
Celibacy as a Collective Trauma: A Freudian Rereading of Patrick Kavanagh's The Great Hunger

Emad Said Elsayed Ibrahim

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia
dr.emad.s@su.edu.sa

Abstract

The Great Hunger (1942) is Kavanagh's most celebrated poem handling the antipastoral realities of farming life. One major feature of antipastoralism in the poem is the manifestation of a sexually frustrated society. This study focuses on the founding of a psychological interpretation for the issue of celibacy and sexual frustration in Patrick Kavanagh's masterpiece The Great Hunger. Kavanagh counters the pastoral tradition of celebrating a rural community of happy housewives and care free virtuous men. Rather, the poem mainly handles sexual frustration of a society of unmarried men and women. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the present paper focuses on the psychological complications, mainly the libidinal and oedipal fixations, associated with and issuing from sexual abstention and frustration. Therefore, an important guide in the working out of the paper's main topic is Freud's Libido and Oedipus complex theories. Integral to the study is an application of Freudian psychosexual symbolism introduced in his The Interpretations of Dreams (1909). Merging also in the study is the role of the church seen as practicing a patriarchal force pertinent to the psychological concerns of the paper.

Keywords: Kavanagh, Freud, Symbolism, Libido, Collective Frustration, Oedipus Complex.

Introduction

Patrick Kavanagh is an Irish poet of the farming agonies; he is not the bard of the romanticized countryside hailed by the Irish Revival. Despite his early idealization of the Irish rural life as shown in his pastoral lyrics introduced in *Ploughman* and other Poems (1936), he has managed to surpass this inclination to adopt more of a realistic vision. Kavanagh expresses his rage against the oft-hailed idyllic view of the Revivalists on countryside life in *The Great Hunger* (1942). At this stage, “Kavanagh rejected the romantic idealisation of the rural that had inspired Yeats and the writers of the Celtic Twilight. He rejected the idioms that promoted a unified national myth, and was critical of Yeats and the Revivalists” (Nordin 51). Kavanagh speaks of the rural Ireland from the point of view of a farmer who has experienced what rural life really is. In this poem, Kavanagh highlights his down to mud, realistic view on the countryside. Allied with the anti-Revivalists “The Great Hunger is about the back-breaking existence of the farmer... Life is consumed by the relentless misery of making a hard living” (Duffy 318). However, no full attention has been given to the role of psychology in the forming of such a hard living. The present study handles celibacy and sexual frustration in *The Great Hunger*. Referring to the same poem, previous critical studies have touched upon sexual frustration. In her biographic work about Kavanagh, Antoinette Quinn notes that “The Great Hunger is also explicitly and pervasively libidinised in a way that is altogether new in Kavanagh’s writing. Where previously he had dealt in romance, he now foregrounds lust and sexual torment” (134). Jonathan Allison has also referred to the same sexual torment: “... fearing sin, and fearing but craving sexual intimacy, Maguire lives a life of sexual abstinence” (45). Through employing a psychoanalytic approach, this paper offers an interdisciplinary attempt as it applies the Freudian libido theory and related Oedipus complex on *The Great Hunger* for the sake of tracing this sexual craving and abstinence to its psycho-traumatic roots.

Freud's psychoanalysis associated with the libido theory has concentrated on the biological aspect of the self, which suffers tension upon suppressing the socially unacceptable sexual desires. Modernism has "a reductionist, materialistic view on the self, [it assumes that] the self is contained within the biology of the individual, calling into question metaphysical issues" (Hoffman et al. 138). This definition of the self creates an affinity between Freudian psychology and modernist thought. Modernist authors, The Great Hunger proves Kavanagh to be an established one of them, have tried to delve deep into the unconscious of their protagonists, however the unconscious is the area of the hidden and the unexpressed. Modernists have resorted to the symbol in order to widen the scope of their poetic expression. Kavanagh's modernist outlook reaches full maturation in *The Great Hunger*, Antoinette Quinn judges the poem as "multifaceted... modernist" (143). However, the poem does not expose modernism's "textual infiniteness, incompleteness, [or] epistemological doubt" (McHale 8).

