

A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Problematic Nature of Desire in Charles Dance's 'Ladies in Lavender'

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Abstract: *The paper attempts to provide a reading of Charles Dance's Ladies in Lavender by opening the realms of unconscious motives, emotional disturbance, and repressed feelings through psychoanalysis. Instead of moving on to a consideration of film as a representation of fantasy, this paper unmasks the psychology of sexually repressed elderly virgin spinster Ursula who picturing herself in love for the first time by the arrival of mysterious young Pole Andrea. This problematic incestuous desire of an old woman towards a young man finds an explanation in Raymond de Saussure's premises of the Jocasta Complex.*

Key Words: *Repressed Emotions, Sexual Desires, Unconscious Motives, Jocasta Complex.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Psychoanalytic concepts are not just limited to one medium. Any human production involving narration, production of images can be analysed and interpreted using psychoanalysis. This criticism is based upon the assumption that sexuality is the basic constituent element in the construction of the subject. Sigmund Freud's foundation of psychoanalysis is rooted in the idea that humans have unconscious longings that must be analysed to understand behaviour. Most of the individual's mental processes are unconscious is thus Freud's first major premise. The second (which has been rejected by a great many professional psychologists, including some of Freud's disciples-for example, Carl Gustav Jung and Alfred Adler) is that all human behaviour is motivated ultimately by sexuality. Freud's prime psychic is that because of the powerful social taboos attached to certain sexual impulses, many of our desires and memories are repressed (that is, actively excluded from conscious awareness). Freud's redefinition of sexuality based on infantile forms culminated in the formulation of the Oedipus complex as the central tenet of psychoanalytical theory. In psychoanalysis, the Jocasta complex is the incestuous sexual desire of a mother towards her son, which is intensified by latent desire and the creation of an adoration cult of the son. Raymond de Saussure introduced the term in 1920 as an analogy to the Oedipus complex, and it may be used to cover different degrees of attachment.

2. THE OLD LADY WITH AN APPLE:

Set in the 1930s, the film delicately portraits the old lady's desiring heart. The story follows two elderly sisters, Janet and Ursula, living together in a cottage by the sea in Cornwall. Their lives are altered when a mysterious young Pole Andrea washes up on the beach near their home. Janet, who lost her husband in World War I, has experienced true love, but in the case of unmarried Ursula, there sprouts a romantic fixation on Andrea. The delicate kernel of the story follows Ursula's increasingly besotted state and her embarrassment as Andrea recovers and casts his eyes elsewhere. When the film begins, both these sisters were contented with each other and had little jealousy until they encounter a young, handsome male species.

After a storm, Ursula spies a figure on the beach below their home. Both the sisters went down to find the unconscious man. The practical Janet who found out that the man is still alive instructed her sister to bring a stretcher, some brandy, and also to call the local Dr.Mead (David Wariner), whereas Ursula seemed to be stuck by the handsome youth and stood simply gazing at him. "He is alive. The tide is low enough for you to get around the point. See if you can find Pendered..... and Luke. Get them to bring a stretcher. And ask Mrs.Pendered for some brandy. Go on! He is barely alive! And send Joe Gallow on his bike to find Dr.Mead" (*Ladies in Lavender*).

The sisters were generous enough to provide him a bedroom and medical assistance. Dr. Mead, who diagnosed a broken ankle as the young man's most serious injury, has prescribed extensive bed rest as the key to recovery. Everybody left the room without being a disturbance for wearisome man except Ursula who preferred to stay back and sat there gazing at the handsome youth.

It seems that Ursula is awestricken by the beauty of the young man. She behaved as if she encounters a handsome man for the first time. When she left alone in the bedchamber, now and then she glanced at the sleeper, longing, in a most feminine manner. It suggests that she harbours – deeply repressed – a romantic, passionate nature that has never found expression in the real world.

