

## Instant Karma The World Anthem Against The Evil By John Lennon: A Psychoanalytic Approach

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### ABSTRACT

This research discusses about a concept in which the consequences of one's actions are immediate rather than borne out over a lifetime in *Instant Karma!* by John Lennon. This descriptive qualitative research focuses to find out how does karma associated as the world anthem against the evil portrayed in John Lennon' song lyrics *Instant Karma!*, from the Psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud. The song title *Instant Karma!* itself is an implementation on a concept of accountability for your actions. Therefore, the view of the psychoanalytic put forward by Sigmund Freud (1901) is compatible to analyse *Instant Karma!* by John Lennon. Data were collected by studying, interpreting work of literature, and evaluating. Studying means get better understanding of the song through close readings the lyrics, contextual insights, and listening to it. Interpreting means trying to find the meaning or theme of the song by related interviews with John Lennon as the writer, composer, and singer. Analyzing through song lyrics was the only way to be done since there's no music video. Evaluating means giving critic about the song lyrics themselves. Criticism is not all about finding fault or any mistakes, but on



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how we interpret the meaning of the song itself. The data was collected together one by one through the note-taking approach to discover the data to associate onto valid information related. The conclusion shows *Instant Karma!* by John Lennon portrays outcome of a person's actions in past and present states of existence. Those actions lead us into our fate. What comes around, goes around, what we sow, so shall we reap. The karma itself is not only associated with bad output but also as a good one. Good deeds will have a positive effect while bad deeds will bring negative consequences.

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## Introduction

The outcome of a person's actions in past and present states of existence is called Karma. Those actions lead us into our fate. What comes around, goes around, what we sow, so shall we reap. This belief what goes around, comes around. The concept of karma itself is a central of worldview depicted by karmic religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and their offshoots, such as Jainism and Sikhism, that together has over 1.5 billion followers worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2015). Karma acts like our fate maker in the future. Karma is not only associated with bad output but also as a good one. Good deeds will have a positive effect while bad deeds will bring negative consequences.

A singer, songwriter, musician and peace activist who achieved worldwide fame as founder, co-songwriter, co-lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist of the Beatles, John Winston Ono Lennon, has portrayed the concept of Karma on his masterpiece. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th Edition (2010: 1419), song is "a short piece of music with words that you sing". Song is simply a medium for anyone to express their emotions, such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, disappointment, etc. Through his song, titled *Instant Karma!*, an English rock musician John Lennon shares that karma can instantly happen into your life. According to John Lennon to Playboy magazine, 1980, "Everybody was going on about karma. but it occurred to me that karma is instant, as well as it influences your past life or your future life. There really is a reaction to what you do now. Also, I'm fascinated by commercials and promotion as an art form. So, the idea of instant karma was like the idea of instant coffee: presenting something in a new form."



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The article Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic proposes a definition about a psychodynamic approach to psychology, which looks at unconscious drives to explain human behavior. Freud believed that the mind was responsible for the conscious and unconscious decisions it made based on psychological impulses. According to Macionis (2006: 66), Freud combines basic drives and the influence of society into a model of personality with three parts: id, ego, and superego. The id (Latin for "it") is the human being's basic drives, which are unconscious and demand immediate satisfaction (2006: 66). The ego (Latin for "I"), which is a person's conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives with the demand of society (2006: 66). The superego (Latin for "above or beyond the ego") is the cultural values and norms internalized by an individual (2006: 66).

The song *Instant Karma!* (also titled "*Instant Karma! (We All Shine On)*") is an English rock song by John Lennon that was released on 1970. *Instant Karma!* was released as a single on Apple Records in February, 1970. After a while in 1975, this song is compiled in an album titled *Shaved Fish*, a compilation album by English rock musician John Lennon with the Plastic Ono Band. This song describes about immediate consequences about one's actions. The protagonist that if he keeps acting selfishly and disrespecting love, he'll face the consequences of his actions immediately, and potentially resulting in death. The lyrics also urge the protagonist to recognise and treat everyone he meets as equals, as we are all human and should live without pain and fear. The chorus repeats that we all shine on like the celestial bodies in the sky. The song *Instant Karma!* itself was conceived, written, recorded, and released within a period of ten days, making it one of the fastest-released songs in pop rock music industry. The view of how karma approaches humans is clearly illustrated both by figurative or literal meaning in the lyrics of this song, on that account, the theory of model of personality with three parts: id, ego, and superego put forward by Sigmund Freud (1901) can be an instrument in term of analysing the song *Instant Karma!* by John Lennon. The pop rock genre song with a bass touch might trick our hearing from the deep meaning behind it, but this song is carrying nice messages. This is related to Psychoanalytic, model of personality with three parts, such as, id, ego, and superego that illustrated both by figurative or literal meaning in the lyrics of this song. Therefore, the paper entitled *Instant Karma The World Anthem Against The Evil By John Lennon: Psychoanalytic Approach*. This research aimed to be a study of the model of personality with three parts, such as, id, ego, and superego that illustrated both by figurative or literal meaning in the lyrics of this song which is discussed to in the



