



# FREUD IN FICTION

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX IN 1960S  
AMERICAN LITERATURE.


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MA Thesis Literatuur en Cultuurkritiek

Juli 2015



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### Freud in Fiction

“American feminism’s nose dive began when Kate Millett, that imploding beanbag of poisonous self-pity, declared Freud a sexist. Trying to build a sex theory without studying Freud, women have made nothing but mud pies”.

Camille Paglia (243)

In Europe, World War One was a turning point of popularity for Freudian theory because psychoanalytic techniques were thought useful for treating soldiers who were shell-shocked. As a consequence, institutes in which psychoanalysis was practiced started to emerge throughout Europe. Because of the success the treatments harboured, word was spread to the United States, and by the time the Second World War came to an end, it was also used to treat American soldiers who had suffered trauma as a result of war violence. Its popularity increased, and in the 1950s and 60s, psychoanalysis was considered by many to be the preferred form of treatment for people with emotional problems (*Freud*).

Despite his commercial success, Freud’s methods were questioned, because critics wanted to see properly researched evidence, whereas Freud used his patients’ testimonies as his only proof. Moreover, in the 1960s, his theories on sexual development during childhood with regard to women were challenged as they were thought sexist and inaccurate (Barry 98). This led to a discussion of Freud’s focus on men and how his theories are mostly generated for the male population. Melanie Klein, a female psychoanalyst and one of Freud’s contemporaries, was one of the first to question Freud’s ideas, yet value him as a pioneer and use his theories as a base for her own. In her book *The Psychoanalysis of Children* she revealed her own views on the superego, the Oedipus complex, and children’s fantasy, and emphasised the fact

that Freud used adult subjects to understand the child, whereas she used children (7). In short, Klein offered a female approach on the matter, but did not shame Freud for his view on women. A more radical approach is that of Luce Irigaray, a French psychoanalyst, who openly critiqued and shamed Freud's view on women from the 1960s onward (Donovan). While childhood development was not Irigaray's main focus, she points out many distinctive differences between men and women in theories coined by Freud who failed to see these variations (Donovan). A later, but more famous female psychoanalyst, is Nancy Julia Chodrow. In her first book, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, published in 1978, she is inspired by Klein, and inevitably by Freud, but draws much more attention to the differences between the sexes, indeed calling out the pioneer for his misogynist views. Dorothy Dinnerstein, another feminist who wrote her book *The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World* around the same time, argued that much of the behaviour Freud analysed was a consequence of a civilisation in which men worked and women were to take care of the children (26), which means that according to her Freud merely mirrored civilisation rather than being misogynist himself. The reactions by female psychoanalysts thus vary greatly, from detesting his viewpoints, to criticising them yet using them as a base, to understanding his works in their contexts.

Freud's male successors handled the matter more subtly and wrote more specific and nuanced theories on female psychosexual development. Carl Jung, for example, developed the theory of the Electra complex, a female equivalent to Freud's Oedipus complex. Jacques Lacan, a translator of Freud's work, was very invested in Freud's theories and approach, and used him as a foundation for his more linguistic approach to psychoanalysis. Freud has inspired many psychologists and psychiatrists,

but also philosophers throughout the years, and his tracks are still visible in contemporary psychological theories. Moreover “[psychoanalytic] theory had an impact on literary studies both as a mode of interpretation and as a theory about language, identity, and the subject” (Culler 142).

Ever since Freud started to publish his ideas, they have been incorporated in popular culture. All types of media, film, television, but also the written medium of literature, have interpreted Freudian theory and through this pointed out its impact and reception in society. Freudian characters and themes are well-represented in film and television throughout time: Hitchcock’s *Spellbound* explicitly mentions it deals with psychoanalysis, and HBO show *The Sopranos* features Dr Melfi, a psychiatrist clearly influenced by Freud. However, Freud himself did not approve of his school of theory being brought to film, as he “thought it impossible to render the psychoanalytic process cinematically” (“Honey”). In the article “Honey, I kidded the shrink”, a brief overview of the genre of psychoanalytic film is given, and it shows how this medium represents the view towards Freud in society by giving a timeline of changes: while older films will approach a Freudian character or theme as a serious matter, it slowly evolved into critique and now, with the aforementioned character of Dr Melfi, for example, they are often seen as a joke. Film is here only used as an example of a medium which integrates popular opinion, and literature can be interpreted as working along the same line, and it would be interesting to see whether this change is indeed reflected in literature as well.

Because of the controversy around Freudian theory in the 1960s in the United States, contrasting the popularity of its form of treatment to the feminist approaches, it is interesting to compare American products of popular culture of that era in order to explore how this conflict was reflected in culture. This essay will focus on literature,

comparing novels with male protagonists, written by male authors to those with female protagonists, written by female authors. The novels used for this research are *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, *I Never Promised you a Rose Garden* by Joanne Greenberg, *Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey. All these novels centre around characters who are, for one reason or another, under psychiatric supervision and are all explicit about their relation to Freudian theory. In order to allow this research to be as narrow as possible, it will focus on one of Freud's most notable ideas within the theory of psychosexual development: a child in its phallic stage. Eventually, analysis will allow us to answer the overarching research question: To what extent is the cultural conflict surrounding Freud's Oedipus complex in 1960s America represented in literature of that time when comparing novels with male protagonist to novels with female main characters?

What has to be kept in mind while reading this research, though, is that I have not written a typical psychoanalytical criticism. As Bertens points out, “[psychoanalytic] criticism focusses on [...] ‘cracks’ in the text’s façade and seeks to bring to light the unconscious desires of either the author or the characters the text presents” (133). The novels discussed in this research do not grant a reading like this, for all novels explicitly refer to Freud numerous times which allows us to assume any Freudian slip present in the novels were put there deliberately. What I have done is given a psychoanalytic reading of the protagonists’ development in order to explore Freud’s resonance in literature. This essay will thus first give an elaborate background on Freud’s theory on the phallic stage, after which all four novels will be analysed looking at all aspects of the Oedipus complex, determining to what extent Freudian theory is applied especially regarding the differences between the genders. In the final

chapter, the four novels will be linked in order to be able to give an exhaustive answer to the research question.

What is to be expected is that there is indeed a difference between the male and female novels, as Freud distinguishes between the sexes, but as a consequence of the aforementioned feminist conflict it is likely that the novels with female protagonists will consist of heavy criticism towards the Freudian way of interpreting the mind, and may lean towards the more nuanced theories by for example Jung and Lacan. The male authors, on the other hand, are likely to have incorporated the theories more bluntly because of the general acceptance and success regarding Freudian theory and treatment of men.

