

An Analysis of the Narrow Road to the Deep North from the Perspective of Life Instinct and Death Instinct

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Abstract: Freud re-defined Eros as first, it makes the relationship between sex and sexual organs no longer so close. This text attempts to illustrate Dorigo's lifetime's deconstruction of the ill-conditioned civilization for Eros from the perspective of life instinct and death instinct and uncover his nihilism. Freud considers sex as a more extensive physical function, first of all it aims at pleasure and secondly it serves the reproduction. Second, it sees sexual impulses as including all pure feelings and compulsions of affection, that is, those impulses usually referred to by the very ambiguous word 'love'. Under the dominance of pleasure principle, we exerts our life instinct and death instinct to run for Eros, which could never be obtained until we die and break at the end of the disappearing circle demonstrates. The circle is a dynamic and endless circle with contained void which symbolizes life's nihilism as people live to death since we were born.

1. Introduction

Freud Sigmund says that life is derived from the mutual conflict and transformation as well as compromise. The *Narrow Road to the Deep North* tells the story of Australian prisoners being enslaved by the Japanese to build the Thai-Burma railway during World War II. Dorigo, the protagonist, was born in a remote village in Tasmania, Australia and became a surgeon after graduating from university. After the outbreak of World War II, Dorigo was captured and made commander and medical officer of a thousand Australian prisoners in the Japanese war camp. He made every effort to rescue Australian prisoners regardless of his life. Just as Freud said, "The phenomenon of life arises from these two coexisting but contradictory actions, until it is brought back to the end by death" [1]. Under the dominance of pleasure principle, we exerts our life instinct and death instinct to run for Eros [2], which could never be obtained until we die and the break at the end of the disappearing circle demonstrates this. It is a dynamic and endless circle with contained void which symbolizes life's nihilism as people live to death since they were born.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1 Deconstruction of Ill-Conditioned Civilization

"Life Instinct tries to combine more and more living things to form a larger whole" [3]. Before

being civilized, the single being, though fragile, is free and full of Eros. Under the doctrine of happiness, it runs for Eros or so-called happiness, and the civilization emerges. Freud said: “Civilization is a process that serves eroticism. The purpose of eroticism is to first combine everyone, then every family, and then combine each tribe, race, and country into a large unity, a unity of humanity” [2]. Freud re-defined Eros:

First, it makes the relationship between sex and sexual organs no longer so close. He considers sex as a more extensive physical function, first of all it aims at pleasure and secondly it serves the reproduction. Second, it sees sexual impulses as including all pure feelings and compulsions of affection, that is, those impulses usually referred to by the very ambiguous word ‘love’ [3].

2.1.1 Join Army

Eros cannot be obtained unless Dorigo is dead. “When the self-defense mechanism selects external objects as targets, the dead instincts are manifested as desire for destruction, aggression, control, exploitation and anti-authority as well as envy of authority” [4]. Before leaving for army, he has already been something of a fatalist about his destiny. He recited another poem as the long day wanes and the slow moon climbs, which is not too late to seek a newer world. Because of this, Dorrigo signed up the World War II where there is only killing and death, no civilization.

Australian spirit is shrinking under the ill-conditioned civilization. Freud believes that the various atrocities and wars in human history are the result of death instincts pointing to external objects. During World War II, Australia, nominally an independent country, in fact was a remote immigration area, raw material source and commodity market of the United Kingdom. Both World War I and the economic crisis reflected the ill-conditioned civilization of capitalism. Dorrigo’s description of captives’ traits in shows the hatred and separation hidden in this civilization: “They lie and cheat and rob. Nobility often eludes them” [5]. These captives are cheap runners, chancers, larrikins, yobs, tray men, crims and so on who were casted into growing up in shanties, with their old men dead in the Great War and their old women left to struggle to live in sustenance camps or slums in a nineteenth- century world that had slagged into the mid-twentieth century”[5]. Eventually, “their cultural development cannot control their offensive and self-destructive instincts from disrupting their collective lives” [5], World War II erupted and Australia spirit, instead of serving civilization, but seeking liberation through death instinct and fellowship is replaced by hatred and separation. Starvation baffled the Australians. It was lurking in each man’s daily acts and thought. To escape it they had no way but to resort to their Australian wisdom which was not much fuller than their empty bellies.

