



Psychoanalysis of the Characters from the Novel Eleven Minutes By Paulo Coelho

Ashman Marwaha^{1*}, Abhishek Suri², Shriya³, Snehleen Kaur⁴, Simran Kaur⁵, Dr. Kumar Gaurav⁶

Abstract:

Modern psychoanalytical techniques may have lost their dependence on the methods referred to by Sigmund Freud, who propounded the school of psychological thought, but the case presented by Paulo Coelho in his book *Eleven Minutes* begs to differ. Paulo Coelho de Souza is an acclaimed Brazilian writer and an international best-selling author, known for his enthralling works of literature. His works focus on protagonists embarking on a journey of enlightenment along with showing psychological growth. This article will present an in-depth psychological analysis of Maria's thoughts as she embarks on a journey to reach self-realization. The paper also highlights her psychological growth which she experiences from various trials and tribulations.

Keywords: Paulo Coelho, Psychoanalysis, Eleven minutes, Journey.

DOI Number: 10.48047/NQ.2022.20.17.NQ880151

Neuroquantology 2022; 20(17):1173-1179

Introduction:

Psychoanalysis is both a theory and a therapeutic approach. It focuses on how conscious and unconscious thinking was developed by Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalysis theory to determine the problems of human psychology in the form of their anxiety. Freud came to these conclusions through his clinical observations and case studies when he was trying to find a cure for patients with hysterical symptoms. When Freud was employed as a neurological consultant at the Children's Hospital, he noticed that many aphasic children had no apparent organic cause for their symptoms. He realized that the symptoms are not present consciously and are present deep within an individual's mind. Thus, Freud's theories changed our perspective on the human mind and behavior. The concept can be better understood through one of the most popular novels of Paulo Coelho, *Eleven Minutes*. Paulo Coelho is a celebrated Brazilian author, known for his enlightening, spiritually motivated journeys his characters undertake which parallel his own life experiences. His accomplishments start from his best seller, *The*

Alchemist to his most recent critically acclaimed novel *The Archer*.

In his famous biography *Paulo Coelho: A Warrior of Light* by Fernando Morias, Paulo Coelho says-

'The Warrior of the Light is a believer'. (Morais) As he is an ardent believer in miracles and also firmly believed that miracles only happen to those who believe that their thought process can change their lives. If a person has enlightened thinking, they will undoubtedly discover serenity and love. Similar to the scenario depicted in his acclaimed novel *Eleven Minutes*, which was released in 2003.

In *Eleven Minutes*, Coelho paints a picture of Maria, a girl from the rural part of Brazil, as an "experienced twenty-two-year-old" who has faced things which are not normal for an individual to see that early on in her life. Over the years, she manifests about leaving everything behind and living the life she had once fantasized about. Due to her family background, immediate environment, and the ideas inculcated through media, she always hope that one day her "Prince Charming" would

***Corresponding Author:** Ashman Marwaha

Address: ^{1*, 2, 3, 4, 5} Students of B.A. Hons, School of Humanities Lovely Professional University

⁶Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Humanities Lovely Professional University

Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest



sweep her off her feet and take her away with him so that they can conquer the world together. Coelho states, "Like all prostitutes, she was born both innocent and a virgin and as an adolescent she dreamed of meeting the man of her life (rich, handsome, intelligent), of getting married (in a wedding dress), having two children (who would grow up to be famous) and living in a lovely house (with a sea view)." (Coelho 1)

This prompts her to have a unique perspective about a certain feeling, which she believes is sacred: Love. This perspective of hers faces many trials and tribulations as she eventually does get to leave her home and go far away to an unknown country, meets her true soulmate who, not only challenges her ideologies but also makes her think about the life she wants and what expects out of it. Her journey to healing herself and all those around her is the center of the book and the aim of this article as well. This article will show how Maria faced the constant shifts of ideas on her journey to achieve spiritual awakening.

Discussion

Psychoanalysis of the protagonist and other vital characters of the literature:

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), Freud presented the idea that instincts fall into either of two major classes, namely Life drives and death drives. They were also known as Eros and Thanatos (Greek figures related to love or sex and destruction respectively) by other psychologists. These instincts are considered to be part of the unconscious mind.

