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## **The Psychoanalytic Approach to Stephen King's *Carrie***

**Mohd Adrees**

Research Scholar,  
Department of Comparative Languages & Culture,  
Barkatullah University, Bhopal.

**&**

**Dr. A. K Paliwal**

Professor,  
Department of English,  
Govt. Hamidia Arts & Commerce,  
College, Bhopal (M.P).

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### **Abstract:**

Modern horror fiction is said to be incomplete and handicap without the contributions of Stephen King. It is Stephen King who is said to revolutionize the world of Horror fiction. Stephen King is called as the “king of Horror”. The present paper has proposed to study Stephen King's novel *Carrie* in its psychoanalytic perspective. The themes in this particular novel include supernatural forces, revenge, guilt, blame, sexuality and sin. *Carrie* is a Gothic novel, which is framed in one of the finest themes, such as Ostracization and Vengeance. An attempt is being made to study the themes and inner psyche of the characters. A series of past traumatized experiences hit *Carrie* psychologically and eventually turn her into a monstrous revenging figure. Furthermore, it is also being supposed to study *Carrie* as repressing her anxieties through Freudian psychology. Psychoanalysis is one of the modern theories that is used in English literature. It is basically an area, where human psyche is fully read, examined, analysed and commented. Literature studies the man as the centre of the forces round him, where he is governed by internal as well as external forces. Stephen King has made the greatest ever contributions in Gothic literature. He is known for creating horror, mystery, suspense, romance, supernatural and other related elements in his writings. The present research article is said to be focussed on *Carrie White's* personality and the circumstances leading her to the downfall towards the end of the story.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Supernatural, Mystery, Gothic, Anxiety, Perspective, Repression, Ostracization, Vengeance.

## **Introduction**

*Carrie* is a Gothic novel. Stephen King's first published novel released on April 15, 1974. The novel is set in the then- future year 1979, it revolves around the eponymous Carrie White, a friendless, bullied high school girl from an abusive religious household. Carrie possesses telekinetic powers when she was three. When she got ridicules and bullied in her school by her classmates, while having her first menstrual cycle. This incident caused a serious mental pain to Carrie. She blamed her religious fanatic mother, Margaret for this. As it is the duty of a mother to educate her child about these private things. This caused a great suffering to Carrie and later this suffering turned out to be very violent and destructive in the whole town. She becomes a monstrous figure in the story, killing people and creating inconvenience to all. Carrie is studied throughout the world by many researchers, scholars and academicians through various lenses. Here Carrie is supposed to be studied through the lens of psychoanalytic approach.

## **Psychoanalysis**

“Psychoanalysis is learned, first of all, from a study of one's self, through the study of one's personality” – (Freud) 1920

“Psychoanalysis could be a style of medical aid that aims to unleash repressed or pent up emotions and recollections to guide the patient to catharsis, or healing” (McLeod, 2014) The main aim or goal of psychoanalysis is to bring those present in the unconscious or subconscious level up to the conscious. The goal is achieved through reprimanding another person concerning the massive queries related to the psychological issues and delving into the complexities that lie beneath the simple ostensible surface. Another important feature that describes the twentieth century experience is that of Global war. As all know this century was packed with major, great and catastrophic wars namely the first world war and the second world war, cold war and many more post-cold war conflicts. The advancement in science and technology during the world war brought an immense change in which the war was fought. They used many newly invented chemical weapons, tanks, and aircrafts in the war as modified techniques and strategies. People encountered psychological issues corresponding to colossal ruin and destruction. Thus writers during this period mainly concentrated on this issue as their pivotal theme in their literary accomplishments. It is well known that psychoanalysis as a discipline greatly impacted the twentieth century world and literature. It is worthwhile to focus

on the origin and development of psychoanalysis and its concepts. The term psychoanalysis was first used in French in 1896 by an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist named Sigmund Freud in his book titled *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Psychoanalysis simply means the analysis of the psyche and it can be defined as a group of theories and therapeutic techniques concerned with the study of the unconscious mind and also forms a method of treatment for mental disorders.

Freud was born on 6<sup>th</sup> may 1856 in Moravian town of Freiberg in Austria but spent his childhood and adulthood in Vienna as his family shifted there when he was four years old. He entered the medical school where he specialized in the field of Neurology and received his medical degree in 1881. Sigmund Freud was the founder of psychoanalysis. He used the theory and therapeutic techniques to study and analyse the behaviour of his patients. He firstly developed this system in his medical clinic, later on this gained a well-known popularity and was later recognised as a discipline. The basic tenet of psychoanalysis is that the emotional and the psychological problems such as depression and anxiety are often rooted in the conflicts between the conscious and unconscious mind. Sigmund Freud has made a division of mind into three parts, i.e. Id, Ego and Super ego. The Id is the very active part in which desires, aggression, pleasure and hidden memories work. Ego is the realistic part, which acts as rationally and the superego is the one which acts as the moral authority, to decide to the requirements of Id. As we know stress, anxiety, anger, fear and trauma can cause serious feelings and abnormal psyche to the individuals. It is basically our unconscious part of the mind, where our repressed desires, deep secrets, childhood memories and other related things.