In the course of applying a psychoanalytic approach, the present study attempts to offer a Freudian interpretation of some symbols that touch upon and address the libido theory in the poem. Speaking of symbolism, Kavanagh can be associated with modernist Yeats, a master symbolist. In his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1908), a book dedicated to Yeats, and that preaches of a new or rather modern anti-romantic poetry, Arthur Symons affirms that "without symbolism there can be no literature ; indeed, not even language. What are words themselves but symbols" (1). Symons even hints at the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure whose linguistic discoveries about language structures laid the foundations for later modernist interest in clarity of expression and distrust in metaphor replaced by images and symbols. Thus, "symbolism is [a] manifestation of modernism, [it] appeared as a poetical deviation from romanticism" (Pedersen 593).

Psychoanalytic criticism argues that “literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author’s own neurosis” (Delahoyde). Freud regards literary works as dream-thoughts to be decoded symbolically. Linking literature to psychology on a technical basis, symbolism, therefore, can reveal much about the psychic condition of authors and protagonists. It allows the poet an opportunity to flee subjective expression and to find classical objectivity in the realm of poetic symbolism. According to Alexandru Philippide, “symbolic poetry is based on the revelations of the subconscious, on the deepening in the dream, and on the crepuscular psychic states. [Symbolism] wants to exclude pathos and eloquence from poetry” (164). Poetic discourse and psychoanalytic discourse are no contending fields at opposite poles; rather they can work in collaboration upon reaching their meeting point: symbolism. The case is not the same with regard to linguistic discourse that deals with the definite as it regards the symbolic as deviation from linguistic norm. Jean Baudrillard concludes: “... to examine poetic discourse in terms of Freud also means examining psychoanalytic discourse in terms of the symbolic” (60). Consequently, the poet experiences a kind of liberation out of the fixed direct and clear-cut sign/ signifier pattern of de Saussure. The symbolic allows the poet an aura of richness attributed to the word, and “...From a minimum of signifiers a maximum of meanings are obtained” (Baudrillard 61).

Freud has spoken of the bond between Psychology and symbolism in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* especially in its third edition (1911). Freud develops his theory of the Oedipus complex depending on his theory of the unconscious, dream interpretation and symbolism. However, Freud did not restrict oedipal and psychosexual symbolism to dreams.

Symbolism is not peculiar to dreams, but is characteristic of unconscious ideation, in particular among the people, and it is to be found in folklore, and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes, to a more complete extent than in dreams (Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams 364-65).

As far as the Freud's libido theory is concerned, the majority of symbols in dreams are sex symbols. Freud refers to the objects that can penetrate and cause injury as representing male genital organ, while all hollow objects that enclose a space are representations of the female genitals.

Freud maintains that the physical influences the psychological. He speaks of the drives as forces influencing mental and behavioral conduct. Freud distinguishes between the self-preserving life-drive or Eros and the aggression-incentive death-drive or Thanatos. Furthermore, he claims that human psyche consists of three components: the conscious or the Ego, the Super Ego, and the unconscious or the Id. The Id should be put under control to satisfy social rules; the resulting frustration is directed by the Ego and the Superego to meet socially accepted norms. His discoveries about the unconscious have provided a clearer understanding of human behavior. The unconscious is the area of wanted and suppressed desires mostly accounted for as sexual. Freud has laid stress on the libido as driving power affecting the psyche. Freud finds that the individual's life is made up of moments of tension and other moments of pleasure. Thus, the discharge of the libido energy causes pleasure while tension is the cause of curbing the release of the libido or the sexual power. For this reason, Freud concurs that a psychological well-being is determined by the psychosexual development of the way in which libido energy of the Id is discharged as a person matures. Psychosexual development in children occurs in stages called the psychosexual stages: the oral, the anal, the phallic, latency, and the genital.

The surpassing successfully of one psychosexual stage to reach another depends on the satisfaction of the needs and sexual wishes of the individual. If those wishes are not satisfied or fulfilled, frustration develops. In contrast to this, if the individual is so well satisfied and pleased in certain stage, the individual may become unwilling to leave the stage and so overindulgence develops. Both frustration and

overindulgence hinder psychosexual development and lead to fixation. According to Freud, fixation is a term that refers to the condition in which an enduring residual of an individual's libido remains lingering in a particular stage of his development. Fixations are obstacles in the way of an individual's psychosexual development. Negatively affecting the psychological well-being of an individual, fixation could lead to various psychological disorders such as autoeroticism, scopophilia, and exhibitionism ...etc.