• The Life Instinct (Eros).

In Freudian theory, sexuality has an unusually wide meaning: it signifies the whole range of erotic, pleasurable experiences. In addition to the genitals, the body has many parts capable of producing sexual gratification (erotogenic zones): "in fact, the whole body is an erotogenic zone" (Freud, 8; see also Freud, 58).

To emphasize that sexuality refers to far more than intercourse and reproduction, Freud frequently uses the name Eros (the ancient Greek god of love) as a synonym for this instinct. Such self-preservative behavior as eating and drinking involves the sexual instinct because the mouth is one of the major erotogenic zones

and because we preserve ourselves out of self-love (narcissism) and the wish to continue gaining erotic pleasure.

Eros is not only responsible for sexual ideation but is also referred to as the "life instinct" which works in the survival skills of the individual.

Maria has shown to have a high libido and sexual instinct that are far more overpowering than her other instincts. Her sexual urges at the beginning of the novel, were strong and required immediate gratification. As her journey progressed in Geneva, her sexual instinct started to dwindle and her survival instincts started to get stronger. She entered prostitution intending to earn enough money to go back to Brazil and not for her own sexual satisfaction.

"I can choose either to be a victim of the world or an adventurer in search of treasure. It's a question of how I view my life." (Coelho 39)

Ralf Hart, when introduced, was looking for the gratification of his sexual instinct which is the polar opposite of what Maria dealt with. Throughout the years, with his two marriages, his sexual instinct got suppressed and he was highly dependent on his survival instincts when he met Maria.

• The Destructive Instinct (Thanatos).

One of Freud's more radical conclusions (reached toward the latter part of his career) is that life itself aims at returning to its previous state of nonexistence, with all human beings driven by a "death instinct" (Freud, 30; see also Freud, 30-37).

A more widely accepted interpretation of Freud's later ideas is that there are two primary human drives, sexual (Eros) and destructive or aggressive (e.g., Brenner, 1973/1974). These two types of instincts are fused together, though not necessarily in equal amounts. Thus, any erotic act, even sexual intercourse, is also partly aggressive, whereas any aggressive act, even murder, is partly erotic. Both the sexual and destructive instincts are present at birth.

Terence, another significant character in the novel, has a far stronger destructive instinct than life instinct. His methods of sadomasochism perfectly represent the aggressive nature of eroticism. He is well aware of the repercussions



it has on his marriage but his addiction to the technique comes into his path to stability.

According to Sigmund Freud, human personality is a complex mechanism, consisting of multiple components. In his famous psychoanalytic theory, Freud states that personality is composed of three main elements known as the id, the ego, and the superego. These elements work together to create an individual's behavior.

- Id:

The id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, impulses, and needs. If these impulses are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state of anxiety or tension. For example, an increase in appetite or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink.

From an incredibly early age of Maria, one can interpret that she has some really deep desires and as mentioned before that this book, presents a rare scenario where upon psychoanalysis, one can conclude that Maria's desires were fuelled by libido or sexual energy. She had her first experience of being attracted to an opposite-gender person at the age of 11, which is a prepubescent age. She was attracted to a boy in her neighborhood. And a few months later, she gets her first period. Her mother informs her as she is now a woman. Here we get to know about her intellect and innocence as she is befuddled with the fact that how can blood on the leg be a symbol of her becoming a woman as she was not provided with a satisfactory answer about her condition. She complains to god as to why she has to endure this agony but eventually gets habitual to the process. This did not soften the blow she was about to suffer as the boy had moved far away from her leading to her first heartbreak.

After 3 years, as she was dealing with a lack of a companion to share her thoughts with, due to her parents' occupations, she decides to journal her thoughts in a diary. When she had just turned 15, she fell in love with the boys had met at a Holy Week procession. She started to associate love more with the person's absence than the presence. She would try to work out what she had done right and what she had done

wrong. She has her first kiss with him which was uneventful. Here, she experiences another heartbreak as she finds him holding hands with one of her friends.

At the age of 15, she also makes another discovery by an accident: masturbation and orgasm.

