

Anton Chekhov's "The Darling": An Exposition of Freudian Unconscious and Jungian Collective Unconscious

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Abstract

This paper, based on a short story titled "The Darling" written by Anton Chekhov, aims to study the protagonist Olenka Smyonovna's mind from a psychoanalytic lens. Despite carrying a lifelong secluded and helpless status, Olenka never surrenders to the one way command of life. In fact, she extends her soft and gentle hands to grip someone related or unrelated to blood to be dependent upon wholeheartedly. Both fate and death play a villainous role so successfully that she changes her focus and options one after another. Although Olenka married twice as a part of an intolerant reality, she has failed to determine a perpetual life equation. Therefore, all her conscious desires and dreams have been repressed directly by the unjust force of uncertainty. This paper examines how the story has reflected both Freudian unconscious and Jungian collective unconscious focusing several necessary issues.

Keywords: Dream; Marriage; Death; Loneliness; Repression; Unconscious; Collective Unconscious

Introduction

Psychoanalysis is extensively recognized as an investigation of human mind. Along with the study of Medical Science, it contributed significantly to the literary world including cultural theory, literary criticism and multidimensional interpretation of different textual issues and events. The Austrian physician Sigmund Freud is considered to be the father figure to introduce this revolutionary concept in the late 1890 for the first time.

Ivan Ward and Oscar Zarate gave an extraordinary definition of psychoanalysis which brought all the relevant sectors under the same umbrella, "Psychoanalysis is a theory of the human mind,

a therapy for mental distress, an instrument of research, and a profession, a complex intellectual, medical and sociological phenomenon” (3).

But here in this literary investigation, the central concern has been set to deal with one of the major human complexities generally termed and known as mental disorder in terms of decision making process and uncertain choice of life and reality. Terry Eagleton preferred to concentrate on human connectivity socially and individually, “It is a crisis of human relationships, and of human personality, as well as social convulsion” (131). The terms “Desire” and “Dreams” have different meanings and functions in the field of psychoanalysis.

Pramod K. Nayar, the author of the book *Contemporary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*, grounded the function of texts and these terms, “Today, texts are read for the ‘desires’ they seem to conceal the kinds of ‘drives’ in their characters and ‘unconscious’ in them’ (63).

Although Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung worked together centering the same background, they moved forward following two diverse ways of explanations. While Freud backed his concept putting the biological engagement in the center, Jung emphasized his concern of collective conscious in particular. For a better understanding Ward and Zarate figured out all the basic components of Freudian psychoanalysis, “Many of its concepts have become everyday cultural currency: ‘Freudian slip’, “wish fulfillment’, ‘Oedipus Complex’, ‘libido’, ‘dream symbolism’, ‘sexual stages’, ‘oral and anal personalities’, ‘ego, id and superego’, ‘repression’ and the ‘unconscious’” (5).

Subsequently, Jung differed from Freud’s concept of unconscious. He disagreed to study human psyche on the basis of libido and physical drive. Nayar pointed out Jung’s base of disagreement, “Rejecting Freudian theories of the libido as restricted to the sexual, Jung proposed that the libido was energy that could be channelized into any field” (73).

Throughout history collective unconscious prevailed in different cultures, “The idea of the unconscious - whether 'collective' or 'personal' - does not, of course, begin with Jung or Freud. The concept of a mind, or spirit or 'will' outside of, and beyond, the everyday 'conscious' mentality of human beings seems - as far as we can tell - to have existed across cultures and throughout human history” (Hauke 54). However, the collective unconscious is rooted to archetypes and natural instincts. Moreno noted a clear definition of collective unconscious, “The collective unconscious is made up of two related although different contents, namely, the archetypes and the instincts” (176). Anton Plavlovitch Chekhov, the prominent Russian

dramatist, short story writer and humanist, offered good amount of fruits in world literature. Like Mark Twain, Merimee and Maupassant, he reached an untouched peak.

Along with his outstanding plays, this veteran author won a great position as a short story writer, “His stories deal with entanglement of relationship, hardship of struggling people, relish of privileged people, helplessness of downtrodden people, loneliness of human being among the crowd” (Alam and Uddin 53). In a short story titled “The Darling”, Anton Chekhov created a distressed character named Olenka and naturally reflected both the concepts of Freudian conscious and Jungian collective unconscious.