The Great Hunger shows the instinctually self-preserving Eros drive suppressed; the poem introduces a community bred to consider abolishing and denying the sexual drive as virtue. Literally, the very title of the long poem suggests a physical need the denial of which has led to negative psychological consequences. As far as the self-preserving drive is concerned, the title recalls one principle calamity engraved in the national Irish memory, the great famine or the potato hunger that stroke Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century. In Ireland, "...Famine is one of the most powerful, pervasive, and arguably one of the most emotive, words in our historical vocabulary, and that in itself makes it all the more difficult to isolate its meaning and wider significance" (Arnold 5). The occasion has left an indelible scar in the collective psychic of the nation. It has even caused some mental problems passed to following generations. Patrick Tracey recalls the harmful effect of the famine on both the national and the personal levels: "The Great Irish Famine left its mark on the tiny island nation... Generations are swept away in much greater numbers, with rates of psychosis more than doubling... The great starvation might be responsible for the schizophrenia that struck my two sisters" (Tracey: 2014).

Kavanagh speaks of the emotional hunger leading to frustration that looms about an impoverish farming locale, a type of hunger initiated first by a physical one. In The Great Hunger, he speaks of the psychological consequences of emotional bereavement inflicted on the Irish by memory. The Great Hunger exhibits a condition

of what might be called collective psychological trauma as the poem introduces a society that suffers from various types of fixations. “Collective trauma”, Cormack O’ Grada writes, is “the transfer of the early Freudian notion of repressed memory from a micro to a macro context” (141). The Great Hunger pictures an authoritarian locale that controls and curbs the growth of a balanced psyche. Maguire, the main persona in the poem, is in a state of complete sexual deprivation issuing from cultural and psychological origins. One principle cultural force in Maguire’s community is the chapel, speaking of human weakness, has aggravated a psychic inherent sense of human inferiority. Claiming a fatherly control, the puritan church of Ireland practices a castrating power. Father and religion prohibit incest and prevent the mother-fixated individual from consummating his love. Consciously out of fear of castration, the son suppresses his love for the mother and hides it to the realm of the unconscious. Castration is a symptom of the Oedipus complex, which characterizes the phallic stage.

The Great Hunger presents a community collectively trapped in the phallic stage to suffer the consequences and resulting fixations of the Oedipus complex. This complex develops in the young boy in the phallic stage. The boy sexually desires his mother as a love-object and wants to get rid of his father who stands in the way of realizing this desire. Castration anxiety forms in the young boy in fear of the father. The resolving of the Oedipus complex occurs either positively or negatively through a process of identification depending on what Freud terms as “bisexuality”. Bisexuality is a matter of disposition within each individual towards masculinity or femininity. The boy can resolve his oedipal trauma positively through sublimation and identification with the masculine disposition of his father. Negatively, the boy could become effeminate by identification with the mother through regarding the father as love-object. As for girls, they can also be oedipal however in a more complicated manner than that associated with boys. The girl passes by two stages; the first has a masculine character and so develops mother-love. Upon discovering

her lacking of the male organ, phallus, the girl passes to the second stage, which has a famine character. The girl acknowledges her castration and thus develops father-love. The denial of this taboo love causes oedipal fixations settled through the girl's desire of having a child. She desires a child from the father as she takes the child as compensation for her phallic lacking and related castration. Surprisingly, males and females in *The Great Hunger* exhibit manifestations of the Oedipus complex and its related traumas and symbols. *The Great Hunger* is a poem that reflects Freud's libido theory and related the oedipal fixations, a hypothesis that the present study hopes to prove.