"It was like floating up to heaven and then parachuting slowly down to earth again."

(Coelho 12)

At one point she believes that she is addicted to sex and her addiction makes her to believe that she has nymphomania. Her diary entry of when she was 17, suggests that despite the condition, she believes she has, she is capable of love, and she needs to find it in her life.

"My aim is to understand love. I know how alive I felt when I was in love, and I know that everything I have now, however interesting it might seem, doesn't really excite me."

(Coelho 16)

Her quest for love is not only restricted to having companionship in life but also to having sexual gratification is also what are the motives of her journey.

"Although my aim is to understand love, and although I suffer to think of the people to whom I gave my heart, I see that those who touched my heart failed to arouse my body and that those who aroused my body failed to touch my heart." (Coelho 16)

Terrence, another pivotal character of the novel, shows a highly overpowering Id. He shows extreme addiction to some aggressive forms of sexual desires which are harmful to him, his victims, and to his marriage as well. He is aware of the consequence but still continues to do so anyway.

In the case of Ralf Hart, he is in a state of mind that he cannot provide gratification to his Id. When he meets Maria, he has lost interest in sex although he still felt love and needs company. Eventually, he is able to achieve what he was seeking in his journey, which is true love, and Maria's companionship.

- Ego:

The ego tries to satisfy the id's desires in realistic as well as socially appropriate ways. The reality principle evaluates the costs and benefits of an action before deciding. In various cases, the id's impulses can be satisfied through



a process known as delayed gratification, where the ego will eventually allow the impulsive behavior, but only at the appropriate time and place. When Maria is presented with the opportunity to make a new life in Switzerland, ego comes into play as her diary entry on that day shows that:

“Everything tells me that I am about to make a wrong decision, but making mistakes is just part of life. What does the world want of me? Does it want me to take no risks, to go back where I came from because didn't have the courage to say 'yes' to life?” (Coelho 25-26)

She is consciously aware of the mistakes she has presumably committed and always wanted do you have a reality that she desired as her ego and her id complemented each other in these aspects.

“And if nothing belongs to me, then there's no point wasting my time looking after things that aren't mine; it's best to live as if today were the first (or last) day of my life.” (Coelho 26)

The ego is the component of personality that tends to keep a balance between the Id (pleasure principle) and the superego (morality principle). This diary entry shows her reality trying to balance her pleasures and morality, through an active debate in her mind.

Over the course of her life in Geneva, her ego tends to be the driving force of her actions. After having a series of depressive episodes, she accepted her reality and decides to be an adventurer. Every decision whether it be to leave her job, try modeling, spending the night with the Arab, even when she decides to enter the profession of being a prostitute, her relationship with Terrence and especially Ralf hart, she makes all these decisions taking into consideration the reality she is living in and was consciously aware of what the repercussions could be of these actions.

In the case of spending time with Terence, she had the choice of stopping whenever she wants but she continued due to her own curiosity. While in the case of her relationship with Ralf, she accepted that she had no future with him as the relationship was bound by the restriction made by Maria herself.

• Superego:

The superego has two parts:

1. The conscience consists of information about things that are viewed as bad by society. These behaviors are often forbidden and lead to dire consequences, punishments, or feelings of guilt and remorse.
2. The ego ideal consists of a set of rules and standards for behaviors that the ego aspires to.

The superego tries to perfect and civilize our behavior. Being the morality-driven principle, It suppresses all id's unacceptable urges and struggles to make the ego act upon idealistic standards rather than on realistic principles. The superego is present in the conscious, preconscious, as well as the unconscious mind. After joining the Copacabana, Maria's superego evolves. It goes beyond the prospects of right and wrong but instead finds a reason to justify the behavior of herself, her clients, her colleagues, and the people around her exhibit.

“Maria, however, was struggling in the pages of her diary not to lose her soul. She discovered, to her surprise, that one in every five clients didn't want her order to have sex, but simply to talk a little. They paid for the bar tab and the hotel room, and when the moment came for them both to take off their clothes, the man would say, no, that won't be necessary.

