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An Unconscious Stage of Identity, Desire, and Attachment: Psychoanalytical Insights into Restoration Drama

Abstract:

The Restoration era in England, spanning from 1660 to 1710, witnessed a profound transformation in the sphere of literature, particularly in drama. The period was characterized by a renewed interest in human psychology, individualism, and societal norms. This research paper offers a comprehensive psychoanalytical analysis of some of Restoration dramas, delving into the intricate psychological dimensions, unconscious motivations, and complex human relationships depicted within these theatrical works. Restoration dramas of the late seventeenth century stand as a captivating area of study of human emotions, societal intricacies, and the multifaceted nature of identity. Beyond their renowned wit and critique of contemporary mores, these plays serve as profound explorations of the human psyche.

Keywords: hedonism, individualism, ego, superego

Drawing from Freudian theory, the paper explores how unconscious desires drive characters' actions, often conflicting with societal norms and conscious intentions. Additionally, attachment theory provides insights into the bonds and relational dynamics depicted in these plays, reflecting the human need for connection and belonging. The portrayal of psychopathology in Restoration dramas sheds light on evolving societal perspectives on mental health, while the depiction of defence mechanisms offers a glimpse into characters' coping strategies and unconscious protective mechanisms. Lastly, the study examines how the Restoration era's societal changes influenced the complex process of identity formation for characters navigating self-perception, societal expectations, and unconscious drives. Through this psychoanalytical lens, the research aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the human condition as depicted in Restoration dramas.

In Restoration dramas, unconscious desires are frequently portrayed as conflicting with societal norms, leading to internal and external conflicts. The desires often are manifested as powerful forces that drive characters' actions and decisions, even when they are unaware of these motivations themselves. These desires frequently conflict with societal norms, leading to internal struggles and external conflicts. In John Dryden's "All for Love," the character of Antony embodies unconscious desires through his forbidden love for Cleopatra. He is unable to resist his passion, highlighting the human tendency to succumb to hidden desires regardless of societal expectations, which compels him to defy conventional wisdom and societal norms. Willmore, in Aphra Behn's "The Rover," grapples with his unconscious desires for freedom and love, which often lead him into precarious situations. His pursuit of pleasure and romance reflects the Restoration society's emphasis on hedonism and

individualism. Willmore, embodies the id-driven individual who pursues immediate gratification, often at the expense of societal norms and moral values.

Restoration dramas also depict the societal repression of individual desires, particularly desires that deviate from established norms. Characters often find themselves constrained by societal expectations, leading to feelings of frustration, rebellion, and internal turmoil. In William Congreve's "The Way of the World," the characters are trapped within a rigid social hierarchy that dictates their behaviour and relationships. The play offers a satirical critique of a society where social hierarchies and materialistic values suppress individual desires. The characters' struggles to navigate these constraints reflect the psychoanalytic concept of the superego, representing the internalized societal norms that govern their behaviour. In John Vanbrugh's "The Relapse," the protagonist, Loveless, struggles with his unconscious desires for infidelity and freedom, which are suppressed by the societal norms of marital fidelity. The play highlights the tension between personal desires and societal expectations, offering a satirical commentary on the Restoration society's moral contradictions.

In Behn's "The Rover", Florinda's unconscious desires for love and autonomy can be seen as expressions of her id, the primal and instinctual part of her psyche. Her conscious efforts to conform to societal expectations and familial obligations reflect the influence of the superego, the moral and societal constraints that govern her behaviour. Hellena's interactions with Willmore can also be analysed through a psychoanalytical lens, with her unconscious desires for adventure and romance representing her id-driven impulses. Her internal struggle to reconcile these desires with societal norms and moral values reflects the conflict between the id and the superego, highlighting the complexities of human psychology and the repression of unconscious desires. The titular character of Willmore embodies the libertine spirit of the Restoration era, pursuing romantic conquests and engaging in amorous adventures without restraint. His interactions with women, including Angellica Bianca, Hellena, and Florinda, highlight the multifaceted nature of human desire and the pursuit of sexual gratification.

