Analysis of the Id in Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt”

While many science fiction stories are more or less influenced by psychological theories, Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt” is heavily influenced by the Freudian theory of the id. The short story tells of a family in a futuristic world who own a technologically advanced nursery. Because the children become more deceiving to the parents, the mother and father decide to take away the nursery, which causes the children to act out even more so. When psychoanalyzing this tale, we see from a Freudian perspective that the unconscious drives of pleasure, or the id, inside of the parents cause their need for extravagance and approval from their children, the parents’ responses to their desires then being learned by their son and daughter. Therefore, because the parents are seen constantly giving into their id, we must conclude that their pasts as children cause them to act in such a way.

It is quite clear in the beginning of the story that George and Lydia Hadley, the parents of the family, are materialistic and live quite lavishly. For example, after going into their children's nursery and seeing that the children must have changed the environment of the room to be an African veldt causes George to not appreciate the technology like an average person would, but to think of it in a way almost like a television advertisement would describe it:

...George Hadley was filled with admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A miracle of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every
home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy, they startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for everyone, not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it was! (Bradbury 3)

The fact that George is not thinking about such a purchase in a realistic and critical sense, but in a way that evokes the need to purchase such technology to keep the family from being bored, shows that he did not buy this out of necessity, but out of pleasure. In their article “Id, Ego, and Superego”, Daniel K. Lapsley and Paul C. Stey of University of Notre Dame write that “the id operates unconsciously, accords with primary process, and impels the organism to engage in need-satisfying, tension-reducing activities, which are experienced as ‘pleasure’” (Lapsley and Stey 5). If we look at the parents’ consistent purchasing of items from a Freudian viewpoint, we can assume that they are being led by their ids to purchase these items in order to feed an impulse of theirs. They are being led by their unconscious desires for extravagance and acceptance from their children whenever they feel the need to buy anything frivolous and act upon it.

However, while George and Lydia’s unconscious drive for pleasure is quite obvious in their pursuit of materials, this drive is much stronger in wanting to please their children. We find that not only do they want to see their children happy, but that they never want to see them upset or punished. After finding out that the children had lied about changing the scenery of the nursery, we find some background information from the parents:

“We’ve given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward- secrecy, disobedience?”
“Who was it said, ‘Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally’? We’ve never lifted a hand. They’re insufferable — let’s admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were offspring. They’re spoiled and we’re spoiled.”

“They’ve been acting funny ever since you forbade them to take the rocket to New York a few months ago.”

“They’re not old enough to do that alone, I explained.” (Bradbury 8)

Because the Hadleys start to mistrust their children as well as realize how materialistic they themselves are, the parents decide that taking away the nursery is a good parenting choice. While they initially pursue this option, the hatred and lack of acceptance from their children ultimately cause the parents to give into their children’s demands:

The two children were in hysterics. They screamed and pranced and threw things. They yelled and sobbed and swore and jumped at the furniture...

“Don’t let them do it!” wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery. “Don’t let Father kill everything.” He turned to his father. “Oh, I hate you!”

“Insults won’t get you anywhere.”

“I wish you were dead!”

“We were, for a long while. Now we’re going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we’re going to live.”

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. “Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery,” they wailed.

“Oh, George,” said the wife, “it can’t hurt.”
“All right — all right, if they’ll just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever.” (Bradbury 11-12)

When analyzing this tale through a Freudian perspective, we know that George and Lydia, just like with their frivolous extravagance, are driven by their id to please their children. Eventually the Hadley’s decide to change their ways of parenting by choosing to punish later in the children’s lives, which causes the children to be outraged when the nursery is taken away, as they have never been punished before. As David McClean, a psychologist in the story, tells George, “this room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there’s hatred here” (10). This hatred in the children eventually causes them to murder both of the parents by locking them in the nursery, where the lions come to life and kill George and Lyida. Therefore, we can assume that the children had learned from their parents to pursue their unconscious desires, which causes them to kill their parents in order to have the nursery.

While we can assume how the children learned certain types of behaviors when we look at the story through a Freudian perspective, this type of analysis also gives us a clue as to why the parents pursue materials excessively as well as the affirmation of their children. In his book *Freudian Repression: Conversation Creating the Unconscious*, Michael Billig states that “what is repressed does not disappear, but is relegated to the realm of the unconscious. We are said to continue desiring in shameful ways, feeling shameful things, but we cease to be aware of these feelings. Thus, Freudian theory assumes the reality of repressed emotions.” (Billig 184). If this is true, this must mean that something from George and Lydia’s pasts cause them to respond in
such a way to the children. Perhaps it was similarly getting everything that they wanted when they were young, or possibly rarely receiving what they wanted when they were children.

Therefore, we can assume that the id of the parents in “The Veldt” lead them to have very frivolous, extravagant lives as well as feel the need to constantly validate their children’s needs and wants. While a Freudian perspective shows that the children learn to give into their id due to learning this from their parents, this type of analysis also gives us further insight into the story, allowing the reader to catch a glimpse of why the parents themselves pursue the desires of their id, as this is a response to experiences and emotions from their pasts.
Works Cited


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www3.nd.edu/~dlapsle1/Lab/Articles_&_Chapters_files/Entry%20for%20Encyclopedia%20of%20Human%20BehaviorFinal%20Submitted%20Formatted4.pdf.
Certainly one of Bradbury’s best short works and maybe his most recognized. The Veldt was first published in The Saturday Evening Post in 1950, and this has been a ubiquitous entry into many collections of his work and has been published on its own in countless anthologies. A family has a smart house (a recurring theme in his work) where machines and robots do virtually all of the work. I remember a different story by Bradbury, also with the same theme of an intelligent house, as part of the Martian Chronicles book, and I like how his complete lack of faith in such a device shows itself. This is totally a Black Mirror plot, but written in the 50's.