

Film and Psychoanalysis:A Freudian Psychoanalytic Reading of Denis Villeneuve's*Enemy*

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Abstract

Psychoanalytic theory has had a significant impact on academic areas like film and literature. Many filmmakers have stepped forward to focus their efforts and attention on this notion of the human mind to make it an essential component in propelling their film into a different frontier. Psychoanalysis is now so widely shown on television that it is almost a distinct genre. The impact of psychoanalysis was frequently apparent in the character of malignant quacks or hopeless idiots in early Hollywood, but after WWII, when psychoanalytic theories were more widely accepted in America, they took on a new position. Villeneuve's *Enemy* is set in the same terrain, dealing with the pinnacle of the human psyche. The film stars Jake Gyllenhaal in a dual role as a character who, plagued with dissociative identity and bipolar psychosis disorder, faces a tremendous conflict after discovering his doppelgänger. In this regard, Villeneuve's *Enemy* does exercise Freudian psychoanalysis, delving into the importance of desire in one's life.

Keywords:repressed desire; doppelgänger; unconscious; dream; spider; the mother

The world-renowned Canadian director Denis Villeneuve and his parenting of Canadian films need no pleasant word to write an immediate introduction. He holds a large proportion of the firmament of Canadian movie, becoming a four-time recipient of the Canadian Screen Award

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for best direction of films. *Enemy* is a 2013 psychological thriller film adapted from Nobel Prize entrepreneur José Saramago's 2002 novel *The Double* (Portuguese: *O Homem Duplicado*). The theory of Psychoanalysis has its considerable influence on academic disciplines like film and literature. Many filmmakers come forth to cast their focus and locus on this theory of the human mind to make it an essential component to drive their films into a new dimension. Dealing with the human psyche and the conflict in the identical self of an individual becomes a constant motif in many films. Villeneuve's *Enemy* treads on a similar field dealing with the human psyche in its apex. Starring Jake Gyllenhaal in a dual role, the film centres its purpose on such a character, at the same time, invaded by dissociative identity and bipolar psychosis disorder faces a problematic clash after discovering his doppelgänger. In this regard, Villeneuve's *Enemy* does exercise in Freudian psychoanalysis. It explores how psychoanalysis, with its distinct emphasis on the importance of desire in one's life, has affected filmmaking, and how psychoanalysis and film include a shared historical, social and cultural context reshaped by contemporary influences.

Psychoanalytic criticism is a type of criticism that practices psychoanalytic approaches to interpret a piece of literature or art. Psychoanalysis is a study of the human mind. It first opened its doors in the 1920s. Sigmund Freud is widely considered the founder of psychoanalysis. He is an Austrian physician who pioneered extensive research into hysteria, compulsive disease, and other debilitating diseases with unknown origins and led to a revolutionary therapeutic approach based on a person's mental illnesses. The human mind, according to Freud, is split into three parts: the "ego," the "super-ego," and the "id." The conscious element of the psyche is known as the ego. It is the wellspring of logical cognition and decision-making that acknowledges and confronts reality. It strikes a delicate balance between primal desires and realities while also gratifying the "id" and "super-ego." The conscience element of the psyche is known as the "super-ego," which nurtures all of our internalised moral norms and ideas we pick up from our parents and society. The "id," Freud's favourite territory, is the unconscious part of the psyche. To confer a proper definition of the unconscious, in his book *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*, Lois Tyson writes: "The *unconscious* is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them" (12).

The idea of "repression" also plays a significant role in Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings often involving sexual or aggressive urges or

painful childhood memories are pushed out of the conscious into the unconscious mind. Michael Billig in his book, *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious* writes: "Freudian repression—the very phrase is ambiguous. At first glance, it indicates quite simple Freud's theory of repression. Freud believed that people repress or drive from their conscious mind, shameful thoughts that, then, become unconscious" (01). The repressed elements find a way of expression through a dream. In her seminal book *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*, Elizabeth Wright writes: "[a]ccording to Freud the energizing force of dreams springs from an unconscious impulse seeking fulfilment, a desire not fulfilled in waking life" (19). Freud proposes two levels of the dream: "condensation" and "displacement." Freud pays his great deal of attention to the idea of "displacement." Again, repressed elements of the unconscious, to quote Peter Barry from his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, "find an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, or unintended actions" (Barry 94).

