

## **Enigma of the Trinity and the Three Deadly Sisters**

This paper seeks to explain why certain numbers recur in text after text. In religious texts number three is used to describe the Godhead in both Christianity and Hinduism and also to indicate divine purpose. Is it just by chance that a writer has chosen a particular number? The repeated reference to three sisters invites scrutiny - the three fates in Greek mythology – Clotho, Atropos and Lachesis, the three caskets in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice, the three witches in Macbeth and the three daughters in King Lear provide only an indication. Children’s stories and folktales abound in the use of number three. Cinderella had two step sisters. Psychoanalysis provides an interesting explanation to all this.

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Numerology seems to have found its beginnings with Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher and mathematician, born in 570 BC. Viewed symbolically, numbers represent more than quantities, they also have qualities. Religion and literature abound with references to number three. The study of literature thereby becomes a significant resource for the study of the human psyche. This is of great significance for Freud and Jung, since it provides a “source” or “data base” of material that goes beyond individual preoccupations and private, intimate material such as dreams. Literature is often regarded as an expression of shared wish fulfillment.

Even a cursory review of religions and sacred scripture reveal that number three has a special place. Sacred and secular texts reveal great truths about human beings, whether in the distant past or at the present moment.

### **Christianity:**

In the Bible we have constant references to three. The first occurrence of the number is in Genesis 1:13. “The third day” was the day on which the earth was caused to rise up out of the water, symbolic of the resurrected life which we have in Christ. It was at the third hour He was crucified;

and it was for three hours that darkness shrouded the Divine Sufferer and Redeemer. Again, it was on the third day that Christ rose again from the dead. Hence three is a number of the resurrection. This was Divine in operation, and Divine in its prophetic foreshowing in the person of Jonah (Matthew 12:39, 40; Luke 11:29; Jonah 1:17)

**Number three is used to signify God's Purpose or His Will!** For example, when God sent the three messengers to Abraham to tell him that Sarah would conceive in her old age (Genesis 18), by the use of the number three we see in this an illustration that they came with God's "purpose and will" to Abraham, that is, it was by the will of God and for His own purpose that Sarah should conceive so that God would make a great nation of Abraham through it.

The same illustration is seen as God brought thick darkness upon the land of Egypt (Exodus 10:22-23) for three days. In this, God's purpose and sovereign will of judgment is worked out. The number three illustrated that it was for God's purposes that they were in darkness while all the children of Israel had light!

Even when we look at the three men who were cast into the furnace of fire, and a fourth who was there like the Son of God (Daniel 3:24-25), we see that it was God's will and purpose that these three men would not be harmed by the fire because of the presence of the Son of God.

The three days and three nights Jonah spent in the fish established that God's purpose and will would be worked out in that. In Acts, the Lord smote the Apostle Paul with blindness for three days (Acts 9:9)"And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." He was blinded for three days not by coincidence, but "by divine fiat or decree". It was God's purpose for him to be blind and to neither eat nor drink for those "three" days because He was bringing Paul to the light! He wanted to indicate by the number "three" that it was for His own good purpose and by His sovereign will that Paul be blind. And that is what the number three signifies. There are many other indications of the number three being used to symbolize the will and purpose of God.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is central to the Christian faith. There are three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity and three evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.<sup>2</sup>

### **Hinduism:**

We know of the Trimurti in Hinduism – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Three is special to Shiva because he is the third in the trinity. He has three eyes - trinetra, he carries a three pronged weapon called a trisul or triayudha or trident, and he brings forth the triple gunas or trigunas of sattva, rajas and tamas and also destroys them through his grace. He removes sins of three births – tri janma papa samhara. He has three braids of hair – trijata. He is known as triloka and trikala jnani or the knower of three worlds – higher, lower and the middle and three times – past, present and future.

Number three also symbolically represents ॐ in its vocative and diagrammatic aspects. The symbol of the ॐ consists of three curves representing three states of consciousness. The sound of AUM has three hidden sounds and the word AUM has three letters. The MandukyaUpanishad explains this symbolism in great detail. The lower curve in the symbol of AUM represents the outward moving wakeful consciousness. The middle curve represents the inward moving dream consciousness. The upper curve represents the silent consciousness of the deep sleep state which is a condition of oneness and peace in which all desires and dreams subside. The semi-circle above the upper curve represents the turiya or the pure consciousness of atman itself. It is neither inner nor outer, neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. It is self-luminous, illuminating everything else, it exists alone and beyond. These three states of consciousness are also represented by the three sounds - A U M. When we utter the sounds as one word AUM, it symbolizes the fourth state of supreme consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

## **Greek Mythology:**

In other religions too number three is significant. The Greeks used the number three a lot and there are lots of trios of women in Greek myth and art. They were known as the femme fatale. There were the three Fates or Parcae in Roman mythology, daughters of Necessity, and the three sisters that controlled man's destiny, chanting to the Sirens' music. Clotho wove the thread of life, Lachesis measured the thread and Atropos snipped the thread of life.

