



## ***It is very fine thing no doubt, but....let's hope no evil will come out of it, Psychoanalytical Criticism of Anton Chekhov's Short Story A Man Who Lived In the Shell: Procrastinate Belikov***

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Available online at: [www.isca.in](http://www.isca.in), [www.isca.me](http://www.isca.me)

Received 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015, revised 18<sup>th</sup> April 2015, accepted 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015

### **Abstract**

Literature is reflection of life rather it's life itself and it questions what we human beings are. Moreover, we human beings and our life style are constructed by implicit human psychic patterns. Therefore, Psychoanalytical lens of criticism lays way to dive deep into a character's unconscious, portrayed in literature, bringing out ameliorated comprehension of his or her attitude and behavior. Accordingly, this is one of the scientific modes exploited by literary critics to explain, interpret and justify human deeds and actions, in literary works specifically and in real world generally. How does psychology mend and amend man's behavior is pivot point of present paper. Keeping character of Belikov at center, the short story "A MAN WHO LIVED IN THE SHELL", by Anton Chekhov, is analyzed through Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Psychologically disturbed and distorted plus socially bound and bordered Belikov puts a perpetual coat of procrastination and a covering of fear; consequently, renders himself unsocial and disagreeable in society.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalytic, Unconscious, Procrastination, Psyche.

### **Introduction**

**Psychology is what????:** Thoughts and emotions chalk out man's behavior and it is psychology that studies human attitude (what he thinks) and human behavior (how he expresses). Psychology is the study of the mind and behavior. The discipline embraces all aspects of the human experience, from the functions of the brain to the actions of nations, from child development to care for the aged. In every conceivable setting from scientific research centers to mental healthcare services, "the understanding of behavior" is the enterprise of psychologists (American psychological Association) <sup>1</sup>. That's why psychology fits us out with basic tools and framework to judge human sayings and doings.

**Psychoanalytic criticism is what????:** As literature is regarded as manifestation of universal life, so, literary criticism is universally acknowledged gate way to peep deep into human unconscious and hence to probe down the life of human beings in general and the characters in specific. Though the characters incorporated in literary genres are explicitly fancy fictitious ones but implicitly they represent universal and realistic ones and shower their affective impacts on readers and audience. Convincingly it is said, "Art is a conventionally accepted reality in which, thanks to artistic illusion, symbols and substitutes are able to provoke real emotions".

In this respect, Psychoanalytical Criticism is one of the most in use critical lens to analyze literary texts especially the characters

and the conflicts they are in. Moreover, Freudian theory lays scientific basis for psychological studies of literary works.

On psychological and cognitive grounds, Freud partitioned mind into three layers: conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious. These are thought residing bodies<sup>2</sup>. Conscious is at present working, thinking and deciding side of mind. At the spur of time, what one thinks is conscious level of mind, of which he or she is well aware. For example, you are reading this document so whatever is going on in your mind during reading is conscious part of mind.