Psychoanalysis suggests, people can experience catharsis, i.e. purification of emotions or cleansing of emotions. A relief is produced from psychological distress to the people who have been caught between the choices, who have been the victims of oppression, distress and identity. Moreover, the crisis of existence are thoroughly discussed and analysed. Psychoanalysis in Literature can be seen by interpreting the literary texts, where we can read and understand the unconscious, desires and anxieties of the author through the story.

### **Stephen King**

Stephen Edwin King (born on september21, 1947) is an American author of horror, supernatural fiction, fantasy novels, science fiction and crime fiction. King has published 63 novels and more than 200 short stories. Seven of his works have been published under the pen

name Richard Bachman. He has also written five non-fiction books. King has been widely known as the "King of Horror". King's first published novel is *Carrie*, published in 1974. Psychoanalysis basically studies the psychosis and the neurosis of the characters. This novel *Carrie* also has the central character Carrie White, who seems to be caught in her psychosis. The work is a Gothic one including horror in it. Carrie is presented as the victim of family and society. She is a teen age girl, who gets harsh and severe treatment from her religious mother. Later in the school, when Carrie experiences her first menstrual cycle, she is brutally abused by her classmates. This incident makes her a revenging girl as she first blames her mother for not educating her about this. Carrie was also telekinetic powers when she was three. In order to take the revenge, or in other words we can say that anxiety she grows in her mind towards the others in her school, later turns to be violent and disastrous. The dominant themes of the novel include sin, death, abuse, bullying, violence, destruction and failed communication.

Major part of the novel is presented in the epistolary form. Carrie's victimization is different from others, as it starts from her mother Margaret at home. Margaret keeps Carrie away from the world and its affairs, which makes Carrie indifferent to others. Carrie's psyche is mainly controlled and passed by her mother, since her childhood. Margaret is the first character in the novel whose psyche gets an attention to its readers. Her religious fanatic ideas and stupidity of life makes Carrie a girl with no emotions, care and feelings. Carrie's upbringing was the sole responsibility of her mother. Carrie blames her mother for everything happened in the school, but her mother (62-66) equates the blood with sin (e.g. The tree of knowledge, of which eating the forbidden fruit, symbolic of sexual indulgence leads to death"

Carrie's bullying at her school makes the basis for the horror in the story. Carrie fails to overcome out of the torture and harassment she faced at her school. Her psyche is disturbed as for revenging. She kills her mother and causes destruction to the whole town. A sense of alienation and Ostracization is created in the life of Carrie. She fails to understand the society and its cruelty.

### **Freudian Psychology**

Psychoanalysis, basically studies an individual's mind. It is basically a process of reaching at a certain conclusion, as by studying a person's mind and behaviour. Before the explanation of anxiety and repression is taken, we must have the prior knowledge that is more basic related to Freudian Psychology. Sigmund Freud has divided the mind into three parts Id,

Ego and Superego. If these three systems work cooperatively on someone, the person is said to be able to carry his functioning of life smoothly with his environment, but if just one among the above fails to satisfy the needs and deeds, the person is said to be in the chaotic manner, which results in the abnormal behaviour of the person. A brief explanation of the three is given below separately.

### 1) **Id**

The id is said to be the first part, which is more active than the other two. The Id's function is to satisfy the basic needs and requirements of the life, such as the hunger, thirst, sex and pleasure etc. Id doesn't require the laws of logic and reason to work. So when a person's basic needs are not satisfied or fulfilled, the person's behaviour results in an atmosphere of tension and frustration. The tension will result in doing what the Freud calls the "the primary process". This primary process is said to produce a memory image of an object that is needed to reduce the tension. So the primary process fails to do it, now we are required with the secondary process to satisfy the basic needs and desires. This secondary process belongs to the Ego.

### 2) **Ego**

As the Id works on pleasure principle, with no consideration of taking reason and logic. The Id fails to understand the social norms, the Ego is said to be a part or process where a person takes the social responsibilities. The system of transactions between the person and the world is Ego. Ego is said to be the reality principle unlike the Id as the pleasure principle. This reality principle calls the Freud as the Secondary Principle. This secondary process is also called as the problem solving or thinking process.