The three Gorgons were three powerful, winged demons named Medusa, Sthenno and Euryale. Of the three sisters only Medusa was mortal. Medusa and her sisters came into the world with snakes on their heads, instead of hair<sup>4</sup>, with yellow wings and brazen hands. Their bodies were also covered with impenetrable scales, and their very looks had the power of killing or turning to stones. It was her head which King Polydektes commanded the young hero Perseus to fetch. Perseus accomplished his task with the help of the gods who equipped him with a reflective shield, curved sword, winged boots and helm of invisibility. When he fell upon Medusa and decapitated her, two creatures sprang forth from the wound - the winged horse Pegasus and the giant Khrysaor. Perseus fled with the monster's head in a sack, and with her two angry sisters following close upon his heels.

The Gorgon also represents what cannot be represented, i.e. death, which it is impossible to see or to look at, like Hades itself. In Hesiod's Theogony (275 et seq.) and in the Odyssey (XI, 633-5), Medusa is the guardian of terrifying places, either the nocturnal borders of the world or the Underworld. She reappears in this role in Dante's Divine Comedy (Inferno, IX, 55-7) and Milton's Paradise Lost (II, 611). Guarding the doorway to the world of the dead, she prevents the living from entering.

The Orphics called the moon's face the Gorgon's Head. According to Robert Graves, during the earlier matriarchal times the Gorgon sisters were representatives of the Triple Moon Goddess. They were masked guardians, the protectors of her mysteries. The fact that Medusa was the

only one of the three sisters who was mortal and could die suggests her association as a dark goddess connected to the dark closure aspect of the lunar cycle.

The patriarchy's fear of the Dark Goddess led them to perceive Medusa as a demonic mythical monster, who was then fortunately decapitated by the hero Perseus. Mythographers have called her a nightmare vision – “a face so horrible that the dreamer is reduced to stony terror.” To be petrified is to be turned to stone. Erich Neumann writes that “the petrifying gaze of Medusa belongs to the province of the Terrible Great Goddess, for to be rigid is to be dead,” and according to Freud she represents the terrifying, devouring aspect of the Great Mother.<sup>5</sup>

#### Furies:

These three lovelies were sometimes called Resentful, Relentless, and Avenger. In another version they are described as horrible to look at, their heads were covered with serpents and blood dripping from their eyes. They breathed vengeance and pestilence. They were often found in the company of Mars, god of war.

Three goddesses of vengeance: Tisiphone (avenger of murder), Megaera (the jealous) and Alecto (constant anger). They were also called the Daughters of the Night, but were actually the daughters of Uranus and Gaea. Another name for them is the Erinyes.

Without mercy, the Furies would punish all crime including the breaking of rules considering all aspects of society including inhospitality. They would strike the offenders with madness and never stopped following criminals. The worst of all crimes were patricide or matricide, and first and foremost, the Furies would punish this kind of crime. They were driven purely by lust for the sinner's blood: blood of revenge for blood of the kindred.

They changed into the Eumenides, protectors of the suppliant, after Athena had made them merciful, sparing Orestes, whom they had stalked for a long time after the murder of his mother and her lover. From these beings we have the words “furious” and “infuriated”.<sup>6</sup>

## **Harpies:**

The Harpies were depicted as winged women, sometimes with ugly faces, with the lower bodies of birds. They had long claws and sharp beaks and could fly as fast as a bolt of lightning. Their names were Aëllopos, Nicothoë, Ocythoë. They were the spirits of sudden, sharp gusts of wind. They were known as the hounds of Zeus and were dispatched by the god to snatch away people and things from the earth. Sudden, mysterious disappearances were often attributed to the Harpyiai. The Harpies were once sent by Zeus to plague King Phineus of Thrake as punishment for revealing the secrets of the gods. Whenever a plate of food was set before him, the Harpies would swoop down and snatch it away, befouling any scraps left behind. When the Argonauts came to visit, the winged Boreades gave chase, and pursued the Harpies to the Strophades Islands, where the goddess Iris commanded them to turn back and leave the storm-spirits unharmed.<sup>7</sup>

## **Sirens:**

In Greek mythology, the Sirens are creatures with the head of a female and the body of a bird. They lived on an island (Sirenum scopuli; three small rocky islands) and with the irresistible charm of their song they lured mariners to their destruction on the rocks surrounding their island (Virgil V, 846; Ovid XIV, 88).