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theory of Psychoanalytic. The research has reviewed 3 studies related to the topic discussed,

The first research entitled Defense Mechanism of Adele Reflected in Adele's 21 Album: a Psychoanalytic Approach (Ari Murti, Danti: 2013). This research aims to find the defense mechanism of Adele based on Adele's 21 album related to Sigmund Freud psychoanalytic approach. The type of the research is qualitative research. There are two types of the data, namely Primary and secondary data. Primary data source come from Adele's 21 album and secondary data come from book, website, or any information related to the study. Then, the data are analyzed based on structural element and a psychoanalytic approach. In analyzing the data, this research applies descriptive analysis. There are three conclusion of this research. First, based on the structural analysis of each element, it shows that there are several elements of the song such as, Measure (Bar) is a segment of time defined as a given number of beats of a given duration, harmony is the notes that compliment or support the melody line, rhythm is the pattern of beats to which the words are sung, tempo the speed of the song, intro is the short instrumental section at the beginning of the song, verse is a section of the song having its own melody, pre-chorus is a short section that builds beyond the verse and usually leads the chorus, chorus is a different section in the song with a different melody, usually following the verses and the bridge. The chorus may be very repetitive, bridge is a section of the song that is different from the verses and chorus. Second, based on defense mechanism it focuses on the id, ego and superego by Adele. And the last, based on psychoanalytic theory it focuses on Adele's characterization.

The second literary entitled The Psychological Concepts in Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" (Putri Anindhita, Novia: 2015). This research analyzes the elements of the poetry in the lyrics and to show the readers the psychological contents as portrayed in the music video. The study uses intrinsic and extrinsic theories to analyze the data and library research to compile the data. Library research is used to get literary theories and psychological theories of Sigmund Freud. The finding of this study is the existence of psychoanalysis contents in American pop music included id, ego, superego, defense mechanism act, and symbolization reflected in lyrics and scenes in the song and in the music video of "Blank Space". From the analysis of both the lyrics and the music video, the writer finds that "Blank Space" can be concluded as the woman's longing for always having sexual intercourse with the man. It means "Blank Space" referring to the woman's genital when she does not do sexual activity. "Blank Space" also has some scenes that express one



of defense mechanism acts, which is called as displacement, such as: cutting the tree, hitting the car, scissoring the man's clothes and throwing them, and then burning the man's suit, squeezing and biting an apple, stabbing a cake, and having cats as pet. Displacement helps the woman to release her anger and love desire towards her man by using other objects as the targets. Theory of psychodynamic dream with the symbolization process is also applied in this music video through the symbols of the brush, tree and knife which represent male's genital to disguise the vulgar messages.

The third literary is Dewey Finn's Will Power in Teaching: A Psychoanalysis on School of Rock, a Film (Riandi: 2019). This research aims to examine a film entitled School of Rock (Linklater, 2003). School of Rock impresses on the audience as a film on a hard rock musician with poor beginnings who is in a pursuit of winning the Battle of the Bands. The affection of unconsciousness mind, feeling(s) of inferiority, id, ego, and superego obviously have seen in the film. Despite this capacity, however, the work fascinates its audience more by its characters' interesting intrigue and student-teacher relationships ended ultimately by a success. In this light, therefore, the appeal of the story seems to ensue not from its mere progression but largely from the dramatization of the psyche of the characters who are engaged in the relationships filled of genuine emotional supplements and trickery at times. From a psychological perspective, the main character in this film is Dewey Finn. This research further is intended to analyze the strength of the will of the main character in reaching dreams by using a psychoanalytic approach. Data used in research this is in the form of a structural element in the film in the form of a film transcript. Results of research this shows that there is a negotiation going on in the psychology of Dewey Finn's inner character involving id, ego, and superego as well as persona and shadow as a teacher all of which are elements of willpower in achieving goals.