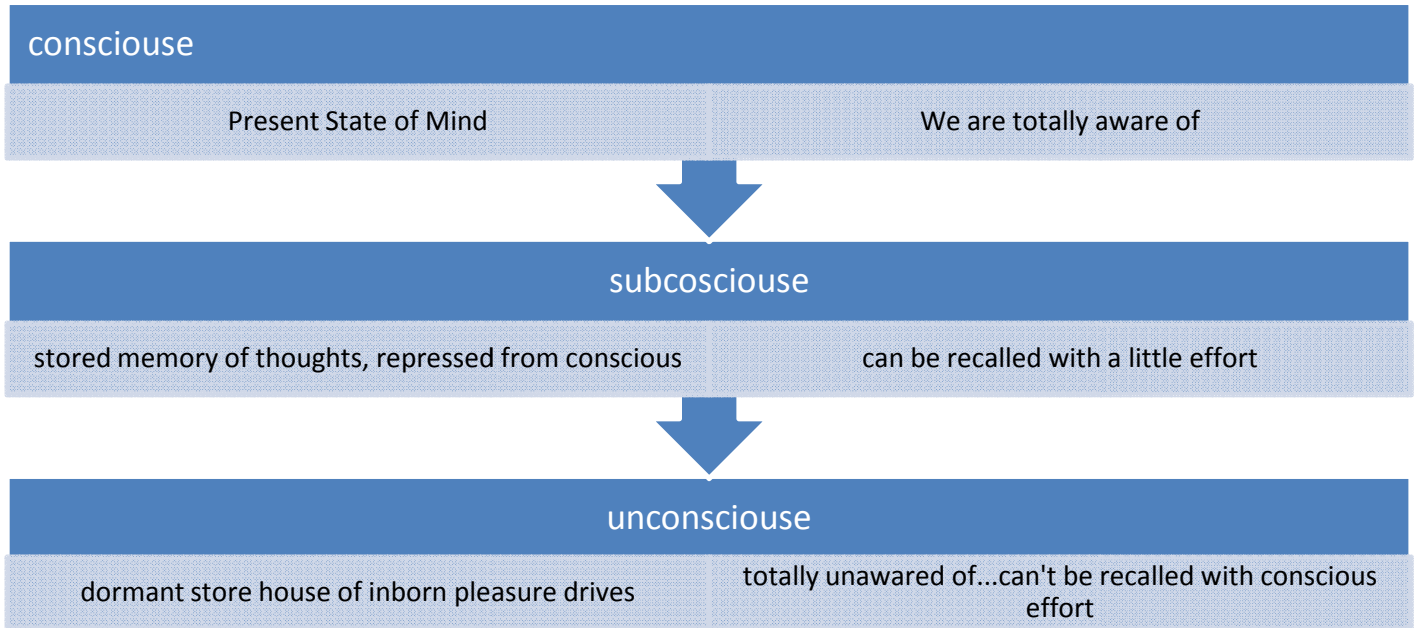
Subconscious is second part, lower than conscious, and works as processor. Thoughts, ideas and feelings that are either suppressed or succeeded by new ones reside in sub-conscious layer.

Unconscious is the largest part, known as store house of repressed feelings, desires and pleasure drives. Dr. Kristi Siegel puts that it is an irrational part of the psyche unavailable to a person's consciousness except through dissociated acts or dreams <sup>3</sup>. In the word of Lois Tyson in his book Critical Theory Today

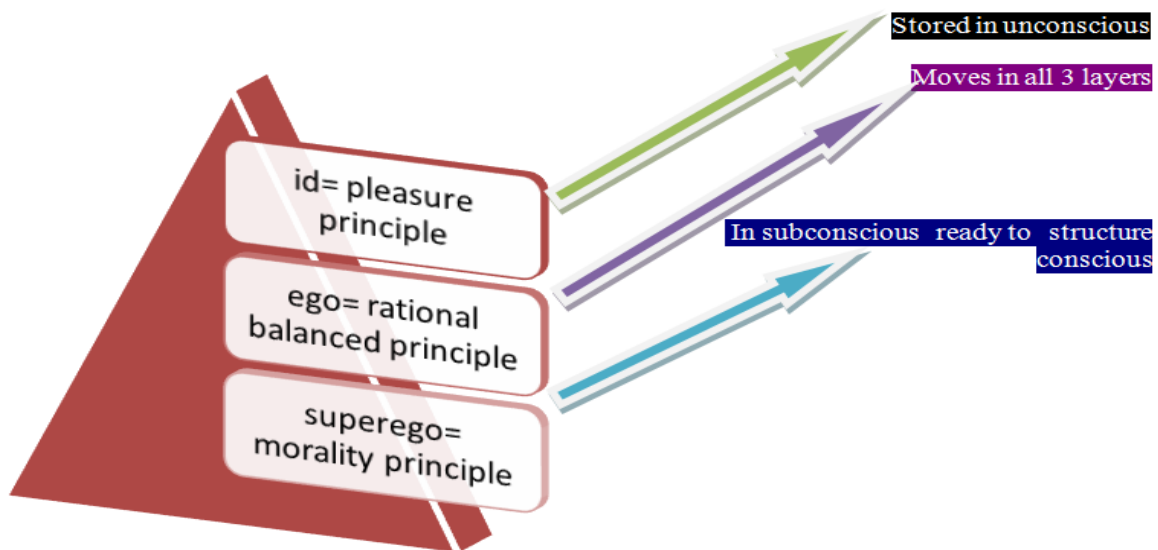
*"The unconscious is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them"*<sup>4</sup>.

This is the structural dissection of mind: layers where thoughts exist and reside. Conscious mind experiences thoughts and feelings and afterwards transfers ignored and less attractive ones, in place of new thoughts and feelings, to sub-conscious. Subconscious mind stores these suppressed feelings for a while and after scrutiny it presses them down to unconscious mind to be buried forever.

