

Freudian Psychoanalysis and Adolescent Resilience in Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now*

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Abstract

This research paper explores Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* (2004) through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, focusing on adolescent resilience in the face of trauma. Freud's theory of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious provides the framework for analysing Daisy, the protagonist, as she navigates war, loss, and love. The paper highlights how Daisy's conscious decision-making, her confrontation with unconscious guilt, and her role as protector for Piper reveal her psychological adaptation and growth. Rosoff's use of stream-of-consciousness narration illustrates the interplay between trauma and resilience, demonstrating how awareness enables survival. The study concludes that *How I Live Now* affirms Freud's belief in the central role of consciousness and relationships in overcoming adversity, suggesting that resilience, rooted in love and adaptation, emerges as a powerful force even amidst war and psychological scarring.

Key Words: Freudian Psychoanalysis, Consciousness, Adolescent Resilience, Psychological Adaptation, War Trauma

Introduction

Literature mirrors life by reflecting the struggles, conflicts, and triumphs of humanity. As Nimavat observes, "one of the most important values of literature is that it nourishes our emotional lives" (5). Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* (2004), a young adult novel set against the backdrop of war, explores trauma, adaptation, and survival through the consciousness of its protagonist, Daisy. Using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, this research examines how Daisy's psychological development illustrates adolescent resilience. By applying Freudian concepts of the

conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, the paper highlights the novel's portrayal of survival, trauma, and growth in the midst of war.

Freudian Psychoanalysis and Literature

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis remains a cornerstone in both psychology and literary criticism. He divided the human mind into three levels: the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious (Freud 22). These states interact dynamically to shape thought and behavior. Literature, through its characters and narratives, often dramatizes these psychic processes. In Rosoff's *How I Live Now*, Daisy's experiences resonate with this framework. Her conscious self allows her to navigate survival, her unconscious is haunted by trauma and guilt, and her preconscious recalls earlier memories that shape her perception. Freud's theory provides a lens to understand Daisy's transformation from alienated teenager to resilient survivor.

The Quest for Survival and Adaptation

Survival and adaptation form the central arc of Daisy's journey. Displaced from New York and placed in England, Daisy experiences hunger, fear, and the collapse of social order. Freud explains that the ego mediates between instinctual drives and external reality (Freud 45). Daisy demonstrates this ego function when she consciously develops strategies for survival with Piper. When separated from Edmond and others, Daisy and Piper endure starvation and uncertainty. Daisy recalls: "Of course in order to survive, Piper and I needed to have a plan and I was the one who was going to have to make it" (Rosoff 84). Her resilience stems from this conscious effort to adapt. Psychological adaptation thus becomes not only a coping mechanism but a transformative process that shapes her maturity.

Consciousness and Trauma

Rosoff employs the stream-of-consciousness technique, allowing readers to perceive Daisy's fragmented thoughts and shifting emotions. William James first coined the term "stream of consciousness" in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), describing the flow of mental activity. Rosoff uses this technique to reveal Daisy's inner conflicts—her guilt over her mother's death, resentment toward her father, and her complex love for Edmond. Trauma functions as a central theme. War's violence and separation force

Daisy into psychological distress, demonstrating Freud's claim that repressed emotions re-emerge in disguised forms (Freud 78). For example, her recurring memories of loss manifest in anorexia and self-blame, yet her conscious awareness helps her confront these traumas. The tension between the unconscious (trauma) and the conscious (adaptation) structures Daisy's resilience.

Adolescent Resilience

Adolescence is a stage of psychological instability and growth. As Sharma notes, "All adolescents need the wise counseling and guidance of patient and understanding parents to succeed in life" (88). Daisy, however, grows without such guidance, relying instead on her bond with her cousin Piper. By protecting Piper, Daisy finds purpose and inner strength. She observes, "I was Piper's guardian now and I thought I'd better act like it and made it clear to her that she was safe with me no matter what" (Rosoff 77). This protective role affirms Freud's notion that love and attachment serve as survival mechanisms. Daisy's resilience, shaped by responsibility and care for others, demonstrates how adolescent identity can be forged through hardship.

War and Psychological Scarring

War is not only the setting of Rosoff's novel but also the force that shapes identity and psychological scars. Franzak notes that war results in "social upheaval and psychological scarring" that leave lasting imprints on individuals. Daisy and Edmond embody contrasting responses: while Daisy consciously adapts, Edmond is immobilized by trauma. When Daisy returns years later, Edmond is physically alive but emotionally shattered. She notes, "I have no idea how damaged Edmond is, I just know that he needs peace and he needs to be loved. And both those things I can do" (Rosoff 210). This closing moment illustrates Rosoff's suggestion that resilience, while fragile, emerges through compassion. Love becomes a healing force for both Daisy and Edmond, affirming Freud's belief in the role of relationships in recovery.

Conclusion

Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* demonstrates how Freudian psychoanalysis can illuminate adolescent resilience in times of trauma. Daisy's conscious decision-making, her struggle with unconscious guilt, and her preconscious memories form a layered

portrait of psychological survival. By emphasizing the interplay between Freud's theory of the mind and Daisy's wartime experiences, the novel affirms the central role of consciousness in adaptation and healing. Rosoff's narrative suggests that even amidst war, resilience and love provide the foundation for survival.

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