

War And Psyche: An Examination Of Psychoanalytic Theory In The Movies “Jojo Rabbit” And “Dunkirk”

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ABSTRACT

War, the intense conflict between kingdoms, nations, and countries often results in extreme losses to both sides, if not more. These losses can be political, economical or social when observed at a macro level, that is, from a national point of view. On a closer observation, at the micro level or the level of the individual, there is the greatest loss of all, the loss of human life. Life on the front for the soldiers is harsh and fraught with dangers. They endure extreme weather conditions and live in constant worry of unexpected attacks. It is often found that the soldiers who make it back home from the war find it difficult to resume life as normal individual. The psychological impact of war came into prominence soon after World War 1, when the old notion of war as a glorious event was broken by the severe disillusionment the soldiers felt and the everyday horrors people endured.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, in his revolutionary works described the human psyche as being composed of three parts; the primitive and instinctual part called ‘id’, the moral conscience called the ‘superego’ and the balancing, realistic part called the ‘ego’. According to Freud, these parts together contribute to the overall personality and behavior, at the same time they exhibit unique characteristics of their own.

This paper seeks to prove that each part of an individual’s psyche comes into play at different situations in life. The materials under study are two war-based movies,

“Dunkirk” (2017) by Christopher Nolan and “Jojo Rabbit” (2019) by Taika Waititi. While

“Dunkirk” analyses the different stages of an adult individual’s psyche, “Jojo Rabbit” explores the way a child’s mind works.

KEYWORDS : Freudian psychoanalysis, Id, Ego and Superego, World War 2

INTRODUCTION

War is an intense conflict accompanied by armed men and mercenaries between nations, countries, states and even kingdoms. It is accompanied by violence, hostility, alienation and terror. The English word “War”; comes from 11th century Old English words “Wyrre” and “Werre”, from old French(also ‘guerre’ as in modern French).

World War 2, that lasted from the year 1939 to 1945 involved some of the World’s major countries. War contributed military powers, ammunition and mercenaries. Air Force took a major part in the military area including bombing strategies. As such this became one of the deadliest among all others till date followed by millions of casualties and death. Death was caused by diseases, famine, Genocide(including the Holocaust) and army were killed including the civilians and personnels. Germany and Japan due to holding of colonial powers and was widely aimed at the front. The principal aggressives were the union powers- Germany, Italy and Japan and the allies- France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union- and to a lesser extent China. The outbreak of war started with the rise of Adolf Hitler and began invading and occupying Poland. Poland had French and British Military support in case of attack from Germany.Peace efforts were an ultimate failure. By this period, it became an era of Military Totalitarianism(which came to be known as Fascism in Italian). The government promoted ‘Fascism’ as much greater than Democracy and also disagreed with communism.

German Aggression started spreading in Europe with Mussolini supporting Hitler. The Great Depression led to huge debts and loan in Western Europe with the crash of the New York stock market. At the onset of the outbreak of war in 1939, considerable changes were to be seen in the literature of that period. It is often called as an era of great Intellectual and creative exuberance.

The rationing of paper affected the production of magazines and books. Not much development was seen during this period except that a few playwrights and new novelists appeared. Only three new poets showed promise (later died in service) namely; Alun Lewis Sidney Keyes and Keith Douglas, the later who was the most gifted and distinctive who wrote about eerie accounts of battlefield. Lewis's haunting works related to the life of officers and other officials are also remarkable ones.

It was the poet of an earlier generation, namely T S Eliot who wrote his masterpiece of war on the basis of his analysis on language, time and History written during the war. The creativity almost ended religious poetry and verse dramas of the 1920s and 1930s. "The Wasteland" brought the concept of well being of the society in which he lived, with a different manner and mood. Books symbolized freedom during this period. For the first time in history, protecting books became the main aim in war zones. They were indirectly used as weapons against the tyranny of war and its supporters.

