The Abyss of the Past
A Freudian Reading of Mo Hayder's The Devil of Nanking

Elisabeth Rettkowski
Abstract

The aim of this bachelor’s thesis is to submit the character of Grey in Mo Hayder’s novel, *The Devil of Nanking* to a Freudian reading with focus on repression and trauma and their impact on sexual development and obsessive behavior. The analysis of to what extent Grey’s past and present experiences form the cornerstone to her mental and sexual development including repression and obsession will be based on Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories. The claim is that Grey’s obsessiveness and sexuality can be explained and seen in terms of a Freudian view of trauma resulting in repression.
## Table of contents

1. **Introduction**  
   3

2. **Theoretical Background**  
   5  
   2.1 Freudian reading: psychoanalytic criticism  
      5  
   2.1.1 Freud and sexuality  
      6

3. **Analysis of Grey**  
   9  
   3.1 Childhood and puberty  
      10  
   3.2 Tokyo - Personality and behavior  
      13  
   3.3 Obsession versus sexuality  
      15  
   3.4 Scars  
      19

4. **Conclusion and discussion**  
   21

5. **Works cited**  
   23
Fear and fascination are so closely linked aren’t they? People deal with fear in one of two ways. I think they either recoil from it and walk in the opposite direction (lots of people just won’t pick up my books because they know the reputation I have). Whereas other people deal with it in a completely different way - they become fascinated. That’s always how I’ve dealt with my fear. If I’ve got something that absolutely horrifies me I’ll go look at it in the eyes as clearly as I can.

Mo Hayder, 2011

1. Introduction

The novel *The Devil of Nanking*, written by Mo Hayder, is based on the war crimes of the Japanese during World War 2 and was first published in 2004. The storyline is centered around Grey, a young woman from England who travels to Tokyo in 1990 to find out the truth about one specific event that happened in Nanking. She develops an obsession with the existence of a conjectural documentary film, which supposedly delivers proof to a report about babies surviving being cut out of the mother’s abdomens, that she had read in a book when she was a child. The fact that people, and especially her parents consider young Grey being insane results in a long stay at a hospital for the mentally ill. At the age of thirteen, Grey runs off and has sexual intercourse with five boys in a van, which results in her being pregnant and treated even more like a person who has psychological problems. Fearing that her mother will kill her and the unborn child and being disbelieved by everyone about Nanking drives her into doing something desperate. With a kitchen knife Grey stabs herself in the abdomen believing her child will survive and be taken far away from her and her parents in particular. The child does not survive.
Grey is the main character in the novel *The Devil of Nanking* and can be looked at from different perspectives, such as from a psychoanalytic point of view. I have chosen to concentrate on Grey because she is the first-person narrator and the reader can follow her life in Tokyo and what she has experienced in her past.

Psychoanalysis is the most suitable form of criticism that can be used to analyze Grey, as she has been exposed to traumas in her childhood and adult life, which results in repression and obsession concerning her sexual development and every-day life. I have chosen to use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories to do so. Repression and its resultant symptoms can be considered a cornerstone of Freudian psychoanalysis in the field of sexuality. I am aware that the use of Freud's theories can be problematic considering that his work reached its peak almost ten decades ago and is today, according to Stephen Thornton "the subject of much critical debate and controversy" (1). The main reason why Freud's theories about the influence of repression on sexuality can be applied to the character analysis in *The Devil of Nanking* is not only the fact that different forms and kinds of sexual acts and traumas can be encountered throughout the novel, but also that, according to Thornton "the multiple manifestations of psychoanalysis as it exists today, . . . can in all fundamental respects be traced directly back to Freud's original work" (1). Even though a number of today's psychoanalysts might consider Freud's ideas being obsolete (Thornton 7), he made groundbreaking discoveries in the field of how trauma and repression seem connected to the development of sexual behavior in human beings. In the novel it appears that Grey's sexual behavior and early traumas resulting in repression are a focal point for the analysis. Her past and her present development seem to be a result of different sexual experiences and acts. Such acts include group-sex, sex where one specific part of the body is covered,
denial of sexuality, masturbation and obsessive sexual behavior. The reader can also follow Grey’s memories concerning events from her childhood, which seem to be a possible reason why she develops repression and obsession both in a sexual and nonsexual way.