Discussion

Olenka Semyonovna, the protagonist of the short story “The Darling”, was alone, workless and frustrated throughout her life. Being lifelong isolated and exhausted, she could do something else to enjoy her abundant freeness. Alam and Uddin pointed out Olenka’s crucial position, “She sees her dream and hope diminished by crude reality. Olenka’s flourishment is barred for her dependence on men and the situation would be reversed if she stood on her own feet” (46). Surprisingly Olenka found nothing so important to be accompanied with. As a result, she always waited for someone to be depended upon. The narrator stated, “She was always fond of someone, and could not exist without loving” (Chekhov 8). From this statement, two questionable expressions like ‘fond of someone’ and ‘without loving’ have been observed. This ‘someone’ does not specify someone related family members or relatives or someone outside blood relationship. Incidentally, Olenka’s reported unpredictable decisions and actions invite both the thoughts of Freud and Jung.

Freudian Unconscious in “The Darling”

In order to study human psyche, Freud introduced three particular elements like the ego, the super ego and the id. They are interrelated to each other. Here, the ego refers to the regular sensible feelings and actions of human being. In an article titled “Psychoanalytic Theory used in English Literature: A Descriptive”, Md. Mahroof Hossain commented on human fundamental elements and instincts:

Freud claimed that all human beings are born with certain instincts, i.e with a natural tendency to satisfy their biologically determined needs for food, shelter and warmth. The satisfaction of these needs is both practical and a source of pleasure which Freud refers to as ‘sexual’. Freud divides this stage into three stages: the oral stage, the anal stage and the phallic stage. (42)

Olenka needed someone to enjoy her time well. Now the question is what kind of enjoyment she wished to be fulfilled. It was true that she felt deep sympathy for the manager of the open air theatre Trivoli named Kukin who was troubled with bad weather. Kukin used to share his bitter stories of despair and loss, Olenka listened to him cautiously as a neighbor, “Olenka listened to Kukin with silent gravity, and sometimes tears came into her eyes. In the end his misfortunes touched her, she grew to love him” (Chekhov 8). From one perspective, Olenka was so ill fated that she lost everybody in her family. Kukin was also ill fated with bad weather conditions and huge loss. As a part of their common stand, feelings and mutual understanding, they could have a good friendship. What Olenka expected was something more than usual relationship, “In the evenings and at night she could head the band playing, and the crackling and banging of fireworks, and it seemed to her that it was Kukin struggling with his destiny, storming the enchantments of his chief foe, the indifferent public” (Chekhov 9). These conscious thoughts, actions and reactions have a coherent relation to human conscience.

In a particular social set up, people cannot spare their desires where conscience forms an invisible barrier to be controlled. There comes the point super ego, “The superego is what can be called our conscience. It is drawn from social settings and cultural codes and influences the way the conscience works” (Nayar 8). Olenka herself faced the force of social dogma and failed to share her opinions as clearly as she wished. Egleton pointed out this reality, “ Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the ‘pleasure principle’ by the ‘reality principle’, but for some of us, and arguably for whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill” (131). It means that when people find no platform to express their dreams and desires, they try to keep them repressed. In the short story “The Darling” Olenka faced the same situation. She had no dependable relatives like father, mother, sister or brother who could support her in such a crucial position. Therefore, she had been entangled with tension, shame and embracement. These unexpected incidents direct people to the realm of unconscious. “Freud proposed that the human psyche has an area into which go all those desires and fantasies that cannot be expressed. This area he termed the unconscious (‘unconscious’ because we are unaware of its existence)” (Nayar 65). In the short story, the narrator noticeably discovered Olenka’s hidden desires, “There was a sweet thrill at her heart, she had no desire to sleep” (Chekhov 9). Then what kind of desire did Olenka want to be contented? Did she expect something biological?

In her later actions, the narrator manifested the meaning of Olenka’s physical approach, “When he returned home at day-break, she tapped softly at her bedroom window, and showing him only her face and one shoulder through the curtain, she gave him a friendly smile...” (Chekhov 9). This soundless projection reveals Olenka’s unconscious territory. Freud analyzed these symptoms from unconscious basis, “Freud realized he couldn’t cure symptoms in one fell