Cinema and psychoanalysis saw their light of the day at the end of the 19th century. From that moment, they, what Barbara Creed writes, "shared a common historical, social and cultural background shaped by the forces of modernity" (77). In 1895, the Grand Café in Paris staged the first film screening, and in 1905, the Grand Café in Paris hosted the first film screening, and at the same time, *Studies in Hysteria* by Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer touched bookstore shelves. Later in the 1920s, an endeavour had been made by Georg Wilhelm Pabst, an Austrian filmmaker side by side with Freudian disciples Karl Abraham and Hanns Sachs to initiate a collaboration to make a film on psychoanalysis. Hence, it is hardly surprising that histories of psychoanalysis and film ran parallel throughout the centuries. Despite a critical repercussion against psychoanalysis, in the 1980s and 1990s, it "exerted such a profound influence that the nature and the direction of the film theory and criticism have been changed in an irrevocable and fundamental way" (Creed 77). To assert the influence of psychoanalysis on cinema, Christine Etherington-Wright and Ruth Doughty, in their book *Understanding Film Theory*, write: "Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan are the most widely recognized practitioners of Psychoanalysis, their theories cover vast areas of the psyche (the mind) and in Film Studies they remain among the most relevant" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 123).

Now psychoanalysis is so frequently portrayed on screen that they almost constitute a specific genre. In early Hollywood, the influence of psychoanalysis was routinely seen in the character of evil quacks or hopeless fools, but after the Second World War, when psychoanalytic ideas had more currency in America, they took on a new role. In films like *Vertigo* (1958), *The Birds* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960), Hitchcock explored the potential of the

surreal and the uncanny. His *Spellbound* (1945) is among the first Hollywood films to advocate psychoanalysis to the American public, and in which a psychiatrist rather than a private detective investigates the mystery. Many modern directors have experimented with similar psychoanalytic themes, including David Lynch, Peter Greenaway, Terry Gilliam, David Cronenberg, and the Coen brothers. Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) presents the familiar mid-American town unfamiliar. Again, his *Mulholland Drive* (2001) finds its expression in dealing with Freudian Uncanny. Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) and *Crash* (1996) have "horrific dream-like quality of irrational logic and concentrate on body transformations, which invests familiar incidents and objects with new and disturbing significance" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 139). The portrayal of psychoanalysis is not very frequent in Indian films because of the lack of interest shown by the audiences and critics. Bollywood filmmaker Vijay Lalwani initiated a modest effort to set the notion of psychoanalysis in the mind of the Indian audience through his 2010 film *Karthik Calling Karthik*. Anurag Kashyap has always been the one to experiment with psychoanalysis through several of his films like *No Smoking* (2007), *Ugly* (2013), and *Raman Raghav 2.0* (2017). However, Villeneuve's *Enemy* is somewhat distinctive in its approach to cast the basic tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Enemy begins with the epigraph, "Chaos is order yet undeciphered" (01:50-55). Villeneuve borrows this line from Saramago. Though this film may appear incomprehensible and indeterminable to the audience at first, this epigraph can earn some understanding of the film, some order, if they grasp how to decipher it. In an interview with *HuffPost*, Villeneuve himself corroborates this fact saying, "If you look at *Enemy* again, you can see that everything has an answer and a meaning" (Ryan). *Enemy* is all about an ordinary man starred by Jake Gyllenhaal. His name is Adam Bell. His existence puts into question when he rents a movie, *Where There's a Will There's a Way*, on the recommendation of a colleague, only to spot an actor who exactly looks like him. Identifying the actor as Anthony Clair, Adam becomes plagued with his doppelgänger. His identical-self starts confronting an existential crisis. Subsequently, Adam rings Anthony's phone, which is attended by Anthony's wife, Helen. She mistakes Adam's voice for Anthony's, and this frightens her. She confronts her husband, Anthony, about the phone conversation, but he claims he has no clue about that. Helen uncovers the mystery of Adam, and his exact resemblance to her husband immediately bewilders her. When Adam and Anthony finally meet in a hotel room, they discover that they are identical, even having the same scar. The climax is reached at this stage. The remaining of the movie proceeds such as this: Anthony manipulates Adam into allowing him to take Mary

