

Location of Self Identity

—A Freudian Psycho-Analysis of the Protagonist in I Want to Know Why

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Abstract: Sherwood Anderson plays a significant role and regards as a signpost in the transitional period contemporary American literature. Moreover, Anderson's writing style exerts a great influence on other writers like Faulkner and Hemingway. Sherwood Anderson has been called the first of America's "psychological writers" because he first explored the motivations and frustrations of his fictional characters in terms of Sigmund Freud's theories of psychology. *I Want to Know Why* is one of his famous short story from his short stories collections *The Triumph of the Egg* which is one of his most representative works. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the unnamed first-person narrator, aged fifteen at the time of the events with Freud's theory of three structures of personality. With the help of Freud's psychoanalysis, this essay mainly probes into the inner spiritual world of the narrator in order to locate his own personality.

Keywords: Writing style; Psychological; Personality

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1. The Purpose of My Presentation

Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941), was an American novelist and short story writer; He was a highly original writer. He depended on inspiration in his creative endeavor. He wrote his stories that appeal not through careful fabrications of incidents and or episodes, but by the sheer emotional force of the moments of revelation, or Joycean epiphany.

I Want to Know Why is a short story by Sherwood Anderson, is told retrospectively by an unnamed first-person narrator, aged fifteen at the time of the events, now about a year older. Many critics and scholars study *I Want to Know Why* and conclude different themes, the disappointment of the naive children, painful transition from innocence to experience, frustration, the difficulty of idolizing, initiation into the imperfect adulthood, betrayal of trust and beliefs and so on. I noticed that psychoanalysis provides us a very good angle to understand this literary work better. In my presentation, more attention will be paid to the protagonist's pursuit of self-identity under the guidance of Freud's personality theory. There is no doubt that Freud's theory can help readers understand the main character, the unnamed protagonist in the story.

2. Pursuit of Pleasure(ID)

Freud developed a personality structure model. He divided the personality into three elements: the id, the ego, and the superego. These elements are not physical structures found in the brain; instead, they represent a general model of personality.

2.1 Id—the Source of Libido

According to the theory of personality structure, the id consists of instincts, which are considered as the drive of human beings' psychological behaviors. Instincts include living instinct and death instinct. The two parts of living instinct are love instinct and sex instinct, and they are called Libido by Freud. So we can say, libido is a living instinct. Id is the source of libido. Libido is a pursuit of satisfying oneself, and during the course of pursuing, the other people's needs and the society's principles are ignored. It encourages people to satisfy sexual desires and the related impulses- the urge to stay warm, eat well and to be loved.

In Freud's view, the id is totally unconscious; the id and the ego are amoral. The id seeks for the satisfaction of selfish needs and desires regardless of whether they are right or wrong. it has no contact with reality. The id

is ruled by the Pleasure Principle, seeking for individual biological needs, and avoids the pain, trying to satisfy the individual instincts and desires.

2.2 Reckless Obsession

In *I Want to Know Why*, the libido of the narrator is expressed in his obsession with horse racing associated truth and beauty from two aspects.

2.1.1 Libido for Horse Racing

Readers can feel his intense libido (love instinct) from the first paragraph when the narrator and four of his friends do whatever they can to go to horse races, even running away from his town: "with the true instinct of Kentucky boys had found our way across town and to the race track and the stables at once". Here the word instinct is clearly a clue that the writer want to dispose of the narrator's libido (loving instinct). The similar expression can be found throughout the text, He is so enamored that he compares the races to live itself. He says "horse racing is in every breath of air you breathe" (paragraph 2). Comparing horse racing to air illustrates the importance of horse racing to this young man. He finds beauty in everything about this field, from the way the horses' appearances, the smell of the stables and the people who tend the animals. For example, in paragraph 10, the narrator said "I can't help it; I'm crazy about thoroughbred horses. I've always been that way. When I was ten years old and saw I was growing to be big and couldn't be a rider I was so sorry I nearly died." That means his pursuit of pleasure (id) has begun before ten. After his unsuccessful pursuit of a rider, in paragraph 11, he made up his mind to be a stable boy. He persistently tracks down his libido for pleasure from horse racing by "wanting to be a trainer or owner" in paragraph 21.

The protagonist is fifteen, an appropriate age for the emergence of libido, and the racetrack is his training ground. Anderson's protagonist finds beauty in the horses themselves, even before they hit the race track. Just being at the track is erotic to the boy.

