, defense mechanisms, and anxiety, the study focuses on the psychological complexities of the Stranger and inspects how the Stranger's internal conflicts and issues contribute in provoking the villagers to commit a crime.

3. Research Methodology

This study applies Sigmund Freud psychoanalysis theory to investigate the psychological problems of the Stranger in *The Devil and Miss Prym* by Paulo Coelho. This theory revolutionized modern psychology by asserting that human behavior is shaped by human desires, hidden reminiscences and instinctual drives (Freud, 1900). Freud is of the view that human actions are often influenced by unconscious impulses, conflicts, and desires, which are classified into three components: the Id which represents the basic and instinctive part of our mind and focuses on immediate pleasure; the Ego which balances the practical and sensible part and achieves harmony between id and reality; and the Superego which demonstrates the difference between right and wrong and focuses on moral conscience. Through these components, we are going to engross the Stranger's unconscious conflicts, Id-driven impulses and past traumas, scrutinizing how he provokes the villagers to commit murder.

In his writings, he has emphasized the theory of psychoanalysis, especially in his works: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900) in which he has discussed about unconscious mind and how secret wishes and hidden struggles shape human actions, *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923) he portrayed the structural model of psyche- Id, Ego, and Superego in which he discusses the internal conflict between instinctive feelings, and reasoning. Beyond the *Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920) suggested the idea of death drive portraying humanity's inherent destructive tendencies. These key principles of Psychoanalysis are depicted vividly in *The Devil and Miss Prym* (Coelho, 2000) where the Stranger's moral experiment reveals the villager's avarice, apprehension, and ferocity and exposes the conflict between instinct and conscience. The study also concentrates on Freud's concept of defense mechanisms, and anxiety to test the Stranger's response to past traumatic events.

This study endorses descriptive qualitative research on the psychoanalytic perspectives of the Stranger's inner desires and his psychological conflicts. Freud's psychoanalytic theory encompasses the theoretical framework for analysis whereas the novel facilitates as a predominant textual source. Textual evidence was methodically extracted from the dialogues and passages that unfold the psychological intricacies of the Stranger which include his past trauma, anxiety, unconscious desires, inner conflicts, and defense mechanisms such as denial, projection, and displacement. The extracted passages were thoroughly perused and classified according to the pertinent psychoanalytic concepts. To identify how the Stranger's past incidents and unconscious issues that impact his behavior and moral actions, each textual evidence was elucidated with Freud's structural model of human psyche and defense mechanisms. Instead of focusing on the overall psychology of the villagers, the analysis encompasses explicitly on the Stranger to enable the in- depth evaluation of the Stranger's psychological characterization.

1. How do the core issues of psychoanalysis reflect the Stranger's behavior?
2. How does the stranger display Freud's concept of the human psyche in *The Devil and Miss Prym*?
3. How does the Stranger reflect on the defense mechanism of Freud's psychoanalytic theory such as projection, displacement, and denial in *The Devil and Miss Prym*?

4. Analysis and Discussion

Core issues in psychoanalysis are deeply painful and emotional experiences develop through past trauma, rejection, betrayal, and unstable relationships. People often face these issues and anxieties because of something traumatic that happened in their lives. These issues continue hindering their lives, personalities, identity and behavior. These core issues remain unhealed in the unconscious mind and control human behavior, emotions, feelings, desires, and their actions (Freud, 1923). The Stranger is a psychologically complex, emotionally unstable, and a tormented character. His past trauma of losing his family shapes his entire personality and transforms him into a person driven by revenge, pain, mental instability, and insecure sense of self.

Anxiety is a mental disorder and an important issue of psychoanalysis which involves fear, stress, psychological tension, and overthinking. This anxiety is caused by any past trauma, regret and inner conflicts faced by the individuals. People often cannot forget these painful, traumatic experiences which result in distress and anxiety. This tension can be seen in the Stranger's behavior. His anxiety of not taking proper actions and remain confused while taking decisions is a strong core issue of psychoanalysis. The murder of his family reflects his emotional distress, tension, and anxiety which results in the loss of his mental peace. Due to this, he decided to manipulate villagers to prove that humanity is not purely good or evil. This imbalance of emotions conveys that inner anxiety cannot be fully expressed.