2.1.2 Rescue POWS

“What on earth comes into your head? Taylor had asked him after Dorrigo once played cards for a prisoner whom Nakamura wanted to punish. My only idea ever, Dorrigo had confessed, is to advance forward and charge the windmill. He takes life as composed by illusions, which could not be possible without our idealistic faith towards it. However, he explained it to himself that if without real time and space, he himself would be impossible and only because of faith that he could live. [4] “He made life up every day, and the more he trusted in his fancy, the more it seemed to work.” After understanding the ill-conditioned civilizations of both sides, Dorrigo went closer to Eros, which Freud referred to as “pure feeling and urge to love” [5], which was not transformed by civilization. There is no choice to do any of this as one existed and lived for the Emperor and also for the railway, which was, in any way, the embodiment of the Emperor’s will, or under this will facing the railway one had no reason to just live or even die because of his own choice” [6]. Nakamura, a tool of system without his own thinking, released his repressed Eros on POWS.

Nakamura's own thoughts are like a jungle unknown and maybe even unknowable to him as he only cared about Japan's honour or the Emperor's future, which is condensed on this railwa. But still he tried to fathom the confusion he felt."

This can be seen in Rooster MacNeice, the incarnation of hatred and separation, who indirectly led to the death of his fellow Darky Gardiner, the incarnation of mateship, and eventually survived. But at the moment when he has something against Gardiner who wa a man once been stolen off him and finally been humiliated by that theft with an intensity and savagery which was far exceeded any ill feeling he had towards the Japanese. But that hate was everything to Rooster MacNeice.

2.2 Re-Deconstruction of Ill-Conditioned Civilization

During his defeat as a captive, death instinct drove Dorigo to rebel against the ill-conditioned civilized system of both sides. Each time he tried his best to rescue the captives, he lifted the civilized system layer by layer and released the bondage of Eros-Their incarnation is the Australian spirit and the affection and understanding of Japanese soldiers.

After seeing the mateship between Australia's partners and the understanding and affection of Japanese soldiers, Dorigo was closer to the essence of civilization on both sides, that is, Eros [5]. He sympathized not only with the captives, but also with Japanese soldiers who were not much different from the captives, because they were both victims of a ill-conditioned civil system and victims of war: "In Java he had come to respect them, as formidable soldiers. But these Japanese soldiers, the wretched of war, was looked as much as the POWs themselves, who were broken, bedraggled and exhausted. Dorigo caught the eyes of one soldier who carried a hurricane lamp. Dorigo Evans felt an overwhelming urge to put his arm around him."

2.2.1 The Shrinking of Australia Spirit

What is similar to Eros on the prisoners of war is the Australian spirit. "It has been a long time since he has thought of women. But he still thinks of her. His world beyond here has shrunk to her. He has conversations with her in his head because he wants to get the idea of wheather he love them because he cannot have her. He understood that the same fearlessness, refusal to accept convention and the same delight in games as well as his same hopelessness to see how far he could push a situation which drove him in the camps to help others, which ist he same as having driven him into the arms of Lynette Maison, the wife of a close colleague [6]. Auld Lang Syne at the POWS concert sang out the Australian mateship and Darky Gardiner is the epitome of this spirit. He tried his best to help Tiny and shared food with him when he was infected with malaria, because he was willing to do everything to keep him alive but more because all those courage, survival, love spirits didn't live in one man but in all of them or with them. They come to realize that to abandon one man was to abandon all of them, including themselves [7].

Therefore, Dorigo carries them and holds them, cutting them into pieces but finally sewing them up. He plays cards with their souls and dares to die to save one more life. He lies, cheats and sometimes robs too, but always for them. For he was going to love them. He gave rare steaks to critically ill patients and tried to amputate Jack Rainbow under conditions of scarce medical supplies.

They tried to hold together with their Australian spirits and their Australian curses, their Australian memories and their Australian brotherhood. But suddenly Australia meant nothing against sleep and hunger and growing slave labour. Australia was shrinking and disappearing, a grain of rice was so much bigger now than a continent. The only things that grew daily larger were the men's battered, drooping hats and emaciated faces and their empty dark eyes.

2.2.2 The Accumulation of Japanese Affection

Japanese Affection and Understanding is also the incarnation of Eros as when the prisoners was having concerts and when he was watching one night. The jungle with a star of fire accompanying the singing men or the 'Waltzing Matilda', which made him sentimental, even sympathetic. Not to feel moved was hard for him.