Through psychoanalysis, Freud uncovers sexual repression. Freud has stated that repression is the centre to which all the other elements of psychoanalytic thinking are related. Chris Clause in his article on "Freud Repression: Definition, Lesson & Quiz" defines repression as:

Repression refers to the ego's efforts to subconsciously keep anxious thoughts and impulses out of consciousness and maintain them in the subconscious mind, where they can be buried and hidden. By repressing certain thoughts and impulses, the Ego is attempting to protect us from the harsh reality of their existence. The unconscious was both a cause and effect of the repression. Three conditions lead to a return of the repressed into consciousness. When the counter-cathexis holding it down weakens; when the drives below it get stronger; or when recent events similar in theme to what's repressed reawaken it; in all three cases the repressed shows up in the very method used for repression. (6)

According to the theory, defence mechanisms are used by the ego to protect the person from anxiety. Repressed information that is pushed down into the unconscious is either unpleasant or undesirable and may cause anxiety. This repressed information is pushed deep down into the unconscious that which becomes hard to restore. Reaction formation is the replacement of feelings by the extreme opposite due to anxiety. For example, the feeling of hatred will be replaced by love. Undoing is when the ego wholly changes actions and thus resulting in anxiety. There is a high chance that the truth may be drastically distorted in this mechanism.

In the case of Ursula, she has repressed her erotic desires and passions deep in her unconscious. Andrea's presence draws buried feelings-long-repressed yearnings for romance, to the surface for Ursula.

Janet is seemed to be busy with a grammar book while Ursula was upstairs, and swathed him in one of the old nightgowns. She communicated with him and realized that he is of Polish origin. When Janet realized his Polish descent, she makes a conversation with him in Polish and learned that his name is Andrea Markowski (Daniel Bruhl) Ursula started showing something more. She dropped a flower onto his food tray. When Janet dug up weeds in the garden, Ursula secretly wrote notes at a desk inside. When Janet came back, she quickly hid the notes and started knitting as if she has been doing it for the last few hours. Ursula later pinned those notes to various objects in Andrea's room to teach him English. In contrast, Janet only responded that Ursula's English lesson was "making holes in the furniture" (*Ladies in Lavender*).

The efforts and strain that Ursula is taking to teach Andrea English are only to earn his special affection. Thus she can access his heart and become his beloved.

The role of the mind is something that Freud repeatedly points out because it is the mind that is responsible for both conscious and unconscious decisions based on drives and forces.

It is Ursula's unconscious desires that motivate her to act accordingly. Ursula has a childlike quality and doesn't know what she feels for Andrea. Is it her love of beauty? Or is it the love of a woman for a little child, or the love of a woman for a handsome man? She is unaware of the emotional changes happening to her, except that she has gone through an entire life without love. Ursula is a woman who has never been in love with anyone. As far as Ursula is concerned, Andrea is the first man she encounters in her life. She sees him as a fulfilment of repressed emotions. She feels long yearned emotional bonding to this little boy and the fluttering in her chest is just exciting to her. All her deep feelings of tenderness, warmth, longing, and erotic passions are finding a way through her over concern and love for Andrea. The most poignant side-line is the love that Ursula starts to feel for this young man and, though he is in his 20's and she is in her 70's who could be his grandmother. We find that Ursula is becoming like Jocasta.

The innocent rivalry of the two ladies began to definite form. Practical Janet points that Andrea will need new outfits and that she will use her savings to outfit him. Ursula's impassioned response is revelatory, but she did not say that she was knitting him socks in secret.

Janet: "I think Andrea needs some outfits when he starts walking"

Ursula: "Yes, I know"

Janet: "I thought I could get him new outfits with the money Aunt Elizabeth left me".

Ursula: "Why?"

Janet: "What do you mean, "Why"?"

Ursula: "Why not use our joint account?"

Janet: "What?"

Ursula: "We are both responsible for him. **But I saw him first**".

Janet: "Oh, don't be ridiculous. Very well. We will use the joint account". (*Ladies in Lavender*)

Meanwhile, Ursula hangs around Andrea, paying extra attention to his needs and discontented whenever her sister gets to him first. When Janet helped him with doing his shaving, Ursula accuses her of being insensitive.