swoop that had built up over years. The symptoms were like a tangled knot, with different causes from the past and present” (Ward and Zarate 128). Olenka expected to fulfill her repressed desire through her decision of proposal and marriage. The story described how Kukin proposed and married finally, “He proposed to her, and they were married. And when he had a closer view of her neck and plump, fine shoulders, he threw up his hands “(Chekhov 9). Olenka thought that her sorrows and sufferings were going to be end soon after the marriage with Kukin. She regained her good health and mind, “Olenka grew stouter, and was always beginning with satisfaction, while Kukin grew thinner and yellower” (Chekhov 10). When Kukin went to Moscow for business purpose, Olenka became hopeless. Due to Kukin’s absence she began to repress her wishes once again. Thus, Olenka’s unconscious state started to influence her regular actions, “Without him she could not sleep, but sat all night at her window, looking at the stars, and she compared herself with hens, who are awake all night and uneasy when the cock is not in the hen-house” (Chekhov 11). From this statement, it becomes clear how extreme desires Olenka kept in her unconscious mind. In order to focus the influence of unconscious mind, Barry noted, “All of Freud’s work depends upon the notion of unconscious, which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions” (96). The consequence reached the peak when Kukin died untimely in Moscow. Losing Kukin Olenka became isolated. She lost all her aspirations to be happy and contented. The narrator of the story described her lamentations:

“My darling!” sobbed Olenka. “Vanka, my precious, my darling! Why did I ever meet you! Why did I know you and love you! Your poor heart-broken Olenka is alone without you! (Chekhov 12)

Here, Olenka could stop her desire fulfilling. She failed as her unconscious desires enforced her to further options. She could not cross four months after the sudden death of Kukin. Barry argued, “Linked with this is the idea of repression, which is the ‘forgetting’ or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of unconscious” (97). In terms of Olenka, the remarkable two traumatic past events are the loss of her father and the first husband Kukin. The interesting fact is- when Olenka met Vassily Andreitch Pustovalov on the way to the church, she began to feel the force of her repressed desires once again, “All day afterwards she heard his sedately dignified voice, and whenever she shut her eyes she saw his dark beard. She liked him very much. And apparently she had made an impression on him too” (Chekhov 13). The most striking thing is- Olenka immediately forgot the memories of Kukin and replaced that position by Pustovalov, “and as soon as she seated at table began to talk about Pustovalov, saying that he was an excellent man whom one could thoroughly depend upon, and that any girl would be glad to marry him” (Chekhov 13).

After losing the first husband, Olenka could take more time to think. The narrator noted Olenka's love and fascination towards Pustovalov, "Olenka loved him-loved him so much that she lay awake all night in a perfect fever, and in the morning, she sent for the elderly lady. The match was quickly arranged, and then came the wedding" (Chekhov 13). Olenka expected that her second marriage would make her happy. She would be able to fulfill all her previous unresolved desires that she was carrying for long. But the irony is- she again lost her second husband. After the death of Pustovalov, she repeated the same expression that she used after the death of Kukin, "I've nobody, now you've left me, my darling," she sobbed, after her husband's funeral. "How can I live without you, in wretchedness and misery? Pity me, good people, all alone in the world!" (Chekhov 16).

After the death of Pustovalov, Olenka's desires became active again when she met Smirnin. But she could not expose her project because Smirnin had wife and son. As a result, she had to repress all her desires to the realm of unconsciousness. "Olenka herself had grown plain and elderly; in summer she sat in the porch, and her soul, as before, was empty and dreary and full of bitterness" (Chekhov 19). The fact is- Olenka never had the chance to fill up this vacuum.

Jungian Collective Unconscious in "The Darling"

Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist, established a different concept in psychoanalysis. Determining the personal and collective unconscious Christopher Hauke remarked, "This speculation and investigation of the depths of human knowledge - beyond an outside conscious rational thinking of the day - also seems to predict an idea of the unconscious" (56). Jung later acknowledged that human being is subject to be motivated and directed by physical desires. Antonio Moreno pointed out the ultimate reality:

Nobody denies the existence of consciousness, because everybody possesses certitude of his own. But in the literature concerning the subject, consciousness is a vague concept, which makes it difficult to know its exact meaning and, in consequence, that of unconsciousness. (175).

The pertinent point here to be noted is that Jung's central concern was not only based on biological urge. He found multiple issues to be the source of unconscious. Nayar noted Jung's idea, "Jung proposed that, while the unconscious was important, the self was also influenced by social norms and the world around it" (73). Thus, it can be understood that the regular actions of human being can be motivated by different sources like social, cultural, and past experiences.

