**PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MR. BEAN**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to use the theory of psychoanalysis to discover and address the unconscious motivation for the behaviour of one of televison’s most loved characters, Mr. Bean, portrayed by Rowan Atkinson from the year 1990-1995. A hilarious show of ingenuity and very little brain power, Mr. Bean is about a man with a child-like nature. When faced with life's problems, he'll always be sure to come up with something inventive to assist him. Armed with his teddy and famous green car, Mr. Bean with leave you rolling on the floor! This paper consists of an introduction as to how the character came to exist, a detailed explanation of Freud’s psychoanalysis theory, most importantly its connection to the character of Mr. Bean, a few popular theories, episode references and a conclusion.

**Introduction**

Mr. Bean; the show that started almost 30 years ago still manages to tickle our funny bone. Rowan Atkinson may have more than 50 acting credits on his resume, but to most of the world he’ll always be best known as the ridiculously rubber-faced Mr. Bean. Though it was on January 1, 1990 that Mr. Bean made his television debut on England’s ITV, Rowan Atkinson began developing the character more than a decade earlier, while he was pursuing his master’s degree in electrical engineering. Because the bulk of the comedy is physical, not narrative, Mr. Bean has not gotten lost in translation. The series was broadcast in nearly 200 countries around the world. Even the most dedicated fans have trouble reconciling the fact that only 14 episodes of the live-action series were ever produced. It did, of course, spawn two movies, an animated series, a video game, and some books. While the beginning of Mr. Bean started by looking in the mirror, Atkinson decided to put faith in what he was doing with his face following that first successful performance at Oxford. Over the years, Atkinson has repeatedly cited French comedian Jacques Tati as one of the great influences on Mr. Bean. Mr. Bean’s creators could not have predicted its success and have repeatedly said that they didn’t think that anyone could have anticipated quite how successful and long lived it would be. In an interview with The Telegraph in November of 2012, Atkinson admitted that Mr. Bean’s time was coming to an end.

“*The stuff that has been most commercially successful for me—basically quite physical, quite childish—I increasingly feel I’m going to do a lot less of. Apart from the fact that your physical ability starts to decline, I also think someone in their fifties being childlike becomes a little sad. You’ve got to be careful*.” – Rowan Atkinson

**Psychoanalysis Theory**

As a therapy, psychoanalysis is based on the concept that individuals are unaware of the many factors that cause their behavior and emotions. These unconscious factors have the potential to produce unhappiness, which in turn is expressed through a score of distinguishable symptoms, including disturbing personality traits, difficulty in relating to others, or disturbances in self-esteem or general disposition (American Psychoanalytic Association, 1998).

In addition to being a therapy, psychoanalysis is a method of understanding mental functioning and the stages of growth and development. Psychoanalysis is a general theory of individual human behavior and experience, and it has both contributed to and been enriched by many other disciplines. Psychoanalysis seeks to explain the complex relationship between the body and the mind and furthers the understanding of the role of emotions in medical illness and health (Farrell, 1981, p. 202).

Sigmund Freud was the first psychoanalyst and a true pioneer in the recognition of the importance of unconscious mental activity. His theories on the inner workings of the human mind, which seemed so revolutionary at the turn of the century, are now widely accepted by most schools of psychological thought. In 1896, Freud coined the term "psychoanalysis," and for the next forty years of his life, he worked on thoroughly developing its main principles, objectives, techniques, and methodology.

In An Outline of Psychoanalysis, Freud (1949) explains the principal tenets on which psychoanalytic theory is based. He begins with an explanation of the three forces of the psychical apparatus--the id, the ego, and the superego. The id has the quality of being unconscious and contains everything that is inherited, everything that is present at birth, and the instincts (Freud,1949, p.14). The ego has the quality of being conscious and is responsible for controlling the demands of the id and of the instincts, becoming aware of stimuli, and serving as a link between the id and the external world. In addition, the ego responds to stimulation by either adaptation or flight, regulates activity, and strives to achieve pleasure and avoid unpleasure (Freud, 1949, p. 14-15). Finally, the superego, whose demands are managed by the id, is responsible for the limitation of satisfactions and represents the influence of others, such as parents, teachers, and role models, as well as the impact of racial, societal, and cultural traditions (Freud, 1949, p. 15).

