
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between Desire and Guilt: Diana the Huntress – Diana a Caçadora

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| ABSTRACT

This study presents an interdisciplinary analysis of Márcia Denser's work *Diana the Huntress*, focusing on the complex dynamics between desire and guilt that permeate the protagonist's journey. Utilising Freudian concepts of Eros and Thanatos, the Oedipus complex, and the compulsion to repeat, the research interprets Diana's self-destructive behaviours as expressions of unconscious conflicts and repressed desires. It incorporates Émile Durkheim's sociological theory on asceticism, considering the impact of cultural values and the internalisation of social judgements on the female psyche. This analysis reveals how the character reflects a cycle of seeking pleasure followed by emptiness and self-punishment, reinforcing a critique of the superficiality of a life guided by patriarchal norms and unfulfilled desires. By integrating psychoanalysis and sociology, the study highlights Denser's critique of the cultural oppression of female identity and the emotional void that results from it.

| KEYWORDS

Desire and Guilt; Eros and Thanatos; Self-Punishment; Female Identity; Literary Psychoanalysis

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1. Introduction

Since its development, psychoanalysis has offered new ways to understand the human mind and the internal conflicts that shape behaviour. Psychoanalytic concepts such as the life and death drives (Eros and Thanatos), the Oedipus complex, and the compulsion to repeat are widely used to interpret psychic and social manifestations in various contexts, including literature. In Brazil, authors like Márcia Denser explore these conflicts through complex characters whose trajectories reveal tensions between repressed desires and sociocultural impositions. In *Diana the Huntress*, Denser constructs a protagonist who exemplifies these internal struggles, living on the margins of social expectations while confronting her own contradictions in self-destruction driven by the desire for freedom and guilt.

Previous studies on literature and psychoanalysis highlight the importance of Sigmund Freud's concepts, whose theories transformed the way we understand complex literary characters and their internal conflicts. Authors like Dostoevsky, for example, have been widely analysed from a psychoanalytic perspective, addressing themes such as guilt, self-punishment, and repression of desires. In more recent literary studies, the character Diana from *Diana the Huntress* emerges as an example of a woman whose trajectory reflects the intersection between unconscious conflicts and social pressures. Even so, there is a gap in the analysis that simultaneously considers the psychoanalytic and sociocultural influences on the formation of Diana's identity, especially regarding the impulses of Eros and Thanatos.

The significance of deepening the interdisciplinary analysis of literary characters that reflect psychic and social tensions justifies this study. The research aims to contribute to the fields of literature and psychoanalysis by examining *Diana the Huntress* from a

Freudian perspective, expanding the understanding of the internal and self-destructive conflicts of complex female characters. By investigating the influence of cultural and familial patterns on Diana's self-sabotaging behaviour, the study contributes to the reflection on the interaction between literature, psychoanalysis, and social criticism, offering insights for understanding narratives that explore the female psyche and its relationships with the social context.

This study aims to analyse Diana the Huntress by Márcia Denser from a psychoanalytic and sociocultural perspective, focusing on the protagonist's unconscious conflicts and self-destructive impulses. The analysis seeks to reveal how Freudian concepts of Eros and Thanatos, the Oedipus complex, and the compulsion to repeat help interpret the character's behaviours and internal dilemmas. Additionally, the study examines the impact of the sociocultural context and the devaluation of the maternal model on Diana's psychic dilemma, highlighting the emotional and social implications that shape her trajectory.

This work employs an interdisciplinary approach to investigate Diana the Huntress, applying psychoanalytic and sociological theories. The methodology combines literary analysis and Freudian concepts such as Eros and Thanatos, the Oedipus complex, and the compulsion to repeat to interpret the protagonist's behaviours and internal conflicts. The analysis is enriched with a sociocultural perspective, examining the influences of social patterns and the devaluation of the maternal model on Diana's psyche. In this way, it seeks to understand how these unconscious forces and social structures intertwine to shape the character's actions and dilemmas.

The article is divided into three main parts. Firstly, a theoretical review presents the foundations of psychoanalysis and its application in literature. The second section analyses the character Diana, addressing her internal conflicts and the influence of Freudian concepts. Finally, the last section integrates a sociocultural analysis, highlighting how social and familial norms impact the protagonist's behaviour and dilemmas.

2. 2. Psychoanalysis and Literature: Foundations and Influences

Psychoanalytic discoveries continue to spark interest in society today as they address conditions that affect a significant portion of the population. Freud (1996) describes the effectiveness of psychoanalysis in treating pathological forms, such as hysteria and obsessive neurosis, in which symptoms — including convulsions, motor inhibitions, and obsessive thoughts — represent symbolic manifestations of unconscious conflicts. These symptoms emerge as substitutes for repressed desires and impulses that, unable to find direct expression, surface in a distorted and symptomatic manner (Freud, 1926/1996).