Janet: "It hasn't let up for a minute. I said –"
Ursula: "I heard you. I think you should apologize."
Janet: "What for?"
Ursula: "For snapping at me."
Janet: "Right. I'm sorry."
Ursula: "I'd call that perfunctory."
Janet: "Ursula."
Ursula: "You can be so insensitive."
Janet: "On the contrary."
Ursula: "Thank you"
Janet: "Don't you think you're behaving rather oddly?"
Ursula: "Janet, you've apologized. I've accepted your apology. Just leave it that, please". (*Ladies in Lavender*)

Freud opines in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* as:

“You might take it as an instance of male injustice if I assert that envy and jealousy play an even greater part in the mental life of women than that of men. It is not that I think these characteristics are absent in men or that I think they have no other roots in women than envy for the penis, but I am inclined to attribute their greater amount in women to this latter influence”. (5)

Janet also falls for Andrea, but it is a kind of maternal love she possesses for him. The love of Ursula could also be taken as akin to the general attachment of a mother to her son who becomes eroticized. Ursula starts to develop a kind of Jocasta Complex towards Andrea. Ursula cannot accept when Janet receives Andrea's special affection. She became possessive of Andrea and cannot accept any other woman is becoming close to him.

Freud has ignored the desires of women, especially mothers and has only interpreted the Oedipus complex and oedipal longings from the point of view of the infant male. Olivier (1989) opined that we can consider Jocasta as the eternal myth of the woman just as Oedipus is thought of as the eternal myth of the man. The Jocasta complex is a variation of the oedipal theme which mainly operates between mother and son. The emotional relationship of a mother to her son is normally the same as that of a natural mother to his natural son, and therefore an emotional Jocasta situation exists between them even in absence of a blood relationship. The blood bond between parent and offspring has long been considered the primary and most significant bond that a person may have. But it is just the factor of the absence of blood relationship which increases the danger of a break-through of unconscious incestuous tendencies.

Ursula is not at all his birth-mother. There is no kind of blood relationship between Ursula and Andrea. This factor also adds to the development of the Jocasta Complex in Ursula.

Andrea's interest in music astonished the sisters: "he does like music, he just prefers the violin" (*Ladies in Lavender*). When Andrea expressed an interest in the violin, Ursula suggested inviting Adam Penruddocke, a fisherman, to come to play his fiddle for Andrea. He takes the violin from Penruddocke and plays the tune to the astonishment of Penruddocke and the sisters. There was a mystified silence when Andrea had finished playing. The sisters seemed to be mesmerized by Andrea's performance, especially Ursula. However, the unexpected intervention of a beautiful painter, Olga, kills the blissful moment of the sisters.

Olga: "Bravo! Encore! Encore! Forgive me. I simply couldn't help responding to such marvellous playing. Was it you?"
Janet: "It was neither of us."
Olga: "Well, whoever it is, is extremely gifted."
Janet: "Yes, They are. Now if you'll excuse us." (*Ladies in Lavender*)

The mothers who suffer from a Jocasta complex are over-indulgent to their adopted sons to an excessive degree desirous of possessing them completely for themselves. These mothers are very selfish and limit the son's social life. These overbearing matriarchs are not ready to step aside Andrea for a young chit of a thing. These mothers are very much frightened that any interaction with a girl may cause the complete loss of their son. They want him to be close to them and no other woman.

The cold response of the sisters to Olga's comment is because they considered her as a threat from outside, who may be able to take him away. That's what drives them to restrict Olga at the very first intervention.

The next scene visualizes the most impediment of much more infatuation of Ursula. Ursula and Andrea walked down the shore enjoying the scenic beauty. They took their seat on a rock where Andrea laid his head in her

lap. After lifting her wrinkly hand to her beating heart she lowered it toward Andrea's head, barely daring to graze his hair.

As Freud points out in *The Question of Lay Analysis*: "the sexual feelings in an adult woman is a "dark continent" for psychology" (10). Jocasta Complex itself concerns a very complicated desire. 'Sexual feelings' were confusing feelings: they began as maternal feelings, but were later experienced as 'more like being with a lover than a baby'. They arose in the context of prolonged time spent alone with their sons. The mother who suffers from Jocasta Complex attempts to replicate the conditions under which mother-infant bonding occurs. Intra-psychoic and interpersonal factors were relevant to both the genesis and outcome of these feelings. The danger of the Jocasta complex is increased if the marital relationship is not a pleasant one. There is either no husband or a passive one.

In the case of Ursula, she is a spinster. No man has ever entered her life. This resulted in the development of intoxicating sexual desires towards Andrea. Ursula wanted to spend all her time with Andrea. She went with Andrea to the beach where he seeks mothering comfort.

