

A Psychoanalysis of The Protagonist in Paulo Coelho's *Veronika Decides To Die*

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Literature is a way to understand life, to appreciate living and therefore to participate in life to the fullest of one's potential. Brazilian Literature, which dates back to the 16th century, also has a fascinating record of people, places and times. For example, the writings of the first Portuguese explorers in Brazil, such as Pero Vaz de Caminha etc, were filled with descriptions of fauna, flora and commentary about the indigenous population that fascinated European readers. Since English is a cosmopolitan language, various literary works from several languages were translated into the English language. Some of the Brazilian works have also been translated into English language and have been read throughout the world.

Paulo Coelho, one of the world's best-selling and loved authors, was born in the Botafogo, neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro, under the sign of Virgo, on 24th August, 1947. He was born and feels proud to have been born on the same day, of the same month and under the same sign, although many years later, as his literary idol, Jorge Luis Borges. Inspired by Borges, he wanted to become a writer.

Coelho was always a nonconformist, a seeker after the new, leading him to try everything good and everything bad that appeared along the way. When, in the fever of 1968, the guerrilla and happy movements took hold, he took part in elections and demonstrations. It was then that Coelho began to experience his crisis of faith and went off in search of new spiritual experiences, resorting to drugs, hallucinogens, sects and magic, travelling all over America in the footsteps of Carlos Castaneda.

Veronika Decides to Die was published in 1998. It is based on the subject of madness. The gist of the message is that "collective madness is called sanity". Veronika has everything she could wish for – young and pretty, with plenty of attractive boyfriends, a steady job, and a loving family. Yet she is not happy and on one winter's morning she takes an overdose of sleeping pills, only to wake up some time later in the local hospital. There she is told that although she is alive, her heart is now irreparably damaged and she has only a few days to live. This story follows

her through these intense days as she starts to question all her ideas about life. Soon she comes to realize that every second of existence is a choice we all make between living and dying.

The novel *Veronika Decides to Die* gyrates around the pivot 'madness'. The characters in the novel are affected psychologically and are admitted in a mental hospital named 'Villete', which is portrayed as "the famous and much-feared lunatic asylum"(11). The reason for their madness is analyzed in this chapter with Freud's psychoanalytic theories. Freud accepts three fundamental principles of psychoanalytic which forms all mental processes. They are, the principle of constancy, the pleasure principle, and the reality principle. The principle of constancy shows the tendency to keep mental tension on the possible lowest point or on the stable point. The pleasure principle shows the tendency of psyche to avoid displeasure and get pleasure maximally, It is the subjective version of the principle of constancy. On the other hand, the reality principle shows the adaptation of the pleasure principle to reality.

Freud has created many theories. Among them the theories which are applied in the paper are Theory of Repression, Theory of Depression and Theory of Death Drive. Psychoanalytic theory of melancholia, referred to nowadays as depression, began mainly with the work of Karl Abraham and Sigmund Freud in the early 1900s. The seminal work in this area was Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, published in 1917, in which he draws on clinical experience in order to explain the state of melancholia. He draws parallels between this and the natural state of mourning, and uses this comparison to explore the psychic mechanisms of depression. Freudian theory offers two possible explanations for the universal feeling of malaise.

For Freud, death is much more than that which stands before us, rather it resides within us, an impulsion eradication. In classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the death drive is the drive towards death, self-destruction and the return to the inorganic; the hypothesis of a death instinct, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state. Death-work for Freud was ultimately in the service of restoring a previous state of undifferentiated internal being, a drive "which sought to do away with life once more and to re-establish (an) inorganic state"(New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis, 107). It was originally proposed by Sigmund Freud in 1920.

Freud developed this theory as an antithesis to the 'life instinct' which is responsible for the natural urge toward self-preservation, pleasurable experiences, and procreation. It assumes that human beings have a natural desire that is self-destructive and opposes the will to live. The death drive was developed by Freud as an explanation for behaviour that he saw in which people seemed

to repeat actions that were harmful or traumatic despite a natural instinct for life and self-preservation. The death drive is a destructive compulsion that often manifests through anger, aggression, and violence towards oneself or others. Depression can be connected to this idea, since it may be viewed as an expression of anger and destructiveness turned inward rather than outside of the person feeling it.

Veronika lives in a rented room in a convent in Slovenia. On November 11, 1997 Veronica attempts suicide by taking excess of sleeping pills, which she has been collecting for six months. She is cool and calm in approaching her death and in choosing her way of death, which will cause less upset to others. After sometime of taking her pills, she becomes unconscious. She is admitted in the Villete and is informed by Dr. Igor that she is going to die within a week or so, as her heart is irreversibly damaged due to her intake of several sleeping pills. This is the trick used by Dr. Igor to make her evade her death instinct and make other people in the Villete to realize the value of their living days on the earth which Veronika is deprived off. There she understands what life is and overcomes her death instinct. Later, she wants to live her life happily outside the Villete.