2.1.2 Libido for Thoroughbred Horses

The narrator manifests his libido (sexual instinct) when he approaches thoroughbred horses. In paragraph 15, I can pick them nearly every time and It's in my blood because "It brings a lump up into my throat when a horse runs and my throat hurts and it's hard for me to swallow". Then his feeling became itching inside in paragraph 17, then in paragraph 19, in the last sentence the narrator stresses his feeling "your heart thumps so you can hardly breathe". When he watches them race, he has an emotional attachment to the animals. Especially Sunstreak, a horse he responds to in latent sexual terms: "Sunstreak is like a girl

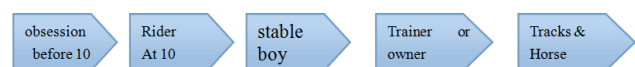
you think about sometimes but never see. He is hard all over and lovely too. When you look at his head you want to kiss him."(p 24) This overwhelming emotion demonstrates how close he feels for the animals in the stables.

Above all, from the id of Freud's personality structure model, libido is the driving force of the protagonist recklessly obsession with the world of horsing racing which he associated truth and beauty. He persistently searches for satisfaction from horse racing, especially from thoroughbred horses.

3. Integration of Libido and Reality—Ego

According to Freud, ego connects id with the outside world. It needs to take the circumstances (reality) into consideration. it is representative of reason and common sense. The ego is called the executive branch of personality because it uses reasoning to make decisions. It is constrained by the Reality Principle, which terminates the Pleasure Principle. Therefore, ego reflects the social reality of people's personality and it shows people's rationality and wisdom. Ego aims to meet people's needs and requirements without hurting them. The ego seems to be loyal to the id, trying to smooth over the difficulties or minimize the conflicts by remaining realistic about how their needs can be satisfied.

In *I Want to Know Why*, The narrator's search for libido is consistently modified by his ego. When he was ten in paragraph 10, he was misled to swallow a cigar in order to stay stunt in order to be a rider. Then he adjusts himself to be a stable boy. The ego inside him also abandons this idea, because this is a job done by black men. He comments: "I wish I was a nigger. It's a foolish thing to say, but that's the way I am about being around horses, just crazy" (p.2). After that, the narrator initiates a trip. He knows that their parents would not allow the boys to go, so they run away and make their way to Saratoga on freight trains. All of these actions came from the combination of his libido and his ego. From this clue his pursuit of libido and reality is integrated.



4. Condemnation to Jerry—SUPEREGO

4.1 Jerry as a Father Figure

The superego is the moral branch of personality the Freudian structure of personality. The superego takes into account whether something is right or wrong.

It is the component of personality composed of our internalized ideals that we have acquired from our parents and from society.

In *I Want to Know Why*, though the boy is only fifteen, his father already has in effect abandoned him. His mother wants to protect him from the fleshly world of racing, but his "father always says, 'Let him alone.'" (p.12). The boy has little respect for his father, even ranking him below the gambler father of his friend. Although he says it is because "he doesn't make much money and can't buy me things," (p.8) the real reason is that his father is not a fellow lover of horses and is not among the fraternity of men associated with them. So when the boy and Jerry Tillford wordlessly pledge their shared passion for the beautiful Sunstreak, the trainer becomes both soul mate and substitute father. The boy says, "I liked him that afternoon even more than I ever liked my own father." (p.31)

"I was standing looking at that horse and aching.... I looked up and then that man and I looked into each other's eyes. Something happened to me. I guess I loved the man as much as I did the horse.... Seemed to me there wasn't anything in the world but that man and the horse and me. I cried and Jerry Tillford had a shine in his eyes" (p.28). The young protagonist thinks Jerry has the same deep emotions as he does. Therefore, the feeling of attachment from Sunstreak transfers to those who care for the horses, particularly Jerry Tilford. He accompanies Jerry as adoring son and bashful lover. "I wanted to be as near Jerry as I could. I felt close to him," (p.34) because he wanted to be near him: "I was just lonesome to see Jerry, like wanting to see your father at night when you are a young kid" (p. 34). The young protagonist idolizes this man and thinks that he is one with the horses. He thinks that Jerry has the same feelings as he has about these majestic animals and likes this man more than his own father. The narrator "almost forgot the horses thinking that way about him," and he thinks Jerry cares for the horses "like a mother seeing her child do something brave and wonderful" (p.31). The young protagonist positions Jerry Tilford, a horse handler, as a father figure.

4.2 Jerry's Betrayal of His Belief in Trust and Beauty

According to Freud, The superego pays close attention to every step of the ego and gives it punishment by making it feel guilty, anxious, and inferior. Superego is the reflection of the social aspect of personalities. The superego is not totally unconscious. It includes the organized part of the personality.