## Freud Explained

While the term unconscious mind is most often associated with psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, it was not coined by him. Long before Freud was even born, philosophers like the German Friedrich Schelling as well as Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert already made the distinction between the conscious and unconscious, even going as far as linking repression, another word often associated with Freud, to this unconscious (Ffytche 2-3). Freud was, however, the first to credit so much of the human psyche to this difference, and he used this principle as an overall cornerstone for his theories on psychoanalysis. Freud explains the assumption of the existence and importance of the unconscious as follows:

[The existence of the unconscious] is *necessary* because the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps in them; both in healthy and in sick people psychical acts often occur which can be explained only by presupposing other acts, of which, nevertheless, consciousness affords no evidence. (142-3)

What this means is that the larger part of the human mind is hidden in the unconscious, the mostly unreachable part of memory. Deciphering this unconsciousness is what Freud regarded as one of the most important aspects of his therapy. He adds a third kind of memory, the preconscious:

[...] at any given moment consciousness includes only a small content, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case be for very considerable periods of time in a state of latency, that is to say, of being psychically unconscious. (143)

These memories are thus not fully unconscious because they can be recalled if the right impulses are given. They are simply not in a person's direct consciousness as a result of lack of storage. They are, however, not repressed memories, as those are stored in the unconscious. The way in which Freud divides the mind can thus be seen as an iceberg: the conscious level



being above water, the preconscious as a layer near to the surface, and the unconscious being the bottom, the largest part of the iceberg.

According to Freud, childhood development is divided into phases, and each phase is associated with its own qualities. Freud's most detailed work on psychosexual development is his book *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (277-375). He explains the beginning of sexuality in children:

We found it a regrettable thing that the existence of the sexual instinct in childhood has been denied and that the sexual manifestations not infrequently to be observed in children have been described as irregularities. It seems to us on the contrary that children bring germs of sexual activities with them into the world, that they already enjoy sexual satisfaction when they begin to take nourishment and that they persistently seek to repeat the experience in the familiar activity of 'thumb-sucking'.  
(Freud 365-366)

Freud argues thus that a child has a sense of sexual instinct, a libido, which shifts throughout its first six or seven years. In the aforementioned quote he introduces the oral stage, which is the first one children undergo. They learn to develop their mouth during their first year, and according to Freud, just like any of the other stages which will be described here, there are certain sexual connotations with that. The next stage, from the ages one to two or three, is the anal stage, in which the child learns to control its bowels. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* he said that now the genital ages, two to five, began. "This may happen in two ways. Either, like any other erotogenic zone, it yields satisfaction in response to appropriate sensory stimulation; or, in a manner which is not quite understandable, when satisfaction is derived from other sources, a sexual excitation is simultaneously produced which has a special relation to the genital zone" (366-7). In a later essay, "The Infantile Genital Organisation", he changes this theory slightly, saying that this phase is actually merely focussed on the phallus,

and is therefore from then on called the phallic stage (391). He admits that this means that nothing can really be said about the sexual development of a little girl during that stage, as “they are not known to us” (391). After this stage, which will be explained more elaborately in a later paragraph, there is a time of latency, in which the focus drifts away from sexuality.

During that period the production of sexual excitation is not by any means stopped, but continues and produces a store of energy which is employed to a great extent for purposes other than sexual – namely, on the one hand in contributing sexual components to social feelings and on the other hand [...] in building up the subsequently developed barriers against sexuality. (366)

This lasts from the age of five or six until puberty. Then, the child enters a second stage of genital focus during which they would experiment with the actual act of sex, and this would last until they are adults (344-5).

These phases explain how and why Freud believed children are sexually aware from a very young age. However, for this study it is more important that he thought that “the phase of development corresponding to [a certain] period must be regarded as an important precursor of the subsequent final sexual organisation” (367). This would also mean that whenever one stage is disrupted or unfulfilled, there are consequences. For every stage there are several events that may have occurred to disrupt the development and would thus have as a consequence a lingering within the phase. This would then be visible in a character trait in later life. For example, if a child was given a too strict potty training during the anal phase, it may become obsessed with being very clean (Ewen 31). Freud called this concept fixation. This can take place in any of the stages of sexual development, but for this research it is important to just focus on the fixation in the phallic stage. First it has to be understood that, as mentioned before, in this stage there is a considerable difference between male and female development. Between the ages of two and five, boys are supposed to undergo the Oedipus

complex. In short, this means they develop sexual feelings towards their mother.

Consequently, they want to replace their father, who is in the relationship they wish to have (Ewen 21). While they imagine going to great lengths to achieve their goals, for most children this will merely remain fantasy, as they realise their father will always be stronger and more competent in fulfilling the mother's wishes than they will ever be (Freud 459). The feelings for the mother, as well as for the father, will turn into admiration, which results in the children using their parents as a model (Freud 458): instead of wishing to be with his mother, a boy will want a woman who is alike her, and instead of wanting to take the father's place, he will use his father's behaviour as an example. As Freud explains in his essay "Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", this peaceful solution mostly has to do with fear, for a boy around this age starts to understand that there are some people who do not have penises. Unaware of the fact that this distinguishes males and females, he is afraid that the lack of one is the consequence of castration, suddenly becoming very scared the same might happen to him if he continues to pursue his love for his mother. Thus, the child will give up on his aims, regarding his efforts as failed (Freud 398). If the child develops normally, this means that the complex is now completely gone. "It is equivalent, if it is ideally carried out, to a destruction and an abolition of the complex. [...However, if] the ego has in fact not achieved much more than a *repression* of the complex, the latter persists in an unconscious state in the id and later manifests its pathogenic effect" (398-99). It is thus important that this Oedipus complex is ended properly so that the child can move into the latency phase. If this is not the case, or if anything else happens during the phallic stage that may upset the family dynamic, fixation will take place. As a consequence, the child can become either extremely self-absorbed or the exact opposite, as well as reckless or overly careful (Ewen 31). Moreover, a disturbed phallic stage may lead to more sexual activity (Ewen 31), or unconventional sexual preferences (Freud 353).

According to Freud, girls go through a similarly overwhelming development during the phallic stage. Their stage is much different, which Freud explains in his essay “Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes” (402-411). This is one of his later essays, in which he admits to having had trouble defining the female development, and still does not quite know everything about it. But as he continues he seems to have strong ideas and theories regarding the female Oedipal complex regardless. Firstly, girls and boys will start off the Oedipus complex in the same way, feeling a love for their mother, wanting their father out of the way. But then, around the age of three, girls “notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis” (405-406). A girl will now thus feel inferior, fears she has been castrated but will at the same time also try to make up for that and try to obtain a penis. She realises that without the penis she cannot have her mother, and feels incompetent. She will at first believe she was punished, but soon realises that all women, including her mother, do not have a penis. Then, “she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being a man” (407). Because she feels her mother is the reason behind her castration – her being the same – she will abandon her wish for a relationship to her even more, leaning towards hatred. One of the most obvious and persisting consequences of penis-envy is jealousy. This is a trait which will stay within the girl, even after the phallic stage. A more complicated consequence of penis-envy is a girl’s dream of fantasy of other children enduring a beating. Freud interpreted this as follows:

The child which is being beaten (or caressed) may ultimately be nothing more nor less than the clitoris itself, so that at its very lowest level the statement will contain a

confession of masturbation, which has remained attached to the content of the formula from its beginning in the phallic phase till later life. (405-6)

A girl would cloak this fantasy as such, because women supposedly have antipathy towards masturbation and would not want to accept their own desire to do such a thing (408). Freud himself struggled finding out why girls felt so strongly about this concept, and eventually concluded that

[it] cannot be anything else than her narcissistic sense of humiliation which is bound up with penis-envy, the reminder that after all this is a point on which she cannot compete with boys and that it would therefore be best for her to give up the idea of doing so. Thus, the little girl's recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes forces her away from masculinity and masculine masturbation on to new lines which lead to the development of femininity. (409)

Slowly a girl will start to realise she cannot have a penis, and “gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place a wish for a child” (409). This is where the Oedipus complex comes back into play, because similar to her male counterpart, she now desires a sexual relationship with the parent of the opposite sex for she wants him to be the father of her child (409). She will become jealous of her mother, as she is the one who is currently in a relationship with the father. Where for a boy the Oedipus complex will fully disappear as a fear of castration, for a girl this motivation does not exist, as she was already castrated. Consequently, the female Oedipus complex will always persist in the unconscious (410). The desires do slip away into the background though, but still, “[her] Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father has a gift – to bear him a child. One has an impression that the Oedipus complex is then gradually given up because this wish is never fulfilled. The two wishes, to possess a penis and a child – remain strongly cathected in the

unconscious and help to prepare the female creature for her later sexual role” (Freud 400). In short, the penis-envy makes way for a desire to have a child.