In the short story “The Darling”, Olenka was remarkably motivated by her physical urge since she was unmarried and lost in thought. Consequently, this biological drive had been reflected in her later thoughts, decisions, and actions. Likewise, her physical fulfillment, she was haunted by different issues like friendlessness, ill-fate and frustration on problematic future. If she had normal life having father, mother, and siblings, she could have a different equation of life. Taking all the multiple issues of life into consideration, C. G. Jung could not support Freud. From C. G. Jun’s perspective, there were more issues in the story that motivated Olenka’s unconscious state. He termed it as collective unconscious. These major issues have been presented below.

Demand of Existence and Isolation

From the very beginning of the story “The Darling”, the first thing to noted that Olenka encountered the punitive brutality of lonesomeness. According to Alam and Uddin, “The darling in this story, loneliness corrodes a woman named Olenka who depends on others to share her life, but nobody understands her feelings” (46). Unluckily, friendship does not last for in her life rather it has doubled her sufferings. This circumstance was not her creation. By born she was carrying an unendurable curse. As a part of its consequence, she always had to be frustrated. The story started with Olenka’s pensiveness, “Olenka, the daughter of the retired collegiate assessor, Plemyanniakov, was sitting in her back porch, lost in thought” (Chekhov 7). The purpose of her thoughtfulness lies on her remoteness.

It was really hard for anyone to live unaccompanied in a house having no relatives. The location of her house was also important to be remarked, “The house in which she had lived from her birth upwards, and which was left her in father’s will, was at the extreme end of the town, not far from the Tivoli” (Chekhov 9). Olenka did everything to confirm her existence. For a better survival and happiness, she decided to marry one after another. If she had someone sympathetic like father or brother or a son, Olenka could have a different thought. Whatever she did has logical and natural equation. “It was evident that she could not live a year without some attachment and had found new happiness in the lodge. In anyone else this would have been censured, but no one could think ill of Olenka; everything she did was so natural” (Chekhov 17). The reason for what she offered her house to Smirnin and his son Shasha was to reduce her isolation.

Dominance of Ill-Fate

Fate always possesses an extraordinary control over human’s decision and action. If it is supportive, people can enjoy a better and systematic life. On the other hand, if it is collapsed, people rarely can recover. What happened to Olenka’s life was more frustrating. Once she had her father, an aunt, and a French school master. During those days Olenka passed her amazing

moments. The narrator depicted Olenka's previous memory, "When she was at school, she had loved her French master. She was a gentle, soft-hearted, compassionate girl, with mild, tender eyes and very good health" (Chekhov 8). From this statement it is remarkably assumed how extraordinary days Olenka once passed. The branch she gripped once to survive distorted multiple times. For example, like others she had no memories either sweet or bitter with mother. She could not remember the presence of her brother and sister. Even whom he married first died untimely. In order to sweep the traumatic memories, she decided to marry for the second time. The irony is- she again lost him within six years. The narrator of the story figured out Olenka's understanding, "She was in despair, her head, her hands, and her feet would turn chill, and she would feel that she was the most unhappy woman in the world" (Chekhov 24).

Patriarchy and Lack of Self Reliance

Olenka Semyonovna is considered to be a great victim of patriarchal mechanism. The best point here to be concerned was that she had no personal opinion. Discussing the basic facts of the then Russian family Aliandra Antoniaci figured out the urgency of Olenka's support, love, and relief:

Ol'ga in "The Darling" does not have any opinions of her own. She adopts not only her husband's or lover's ideas, but also their worries and interests as if they were hers. She even takes care of a small boy, who is not her son, looking after him in all aspects of his life. Her need to love someone is so great that when she does not have anyone to love, she is completely depressed" (301).

It was true that Olenka never accused of it. But her words, actions and silence reflected the dominance of patriarchy. Possibly, during the time of Olenka, women had no way to express their opinions. She followed this unwritten custom deliberately:

And what was worst of all, she had no opinions of any sort. She saw the objects about her and understood what she saw, but could not form any opinion about them, and did not know what to talk about. And how awful it is not to have any opinions! (Chekhov 18).