However, the Japanese Affection and Understanding is repressed due to the ill-conditioned civilization. To Dorigo Evans, Nakamura no longer seemed that strange but much more like a human than an officer, who played cards with him the night before, not the harsh but pragmatic commander he had bartered lives with that morning, but the frightening force that takes hold of everyone, groups, nations, and bends and warps them against their natures and their judgements, and destroys all before it with a fearing fatalism. Driven by death instinct, even if Nakamura saw the partnership that Australia shared with him, he paralyzed it with ephedrine and continued to exert violence and terror on the captives. Because freedom or Eros or so-called happiness didn't arrive and instead greatly depressed by the Emperor's will of Japanese ill-conditioned civilization. He thought that "exactly because he was a good man, who understood his goodness as obedience, reverence and painful duty. He was able to order down this punishment.

Death instinct makes Dorigo feel freedom during his captive days: "He could never admit to himself the truth that it was death that had given his life meaning" [7]. Many years later he realized that it was hard to admit that during the war, though a POW. For three and a half years, he had in some fundamental way been free.

2.3 The Nihilism

"Nihilism" origins from Latin and its verb "nihilize" means the process of destruction to nothing. Nihilism accompanies Dorigo who lives to death. He lived in the world where Eros is repressed, thus being forced to search for the meaning of life or Eros lifetime in another substitute world. However, the meaning of life cannot be gained unless he is died. Therefore, Dorigo holds nihilism towards both worlds or everything.

2.3.1 Void of Real World

The story was told dis-chronically, which implies that Dorigo is incapable of giving meaning to important events in real life. The last words Dorigo said is: "Advance forward, gentleman. Charge the windowsill (windmill)"; Soldiers find it hard to recall the suffering of being a captive. They live and they die, and truth is nothing; the railway, the most persuasive evidence, gradually disintegrate, decayed and then disappeared. It was abandoned, dismantled, pulled up and sold off. It was all for nothing and nothing of it remained. People kept on egering for meaning or hope, but the annals of the past are a muddy telling of chaos or a colossal ruin, boundless and buried. Or the lone and level jungle stretched far away" [8].

2.3.2 Vacuum of Substitute World

War ends, in order to truly gain Eros, Dorigo lingered on the edge of death under the dominance of death instinct. He is eager to push things to the limit to return to the primitive inorganic state. Firstly, he avoided civilization. He in vain tried to keep his "war" going, adding up any opportunities for adversity and intrigue or adventure which presented themselves. Secondly, he rejected the morality advocated by civilization. He did not believe in goodness or virtals as it was uselessly dressed up and waiting for waves of applause. And he had had enough of nobility and worthiness. Lastly, he was wild about drag-racing after drinking. Consequently, he succeed in

returning to the substitute world full of light or Eros when he was dead. In any case, he was hurtling backwards into an ever faster swirling wave of people, things, places, backwards and round, getting deeper into the growing, darkening, dancing storm of past experiences forgotten or half-remembered, faces or gestures misunderstood or a light he had stolen from the sun.

When he was three days in dying, blinding, beautiful light was toddling him back and forth, in and out of its transparent oblivion and into the arms of women. In this moment, he stunned to come to realize it was just the beginning of his life. It seemed that nothing once happened. His mother often said that the world is just the world and his father often said you live and die like a dog and he himself often feels that the life contained within a book were, for him, the most truthful.

3. Conclusion-Death poem

“Death poem” written by the eighteenth-century haiku poet Shisui best explained his nihilism as a contained void [9], an endless mystery length-less breadth. It is a great wheel, eternal return a circle of antithesis of the line. (in Figure 1)



Figure 1: The circle, from Richard Flanagan, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

It is a dynamic and endless circle with contained void which symbolizes life’s nihilism as people live to death since they were born, the abandonment ceded to metamorphosis. Where once death stalked, life returned, it hailed rot and ruin. Finally left was the heat and the clouds after rain with insects and birds and animals being part of nature. Humans are only part of many things and the highest form of living is freedom: “a man to be a man, a cloud to be a cloud, bamboo to be bamboo.” From the perspective of life instinct and death instinct, the text illustrates Dorigo’s lifetime’s deconstruction of the ill-conditioned civilization for Eros and uncover his nihilism towards life. Under the dominance of pleasure principle, we exert our life instinct and death instinct to run for Eros, which could never be obtained until we die and the break at the end of the disappearing circle demonstrates this.

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