In the previous paragraphs, the idea of id and ego was briefly mentioned. In order to explain this aspect I will summarise the essentials of Freud’s essay “The Ego and the Id” (439-483) here. The id is present from someone’s birth and represents a person’s basic instincts. It works via the pleasure principle, which means it will strive for what will most please themselves – it wants direct gratification. Moreover, it falls completely in the unconscious part of the mind, meaning its origin and motives are hard to pinpoint. The ego develops during the first few years of a child’s existence and allows it to think reasonably, keeping in mind the possibilities within the real world, using the reality principle. This part of the human way of thinking is partly conscious, partly unconscious, but also in part preconscious. Freud also introduces the idea of a super-ego which develops during the phallic stage, moderates the id’s impulses and is the moral side of the mind. Like the ego, the super-ego also operates on all three levels of consciousness. Its goal is to develop the ego’s realistic ideas into moralistic solutions. The super-ego consists of two systems: the conscience and the ego-ideal. The conscience will punish a bad decision by making someone feel guilty, and the ego ideal is seen as an imaginary ideal self-image. The latter Freud calls “the heir of the Oedipus complex” (459):

By setting up this ego ideal, the ego has mastered the Oedipus complex and at the same time placed itself in subjection to the id. Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id. Conflicts between the ego and the ideal will, as we are now prepared to find, ultimately reflect the contrast between what is real and what is physical, between the external world and the internal world. (459)

What has to be kept in mind, thus, is that the super-ego is the result of a well-solved Oedipus complex in which the boy has decided to look up to the father, wanting to identify with him. While it makes for a limited view on this quite complicated division of the psyche, Freud summarised it himself as: “[it] may be said of the id that it is totally non-moral, of the ego that it strives to be moral, and of the super-ego that it can be super-moral and then become as cruel as only the id can be” (474). As mentioned in the paragraph on penis-envy, for the girl this superego is slightly different, less resolute. This is a consequence of the lack of a reason to completely abandon the Oedipus complex, as she has already been castrated, whereas a boy will be so scared to be castrated he will completely leave behind their complex. A girl will always retain her feelings in the unconscious. This thus means that where for a boy there needs to be a reason to remain fixated in the phallic stage for there to be visible consequences in adulthood, while for girls this will always be the case.

These vast differences between men and women in the phallic stage are of great interest when looking at the different novels which will be analysed for this research. All novels focus on sexual issues which can be related to the actions in this stage. As half of them are written from a male perspective, and the other half from a female, it is interesting to primarily concentrate on the Oedipus complex versus penis-envy, and the distinctive way in which the sexes are to develop their super-ego.

### **Esther's Resistance: An Analysis of *the Bell Jar***

*The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath was first published in 1963, and follows college student Esther Greenwood as she travels to New York for an internship at a magazine for a month. Esther knows that she should be thrilled to be given this opportunity, and should be having the time of her life, but she feels “very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo” (2-3). Esther has resolute ideas about who she wants to be: a strong, independent, unmarried, childless woman. Still, she starts doubting her significance in the world, and we slowly see her sinking into a depression.

While Esther reflects on her childhood regularly, the reader gains little insight in her as a toddler. This age seems crucial, though, because when analysing her behaviour, there is plenty of evidence that her Oedipus complex was interrupted. This would mean, according to Freudian theory, that during her phallic stage a traumatic event must have disrupted the family dynamic. We do learn that Esther's father died when she was nine, but traditionally this would be years too late to have an impact on the resolution of the complex. The novel, however, does not seem to want to link a certain age to the stage, as Esther goes through other developments, which according to Freud should have happened earlier as well, at a later age, such as seeing a penis for the first time.

The most evident result of Esther's lingering Oedipus complex is her hatred towards her mother. Esther hints at this throughout the entire novel, throwing away flowers her mother gave her (195), wishing for a different mother (36), and claiming her mother was not a good wife (159). At one point, she even fantasises about killing her mother:

My mother turned from a foggy log into a slumbering, middle-aged woman, her mouth slightly open and a snore raveling from her throat. The piggish noise irritated me, and



for a while it seemed to me that the only way to stop it would be to take the column of skin and sinew from which it rose and twist it to silence between my hands. (118-119)

She admits this hatred to her psychiatrist, who in her turn allows Esther to feel this way, smiling and saying "I suppose you do" (195). The psychiatrist's response makes the reader realise that admitting this is a big step in Esther's healing process.

It becomes clear that her feelings towards her mother are actually fed by her affection for her father when Esther visits her father's grave. There, she is reminded of the fact that her mother never mourned his death. This had always made her feel angry, but in the same instance we learn her disregard had actually started earlier already. She thinks about how she, and not her mother, was always her father's favourite. With this, she insinuates a certain friction in the family, a kind of competition for the father's affection. Moreover, in this scene she also muses about what it would have been like if her father had not died, how he would have taught her everything he knew (159). This heroic view of a parent is very childish: children believe their parents to be omniscient. This instance clearly shows Esther was never able to outgrow this perspective, conclusively showing the reader she is fixated in the phallic stage.

According to Freud, penis-envy originates when a girl sees a penis for the first time. For Esther, this only happens when she is well into puberty when her boyfriend Buddy pulls down his pants while suggesting she would do the same. Girls would now realise they cannot fulfil their love for their mother, and their desire turns towards their father. Somehow, without having had this experience, though, Esther has already turned towards her father. Nonetheless, the incident with Buddy seems to have reawakened the Oedipus complex in Esther, as this seems to pull her back in time, to the time before her father died. This experience becomes quite literal, when she finds out, or believes, that her handwriting has changed into that of a little girl, too (125). On the other hand, though, Buddy's penis did not leave a great

impression on Esther, and no trace of envy can be found in her reaction: “The only think I could think of was turkey neck and turkey gizzard and I felt very depressed” (64). We could go as far as suggest that Esther claims here that the man is the weaker sex in terms of their reproductive organ, whereas Freud points out that women are supposed to judge their smaller equivalent as inferior. This is one of the many instances when Esther openly challenges Freud’s gender-normative theories.