The Great Hunger, opens with a critical announcement, "Clay is the word and clay is the flesh" (Kavanagh, *Collected Poems*, 78) hereafter referred to with the initials TGH and line number in brackets. It is the "clay" of unsentimental narrow farming life that forms the axis around which the farmers' lives and harsh realities center. Furthermore, "clay is the flesh" that psychologically seeks gratification of pleasure through its erotogenic zones. In this sense, Kavanagh draws a picture of a community trapped in the nets of libidinal confines and the impoverish locale seen as denying the desirable and tantalizing physical claims of the "clay" incarnated into "flesh". The poet's inverted biblical allusion to St John's reflects the type of inhabitants living within the confines of a farming surrounding in which it is "clay" and not the Christian God whom they worship. Thus, replacing "God" in St. John's verse with "flesh" presupposes a deity that ritualizes the gratifying of pleasurable sensations. Wishing to gratify these sensations in a socially acceptable manner, Maguire "promised marriage to himself" (TGH 12). Despite of this wish, he never gets married. Maguire remains "free from every net spread / In the gaps of [sin] experience" (TGH 28-29). Tragically, however, oedipal and helpless Maguire resorts to the imagined women of his fancies. "We will wait and watch the tragedy to the last curtain" (TGH 14) only to discover that Maguire's celibacy is a symptom of a troubled unconscious.

Castration is the punishment for the taboo mother love. Fear of father, thus, gratifies leading to the shunning of any possible relationship with other women; masturbation becomes their save way out of libidinal tension. Under the influence of the Oedipus complex, “the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother’s breast and is the prototype of an object choice on the anaclitic model; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 31). Identification with the father characterizes the positive dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Such dissolution occurs because the child is aware of the fact that he cannot overcome the presence of the father and win the mother. Maguire's superego leads him to sublimation, specifically directing his energy to the telling of the fields. While his mother “praise[s] the man who made a field his bride” (TGH 57), Maguire is aware of impoverish farming and “the grip of irregular fields! No man escapes” (TGH 67). Maguire does not accept this type of sublimation. He finds himself “trapped in what seems like a stagnant rural landscape... [T]he sense of entrapment is reinforced by the harsh realities of farming and rural life” (Shokouhi 150).

Maguire believes that “God's truth is life” that craves for pleasure satisfaction in the “grotesque shapes of its foulest fire” (TGH 79); consequently he does not accept his mother's offer of puritan sublimation. Oedipal Maguire suffers mother fixation: “he loved his mother/ Above all others” (TGH 101-2). As long as she lived, she was “Wife and mother in one”(TGH 97). Maguire's mother forms a dominating love-object. This Oedipal relationship spoils any future love leading to marriage. Even after the death of his mother at the age of “ninety-one”, she continues to be a curbing force in his emotional life. He withers as he remains faithful to his secrete lust. Maguire dissolves his Oedipus complex (by suppressing such sensual desire)through the losing of his phallus. He is torn between two castrating powers; a patriarchal church and actual mother sometimes seen as representative and guardian of that

religious power. Maguire succumbs to the overpowering authority of a church playing the role of the law of the father.

The dissolution of the Oedipus complex occurs through identification depending on the concept of bisexuality, which is a matter of a disposition. Therefore, “the relative strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions is what determines whether the outcome of the Oedipus situation shall be identification with the father or with the mother” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 33). The Oedipus complex is a twofold issue: positive and negative. In the positive case, the boy develops affection towards mother and then at a later stage he identifies himself with the father as sublimation and in fear of castration. In a negative case the boy identifies himself with the mother, he “behaves like a girl and displays an affectionate feminine attitude to his father and a corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother” (Nagera et.al 126). Falling under the fixation of the negative aspect of the Oedipus complex, Maguire becomes effeminate and emerges with “... two stones in his fist / And an impotent worm on his thigh” (TGH 113-14). Wifeless as he is, his solitary libidinal passion with “the vague / women of his mind” (TGH 115-16), plagues his life:

*And returned to his headlands of carrots and cabbage,
To the fields once again
Where eunuchs can be men
And life is more lousy than savage. (TGH 115-24)*

In vain, he tries to avoid the threat of emasculation through sublimation. The hard work in the fields might slow down his advance towards being effeminate. In another occasion, he speaks to the men at the field like “a man who could give advice / ... [in] the voice of a great cattle-dealer” (TGH 450-1). However, the passive influence of the Oedipus complex, unconsciously forcing Maguire to behave like a girl, seems to be overwhelming. In a wife-like manner, Maguire is in charge of the household tasks as mother claims an authoritative and even castrating power that greatly overshadows his feigned voice of a “cattle-dealer”. Freud finds that the mother's

figure could practice a castrating role on the male child as she claims the authority of the father. Therefore, he succumbs to the authoritative mother speaking “sharply” with “a venomous drawl”.