This study utilises Freud's findings and those of other authors to analyse Diana Caçadora's work. By blending sociological and psychological aspects with contributions from psychoanalysis, this analysis becomes feasible, as the character acts in ways described by various scientists and writers, aligning with findings from scientific fields to which psychoanalysis offers theoretical and methodological contributions.

Literature has been a rich source of insights for psychoanalysis, with Dostoevsky's work serving as a notable example of this relationship. In novels such as *Crime and Punishment* (2001), *The Brothers Karamazov* (2008), *The Idiot* (2014), and *Notes from Underground* (2000), Dostoevsky explores unconscious conflicts, feelings of guilt, and the unconscious need for punishment. These works provide profound reflections on the human mind, which is fundamental to literature and psychology. Freud also applied psychoanalytic concepts to literary analysis; in *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's "Gradiva"* (1907/1996), he illustrates how the protagonist's delusions and dreams reveal repressed desires and unconscious conflicts. According to Lobo (2000, p. 100), Freud interpreted *Gradiva* as a "clinical case" that explores the unconscious and the unfolding of a problem and its resolution: *Freud's study demonstrates how this novel can be read as a clinical case, containing the development of a problem and its cure.*

Beyond prose, poetic language, with its symbolic and expressive nature, plays an important role in understanding human behaviour. With its capacity to communicate complex emotions and thoughts, poetry can reveal subtle psychic dynamics that escape common language. This symbolic character of poetry enriches psychoanalytic analysis, bringing to light profound aspects of the psyche and allowing for an expanded understanding of the psychological mechanisms that guide human behaviour.

Thus, literature and symbolic language not only enable an understanding of human psychic dynamics but also, like mythological and philosophical themes, allow psychoanalysis to explore fundamental impulses, such as the duality between Eros and Thanatos.

3. Eros and Thanatos: Duality and Self-Punishment in Diana the Huntress

3.1 Eros and Thanatos in Diana

This section applies the concepts of Eros and Thanatos to Diana's analysis, revealing how her unconscious and repetitive conflicts reflect the forces described by Freud. Since the emergence of psychoanalysis, ideas such as the life and death drives—Eros and Thanatos, introduced by Freud—have become an intriguing way of understanding the human mind in literary works. Szaluta (2014) observes that ego ideals can create internal tension in characters, often leading to a form of self-sabotage. In Diana Caçadora, this duality between Eros and Thanatos is evident. Diana is a character who lives between the desire for fulfilment and a compulsion for behaviours that, in reality, only bring her pain. As Freud explained, Eros represents forces like creation and love, while Thanatos drives the individual towards destructive or repetitive actions that ultimately cause suffering.

This duality between Eros and Thanatos highlights the contrast between the pursuit of satisfaction and self-sabotage, a recurring theme in literature that is intensely manifested in Diana Caçadora's journey.. In literature, these drives are often explored in characters who move between the pursuit of satisfaction and cycles of self-sabotage. In *Diana Caçadora* by Márcia Denser, the protagonist embodies this duality, revealing a psyche marked by self-deprecation and behaviours that, although they offer momentary pleasure, inevitably lead her to feelings of emptiness and despair.

3.2 Asceticism and Social Pressure

While Freud interprets repetition as an intrinsic psychic phenomenon, Durkheim offers a perspective that considers the impact of social values on individual behaviour. According to Durkheim (1996), practices of self-punishment and renunciation often reflect an internalisation of cultural judgments and norms. In Diana's journey, these cultural values that suppress female freedom reinforce her inclination towards self-deprecation, creating a modern form of asceticism.

Thus, Diana's internal struggle between Eros and Thanatos is intensified by the influence of the patriarchal society in which she lives. Her self-destructive behaviour is not merely a reflection of a psychic drive but also an unconscious response to social judgements that dictate what is acceptable for a woman. In this way, Durkheim's concept of asceticism complements the psychoanalytic analysis, revealing how Diana's self-destructive behaviour is also a form of self-punishment imposed by social expectations that restrict her autonomy.