In accordance with the social morality, the main func-

tion of superego is to constrain the impulse of instinct and control the behavior of id. It is reprehensive of the Morality Principle. It demands behaviors to be moral and perfect. More importantly, the superego is observing the every step of the ego and gives it punishment by filling it with anxiety, guilt or inferiority.

One night after the race, the boy follows the trainer on the town and they end up at a whorehouse. There, Jerry brags about his ability to make a race horse in order to impress a woman, The women in there were ugly and unclean, the place smelled rotten and there was rotten talk. The narrator was shocked to hear Jerry bragging about his success with Sunstreak, as if he had won the race and not the horse. He was furious when he saw Jerry looking at one of the hard-mouthed women with the same sparkle in his eyes which he had when he looked at Sunstreak before. Because he has placed Jerry on a pedestal, he is not prepared for Jerry's betrayal of his belief in trust and beauty. He was punished by the superego inside him; He could not sleep for what he saw. The incident keeps on haunting him. And a year later, the boy is still angry at the trainer. It gives me the fantods (p. 42) and "I keep thinking about it and it spoils looking at horses and smelling things and hearing niggers laugh and everything" (p.42).

The protagonist learns a useful lesson that humans, even ones we look up to, can betray us from time to time. Outside of the stables, Jerry Tilford is a different person. The young man is mad and "began to hate that man" (p.39). The protagonist changes so dramatically that he does not even use Jerry's name when referring to him. Calling him "that man" illustrates his disappointment and a betrayal of his trust and beliefs. His anxiety and quilt are obviously a condemnation to Jerry for what he had done. This condemnation leads to the position of his own identity.

5. Locality of His Own Identity

Anderson wrote stories combining Freud's theory of three personalities, which made the state mind of the young protagonist more vivid. Furthermore, the abnormal behaviors and isolated inner mind are understood easier and better because of the analysis of the narrator with three structures of personality.

The boys spent in Saratoga six enjoyable days with fine weather and great horses. On returning, the narrator was received with reproaches from his mother; his father, however, did not say much. The narrator told his parents all that they asked him, he only kept one thing secret from them. He offers as the explanation for what the other boys would surely consider an odd impulse. though the story

surely would have been a hit with his young male friends.

He was the only witness to the incident and it is this very incident that keeps on puzzling him on account of his superego regulated him. His moral side is repulsed by the rottenness of this "place for bad women," and he says that the whores are "not nice to look at or be near," but his libido holds him at the open window to take it all in. He closely observes one woman, the prostitute that Jerry Tilford has also singled out as the most appealing: "They were homely too, except for one who . . . looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him". He denies the pure feeling linked Middlestride and the woman. In this way, he claims that he is a loyal person himself, unlike Jerry. He is a loyal person.

Before his discovery of Jerry's betrayal, he had predicted that "The horse was better than me, steadier, and now I know better than Jerry" (p.28). He still loves all about horses "Spring has come again and I'm nearly sixteen and go to the tracks mornings same as always". He is a persistent person. From above all, The narrator I on I Want to Know Why, coming to term with himself as a persistent and loyal person, for he still adoring the horsed since he disappointed with the horse trainer.

Anderson was probably the first writer since Mark Twain to write in the colloquial style. He regarded the vernacular as an honest medium and developed a style the major features of which included clarity, directness, and a deceptive simplicity.

Anderson is credited with capturing the real sound of

everyday speech in his writing and experimenting with new forms and styles, breaking down tired, old formulas. In the episodic pattern of the book gave the guide for Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner who quoted him as "the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on".

Sherwood Anderson has been called the first of America's psychological writers because he first explored the motivations and frustrations of his fictional characters in terms of Sigmund Freud's theories of psychology. Anderson was regarded as "American Freud" by West Rebecca and Michaud Regis. He accepted and connected Freud's psychoanalysis. Therefore, I am going to adopt Freud's psychoanalytical theories to see if there is deep meaning he wants to reveal in his short story I Want to Know Why.

Once again, a shared "love" yokes man and boy, only this time the love object is purely and overtly libidinal(-sexual): "The tall rotten-looking woman was between us just as Sunstreak was in the paddocks." What the boy wants to think of as a separation between him and the worldly man is just another primal union. Libido (Eroticism) was a submerged part of his earlier bonding with Jerry, but now it is unmistakable: the trainer's "eyes began to shine just as they did when he looked at me and at Sunstreak." Jealous rage and self-disgust motivated by superego make the boy want to "scream and rush into the room and kill him."(p.39) Then when Jerry kisses the woman, he creeps away like a dejected odd man out.