

LITERATURE AS A MIRROR OF THE PSYCHE: A FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH TO COLONIAL TRAUMA IN INDIAN HORSE

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the application of Freudian psychoanalysis to Richard Wagamese's novel Indian Horse, highlighting the psychological development and inner conflicts of the main character, Saul Indian Horse. The study analyzes how Freudian concepts such as repression, trauma, and the tripartite structure of the psyche (id, ego, superego) manifest in the experience and behavior of Saul. The main objective of the paper is to present how the trauma of the St. Jerome's Indian Residential School system and the loss of cultural identity affect the psyche of the main character. By analyzing Saul's journey, the study intends to show the deeper psychological issues and the impact of colonial trauma on Indigenous identity and mental health. The study also aims to contribute to the understanding of how literature mirrors the complex psychological issues and the ways in which historical and cultural trauma can shape an individual's psyche. The study is qualitative in nature and interprets the story of the novel according to the theoretical views of Sigmund Freud. The results exhibit that Saul experienced psychological trauma and mental conflicts due to his past intolerable experiences at his school that highlight the psychological effects of colonialism.

Key words: Colonialism, Colonial Trauma, Psychoanalysis, Indian Horse

INTRODUCTION

Richard Wagamese's Indian Horse is a novel that presents the traumatic experiences of Saul Indian Horse, an Indigenous man coping with the traumatic legacy of the residential school system in Canada. The novel deals with a deep investigation of cultural dislocation, identity crisis, and the long-term effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. While other studies of Indian Horse have focused on its social and historical context, this study tries to find the psychological dimensions of Saul's character and the novel's broader implications regarding trauma and

mental health through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. Freudian psychoanalysis, provides an understanding the human psyche, particularly through concepts such as the unconscious mind, repression, and the tripartite structure of the psyche, including the id, ego, and superego. These theories are mostly relevant to the character of Saul, whose life is affected by psychological turmoil. The trauma of Saul's character by the residential school system, along with the subsequent loss of cultural identity, can be understood as forces that disturb the balance of

his psyche, leading to repressed memories and internal conflicts.

This research studies how Freudian theories can be useful to understand Saul's psychological development and struggles throughout the novel. The study focuses on finding the ways in which the novel shows Freudian concepts, such as the repression of traumatic memories, the expression of the unconscious in Saul's dreams, and the internal conflict between his desires (id), moral standards (superego), and the reality he faces (ego). By using a Freudian lens, this study aims to offer a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of colonial trauma on Saul. This research is significant because it not only adds to the field of psychoanalytic literary criticism but also presents the psychological effects of colonial trauma, proposing insights into how literature can serve as a medium for exploring complex psychological and cultural issues.

Research Questions

1. How does Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* reflect Freudian concepts such as repression, the unconscious, and the id, ego, and superego in the psychological development of Saul?
2. In what ways can Saul's struggles with identity, trauma, and cultural dislocation be interpreted through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis?

Literature Review

The work of Felman and Laub (1992) reports the potentialities but difficulties that can be faced when literature is used to exemplify trauma, highlighting its nature. Their work is appropriate to discuss how understanding of memory and trauma fits with the suppressed memories evolving within Saul in *Indian Horse* in the novel.

The idea of cultural trauma, mainly among Indigenous groups has been a main topic. In his work, LaCapra (2001) remarks on the way literary archives have been able to save historical trauma but how these stories later established collective symbolic worth. LaCapra gives a model for understanding that the cultural trauma portrayed in *Indian Horse*, particularly as it is rooted in the school. In the postcolonial literature, numerous scholars (e.g. Samuel Weber 1995, Bruce Fink and Simon Clarke) have studied how colonial impact on both sides, the colonizers as well as colonized, hits category psychoanalytic discourse which initiated mainly from Freudianism. Bhabha (1994) uses of the idea of being "unhomely," in order to describe the feeling that colonial subjects have. Recent research has focused on intergenerational trauma, mainly among Indigenous groups. Brave Heart et al. (2011) describe how the trauma of colonization and residential schooling are spread intergenerationally thereby affecting identity, pain and hurt. This is key to understand Saul beyond what happens directly to him, and the intolerable weight of trauma within his culture. Recent research has also studied the significance of narrative in Indigenous healing, mainly how storytelling is employed as a method for identity restoration and trauma processing. Furthermore, Kirmayer and colleagues (2011) deliberate how Indigenous stories promote cultural resilience and healing. Caruth (1996) says that all of literature as merely a space for suppressed traumas and again offers an explanation for how forgotten memories direct Saul throughout the novel.