The aim of this paper is to submit the chosen character to a psychoanalytical reading and analysis using Freud’s theories about repression and sexuality. Freud’s psychoanalytic research will allow me to investigate to what extent repression and trauma have an impact on sexual disorders or symptoms of disorders and obsessive behavior in the novel. My claim is that the sexual development of young Grey and her present sexuality and obsession over Nanking can be explained and seen in terms of a Freudian view of repression and trauma.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Freudian reading: psychoanalytic criticism
To begin with, psychoanalysis was not a tool for literary criticism. According to Keith Green and Jill LeBihan, psychoanalysis “is not primarily a literary practice, . . . it is a clinical and therapeutic methodology” and “it has a long and complex relationship to practices of reading and writing and . . . why people write and how texts affect their readers” (143). Nevertheless, literary critics have adapted methods that psychoanalysts use to analyze literature. According to Peter Barry, psychoanalytic criticism is “a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature” (92). Common techniques are “dream interpretation and free association to investigate the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind and” to bring
“repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind” (Oxford Dictionary). In Grey’s case it is not clear whether she is conscious about her repression or not but she is aware of what she has experienced and, to some extend, how it has and still does influence her development. Freud’s psychoanalytic theories are suitable for analyzing Grey’s character and past and present behavior. Green and LeBihan write about Freudian psychoanalysis in literature and mention that the key concept of Freudian psychoanalysis is “the idea that there are unconscious processes, operations in the mind that cannot be represented. . . . Repression is the action that produces the unconscious by rendering experiences, thoughts, desires and memories irretrievable” (147). By regarding the novel as some kind of personal journal where the reader can follow Grey’s thoughts and memories, “the methods of “reading” employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts” (Delahoyde 1) can be adopted to interpret or rather analyze the connection between trauma, repression and Grey’s development.

2.1.1 Freud and sexuality

In The Devil of Nanking, Grey has developed repressive and obsessive behaviors, both sexual and non-sexual, that are connected to her past and present experiences. To understand how sexuality and repression are related to psychological, literary analysis and, in particular, how it can be used to read and interpret characters from a Freudian perspective, Freud’s theories about what impact traumas resulting in repression have on obsessive behavior and sexuality have to be looked at.

---

1 No specific details can be found on the web page about what kind of dictionary provides the information besides Oxford Dictionary.
2 Here, too I am aware of the possible limitations of Freudian theory from present-day perspective.
To begin with, Freud does not differ much between male and female sexuality. Freud suggests that no differences, regarding the auto-erotic activities of both sexes can be seen in early childhood:

The development of the inhibitions of sexuality (shame, disgust, pity, etc.) takes place in little girls earlier and in the face of less resistance than in boys; the tendency to sexual repression seems in general to be greater; and, where the component instincts of sexuality appear, they prefer the passive form. The auto-erotic activity of the erotogenic zones is, however, the same in both sexes, and owing to this uniformity there is no possibility of a distinction between the two sexes such as arises after puberty (On Sexuality 141).

Even though Freud explains that the function of the different sexes' genitalia is the same from the beginning, he differs between the emotional development of males and females and asserts an early, significant “weakness” due to emotions in young girls, which leads to the conclusion that, according to Freud, girls' actions and choices are probably emotionally more influenced than boys'. The emotional differences show even more in and after puberty, where they result in “a fresh wave of repression” (143).

Freud indicates that especially women but also men tend to repress. According to Freud “the excitations concerned continue to be generated as before” (162). Whatever is being repressed will sooner or later find its way “to expression as symptoms” (163). Freud says that a repressive person can have “an approximately normal sexual life – though usually a restricted one – but there is in addition psychoneurotic illness” (163). It is also mentioned that repressive behavior not only can result in the development of neuroses of different kinds, but also in perversions and the enabling of “excessively strong excitations arising from
particular sources of sexuality" as a result of sublimation (163). Hence, both repression and sublimation can be regarded as defense mechanisms of the mind as a result of trauma for instance, appear simultaneously and become a part of the individual's sexuality, which, by nature, is a drive as De Lauretis explains it (119). Furthermore she says:

No longer the direct result of a single, biological causality or reproductive instinct, sexuality in Freud is a function of fantasies conscious and unconscious, which overdetermine the vicissitudes of the drive and make of sexuality a process, a structuring of the subject, an activity of production (De Lauretis 119).

