

## Lost in Unbridled Pursuit of Pleasure: A Psychoanalytic Study of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*

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### Abstract

This article aims at making a psychoanalytic study of the hedonistic indulgence of a bewildered, dull and aimless generation of affluent youth in the transitory glittering of the New York Cafe society as depicted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*. The main characters of this novel Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert are driven by hedonism which ultimately leads to their self-destruction. This article tends to make a psychoanalytic study of the hedonistic nature of the human mind through the perspective of pleasure principle by analyzing the issues of id, ego and superego. Freud, in his book, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, writes: "what decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle" (263). The term "pleasure principle" was originally used by Sigmund Freud who argued that it is the tendency of people to go to great lengths to avoid even momentary pain and to seek immediate gratification, regardless of the consequences. In the novel, both Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert live their respective lives hedonistically until their psychology clashes with each other in pursuit of wealth and status. The purpose of the paper, therefore, is to analyze the pleasure seeking behaviour of these two characters which stems from the human psyche by interpreting the issues of id, ego and superego, where id largely dominates their psychic apparatus with few instances where ego intervenes and manifests the superego.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, hedonism, id, ego, superego, pleasure principle



Literary theories have always operated as a lens through which any literary work can be analyzed and examined and therefore, it becomes plausible to look beyond the story and to delve deep into different critical aspects that lie beneath a particular literary work. The novel *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) is no exception. The writer of this novel F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) lived almost in the same era where we can find the great psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) whose theory of psychoanalysis can be applied in this novel to understand the structure of the human psyche of different fictional characters. Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* writes:

If we take the time to understand some key concepts about human experience offered by psychoanalysis, we can begin to see the ways in which these concepts operate in our daily lives in profound rather than superficial ways, and we'll begin to understand human behaviours that until now may have seemed utterly baffling. And, of course, if psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behaviour, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts, which are about human behaviour. (Tyson 11)

Through this novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, F. Scott Fitzgerald depicts the pleasure seeking lifestyle and self-destructive moral values of the then generation after the end of the First World War. The main characters of this novel Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert are young and gorgeous, rich and leisured, and dedicate their lives to the reckless pursuit of happiness. But this intimate story turns tragic, as their marriage disintegrates under the weight of their expectations, dissipation, jealousy and aimlessness.

The purpose of this present article is to analyze the issues of id, ego and superego and to understand how these mechanisms of psychological forces operate in the main fictional characters like Anthony Patch and Gloria Gilbert that eventually drive them towards their psychological self-destruction. Pramod K. Nayar, in his *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*, writes:

Psychoanalytic criticism, therefore, explores the language of the unconscious, of the repressed and the hidden as embodied in literary or cultural texts such as art or fiction, with particular attention to the repression of sexuality and its desires. Psychoanalytic criticism uncovers the 'subject' of the author as revealed through the images, the language and the codes of her/his work. It asks questions of the author's attempts to conceal her/his desires and drives, and the cultural codes that force her/him to do so. (Nayar 64)

The novel begins with the life of Anthony Patch who is seen worrying about death and dangers of the outside world: "At eleven he had a horror of death. Within six impressionable years his parents had died and his grandmother had faded off almost imperceptibly, ... So to Anthony life was a struggle against death, that waited at every corner" (Fitzgerald 9). Based on the psychoanalytic principles established by Sigmund Freud, Tyson writes in his chapter about the origin of the unconscious: "When we look at the world through a psychoanalytic lens, we see that it is comprised of individual human beings, each with a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behaviour that are the direct result of that early experience" (Tyson 12).