Veronika decides to die because ‘‘everything in her life was the same’’(6). Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of melancholia is applied to find the reason for Veronika’s depressed state which drives her to commit suicide. According to the theory, depression is stated as ‘‘... a loss of interest in the outside world ...’’ (Mourning and Melancholia, 204). Veronika was inhibited by her ambition when she was young. She wants to become a pianist. Her music teacher too recognizes her talent and encourages her to become a professional. But her mother convinces her that she cannot earn money by becoming a pianist and asks her to pursue law. She too has done the same for the wish of her mother because her mother always does many things for Veronika but does not expect anything in return from her. This makes Veronika very weak and drives her away from her dream.

...afraid of hurting them, she (Veronika) had not dared to pay the price of her dream, the dream that was buried in the depths of her memory, although sometimes it was awoken by a concert or by a beautiful record she happened to hear. Whenever her dream was awoken, though, the feeling of frustration was so intense that she immediately sent it back to sleep again (85).

Veronika is not ready to hurt her parents who showers unconditional love on her. Though Veronika has studied law for her mother’s sake, she not become success in the field and ends up being a librarian. The life of Veronika will have flourished if she has not deprived from her dream.

The longing to achieve her dream makes her life empty. She has no interest herself from the outside world and locks herself in the convent room after her work is over.

Applying Freud's Theory of Death Instinct to the probe deep into the character of Veronika reveals the reason for the hollowness in her life. Death drive is the self-destruction of oneself. The self-destruction is caused only when a person is unable to show her anger on someone else. This is the case with Veronika lives a routine life outside the Vilete and also inside the Vilete. This is when she meets Zedka who explains her what actual 'madness' is. She develops a friendship with Zedka.

After she is admitted in the Vilete, she starts to do whatever she has not yet done before, in the name of 'madness'. She slaps the leader of the group 'Fraternity' in the Vilete for making fun of her before others who have gathered in the refactory room and she cries in front of the nurse in her ward which she has not done before. Her feelings overflow in the name of 'madness' and thus she becomes reciprocate to the others around her, which she has not done before when she is out of the Vilete. Earlier, she does not have the habit of reciprocating to others even when she knows they are criticizing her. She has also not cried in front of others. But now she has changed a lot and a ray of desire to live has evolved in her. Actually when she took the pills, she wanted to kill someone whom she hated, "when I took the pills, I wanted to kill someone I hated. I didn't know that other Veronikas existed inside me, Veronikas that I could love" (59).

This is the feeling of Veronika when she took the pills. She hated herself completely because she was not an original Veronika who behaves as she wishes. Her actions concern not to hurt her parents. Even after she is informed that she will die within a week, she did not hurt her parents by visiting them. When Dr. Igor's secretary comes to her to inform that her mother is waiting to see her, she replies, "I don't want to see her. I've cut all my links with the outside world (73).

Veronika also loves a schizophrenic, Eduard who waits for her to play the piano every night. And at last she escapes with him from the Vilete because she wants to die out of the Vilete. Thus the reason for madness stated in Freud's Theory of Melancholia and Death Instinct are applicable to reason the madness of Veronika. The reasons for her madness are deprivation of achieving her aim and self-destruction of herself was the result of her non-reciprocate nature of life.

Moreover, the actual madness of Veronika's life is not after she is admitted in the Vilete but before she has been admitted. The life which she lives outside the Vilete is a life of

depression which drove her to the death instinct she developed in her life. This depression is removed when she is allowed to live her life in the way she wants inside the Vilete. She actually becomes same after she is admitted in the Vilete but she is called as 'mad' just because she does what she wants to do. The character Veronika, is not actually 'mad' she is stamped as 'mad'. Zedka says that

Anyone who lives in their own world is mad . . . you have Einstein, saying that there was no time or space, just a combination of the two, Or Columbus, insisting that on the other side of the world lay not an abyss but a continent . . . Those people – and thousands of others – all lived in their own world (30).

Veronika who is absolutely normal was stamped as mad and was admitted in the Vilete. She is a very good pianist but depriving of her from her desire makes her life empty and she avoids herself from others and locks up herself in her convent room after her routine work. Eduard, the man who can interpret paintings perfectly and dedicates his life fully to the world of painting, is also deprived from his wish. Thus he is disturbed and avoided people's company as he is pulled away from his dream in the name of love by his parents. Zedka who has loved a man very passionately, is cheated by him. She too locks herself in her room and avoids the company of her lovable husband and children.

Thus, the paper presents an analysis of the characters of the novels based on the Freudian theories and also strongly proves the death instinct of the character. Though it appears to be simple, the novel has a very strong message to the society and Paulo Coelho has given it clearly through the characters in his novel. To conclude, Paulo Coelho is a man to be admired and taken as a role model of how to withstand all the sufferings life implements on a person.

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