Pearl Harbour was found to be an independent propaganda agency by the Writers War board, which were spotlighted modernist books as the targets of nazism. The American publishers also gladly joined the campaign. Buying a "modern book" depicted "a defense for liberty" they believed. The 1940s were a period for much literary rise in America. Its international popularity coincided with the growth of literature in America. Even Europe and China contributed their works for literature in America.

OBJECTIVE

- To carry out a detailed study of war movies with focus on Christopher Nolan's "Dunkirk" and Taika Waititi's "Jojo Rabbit".
- To gain a thorough understanding of Psychoanalytic criticism
- To study Freudian concepts of id, ego and superego as well as the manifestations of these in an individual's personality.
- To apply the above concepts in the analysis of the two war movies and analyse their manifestations in the personalities of the central characters.
- To prove that one's personality is a joint manifestation of three concepts and that circumstances in life play a role in establishing a dominant personality trait.

HYPOTHESIS

Freudian psychoanalysis divides the human psyche into three parts: the id, ego and superego. Each contributes to the personality of an individual. Here, we seek to prove that at different circumstances in life, different aspects of the psyche come into play.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theory applied in this paper is the theory of Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the element of conscious and the unconscious in the mind of a human body. Divining the psyche's signs must happen in a controlled environment, under specific conditions, that is the screen of a film. Freud's Psychoanalysis is not visual or image-oriented, instead Health is the asserted fact. In fact, it resists images. Cinema, on the other hand, draws in the spectator through images. Images are the primary mode of contact and medium through which the film moves. In the movie "Jojo Rabbit", ten year old Jojo is fascinated with the political figure of Adolf Hitler. His patriotic fervor is shattered after several incidents, especially when he comes to know about his mother's anti-Hitler activities secretly. Though he was angry towards the Jewish girl secretly kept by his mother, he later starts liking her and eventually hears her point of view. This leads to Jojo discovering the real facts and the subsequent change in his beliefs. All his emotions manifest in the form of his imaginary friend, a comical Hitler look-alike.

In the movie "Dunkirk", the soldiers fight against troops in the fight between Germany and France. Psychoanalysis in this movie paves the way through the Psyche of the distorted and shell-shocked soldiers who escaped death in the war. We can see that once they have experienced such a state of fear and nightmare, they aren't ready to fight the war again in their life and gradually start's losing their mental stability day by day. And such injured and later recovered soldiers suggest the others , especially their friends not to go further behind the war and motivates them to escape.

Nazism is one of the main themes of both the movies which comes in slightly different approaches. In "Jojo Rabbit" the children in the Training Camp sees it light heartedly and move with patriotic fervor as compared to the movie "Dunkirk" were soldiers are in between life and death and distorted by the war due to the Nazi rule. No one character is given special treatment in the movie. The Evacuation of soldiers stranded in Dunkirk seems to be crucial due to instant firing from fighter planes. As in the movie; around 300,000 soldiers were trapped in the beaches of Dunkirk. Many lose their lives during the evacuation process but none of the other soldiers respond as it's not something new to them. The mental state of these soldiers is revealed here as many are shell- shocked by the terror of war. The soldiers desperately long to return to their homes amidst the terrors they face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

War has been a part of human existence from the time of evolution itself. Whether it was a forest dweller trying to claim the best hunting spot for himself or a king trying to expand his empire, wars have been fought to establish ownership and claim. In the present 21st century, war serves the purpose of establishing dominance or in order to gain access to precious resources. During the 20th century, the world became witness to two great wars which would change the concepts of warfare like never before: the two World Wars. The first World War, which lasted from 1914 till 1918, was fought between the Central powers which consisted of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Powers which was formed by Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan and the United States. This war is considered to be one of the largest and deadliest conflicts in history. This war came to an end with the signing of a peace treaty at Versailles. The year 1939 saw the start of the Second World War, which was fought between the Axis Powers which included Germany, Italy and Japan and the Allies which consisted of France, Great Britain, United States and the Soviet Union. This war ended in 1945 with the dropping of the atom bomb on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.