This is furthermore reflected in her view on sexual relations. She recounts her relationship with Buddy, who is in love with Esther, but has very traditional ideas about gender roles, and for that reason Esther cannot truly care for him. She tries to defy the role of women reflected in society at various occasions, and it is also reflected in her desire to lose her virginity before getting married. She learns that Buddy did not safe himself for her, so she figures she should not wait either: she “couldn’t stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not” (77). However, she refuses Buddy’s offer to sleep together, and since she has not had many positive sexual encounters, as some dates even resulted into near rape. Towards the ending of the novel, though, she loses her virginity to a professor Irwin. Although a bloody occasion, she still feels proud having defied social restrictions. This is again reflected in her statement that what she hates “is the thought of being under a man’s thumb ... [a] man doesn’t have a worry in the world, while I’ve got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line” (221). This shows a certain envy for men, rather than pure hatred, which is in fact a way some critics interpreted Freud’s notion of penis-envy. Betty Friedan explains Freud was only describing the gender differences in Victorian culture and the jealousy women felt because of the privileged position of men. Friedan argues he misinterpreted this as having a bodily origin, but agrees with Freud’s analysis of the consequences (Friedan).

Esther's resentment of gender discrimination and the social pressure resulting from this is also clear when looking into her lack of interest in children. After she witnesses a child being born she even decides to use birth control, being sure she will never want to go through such pain. In Freud's theory, however, a woman is supposed to desire a child when she realises she cannot have a penis (Freud 400), so Esther is here both defying gender roles, as well as not giving in to Freud's theories.

When looking at the novel in greater depth, though, this rejection of penis-envy seems only superficial, as her Oedipus complex is aimed at her father, and the beginning of the novel implies that Esther has eventually given in to some of the expectations society had. To explain the former we must look at the beginning of an Oedipus complex, in both men and women: it all sets off with the mother as the "original subject" (Freud 405). Only after the girl realises she cannot please her mother because of her lack of a penis, will the feelings shift to the father. As Esther's complex focusses on her father, a certain degree of penis-envy must have taken place in Esther's life. The true confirmation of Esther's inability to fully defy penis-envy comes from analysing the end of Esther's life as we know it: it very much benefitted from Esther complying to Freud's theories. In the first chapter Esther says that now, from the point in time when she is telling the story, she has a child, and that she is "all right again" (3). Her mental issues have been solved, but in order for that to happen, she needed to have a baby – she needed to replace her desire to have a penis with something else: a baby.

In the chapter "Freud Explained", I have shown how Freud believed that a woman's super-ego will always remain underdeveloped as a result of penis-envy. As Esther in addition to this penis-envy suffered from fixation in the phallic stage, it can be argued that her super-ego will hardly be formed at all. When looking at Esther's decision making, this indeed seems to be the case: she decides to oppose morals consciously, while the super-ego would urge a person to conform to society's expectations. The lack of this super-ego permits the ego much

more ground, and this, too is heavily reflected in her character: she wants to develop a self, not conforming to society's norms. This ego even goes as far as to suppress the id, as every action Esther undertakes seems to be in honour of defying norms, and fun and spontaneity which should be instigated by the id, are undetectable in Esther's personality. The heavy influence of the ego is also reflected in the repeated phrase "I am, I am, I am" (152, 233) which is the sound of Esther's heartbeat, reminding her of the importance of her life when trying to kill herself (152), and at the funeral of a friend who committed suicide (233). She realises the significance of her existence, and is reminded she should not kill herself. Esther's ego is also reflected through the motif of mirrors. The mirror as a symbol is mostly associated with Lacanian theory: Jacques Lacan developed the theory of the mirror stage in which a child develops the ego, id, and super-ego (Lacan 2). In the context of *The Bell Jar*, though, it can also be viewed in Freudian context, for it symbolises Esther's quest to establish her own identity which she needs to grow out of her Oedipus complex. Throughout the novel, Esther encounters several mirrors, and always feels the need to look into them, to affirm her existence. But whenever she looks, she does not recognise herself. This already happens early on in the novel, when she is in an elevator and "noticed a big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman staring idiotically into [her] face" (17), although here she acknowledges it is herself: "It was only me, of course. I was appalled to see how wrinkled and used-up I looked" (17). More notable are two times further on in the novel, when she has undergone her first shock treatment, and when she is admitted to the hospital after trying to overdose using pills (168). At the latter, she had to convince a nurse, who tried to tell Esther she had better not see herself, to hand her a mirror. Esther acts terribly confused:

At first I didn't see what the trouble was. It wasn't a mirror at all, but a picture.

You couldn't tell whether the person in the picture was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over

their head. One side of the person's face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow. The person's mouth was pale brown, with a rose-coloured sore at either corner.

The most startling thing about the face was its supernatural conglomeration of bright colours. (168)

Throughout the novel she is constantly trying to create a self, to create an identity regardless of social restrictions. Yet, in this instance, she does not recognise herself: she has become someone she does not want to be. This attests to Esther's lack of a super-ego: she is constantly trying to be someone, but does not know who.

*The Bell Jar* is thus interesting in both feminist and Freudian context, for there are quite contradictive arguments to be found in favour but also against both schools. Nonetheless, the feminist themes that seem to be interwoven throughout the novel are entirely battered by Esther's future. While at first she appears to be an independent and strong woman, we learn that she, too, succumbed to cultural pressure. While we know Esther's fate from the very beginning, throughout the novel we believe Esther will indeed defy the social constructions as the fact that she will have a baby does not shock us at first. However, knowing the Freudian overtone of this baby makes us look back at the novel's meaning. This still points to two very different conclusions, as it could be seen as supporting Freudian ideas about female sexual development, but it can also be argued that the author tried to show the cultural impression of Freud, the way he describes behaviour but also creates expectations. As the novel works so hard to show Esther's intentions and hope to change expectations, I believe the novel is more so about the impact of Freudian theory in the American society, rather than confirming these theories.

### **Drowned in the Land of Sorrows: An Analysis of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden***

In *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, published in 1964, we get to know Deborah, a seventeen-year-old girl, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia. We learn how both the girl herself as well as her family deal with this as we follow Deborah's journey at a mental hospital. The most prominent evidence of Deborah's disease is the fact that she has created a fictional world, Yr, to which she often retreats in her mind. It started as a place of comfort, but has developed into a terrible dictatorial place, and the characters are slowly taking her over.

As her parents and doctors are trying to find out why Deborah has become ill, they often reflect on her past. Her mother, Esther, says: "They tell me that these illnesses are caused by a person's past and childhood. So all these days we've been thinking about the past. I've looked, and Jacob has looked, and the whole family has thought and wondered, and after all we just can't see any reason for it. It's without a cause, you see, and that's what is so frightening" (30). Deborah's psychiatrist, Dr Fried, does not give up because of this remark, aware of Deborah's troubles as a young girl. These were mostly instigated by a tumour she had as a little girl, on her urethra (15), of which one the first symptoms was "an embarrassing incontinence" (32). She was only five at the time, but this was "old enough to be ashamed when the doctors shook their heads about the wrongness inside her, in the feminine, secret part" (40). Oftentimes, the removal operation is mentioned, and Deborah sees it as a "ruination of her secret and female parts" (128). This doubtless traumatic event is certainly enough to bring about a fixation in the phallic stage, but on top of that her mother was pregnant of a second child who disturbed the family dynamic and also demanded much attention of both parents. According to Freud, a new sibling will always cause jealousy, and will also be enough to fixate a child, especially in the phallic stage when a stable family dynamic is important (Freud 408). Jealousy and hatred were emotions highly present in

Deborah with regard to her sister Suzy, and she even described her as being very ugly and overall an “intruder” (45). Deborah has a memory in which she tries to kill Suzy when still an infant, holding her out of a window, planning to throw her out, but her action is interrupted by her mother entering the room. Towards the ending of the novel Dr Fried unravels this cannot have actually happened. Because Deborah was only five and because her mother did not have the appropriate reaction when stumbling upon the attempted murder, Fried concludes it is merely a fantasy so real to Deborah she believed it to be a memory.