*It was he that lit the fire
And boiled the kettle and gave the cows their hay.
His mother, tall, hard as a Protestant spire,
Came down the stairs bare-foot at the kettle-call
And talked to her son sharply: ‘Did you let
The hens out, you?’ She had a venomous drawl (TGH 126-31)*

The dreaming or the imaging of “Steps, ladders or staircases, or, as the case may be, walking up or down them, [are] representations of the sexual act” (Freud, *The Interpretations of Dreams* 368). The Castration threat upon the suppressing of sexual desires manifests itself in masturbation. Castration might be inflicted on the child by the parental figure. In her thorough study of Freudian libido theory Negara et al concludes; “Freud felt that typically the castration threat was ‘more or less plainly’ made, usually by the mother figure, as a punishment for masturbation”(79), or “the no-target gun fired”(TGH 119). Consequently, Maguire's unconscious forces him to remain under the threat of an overwhelming mother figure.

Again, his mother’s voice gets “venomously” threatening like “a rust-worn knife” as the woman ages. Maguire resolves his oedipal complex through becoming more of a girl rather than a man. Maguire then admits that the castrating voice of his mother has “cut him up the middle till he became more woman than man” (TGH 445). Bisexuality has a critical role in the dissolution of the Oedipus complex.

*[I]n both sexes the relative strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions is what determines whether the outcome of the Oedipus situation shall be an identification with the father or with the mother. This is one of the ways in which bisexuality takes a hand in the subsequent vicissitudes of the Oedipus complex (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 33).*

On another occasion, Maguire likens his occasional inability to discharge his libidinal energy, masturbating, to “menopause”. His quitting for a while is much like a “menopause, the misery-pause” (TGH 466). Showing more of a feminine sexual disposition, Maguire resorts to the negative dissolution of the Oedipus complex in a community of patriarchal religion, harsh fields, and domineering mother.

Fear of maternal punishment and patriarchal puritanism of the church represent two castrating forces thwarting Maguire's psychosexual development. Physical needs ranging from hunger to sex occupy Maguire's mind as result of the collective trauma of hunger irritating the collective unconscious of the Irish. Consequently, “clayey hours” smear his soul even in church. Amidst the congregation assembly, he whispers to himself “Wonder should I cross-plough that turnip-ground” (TGH 183). The congregation is “hungry for life”, yet the religious check practices its patriarchal castration and “Sin” is an alarm of punishment. “Religion, the fields and the fear of the Lord” (TGH 216) pressurize the unconscious of the farmers to suffer fixations. After church and going back home, Maguire falls under the spell of sensuality; helplessly he turns back to his secrete discharge of libidinal energy in the manner that never needs a wife: “Pat opened his trousers wide over the ashes”(TGH 253). The patriarchal power of the church monitors and checks the practice of love.

No less frustrated, women experience oedipal fixations in Maguire’s community. “While The Great Hunger foregrounds male sexual frustration, it does not altogether neglect its female counterpart” (Quinn, 125).The psychological trauma is collective enough to influence the behavior of both sexes. Therefore, mother, sister, Agnes, and schoolgirls are all taken as samples exposing aspects of the Oedipus complex. Affiliated with the patriarchal authority of the church, mother takes the side of puritanism and said: “Now go to Mass and pray and confess your sins / And you’ll have all the luck” (TGH 277-78). Maguire is “dominated by his manipulative, elderly mother. He lives in fear of a vengeful God, or at least of vigilant clergy” (Alison 45).

The castrating effect of religion reaches its highest level as a fathering God punishes with hunger those who seek premarital sex. God threatens with lack of “luck” in crop season those who do not confess and repent for their sins. The great famine experience troubles the collective unconscious of the Irish. The trauma of hunger passes unconsciously from one generation to the next; that is why the mother links a successful harvest with the obedience of God whose “chapel [is] pressing its low ceiling over them” (TGH 338). The chapel preaches a Christian God, and “one of his chief functions is to act as the custodian of extra-marital chastity” (Quinn137).