War film is a film genre concerned with warfare, typically about naval, air, or land battles, with combat scenes central to the drama. It has been strongly associated with the 20th century. The fateful nature of

battle scenes means that war films often end with them. Themes explored include combat, survival and escape, camaraderie between soldiers, sacrifice, the futility and inhumanity of battle, the effects of war on society, and the moral and human issues raised by war.

“Dunkirk” (2017) is based on a real event during World War 2 when more than 300,000 British soldiers were trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk in France while retreating from German troops. The movie follows the events leading up to the evacuation of these soldiers from three different points of view as well as three different time frames. In the first narrative, we see the soldiers on the beach wait in anticipation of rescue over a period of a week while in a second narrative, we follow a small civilian boat on its way to Dunkirk in the course of a day. In the third narrative, we see Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots over the course of an hour. The three narratives converge on the day of the evacuation, creating a strong element of suspense and thrill. The movie contains very little dialogues, instead the mood and tone is set by the background music and a fast paced storyline.

In the first narrative, where the soldiers await rescue, the central character is a young British officer named Tommy, who is the lone survivor of a German ambush. Through this character the audience gets to see the mental condition of the soldiers who are desperate to get off the beach before the next ambush from their enemies who have surrounded them. The soldiers fear for their lives and in this situation, their actions are governed by the instinct, which was termed as ‘id’ by Sigmund Freud. Here, neither patriotic nor moral duty can convince these soldiers to stay. Once they find a suitable boat, a small group (including Tommy) decide to make their escape, however the boat is damaged by shooting Germans. Desperation overtakes the senses and one of the soldiers begins to accuse another of being a spy, only so that they could leave him behind. The accused soldier refutes this accusation but finally reveals that he is a French soldier who has stolen the identity of a dead British soldier in order to escape. In both these cases, the soldiers do not seem to care for the lives of their fellow soldiers, going as far as being willing to leave them to certain death. Here, the instinctive id overpowers the moral superego in order to ensure survival.

In the second narrative, the plot follows the civilian boat on its way to Dunkirk, the focus is on a man named Dawson. Dawson is a civilian who owns a boat, and is commanding it himself, unlike the other navy officers. The audience learns that he doesn't want to leave the boat to the control of the Navy officers, yet he is willing to risk his own life to save as many soldiers as he can. Here, the ego part of his psyche is trying to bring about a balance between his conflicting id and superego parts, his sense of ownership makes him refuse to let the Navy have his ship, yet his moral conscience wishes to contribute to the rescue. The only way around is for him to command the boat himself and join the rescue operation.

In the third narrative, three RAF (Royal Air Force) fighter planes are tasked with providing cover for the rescue from the air. These fighter jets are repeatedly warned to keep an eye on their fuel which puts them on a highly restrained time period. However they are ambushed by German planes, and two of the jets are destroyed. The remaining jet, piloted by a man named Farrier, chooses to continue with the task of providing cover even though his plane is fast running out of fuel. He has the option of returning to the base safely, but he forgoes the opportunity and continues towards Dunkirk. Just as he arrives, he runs out of fuel and in one final act of true patriotism, he shoots down an enemy plane, saving the rescued troops and finally allows himself to be taken prisoner by the Germans. Here, both id and ego are overpowered by the superego, which is shown by his willingness to continue even at risk of his life. The sensible action would have been to turn back, but that would have resulted in loss of life.

Moving onto the movie “Jojo Rabbit”, the plot revolves around a ten year old boy in Nazi Germany. Johannes "Jojo" Betzler joins the Hitler Youth, a training camp that indoctrinates Nazi ideals in the youth. Jojo greatly believes in these ideals and views Adolf Hitler as a hero figure, so much so that he creates an imaginary friend that is a comical doppelganger of the real Hitler. To the young boy this imaginary Hitler’s words are as good as those of the real Hitler, which leads him to try to prove his courage with a grenade. The attempt backfires and young Jojo is left severely injured. Yet, he never loses faith in his imaginary friend. Later, it is revealed that Jojo’s mother has hidden a young Jewish girl in their house, a truth that shakes the very core of his beliefs. Although he believes he should report the girl, which will likely result in her death, he is unable to do so. Slowly he warms up to her and soon realizes that she is not bad, just another innocent human. He begins to question the ideals he so strongly believed in. When his mother is hanged, after her part in the anti-Nazi resistance is discovered, his beliefs are shattered and he begins to see the inhumanity of the Nazis. At the end of the movie, he has completely changed his mind about Nazism and Hitler, going as far kicking the imaginary Hitler out through a window.