In examining complex literary characters, such as Diana in *Diana Caçadora*, the duality between Eros and Thanatos reveals the inner struggle between the desire for self-destruction and the pursuit of fulfilment. These themes, widely explored in literature and symbolised through mythology, illustrate how psychoanalysis links human behaviour to the fundamental drives of life and death. Thus, psychoanalysis and literature are interconnected, utilising universal symbols to interpret the complexity of human behaviour. Beyond poetry and prose, Freud also found inspiration in mythological and philosophical themes to develop foundational concepts of psychoanalysis, such as the life and death drives. The duality between Eros and Thanatos, presented in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud (1920), reflects the struggle between constructive and destructive forces that shape the human psyche. Although the concept of Thanatos was not directly derived from literature, Freud utilised cultural myths and symbols, like the Greek gods of love and death, to illustrate this universal tension between creation and destruction. This mythological reference not only facilitated an understanding of the death drive but also enriched the psychoanalytic interpretation of literature, where themes such as self-destruction, sacrifice, and the conflict between desire and guilt are widely explored. Thus, psychoanalysis and literature are intertwined, using universal symbols to interpret the complexity of human behaviour.

Based on speculations about the origin of life and observing biological parallels, Freud proposed that, alongside the life drive, which unites and preserves, there is also a death drive, which tends to disintegrate and return the living matter to its most primitive state. In this way, he postulated the existence of a "death instinct," suggesting that vital phenomena could be understood through the intersection and constant antagonism of these two fundamental drives. In this context, the aggression drive is considered the primary descendant and representative of the death instinct, existing alongside Eros and, together with it, sharing dominion over consciousness.

It is indisputable that much of the compulsion to repeat brings forth experiences that disgust the ego, as it surfaces a displeasure that does not contradict the pleasure principle. Freud argues that while the conscious ego experiences displeasure, the unconscious may simultaneously feel satisfaction in fulfilling repressed desires. Thus, one system's displeasure can represent another's satisfaction, which explains the strength and persistence of specific compulsive repetitions, even when they cause conscious suffering.

There are various reasons for this approach, all inferred from the text, which makes explicit how the character imposes a rigorous ritual of unconscious self-punishment. Extraordinary efforts to bring pain and ignominy upon oneself serve as prima facie evidence that the individual suffers from guilt and seeks punishment to relieve it. Most people do not recognise that the average individual's conscience does not align with the standards of the world of reality, being much more rigid and less sensitive to reason. In the realm of the unconscious, fantasies of crimes are laden with as much guilt as real crimes and must be punished. Even instinctual impulses, innocent in themselves, can be sources of distressing remorse.

Thus, a woman endowed with many attributes is led to self-deprecation, especially when her behaviour deviates from conventional standards. The character is presented as an emancipated, upper-middle-class intellectual woman, with all positive qualities: a successful intellectual, yet also frustrated and anguished, obsessed with the pursuit of destructive pleasures such as hunting and sadism. Diana's actions are associated with the search for erotic satisfaction, followed by profound dissatisfaction.

The alternatives appear limited to two options: conform to conventional behaviour by repressing her impulses and acting in line with social expectations for women to be mothers, or face exclusion. As Denser (1981) states, for such women, the dilemma is clear: they must either "write or wash nappies." Silva (2013) notes that this narrative derives from a society that disapproves of women engaging in activities deemed fit for men or associated with women of "ill repute."

These values, upheld by society, have profound consequences for women, directly influencing the formation of the female ego. A girl's drama arises when, upon recognising anatomical differences, she also perceives the supposed inferiority of her mother, which is socially constructed and extends beyond possible castration and the mere fact of being a woman. It is essential to note that this "inferiority" is a social construct rather than an intrinsic characteristic. At this point, through the Oedipus complex, the idealised female ego is formed, already marked by the double devaluation of the maternal model—a narcissistic wound that leaves a mark difficult to heal.

On the one hand, we have the societal prejudice against women that acts against Diana; on the other, we have her fragile psychological figure, driven by loneliness, sadness, and anguish. The result of this is her tragedy, the impossibility of choice. These two silent, concealed yet powerful forces transform Diana into a huntress capable of provocations and aggressions that weaken and demean her.

Throughout the text, there is a pervasive, desperate yet futile search, as Diana finds no true pleasure in this relentless and narcissistic hunt, reflecting the unfulfilled desires of her subconscious. For this character, living in Jardins, a prestigious area of São Paulo, each encounter ends in emptiness and loneliness, accompanied by a poignant sense of helplessness and lovelessness. In this context, it is essential to highlight the critical attitude the author impresses upon the text, using abundant symbols that evoke an apparent but ultimately hollow luxury, incapable of relieving Diana's despair. This connection reinforces the idea that the apparent luxury and sophistication surrounding the character cannot fill her emotional void, emphasising the author's underlying critique of the superficiality of a life driven by futile and ephemeral values.