Andrea was playing for Janet and Ursula as they sit in their sunny garden and the dainty remains of tea on the table. Janet was enjoying the music, while Ursula is looking up at Andrea in the glare sun. Again Olga "just happens" to be passing by.

Olga: "Hello again. My name is Olga."

Janet: "How do you do?"

Olga: "Good Afternoon. We met the other evening at the village hall. Forgive me. I had to stop listening to that music. You have such a beautiful garden".

Janet: "Thank you." (*Ladies in Lavender*)

Before taking departure, Olga, uninvited, takes a bit of cake from the tea table, and murmurs "delicious". Both sisters again have a very chilled reception. Later the sisters receive a letter from Olga asking to meet Andrea, explaining that her brother, Boris Danilof, a world-famous violinist, would love to hear their talented guest. While they were reading, Andrea came in unexpectedly. The ladies somehow manage to hide it. They withhold the letter's contents from their guest. Janet later burnt the letter.

It is obvious that both the sisters hate her. Olga's forwardness, combined with her fluent German, proves a threat to the ladies. The sisters feel intense jealousy for Olga because she is beautiful enough to attract Andrea and take him away from them. The sisters become possessive of the handsome young man and do not want him to have any kind of relationship with that interloper. For them, it is their paradise where Andrea is the core to which they live. They don't want any outsider to enter into their harmonized living space. The presence of Olga is always been a threat to Ursula. She is frightened so much that she considers Olga to be a witch who may take away Andrea.

At night she dreamed that a younger version of her is rolling around in a field of wheat, captured in Andrea's embrace. Immediately before she wakes, however, the face of the embraced dream-woman becomes that of Olga.

Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* declared that:

Dreams "are not meaningless, they are not absurd; they do not imply that one portion of our store of ideas is asleep while another portion is beginning to wake. On the contrary, they are psychical phenomena of complete validity - fulfilments of wishes [my emphasis J.J.]." Dreams, therefore, require integration into the range of intelligible waking mental acts; "they are constructed by a highly complicated activity of the mind" (and "a dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish". (5)

Ursula found herself if becoming sexually attracted to Andrea. She wanted him to herself. She fell in a heap, thinking of him. Make-believe and dream. The problem was that the loving feelings got somehow mixed up with sexual feelings. Incestuous tendencies are usually not overtly present but are enclosed deep in the mind.

Andrea met with Olga at the beach. She invited Andrea for lunch. She told Andrea that his brother is Boris Danilof, the world-famous violinist. She also told him that she has sent a letter to the sisters regarding introducing Andrea to her brother. . He was surprised to know that they have not told Andrea about the letter. The scene ends with Andrea agreed to make many more visits to Olga's cottage so that she could paint him while he was playing his violin. After that, he came back to the sisters where he dined with them. He behaved very strangely that upset them especially Ursula. She visited his room at late night but was withdrawn by her sister. But Andrea hasn't slept yet. The next morning was not at all a pleasant one for Ursula. Janet is fond of Andrea but alarmed by her sister's feelings for him.

Janet: "What do you think you were doing last night? Ursula"

Ursula: "I don't know. You were happy with Peter. Weren't you? It wasn't all pain?"

Janet: "Why, no, but..."

Ursula: "Before he was killed you..."

Janet: "**Ursula...Andrea's a boy**"

Ursula: "**Yes, and I'm an old woman...** Silly and ridiculous and...foolish".

Janet: "Naïve."

Ursula: "Well, How could I be anything else? It's not fair."

Janet: "No. No, it isn't."

Ursula: "Do you want him to go."

Janet: "What"

Ursula: "Andrea. Do you want him to leave?"

Janet: "No, but."

Ursula: "I'll be all right, Janet." (*Ladies in Lavender*)

In the case of Jocasta Complex maternal love, the desire to bond, and sexuality were confused. They were meeting a man, not the baby. Erotic sentiments became confused with maternal feelings. The feelings of love, closeness, and joy were intoxicating and addictive. The more painful and shameful feelings were obscured. The danger was of the mother becoming like Jocasta, the son like Oedipus: physically a grown man with his mother, but emotionally still a child with mummy.