As De Lauretis points out, sexuality is a drive in every human being, which is entrenched in everyone from the beginning, but to summarize Freud's theory, it changes in different directions due to gender, personal background and puberty and can turn from "normal" into "abnormal". Sexuality, which is a focal point in Grey's life and will be discussed more thoroughly in the analytical part of this essay, can easily change due to different circumstances and become an important part in a person's life who has developed sexually "abnormal" behavior. In Grey's case, sexual feelings are welling under the surface and cannot be satisfied but repressed because the people in her environment do not show any understanding or acceptance. Here Freud calls a person who has gone through different stages of sexual repression and developed an "abnormal" sexual behavior a "psychoneurotic" (85). According to Freud most psychoneurotics fall ill after puberty "as a result of the demands made upon them by normal sexual life... Or else illnesses of this

---

3 I have chosen to use quotation marks when discussing "normal" and "abnormal" sexual behavior due to the fact that what Freud might have considered being abnormal during his time might not be regarded being abnormal today.
kind set in later, when the libido fails to obtain satisfaction along normal lines” (85). Furthermore Freud explains that as a result, the psychoneurotic seeks satisfaction from objects that can be considered “abnormal”, hence the term perversion. He also mentions “that what appears to be the strong tendency of psychoneurotics to perversion may be collaterally determined, and must, in any case, be collaterally intensified” (85).

Sexual repression must, according to Freud, be put as an “internal factor alongside such external factors as limitation of freedom, inaccessibility of a normal sexual object, the danger of the normal sexual act, etc., which bring about perversions in persons who might perhaps otherwise have remained normal” (85). Perversions can differ between individuals. Some of the perversions mentioned in Freud’s work are sadism, masochism and fetishism. Even though Grey does not show any tendency towards sadism or masochism, she still meets Jason, who also happens to be her room mate in Tokyo and who has a fetish or perversion for disabled people, which also affects Grey’s persona and sexual life.

3. Analysis of Grey

Grey is a former student from England in her early twenties, who discontinues her studies to travel to Tokyo and find the answers to a specific event that happened in Nanking during World War 2. She tracks down the Chinese professor Shi Chongming who is supposed to be in possession of a film relic that would prove what Grey believes has happened. The reader meets an introverted woman who is biting her nails and who is obsessed with her notes and a war crime she has been trying to prove “for nine years, seven month and eighteen days” (16).
3.1 Childhood and puberty

Grey grows up in a home isolated from the outside world, not being allowed to go to a public school, watch TV, listen to music or read whatever book she wants to. “I was afraid of my parents, especially of my mother . . . my mother had always been so certain that she was in control of what I knew and thought about. She wouldn’t trust a school not to fill my head with the wrong things, so for years I was educated at home” (23-24). Grey names the fear of her mother, which broaches the question if this fear could be the ground for later repression. Freud does not mention anything specific about simply fearing your own mother but there have been cases where girls developed the fear of being killed by their mothers (On Sexuality 373). According to Freud hysteria can be closely related to an intimate relationship between mother and daughter. He assumes that “this fear corresponds to a hostility which develops in the child towards her mother in consequence of the manifold restrictions imposed by the latter in the course of training and bodily care” (373). Freud talks about early childhood in particular. Regarding the fact that Grey states that her mother has always been certain about control indicates that her strictness already began when Grey was a child and from that point must have continued until Grey reached puberty. Grey makes no statement about the improvement of her relationship to her mother but this negative relationship may be considered being traumatic to some extend.

As mentioned in the above section, Grey grows up isolated, which includes her non-existing knowledge about sex. Even though she did hear about it, “the bees and the birds” (66), she never knew that sexuality came along with a certain amount of responsibility. “You don’t have to understand sex to want to do it . . . I was the worst combination you could imagine – ignorant of the nuts and bolts and as fascinated as the day is long (66). At the age of thirteen she has sexual intercourse
without protection with five boys in a van. As a result, she becomes pregnant. This event could be seen as traumatic if it would have been involuntary, which it was not but the negative and judging reaction of her parents and doctors might have been a shock or, in other words, a trauma. The question is why Grey did it. In her case it appears to be a combination of not knowing and wanting to know, curiosity, that drove her to do it. Curiosity manifests itself in children at an early age and results in the child exposing its genitals due to the absence of a certain grade of shame (Freud 110). But as shame evolves in the child, along with "normal" upbringing, this need decreases. If this curiosity cannot be satisfied, repression sets in. Freud says that "the desire to see other people's genitals persists as tormenting compulsion, which in some cases of neurosis later afford the strongest motive force for the formation of symptoms" (110). Grey's decision to have sex with those five boys might descend from an "abnormal" upbringing and the desire to "see" or "feel" other people's genitals to satisfy her curiosity.