Along with structural division of mind, Freud had given theory of personality: constitutional components that structure personality. We can aptly label them as thinking paradigms. Freud divided the psyche into three parts, the id, ego and superego, all developing at different stages in our lives<sup>5</sup>. In Freudian view man's personality is outcome of conflict and rivalry between these psychic components. Freudian model of personality is governed by following three cognitive paradigms.



**Figure-1**  
**Sigmund Freud Tripartite Human Mind Dissection**



**Figure-2**  
**Sigmund Freud Tripartite Partition of Human Psyche**

Id is named as pleasure principle or drive, characterized by stubborn irrational desire to fulfill each aroused feeling, not even considering moral and logical constraints. The id is the oldest and most primitive psychic agency, representing the biological foundations of personality. It is the reservoir of basic instinctual drives, particularly sexual drives, which motivate the organism to seek pleasure<sup>6</sup>. Id can be impressively compared to a child behavior: what does a child do? He/she does what fits well to them for pleasure, void of moral and rational regards. The id is the impulsive part of our psyche which responds directly and immediately to the instincts. The personality of the newborn child is all id and only later does it develop an ego and super-ego<sup>5</sup>. Freud called the predominantly passionate, irrational, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche the *id*, or "it."<sup>7</sup>. In Freudian theory id is regarded as inborn set of feeling, mostly negative, driven by pleasure drives. During personality development, as soon as child finds id negative and morally and socially banned, he or she suppresses them in unconscious level of mind. Sometimes in puberty, these repressed and suppressed feelings bounce strongly back to conscious level and render man a sexual pleasure seeking animal.

On the other hand, superego is morally and ethically constructed paradigm and approach of thinking. It is really a projection of the ego. The superego almost seems to be outside of the self, making moral judgments, telling us to make sacrifices for good causes even though self-sacrifice may not be quite logical or rational. And, in a sense, the superego *is* "outside," since much of what it tells us to do or think we have learned from our parents, our schools, or our religious institutions<sup>7</sup>. Concept of societal fear and moral punishment is its characteristic constructive component. Superego always judges things on moral grounds, out casting id pleasures and even objective reality. It resides in subconscious part and jumps abruptly into conscious when we have to take decision. Either extreme is exploded; a man underpowered by uncompromising superego sometimes fits nowhere in real life.

In contrast to the two extreme, ego is at mean. The ego, or "I," was coined by Freud for the predominantly rational, logical, orderly, conscious part<sup>7</sup>. It works as referee to moderate id and superego. Ego equilibrates pleasure drives of id and morality drives of superego and recommends for the best option available on logical and pragmatic solution. Ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id<sup>8</sup>. The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions<sup>8</sup>. The ego manages the demands of 1 the libido and id, external reality, and super-ego to ensure a balance psychical personality<sup>9</sup>. The ego is '*like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse*'<sup>10</sup>. It's apt to term ego as the busiest psychical section of human mind. The poor ego has a still harder time of it; it has to serve three harsh masters, and it has to do its best to reconcile the claims and demands of all three...The three tyrants are the external world, the superego, and the id<sup>10</sup>.

A normal balanced person is led by ego and characterized by extrovert personality while in either case of id or superego domination over man's thinking, personality distorts. Id driven man is bestial in nature while superego dictated person is mechanical and damn introvert and it is ego that works as mediator and negotiator, ensuring balance personality. As in the words of Freud "One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotor energy and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it"<sup>10</sup>.

**Man lies where????:** Animal lacks reason; machine wants emotions; a man is a balanced amalgam of the both. An emotion driven man is the worst barbarous untamed horse; quite contrary, a man, absolutely void of emotions and overpowered by mechanical logicity, is out of living human race and fits better with machines. What differentiates and emancipates man from animals and machines is balanced personality. He neither is animal to die with food and sex nor is he machine to be put aside in any corner of room for emotionally evacuated logical calculations rather man is, in the words of Aristotle, a social animal: an alloy of reason and emotion. Extremes are damn doomed to explode. The very truth is unearthed by Jonathan Swift in his world's famous satirical work "Gulliver Travels" and his terminology "yahoo", a symbolic representation of bestial side of man, and Houyhnhnm, an embodiment of staunch stoic logicity and rationality, is a crystal clear witness upon the idea that both yahoos and Houyhnhnm are at extremes, contrary to that, human beings are at mean. Robert Frost is aptly quotable here when he says literature that is representation of life is marriage of thought and emotion.