Interesting about Deborah’s situation is her hatred towards her father Jacob. This is essentially one-sided because he claims to love both his daughters and is very upset about Deborah’s disinterest in him:

His oldest daughter had just parted from him, almost eagerly in that grim place of locks and bars, turning away from his kiss, stepping back. She had not seemed to want comfort from him, almost shrinking from touch. He was a man of tempers and now he needed a rage that was cleansing, simple, and direct. But the anger here was so laced with pity, fear, and love that he did not know how he could free himself of it. It lay writhing and stinking inside him, and he began to feel the old, slow waking ache of his ulcer. (11)

What we also learn from this moment is that he feels envious towards the mother, who receives all the attention. This points out a certain competition between the parents for the affection of their children. This is highlighted when we hear this from the mother’s point of view, as “Esther felt that she knew Deborah better than her husband did” (13), noticing her mental illness much earlier.

Deborah has been avoiding contact with her father, explicitly telling her psychiatrist she does not want him to visit. Dr Fried had not enquired any further, but eventually she does

want Deborah to explain herself. It then becomes clear that she was given a beating occasionally, but also that there is much more behind her hatred:

‘He was always frightened of the men- the men lurking to grab me from dark streets; sex maniacs and fiends, one to a tree, waiting for me. So many times he shook warnings into me. Men are brutes, lusting without limit. Men are animals ... and I agreed in myself. One time he was scolding me for having seen an exhibitionist on the street. Because I had attracted the man’s attention my father somehow connected me with having done something. He was full of rage and fear and he went on and on as if all such men were bound by laws like gravity to me alone. I said to him “What do they want with me, broken into and spoiled already? I’m not good enough for anyone else.” Then he hit me very hard because it was true.’

‘Was he afraid, perhaps, of the commands of his own passions?’

‘What? He was a father-’ Deborah said, beginning to know the answer before she refuted it.

‘He was a man first. He knows his own thoughts. Do all others have such thoughts? He knows they have. Do all others have so good control as he has? Surely they cannot.’

(107)

Dr Fried evidently points at the Freudian Oedipus complex here, but in a controversial light. In this view, the father is the focal point rather than the daughter, hinting the Oedipal complex is fed from a man’s desire rather than a girl’s. He projects his own wishes on other men in Deborah’s life, but also punishes the girl for this.

In addition to Jacob’s fear of men around his daughter, he spoke of them as having an illness: “He had spoken of the diseased parts of these men and Deborah knew that her shame-parts too had been diseased” (108). As a consequence, Deborah had developed an inferiority



complex regarding her reproductive organs. This is generally, according to Freud, a consequence of penis-envy, but her father has taught her that men, too, are deficient, and thus that she is more like men in that context. As a result, Deborah did not develop according to Freudian terms, not truly suffering from penis-envy, but still carrying the psychological after-effect of feeling inferior. However, another consequence of penis-envy is turning to the father rather than to the mother in the Oedipal complex upon realising she cannot fulfil her mother's sexual desires. As Deborah does not undergo penis-envy because she is taught that she is like men, her feelings never shift, meaning her Oedipus complex is focussed on her mother.

It is difficult to apply Freudian theory to Deborah's development of the super-ego, because that so heavily relies on penis-envy. There is, however, a passage in the novel which discusses the existence of morals within mental patients: when Dr Fried is trying to convince her colleagues Deborah is starting to become better, to develop new morals, one man asks 'Do they ... do they have considerations like that? I mean ... morals?' (183). They continue discussing what one should expect of patients such as Deborah when it comes to considering other people, and Fried keeps defending the patients, although other doctors doubt their capacity to empathise. In the case of Deborah, applying Freud's ideas would lead to the conclusion that there would be little super-ego, little moral, both because women already have little of it, but also because of the fixation of the phallic stage. Fried's defending tone allows for a reading that the novel warns for the assumptions made using Freudian theory. Her answer to the aforementioned question confirms this:

Of course. ... As you work here, you will often see evidences of it. There are many examples of such ethics or morals, which have moved "healthy" ones to awe over the years – cost to the patient, but present nevertheless to remind us and to kick the crutch from our complacency. I remember when I left my hospital in Germany, a patient gave me a knife to protect myself. This knife he had made in secret by grinding down a

piece of metal for months and months. He had made it to save against the day that his illness would become too painful for him to bear. (183)

Rather than only considering his own well-being, this patient shows morals by giving away this precious possession to someone who may need it more.

Throughout the novel, Dr Fried, sometimes called by her Yri name Furi, tries to help Deborah to break down the world of Yr, challenging her to create boundaries between imagination and reality. When Deborah feels this is established enough to leave the hospital, she starts taking classes to obtain her GED diploma, which is an equivalent to a high school diploma, so she can truly live a life when released. This motivates Deborah to work through her issues, and allow herself to heal. Slowly but surely, she starts to remember the good things in life, which becomes most clear when she is reintroduced to Quentin Dobshansky, an old dear friend whom she had forgotten:

Deborah was suddenly struck that Quentin Dobshansky, her friend, was a man – a sexual man – a passionate man – who seemed to be sounding a cry of passion into the echo-places of her emptiness. Only at that moment did she become aware of them as empty. And at that moment did she become aware of them as empty. And the instant she discovered emptiness, she discovered hunger. It was a long, hard hunger, years late and never plumbed before. But the measure of hunger was the measure of capacity. Furi had been right; nuts or not, Deborah could feel. (235)

She realises she had been shutting out feelings, leading to her believing nobody had feelings for her either. Seeing Quentin awakens her in that area, and even allows her to realise her parents, too, love her: “It came to Deborah that it was her parents who had bought this fight for her. They could have cut her off from it the minute that she failed to make their progress. They had kept faith with a future which might never sing their praises” (217).

Although this all shows a bettering in Deborah's condition, at the beginning of the final chapter, Deborah is not much better at all. She is still taken over by Yr characters quite often, and even has a mental breakdown, leaving little of a positive ending. However, after this breakdown, Deborah is determined to say goodbye to her old friends in Yr, and despite their effort to keep her at least partially there, she finally declares she is "going to hang with the world. Full weight" (254).

As mentioned before, the novel also focusses on the way in which Deborah's family deal with the girl's condition, and a great theme that should not be disregarded in this essay is their fear of the stigma surrounding mental illness. As a consequence, they are afraid to tell other people where Deborah is, and they make up "the story that they would tell their acquaintances and those relatives who were not close enough or whose prejudices did not allow for mental hospitals in the family. For them, the hospital was to be a school" (13). While this has nothing to do with the Oedipus complex, it does show the controversy around the psychiatric world: the impact of Freud is clearly big, but not everyone is willing to accept his influence.

