

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

DECIPHERING MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA IN HERTA MULLER'S THE FOX
WAS EVER THE HUNTER

Dr. Gowher Ahmad Naik

Assistant Professor,
School of Humanities,
Lovely Professional University,
Phagwara, Punjab, India

Deepak Kapur

Ph.D. Research Scholar,
School of Humanities,
Lovely Professional University,
Phagwara, Punjab, India

Dr. Gowher Ahmad Naik, Deepak Kapur : Deciphering Mourning and Melancholia in Herta Muller's The Fox was Ever the Hunter.--Palarch's Journal of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(6). ISSN 1567-214x

Abstract

The present research paper explores mourning and melancholia in Herta Muller's The Fox was Ever the Hunter. Sigmund Freud wrote an essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," in which he proposed new ways in which the mind works and grows. He also offered a theory that attempted to explain the origin and progression of melancholic states in humans. The object relations theory that is prevalent today had its origin in this essay on "Mourning and Melancholia". In mourning and melancholia, the subject cannot identify the object that has led to the loss in his life. As a result, the subject suffers from various psychological dilemmas. Moreover, the person feels traumatized, disturbed and distressed due to this loss. It develops a void in the self of the individual. Therefore, he suffers from alienation and loneliness. The paper discusses the way characters in Herta Muller's The Fox was Ever the Hunter are dehumanized and ill-treated; thus, they suffer from mourning and melancholia. Their past thoughts haunt them, so they get depressed by this.

Keywords: Mourning, melancholia, Sigmund Freud, totalitarianism, Herta Muller

Introduction

Mourning and melancholia happen after an individual experience the loss of a loved one. In mourning, this loved one need not be a person. It can be a close-held idea or ideal that has been thwarted by the circumstances or by the government. This close-held idea can be the notion of liberty, the right to pray in public spaces, the bond with a particular community, etc. Mourning is considered a normal process that is

required if one is to recover from the loss. It is not considered pathology and psychoanalytical intervention is not required in this case.

In melancholia, on the other hand, a person develops suicidal tendencies and needs medical intervention in order to lead a normal life. If he is made to identify the loss, he is unable to explain to himself what is so disturbing and distressing in this loss. He experiences a loss of appetite and is not able to digest his food properly. He also finds it difficult to sleep and have a sound sleep. The subject considers himself worthless and starts hating himself. Freud says in *Mourning and Melancholia*, "If the love for the object-a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up-takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (251).

But, the subject does not feel shameful in front of others. Normally, a person who experiences remorse and guilt feels shy and remorseful in others' presence. But, a person who is experiencing melancholia does the opposite. He wants to expose his condition and wants sympathy from others. He also experiences a loss of self-regard. The part of his ego that accuses and criticizes him seems to be an outside agency. But, in fact, it is a split-off part of his own ego that criticizes the rest of his ego. This split-off ego is called the ego ideal.

This ego ideal keeps a watch over the ego at all times and censors whatever decision the ordinary ego takes. This condition is similar to paranoia. Paranoia is a pathological condition in which the patient thinks that other persons are dictating him what to do. It is his divided ego that dictates him. All this happens unconsciously in the person and this phenomenon is in contrast to mourning, which is a conscious activity. Though, both mourning and melancholia have certain similarities also. In both of these, the individual loses interest in the external world and experiences inhibition. He also experiences the absorbedness of the ego.

Freud writes in "*Mourning and Melancholia*," "A correlation of mourning and melancholia seems justified by the general picture of the two conditions. Moreover, whenever it is possible to discern the external influences in life which have brought each of them about, this exciting case proves to be the same in both. Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on. As an effect of the same influences, melancholia instead of a state of grief develops in some people, whom we consequently suspect of a morbid pathological disposition" (152-53).

Sigmund Freud wrote a paper "*Mourning and Melancholia*" in 1915, which he published in 1917. In this paper, he proposed new ways in which the mind works and grows. He also offered a consistent theory that attempted to explain the origin and progression of melancholic states in humans. The object relations theory that is prevalent today had its origin in this essay by Sigmund Freud. Through this paper, Freud was able to integrate his clinical and theoretical findings.

Freud discusses that in melancholia, the subject is not able to identify the object that has led to loss in his life. If he is made to identify the loss, he is unable to explain to himself what is so disturbing and distressing in this loss. He experiences the loss of appetite and is not able to digest his food properly. He also finds it difficult to sleep and have a sound sleep. The subject considers himself worthless and starts hating himself. Freud says in *Mourning and Melancholia*, "If the love for the object-a love which cannot be given up though the object itself is given up-takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (251).

Mourning and melancholia happen because the libidinal cathexes are fixed on the love-object. When the love-object is available no more, the person finds himself in a very strange condition. This usually leads to mourning. If he finds another love object, his mourning comes to an end. However, if his love object is not

replaced shortly, the patient internalizes his former love-object. He identifies the lost love-object with his ego and starts hating his own ego for what the love-object has done to him. This is the condition of melancholia. It can also be the case that the person receives insult and hate from the love-object. He is rejected by the love-object and his ego kind of hangs, as there is now no object where the ego can place itself. When this happens, the libido ceases its interest in the love-object.