The author describes Diana's successive failures, exposing a being placed under the sign of social disadvantage due to her womanhood. Diana, a woman who longs for sexual pleasure, sees her pursuit of satisfaction constantly thwarted by religious morality, which considers this desire sinful. This conflict generates a repressed desire that heightens her anguish and isolation. Denser points out that, in the ritual farce in which Diana is ensnared, love is impossible because, for it to exist, a pleasurable and enriching exchange between the parties would be required, something that, however, never materialises.

(...) but, my heart, that smiling, corruptible demon, had already set in motion the absurd creature I invariably become—a cross between a spoiled little dog wagging her tail hysterically and the predator, the lean, ravenous wolf who, although her stomach growls, groans, and contorts, still maintains a threatening posture, the dignity of knowing herself as a wolf (which is bloody awful). (DENSER, 1986, p. 40-1).

The hollow structure of her interactions reflects an inability to establish authentic and reciprocal connections, which are essential for building a true and loving bond. This necessary exchange in a romantic relationship would only be possible with an ego that had already lived through and resolved its deepest desires as a human being, which does not seem to be the case for Diana. Thus, love remains an unattainable illusion for Diana, leaving her unfulfilled. In this way, the absence of genuine exchange not only prevents the emergence of love but also reveals Diana's helplessness and solitude, trapped in a cycle of destructive pleasures that deepen her sense of emptiness.

I know a man like Fernando does not come around often in life. That is 34 years of experience talking. Statistically speaking, since my father, how many? Bloody hell, I stopped counting at 58, naturally leaving out the "hello-goodbye" types, the ones drowned in alcohol, in oblivion, and so on. Moreover, I am not talking about platonic love, my dears; I like something I can grab and grab what I can. Casális used to call them "my collection of hunting trophies," a series of mounted heads with the face of the hunter. Monotonous.

The mention of the paternal figure is significant here. There are few references to either the father or mother; they are always distant and unfocused. This parental detachment may explain why Diana maintains unfulfilling relationships with men, which do not enrich her as a person and instead lead her from one partner to another in pursuit of an impossible satisfaction.

3.3 Superficial Relationships and the Cycle of Self-Punishment

In Diana's character, this dynamic materialises as a life marked by the search for pleasure, followed by regret and emptiness, forming a cycle of self-sabotage. By incorporating asceticism as an unconscious form of self-punishment, Diana internalises society's judgement of her behaviour, especially within a patriarchal society that represses sexual autonomy and the aspirations of women who defy conventional roles. Thus, what Durkheim (1996) describes as asceticism—the pursuit of supposed purification through renunciation—is represented in Diana's life by a repetition of superficial and self-destructive relationships, which reinforce the control of patriarchal values over her identity and freedom.

Émile Durkheim's sociological theory provides a powerful interpretative key for understanding the self-destructive behaviour and self-punishment present in Diana's journey in Diana Caçadora. When analysing ascetic practices, Durkheim highlights that renunciation, self-denial, and self-inflicted suffering function as mechanisms of internal control and purification. Although

commonly associated with religious rituals, these behaviours manifest a value structure in which pain and restraint emerge as forms of compensation and sacrifice, particularly in contexts where social norms oppress individual freedom.

Durkheim argues that asceticism not only disciplines the individual but also establishes a pattern of sacrifice that links suffering with redemption or social acceptance. In Diana Caçadora, Diana experiences this sacrifice internally, compulsively repeating actions that deprive her of genuine satisfaction, trapping her in a routine of fleeting pleasures and subsequent self-deprecation. By portraying Diana as a character who constantly self-sabotages, Denser reveals the oppressive effect of cultural values that associate female freedom with "misconduct" and punishment.

This cycle of momentary pleasures and subsequent suffering in Diana illustrates modern asceticism. The character submits to a ritual of self-sacrifice imposed both by society and her own choices, reflecting Durkheim's critique of moral control that subjects the individual to suffering. By positioning Diana in this struggle between the desire for freedom and the need for self-punishment, the author underscores a social critique of the patriarchal pressure that conditions female behaviour to a role of submission and self-denial.

Ritual actions are always associated with conditions that determine their occurrence: periodic ones, like the seasons or stages of an individual's life; and occasional ones, like local or natural calamities or accidents in individual lives.