As the story progresses, we find another character named Gloria Gilbert whose brainless beauty captivates Anthony. He proposes Gloria and both of them get into an



artificial relationship. However, one of the first instances of psychological issue occurs between them when Anthony perceives Gloria as the mirror of himself: “Gloria has a very young soul--irresponsible, as much as anything else. She has no sense of responsibility” (Fitzgerald 54). Gloria is always perturbed about her fleeting youth and is only concerned regarding her beauty. She rejects the very idea of marriage as it comes with a lot of responsibilities:

“I don't like being twenty-two. I hate it more than anything in the world.”  
 “Being twenty-two?”  
 “No. Getting old and everything. Getting married.”  
 “Don't you ever want to marry?”  
 “I don't want to have responsibility and a lot of children to take care of.”  
 (Fitzgerald 93)

When Gloria asks Anthony about his work, Anthony's desultory response makes it pretty much obvious that both of them are reckless, irresponsible, impulsive and spendthrift:

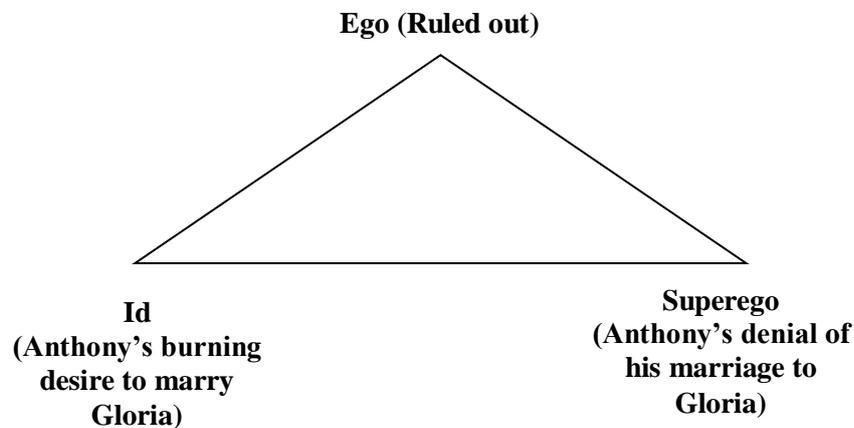
“What \_do\_ you do with yourself?”...  
 “I do nothing,” he began, realizing simultaneously that his words were to lack the debonair grace he craved for them. “I do nothing, for there's nothing I can do that's worth doing.” (Fitzgerald 95)

This becomes the reason where Anthony gives a second thought about his marriage to Gloria: “‘in the first place I have no one I want to marry; in the second place I haven't enough money to support two people; in the third place I am entirely opposed to marriage for people of my type; in the fourth place I have a strong distaste for even the abstract consideration of it’” (Fitzgerald 134).

Now if this particular incident of Anthony's denial of marriage to Gloria is examined from a psychoanalytic perspective, then it reflects Anthony's psychic core issue of ‘insecure or unstable sense of self’ i.e., “this core issue makes us very vulnerable to the influence of other people ...” (Tyson 16) Anthony does not only get insecure about his upcoming financial crisis in the presence of Gloria, as both of them have the habit of leading life quite extravagantly, but also because Gloria would get to know about his anxiety over death. Anthony fears unconsciously that due to his weakness, he might be exposed to the possibility of being harmed or attacked by Gloria in future, even if not physically, but mentally or emotionally. Tyson gives an explanation to Anthony's unconscious fear: “I am anxious because something I repressed—some painful or frightening or guilty experience—is resurfacing, and I want to keep it repressed” (Tyson 17).

In this novel, Anthony's psychological insecurity regarding marriage but eventually his preposterous self-convincing thoughts about his marriage to Gloria that everything will work out somehow regardless of the consequences, shows how his id takes control on his psychic apparatus. Id, ego and superego are the three parts of human psyche. Tyson, interpreting Freud's analysis of the id, writes: “The id is devoted solely to the gratification of prohibited desires of all kinds—desire for power, for sex, for amusement, for food—without an eye to consequences. In other words, the id consists largely of those desires regulated or forbidden by social convention” (Tyson 25).

In the novel, it's visible from various instances how Anthony's id dominates his psychic apparatus and how Anthony is driven by his desire for Gloria Gilbert on the id level:



Now, how Anthony's desire of instant gratification of Gloria's beauty through marriage i.e., how his id controls other parts of his psychic apparatus is visible from various instances in the novel: "He was not so much in love with Gloria as mad for her. Unless he could have her near him again, kiss her, hold her close and acquiescent, he wanted nothing more from life" (Fitzgerald 169). It shows his burning sexual desires for Gloria which he thinks of fulfilling through marriage without thinking about the consequences.