### 3) **Superego**

This part or process develops first in the family and the society, about what is good and what is bad. The decision of making the things right and wrong is well taught to a child in his family and society. This process is also called as the moral process. The superego is developed by the teachers, ministers, policemen or anyone who has the authority over the person. The religious institutions also play the most important part in the development of the Superego of a person.

Stephen King's *Carrie* is one of the horror novels, that is using a new type of horror; madness. This horror formula of Stephen King is highly associated with the psychological

conditions of the characters. The specific usage of Freud's anxiety and repression theory for discussing the psychological conditions of the characters in *carrie* is the right decision considering that it could explain more about events that trigger some psychological occurrences in the novel.

It was Carrie's Id which was filled with anxiety and revenging attitude, her ego and superego fails her to make any way to overcome her anxiety. Carrie makes use of telekinetic powers to satisfy her Id. The moral anxiety that comes from witnessing the telekinetic powers is also felt by even Carrie herself. Moving things with only the power of the mind defies what she and other characters perceive as normal. The monster in the story has created the fear that challenges the moral values of every character who has an encounter with the monster. Carrie uses the repression as a weapon to counter the threat from the consciousness. The traumatic experiences that forced the Carrie to repress the memory that she has telekinetic powers, is a terrifying one. It all started when Carrie White was three years old. Carrie was tortured and scold by her mother since her childhood. It her mother Margaret White when she screamed at Carrie, unusual things started happening to Margaret's property as the stones started falling from the sky. Carrie has repress this power so Margaret could not be in any trouble anymore. This repression went until in her life when she broke the repression. That point is when Carrie experiences her first menstrual cycle in her classroom. That bullying and taunting by her classmates started a process of unfolding the powers as Carrie could move the things with her mind. It was basically the moment that gave Carrie a way to reopen her repressed desires, which were placed in her ego. Repression and anxiety play an important role in shaping and framing the personality of Carrie. *Carrie* might have studied through various other lenses, but an effort was made to study *Carrie* through the lens of Psychoanalysis.

### **The Themes and the Inner Psyche of the Characters**

*Carrie* is a novel, which is covered with the best themes such as sin, guilt, supernatural, blood, revenge, alienation, sex and violence. But the two most important themes, covering the whole story are Ostracization and Vengeance. The novel deals with the themes of Ostracization, centring around Carrie being ostracized for not conforming to societal norms. It was Margaret White who is said to be responsible for making Carrie's life as ostracized. She was never seem to be enjoying and experiencing the societal norms and liberty. A driving force of the novel is her first period in the shower leading her to be pelted with tampons and further scorned. Sue is seen to be the only character in the novel who feels some genuine remorse for

Carrie and arranges a date with Sue's fiancé, Tommy, for the spring ball. Chris is said to be a person who needs vengeance against Carrie which results in pig blood being dumped on Carrie during the spring ball. The theme of Vengeance is seen when Carrie is forcing various hardships at different levels in her life. She manages to endure for years without her supernatural powers. However, after being invited to a prom only to have a pig blood dumped on her, Carrie breaks, and annihilates the city. This psychological disorder starts right from her family when Carrie was a child, then it goes up to the school level. Carrie having telekinetic powers didn't make any use of them, but finally when she felt a sense of alienation and estrangement, she choose to make use of her powers and her vengeance gets to its satisfaction.

## Conclusion

The research article focuses on Carrie's personality, her ill treatment both at her school and home. The factors responsible for her ill behaviour and making her a disturbed personality are thoroughly discussed. *Carrie* is also seen as an unrealistic source of entertainment, due to its violent themes of blood, death destruction and revenge. After the analysis of King's *Carrie*, using psychological approach, the psychosis of the main character is read and analysed. It has been felt that Carrie was not solely responsible for her ill doings, as the circumstances around her make her a character like such a monstrous and violent figure in the novel. Horror story formulae and Freudian psychology are used to analyse the novel for the reason. The dysfunctional relationship between Carrie and the normality features in the novel forms a trigger that effects Carrie psychologically. Carrie is not supposed to follow the conventional means of the society. As by ostracizing her from the societal norms, she is supposed to get a psyche where she doesn't felt loved and sympathy by others. Secondly her treatment at her school by her classmates makes the novel as a turning point to get the horror introduced in the novel. Carrie was not using her telekinetic powers earlier, as the school incident brings the violence and destruction to the school and the whole town. At the end in the novel, Carrie White is shown as the monstrous figures in the novel. All the events and issues lead her to trap into the psychological issues, that forced her to use supernatural powers. *Carrie* explores the themes of treating others the way you want to be treated all revolving around revenge. All that we came to a certain conclusion is what Carrie wants. It's basically Love, which Carrie aspires for. She fails to get it from her peers and even from her family.



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