Diana introduces her fellow writer, Das Graças, as a controversial professional with a combative and provocative stance, almost like a modern version of Gregório de Matos, the "Hell's Mouth." Diana acknowledges the impact and intensity of Das Graças's writing but also expresses a critical view, considering this approach "antiquated and ineffective" from her own cynical, bourgeois perspective. Furthermore, the context in which Diana mentions "gatherings of perverts, madmen, invested megalomaniacs," among others, suggests that Das Graças moves in circles outside social and cultural norms, reinforcing her image as a figure beyond conventional standards. For Diana, this unconventional behaviour would be quite common in the artistic milieu.

Diana's friendship, as in many of her other relationships, reveals a sadomasochistic behaviour, marked by a conflicting attraction between the desire to engage and the need to criticise or even emotionally subjugate the other, reflecting her cynical and complex view of the world around her. In this way, the character demonstrates a capacity for self-fragilisation with a sadomasochistic component:

(...)I grew up, resolved, with perverse intentions to hunt something or someone because there were still drinks to be had and forbidden loves to pursue. (...) I no longer expect great things from love, just a fleeting relief. Nowadays, I understand that "forbidden loves" means sleeping with bank clerks, shop assistants, or dodgy types from the blue zone, preferably sky blue. In the end, only bitter bile is left, the emptiness that returns like a hangover from unfulfilled promises.

The author describes this self-destructive attitude of the character as causing sadness, loneliness, and anonymity in a big city. According to Menninger (1938), the repetition of her self-destructive choices has the aspect of a 'chronic suicide'. This behaviour can also take on a passive form, where the character surrenders to resigned acceptance instead of shouting, fighting, and creating complications. Passivity can be just as damaging as active aggression; in such cases, the punitive effect is more insidious, as if the individual were a victim of fate or inexorable forces. The lack of action or passive acceptance of undesirable circumstances can cause suffering as intense as direct aggression, resulting in a subtle and persistent form of self-punishment, where the person feels at the mercy of an uncontrollable fate, intensifying the sense of powerlessness and emotional exhaustion.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of psychoanalytic foundations and their influence on literature demonstrates how the duality between the impulses of Eros and Thanatos illuminates the unconscious conflicts of complex characters. In Diana the Huntress, these concepts intertwine with the sociocultural context, revealing the impact of social expectations and judgements on the construction of female identity. Psychoanalysis, by linking literature to the primordial drives of life and death, expands our understanding of the motivations that lead to self-sabotage and self-imposed suffering. This backdrop establishes a profound critique of the limits imposed by patriarchal society on female behaviour. It opens the way for examining Diana's journey as a narrative transcending the pursuit of pleasure, exposing the fragility and complexity of an identity marked by pressures and repression.

The analysis of Eros and Thanatos, alongside Durkheim's perspective on asceticism, reveals a complex interaction between Diana's self-destructive impulses and the cultural repression that shapes her behaviour. In Diana the Huntress, the character embodies a cycle of seeking immediate satisfaction followed by regret, reflecting the struggle between internal desires and internalised social norms. Durkheim complements Freud's psychoanalysis by highlighting that patriarchal forces and cultural values reinforce self-punishment and limit female autonomy, transforming Diana into a symbol of repression and emotional fragility. This portrayal of a woman caught between the desire for freedom and the compulsion towards self-sabotage critiques cultural impositions. It paves the way for a broader reflection on the construction of female identity and the forces that confine it.

The analysis of Diana the Huntress reveals the complexity of a character who, in her pursuit of freedom and pleasure, finds herself trapped in a cycle of guilt and self-punishment, driven by unconscious impulses and social pressures. Through a psychoanalytic lens, Diana personifies the duality of Eros and Thanatos, the drives of life and death, while also reflecting the influences of the

Oedipus complex and the compulsion to repeat. As she moves between the desire to live fully and resignation to inevitable self-destruction, Diana exposes the contradictions and dilemmas of female identity in a society that continually limits her behaviour and ambitions.

Examining Diana the Huntress unveils a character caught between a yearning for freedom and a repetitive cycle of guilt and self-reproach fueled by deep-seated impulses and social constraints. In Diana, the duality of Eros and Thanatos interacts with Durkheim's notion of asceticism, revealing the cultural repression that limits female autonomy and transforms pleasure into a source of anguish. Thus, Vicens uses Diana's narrative not only to explore a fragmented psyche but also to critique the superficiality and emotional emptiness imposed by rigid, stigmatised social norms. Diana the Huntress transcends the simple pursuit of pleasure, becoming a mirror of the frustrations and anguish that result from internalising a devalued female identity, subjected to constant self-deprecation. This work significantly contributes to the literature and enhances our understanding of the psychological and social dynamics that shape human behaviour, particularly by incorporating psychoanalysis and social critique.

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