"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" (Coelho, 2006, p. 117)

This creates tension, confusion and a disturbed mind. He shifts his anxiety into a moral tragic experiment. His inability to find peace and satisfaction is also a form of restlessness and anxiety. Fear of betrayal occurs when a person has faced injustice, barbarity, and dishonesty and become doubtful to others. This shows that how a person imposes the brutality and cruelty to others. The murder of his family without reason forces him to manipulate people to commit a crime and betray their moral and ethical values for money. This is the reason that the Stranger sees human beings as treacherous and selfish.

"Before they died, however, they had time to execute my wife and daughters." (Coelho, 2006, p. 42)

This influences the Stranger to provoke the villagers to murder an innocent and to prove that people will betray one another. Thus, the Stranger has a conviction that people are disloyal, prefers corruption, are selfish and cannot be morally trusted. Fear of abandonment is another crucial core issue of psychoanalysis. Fear of abandonment arises when a person faces emotional detachment from the people they love or when they lose their loved ones. This creates emotional instability, loneliness, and dejection. As the Stranger is deprived of his wife and daughter, he suffers from emotional abandonment.

"I don't care whether I live or die. But first, for the sake of my wife and daughters, I need to grasp what happened in that hiding place" (Coelho, 2006, p. 43)

It highlights his suffering of no home, no family and no authentic relationships. Due to the trauma of losing his family, he becomes emotionally and mentally abandoned. He prefers isolation and doesn't make further connections. Even he does not connect with the villagers and Chantal as he wants to protect him from further attachments.

Low self- esteem refers to the issue when an individual feels despicable, impotent, and broken. Low self- esteem often emerges from the traumatic events which shatters confidence and dignity. The Stranger lost his family and the guilt of not protecting his family results in low self- esteem. Despite being wealthy, his self- respect is damaged. He becomes aloof and indifferent to the pleasures around him. Instead, he falls into abyss of darkness.

"I lost the most precious thing a man can have: my faith in my fellow man. I laughed and I wept at God's irony..." (Coelho, 2006, p. 42)

This depicts that pessimism enshrouds him. He seems to fall in the valleys of gloom and despair where he only witnesses unfairness, injustice, and frustration. Insecure or unstable sense of self means the loss of identity where a person is unaware of his deeds and is influenced by traumatic incidents. Perplexity hinders a man of making any decision himself. The Stranger strives between vengeance and conscious. Sometimes, he appears vicious and there are moments when he becomes pensive and indecisive.

"I'm not trying to prove that humanity is perverse. What I'm trying to do is to prove that I unconsciously asked for the things that happened to me" (Coelho, 2006, p. 72)

This underlines his internal struggle and conflict between right and wrong. He also discusses the ideas of good and evil to Chantal, reflecting his emotional instability, identity confusion, and a fractured sense of self. Thus, the Stranger's manipulation of the villagers to commit a crime is not because of his evil nature. The reason lies in the unhealed pain, and his past trauma which damages his identity, creates tension and mistrust in *The Devil and Miss Prym*.

Human nature refers to the behaviors, instinctual desires, and emotional tendencies of human beings. It explains how different people think differently, how their choices vary, how their inclinations differ, and how every individual is unique from others. Since ancient times, philosophers, thinkers, artists, and writers have questioned whether human beings are naturally good, evil, wicked, generous or selfish. Human nature also highlights the ability of an individual to distinguish between rational and irrational tendencies. Thus, human nature is complex, critical and a comprehensive subject that explores the deep inner core of humanity.

Human beings are prone to devilish acts; and this just not depends on external circumstances, but because evil is a part of human nature. Human nature has always been a motif of captivation. Human beings embrace both the traits of goodness and evil and each trait vary from individual to individual. Every human has a good side and a bad side, but sometimes the darker side comes out under pressure or temptation. This instinct of human being is best described in Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* where the Stranger provokes the villagers to commit a crime. By applying Freud's psychoanalysis, this study will

examine how the Stranger's inner desires, conflicts, past trauma and his unconsciousness reflect Freud's concept of the human psyche.