Defence mechanisms, as conceptualized by Sigmund Freud, are psychological strategies that individuals employ unconsciously to protect themselves from emotional pain, anxiety, or perceived threats to manage stress and cope with emotional conflicts. These mechanisms operate beneath the surface of conscious awareness, influencing behaviour, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. projection, where characters attribute their own unacceptable feelings or impulses to others.

Willmore's libertine behaviour and pursuit of romantic conquests can be seen as a form of projection, where he externalizes his own desires onto the women he encounters, avoiding personal responsibility for his actions. In "The Way of the World", Mirabell's engagement in strategic maneuvers, cunning plans, and the manipulation of social dynamics can be interpreted as indicative of rationalization—a defence mechanism employed to justify or explain away behaviours, choices, or emotions to protect oneself from guilt, shame, or anxiety. His attempts to rationalize his actions, maintain control over his circumstances, and achieve his objectives reflect the psychological barriers, internal conflicts, and coping strategies associated with rationalization. Millamant's strategic approach to relationships, emotional restraint, and desire for control resonates with themes of emotional regulation, self-preservation, and relational navigation. Her analytical approach to maintain control over her emotions and relationships can be seen as reflective of intellectualization—a defence

mechanism employed to distance oneself from emotional pain, vulnerability, or intimacy by focusing on intellectual or rational aspects of situations.

In George Farquhar's "The Beaux' Stratagem", Mrs. Sullen's repression of her unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and emotional turmoil in her marriage can be interpreted as a manifestation of repression, a defence mechanism characterized by the unconscious exclusion of painful thoughts, feelings, or memories from conscious awareness. Her reluctance to confront her true feelings and her desire for independence highlight the psychological barriers and emotional challenges associated with repressive coping strategies. Archer's rationalization of his deceptive practices, manipulative behaviour, and projection of his insecurities onto others reflect the employment of defence mechanisms such as rationalization and projection. His efforts to justify his actions, deflect responsibility, and externalize his internal conflicts underscore the psychological complexities and coping strategies employed by individuals navigating relational challenges and emotional distress.

Identity, the conception of oneself as an individual, and self-deception, the act of deceiving oneself to believe things that are not true, are intricately linked themes explored throughout "The Rover." Behn's characters grapple with questions of identity, societal roles, and the masks they wear to navigate the challenges of love, desire, and societal expectations. One of the most prominent motifs in "The Rover" is the theme of masks and masquerades, both literal and metaphorical. Characters often don masks to conceal their identities, pursue romantic interests, or escape societal scrutiny, reflecting the fluidity and complexity of identity in the Restoration era. For instance, Hellena and Florinda don disguises to navigate the restrictive norms of their society, allowing them to assert their autonomy and challenge traditional gender roles. These masquerades serve as a form of self-deception, enabling the characters to explore their desires and ambitions while maintaining a semblance of social propriety.

Identity, in George Etherege's "The Man of Mode," is intricately linked with self-presentation, social status, and the performance of gender roles within Restoration society. The protagonist, Dorimant, embodies the duality of identity as he navigates the roles of a libertine, a lover, and a socialite. His ability to shift personas and manipulate social situations reflects the fluidity of identity in the Restoration era, where self-presentation often takes precedence over genuine self-expression. Harriet's journey from innocence to experience highlights the fluid nature of identity and the impact of societal expectations, gender roles, and relationships on individual self-perception. Her interactions with Dorimant and other characters offer insights into the complexities of identity formation and the struggle for authenticity amidst societal pressures. Dorimant's manipulative behaviour, deceitful tactics, and self-serving motivations illustrate the pitfalls of self-deception and the moral ambiguity that accompanies it. His reluctance to confront his true feelings for Harriet and his pursuit of pleasure over genuine connection reflect the destructive nature of self-deception.

Mrs. Sullen's quest for personal freedom, independence, and self-expression highlights the struggle for authentic identity amidst societal expectations, patriarchal constraints, and relational challenges. Her journey to assert her identity, challenge societal norms, and pursue personal fulfilment underscores the complexities of identity formation, self-perception, and the human quest for authenticity. Archer's engagement in deceptive practices, strategic maneuvers, and the repression of his true self reflect the complexities of identity, self-deception, and the human capacity for adaptation, survival, and manipulation within the socio-cultural landscape of Restoration society.