In *Indian Horse*, hockey turns out to be the real field of contest and escape in the development of Saul's identity. Forsyth and Giles (2012) discuss how sports and ice hockey have always been intertwined with Indigenous peoples' identity and their struggle for cultural acknowledgment within Canada, therefore offer a context in which Saul's

relationship with hockey can be understood. Recent studies have insisted on the need to indigenize psychoanalytic. Gone (2009) states that Western frameworks for understanding human psychology must be culturally transferred into Indigenous contexts.

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature adopting a descriptive and interpretive research design, aiming to analyze the text of *Indian Horse* through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The research involves a detailed examination of the narrative structure, character development, and symbolic elements in the novel that reflect Freudian concepts such as the unconscious, repression, and trauma. The primary data for this research is the text of *Indian Horse* itself. This includes a thorough reading of the novel to identify and extract relevant passages that illustrate Freudian themes. Data analysis is conducted using a thematic approach, where key themes related to Freudian psychoanalysis such as repression, the unconscious, trauma, id, ego and superego are identified within the text. The analysis involves interpreting how these themes are expressed through the characters, particularly Saul, and how they relate to the broader cultural and historical context of colonialism and Indigenous identity. The theoretical framework is based on Freudian psychoanalytic theory, with a particular focus on concepts such as repression, the unconscious, the role of trauma, id, ego and superego in shaping identity.

Analysis

A Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* presents understanding into the internal psychological complexities of Saul, and, more broadly, the effects of colonial trauma on Indigenous identity. The basic theories of major Freudian notions of

repression, the unconscious, trauma, id, ego and superego are applied to demonstrate how these features are woven together in the story to present the lasting effects of colonialism

Repression and the Unconscious

In Freudian psychoanalysis, repression is the process by which throbbing or traumatic memories are pressed into the unconscious mind, where they remain their influence in the behavior and emotions of a person without their conscious awareness. In *Indian Horse*, it is Saul's experiences at the St. Jerome's Indian Residential School that frame a central traumatic event for his later psychological makeup during the novel.

Evidence of Saul's repression is that he cannot recount his abuse at the residential school. These memories of terrors of his experiences are buried deep in the unconscious and surface only indirectly through his behaviors—for example, his withdrawal from others, his anger, and his eventual turn to alcohol. This repression is manifested in Saul's reluctance to confront his past, and this sense of disconnection extends into himself and his cultural identity.

This issue is reflected in the uneven form taken by Saul's repressed memories in this novel. It is in moments that Saul's past is slowly unpeeled as the story moves, much like it happens in real life with traumatic memories. It further explains the hard time that Saul faces in patching these memories together into his conscious being. These gaps in his story symbolize the psychological barriers he had set up to protect himself from the full emotional blow of his trauma.

Trauma and Its Manifestations

Freud defines trauma as psychological issue that can cause long lasting trouble emotionally and behaviorally if not worked through. In the case of this novel, Saul's trauma lies in the regular abuse

he underwent at the residential school and the broader cultural genocide committed against Indigenous peoples.

The trauma Saul undergoes is not only personal but collective, symbolic of the suffering his community went through. It also portrays the residential school system as an institutional effort to abolish the cultural identity, language, and traditions of Indigenous children, which has left them with psychological damage and displacement from their tradition. The understanding of this greater cultural destruction strengthens Saul's trauma with a feel of existential misery that intensifies his suffering.

Trauma for Saul reappears at many points in the novel. His early escape into hockey is almost a form of savior in that hockey gives him a space in which to transfer his pain and anger. Competitive hockey soon becomes the cause of additional trauma as he rises up the ranks. The racism and discrimination on and off the rink bring Saul back to times at St. Jerome's to a great detriment of his psychological health.

This unsettled trauma further shows in Saul's drinking. Freud recommended that very often, people used self-destruction to soothe the pain of suppressed memories and unresolved psychological conflicts. In this case, for Saul, alcohol becomes a means of escaping from the intolerable weight of the past, which further alienates him from the community and himself.

The Broader Implications of Colonial Trauma

Indian Horse presents Saul's story to mirror a broader picture of the effects of colonial trauma on Indigenous people. The work comprises intergenerational effects of trauma, showing how colonial policies offended people from generation to generation. As such, Saul's story is representative in that it stands in for many others experienced with violence and cultural erasure meted out on that same level. The novel further

highlights cultural extension and community in the process of healing from trauma. Saul's final return to his people, to the land, and to traditional practices is resistant in many ways to the forces that pursued to abolish his culture. His return to his roots is depicted as a step to take back his identity and find peace.