Freud states that the instincts are the ultimate cause of all behavior. The two basic instincts are Eros (love) and the destructive or death instinct. The purpose of Eros is to establish and preserve unity through relationships. On the other hand, the purpose of the death instinct is to undo connections and unity via destruction (Freud, 1949, p. 18). The two instincts can either operate against each other through repulsion or combine with each other through attraction (Freud, 1949, p. 19). The basic objective of psychoanalysis is to remove neuroses and thereby cure patients by returning the damaged ego to its normal state (Freud, 1949, p. 51). During analysis, a process that often takes many years, patients tell analysts both what they feel is important and what they consider to be unimportant. An aspect of analysis that has both positive and negative repercussions is transference, which occurs when patients view their analysts as parents, role models, or other figures from their past. Transference causes patients to become concerned with pleasing their analysts and, as a result, patients lose their rational aim of getting well (Freud, 1949, p. 52).

The method of psychoanalysis involves several significant steps. First, analysts gather material with which to work from patients' free associations, results of transference, dream interpretation, and the patients' slips and parapraxes (Freud, 1949, p. 56). Second, analysts begin to form hypotheses about what happened to the patients in the past and what is currently happening to them in their daily life. It is important that analysts relay the conclusions at which they arrive based on their observations only after the patients have reached the same conclusions on their own accord. Should analysts reveal their conclusions to patients too soon, resistance due to repression occurs. Overcoming this resistance requires additional time and effort by both the analysts and the patients. Once patients accept the conclusions, they are cured (Freud, 1949, p. 57).

In the final chapters of An Outline of Psychoanalysis, Freud (1949) insists that it is neither practical nor fair to scientifically define what is normal and abnormal, and despite his theory's accuracy, "reality will always remain unknowable" (p. 83). He claims that although his theory is correct to the best of his knowledge, "it is unlikely that such generalizations can be universally correct" (Freud, 1949, p. 96).

As noted previously, Freud coined the term "psychoanalysis" in 1856. Even today, as we are rapidly approaching the twenty-first century, psychoanalysis remains as a valid option for patients suffering from mental illnesses. The acceptance and popularity of psychoanalysis is apparent through the existence of numerous institutes, organizations, and conferences established around the world with psychoanalysis as their focus. The theory of psychoanalysis was innovative and revolutionary, and clearly has withstood the test of time.

Perhaps even more noteworthy than the longevity of psychoanalysis is the fact that it has served as a catalyst to many professionals in the field of psychology and prompted them to see connections that they otherwise would have missed. Psychoanalysis enlightened health professionals about many aspects of the human mind and its inner workings, phenomena that had previously been inexplicable. As a direct result of psychoanalysis, approaches to psychological treatment now considered routine or commonplace were developed worldwide.

By far one of the greatest strengths of psychoanalysis is that it is a very comprehensive theory. Psychoanalysis, originally intended as a theory to explain therapeutic or psychological concepts, explains the nature of human development and all aspects of mental functioning. However, many experts contend that psychoanalysis can also be used to describe or explain a vast array of other concepts outside of the realm of the psychological field. For example, religion, Shakespeare's character "Hamlet," the nature of companies and their leaders, or an artist's paintings can all be explained by the principles of psychoanalysis. This comprehensiveness suggests that the theory of psychoanalysis is, at least to some extent, pointing in the general direction of the truth.