**This short story is about????:** "*A Man Who Lived In The Shell*" is a frame story by Anton Chekhov, dealing with an introvert person Belikov: a conservative teacher overpowered by societal pressures. Frame narrator sets the background of story in which two characters, Ivan Ivaski and Belkin, sitting in pastoral farm, spent time by relating Belikov's story. In Ivan's narration, Belikov is a man of lazy, afraid and disturbed personality who seeks negativity in everything. Skeptic in approach and strict in action, Belikov lives alienated and isolated, criticizing novel radical modernism, setting curfew over student's freedom and having seldom silence visits to friends. Quite surprisingly, this self centered person happens to be in love with a young lady: sister of new school teacher and colleague of Belikov. In spite of emotional attachment with her, he doesn't marry her because a cold wave of fears and responsibilities of marital life sweeps through him, rendering him in insane state of indecisiveness. Having humiliated by the brother and humored by the sister, his life ends with heavy heart. In the end of story, Ivan Ivaski and Belkin admit that in modern world everyone is in fix; in one or another shell that is death of individuality and self.

**Writer is who????:** Anton Chekhov, a Russian physician, renowned short story author and playwright (1860-1904) is the

writer of given short story. He was professionally a doctor but originally and implicitly he was a high profile literary figure. He himself proclaims this thing as

*“Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress.”* (Letter to Alexei Suvorin, 11 September 1888)<sup>11</sup>. Throughout his life he confronted deprivations and want of freedom and individuality. His thorough life was nothing more than shell. He experienced life, all and all, in shell; starting from strangled serf grandfather followed by the hitler reign of stoic strict and religious fantasist father. That’s why his literary works are abundant with such autobiographical touches.

**Analysis of Belikov: In Light of Freudian Theory:** *“A Man Who Lived In The Shell”* is a biographical account of Belikov: a middle aged bachelor school teacher in possession of peculiar odd behavior. His introvert personality and courier life style is governed and underpinned by his baffled psyche. Whatsoever he says and whatsoever he does is actually an explicit dramatization of what he thinks implicitly. From title to structure and from character of Belikov to that of Belkin, the underlined accented universal theme remains one and the same: how societal pressures make man retrieve back into individual solitary shell, afraid of others and indifferent to society.

**Structure of story:** From the very onset of story, the title *“A MAN WHO LIVED IN THE SHELL”* foreshadows the idea that it’s going to be a story of a psychologically shrunk and socially enfolded person. Frame structure of the story also lays out the same idea of societal pressures, dictating individual’s self freedom and as result making individuals drag their heels back to confounded shell. The dark and gloomy atmosphere of the story suggests barren bleak and dismal dreary life style of modern man. Such pessimistic commencement sustains round the story and anatomizes cracks of hopeless helpless modern man.

**Setting:** The setting of the story is in a village where two sports men are spending their night in a **shed**. The very idea of shed again forecasts unconsciously the major focus of the story that why a man does tries to find covering for him.

*“The sports men, overtaken by drunkenness on the outskirts of the village Mironositskoye , decide to spend night in a shed.....”*

**Costume:** As for as the costume of Belikov is concerned, he wears thick jersey, wadded coat and galoshes even when the weather is in its best mood. He puts on dark glasses and is never anywhere without an umbrella. Actually, it shows how Belikov yearns to keep hiding his Shadows by maintaining his Persona.

*“He was famous for not stirring out his house...even in the best weather, without an umbrella, galoshes, and a wadded coat.”*  
*“...made his driver put up hood.”*

**Case:** Belikov keeps his everything in a sort of case which shows an implicit action on his part to maintain his Persona in front of

psychologically dictating society and conceal dark Shadows of his unconscious desires, wishes, yearnings and longings. It occurs to him as his Super Ego dominates his Id and Ego; hence it distorts his Ego balance; consequently, he begins to behave in a strange way.

*“ Belikov tried to keep his thought in a case”*

*“...case of grey for his watch.”*

*“Umbrella he kept in a case”*

*“...pen knife in a case.”*

*“...his face seemed to have a case of its own.”*

*“...typically a mind encased.”*

**Bedroom:** Bedroom of Belikov is mirror image of his personality. By dint of his recluse nature and over dominance of his Super Ego, he had self imposed restriction over himself.