However, the superego of Anthony manifests as he realizes that his fixed income is already stretched thin financing his own extravagant lifestyle, and now he will need to fund Gloria's social exploits as well. "Society's rules and definitions concerning sexuality form a large part of our *superego*, or the social values and taboos that we internalize (consciously or unconsciously) and experience as our sense of right and wrong. ... The superego is in direct opposition to the *id*, the psychological reservoir of our instincts, and our *libido*, or sexual energy.... Thus, the superego—or cultural taboos—determines which desires the id will contain" (Tyson 25). Through a conversation between Anthony and his grandfather, his grandfather Adam Patch also acts as Anthony's superego that continuously gives judgements and warns him to make Anthony understand that marriage would not be a good idea for him:

"How much do you save a year?"

"Nothing so far—"

"And so after just managing to get along on your money you've decided that by some miracle two of you can get along on it." (Fitzgerald 198)

Anthony's hedonistic lifestyle has always been driven by the notion of pleasure principle. The pleasure principle is the driving force guiding the id: "A general tendency of our psychic apparatus ... seems to manifest itself in the tenacity with which we cling to existing sources of pleasure and the difficulty we have in giving these up" (Freud 416). As the conversation between Anthony and his grandfather progresses, it would be revealed through the words of his grandfather how Anthony has always led his life on instant gratification without paying much attention to the consequences:

“Gloria has some money of her own. Enough to buy clothes.”

“How much?”

Without considering this question impertinent, Anthony answered it.

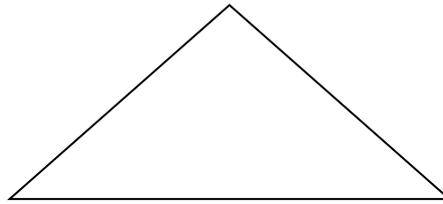
“About a hundred a month.”

“That's altogether about seventy-five hundred a year.” Then he added softly: “It ought to be plenty. If you have any sense it ought to be plenty. But the question is whether you have any or not.” (Fitzgerald 199)

But Anthony's grandfather Adam Patch's warning does not put off Anthony's immediate gratification of marrying Gloria and shows his rejection of the reality principle i.e. the ability of the mind to assess the reality of the external world, and to act upon it accordingly. Anthony's “pleasure ego” triumphs over his “reality ego” as he says to his grandfather: “I can manage very well. You seem convinced that I'm utterly worthless. At any rate I came up here simply to tell you that I'm getting married in June. Good-by, sir” (Fitzgerald 199).

However, the marriage of Anthony and Gloria starts to face difficulties soon after. The spark between them starts to fade off when “Gloria found that other men no longer bored her; ... when Anthony discovered that he could sit again late into the evening, talking with Dick of those tremendous abstractions that had once occupied his world” (Fitzgerald 225). Again the superego manifests as Anthony finds Gloria selfish neglecting household responsibilities and Gloria gets to know about Anthony's anxiety over death: “Anthony found that he was living with a girl of tremendous nervous tension and of the most high-handed selfishness. Gloria knew within a month that her husband was an utter coward toward any one of a million phantasms created by his imagination” (Fitzgerald 226). Through various instances in the novel the superego exhibits and constantly reminds them that their marriage, which was the result of their id of burning desire, would not bring sweet consequences in their respective lives.

### **Ego (Drowned out as it fails to meditate between Id and Superego)**



**Id**  
(Anthony and Gloria's clinging towards each other from the perspective of “pleasure principle” such as physical satisfaction and financial fulfilment respectively)

**Superego (Anthony and Gloria's discovery of each other that warns them to end their marriage)**



Through several incidents, Gloria gets to know about Anthony's psychological issue of anxiety over death and these incidents act as her superego which constantly warns her about the consequences of being in a marital relationship with Anthony:

It was after midnight and pitch dark in their room. Gloria was dozing off and Anthony's even breathing beside her made her suppose that he was asleep, when suddenly she saw him raise himself on his elbow and stare at the window. ... Then there was suddenly a rattling flutter at the window, staccato and loud upon the hushed, pent air. ...