Andrea again visits Olga but was unexpectedly got out by her. He came back home angrily, went straight to his room, without bothering the sisters who were waiting for him for the lunch. Ursula went after him to his room where Andrea shouts back at her: "what do you think....Boris DanilofWhy you no tell me?" Janet ran in, "because she didn't know" (*Ladies in Lavender*). Ursula ran out weepingly. Later Andrea apologizes to her.

In the next scene Janet cuts Andrea's hair, Ursula stands nearby, looking at them. Janet and Andrea proceeded forward after cutting, while Ursula restrained for a moment, took a small piece of Andrea's hair from the ground, and followed them.

All the love that she has for him is bottling up. She became increasingly attached to him and her heart just leaps when she sees him. Ursula, who has never really been in love before, is smitten and fusses over her charge like a giddy schoolgirl. She keeps Andrea's hair as a token of remembrance.

Andrea again met Olga at the pub. She asked Andrea to come to her cottage. She has something very important to tell him. Andrea went there, Olga tells him that they should set off for London immediately because her brother wanted to meet him. Andrea protest that he could not come without bid the sisters' goodbye. There is no time and she convinces Andrea to write a letter explaining everything. They left the Cornish Coast forever.

Ursula who was awaiting Andrea with special food items broke into tears when she realized that Andrea has gone. She is depressed very much that she found comfort in Andrea's empty room. She was seen curling up totally upon his bed.

Freud believes humans are driven by the pleasure principle, where sexual desires and aggressive behaviour are controlled by the reality principle, the so-called restrictions we follow to conform to proper behaviour. Consequently, our drive for unbridled pleasure is repressed by the reality principle and becomes sublimated or buried in the unconscious.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud points out that: "The goal towards which the pleasure principle impels-us-of becoming happy-is not attainable: yet we may not – nay, cannot – give up the effort to come nearer to realization of it by some means of other" (43).

Ursula who goes after unattainable pleasure ends up with a final loss. Ursula's buried repressed desires got activated by the arrival of Andrea. Andrea's presence reminded her of the kind of physical love she will never know. Ursula found it difficult to think of Andrea as an adult and separate, with his own lives, identities, and aspirations. She acts on a don't leave me attitude to keep him tied down, because she was bathing in a vision of beauty and desire. For Andrea, the time has come to make use of his life saved by the sisters. However, Ursula's repressed desire which has given expression through the problematic relationship with Andrea ended with an inevitable separation.

To summarize Freudian theory so far, the human mind is structured around the id-ego-superego triad that represents the tension between the pleasure and the reality principle; the ego is the moderator between pleasure and reality. The ego balances the id and superego by repressing those id desires that are not socially acceptable-which includes the desire for the son-into the unconscious.

The film ends on a happy note. After a few days there came a letter from London. Andrea apologized and also requested to listen to his concert. However, the sisters travel to London to attend Andrea's first public performance, while the rest of the village listens in on the wireless. They congratulated Andrea. Andrea is surprised to saw them. They returned and back to their normal life.

3. CONCLUSION:

Ladies in Lavender provides a telling portrait of a provincial world, heaven containing its seeds of a problematic desire. But it's also a tale about youth and aging, the sisters' circumstances; Ursula's, in particular, provides an affecting emotional fulcrum. It also provides an insight into an uneventful life and the problem of desire in old age. According to Sigmund Freud ", repressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in second childhood" (Freud, 657). It is often seen in the people who lead an introverted life, repress their emotions. Janet is the dominant personality. She is more level-headed and pragmatic while Ursula is a quieter, more passive one. She stayed at home with her parent until their death. She seems to be overly sensitive and borderline childlike. Ursula always depends on her sister in all subjects. Janet runs the home, drives the car, and takes decisions on matters. Ursula falls behind her sister and never takes an active role and thus finally ends up repressing much of her desires. All her repressed emotions are later pushed down into the unconscious. These repressed emotions may be either problematic or undesirable and may cause anxiety. These blocked desires may wind up projecting themselves to the conscious at the wrong time and place. In the case of Ursula, these repressed feelings begin to identify with Andrea. This resulted in intense adoration, which converts into blind worship of Andrea. Ursula demands the permanent presence of a son and starts an insatiable desire for constant physical contact expressing incestuous love.

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