They wanted to talk about the pressures of work, about their unfaithful wife, about how lonely they felt, how they had no one to talk to (something she knew about all too well).” (Coelho 82)

She believed that the journey she is on does not define that path is wrong or right but a majority of her clients and colleagues are on the path and she wants to know why.

“Maria found no bitterness, guilt or sadness amongst her colleagues, only a kind of resignation, and a strangely defiant glint in the eye, as if they were proud of the way they confronted the world, independently and confidently.” (Coelho 171-172)

The conscience part of Maria died on the night she spent with the Arab. She was disoriented by what has happened to her and the idea of what she did was right or wrong does not occur to her. All she believes is that she had no sense of



guilt. She found it easy. Her morality diminishes as time progresses until she realizes the importance of “eleven minutes” and faces a radical change of perspective.

“I let fate choose which route I should take.

I’m not the only one, even though my fate may put me outside the law and outside society. In the search for happiness, however, we are all equal: none of us is happy - not the banker/musician, the dentist/writer, the checkout girl/actress, or the housewife/model.” (Coelho 58)

Her ego ideal was the reason for her to know the significance of eleven minutes. This discovery lets her to decide on a new set of rules, made by her morality that was to help each and every client she meets by adopting some personas depending on the situation she is in.

“It’s really only forty-five minutes, and if you allow time for taking off clothes, making some phoney gesture of affection, having a bit of banal conversation, and getting dressed again, the amount of time spent actually having sex is about eleven minutes.

Eleven minutes. The world revolved around something that only took eleven minutes.” (Coelho 88)

In 1905, Freud published Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality in which he laid out his discovery of the psychosexual phases:

- Oral (ages 0–2);
- Anal (2–4);
- Phallic-oedipal or First genital (3–6);
- Latency (6–puberty); and
- Mature genital (puberty–onward).

Maria, upon introduction, was in her Latency phase. During the latency phase, the Id of an individual is present in the genital area but is suppressed and does not work on immediate gratification. When she gets her first period, she enters the Mature genital phase of her life, where the Id is reactivated, and sexual energy flow is started again. This continues for the rest of her life.

Comparison with Coelho's Bestseller:

While comparing his first best seller “The Alchemist” and the current subject of this study “Eleven Minutes”, we can find common

emotions and conditions like love, prosperity, and others. Both stories describe how a person is attached to the desire for material things. People continuously work to feed their hunger for desire, resulting in being tangled in the complex web of society.

The way Santiago went on an adventurous trip for the treasure, which he doesn’t know is placed near the pyramids of Egypt, is the same as how Maria fulfilled her dream and desire, to be rich and powerful in society, want to do anything.

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” - Lord Acton

In Alchemist author Paulo Coelho describes how the magic of love work on a person, it detaches him/her from reality, and he/she starts thinking about the baseless future with his/ her lover. The same thing happened with Maria as well when she falls in love for the first time and then with her boyfriend.

In both of the stories, Maria and Santiago found many people who gave them the motivation to do whatever they want. They helped to resurface their emotions and pursue them to think rationally. Like the boy (shepherd) in Alchemist meet the King of Selem when he was in doubt, about what to do next, and whether he should or should not go to Egypt. Similarly in Eleven minutes, the translator, Mailson, advised Maria when she was confused and uncertain about the future.

They both found people in their way and learned lessons from them which helped them in their journey. They both worked in the shop of Arab. The author used some words to always pursue the character to fulfill his/her desire like Omens, love, satisfaction, pleasure, etc.

Hence, we can interpret that the writer wrote or described (desire to attain) from different perspectives in both novels. In his writings we can easily see the emotions and characteristics of human nature like love, lust, desire, satisfaction, pleasure, learning, want, and others.

Conclusion:

Maria, the protagonist of the novel Eleven Minutes by Paulo Coelho was an Id-driven person. The Id includes all of the instincts, and



the total supply of psychic energy. It is the dark inaccessible part of our personality. This was displayed in the novel in various sections.