Grey's situation is not about voyeurism but the sexual act itself. Still it can be regarded as repressed curiosity as a result of her isolation and lack of sex education from her parents' side. That kind of repressed curiosity breaks out when Grey reaches sexual maturity. The question is whether Grey acted more emotionally than rationally. Emotional reactions can be explained by Freud's assumption that, according to him, the emotional development differs between males and females and that girls show significant "weakness" due to their emotions (141-143), but there is no statement about rationality. Curiosity is an emotion, however, a rational person would probably not have had sex with five strangers in a van, which indicates that Grey rather acts emotionally.

---

4 "Abnormal" compared to what one might consider being "normal".
Grey appears to have spent at least five years in a hospital. It remains unclear when exactly she was institutionalized but one of the reasons must have been her self-inflicted abortion, after the incident with the five boys, due to a part she had read in an orange book about the massacre that happened in Nanking. Reading about the massacre and that babies survived being cut out of the mothers’ pregnant bodies and not having succeeded with this procedure herself seems to be the foundation of her so called insanity, which was imposed on her by her parents and the doctors after Grey had lost the baby and revealed details of the massacre. “My parents wouldn’t back me up, and there were other things that made the professionals think I was crazy – all the stuff about sex to start with” (31). Being declared insane for believing in something that has been written down in a book and for not knowing any better (sexual intercourse, abortion) must have been traumatic. Freud explains that “what is feared, what is the object of the anxiety, is invariably the emergence of a traumatic moment, which cannot be dealt with by the normal rules of the pleasure principle” (New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 126). Furthermore Freud says that “the first and original repressions arise directly from traumatic moments” (127). Grey develops an obsession about Japan and Nanking, which can be regarded as a neurotic reaction to her traumatic experience (Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis 144-145). The orange book naming the specific Nanking event could not be found so Grey could not prove what she had read, which feeds her obsession even more. She starts to study Japanese and Chinese, the history of both countries and at her university she stumbles across an article, which mentions the existence of a film relic of that specific event and professor Shi Chongming, who is supposed to be in possession of that exact documentation. Her new goal is to talk to the professor and prove that she is not insane, even though she only wants to prove it to herself (Hayder 25).
3.2 Tokyo - Personality and behavior

One characteristic of Grey's personality is her introversion. She never mentions any friends she had back in England and apart from her sexual relationship with Jason Wainwright\(^5\) she does not make any friends in Tokyo either. Freud mentions the process of introversion in connection with sexuality. According to him "the libido turns away from reality, is taken over by imaginative activity, strengthens the images of the first sexual objects and becomes fixated to them" (250). However, it is doubtable that this is the case here. I can agree with Freud insofar that Grey's obsession might be a remotely sexual replacement, a source of mental satisfaction and that her introversion is a result of this obsession, but it might also be possible that her introversion is a result of her repressing her childhood experiences and hospitalization. As soon as she opened up about Nanking and the incident in the van to people that were close to her, she experienced rejection in form of being declared insane. She was even rejected by the boys in the van, who promised to take her to a pub after the sexual intercourse. Instead she ended up left alone on the roadside (Hayder 159).

Another characteristic of Grey's personality or her behavior is that she is biting her nails, which she seems to feel embarrassed about. "I fumbled my cardigan sleeve up and pushed out my hand to him. I hoped he didn't notice my bitten nails" (16). According to the Internet source Changing Minds, Freud's psychosexual stage theory explains that biting one's nails refers to an oral fixation (1); "The Oral receptive personality is preoccupied with eating/drinking and reduces tension through oral activity such as eating, drinking, smoking, biting nails. They are generally passive, needy and sensitive to rejection" (1). Her introversion can be a proof that she

\(^5\) Her roommate in Tokyo.
is “sensitive to rejection”. The reduction of tension on the other hand might be the reason why she turns into a chain smoker in for her difficult or uncomfortable situations, such as working at a hostess club in Tokyo and interacting with the capo Fuyuki on her search for the secret ingredient: “I sat in silence, smoking cigarette after cigarette, thinking, What next, what next, what next? I had the distinct idea I was getting near, that I was circling something closely” (218).