Those sailors who succumbed to the Sirens' song immediately died. As a result, the island was covered with piles of white bones, the remains of the perished sailors. Hence, the very setting in which the Sirens dwelled was filled with death. Whenever a ship approached the Sirens' island, the wind died away, the sea became still, and the waves flattened into a calm sheet of glass; the sailors entered the land where life is fixed forever. The Sirens themselves were neither dead nor alive: they were creatures in between-the living dead. Or, as Jean-Pierre Vernant says, they were, on the one hand, pure desire, and, on the other hand, pure death; they were "death in its most brutally monstrous aspect: no funeral, no tomb, only the corpse's decomposition in the open air"<sup>8</sup>

The Argonauts escaped them because when he heard their song, Orpheus immediately realized the peril they were in. He took out his lyre and sang a song so clear and ringing that it drowned the sound of those lovely fatal voices.

When on another journey Odysseus' ship passed the Sirens, he had the sailors stuff their ears with wax. He had himself tied to the mast for he wanted to hear their beautiful voices. The Sirens sang when they approached, their words even more enticing than the melody. They would give knowledge to every man who came to them, they said, ripe wisdom and a quickening of the spirit. Odysseus' heart ran with longing but the ropes held him and the ship quickly sailed to safer waters (Odyssey XII, 39).

Pietro Pucci gives two explanations for this. First, "the Odyssey presents the Sirens as the embodiment of the paralyzing effects of the Iliadic poetics because their song binds its listeners obsessively to the fascination of death" (210). Death is therefore something that lies at the centre of the Odyssey, the song of survival, but it is also something that must be left unspoken. The second explanation concerns the fact that "the Odyssey's own sublime poetry cannot be inferior to that of the Sirens. No text can incorporate the titillating promise of a song as sublime as the Sirens' without implying that this sublimity resides in the incorporating text itself" (212).

Thus, the Odyssey itself has to be understood as the embodiment of the Sirens' song. Their song is thus "the negative, absent song that enables its replacement—the Odyssey—to become what it is" (212). In sum, the Sirens' song is left unsung either because death as such is something that has to be left unspoken or because the Odyssey itself comes to incorporate or represent the Sirens' song. In both cases, the Sirens' song stands as an empty, unutterable point in the Odyssey, which, with the allusion to deadly pleasure, brings a sublime quality to the poem.<sup>9</sup>

Today's public sirens very much resemble their predecessors, the ancient Sirens of classical mythology in its petrifying effect. When we hear the

sound of a siren, we immediately think, “Danger!” or maybe even, “Death!” During wartime, the codified signal of sirens warns of enemy attacks, and during peacetime, sirens alert people to fires or medical emergencies. In some countries, sirens are also used on national holidays to invoke solemn events from the past. In the former Yugoslavia, sirens went off every year at 3:00 P.M. on the day commemorating Tito’s death; and in Israel, sirens announce the moment of silence on Memorial Day, when people remember the soldiers who fell during the war for independence. When the sirens sound, life is interrupted: people stop, the traffic stops, and for a minute everyone stands motionless. The sound of sirens invokes the stillness of time; it freezes the moment and petrifies the hearers.<sup>10</sup>

### **Cerberus:**

In Greek mythology, the three-headed watchdog who guards the entrance to the lower world, the Hades. It is a child of the giant Typhon and Echidna, a monstrous creature herself, being half woman and half snake.