1. When Maria discovered masturbation after her first kiss. As mentioned In Freud's psychosexual theory, in the genital stage, she represented normal development and psychological maturity. Moreover, he also mentioned that the woman's erotogenic zone shifts from the clitoris to the vagina. In Maria's case, it happened almost by chance, as she was touching her genitals while waiting for her mother to come home. According to Freud, this was because of the Latency period, during which the child's erotic drives become deemphasized this was depicted when Maria used to do this when she was a child, and she liked the feeling. Once her father saw her touching her genitals and he slapped her hard. She remembered how hard the slap was but forgot the pleasurable sensation. Maria was alone at home, and she had nothing to do; she began examining her own body, in the hope that she might find some unwanted hair that could immediately be tweezed out. To her surprise, she noticed a small gland above her vagina; she began touching it and found that she couldn't stop the feeling provoked was so strong and so pleasurable and her whole body – particularly the part she was touching – became tense and in a while, she felt as in she entered in a paradise, the feeling grew intense. Soon she discovered that everything became vague around her, she could not hear or see anything, and this is when she experienced her first orgasm.

2. During her adolescent years, Maria promised herself that she'll not fall in love again. However, she was someone who neglected her own advice, so she went out with one boy and then the other. So, one fine day she lost her virginity in the back seat of the car. She and her boyfriend were touching each other with more than usual ardor. The situation got worked up and she allowed him to penetrate her. This was because she had her fantasies that she built from reading erotic magazines, books, and watching TV programs and the icing on the cake was she was the only virgin amongst her group of girls. According to Freud, this was Wish Fulfillment which means forming mental

images of an object that will satisfy a need, a function of the Id.

3. From Childhood Maria wanted to go on a solo trip to Rio-de-Janeiro. Somehow, she managed to afford the trip. But that trip turned her life upside-down. From Rio, she ended up in Geneva, Switzerland. She thought that Geneva was an opportunity to lavish life, this represents the Primary process. This means the chaotic irrational mode of thoughts, representative of the Id. But this landed Maria in hell. From being a bar dancer to a prostitute. She cooks up various fantasies in her mind which were left unfulfilled and eventually it led to disappointment rather than accomplishment.

4. After Maria left the bar with 5000 Francs, rather than utilizing that money to rebuild her career she wasted it. The moment she realized this, she immediately got a portfolio done and circulated it to various agencies. She waited for the call from the agency day in and day out, but it did not ring for a long time. But one fine day she got a call from a model agency, and she had a meeting with the Arab and became a victim of the casting couch. And there she earned her first 1000 Francs by sleeping with the Arab guy. From here she started her career as a prostitute as she thought of it as an easy way to earn handsome money.

As said Maria was an Id-driven person, she also used various defense mechanisms to pacify herself. According to Freud Defense mechanisms means a method used by the ego to ward off threats given by the id, superego, or external world, and reduce the corresponding anxiety.

Coelho's Eleven minutes presents a compelling case of the supremacy of desires on an individual which modern-day psychoanalytical psychologists may no longer believe in but the novel makes the readers understand that these concepts still are relevant in society.

Works Cited

- Boag, Simon. "Frontiers | Ego, Drives, and the Dynamics of Internal Objects." *Frontiers*, 1 Jan. 2001, www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00666/full.
- B, Robert Ewen, and Robert B. Ewen. "An Introduction to Theories of Personality." 7th Edition, Psychology Press, 2014.



- Cherry, Kendra. "Life and Death Drive: Freud's Thanatos and Eros Theory." *Verywell Mind*, 28 Mar. 2022, www.verywellmind.com/life-and-death-instincts-2795847.
- Schalkwijk, Frans. "Frontiers | a New Conceptualization of the Conscience." *Frontiers*, 1 Jan. 2001, www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01863/full.
- Morais, Fernando. "Paulo Coelho: A Warrior's Life." *The Authorized Biography*, HarperOne, 2009.
- Coelho, Paulo. *Eleven Minutes*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa, HarperElement, 2004.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality." The 1905 Edition, translated by Ulrike Kistner, Verso, 2017.
- Mayer, Claude-Hélène, and David Maree. "A Psychobiographical Study of Intuition in a Writer's Life: Paulo Coelho Revisited." *PubMed Central (PMC)*, 31 Aug. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5590531.
- Freud, Sigmund. "On Aphasia." *A Critical Study*, International Universities Press, 2011.