As mentioned above, the oral receptive personality is non-active, needy and “fears” being rejected. In Grey’s case all three of them seem to be correct. Her need of knowing comes along with her obsession. Her passiveness seems to be a part of her introversion as a result of repressing the negative experiences she made when opening up to her parents and the hospital staff about Nanking. As described in the theoretical part, repression will sooner or later find its way “to expression as symptoms” (Freud, *On Sexuality* 163). Most of the symptoms have already been mentioned but apart from obsession (Nanking), introversion/passiveness and fixation (biting nails, smoking), sensitivity to rejection appears to be a symptom as well. Freud describes as “namely a judgment by a psyche that fails to encounter in the outside world a satisfying mental representation of what it desires” (Danon-Boileau 1). At the beginning, the one thing Grey fears the most is to be rejected by Chongming. This becomes clear when he does not call her to talk about Nanking:

He had said a week. That meant Sunday. But Sunday came and he didn’t call. I couldn’t believe it. He had broken his promise. I waited the whole day, sitting in the sofa in the living room, the shades all drawn against the heat, a pile of my books scattered around me. I stared and stared at the phone. . . . I sat with my

---

6 This is a part of the "mission" to get access to Chongming’s film relic.
chin in my hands, staring glumly at the phone that didn’t ring for me all day and
night (103).

Even though Grey always wanted to have a boyfriend (159) she never made any
attempt to approach a man after the incident in the van resulting in her abdomen being
scared over, but during her stay in Tokyo, her roommate Jason shows sexual interest
in Grey, which leads to her fear of not only being rejected by Chongming, but also
being rejected by Jason:

What did this mean? Had he left me, just like the boys in the van? Had I got it
all wrong? I sat down on the floor, rubbing my stomach over and over again.
My heart was hammering in my chest. I should never have let it go this far – I
should have left everything just as it was. I looked at the condom he’d left in the
bin, and the same blank feeling I’d had watching the van’s lights disappear
came over me again, like nausea (236).

Throughout the novel, Grey’s obsession about Nanking turns into an obsession about
Jason and having a sexual relationship. Both obsessions will be analyzed in the next
section.

3.3 Obsession versus sexuality

In the novel, Grey mentions several times that she is waiting for the truth and proof,
that she is not insane, for more than nine years. The first sign of her obsessive
behavior shows in an early conversation with Chongming: “I’ve been needing to
meet you for almost half my life’, I said. ‘I’ve been waiting for this for nine years,
seven month and eighteen days’” (16). Furthermore she appears to have collected and
prepared an immense amount of material about Nanking:
I undid the band and spread out my notes. There were sheets of translations in my tiny handwriting, photocopies of testimonies from library books, sketches I'd done to help me visualize what had happened. 'Especially Nanking. Look,' I held up a crumpled paper covered in tiny characters, 'this is about the invasion -- it's a family tree of the Japanese chain of command, it's all written in Japanese, see? I did it when I was sixteen. I can write some Japanese and some Chinese' (19).

Grey's intense obsession almost poses the question if her behavior resembles that of a psychoneurotic. As mentioned, her obsession could be some kind of sexual substitute, which excludes a "normal" sex life. According to Freud, a person, who has gone through different stages of repression and has developed abnormal sexual behavior, which includes complete abstinence, can be called a psychoneurotic. And a psychoneurotic seeks satisfaction from objects that can be considered "abnormal" (85). In Grey's case I can agree with this theory regarding her enthusiasm and apparently satisfying intensity she shows when discussing Nanking. The "abnormal" object of her obsession is to prove that the Nanking-babies who were cut out of their mothers' abdomen were alive (452-453). Grey has literally predicated her sanity on proving that she is right about Nanking.