"Who's there?" he cried in an awful voice.

Gloria lay very still, wide awake now and engrossed not so much in the rattling as in the rigid breathless figure whose voice had reached from the bedside into that ominous dark.

The sound stopped; the room was quiet as before--then Anthony pouring words in at the telephone.

"Someone just tried to get into the room! ...

"There's someone at the window!" His voice was emphatic now, faintly terrified.

"All right! Hurry!" He hung up the receiver; stood motionless. (Fitzgerald 228)

However, as the desires of both Anthony and Gloria are on the id level, caring only about the instant gratification of physical satisfaction, money and materialism; therefore, Anthony keeps overlooking Gloria's irresponsibility towards domestic duties:

"Haven't you ever sent out the laundry?"

"Is it there?"

"It most certainly is."

"Well, I guess I haven't, then."

"Gloria,"... "All you'd have to do would be to cram your own junk into that bag and ring for the chambermaid."...

Anthony considered that he was being extraordinarily logical. But Gloria, unimpressed, put away her cosmetics and casually offered him her back.

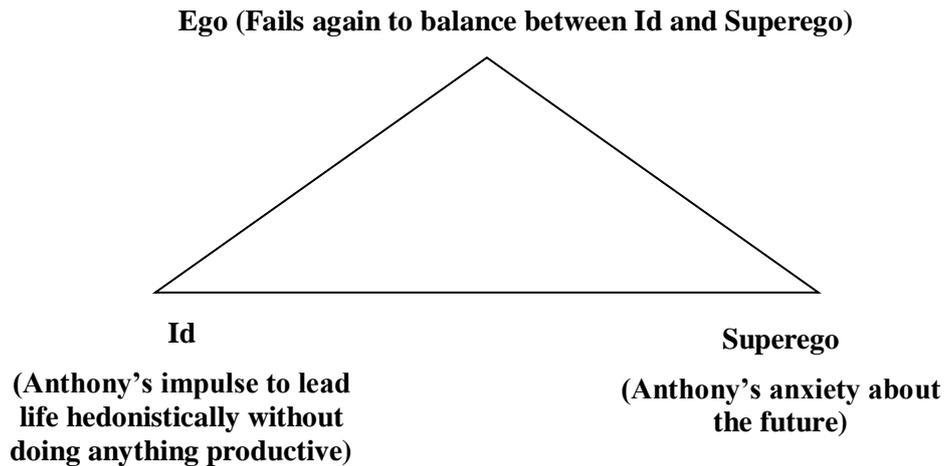
"Hook me up," she suggested; "Anthony, dearest, I forgot all about it. I meant to, honestly, and I will to-day. Don't be cross with your sweetheart."

What could Anthony do then but draw her down upon his knee and kiss a shade of color from her lips. (Fitzgerald 237-38)

Gloria also pays no heed towards Anthony's psychological problems that constantly haunt him regarding the terrors of death; rather she takes it as a joke and laughs it away: "After many weeks it came gradually out into the light, to be laughed and joked at. They made a tradition to fit over it--whenever that overpowering terror of the night attacked Anthony..." (Fitzgerald 231). The psychic structures of both Anthony and Gloria are flawed beyond repair, because their id and superego are so unbelievably clashing that ego is drowned out and fails to mediate between the two of them: "The *ego*, or the conscious self that experiences the external world through the senses, plays referee between the id and superego ... In this way, the ego is, to a large degree, the product of conflicts between what society says we can't have and what we (therefore) want" (Tyson 25).