The novel shows many different sides of the Oedipus complex and this way it also reflects the different opinions. In short this novel acknowledges the impact our Austrian psychologist had on 1960s American society, but also points out not everything should, or could, be solved by applying his theories. As said before, Esther has surely been helped by resolving some issues which are related to the Oedipus complex, but in the end, Deborah is not fully better yet. Moreover, some characters, such as Deborah's parents and the doctors, are supporters of Freudian theory, and others – other members of the family – are not, show the controversy present in society.

### **Alex's Laments: An Analysis of *Portnoy's Complaint***

*Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth was first published in 1969, and is in its most basic form a monologue, as the protagonist Alex Portnoy tells his life to his psychologist, Dr Spielvogel. The prologue of the novel is a fictitious dictionary entry, explaining how the phrase 'Portnoy's Complaint' came into being and what its specific meaning is. In essence, this definition is a summary of the novel, because it teaches us how Alex's thoughts and beliefs came into being.

Alex was born into a proud Jewish family, but already as a child he dismissed his religion, to his parents' discontent. This struggle with conforming to his parents' religious ambitions and desires is a major theme which has been explored by many critics already. Some try to find the connection between this theme and the Oedipus complex, which is also evidently present in the novel. In a comparative study of several Jewish novels, Frederic Cople Jaher claims that Alex has indeed suffered from an Oedipus complex, but was ultimately able to resolve this issue to some extent, and consequently as an adult abhors his mother and women like her (530-1). Still, though, Alex constantly finds partners that bear similarities to his mother, which makes it difficult to support Jaher's claim. Alex's disgust only surfaces when he becomes conscious of the woman's similarities to his mother, which suggests that it is more likely a consequence of his superego knowing that he should not feel sexual desires towards his mother. This friction between Alex' id and superego reoccurs in almost every masturbation or sex scene, as he often contemplates his reasons and is in constant conflict with himself.

As a little child, Alex was very impressed by his mother. He believed she had some sort of superpower, being able to transform into his teacher and any other woman, believing she was always present, and always looking after him. Many times throughout the novel there are paragraphs full of praise for her:

It was mother who could accomplish anything, who herself had to admit it might even be that she was actually too good. ... She could make jello, for instance, with sliced peaches *hanging* in it, peaches just *suspended* there, in defiance of the law of gravity. She could bake a cake that tasted like a banana. ... She would telephone all the other women in the building drying their clothes on the back lines – called even the divorced goy on the top floor one magnanimous day – to tell them rush, take in the laundry, a drop of rain had fallen on our windowpane. What a radar on that woman! ... The energy on her! The thoroughness! ... Devotion is just in her blood. (11-12)

At the same time, though, he is scared of her. Immediately after the aforementioned paragraph he mentions his mother's relentlessness when it comes to punishing him, locking him out of the apartment, without Alex knowing what he could "possibly have done" (14). Moreover, he notes she would often hold a knife when disciplining him, making him afraid she might use it (17). Still, the predominant feeling he remembers he had for her, is love.

For his father, Alex feels little admiration. Neighbours do not respect his job as an insurance agent, which makes Alex doubt his capabilities, and throughout the novel, Alex describes him as an incompetent father as well as husband. He was weak in Alex's eyes, and he only emphasised this himself, continuously telling Alex he does not want him to grow up to be like him (5). At the age of nine, when playing baseball with his father, he notes that "on top of all the other things I am just beginning to suspect about my father, he isn't "King Kong' Charlie Keller [a famous baseball player] either". Alex thus already felt this disdain when he is only a little boy, but continues to feel this way for the rest of his life. As an adult, he once bought his father a magazine subscription, but as he visited him, he saw the magazines were unopened, and Alex now saw his father as incompetent as well as ungrateful (9). The present-time Alex, too, mentions the incompetence his father exudes: "How could he oppress? – he *was* the oppressed. How could he wield power? – he *was* the powerless. How

could he enjoy triumph, when he so despised the triumphant – and probably the very idea” (40). There are clearly few moments of respect towards his father in this novel. There is one time, though, when he is impressed by his father. As young child, his father takes Alex to a bathing house monthly. Here he sees his father’s penis and describes it with admiration (49-50).

This introduces Alex’s evident fear of castration. Despite his father’s incompetence in life, Alex realises his father is the only one of them two who can satisfy his mother in the sexual sense. His mother only confirms this, according to Alex, because she is very denigrating towards his “little thing” (50). The shame he feels is only reinforced by a small medical problem he had when he was nine: his left testicle appeared to have disappeared. He became scared he was turning into a girl:

[If] the testicle could have taken a dive backwards toward the bowel and there begun to convert itself into just such an egg as I had observed my mother yank in a moist yellow cluster from the dark interior of a chicken whose guts she was emptying into the garbage. What if breasts began to grow on me, too? What if my penis went dry and brittle, and one day, while I was urinating, snapped off in my hand? Was I being transformed into a girl? Or worse, into a boy such as I understood (from the playground grapevine) that Robert Ripley of *Believe It or Not* would pay “a reward” of a hundred thousand dollars for? (39).

This clearly illustrates the fear Freud believes little boys are supposed to feel during their Oedipus complex. Luckily for Alex, though, his medical condition is solved by medication, and he does not have to undergo an operation. “I am spared the knife. (Once again!)” (39), which refers to his mother’s threatening attitude: “Who else do you know whose mother actually threatened him with the dreaded knife? Who else was so lucky as to have the threat of castration so straight-forwardly put by his momma? Who else, on top of this mother, had a

testicle that wouldn't descend?" (257). Alex here fears that his manhood will never develop or will be taken away from him. In order to be a man, physically, he wants to be like his father. However, he does not aspire to be like his father in terms of behaviour as described in the previous paragraph. For this aspect, Alex interestingly notes the sexes are mixed up in their family (41), which would mean he desires to be like his mother – who behaves like fathers in regular families – in character. He has not achieved this yet, and he states to his doctor that he “can't stand any more being frightened like this over nothing!” (41). He then cries out: “Bless me with manhood! Make me brave! Make me strong! Make me *whole!*” (41).

Up until this point, Alex seems to have gone through a regular Oedipus complex, disregarding the fact that his fear of castration never goes away. However, the signs of fixation are numerous, so Freudian theory would suggest his Oedipus complex was never resolved. This most likely has to do with his father's lack of authority. A young boy should want to kill his father in order to be with his mother, but he should also be scared of him, realising he could never actually kill his father, and thus letting go of his desires. Alex mentions he would like his father gone a few times. The earliest memory of this is when he is only four years old and feels sexually attracted to his mother. He notices his father is not at home, and hopes he will never return (45). This is still rather innocent and passive, but later he expresses concern towards his own feelings:

“[What] terrified me most about my father was not the violence I expected him momentarily to unleash upon me, but the violence I wished every night at the dinner table to commit upon this ignorant, barbaric carcass. How I wanted to send him howling from the land of the living [...]. And what was especially terrifying about the murderous wish was this: if I tried, chances were I'd succeed! *Chances were he would help me along!* I would have only to leap across the dinner dishes, my fingers aimed at

his windpipe, for him instantaneously to sink won beneath the table with his tongue hanging out” (41).

He does restrain himself, though, even when his father is particularly vulnerable because his mother is recovering from surgery and “very nearly expired” (64). He also mentions he feels actually acting upon this weakness, would be taking advantage of him, which again highlights the fact that he feels his father is inferior.