As her obsession has taken over everything in her life, her sexuality is non-existing due to her past: her experiences at the hospital, her sexual intercourse with the five boys that have fallen short of her expectations, her parents and mainly, as a result of her self-inflicted abortion, her scars on her body:

And so I had to agree with the doctors -- the immediate result of sex hadn't been what I'd expected. And with the way my body was, there probably wasn't ever going to be a chance to find out if it could be different in the future. . . . and it
didn’t take long to decide that sex was dangerous and unpredictable... I came to the conclusion that I’d be better off just pretending it didn’t exist (159).

It has already been determined that Grey’s repression alters in symptoms. The denial of sexuality or at least her avoidance of it can be regarded as a symptom as well. But a human being cannot erase sexual needs that are embedded in her genes. As already mentioned in the theoretical part, Freud assumes that repressed feelings, here sexuality, can enable “excessively strong excitations arising from particular sources of sexuality” (On Sexuality 163). Even though she does not have a sexual partner, she masturbates on a regular basis:

As soon as I got out of the hospital, and wasn’t being watched every five minutes, I began my own guilty experiments. I soon knew how to make myself come, and although I never actually squatted over a mirror... I was sure no other girl on earth had got to know the dark tract between her legs the way I knew mine (160).

Freud suggests that the act of masturbation and here a girl experiencing pleasure in rubbing her genitalia is discovered in early childhood and becomes an important part in later sexuality (106-107). Freud does not define masturbation as a symptom of repression but as has been stated, Grey uses her own body as a vessel for satisfaction instead of another sexual partner and therefore her act of masturbation can be regarded as a result of repressing her sexuality.

Eventually Grey takes the step and agrees to have sexual intercourse with Jason, but only on one condition. She always keeps on a camisole that covers her scars. Even though Jason wants to know her secret, he gives her the space she needs, which helps her to experience sex the way she had always wanted to and gradually her obsession seems to shift from Nanking to Jason.
The funny thing was that I was happy in spite of the way things had become between me and Shi Chongming. Something had shifted – it was as if the dry, frantic neediness I’d brought with me to Tokyo had somehow edged out of me and infected him instead (260).

Grey had normal sexual intercourse with Jason (besides the camisole) and according to Freud, “the normal sexual aim is regarded as being the union of genitals in the act known as copulation, which leads to a release of the sexual tension and a temporary extinction of the sexual instinct – a satisfaction analogous to the sating of hunger” (61). The reason why her obsession has shifted to having sex with Jason might be because one of her needs or hungers has been satisfied, here sexuality instead of “having-to-know”. As a matter of fact her repression has its roots in both her fear of people not believing her (Nanking) and not being able to have sex (scars). One of these repressed longings has been satisfied which seems to explain her change and “new” priority.

Eventually Grey shows her scars and explains where they come from. She discovers that Jason has a craving for physically disabled women (who often are neurotic in some way) and that he loves “to fuck freaks” (274). She suddenly remembers things she had seen in his room:

Everything was coming back to me – the photographs in his room, the videos the Russians7 swore he watched, the way he’d talked about the Nurse. I was one of them – a freak. Something mangled to turn him on, just like in the videos he watched (274).

---

7 Her other two room mates.
Being called a freak is traumatic for her, which again leads her into repression to some extent but this time she does not agree with Jason calling both him and her “a pair of perverts” (175). Comparing what had caused the scars and Jason’s sexual preferences, Grey comes to the conclusion that it is not possible to put the ignorance that has led to the incident in the van, her pregnancy and scars on the same level with conscious perversion. Again she shifts her obsession back to Nanking, which might have had the greater importance from the beginning.

3.4 Scars

To explain her scars, I have to summarize what it is that Grey is trying to prove, the root of her obsession. In the orange book she read about a Japanese general who cut open a Chinese woman’s pregnant body and took out the unborn baby, which was fully developed and alive. As it was a traumatic experience for Grey that no one believed her and accused her of having made it up, she developed the obsession, as a result of repression, of dedicating her energy to prove that it was true.

After the incident with the five boys it took her a long time to discover that she was pregnant due to her lack of knowledge:

I didn’t tell a soul at the hospital what those weeks after the van were like. How it took me weeks and month to piece it all together from whispers and odd allusions in the ravaged paperbacks on the shelves at home. How when I realized that there was going to be a baby I knew, beyond any doubt, that my mother would kill either me or the baby or both (272).