The psychological distance that emerges between Anthony and Gloria is depicted by Fitzgerald in the scene where they are seen leaving the hotel room in California to go back to New York. Gloria says to Anthony: "Oh, Anthony, it's sort of the first place we've

lived together. Our two little beds here--side by side--they'll be always waiting for us, and we're never coming back to 'em any more" (Fitzgerald 243). Back in New York, both Anthony and Gloria continue leading their life under the perspective of pleasure principle where Anthony is seen dreaming about all the luxurious things in life but in reality refuses to do anything productive: "I'd like to take Gloria abroad," ... and next to that I'd sort of like to have a place in the country, somewhere near New York, of course, where I could write--or whatever I decide to do" (Fitzgerald 246).



Anthony's superego again manifests and warns him about the consequences that are going to take place as Anthony is seen worrying about the problems of their future: "They discussed with their friends the stupendous problem of their future ... as Anthony ran through his list of what they 'ought' to do, and where they 'ought' to live" (Fitzgerald 245). However, when Gloria says "But what am I going to do if he works? Maury, will you take me around if Anthony works?" (Fitzgerald 246) Anthony's immediate response shows that his id once again rules over his superego as he says: "Anyway, I'm not going to work yet" (Fitzgerald 246). Anthony's refusal to work can be analyzed from a psychological perspective where Anthony fears of losing his romantic partner Gloria in his absence due to work: "It was vaguely understood between them that on some misty day he would enter a sort of glorified diplomatic service and be envied by princes and prime ministers for his beautiful wife" (Fitzgerald 246). Also Anthony has always spent his life from the perspective of pleasure principle, therefore, his id, with all its dreams and desires supersedes his ego and superego.

In this novel, there is a constant psychological conflict between the 'pleasure' and 'reality' principle. In New York staying at the Gray House is not satisfying to them. Both Anthony and Gloria desire for an opulent place to live in but they deny the very idea of searching for it on their own and depend solely on their friends. How their behaviours, always ruled by the pleasure principle, are described through a conversation between Anthony and Gloria and their friends:

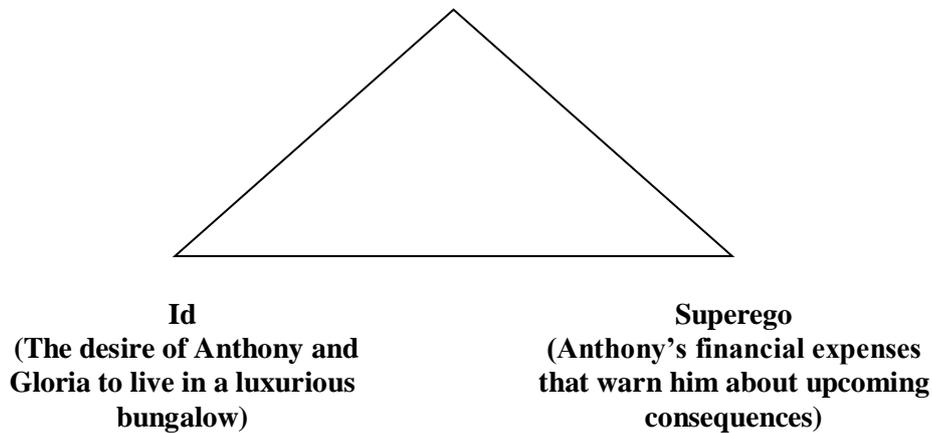
"Well," said Gloria helplessly, "I'm sure I don't know. We talk and talk and never get anywhere, and we ask all our friends and they just answer the way we want 'em to. I wish somebody'd take care of us"...

“You two amuse me,” he said. “Of all the unpractical people! As soon as a place is mentioned you expect us to pull great piles of photographs out of our pockets showing the different styles of architecture available in bungalows.” (Fitzgerald 246-47)

As Fitzgerald rightly points out, both Anthony and Gloria’s psychological conflict is, between ‘pleasures’ to have a good bungalow where they can spend their life lavishly and ‘reality’ where they refuse to give efforts to even search for it. It shows their unrepressed id that comes out of the unconscious to have immediate gratification of pleasures of life but controls them from working hard enough to achieve it.

In Marietta, Anthony takes a luxurious bungalow at rent for both of them as once again his id with all its desires dominates his behaviour. But due to superego’s manifestation, ego comes in and tries to balance between the two of them as Anthony starts working to manage his finances.