According to Freud’s psychoanalysis, at the developing stage of childhood, a child’s psyche is dominated by the id, which is why they often act based on what they hear from others rather than by rational thought. In the light of this statement, the actions of young Jojo, especially his plan to betray the Jewish girl, cannot be condemned because he is only doing what he has been indoctrinated at the Hitler Youth camp. At the same time, he finds it difficult to believe everything they teach, such as violence. Here, the still developing superego tries to intervene, as observed when Jojo feels reluctant to kill a rabbit just to prove he can kill. His gentle nature makes him the target of the other boys and they tease him mercilessly. Jojo does not wish to believe he is a coward as it would mean he wouldn’t have friends and at the same time he doesn’t want to kill. These conflicting emotions manifest as his imaginary friend ‘Adolf’ who tells him it’s ok to not want to kill because courage comes in many forms. A child’s imagination is often influenced by what he sees and hears, so it is no surprise that his ‘friend’ would take the form of the one person he admires, Adolf Hitler.

Later in the movie, Jojo’s beliefs are challenged by the Jewish girl hiding in his house. All of a sudden, he finds that everything he had so far believed in was not entirely the truth and this makes him question the Nazi ideals. He is, to an extent, afraid to do so, as he fears that he will be labeled a traitor. This fear is further compounded when ‘Adolf’ scolds him for being less patriotic. His mother’s death and Jojo’s understanding that he has become an orphan only because of the inhuman ideals of Nazism pushes him to abandon his beliefs completely. At the end of the film, Germany has lost the war and the real Hitler shoots himself in the head. Jojo’s imaginary friend tries one last attempt to turn him back to Nazism, but Jojo kicks him, sending him flying far. This indicates that Jojo no longer believes everything he hears, his ego has developed to the point he can differentiate good and bad and that he has completely shunned the inhuman ideals he once believed in. He no longer needs the whispered assurance of an imaginary friend to guide him.

CONCLUSION

As we near the end of our research, we can now analyse the synthesis of the arguments raised and draw some general conclusions. As we can now see that War isn’t a glorious thing to be praised analyzing the movies that have been discussed previously. Analysing in psychoanalytic approach; both the movies “Jojo Rabbit” and “Dunkirk” , we can see how their plot paves way for different conclusions in its own light, but about the same theme “War”. The World War 2 which was a much more destructive one among all others in the world, has caused much misery and lives of innocent ones. The failure of the Peace Treaty within nations and the ultimate overpowering of Germany and Poland by Adolf Hitler, drastically changed the cultural and political scenario of the countries. In “Jojo Rabbit” we can see that even young kids and men are encouraged to fight war and to be merciless to their enemies(especially

the Jews; considered as impure by the Aryan race of Germany). Patriotic fervour pushes all the young ones to move forward with all vigour and joy. Whereas in “Dunkirk” a group of soldiers who are stranded in the beach of Dunkirk are desperately hoping to return to their homes. Shell shocked by the effects of War and its crucial moments; they have mentally become cold to the deaths happening around them by constant firing by air planes. Comparing both the movies, ultimately War is proven to be painstakingly ugly and its glory shatters into pieces. Our aim to analyze the movie in its light of theories has proved that despite each victory in a War, ultimately its aftermath is the loss of innocent lives who lost hope and a happy living with their family and closed ones. War has many untold stories and heroes that’s not historically recorded. These Wars and its impact should act as a moral to the present uncertainties in the modern world.

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