There can also be a feeling of uncertainty in the person regarding his love-object. This uncertainty, when combined with insult from the love-object, leads to an unpleasant and heightened effect on the subject. In such a case, there are two opposing forces operating in the subject. On one side, the person has lost love and respect for his love-object and on the other hand, his libidinal drive coaxes him to stay connected with his loved one. The person whose libidinal drive is very strong returns to his love-object in a hallucinatory state.

In psychoanalytical terms, it means that the person is suffering from psychosis. Freud says in *Mourning and Melancholia*, "If one listens to melancholic's many and various self-accusations, one cannot in the end avoid the impression that the most violent of them are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but with some significant modifications they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love" (248). His being in psychosis can easily be demonstrated to him, but this act has no therapeutic effect on him and he continues to experience this state of psychosis.

In 1919, Freud wrote his paper titled "The Uncanny". Freud was much perplexed by the phenomenon of uncanny. The analysis of this concept prompted Freud to refine his views and it became instrumental in pushing Freud towards his later views. He, in this paper, links the concept of uncanny to compulsive repetition as well as to trauma and infantile anxiety. This essay is written in two parts. In the first part, Freud discusses the words homely and unhomely. It is discussed in detail as to how these words are used in the German language and other languages. In his German essay, he mentioned the German word 'Unheimlich,' which means uncanny as well as home-like. He used this word to refer to the human ego, which is an uncanny sense that is not at home in itself. The second part deals with those feelings, expressions, situations, things and people, which can represent the uncanny feeling.

According to Freud, uncanny is not a strange or alien concept. In it, the familiar things of the mind become repressed and hence seem to be alien to us. Thus, uncanny is a very subjective experience. It is based on our own experiences. But, it seems alien to us and thus haunts us time and again. He based this paper on everyday experiences and tried to explain why we feel stressed, worried, repulsive, and frightening. Freud's concept of Uncanny deals with the return of the repressed and our confirmation of what can be called the surmounted primitive beliefs. An analysis of the uncanniness of our life is necessary in order to decipher neurosis and various other mental illnesses.

Adina, Clara, Paul and Pavel in *The Fox was Ever the Hunter* finds life terrifying and full of betrayal in a totalitarian regime. Adina and Clara are friends. Pavel is a married person who becomes Clara's lover but works for the secret police and spies on her beloved secretly. Adina's apartment is broken into by the secret police a number of times. Each time they take away a piece of the fox fur hearth rug that Adina and her mother bought together. This gets on Adina's nerves and she becomes extremely disturbed when she thinks of the time when the final paw will be cut by the secret police. She, as a result, all the more mourns her privacy and the freedom of her life. Adina attempts to survive in this reality that is worse than a nightmare. She suffers under the weight of the totalitarian regime and her soul seems to be wrung out by despair.

Adina, who is a school teacher, possesses a very depressing outlook on life. The leaves of the poplars that surround her apartment block look like knives to her. Muller describes her state of mind in the following words, "When Adina stares at the poplars too long, they dig their knives inside her throat and twist them from side to side. Then her throat gets dizzy" (03). Her condition is described by images that have photographic

precision and which coalesce into a kaleidoscope of terror. Then, the reader realizes how difficult it is to keep mind and body intact in a repressive regime- a regime where the distinction between friend and foe and the difference between the victim and the perpetrator has blurred completely. She is given an apple by Clara. The first bite by Adina reveals a worm inside it, which she eats along with the flesh of the apple. Her hunger has taught her not to worry about such small things anymore. The psychological reality of Adina's mind, who is living in a dictatorship, is communicated through the physical detail. Adina tries to survive in the reality of Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania, which is worse than a nightmare for her. In this novel, the characters live their lives under the ever-watchful eyes of the state. Not the state alone, even common people help the state spy on the people whom they consider dissidents. People are bribed and threatened to spy on their friends and relatives. As a result, they develop a melancholic outlook on life.

One day the tinsmith commits suicide. His disillusionment that had caused a great amount of suffering in his mental life was too much for him. He always mourned the good days when the country was not in the grip of totalitarianism. He hung by a rope, but his body was so close to the floor that he could have stood on his tiptoes and stepped out of the noose had he desired to do so. His body is found hanging by a man who worked in the slaughterhouse. He loosens the noose and takes the rope because it would come in handy for him at the slaughterhouse. He had to take a stovepipe from the tinsmith, but he tucks three stovepipes under his arm. The seamstress comes and takes away a pair of pliers and a watering can. She says, "I'll take that for watering the grave" (40). The barber comes and pockets a small file into his smock. This greed and the sheer loss of faith in human relationships and human camaraderie that has crept into almost every person is the result of the dictatorship. The dictatorial dispensation does not care for feelings and emotions but is concerned solely with the economy and the production required for it.