### **Ego (Anthony starts working)**



However, his main motive behind it is to flatter his grandfather just for the sake of inheritance of Adam Patch’s huge property in the nearest future: “Anthony was going to work at an astounding pace on his history and thus ingratiate himself with his cynical grandfather” (Fitzgerald 258). As this novel, with large instances, is driven by the notion of pleasure principle, therefore, their ego cannot stand for long as Anthony and Gloria join the nearest “really nice” club where they explore the possibilities of some kind of indolent present pushed by the pleasure loving instinct once again: “Gloria was sure she wanted but to read and dream and be fed tomato sandwiches and lemonades by some angelic servant still in a shadowy hinterland. Between paragraphs Anthony would come and kiss her as she lay indolently in the hammock” (Fitzgerald 258). Anthony and Gloria, driven by the never ending desires of their id, start to face financial crisis leading life in such a slothful and extravagant way. The superego manifests as both of them decide to control their finances for some period of time: “Having danced and splashed through a lavish spring, Anthony and Gloria found that they had spent too much money and for this must go into retirement for a certain period” (Fitzgerald 276). At this moment, both of them consciously or unconsciously accept the warning imposed by their superego and try to behave in a way to have a control over their id.

However, Anthony cannot restrict his id that comes in the form of his desire for enjoying parties with increasing alcoholism and therefore, his relationship with Gloria starts to get bitter. When one day Gloria insists Anthony to go home, Anthony's behaviour shows that his id once again surpasses his superego that brings the first instance of his psychological self-destruction:

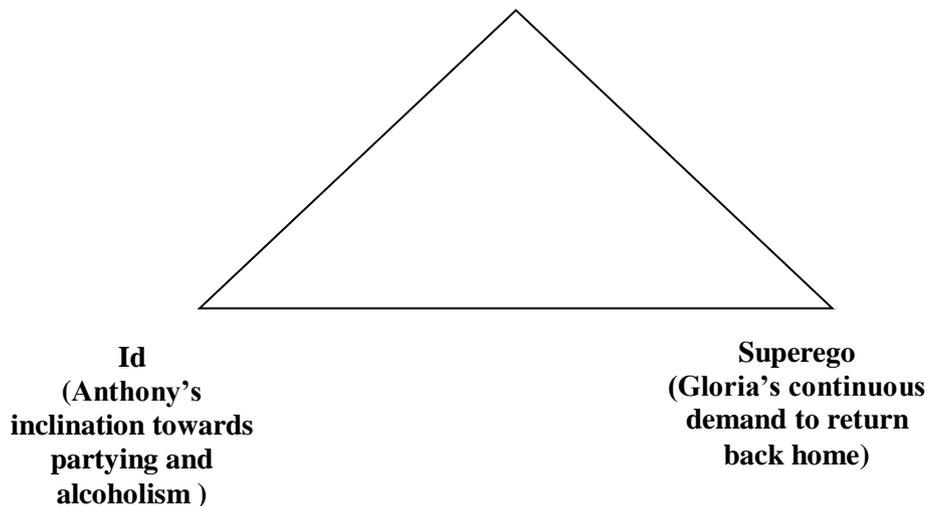
“We've got to go, dear.”

“Now?” He looked at her unwillingly. At that moment nothing seemed of more importance than to idle on that shady porch drinking mellowed Scotch...

“We've really got to go,” repeated Gloria. “We can get a taxi to the station.... Come on, Anthony!” she commanded a bit more imperiously. (Fitzgerald 282)

Interpreting this incident from a psychoanalytic perspective, it can be said that Gloria's continuous demand to go home acts as Anthony's superego. However Anthony, too much drunk in his own pleasure loving world, surrenders to his id.

### **Ego (Ruled out)**



His id becomes so uncontrollable that it surpasses his superego; and his ego, fails to oscillate between these clashing two, breaks down which ultimately results in a bitter fight between him and Gloria.