Psychoanalysis approach was founded by Sigmund Freud. Freud believed that people could be cured by making their unconscious a conscious thought and motivations, and by that gaining "insight". The aim of psychoanalysis therapy is to release repressed emotions and experiences, i.e. make the unconscious conscious. Psychoanalysis is commonly used to treat depression and anxiety disorders. It is only by having a cathartic (i.e. healing) experience can a person be helped and "cured". The id according to Freud is the part of the unconscious that seeks pleasure. His idea of the id explains why people act out in certain ways when it is not in line with the ego or superego. The id is the part of the mind, which holds all



of humankind's most basic and primal instincts. It is the impulsive, unconscious part in the mind that is based on the desire to seek immediate satisfaction. The id does not have a grasp on any form of reality or consequence. Freud understood that some people are controlled by the id because it makes people engage in need-satisfying behavior without any accordance with what is right or wrong. Freud compared the id and the ego to a horse and a rider. The id is compared to the horse, which is directed and controlled, by the ego or the rider. This example goes to show that although the id is supposed to be controlled by the ego, they often interact with one another according to the drives of the ego. The Id is made up of two biological instincts, Eros which is the drive to create and Thanatos which is the drive to destroy. In order for people to maintain a realistic sense here on earth, the ego is responsible for creating a balance between pleasure and pain. It is impossible for all desires of the id to be met and the ego realizes this but continues to seek pleasure and satisfaction. Although the ego does not know the difference between right and wrong, it is aware that not all drives can be met at a given time. The reality principle is what the ego operates in order to help satisfy the id's demands as well as compromising according to reality. The ego is a person's "self" composed of unconscious desires. The ego takes into account ethical and cultural ideals in order to balance out the desires originating in the id. Although both the id and the ego are unconscious, the ego has close contact with the perceptual system. The ego has the function of self-preservation, which is why it has the ability to control the instinctual demands from the id. The superego, which develops around age four or five, incorporates the morals of society. Freud believed that the superego is what allows the mind to control its impulses that are looked down upon morally. The superego can be considered to be the conscience of the mind because it has the ability to distinguish between reality as well as what is right or wrong. Without the superego, Freud believed people would act out with aggression and other immoral behaviors because the mind would have no way of understanding the difference between right and wrong. The superego is considered to be the "consciousness" of a person's personality and can override the drives from the id. Freud separates the superego into two separate categories; the ideal self and the conscience. The conscience contains ideals and morals that exist within a society that prevent people from acting out based on their internal desires. The ideal self contains images of how people ought to behave according to society's ideals.



The song *Instant Karma!* (also titled "*Instant Karma! (We All Shine On)*") is an English rock song by John Lennon that was released on 1970. *Instant Karma!* was released as a single on Apple Records in February, 1970. After a while in 1975, this song is compiled in an album titled *Shaved Fish*, a compilation album by English rock musician John Lennon with the Plastic Ono Band. This song describes about immediate consequences about one's actions. The protagonist that if he keeps acting selfishly and disrespecting love, he'll face the consequences of his actions immediately, and potentially resulting in death. The lyrics also urge the protagonist to recognise and treat everyone he meets as equals, as we are all human and should live without pain and fear. The chorus repeats that we all shine on like the celestial bodies in the sky. The song *Instant Karma!* itself was conceived, written, recorded, and released within a period of ten days, making it one of the fastest-released songs in pop rock music industry. The view of how karma approaches humans is clearly illustrated both by figurative or literal meaning in the lyrics of this song, on that account, the theory of model of personality with three parts: id, ego, and superego put forward by Sigmund Freud (1901) can be an instrument in term of analysing the song *Instant Karma!* by John Lennon. The pop rock genre song with a bass touch might trick our hearing from the deep meaning behind it, but this song is carrying nice messages. This is related to Psychoanalytic, model of personality with three parts, such as, id, ego, and superego that illustrated both by figurative or literal meaning in the lyrics of this song.

## Result and Discussion

Data were collected by studying, interpreting work of literature, and evaluating. Studying means get better understanding of the song through close readings the lyrics, contextual insights, and listening to it. Interpreting means trying to find the meaning or theme of the song by related interviews with John Lennon as the writer, composer, and singer. Analysing through song lyrics was the only way to be done since there's no music video. Evaluating means giving critic about the song lyrics themselves. Criticism is not all about finding fault or any mistakes, but on how we interpret the meaning of the song itself. The data was collected together one by one through the note-taking approach to discover the data to associate onto valid information related. The conclusion shows *Instant Karma!* by John Lennon portrays outcome of a person's actions in past and present states of existence. From that we found 6 datas related with The Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Also, we found that John Lennon is using figurative

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language in term of portrait the messages of his masterpiece, Instant Karma!. Instant Karma, is a popular song written by John Lennon, was initially released in 1970. The song's title comes from the Hindu and Buddhist concept of karma and describes the instant or immediate effects of one's actions, either good or bad. Lennon pointed out that the song describes the impact of one's actions, which have consequences either positive or negative and come back around immediately. The song's structure is simple and easy to remember, with a repeating chorus that emphasizes the song's primary message. Lennon believed that by keeping things simple, he would reach a broader audience, and the song's message would be more accessible.