on a romantic retreat to a motel where he may have sensual pleasure with her; Adam goes to Anthony's apartment and pretends to be Anthony to have his satisfaction with Helen, but Helen initiates it knowing full well he is not her partner; seeing the marriage ring, Mary learns Anthony is not Adam, and she compels him to drive her home, only for them to fight in the car; the car suddenly crashes, killing both of them; the next day, hearing about the catastrophe, Adam dresses in Anthony's coat and retrieves the underground-club key; Adam enters the bedroom only to sigh on Helen replaced by a gigantic spider.

There is a constant confrontation between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, and between the "id" and the "ego." Villeneuve, once again, drops a hint when he defines the film as a documentary about his or Gyllenhaal's psyche. The film is more concerned with the core framework of the unconscious than with the lives of a specific character. Both Adam and Anthony are the same person. They both reflect two identical versions of the same individual who are constantly striving for supremacy. They use sensual pleasure as a means of escaping the unpleasant truths of life. The repressed desire in their psyche constantly manipulates and measures their every action and conduct. Adam, a professor, is mentally scarred despite undertaking highly qualified and socially valued work. The ego part of Adam's personality gives way to the superego's dominance. On the other hand, Anthony, a mediocre actor, acts without conscience. He retains an unusually casual connection with his wife and bestows little regard for others. It is the "ego" part that pursues the impulses of the "id." Villeneuve illuminates the constructions of a protagonist's psyche as prototypical for many men. There is an ongoing collision between the "id" and the "ego" in the sense that Adam is somewhat reflective of the unconscious mind of Anthony as the repressed desire gains a way of liberation through sensual pleasure with Mary (Adam's girlfriend). However, when Anthony blackmails Adam into allowing him to take Mary on a romantic retreat where he may have physical pleasure with her, their roles are reversed. Adam, on the other side, takes Anthony's place and sleeps with Helen (Anthony's wife), representing the "ego."

The female characters also play a key role in steering the film into the realm of psychoanalysis. Helen, Anthony's pregnant wife, is closely linked to the notion of "super-ego," which stands firm against Adam/Anthony being devoured by the "id." But in the final scene, a gigantic spider displaces pregnant Helen. The fear painted on the face of Adam/Anthony after seeing the spider pictures Adam/Anthony's understanding of how he is ruining Helen. He will walk back to the club and indulge in watching the spider getting squished. The squashing of the spider symbolises the squashing of the commitment to his relationship with others. He acknowledges this with a straight face and goes back to his philandering ways. He speaks in his lectures earlier: "And then, Karl Marx added, the first time it was a tragedy, and the second

time it was a farce" (18:20-24). Adam/Anthony admits that this is repeating, and it is no tragedy.

In this respect, the wedding ring plays an essential part in the film. The ring binds Adam/Anthony to society, implying the cultural norms and morals. The conscience part of Adam/Anthony's psyche confers a castigation ascribing a feeling of guilt almost all the time. On the other side, Mary is immediately associated with the "id" as Adam/Anthony seeks to set free the desires of sensual pleasure through her body. Again, the closeness of the spiders to women represents the protagonist's uncertainty and ambivalence in his connection with women. On the one hand, Adam engages in the web by allowing himself to be dragged off the rails, but he is also terrified of becoming entangled in the web of marriage. This liking to the women results in the relationship with the mother, the Oedipus complex, as Freud defines. The first speech in the first scene is that of the mother: "Hello, darling. It's your mother. Thank you for showing me your new apartment. Umm... I'm worried about you. I mean, how can you live like that? Anyway, would you call me back? Let's get together again. I love you" (01:21-41). In the second scene, the future mother Helen appears (1:44-46). The protagonist's whole uncertain state revolves around these two limits: his estranged connection with his mother and the duty of becoming a loyal partner to a mother. During Adam/Anthony's chat with the mother, the basis of their connection becomes apparent. She is impatient and harsh, giving Adam/Anthony directives: "Eat those" (1:00:53). At the same time, she wants her best, and the order matches a good-natured question: "you want some coffee" (1:00:53)? It is profoundly significant in this context that the father plays no role in the film. The mother impersonates both facets of the Oedipus complex: the doting mother and the castration-threatening father. Love and law unite the protagonist to the mother image. That is why he experiences constant closeness to women. Immediately after the confrontation with the mother follows the sequence in which a creepy spider moves through the sky. When one interprets the image of the spider as a mother, she becomes the frightening and authoritative element for the protagonist. The car crash ends with a look at a spider web. The words spoken by Anthony in the car are also significant as those are a metaphorical castration talk staging the dilemmas of the protagonist: "I'm not a man" (01:22:35)?