The Id in Indian Horse

According to Freud, Id is the primitive, instinctive part of the mind that functions on the basis of pleasure. It seeks immediate satisfaction of desires and needs thereby often overlooking social norms or reality. In Indian Horse, the id is reflected in the deep desires and impulses of Saul, much formed by his will to survive the cruel realities of his life, which involved the abuses at St. Jerome's Indian Residential School.

one can see Saul's interest in hockey as an expression of the id. Hockey is a channel for his stuffed aggression, fear, and anger. That is what he could do on the ice: the stuffed, intense emotions that were inside him could be aired through physical activity, making him free from the psychological torture he was going through. This is seen through the influence of the id in the way Saul becomes entirely consumed by the game to seek the pleasure or escape it provides, but he will not actually face the pain that dwells deep within.

Moreover, the work of the id is vivid in Saul's later life. Most particularly, it is vivid in his struggles with heavy drinking. His turn to alcohol represents a demand by the id for immediate satisfaction as a way to reduce the pain resulting from the unsettled trauma. Self-destruction depicts how the id dominates in the absence of effective regulation from the ego and the superego.

The Ego in Indian Horse

The ego that works on the reality principle, intermediates between the demands of the id and the limitations of reality, which include the social norms and expectations. It is through his struggling in the gravities of life, trying to overlap his deepest desires (id) against the harsh realities of the environment, that Saul develops an ego.

Saul's ego functions as he moves through different worlds: his ancestors' Indigenous world and the white-dominated world of the school. This mediating function of the ego can be seen in the manner in which Saul seeks to hold on to an impression of self-control and normality in the unbearable situations. For example, his self-controlled approach to hockey, where he develops his skills and beats his opponents, demonstrates the power of the ego in directing the id-driven impulses into socially acceptable forms of achievement.

However, the suppressed memories and racism become too devastating at times for his ego to handle. As these psychological conflicts intensified, it became obvious that Saul's ego had an increasingly difficult time acting this mediating function. This can be seen in his increasing alienation and dis-illusionment.

The Superego in Indian Horse

The superego contains of the set of moral values and principles taught by parents, society, and culture; it attempts for perfection and causes guilt or shame when these principles are not met. In Indian Horse, the superego is a complex one since there coexist double pressures from Indigenous culture and those standards forced by colonial society.

Thus, Saul's superego is shaped by the adversarial school setting and his Indigenous inheritance. He inherits a respect for his culture, traditions, and spirituality. Through this side superego, he is directed toward his sense of identity.

However, the school offers conflicting values, thus compelling Saul to adopt the repressive ideologies of colonialism. Through the tough administration of the school, a sense of guilt links itself with his indigenous identity on Saul, thus budding deep conflicts within his superego. This imposed colonialism is revealed in the later struggles by Saul with self-worth. It is thus the guilt, enforced by the school's teachings and broader society's racist attitudes, that adds to Saul's inner conflict as his superego tries to settle these inconsistent moral rules.

Saul's struggle with the superego is more apparent later, as he is consumed by the feelings of guilt for surviving the trauma that took so many lives in his community, not to mention his own personal failures. This guilt expresses the punitive aspect of the superego; which Freud refers to as an inner critic that punishes the ego with feelings of inferiority.

Conclusion

Analyzing the novel through Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, Indian Horse depicts psychological effects of colonial trauma on an individual's identity. The story of Saul Indian Horse shows the complex interaction between repression, trauma, and identity that create conditions of sustained oppression. It offers a strong narrative for persistence and healing at the individual level and on the broader level it shows the resilience of Indigenous cultures as a repercussion of colonial violence. This analysis highlights how significant it is that this psychological trauma, triggered by colonialism at the individual and collective levels, is recognized. Wagamese's Indian Horse elevates the repressed traumas into light, presenting a way toward accepting and healing, and ultimately toward settlement. It is through the Freudian theories of the id, ego, and superego that an understanding of Saul's psychological struggles and the broader

effects of colonial trauma has been raised in the novel. The tussle of these psychological issues fighting within him reflects in the journey of Saul. The novel depicts individual psychological conflict but acts more generally to comment on the collective trauma of Indigenous peoples as a whole.

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