The Stranger in Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* reflect the concept of human psyche presented by Sigmund Freud. His repression, unconscious desires and inner conflicts between id, ego and superego makes him the strong example for displaying human psyche. The murder of his wife and daughter changes the Stranger's view of seeing the world completely. The trauma that lies within the Stranger is reflected in his behavior. Instead of dealing with his grief in a positive way, he tries to manipulate and stimulate the villagers to commit a crime. This is because he wants to examine that evil is an inherent part of human nature.

"Given the right circumstances, every human being on this earth would be willing to commit evil." (Coelho, 2006, p. 15)

To prove it, the Stranger visits the village of Viscos to provoke the villagers to commit a sin and he offers gold at the cost of an innocent person's life. Here, the conflict between material desires and ethical undertakes. This reflects the psychological conflict in human psyche between moral values and greed. The story unfolds when the argument starts among the villagers about the sacrifice of an individual for the well-being of others. This proves the notion that human beings can commit a crime when worldly desires outdo the moral conscience. This shows that evil can compel any individual to be inclined to immorality.

This shows how his past trauma has affected his thinking. He believes that evil is present within everyone and that no human is completely virtuous. Freud illustrates that such kind of traumatic experiences can persist concealed in the unconscious mind that results in a drastic change in a person's behavior (Freud, 1923). Therefore, he decides to test the villagers and influence them to commit a crime and to prove that human beings are inherently evil.

"I need to know if we are good or evil. If we are good, God is just and will forgive me..." (Coelho, 2006, p. 17)

This highlights the dual nature of human beings. The Stranger wants to investigate whether the devilishness exists within the villagers or not. Another important aspect of human psyche in the novel is the conflict between human desire and moral values. Sigmund Freud explains this through the concept of id, ego, and superego. The id is the innate and instinctual part of mind which is driven by impulses, inner desires, pleasures, and motivations. It does not differentiate between right and wrong; rather, focuses on pursuing pleasure and immediate satisfaction. The ego represents the rational and sensible part of mind. It balances id with reality. The ego reflects logic and it also think about the ramifications before performing any action.

The superego governs the moral conscience of the mind. It focuses on morality, ethical values, and self-discipline. It often creates the feeling of guilt or shame when thinking about doing something evil. In the novel, the Stranger deliberately forces the villagers to commit a crime by offering them gold which actually stimulates the villager's id. He describes this by saying, "If, at the end of seven days, someone in the village is found dead... the money will go to the other villagers, and I will conclude that we are all evil." (Coelho, 2006, p. 16) This in fact builds tension between the villager's greed for wealth (id) and their sense of right and wrong (superego). This tension created within the villagers reflects their inner psychological conflict given by Freud (Freud, 1923).

The concept of aggression and death drive- an unconscious impulse toward destruction, self- annihilation, and aggression that exist alongside the life drive (Eros) in every human being (Freud, 1920) is associated with Freud's later works which can be seen in the moral experiment of the Stranger. The Stranger's inner desire to evoke evil and tests the moral values of the villagers is the result of his destructive impulse. He believes that evil dominates human nature which influences the loss of his faith in goodness. As the story

unfolds, the characters like Chantal Prym recognize their moral conscience, illustrating that superego can dominate id under specific conditions (Freud, 1923).

Thus, the Stranger displays the concept of human psyche by Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1923). The Devil and Miss Prym (Coelho, 2000) show that human nature is not completely good or evil but is shaped by inner conflicts, and moral consciousness.

Imagine a person standing calm in a crowd while struggling with his thoughts, fear, trauma, and regret. He might be facing a number of issues which trigger his mental tendencies. Humans hide their emotions to function properly and this conflict keeps hindering them. Any kind of past trauma may also influence a person not to react to any kind of situation. A person generates the defense mechanisms which help them reduce their anxiety, stress, tension and the inner conflict. This concept was expanded by Anna Freud, although it was first introduced in the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. Anna Freud explained them as unconscious resources used by the ego to alleviate internal stress and hidden conflicts (Freud, 1937). These defense mechanisms do not solve the conflicts instead they protect our minds from further conflicts and problems. Although, this helps individuals staying away from anxiety and other issues, it also restricts the daily routines and the proper functioning of the individuals.

These defense mechanisms of psychoanalysis can be applied to the character of Stranger in The Devil and Miss Prym (Coelho, 2000). The Stranger is not completely evil; rather he is a psychologically disturbed character. He suffered from a past trauma of losing his family which stimulates him to test the moral integrity of the villagers. His experiment of testing the villagers by offering gold and asking them to murder an innocent is a reaction of his inner psychological Pain and traumatic experience. This study focuses on defenses such as denial, projection, and displacement.