Conclusion

Children have lost sensitivity towards life and death as they have seen so much death all around. When Adina stops a girl from putting a frog in her pocket as it would die, the girl laughs and replies, "That doesn't matter, doesn't matter at all" (51). The school where Adina teaches does not even care for the teachers. The toilet papers for teachers get stolen and they had to use newspaper instead. The teachers first rub the newspapers between their hands so that it did not scratch. When they complained about it to the director of the school, he snubbed them by saying, "Back then, the only people who had newsprint were the estate owners. Now everyone has a newspaper at home. But all of a sudden news-print's too rough for such sophisticated gentlemen and ladies" (63). A physics teacher is interrupted from the class and told by the director to move a wardrobe away from the wall so that the director can find the buttons of his suit. The director even tries to exploit Adina sexually, but Adina thwarts her sexual advances. Such a scheme of things leads to despair and moroseness in the masses. They develop a sad outlook on life and always mourn the good old days when they were alone. Nobody dares to discuss such things in public.

These horrible and terrible incidents have depressed and traumatized the psyche of the characters. As a result, they have suffered from the problem of mourning and melancholia. Uncanny thoughts have haunted their psyche, so they were unable to integrate with the people around them.

Works Cited

- [1]. Ahmad Naik, Gowher and Gupta, Diksha, "Narratives of the Holocaust and Its Traumatic Effects on Jews in Imre Kertesz's *Detective Story*." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and*

- Innovative Research (JETIR)*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 206-210.
www.jetir.org/view?paper=JETIRDW06032.
- [2]. Ahmad Naik, Gowher. *Multiculturalism and Socio-political Issue in the Select Novels of Zadie Smith and Amy Tan*. 2017. Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Ph. D. Dissertation.
- [3]. ---. *The Problem of Mourning: A Psychoanalytic Study of Tony Morrison's Beloved*. 2013. Lovely Professional University, MPhil. Dissertation.
scholar.google.co.in/citations?user=71oqFXUAAAAAJ&hl=en.
- [4]. Eagle, M.N. *From classical to contemporary psychoanalysis. A critique and integration*
- [5]. Taylor and Francis Group, 2011.
- [6]. Freud, S and Breuer, J. *Studies on Hysteria*. Standard Edition, 2, 1-251. London, UK: Hogarth Press, 1955.
- [7]. Glăvan, Gabriela. "Fictions of Displacement: Cătălin Dorian Florescu and Herta Müller." *Analele*
- [8]. *Universității de Vest din Timișoara. Seria științe filologice* 54, 2016, pp. 107-113.
- [9]. Gupta, Diksha & Ahmad Naik, Gowher. "The Plight of Jews in Auschwitz during the Holocaust: An Analytical Study of Imre Kertész's *Fateless*". *Journal of Critical Reviews*. Vol. 7, Issue 9, 2020 pp. 3287-3290. www.jcreview.com/fulltext/197-1607144862.pdf?1609428394.
- [10]. Haines, B. "The unforgettable forgotten': The Traces of Trauma in Herta Muller's *Reisende*
- [11]. *auf einem Bein*." *German Life and Letters*, 55: 266-281.
- [12]. Kapur, Deepak & Ahmad Naik, Gowher. "EXPLORING THE INDELIBLE SCARS AND EXILE IN HERTA MULLER'S *THE PASSPORT*: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY." *Journal of Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, issue, 14, 2020, pp. 4246-4249.
<http://www.jcreview.com/?term=Gowher+Ahmad+Naik&sarea>.
- [13]. Kumar, Sanjay and Ahmad Naik, Gowher. "Race, Issues and Perspectives: A Critical Study of
- [14]. Its Genealogy." *Journal of Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, issue 14, 2020, pp. 4240-4242.
www.jcreview.com/?mno=21207.
- [15]. ---. "ETHNICITY, ITS ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES: A CRITICAL STUDY." *Journal of*
- [16]. *Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, issue, 17, 2020, pp. 3384-3387. www.jcreview.com/?mno=19871.
- [17]. ---. "The Plight of Minorities under the Totalitarian Regime: A Study of Herta Muller's *The Hunger Angel*." *Journal of Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, issue, 17, 2020, pp. 3367-3368.
<http://www.jcreview.com/?term=Gowher+Ahmad+Naik&sarea>.
- [18]. ---. "STATE-SPONSORED REPRESSION AND VIOLENCE ON MINORITIES IN HERTA MULLER'S *TRAVELLING ON ONE LEG AND THE FOX WAS EVER THE HUNTER*." *Journal of Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, issue, 14, 2020, pp. 4250-4253.
<http://www.jcreview.com/?term=Gowher+Ahmad+Naik&sarea>.
- [19]. Mironescu, Doris. "Uncomfortable spaces: language and identity in Herta Müller's work." *World*
- [20]. *literature studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2015, pp. 60-70.
- [21]. Muller, Herta. *The Fox was Ever the Hunter*. Translated by Philip Boehm. Portobello, 2016.