However, Maguire trusts life's truth and knows that his mother is a “liar” and that “morality yields to senses” (TGH 78). Patrick Walsh judges “Kavanagh [as] a great poet with a strong commitment to truth – not what modern man in his confusion refers to as truth, but truth that is everlasting and eternal” (365). Theorized psychological truth is empirical and eternal. Aware of this truth, Kavanagh knows that the suppression of the sensual overcharges the unconscious and leads to psychic fixations. Mother completes the oedipal circuit; Maguire knows that his mother is in league with the castrating figure of father-incarnated chapel. Sexual abstention and related frustration is the result of a puritan view on sex. In Michael O'Loughlin's view, the chapel practices a puritan curbing force leading to a sense of inferiority and shame.

There is considerable support in the literature for the notion that Irish people have particular psychic and character vulnerabilities that emerge from a pervasive sense of inferiority and malignant shame exacerbated by the effects of an Irish Catholic upbringing steeped in puritanical morality (235).

Sexual frustration, one symptom of exaggerated puritanical morality, overwhelms the rural society, a case that openly satirizes the oft-thought pastoral image of rural Ireland. In the presence of Maguire, Agnes, a country girl,

*... held her skirts sensationally up,
And not because the grass was wet either.
A man was watching her, Patrick Maguire.
She was in love with passion and its weakness
And the wet grass could never cool the fire
That radiated from her unwanted womb (TGH 289-94).*

Showing symptoms of what Freud calls exhibitionism, “Agnes held her skirts sensationally up” hoping to seduce a voyeur; ... [to] / cool the fire / That radiated from her unwanted womb” (TGH 289-94). Agnes suffers exhibitionism; a libidinal fixation that drives the patient to expose parts of his/her body. Agnes disparately seeks to seduce a voyeur. Her behavior is a direct invitation for sex rather than marriage. Disparate and driven by “passion and its weakness”, Agnes is ready to accept premarital sex so long as there are no marriage chances. She finds satisfaction in exhibiting herself; however the over ostentatiousness of the “sensationally” holding up of her “skirts” seems pervert. “Exhibitionists will display their own genitals to obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of another... [A behavior that] defines pervert exhibitionism” (Nagera et al. 154). Therefore, “exhibitionism” always entails “scopophilia”, the sexual desire of a voyeur to look at another. Therefore, “...anyone who is an exhibitionist in his unconscious is at the same time a voyeur” (Freud, Instincts and their Vicissitudes 127). A voyeur yet already castrated, Maguire “was watching” with no intention or courage to approach her “unwanted womb”. Kavanagh shows another case of exhibitionism and scopophilia as some girls stretch wide their legs.

*And there would be girls sitting on the grass banks of lanes
Stretch-legged and lingering staring –
A man might take one of them if he had the courage. (TGH 389-91)*

“Stretch-legged”, the girls are exhibiting themselves to tempt passersby. However, the “lingering staring” of those girls marks a case in Freudian psychology called

scopophilia. Scopophilia is a psychological “component with an active sexual aim—that is the aim to look at” (Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality 167).

Exhibitionism and scopophilia are manifestations of oedipal fixations. The Oedipus complex in girls is more complicated than that in boys. The girl passes by two stages depending on the genital area. Thus, “[girls] sexual life is regularly divided into two phases, of which the first has a masculine character, while only the second is specifically feminine” (Nagera et al. 69). In the first phase, the young girl takes her mother as a love-object and she does not accept the fact that she is castrated, thus she develops a penis-envy. In the second phase, she resolves her situation with accepting castration and then she takes father as a love-object. The penis-envy shifts to penis-child, having a child compensates her lack of phallus. She looks upon father as a love-object and desires having a child from him. Upon reaching the second phase

The girl’s libido slips into a new position along the line ... of the equation ‘penis-child’, and for purposes of getting a child she now takes her father as love object and the mother becomes the object of her jealousy. She turns to her father and this attraction to him is secondary to her wish to obtain a baby from him (Freud, Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes 256).