The most evident consequence of Alex’ unresolved Oedipus complex is his obsession with masturbation. From a very young age onwards, he cannot stop masturbating, making up all kinds of excuses to be able to be in the bathroom for a longer period of time – cramps, diarrhoea. Even in public places he could not keep his hands off of himself, and random objects turn him on. He is, however, incapable of performing the act of sex itself, because only he himself can make him reach climax.

What Alex keeps referring to as a negative consequence of his fixation in the phallic stage, is his remaining obsession with his mother. Although he has little to no contact with his parents as a grown up, he realises he is looking for women who are much like her when looking for a relationship. This starts off as a young boy, when he is interested in his sister, and uses her underwear to get aroused. It continues in his adult life, when he calls his girlfriend his “mother-substitute” (266). At the same time, he denies this:

Because she wore red hair and freckles, this makes her, according to my unconscious one-track mind, my mother? Just because she and the lady of my past are offspring of the same pale Polish strain of Jews? This then is the culmination of the Oedipal drama, Doctor? More farce, my friend! Too much to swallow, I’m afraid! ... I mean this is maybe going too far for a laugh, Doctor Spielvogel, Doctor Freud, Doctor Kronkite!  
(266)



He blames his doctor for bringing this subject up, although he talks about this at his own initiative, as he is the only person speaking in this novel. According to Freud it is the resolved Oedipus complex that allows this projection from mother onto future wife, which means Alex has in fact gotten through the complex. Still, he believes this is a negative consequence. This is only one of many instances where Alex seems to want to blame everything he does on Freudian theories, getting away with everything, because it is all conform to Freud's ideas. Interesting about this, is that according to Freudian theory much is supposed to be unconscious, whereas for Alex, he is very much aware of every Freudian thing that happened in his life, although only in his adulthood: "I don't remember that I was one of those kids who went around wishing he lived in another house with other people, whatever my unconscious yearnings may have been in that direction" (95). He precedes this with a dramatic exclamation, "Whew! Have I got grievances! DO I harbour hatreds I didn't even know were there!" (94), which only highlights his using Freud as excuses for his current behaviour. Dean Franco points out this allows for a different reading, and much like Jaher draws parallels between the Freudian intertext and the protagonist's struggle to belong: "The psychosexual dynamic is thus not the "hidden message," nor even the latent structure for the reader to discover. Rather, psychosexual processes are the internal allegory of the novel's themes of social identity" (100).

This novel heavily relies on Freudian ideas and the protagonist constantly reminds the reader of this. The humorous tone of *Portnoy's Complaint* indicates the satirical implications, as the character of Alex shows the influence of Freud's theories in American society. The analysis of *Portnoy's Complaint* has led to the conclusion that Freudian theory in this novel is mostly used as a way to avoid responsibility for one's own behaviour, which indicates a critical point of view towards the integration of Freudian theory in American civilisation.

### **Father McMurphy: An Analysis of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest***

Ken Kesey's 1962 novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is told through the eyes of Chief Bromden, a tall half-Indian man who pretends to be deaf and dumb so he will be ignored but still be aware of all the rumours in the psychiatric hospital where he has been a patient for ten years. This male-only hospital is unofficially divided into Acutes, men who can be cured, and Chronics. Bromden belongs to the latter: those who cannot be cured. While Bromden is not the protagonist when looking at the main plot action, he is the narrator and we experience the story from his point of view, and are consequently often confronted with his feelings and ideas. Later, the true main character will be discussed, but for Bromden, too, a psychoanalytical exploration is possible. His personal quest to understand his heritage shows his fixation clearly, as English professor Robert Waxler shows:

In the simplest Freudian version of the Oedipal story, if the son is to achieve manhood, he must symbolically kill the father and marry the mother. But what if the father, a member of an ethnic minority, has been marginalized by the mother, a member of the dominant culture? How then does the son rejuvenate desire for the mother, especially when that mother in the mind of the son, has become an abstraction, a repressive symbol of the majority culture? (Waxler 266).

While Waxler seems to understand a resolution of the Oedipus complex wrongly as a boy generally does not actually go through with his ideas of killing the father and marrying the mother because his fear of castration weighs stronger than his obsession, he does make a valid point. He shows that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* shows a shortcoming in Freud's western theory. Freud assumes a child grows up in a family in which the father is dominant, whereas in Bromden's experience, his mother was more powerful because she was white and his father was from an indigenous culture. Applying Freud to this problem does explain

Bromden's constant struggle to find an identity, for despite his age, he does not really know who he is. Nurse Ratched, the head nurse, in this view also represents his mother, and as Waxler points out, when she is introduced by Bromden "she is carrying her woven wicker bag made by Indians but used by her to carry the tools that she manipulates to maintain her dehumanized control over the ward" (266). Only when Ratched has lost this tyrannical power at the very end of the novel, Bromden feels he can stand on his own two feet and escapes the hospital. He decides to go back to the tribe he grew up with, which means he has embraced his father's heritage and has decided to take after his father now that he has been able to put his mother's power behind him.

A few chapters into the novel, we are introduced to Randle McMurphy. His oddly positive spirit surprises the other patients and they are immediately intrigued by him. At first, though, they are hesitant about letting him in, as he upsets the dynamic within the hospital and questions Nurse Ratched's intentions. At first the patients try to defend her, but later agree with McMurphy and rebel against her. Janet Larson wrote an essay on how the novel portrays McMurphy as a messiah, leading the other patients towards a better fate while sacrificing himself (26). While this is indeed an explanation for his influence, looking at the relationships with other characters in the novel, McMurphy's behaviour here seems fatherly, trying to help the patients achieve their main goal: finding power by becoming a real man. In this scenario Nurse Ratched, first greatly admired by the patients, then represents the mother, and all patients but McMurphy are the children. When analysing the dynamic between these characters, it becomes clear that the Oedipus complex can be applied in this scenario as well. The first relationship is that between mother and child: while the children are generally scared of Ratched, there are indications that the patients see her as a mother and care for her, despite the fear. When McMurphy is trying to show Ratched's negative influence, one patient, Harding, defends her with conviction, saying:

Miss Ratched is a veritable angel of mercy and why just *everyone* knows it. She's unselfish as the wind, toiling thanklessly for the good of all, day after day, five long days a week. That takes heart, my friend, heart. In fact, I have been informed by sources ... that she even *further* serves mankind on her weekends off by doing volunteer work about town. (61)

Harding thus praises her kindness, but the paragraph continues with him also pointing at her grace and beauty:

Her gentle knock on the door. The ribboned basket. The young couple overjoyed to the point of speechlessness. The husband open-mouthed, the wife weeping openly. She appraises their dwelling. Promises to send them money for – scouring powder, yes. She places the basket in the center of the floor. And when our angel leaves – throwing kisses, smiling ethereally – she is so *intoxicated* with the sweet milk of human kindness that her deed has generated within her large bosom, that she is beside herself with generosity (61).