"All my sense of compassion gradually vanished, and now my heart has entirely shriveled up; I don't care whether I live or die." (Coelho, 2006, p. 43)

One of the most important defense mechanisms is denial. Denial, according to Freud refers to the rejection to adopt a troublesome situation so that one should avoid psychological collapse (Freud, 1923). The Stranger portrays this by adhering to the conviction that evil is in the core of every individual. This notion compels him to accept the unbearable reality that his family's demise was unplanned. Throughout the story, the Stranger tries to manipulate the villagers to commit a murder by being intrigued of acquiring gold. This belief permits him to rebut a severe truth that suffering descends without any moral justification. This challenges the moral expectations of humanity.

Another prominent aspect of defense mechanism is Projection. Projection as defined by Freud involves attributing one's own unacceptable or distressing thoughts and feelings to others rather than acknowledging them as one's own (Freud, 1916). The Stranger also depicts the psychoanalytic notion of projection where a person imposes his own negative thoughts and feelings onto others. Since the Stranger feels rage and resentment towards humanity, he assumes that every human being also possesses evil or bad intentions. This excites him to offer gold to the villagers and urge them to commit a crime.

"Only Evil will be rewarded; if no one is murdered, Good will earn nothing but praise." (Coelho, 2006, p. 48)

This highlights the Stranger's extreme pessimistic thoughts that he projects onto others. The loss of his family creates a sense of despair and resentment. Consequently, he imposes his own deprivations over the human race.

Moreover, displacement is also implicitly present in the antagonist character. His deeds and actions provoke the villagers to quench his thirst of vengeance. Freud described displacement as the process by which physical intensity- the emotional charge attached to one object or experience- is transferred along associative pathways to another (Freud, 1961).

Rather than venting his frustrations towards something he cannot possibly change, he displaces these emotions onto someone else and manipulates them into a violent situation in order to release his negative feelings.

In short, the Stranger in *The Devil and Miss Prym* is a psychologically conflicted and disturbed character whose behavior is driven by unconscious defense mechanisms according to Freud. His denial or inability to accept the harsh realities of life (Freud, 1923), his projection of negative thoughts onto others (Freud, 1916), and his displacement of frustration (Freud, 1961) clearly show that he is a person trying to make him mentally and psychologically stable under severe trauma.

5. Conclusion, and Implications

In a nutshell, this study focuses on the psychoanalytical aspects of the Stranger proposed by Sigmund Freud. The character of the Stranger does not only symbolize wickedness but also represents a psychologically disturbed and emotionally tormented character. His desire for vengeance is the cause of his past trauma of losing his family. The brutal murder of his wife and daughters transform him into a completely different person. This incident changes his perception about humanity and tries to test the moral goodness of people. His personality is reflected by anxiety, unstable sense of self, despair, and emotional instability (Freud, 1923).

Moreover, the Stranger symbolizes the complications of Freud's concept of human psyche i-e Id, Ego, and Superego. The Stranger struggles between his hidden desires, rational conscience, and his morality that leads to the psychological problems affecting his behavior. The Stranger also endures the past trauma that exacerbates the core issues including an unstable sense of self, fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, and low self-esteem which stimulates him to corrupt the ethical and moral values of the villagers.

This study contributes to the psychoanalytic literary criticism and the reason lies in exploring the character of Stranger as an individual psychological figure, profoundly investigating his traumatic experiences, internal conflicts, tension, and his hidden desires. The study does not merely present the Stranger as a symbol of wickedness or evil. This study shows how the literary characters can be examined via unconscious psychological processes rather by focusing on noticeable actions and symbolic perspectives of the characters. The psychoanalytic criticism exposes the unconscious motivations, psychological depth of the character's actions.

Consequently, Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* do not reflect the nature of good and evil but rather it is a psychological exploration of human mind. One of the prominent examples is the character of Stranger who suffers from past trauma, inner conflicts, desires, and moral struggles. Thus, this novel concludes that human nature is not inherently good or evil. It is because every individual carries both goodness and darkness within themselves.

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