

Freud on Dr. Seuss

A book review by Josh LeBeau

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The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss, 61 pages. Beginner Books, \$3.95

The Cat in the Hat is a hard-hitting novel of prose and poetry in which the author re-examines the dynamic rhyming schemes and bold imagery of some of his earlier works, most notably Green Eggs and Ham, If I Ran the Zoo, and Why Can't I Shower With Mommy? In this novel, Theodore Geisel, writing under the pseudonym Dr. Seuss, pays homage to the great Dr. Sigmund Freud in a nightmarish fantasy of a renegade feline helping two young children understand their own frustrated sexuality. The story opens with two youngsters, a brother and a sister, abandoned by their mother, staring mournfully through the window of their single-family dwelling.

In the foreground, a large tree/phallic symbol dances wildly in the wind, taunting the children and encouraging them to succumb to the sexual yearnings they undoubtedly feel for each other. Even to the most unlearned reader, the blatant references to the incestuous relationship the two share set the tone for Seuss' probing examination of the satisfaction of primitive needs. The Cat proceeds to charm the wary youths into engaging in what he so innocently refers to as "tricks." At this point, the fish, an obvious Christ figure who represents the prevailing Christian morality, attempts to warn the children, and thus, in effect, warns all of humanity of the dangers associated with the unleashing of the primal urges.

In response to this, the cat proceeds to balance the aquatic naysayer on the end of his umbrella, essentially saying, "Down with morality; down with God!" After pooh poohing the righteous rantings of the waterlogged Christ figure, the Cat begins to juggle several icons of Western culture, most notably two books, representing the Old and New Testaments, and a saucer of lactal fluid, an ironic reference to maternal loss the two children experienced when their mother abandoned them "for the afternoon." Our heroic Id adds to this bold gesture a

rake and a toy man, and thus completes the Oedipal triangle.

Later in the novel, Seuss introduces the proverbial Pandora's box, a large red crate out of which the Id releases Thing One, or Freud's concept of Ego, the division of the psyche that serves as the conscious mediator between the person and reality, and Thing Two, the Superego which functions to reward and punish through a system of moral attitudes, conscience, and guilt. Referring to this box, the Cat says, "Now look at this trick. Take a look!" In this, Dr. Seuss uses the children as a brilliant metaphor for the reader, and asks the reader to re-examine his own inner self. The children, unable to control the Id, Ego, and Superego allow these creatures to run free and mess up the house, or more symbolically, control their lives. This rampage continues until the fish, or Christ symbol, warns that the mother is returning to reinstate the Oedipal triangle that existed before her abandonment of the children. At this point, Seuss introduces a many-armed cleaning device which represents the psychoanalytic couch, which proceeds to put the two youngsters' lives back in order.

With powerful simplicity, clarity, and drama, Seuss reduces Freud's concepts on the dynamics of the human psyche to an easily understood gesture. Dr. Seuss' poetry and choice of words is equally impressive and serves as a splendid counterpart to his bold symbolism. In all, his writing style is quick and fluid, making The Cat in the Hat impossible to put down. While this novel is 61 pages in length, and one can read it in five minutes or less, it is not until after multiple readings that the genius of this modern day master becomes apparent.