From the story it was seen that Olenka was friendly, educated and good mannered. Therefore, she must have choice and opinions. There remains no statement in the story where Olenka protested or refused others' words and works. Whatever Kukin and Pustovalov said and did, Olenka trusted and followed. The most interesting thing happened, when Shasha came. She loved him like a mother and provided all the things a boy could wish. Yet the boy never behaved well with Olenka. Therefore, silence began to prevail in her character. Possibly being victim to be a woman, this silence was a protest against patriarchal mechanism. Another faulty point of

Olenka to be noted here is her over dependency that made her submissive and reckless. Moosavinia indicated, “The Darling” is one of those short stories which particularly narrates the emotions and relations of Olga Semyonova who is always submissive and over-dependent on a man. (Moosavinia 1). If she developed a substantial self-dependency, she could have a firm control.

Treatment towards Love and Relationship

Like other issues the attitude towards relationship was also significant. She had good relationship with her father and the aunt Bryansk, “In earlier days, she had loved her papa, who now sat in a darkened room, breathing with difficulty; she had loved her aunt who used to come every other year from Bryansk” (Chekhov 8). She was a compassionate girl. Whenever she heard of someone’s misfortune or bad news, she shed her tears immediately. It proves that she was haunted not only by her physical demands but also by sorrows and sufferings of others. Whoever she met she extended her enlarged heart. She never made any extra marital relationship. For practical and natural reason, she married twice. If she had bad intention, she would not decide to marry. “In Chekhov, love is not confined to platonic love; in addition, it has extended to physical love and extra –marital love. Love is a feeling and commitment which is fulfilled through marriage” (Alam and Uddin 46). She was loyal to her husband. For example, Olenka could make an extra marital relationship with Smirnin. When she learned about his problematic affairs, she suggested Smirnin to make it up with his wife. She used to talk and play cards with Smirnin in the absence of Pustovalov. She could hide them. But Olenka shared everything to Pustovalov, “And when Pustovalov came back, she told him in a low voice about the veterinary surgeon and his unhappy home life” (Chekhov 16). When Smirnin resigned his job and returned, Olenka offered her house without any rent. It means that Olenka could not tolerate loneliness. She always expected someone beside her. The narrator noted Olenka’s concern about Smirnin:

“Good gracious, my dear soul! Lodgings? Why not have my house? Why shouldn’t that suit you? Why, my goodness, I wouldn’t take any rent!” (Chekhov 20)

All these factors worked behind Olenka’s collective unconscious.

Rise of Motherhood

Olenka always wished to have a family and children despite being a widow. But she never met that happiness. Therefore, in her collective unconscious state, motherhood prevailed. When the veterinary surgeon Smirnin came with his only son Shasha, Olenka became happy. She felt an urge of motherhood inside. “Her heart warmed and there was a sweet ache in her bosom, as though the boy had been her own child. And when he sat at the table in the evening, going over his lessons, she looked at him with deep tenderness and pity” (Chekhov 21). Olenka took

care of Shasha and tolerated all his ill manners. In order to fulfill her desire to have a child, she called Shasha as “Shashaenka” keeping the common tune of her name. To focus Olenka’s love, the narrator added, “Ah, how she loved him! Of her former attachments, not one had been so deep; never had her soul surrendered to any feeling so spontaneously, so disinterestedly, and so joyously as now that her maternal instincts were aroused” (Chekhov 23).

Even she had plan to pass her entire life for this boy, “For this little boy with the dimple in his cheek and the big school cap, she would have given her whole life, she would have given it with joy and tears of tenderness” (Chekhov 23). From this statement it can be claimed that whatever Olenka did for Shasha was for her unconscious maternal instincts.

Conclusion

Olenka Semyonovna's actions are necessarily based on unconscious state. The activities she did in the entire story can be examined in the light of Freud and Jung, respectively. In one side, she was beautiful, healthy, and good mannered. Being a lonely girl, it was quite natural to be driven by physical desire. Olenka successfully captivated both Kukin and Pustovalov’s concentration by applying her physical appeal as a tool to fulfill her suppressed fantasy. Here, the replication of Freudian unconscious is clearly visible. On the other side, Olenka's situation and engagements can be investigated from Jungian collective unconscious. The fact is- Olenka was not only directed by physical appetites but also by other drives. She enticed Kukin and Pustovalov not to make extra marital relationship rather to marry. Besides, she did not marry twice intentionally. If Kukin did not die ill-timed, she would never have thought of the second option. Fate, death and reality made Olenka's life so vulnerable that she suffered immensely to endorse her existence. Since Olenka's marriage did not last long, she never tasted the sense of motherhood. All these drives functioned as the vital components of collective unconscious.

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