Originally, the dog was portrayed having fifty or hundred heads but was later pictured with only three heads (and sometimes with the tail of a serpent). Cerberus permitted new spirits to enter the realm of dead, but allowed none of them to leave. Only a few ever managed to sneak past the creature, among which Orpheus, who lulled it to sleep by playing his lyre, and Heracles, who brought it to the land of the living for a while. In Roman mythology, the Trojan prince Aeneas and Psyche were able to pacify it with honey cake.<sup>11</sup>

In Freudian theory the mechanism of repression explains what remains unconscious. The Greek underworld had a watchdog named Cerberus, who guarded its entrance. For Freud the watchdog function of Cerberus is assigned to repression, which guards both the exit from and the entrance to the unconscious. The undoing of repression explained the release of thoughts and feelings into consciousness, and Freud attributed such power to words and verbal interpretation. Freud’s conception of the unconscious thus placed a high burden of explanation upon the concept



of repression, which he conceived of as a psychophysiological mechanism common to all of humanity.<sup>12</sup>

### **Three Graces**

A more appealing trio of women is The Three Graces, sometimes called Splendour, Mirth, and Good Cheer, or Beauty, Gentleness, and Friendship. They were often shown with Venus, the nine Muses, and Apollo. The three graces is a very popular art motif, with involved iconography, but might have been just an excuse for artists to portray nude women.

### **Judgement of Paris:**

A trio of women is also the subject of another favourite art motif, the Judgement of Paris. Paris was the son of the king and queen of Troy. They heard a prophecy that Paris would be the ruin of Troy so put him on Mount Ida where he was brought up by shepherds.

Years later the three goddesses, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, were at a wedding where someone tossed a golden apple into the crowd, inscribed "To the Fairest." All three wanted it and asked Zeus to decide, but he was too smart to get involved. He packed them all off to Mount Ida for Paris to make the decision.

Hera and Athena offered him riches, fame, empire, and military glory, but when Aphrodite bribed him with the offer of Helen, He voted for Aphrodite, even though Helen was already married and Paris himself was in love with a nymph. What's more, Paris had to go and abduct Helen, which started the Trojan War.

This motif was also used as an allegory representing a choice between the active life and the sensuous one.<sup>13</sup>

### **Fairy Tales:**

The story of Cinderella with her mother and two step sisters is interesting. According to Adam Phillips who makes use of the Freudian approach,

Cinderella is a girl with three mothers: a mother who has died (about whom we know nothing); a wicked stepmother; and a fairy godmother. This translates as a mysterious mother whose wishes are unknown, a mother who hates and sabotages Cinderella's pleasure, and a mother who does everything she can to support it.

The Cinderella story shows us that people who had difficult childhoods can have perfectly happy lives. All they have to do is not betray their deepest wishes. Things were certainly not looking good for Cinderella, but she turned out to be extremely adept, given a bit of help, at getting what (and where) she wanted.

The other striking thing about Cinderella - and which makes Freud's question relevant - is that men are not Cinderella's problem, women are. Ultimately, the difficulty for Cinderella is not finding her prince, but getting to him; it's not a question of whether they will desire each other, but of whether she will be allowed by the other women to get there. The real problem, in other words, is not between men and women, but between women. If only women will let them, women can get on with men.

As a contemporary fairy tale with a psychological message, it is a story about why women do not want other women to have pleasure. It is, by the same token, a story about how women - or parts of themselves - can be enemies of their own desire; a story about how women, out of fear of other women's envy, want to frustrate themselves.

If Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters are part of herself, then they are saboteurs of her pleasure, recruited to stop her getting to the ball. The story couldn't be clearer: the ball, literally and metaphorically, is not a problem - Cinderella is not shy or awkward, the couple clearly wants each other even though they go about it in different ways, no one comes between them. Narrative is always about frustration. The story of Cinderella's life is about how she gets to have a life, about how she deals with everything and everyone that frustrates her. After she marries her prince, there is no story, no need for one; they live happily ever after.

If we read the story as an internal drama - in which everyone in Cinderella's story is a part of herself - it is as though what Cinderella does, all that endless housework is an attempt to keep at bay her pleasure-seeking because it incites envy. It is not her pleasure that is sabotaged - when she gets to her prince, they have a very nice time - but her wanting pleasure. Her stepmother and stepsisters stop her remembering that there are things she wants and that she is capable of having them. They come between her and her wishes, unlike her fairy godmother.

Once the fairy godmother turns up, everything changes. Cinderella goes from serving her stepfamily, in an essentially self-sacrificing way, to being served, but in a notably unself-sacrificing way. It is a completely different picture of what it is to look after someone. Cinderella's fairy godmother, rather like a certain kind of artist, enjoys nothing more than doing her work; she does not seek, she finds - as if to say, what you need is always to hand if you know how to use it. The fairy godmother gets enormous pleasure from transforming the pumpkin, the rat and the mice into the coach to take Cinderella to the ball. In other words, if Cinderella was a story about what women want, the answer would be: women want a mother who does everything she can to facilitate their pleasure; a mother who relishes her daughter's pleasure rather than envies it, or competes with it, or trivializes it.