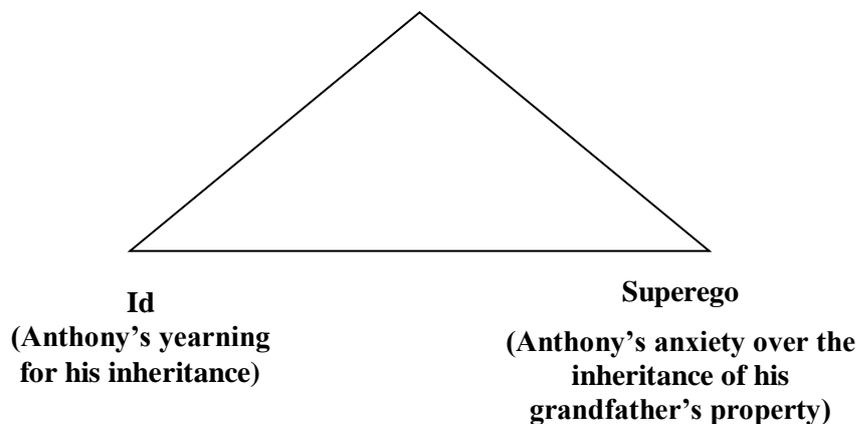
It seems to Anthony for the first time that Gloria is the main obstacle that is preventing him from living his life in his own pleasure seeking way:

The whiskey had both soothed and clarified the restless things in his mind. It occurred to him that she had taken this same attitude several times before. Was he always to retreat from pleasant episodes at a touch of her parasol or a flicker of her eye? ... In his mind was but one idea – that Gloria was being selfish, that she was always being selfish and would continue to be unless here and now he asserted himself as her master. This was the occasion of all occasions, since for a whim she had deprived him of a pleasure. His determination solidified, approached momentarily a dull and sullen hate. (Fitzgerald 282-84)

Gloria becomes the manifestation of Anthony's superego under the perspective of "ego-ideal" that keeps reminding him about the consequences of their marriage and keeps warning him about working: "Yes, you ought to do something" (Fitzgerald 303). But it becomes unbearable for Anthony to come out of the cocoon of pleasure to face the painful experience of reality. His id clashes with his superego, breaks down all defence mechanisms to release the repressed and Anthony makes Gloria responsible for his surrendering to id: "As a matter of fact I think that if I hadn't met you I would have done something. But you make leisure so subtly attractive--" (Fitzgerald 304)

However, as both Anthony and Gloria have always lived life so hedonistically, therefore, their id driven by the pleasure principle surpasses their superego and their ego fails once again to balance, and therefore, both of them decide to surrender to the gratification of momentary pleasures disregarding the consequences: "The magnificent attitude of not giving a damn ... for what they chose to do and what consequence it brought. Not to be sorry, not to lose one cry of regret, to live according to a clear code of honor toward each other, and to seek the moment's happiness as fervently and persistently as possible" (Fitzgerald 327). Both Anthony, amidst waiting for the inheritance of his grandfather's fortune, and Gloria, worrying about her beauty and fleeting youth, indulge in reckless pursuit of drinking and partying. The reality of life hits Anthony hard when his grandfather Adam Patch gives a surprise visit to Anthony's one of the wild parties. Anthony's pleasure seeking lifestyle with his beautiful wife Gloria comes crashing down in a second: "In this extremity they were like two goldfish in a bowl from which all the water had been drawn; they could not even swim across to each other" (Fitzgerald 400).

#### **Ego (Anthony's apology letter to his grandfather)**



Anthony's ego manifests in the novel so late when ultimately disgusted by Anthony's indulgence in alcohol, his grandfather disinherits him before his death. Anthony throughout his life has waited for his inheritance rather than being involved in any productive, meaningful work. His dream and desire to always spend his life extravagantly get shattered in the hands of hard reality. Anthony's id of immediate gratification of the pleasures of life once again knocks his psychic apparatus and Anthony is seen fighting for his inheritance with the help of legal action. In a conversation between Anthony and Muriel, Muriel acts as Anthony's superego who alerts Anthony of his idle lifestyle.