There has already been a discussion about Grey fearing her mother. Even though she does not reveal entirely why she fears her, apart from being raised in isolation, the reader can assume that Grey’s sexual contact with the boys must have had a negative
influence on the mother-daughter relationship and therefore exacerbated Grey’s fear and repression and probably fed an upcoming neurosis. In a conversation with Chongming, Grey reveals that she wanted to see her baby alive and taken away from her mother:

'I know. It’s terrible, and I’ve got no excuse for – for crying about it. I know that. But I didn’t mean to – to kill her. I thought she would live. I’d read about the Nanking babies, in the orange book, and I – I don’t know why, but I thought maybe my baby would live, too, and so I – ' I sank into the chair, staring down at my shaky hands. 'I thought she’d be okay and they’d take her away and hide her somewhere, somewhere my . . . my parents couldn’t find her’ (453).

Her act of stabbing herself in the abdomen appears to be extremely self-destructive. Freud has two theories about self-destructive behavior. The first one, which can be excluded, is the death-principle where a person wishes to be non-existing or simply dead. Grey does not show any suicidal behavior and has no thoughts about wishing to be dead. The other one is called Eros, “the contrast between the instinct of self-preservation and the preservation of the species, as well as the contrast between ego-love and object-love” (379). In Grey’s case it seems as if she is trying to protect the baby from her parents, and especially her mother, by stabbing herself (opening the abdomen) and hoping that the baby would survive. It is questionable if Grey would have acted the same way if she had not read the information about the Nanking-babies surviving this procedure. It can be assumed that her acting was both consciously and unconsciously influenced by her obsession about Nanking.
4. Conclusion and discussion

My aim was to analyze to what extent Grey’s repression as a result of traumatic experiences has an impact on sexuality and obsessive behavior and if Grey’s sexual and obsessive development can be explained and seen in terms of Freudian view of repression and trauma. The result is that by using Freud’s theories, it can be explained how and why Grey developed the way she did, even though Freud’s “ideas” have to be used carefully due to the fact that his “empirical” work might not be considered obsolete (Thornton 7).

In Grey’s case, her past plays an immense role for how she develops. In my analysis I have examined her relationship towards her parents and especially her mother, the experiences she made while being institutionalized and how all the different events, such as the sexual intercourse with the five boys, the pregnancy and the abortion have changed her life into what it is in the present. Due to those partly traumatic events, repression has caused her to obsess over the massacre of Nanking and forced her into denying her own sexuality. As an adult she is introverted, bites her nails, clings to her notes and smokes in for her uncomfortable situations, which seems to be a behavior that appears to be a result of years of repression resulting in obsession. Even though she opens up to Jason and shifts from Nanking/non-existing sexuality to an almost obsessive sexual relationship with Jason, she does not come free from Nanking and the source of her trauma. After being let down by Jason, which actually fed her repression, she turns back to her obsession over Nanking and the Nanking-babies.

If she would have grown up in a more loving home without isolation, which is only something I can assume, her life might have looked completely different but
from what I have analyzed I can say that her trauma resulting in repression is the reason why she turned into the person she is in Tokyo.

Using Freud's theories for a character analysis has helped to see the connection between trauma, repression and sexuality; at least to some extend. The sexual development of a person is obviously based upon the circumstances he or she grows up in regarding Freud, but not every characteristic of one's persona must automatically be related to an underlying sexual aspect. Often, behavior or fixation can be explained by referring back to sexual issues or sex related experiences but in Grey's case I found it difficult to take a "deeper" look at the mother-daughter relationship, for instance, because Freud does not even take up aspects of a relationship like this. Regarding Freudian theories, it was difficult not to relate Grey's fear and obvious hate for her mother to anything else but infantile sexuality. There is no trace of any underlying sexual connection between Grey and her mother, which made it inappropriate to explain their situation by linking it to Freud's theory. I also think that many things Grey did were not related to some kind of sexual nature. I regard biting nails as an act of nervousness that is, in her case, not related to sexual repression but her obsessiveness over Nanking. This obsession on the other hand has caused trauma (loss of the baby, institutionalization) and left Grey with scars that not only influence but also make a "normal" sexual relationship or healthy view on sexuality almost impossible for her. Another Freudian theory that I find hard to simply accept is that female children tend to repress more due to their emotional weakness than males. Freud's observation appears to be obsolete and might be based on views that were current during his time.
6. Works cited

Primary sources


Secondary sources