Data I

"Instant Karma's gonna get you  
Gonna knock you off your feet"

Here, Lennon is emphasising that there is a balance in everything we do. According to Lennon, when we do good things or bad things, it comes back to us like an instant boomerang. Hence, it's important to focus on doing good in the world as our actions have direct consequences.

The song's chorus portrays the idea that when we do bad things, it comes back to haunt us. Lennon urges us to consider the aftermath of our actions, warning us that karma isn't always in our favor, saying,

Data II

"We all shine on like the moon and the stars  
And the sun"

This line encourages people to do good in the world and help others as it will shine favorably on us. Lennon believed that doing good in the world would cause good things to come back to us in return.

The song emphasizes that we all need to start making positive choices and be responsible for our decisions. The second verse of the song is a call to immediate action, saying,





Data III

"Better recognize your brothers

Everyone you meet"

Lennon encourages us to recognize each other and be kind to one another. He believed that by treating each other with love and respect, we can change the world for the better.

"Instant karma's gonna get you" (personification)

"Gonna knock you right in the head" (personification)

"Laughing in the face of love" (personification)

"Gonna get you right in the face" (personification)

"Join the human race" (irony)

"And we all shine on like the moon and the stars and the sun" (simile)

"We all shine on" (hyperbole)

"Gonna knock you off your feet" (personification)

"Surely not to live in pain and fear" (dead metaphor)

Sentences contain figurative languages found in the lyric, and the mostly appeared was personification. Figurative language in the song revealed that the theme used by the writer in the song is nature and religion theme.

Data IV

"Why on earth are we here?"

"Surely not to live in pain and fear"

The superego can be considered to be the conscience of the mind because it has the ability to distinguish between reality as well as what is right or wrong. From the lyrics above, we all know that we live on earth to not to live in pain and fear. It is absolute and untouchable. We are here to understand, embrace, and then conquer pain and fear, and not let it take away any of our goodness, our happiness, or our abilities to contribute well to the world. Fly your freak flag proudly, be nice, work hard, and then work harder. Repeat as long as you can. Life might throw crap at you, you change and grow, but you still are who you are. So, taking that theory into account, John Lennon would have remained John Lennon, his essential qualities of intelligence, musical and artistic talent, and quick wit intact. His lesser



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qualities, of course, would have also remained. There's no excusing some of Lennon's past behaviors, particularly notable in his earlier years, and particularly cruel and heartless towards his first wife, Cynthia, and son Julian. If you have the ability to act in this manner, you will never lose it, but perhaps might gain the wisdom, compassion, and self-control to be able to mute it.

Data V

"What on earth you tryin' to do?"

"It's up to you, yeah you"

Lennon is trying to convey that the id is the part of the unconscious that seeks pleasure. The id explains why people act out in certain ways when it is not in line with the ego or superego.

Data VI

"Instant karma's gonna get you"

"Gonna knock you right on the head"

"You better get yourself together"

The ego is responsible for creating a balance between pleasure and pain. Based on those lyrics. Lennon with his figurative language is trying to convey a message. Once karma hit you, you already began to live in a good and sensible way not being confused and foolish at least. You've got your pleasure from your past behavior and now it is the time for you to pay anything you have done, as the consequences. All that's left is pain.

## Conclusion

The song lyrics in Instant Karma's John Lennon are an instrument that can be used as an example of concept of karma and describes the instant or immediate effects of one's actions, either good or bad. Lennon pointed out that the song describes the impact of one's actions, which have consequences either positive or negative and come back around immediately. The song's structure is simple and easy to remember, with a repeating chorus that emphasizes the song's primary message. Lennon believed that by keeping things simple, he would reach a broader audience, and the song's message would be more accessible. Instant



karma will not happen without actions. In accordance with what was conveyed by the theory of Psychoanalytic that people could be cured by making their unconscious a conscious thought and motivations, and by that gaining "insight". The aim of psychoanalysis therapy is to release repressed emotions and experiences, i.e. make the unconscious conscious. The results of the analysis of the lyrics of the song Instant Karma! shows that literature can be a good tool for literary criticism. The song simple and easy to remember lyrics, with a repeating chorus that emphasizes the song's primary message make the messages inside it well conveyed and more accessible.

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