The opening scene, that depicts an underground poorly lit fetish club, is a keystone to the psychoanalytical approach since it reflects a repressed desire of a character. It is analogous to the unconscious psyche, into which not only Adam but even certain wealthy people invade to obtain sensual heat. In the framework of psychoanalysis, Villeneuve's use of light

throughout the film is crucial. His creative depth reflects in his use of both high and low-key lighting. The use of light quickly connotes that the whole scenario shown in the film is happening out somewhere in the "dream." Everything appears to be taking place in the protagonist's unconscious mind. In his dream, Anthony constructs all of the personalities in the club, based on his day-to-day psychological experiences. Here, the atmosphere of the club provides a relatively secure outlet for unsolved conflicts, concerns, and unconscious wounds. Consequently, the entrance key of the fetish club becomes a striking motif in the film, with the audience being exposed to it through a close-up view right at the beginning. Adam's discovery of the same key in Anthony's coat pocket reveals a significant sense. It is not merely a passkey of an entrance. It is the key to enter into the unconscious mind where all the desires are repressed and subsided. Adam's exploration of the key in Anthony's coat pocket suggests that Adam and Anthony are physically the same person. They both are preoccupied with their repressed desires in their subconscious and unconscious mind. Again, Villeneuve interlinks the "id," "super-ego" and "ego" using the key. Freud has argued that "the mind can be seen to be in a permanent state of struggle due to the conflicting nature of the three layers of the psyche" (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 136).

One of the three fundamental parts of Freud's "Uncanny", the "doppelgänger" or "double," is a recurring topic in numerous psychological thriller movies. The "double" displays a manifestation of unfulfilled desires in both personal and impersonal life, depicting the imperfection of one's existence. The doppelgänger, in Villeneuve's *Enemy*, becomes a threat to the identity of the protagonist. Villeneuve aims to address a severe existential question: what would happen if someone encounters someone exactly like him in every way? When the protagonist sees his identical double in a movie, he threatens his identity. When Adam and Anthony establish that they are alike in every regard after their face-to-face interaction, they experience a loss of identity. Finding out who is original and who is a replica becomes a critical question for them. Even yet, they are unable to accept the presence of the other and begin to compete with one another.

Conclusions

There is no denying that Freud's psychoanalysis has had a significant influence on film and literature. Simultaneously, it is the victim of a variety of criticisms while applying it on film after film. It has been charged with being monotonous and totalizing. As Barbara Creed rightly puts, "Film after the film was seen as always representing the male character as in control of the gaze and woman as its object. Or woman was invariably described as without

voice, or as standing outside the Symbolic order” (85). The same is the case in Villeneuve’s *Enemy*. To deal with the elements of Freudian psychoanalysis, Villeneuve objectifies the women in the movie. They are demoted to merely an object of desire. Their voices are hushed. Depicting them with the image of the spider, Villeneuve plays a game of ducks and drakes with their identity. The picture of the spider not only pictures Helen and Mary’s identities, but it also depicts the character of the mother. The women characters are also passive as they are very much dependent on male characters. Again, the penis envy of the three women characters is indirectly shown through their affectionate relationship with Adam/Anthony. Another fascinating point to be heeded is that in the film the correlation between women characters is not presented. They do not chance to cross their paths.

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BIO-NOTE

Mr Swarup Das pursued his post-graduate degree in 2019 from the University of Burdwan. He graduated from Burdwan Raj College under the same university in 2017. Presently, he is working as a student with a budding interest in the fields of film studies, Dalit literature, Bengali poems and fictions, media studies etc. He is from Murshidabad, West Bengal.