So guilty is Cinderella about her own pleasure that when she does finally marry her prince, she finds two "noblemen" for her ugly stepsisters.

Once Cinderella is given a bit of help by her fairy godmother, she quickly gets the knack of following her heart by leaving her slipper (as good as a phone number in the circumstances) so her prince can find her. The slippers represent the couple who have to be together, but Cinderella also has a double life - or rather two lives that, just like a pair of shoes, are similar (they are both hers) and inextricable (one shoe is no good to anyone). In one life she is called Cinderella because "when her work was finished the poor girl would sit in the chimney corner among the ashes and embers for warmth"; in another life she is a princess "a hundred times more beautiful than her stepsisters, although they were always

magnificently dressed”. She is like an undiscovered secret, and once she is discovered, the first thing she seems to learn is how to keep secrets, primarily the secret of having been to the ball.<sup>14</sup>

### **Shakespeare:**

Macbeth opens with famous scene with three witches or weird sisters as they were called. They are stirring a boiling cauldron

Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.  
2 WITCH. Fillet of a fenny snake,  
In the caldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,  
Adder’s fork, and blind-worm’s sting,  
Lizard’s leg, and owlet’s wing,—  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.  
ALL. Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.  
3 WITCH. Scale of dragon; tooth of wolf;  
Witches’ mummy; maw and gulf  
Of the ravin’d salt-sea shark;  
Root of hemlock digg’d in the dark;  
Liver of blaspheming Jew;  
Gall of goat, and slips of yew  
Sliver’d in the moon’s eclipse;  
Nose of Turk, and Tartar’s lips;  
Finger of birth-strangled babe  
Ditch-deliver’d by a drab,—  
Make the gruel thick and slab:  
Add thereto a tiger’s chaudron,  
For the ingrediants of our caldron.  
ALL. Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.

2 WITCH. Cool it with a baboon's blood,  
Then the charm is firm and good.  
(Macbeth, IV,i)

Traditionally, the witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* have been treated as symbolic manifestations of the potential for evil. Many students and critics of *Macbeth* enjoy blaming the witches, along with Lady Macbeth, for Macbeth's downfall. Regardless, it may be argued that the witches are the main protagonists of the play. One eminent modern literary critic, Terry Eagleton, has addressed the issue of the witches as heroines directly:<sup>15</sup>

To any unprejudiced reader—which would seem to exclude Shakespeare himself, his contemporary audiences and almost all literary critics—it is surely clear that positive value in *Macbeth* lies with the three witches. The witches are the heroines of the piece, however little the play itself recognizes the fact, and however much the critics may have set out to defame them.

For Eagleton, the social reality of the witches matters. They are outcasts, much like feminists they live on the fringe of society in a female community, at odds with the male world of "civilization," which values military butchery. The fact that they are female and associated with the natural world beyond the aristocratic oppression in the castles indicates that they are excluded others. Their equality in a female community declares their opposition to the masculine power of the militaristic society. They have no direct power, but they have become expert at manipulating or appealing to the self-destructive contradictions of their military oppressors. They can see Macbeth's destruction as a victory of a sort: one more viciously individualistic, aggressive male oppressor has gone under.<sup>16</sup>

In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio is forced to choose between three caskets to win Portia as his bride. Freud believes that this motif must be indicative of some universal human problem; it must be an archetypal representation of something that lies deep within the human

(collective) psyche. Hence if we can understand it, we can understand something about this shared psyche.

Freud turns to a critic who interprets this scene in the context of an astral myth.

Prince of Morocco represents the sun and chooses golden casket; Prince of Aragon represents the moon and chooses silver casket; Bassanio is the star youth (son of North Star) and he chooses leaden casket. Note that in this scenario the choice reflects the character or nature of the chooser, not what is chosen; that is, “sun” chooses “gold”; “moon” chooses “silver”. Among other things, Freud wants to re-orient the choice toward the chosen object. He objects to the astral paradigm where myth is seen to be of divine origin and seeks to show that myths (like dreams) are of a human origin. He believes that what lies behind the myth is human (psychic) experience. The universality of the myth reflects the universality of the human psychic constitution

Freud will apply psychoanalytic procedures at three crucial junctures to explain this problem.