Reflecting this, Kavanagh offers an exact application of Freudian findings in referring to women in his society suffering sexual frustration:

*The young women ran wild
And dreamed of a child.
Joy dreams though the fathers might forsake them
But no one would take them,
No one would take them;
No man could ever see
That their skirts had loosed buttons,
Deliberately loosed buttons.
O the men were as blind as could be. (TGH 320-28)*

Women dream of having a “child” symbolizing power-indicative phallus in a frustrated community. A child is a Freudian symbol of the genitals. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud notes: “Children in dreams often stand for the genitals; and, indeed, both men and women are in the habit of referring to their genitals affectionately as their ‘little ones’” (370). The sexual pleasure or “joy” in having dreams of “fathers” cannot be attained because “no one” and “No man” can take them despite women's exhibitionist attempts as they deliberately “had loosed buttons” of their “skirts” to seduce these sex forbidden “blind” men. Psychic individuals suffering pervert scopophilia could experience eyesight disturbances, thus men could turn “blind” in sublimation of the instinctual drive of looking at a forbidden sight. The libidinal pleasure of looking is put under the repressive demands of the ego, and consequently related desires are prohibited from being conscious. In that case, “there will be a general disturbance of the relation of the eye and of the act of seeing to the ego and consciousness. The ego will have lost its dominance over the organ, which will now be wholly at the disposal of the repressed sexual instinct... Because you sought to misuse your organ of sight for the evil sensual pleasures, it is fitting that you should not see anything at all any more” (Freud, *The Psycho-Analytic View of Psychogenic Disturbances of Vision* 216-17). Freud gives the argument a religious bearing. “Here Freud includes the idea of talion punishment” (Nagera et al. 148). In a bitterly comic manner, Maguire declares that the chapel shall remain practicing its blinding rather castrating influence even after death. Thus, if he is to open his eyes “once in a million years / Through a crack in the crust of the earth he may see... / a woman’s legs. / [he would] Shut them again for that sight is sin” (TGH 727-29). Such comic remark reinforces the feeling of frustration and enhances the possibility that the long poem was written first as a black comedy mocking the religious and social check on the sexual lives of rural Irish communities.

Like other women in *The Great Hunger* Maguire's sister Mary Anne is no less distressed. Mary Anne is first introduced in the poem as she “grunt[s] in bed” a sound

that might indicate her unfulfilled desires. A woman “of middle-aged virginity / She prayed for release to heaven or hell” (TGH 441-42). Mary Anne loses hope of having a phallus-child to compensate her penis-envy. The frustration resultant leads her to turn hostile against children

... *Mary Anne spat poison at the children*

Who sometimes came to the door selling raffle tickets. (The G.H. lines: 523-4)

Mary Anne suffers an unresolved Oedipus complex especially at the second phase. In this stage, the girl looks upon father as a love-object and then develops her feminine character. Fatherless and unmarried, Mary Anne is unable to consummate the sexual needs of her feminine character. In this case and under certain bisexual disposition, the girl may linger in the first phase of the Oedipus complex and develop a masculine character so turning again to mother as love-object. Therefore, “the girl might bring her masculinity into prominence and identify herself with her father (the lost object) instead of with her mother” (Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 32). Mary acknowledges her inability to have father or any other man as love object; consequently she may bring her masculinity into play and get identified with the father. At this point, she cannot realize the equation "child-penis". Therefore, turning hostile, she, “spat poison at the children” selling raffle tickets at her door. This greatly contrasts with emasculate Maguire who tenderly searches “... his trouser-pocket and fingered out a penny / Or maybe a tobacco-stained caramel” (TGH 529-30) for the children. “You're so soft” (TGH 531), Mary says to her effeminate brother. This contradictory behavior of Mary Anne and Maguire towards children can reflect two different ways of venting out sexual tension. The playing with Children or even beating them is a representation of the act of masturbation. Freud takes children as a symbol of the genitals or the “little ones”, thus “Playing with a little child, beating it, etc., often represents masturbation in dreams” (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 370). The dissolution of the Oedipus complex takes the negative rout both for

Maguire becoming effeminate and for Mary Anne who seems to have acquired more of a masculine character.