Although Freud's life had ended, he left behind a legacy unmatched by any other, a legacy that continues very much to this day. Whereas new ideas have enriched the field of psychoanalysis and techniques have adapted and expanded over the years, psychoanalysts today, like Freud, believe that psychoanalysis is the most effective method of obtaining knowledge of the mind. Through psychoanalysis, patients free themselves from terrible mental anguish and achieve greater understanding of themselves and others.

**The character of Mr. Bean in depth**

Mr. Bean is shown to be a bachelor living alone at the address of Flat 2, 12 Arbour Road, Highbury, and is almost always seen in his trademark tweed jacket, brown pants and a skinny red tie. He also usually wears a digital calculator watch. Mr. Bean rarely speaks, and when he does, it is generally only a few mumbled words which are in a comically low-pitched voice. His first name (he names himself "Bean" to others) and profession, if any, are never mentioned. In the first film adaptation, "Mr." appears on his passport in the "first name" field, and he is shown employed as a guard at London's National Gallery. He is seemingly an intelligent and respectable man doing trigonometry or going out on the town but mostly silent or mumbling. He often misunderstands human subtleties and behaviors. Bean generally does simple tasks in absurd, roundabout ways and can be downright nasty to those that interfere with his person - the driver of a three-wheeled blue Reliant, for example, or a magician who takes his watch for a trick. As a direct result of his selfish and erroneous ways, Bean has an unusual romance with Irma Gobb. He does, however, seem to love Teddy, his aptly named teddy bear - but that doesn’t save the stuffed animal from some of Mr. Bean’s most disastrous actions.

Mr. Bean often seems unaware of basic aspects of the way the world works, and the programme usually features his attempts at what would normally be considered simple activities, such as going swimming, using a television set, interior decorating, or going to church. The humour largely comes from his original and often absurd solutions to problems and his total disregard for others when solving them, his pettiness, and occasional malevolence. He is a fun and even lovable little man who is somehow also an unforgivably destructive, cruel, and near vindictive character. He is a very odd man about whom we know nothing, who basically wanders around, getting into trouble, finding unique solutions to predicaments, and both wittingly and unwittingly causing mayhem. Not only does he seem to be unfamiliar with all social conventions and standard methods for doing anything, he never even demonstrates normal human thought processes — witness his strategy for protecting his furniture and possessions when painting his flat, which is to wrap every single item in newspaper right down to individual grapes, not to mention that his method of painting the flat includes a stick of dynamite. Considering the mixture of stupidity and inspiration in his way of doing things, Mr. Bean epitomizes the aphorism, "*Nothing can be made foolproof because fools are so ingenious*". Mr. Bean apparently is artistic, due to the reaction of the Art Teacher in the episode “Back to School, Mr. Bean.” He is obnoxious, crazy and sometimes seems stupid. Mr. Bean is also a pain to the Reliant Regal in loads of episodes becoming a running gag in the series. In a few occasions, Mr. Bean had been a bit kind but he rarely shows it. He is known to have a criminal record due to the acts he has committed. These include : accidentally headbutting the Queen, vandalizing hotel property and wandering around the corridors naked, blowing up a car, littering and destroying a lady's shopping whilst trying to get back a golf ball etc. However, he has not been cautioned or arrested over any of these, so the general idea is Mr Bean is allowed to get away with committing the acts.