*“Belikov’s tiny bedroom was like a box, there was a canopy over the bed.”*

*“...he always drew bed cloth over his head”*

**Victim of social Pressure:** Belikov becomes a prey to the social pressures by virtue of the overwhelming influence of his Super Ego and being over conscious of outer world and it’s so called decorum. He always utters the following words: *“It is very fine thing no doubt, but...let’s hope no evil will come out of it”*

*“Deviation from rules always made him dejected”*

*“...never kept a female servant due to fear of social notion”*

**Belikov, in views of others:** Although he had a great sense of his moral responsibility due to ascendancy of his Super Ego but people felt a sort of tediousness in his company and had a kind of trepidation from his ethical ideology. Brother of Varya calls him a snake and Vampire- Spider who loves to spend his life in his own hole or web made by him. He is an introvert and tries to maintain his Persona of socially responsible person.

*“...old habit of visiting friends in home and saying nothing.”*

*“Clergy and women were afraid of him.”*

*“...they bore with him.”*

**Belikov’s Procrastination:** Another psychological trauma Belikov is suffering from is Procrastination down to his Introvert personality and his over powering ethical sense as for as his marriage with Varya is concerned.

*“...the decision to marry seemed to have painful effect on him.”*

*“...marriage is a serious step one ought to weigh one’s future duties and responsibilities.”*

*“He put off proposing her”.*

**Death of Belikov:** When Belikov dies and he is in his coffin his looks are calm and complacent which is the very proof of his love for his Shell.

*“When he was in his coffin box after death he looks very cheerful to find a permanent case for himself.”*

Death of his self and Ego was his destination which he is able to attain at the end.

## Discussion

Man is an amalgam of passions, feelings, reason, intuition and imagination and he is highly unpredictable creature in the world. But Psychological Theories help us to understand the working of human mind which is the center of the all above said things. Belikov is a personality who is Introvert and reclusive by temperament. As far as the working of his mind is concerned, his Super Ego overpowers his Id and his Ego is powerless to uphold balance in both segments of his mind and hence his Ego gets disturbed and he has to put on a Persona to hide his Shadows by wearing a garb and cloak of moral responsibility. By reason of that, his overmastering passion of his moral responsibilities infatuates him and he begins to behave in socially unacceptable way by trying to propagate his moral philosophy. He minutely observes the public morals and tries to put a check on them if they are not moral according to him. So people develop a sort of disliking for him due to his reclusive nature and moral philosophy. Adding oil to fire, more bitter is the fact that it's not a single case: human history testifies existence of such reclusive introvert persons round the ages and spaces. Chekov himself in the story writes about such people: "There are plenty of people in this world who are reclusive by nature and strive like hermit-crab or the snail, to retreat within their shell."

Writer also says: "There are plenty of men who are like Belikov and like to live in shell". They will keep coming on the face of earth according to Chekov.

Literature that is an expression of human existence that deals with human beings destined to live on this planet earth: impressively, examining each aspect of human life. As life is a continuous confrontation of one's soul and self with outer world, society and divinity, literature being a reflection of life puts these self-outer world conflicts down, round the literary clock. Therefore, Belikov, neither in real life nor in literature, is some endangered or extinct species; contrarily, it's ever existing category of human beings. Consequently, looking back at literary works (from past to present), replete us with such archetypal examples upheld by literary figures, in the form of Shakespearian Hamlet: famous for his procrastinate nature (*To be or not to be...*), Eliot's Prufrock, delaying things to their bottom.

## Conclusion

Thanks to Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis, we are capable to understand the implicit and unconscious stimuli behind human actions and behavior. We are proficient to judge Personae, different men dress in the society and the dark Shadows of working of their unconscious. We are competent to comprehend Introvert and Extrovert people. The story bestows a message that

man should try to have equilibrium between his Id and Super Ego so that he may be able to enjoy his real life.

In nutshell, it's Freudian given insight that human beings are the most sensitive creature of the world, demanding in-depth scrutiny and psychological care. Now, this idea of Freud is held high that only way to keep human psyche intact is to channelize human emotions; suppression of emotions doesn't mean uprooting them completely, rather it's an enforced delay in their execution. Therefore, one thing is crystal clear, the more you suppress your emotions the more they bounce back and sometimes this bouncing back of reserved emotions is so strong to dominate conscious mind and cause inhumane actions done on the part of psychologically suffered person. But more important is the way and the channel of execution; expressing emotions doesn't mean volatile let out of Id, rather it is proper channelization of emotions at Ego level, ensuring the social and religious ethical regards intact. This is the essence of being human beings: combination of emotions and reasons; reason channelizing properly harmless execution of emotions, in favor of both individual and society.

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