First procedure. Freud examines the reversal of gender roles which Shakespeare undertakes with regard to his sources. In *Gesta Romanorum*, a woman chooses from among three suitors and this is true in Estonian epic as well. In *Merchant of Venice*, the choice is among 3 caskets, not 3 women as such. But Freud appeals to dream interpretation here and asserts that in dreams caskets, boxes, baskets, cases, are frequently symbolic representations of women. Therefore for Freud when Bassanio chooses among the 3 caskets he is actually choosing among 3 women.

Freud proceeds to look for other examples of this theme, the choice between 3 women. In *King Lear*, his elder daughters - Goneril and Regan flatter their father to prove their love and receive part of his kingdom in return, whereas with Cordelia, the youngest, genuinely good and loving daughter, refuses to flatter and is disowned. Lear's choice leads to his ruin and general decline. *King Lear* presents a kind of counter-example, representing the false, wrong choice.

Second procedure. In King Lear Cordelia is inconspicuous, loves her father “silently”. In fact when she refuses to speak after her sisters have flattered their father, King Lear is furious and says “Speak” and Cordelia says, “Nothing”; Portia is “leaden”, dull, unobtrusive; Cinderella hides herself away in ashes. All these qualities relate to muteness, the refusal to speak, dumbness; that is, they point to the silent love these figures embody. Unobtrusiveness is the refusal to assert oneself, to show off. Freud’s clinical experience shows him that in dreams and therapy, muteness is Death.

Applied to the scene in Merchant of Venice and the other tales and myths Freud has cited: the choice of the third woman is the choice of a dead woman. “Dead woman,” however, is merely a displacement of Death as Woman, or the Goddess of Death. Freud pauses here to note the contradiction, the seeming senselessness of the result at which he has arrived: How can this scene represent the choosing of death? No one chooses death freely. On the contrary, one is the victim of death. Has Freud painted himself into an interpretive corner?

Third procedure: Freud states that symbolic substitution often travels along the path of semantic opposition. In the unconscious, opposites, contraries, often represent one and the same content. Just as the unconscious knows no negation, it also knows no contradiction. Opposites are connected—if only by the quality of contrariety itself. “Reaction-Formation” is the name this reflex has in Freud’s analysis of our psychic life: we master certain impulses or emotions by exaggerating their opposites. For example, we may hate someone bitterly, but we affect exaggerated love of that person. This exaggerated love is the marker of our hatred.

In the Greek myths, fairy tales and Shakespeare’s plays, then, the human psyche rebels against the story of the fates and the cutting of the life thread: the Goddess of Death is thus replaced by her opposite, the Goddess of Love. These stories compensate for the reality of death by substituting for it the choice of love. If our unconscious mind recognizes the necessity of death, it rebels against this recognition, represses it, by transforming it into a content that is more pleasurable.

The deep-psychoic message of this motif is, therefore, the necessity of death; but the tales Freud examines distort this message by presenting it as its opposite: the choice of love. This is a wish-fulfillment fantasy, indeed, the greatest human wish-fulfillment, the overcoming of death.

In the final scene of the drama, in which King Lear must renounce love and choose death, he carries the body of his dead daughter Cordelia onto stage. In this instance, then, literary creativity undoes psychic censorship, and this leads, like the interpretive work of the analyst, to a therapeutic result and to pleasure. For Freud, this trait marks King Lear as an especially successful literary work.

The literary text has an impact much like that of psychoanalysis itself: by undoing some of the distortions imposed on the repressed unconscious material (here: the necessity of death), literature brings those truths back to consciousness, but does this in an unobtrusive manner, because some of the distortions are still there.

Freud's conclusion of the 3 women from among which men in this mythic scene must choose are 3 guises of the mother: the mother who gives birth to him, the mother of his children, and the mother earth who takes him in at death. This is true of *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Paris Myth* and *Cinderella*. The message on the manifest level is thus: The choice of love. Wish-fulfillment has altered the "authentic" unconscious message into this more acceptable and pleasing conscious one.

Literature undoes repression, helps reveal and uncover the hidden, unconscious truth behind the textual façade (here: the truth of death), and hence brings us psychic relief and pleasure.

For Freud, this also accounts for the universal impact of great literature: it "sounds chords" in the instrument of the human psyche, resonates with eternal problems of the unconscious mind; it touches and activates these unconscious themes and ideas. Artists commune with the human psyche (the unconscious) in a pre-scientific manner.<sup>17</sup>



## End Notes

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- 11 Micha F. Lindemans, "Cerberus." Encyclopedia Mythica, Online, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cerberus.html>[Accessed May 11, 2012].
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