The admiration this section suggests feels almost inappropriate, giving Harding a clear position in the Oedipus complex as the boy who feels sexual affection for his mother. Yet, McMurphy only has to tell him once again that Ratched is in fact “a bitch” (60) before he is swayed and agrees they have to rebel against her. The fear the patients feel towards her fits into the Oedipal theory as well, but as this requires a more elaborate discussion this will be discussed in a separate paragraph. The next relationship to analyse is the one between the patients and McMurphy, the children's feelings for their father. When McMurphy is admitted to the hospital, the other patients have little respect for him because of his strange behaviour. However, he quickly starts shaking things up, betting he can upset Ratched within a week and as he succeeds the other patients are easily swayed as they realise he possesses a kind of power they have never felt since being admitted to the hospital. They start to idolize

McMurphy and see how Ratched has always been unfair in her treatment of them, using methods such as electroshock therapy to maintain her power. When now looking at Freudian theory, this moment is parallel to a little boy's realisation that the male human is superior to females, as well as to the moment when he understands his father's capability to fulfil the mother's desire and his own incapability to do so. From this moment onwards, the patients admire McMurphy and even want to be like him. McMurphy, in his turn, accepts this fatherly position, and takes the lead in the rebellion. However, Ratched does not give up, and soon McMurphy finds he had better give in to her authority, because he will have to remain in the hospital until Ratched dismisses him, and by defying her he will never be allowed to leave. This decision leads to unease in the group of patients, because McMurphy lets them down as a leader. One patient, Cheswick, even commits suicide as a consequence. McMurphy then realises the trust the boys have put in him, and how this means he has full responsibility over them. Despite his declining health as a result of the pressure, he feels obligated to teach them to be independent men. In order to do so, he takes them on a fishing trip and eventually arranges Billy's deflowering. His indifference towards the electroshock therapy he receives after being in a fight with wardens in order to defend another patient only elevates McMurphy's reputation as a courageous, undefeatable man. While Ratched tries to use McMurphy's awful state as a way to scare the other patients, they are unimpressed and encourage McMurphy to escape. However, he still feels he cannot abandon his sons and he chooses to stay to organise one last act of rebellion: the night in which Billy loses his virginity all other patients drink alcohol and smoke weed and as the mess is discovered by wardens in the morning, chaos ensues: Billy commits suicide, McMurphy tries to strangle Ratched, and consequently, McMurphy is given a lobotomy. To an extent though, his rebellion was successful because Ratched has lost her power and the patients go to other wards or even leave the hospital on their own account, meaning the boys can let go and have thus resolved

their Oedipus complex. To really see the connection to the Oedipus complex, the interesting relationship between Ratched and McMurphy must be analysed now. Most evident is their battle for power, both trying to have the upper hand over their sons, trying to defeat each other constantly. The relation between this and the Oedipus complex becomes clear when reminded of the perspective: that of one of the sons. Him seeing this battle between the parents as a child going through the Oedipus complex is realistic, because he would feel the mother craves all the attention, with the father trying to prove his power at the same time.

McMurphy mentions that the men in the hospital are all “victims of a matriarchy” (63) because they as well as the male doctors are suppressed by Ratched. Calling themselves victims suggests a feeling of fear towards women which is confirmed by the fact that they are afraid women may castrate them: McMurphy points out this link when he tries to convince the other patients of Ratched’s cruel intentions, and calls her a “ball-cutter... going for your vitals” (60). Bromden points out that he has felt less of a man since he has entered the hospital, and the patients’ quest for manliness reinforces this idea. As Ratched is the reason behind their suppression, she can indeed be seen as the castrator. This is also referred to when Bromden reveals the story of Rawler, a patient who committed suicide by cutting off his testicles, and Bromden says: “all the guy had to do was wait” (129), meaning the hospital achieves the same thing after a while. Interestingly, McMurphy himself, too, is scared of castration, and when Ratched tells him that after his third electroshock therapy he needs to undergo an operation because the therapy seems to have little effect on him, McMurphy suggestively jokes this operation would be a castration (293). While it is not, the lobotomy does turn him into a vegetable, and is thus merely a different method towards the same goal.

According to Freud, a super-ego is created as the result of a resolved Oedipus complex because the child develops an ideal ego based on the father’s character. There is no doubt that the other patients have a desire to be like their father McMurphy at the end, which means they

have indeed resolved their complex. However, it is not until the very end of the novel that they are truly able to be as courageous or manly as McMurphy was, and they show this by making their independent choices. When looking at the Freudian analysis regarding Bromden and his heritage, it is evident, too, that after he has been able to put the fear of women behind him, he aspires to be like his father, visiting the old tribes to which he belonged.

With *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* Ken Kesey truly reflected the Oedipus complex in its entirety: a boy's desire for his mother developing into a fear for her, and this same boy's disrespect towards the father developing in an admiration and aspiration to be like him. The fact that the characters are adults rather than children, and that there is no natural familiar relationship is what makes this novel unique and worth reflecting on. This suggests that the Oedipus complex transgresses the restrictions of age and relation Freud set for it. This is enhanced by the interpretation of the Oedipus complex using Bromden and his family as a starting point, because this again shows the rules of Freud are bendable. Moreover, Bromden's situation which does not fit into the Western format Freud used shows its flaws or gaps. Nonetheless, although Freud is sometimes mockingly mentioned in the sense that McMurphy does not know who he is (58), there is no indication that Kesey wrote the novel to show Freudian theories are outdated or wrong. I would even say that by applying the theory on a larger scale, Kesey shows its possibilities and relevance in other contexts as well as family. This changes the novel from being about a mental hospital and its patients, to a story representing the world and the relationship between all people.

### Freud in Fiction: A Conclusion

All four novels clearly use Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex in detail, also showing the boundaries and the differences between the genders. However, where I had predicted the female authors would be more hesitant using Freudian theory to define their characters than the male authors, I appear to have been wrong.

In *The Bell Jar* and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, the 'female novels', the protagonists both appear to resist the restrictions a Freudian-oriented society would put upon them. While the characters go through different developments and the novels are resolved in distinctive ways, the overarching message they convey is rather similar. Esther, the main character of *The Bell Jar* wants to defy social constrictions but in the end is able to restore her psyche by conforming to Freudian theory, and in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* Deborah's state is at least in part instigated because she did not comply with her father's expectations which were also fed by Freud. This would thus lead to the conclusion that Sylvia Plath and Joanne Greenberg surely incorporated the doubts society had in terms of the female Oedipal complex. However, *The Bell Jar* can certainly be interpreted with a less feminist undertone, as the fact that Esther can only continue life normally when complying with Freudian ideas can also mean that resisting is no use because Freud's theories are indeed true and there is no escaping.

*Portnoy's Complaint* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* are much more distinguished from one another. In the former, the focus is on the protagonist's exploitation of Freudian theory and therefore him not taking responsibilities for his own actions, showing Freud's ideas have perhaps gotten too big an impact on society, allowing people to use them as excuses for their own behaviour.

In *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, theories are applied in broader situations, highlighting their omnipresence in the world.



All four novels thus deal with the Oedipus complex differently, but all do bring up the social issues surrounding it in 1960s America. The novels by the female authors do indeed highlight some feminist problems of inequality, but by no means did the other two novels blatantly accept Freud's ideas. All authors used the theories as Freud suggested – also regarding the differences between men and women – so in that sense, the theories are accepted and known, but they added criticism. Every author had their own insight, and they all reflected the complex conflict in society, but more so by using characters with contradictory opinions than by distinguishing themselves from one another. While I had thus expected there to be a much bigger difference between male and females in the intensity of criticism – females much more because of the inequality – this is not the case, and the difference is in angle of criticism rather than fervour.

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