However, it gets clear that Anthony's psychic structure is dominated by his id as he refuses to do anything productive while just wasting his time in the lawsuit:

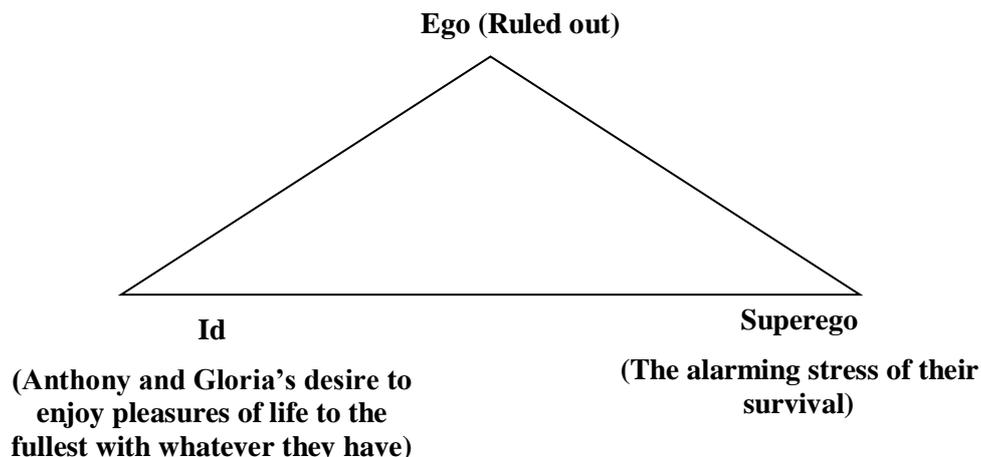
... he replied listlessly; "all will cases. They say it's exceptional to have one settled under four or five years."

"Oh ..." Muriel daringly changed her tack, "why don't you go to work, you lazy!"

"At what?" he demanded abruptly. "Why, at anything, I suppose. You're still a young man."

"If that's encouragement, I'm much obliged," he answered dryly--and then with sudden weariness: "Does it bother you particularly that I don't want to work?" (Fitzgerald 576-77)

Anthony and Gloria, putting each other responsible for all the consequences that they are going through, start drifting apart from each other: "You'd think everything was my fault. You'd think you hadn't encouraged me to spend money--and spent a lot more on yourself than I ever did by a long shot" (Fitzgerald 583). However, both of them, driven by their own desires, surrender themselves completely at the control of their id where it feels appropriate for both of them to simply die relishing whatever they are left with rather than working hard and survive: "'Anthony,' she cried suddenly, 'two hundred a month is worse than nothing. Let's sell all the bonds and put the thirty thousand dollars in the bank--and if we lose the case we can live in Italy for three years, and then just die'" (Fitzgerald 605).



It shows their complete psychological self-destruction under the dominance of their uncontrollable id.

Though the verdict of the lawsuit falls in Anthony's favour, Anthony, going through a lot of humiliation, loses his mental stability:

He was thinking of the hardships, the insufferable tribulations he had gone through. They had tried to penalize him for the mistakes of his youth. He had been exposed to ruthless misery, his very craving for romance had been punished, his friends had deserted him--even Gloria had turned against him. He had been alone, alone--facing it all. (Fitzgerald 640)

At the end of the novel, it is seen that in the unbridled pursuit of pleasure Anthony and Gloria headed their way towards self-destruction like 'a moth to a flame'. Their desire to live life hedonistically drowning in increasing alcoholism brings utter despair in their lives. The dominance of id over their psychic apparatus destroys their ability to resolve the tremendous conflicts arising in their psyche. Their ego fails to prevent the id from continuing its reckless chase towards instant gratification of the libidinal desires which puts them in the clutches of absolute misery. Therefore, this paper, through the lens of psychoanalytic criticism, uncovers the different layers of human psyche. Truly, Fitzgerald's characters had beautiful possibilities of the future, however, are damned in the hands of their own destructive desires.

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