Attachment theory, originally developed by John Bowlby and further expanded by Mary Ainsworth, explores the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the bonds formed between individuals, particularly between infants and caregivers. The theory emphasizes the importance of early attachment experiences in shaping an individual's emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and sense of security. Attachment theory identifies four primary attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant. These styles reflect individuals' patterns of relating to others based on early caregiving experiences and subsequent relational dynamics. In "The Rover," Florinda's attachment to Belvile highlights the emotional bond they share, their mutual affection, and the sense of security and belonging they find in each other's company. Their relationship serves as a source of comfort and support, reflecting the positive impact of secure attachment on emotional well-being. Willmore's relationships with Angellica Bianca and Florinda exemplify these insecure attachments, as he navigates the tension between his desires for emotional intimacy and his fear of commitment and vulnerability. His interactions with these women reveal the complexities of attachment dynamics, exploring the impact of early life experiences, societal norms, and personal insecurities on his ability to form secure attachments and maintain healthy relationships.

Psychopathology refers to the study of mental disorders, abnormal behaviour, and the psychological processes that underlie these conditions. In "The Rover," Behn explores the complexities of human emotion, mental distress, and the impact of societal pressures on individual psyches, offering a nuanced portrayal of psychopathology within the Restoration era context, especially through the character of Blunt. He is depicted as a wealthy and naive gentleman who becomes infatuated with the courtesan, Lucetta, which can be seen as a manifestation of Blunt's vulnerability and his susceptibility to emotional manipulation, suggesting a possible underlying psychological dependency. Blunt's obsessive nature and inability to perceive reality accurately highlight potential cognitive distortions indicating a detachment from reality and a propensity towards self-deception. Blunt's behaviour also exhibits traits of impulsivity and poor judgment, particularly in his interactions with Lucetta. His rash decisions and lack of foresight contribute to his downfall, further emphasizing his psychological vulnerabilities. Moreover, Blunt's reaction to betrayal and humiliation reveals a fragile ego and susceptibility to emotional distress. His descent into despair and desire for revenge reflect underlying feelings of inadequacy and a need to assert control, possibly stemming from deep-seated insecurities or past traumas.

Lady Wishfort's preoccupation with her appearance, social standing, and obsessive desire for admiration can be interpreted as indicative of narcissistic tendencies—a personality disorder characterized by a grandiose sense of self-importance, a lack of empathy, and a need for excessive admiration. Her manipulative behaviours, self-centeredness, and emotional volatility resonate with themes of narcissism, emotional instability, and psychological disturbance. Mirabell's strategic maneuvers, cunning plans, and manipulation of social dynamics can be interpreted as indicative of Machiavellian tendencies—a personality trait characterized by manipulation, exploitation of others, and a lack of morality or empathy. His engagement in deceptive practices, cunning strategies, and relational manipulation resonate with themes of Machiavellianism, manipulation, and psychological complexity even though he did not want to harm anyone or tamper any healthy relations intentionally.

While Dorimant's self-centeredness, manipulative behaviour, and disregard for others' feelings align with narcissistic traits, reflecting the ego-centric values and moral ambiguities prevalent in Restoration society. His inability to form meaningful connections, prioritize

others' needs, and maintain stable relationships highlight the destructive nature of narcissism and its impact on interpersonal dynamics. Harriet's emotional volatility, insecurity, and dependence on Dorimant resonate with symptoms of borderline personality disorder, reflecting the intense emotional experiences, relational struggles, and identity disturbances characteristic of this psychopathological condition.

In conclusion, the psychoanalytical analysis of Restoration dramas offers a profound exploration of the human psyche, societal dynamics, and cultural intricacies portrayed within these seminal works. Through the lens of psychoanalytical theories, including Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, and Jung's archetypal theories, this research has illuminated the complex interplay of desire, repression, identity, trauma, and resilience depicted in Restoration plays. The study has revealed the universal human experiences, psychological patterns, and societal norms reflected in these theatrical works, highlighting their enduring relevance and profound insights into the complexities of human nature, society, and the human psyche.

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