Conclusion

Unlike the Revivalist image of rural Irish farming life, The Great Hunger introduces an anti-pastoral image of a sexually frustrated society suffering oedipal fixations. Approaching the poem from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, the poem has revealed important psychological facts concerning the issue of celibacy and sexual frustration. Maguire, the main persona, is effeminate as result of oedipal fixations. Maguire has negatively found dissolution of his Oedipus complex through identifying himself with the mother. Having a powerful mother claiming the authoritative power of father, Maguire unconsciously sublimates his oedipal fixations through selecting mother as object of identification. In contrast to his condition and due to the same psychological fixations, his sister Mary Anne acquires masculine character traits. She remains trapped in her primary oedipal mother fixation and refuses to pass to the second stage of father love. She unconsciously takes her powerful mother as love-object, a psychological fact that results in identification with the father. Other girls in the society manifest cases of other oedipal fixations due to male sexual abstention. Agnes and some other girls suffer exhibitionism and related scopophilia. Men turn “blind” upon falling under religious-cum-oedipal castrating check. Freudian psychology, this time, explains the anripastoral anti-Revivalist appeal of the poem upon revealing facts about a sexually frustrated society. The Great Hunger pictures a psychic society suffering various fixations, a fact that proves the poem’s deep affinity with Freudian psychology.

Works Cited:

- Allison, Jonathan. “Patrick Kavanagh and Antipastoral”, *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poery*. ED. Matthew Campbell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003. 42-58

-
- Arnold, David. *Famine: Social Crisis and Historical Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
 - Baudrillard, Jean. "Beyond the Unconscious: The Symbolic". Trans. Lee Hildreth. *Discourse* 3. Spring (1981): 60-87
 - Delahoyde, Michael. "Psychoanalytic Criticism".
<http://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyde/psycho.crit.html>
Accessed 20 Feb. 2020
 - Duffy, P, J. "Writing Ireland: literature and art in the representation of Irish place". *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*. Ed. B Graham. London: Routledge, 1997. 64-83
 - Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 3rd ed. Trans. and edited by Strachey, James. New York: Basic Books, 2010 (1911)
 - _____. "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 19. Trans. & edited J. Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press, 1955 (1924d)
 - _____. "The Ego and the Id". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 19. Trans. & edited J. Strachey et al., London: Hogarth Press, 1955 (1923b)
 - _____. "Instincts and their Vicissitudes". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 14. Trans. & edited J. Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press, 1955 (1915c)
 - _____. "The Psycho-Analytic View of Psychogenic Disturbances of Vision". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 11. Trans. & edited J. Strachey et al., London: Hogarth Press, 1955(1910i)
 - _____. "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 7. Trans. & Ed J. Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press, 1955 (1905d)
 - Gilsenan Nordin, Irene. "The Place of Writing in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats and Patrick Kavanagh". *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 13. Issue 2 (2014): 43-56.
 - Hoffman, L. et al. "Toward a Sustainable Myth of Self an Existential Response to the Postmodern Condition" *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* Volume 49 Number 2 April. 2009. 135-173
-

-
- Kavanagh, Patrick. "The Great Hunger", *Collected Poems*. Ed. A. Quinn. London: Penguin Books, 2005. 78-100. [http:// b-ok.asia/book/1258622/1369c9](http://b-ok.asia/book/1258622/1369c9). Accessed 15 Nov. 2019
 - McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1987.
 - O'Loughlin, M. "Trauma trails from Ireland's Great Hunger: A psychoanalytic inquiry". *Loneliness and Longing: Conscious & Unconscious Aspects*. Eds. Willock, B., Curtis, R. & Bohm, L. New York: Routledge, 2012. 233-251
 - Pedersen, Elena. "Symbolism, the Beginning of Modern Poetry", *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 180. 2015. 593-599
 - Philippide, A. (1966), *Studies on World Literature*, Youth Publishing House, Bucharest.
 - Quinn, Antoinette. *Patrick Kavanagh A Biography*. Gill & Macmillan, 2014. [http:// b-ok.asia/book/4809468/0788fb](http://b-ok.asia/book/4809468/0788fb). Accessed 15 Nov. 2019
 - Shokouhi, Marjan. "Towards a Poetics of Dwelling: Patrick Kavanagh's Countryside". *Estudios Irlandeses*, Issue 14, March 2019-Feb. 2020. (2019). 146-159
 - Walsh, Patrick J. "Clearing the Misty Celtic Fog". *Modern Age*, Fall, Vol. 43. Issue 4. 2001. 363-366