At the beginning of episode two onwards, Mr. Bean falls from the sky in a beam of light, accompanied by a choir singing - *Ecce homo qui est faba* ("Behold the man who is a bean"), recorded by Southwark Cathedral Choir in 1990. These opening sequences were initially in black and white in episodes two and three, and were intended by the producers to show his status as an "ordinary man cast into the spotlight". However, later episodes showed Mr. Bean dropping from the night sky in a deserted London street against the backdrop of St Paul's Cathedral. At the end of episodes three and six he is also shown being sucked right back up into the sky in the respective background scenes. Atkinson has acknowledged that Bean "has a slightly alien aspect to him". Whether Bean is an extraterrestrial is not clear. He is a slow-witted, sometimes ingenious, selfish, and generally likable buffoon who brings various unusual schemes and connivances to everyday tasks. It makes us ask ourselves, ‘How can he not know the basics of human life?’ Perhaps it is cruel to say, but there are times Atkinson does look alien indeed; his voice, appearance, style, and mannerisms are absolutely awkward and incredibly funny. Sometimes, despite his ignorance, we even feel sorry for Mr. Bean thanks to Atkinson’s sad face and drooped shoulders. Who knew the laughter he caused could be so endearing? Even though it is incredibly ridiculous that a grown man would have a teddy bear, much less think it is a real pet, Bean’s askew abuse amid his devotion to Teddy helps create attachment for the viewer. Likewise, Bean’s woefully mistaken and immature relationship with Irma is great fun. What on earth could she possibly see in him?

**Psychoanalysis and Mr. Bean**

Mr Bean seems to be merely a child trapped inside a man’s body, looking at the world with a bright awe in his face, constantly doing silly things. Bean is never seen to question his actions, but accepts everything he does. What is going on behind that innocent grin and wide-eyed expression?

“*Phil, you’re just an eight-year-old trapped inside a twelve-year-old’s body.*” – Glen Cullen

Throughout the entire original series Mr Bean mostly speaks with mumbles, or one word responses like “Bean”. Monosyllabic word choice could link to possible autism, Asperger Syndrome, or possible Savant Syndrome as all of these are usually accompanied by lexical hindrances. Bean is Socially Awkward. His life-long friend is a teddy bear and perhaps Mr. Bean's best friend. The little brown bear is a knitted oddity with button eyes and sausage-shaped limbs, which invariably end up broken in half or in various other states of destruction and disfiguration. Although Teddy is inanimate, Mr. Bean often pretends it is alive. For example, when Mr. Bean hypnotises Teddy, he snaps his fingers and the bear's head falls backwards as if it had fallen asleep instantly. Mr. Bean behaves as if the bear is real, buying it a Christmas present or trying not to wake it in the mornings. His closest human relationship is Irma Gobb who appears in three episodes. In "The Curse of Mr. Bean" and "Mr. Bean Goes to Town", the character is simply credited as "the girlfriend". She is treated relatively inconsiderately by Bean, who appears to regard her more as a friend and companion than as a love interest. However, he does become jealous when she dances with another man at a disco in "Mr. Bean Goes to Town", and she certainly expects him to propose to her on Christmas Day in "Merry Christmas, Mr. Bean"; with his failure to do so resulting in her leaving him for good. He doesn't show much care to his girlfriend which was proven in many episodes. He also tends to hate Irma kissing him. This furthers the theory of Bean registering somewhere on the Autism Spectrum, as he either struggles to form social relationships, or chooses not to. Mr Bean possesses an apparent vulnerability, he is innocent and sweetly naive yet selfish and highly vindictive when he wants to be. He switches between these two modes like a child in his pre-teens. And, like any child, his first duty to himself is look out for himself – scratch the surface and you will discover that Bean is a highly selfish character.

“*I think Mr Bean is a very uncynical character, he is actually very open and entirely self-centred and a highly vindictive character when he wants to be. Not at all pleasant, but at the same time I do not think he has any malice in him.*” – Rowan Atkinson

Starting with the first episode, Mr. Bean has a long-running feud with the unseen driver of a light blue Reliant Regal Supervan III, which will usually get turned over, crashed out of its parking space, and so forth by Mr. Bean in his Mini, who is usually oblivious to the results. These mishaps became a running joke throughout the series. In "Tee Off, Mr. Bean", Bean is hitchhiking and the Reliant pulls over for him, but Bean, who recognises the car, pretends to not see it, until it leaves. Whenever Bean encounters the blue Reliant Robin he has to damage it, overtake it, or even try to knock it over. This behaviour could be an example of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Bean often gets himself into all manner of scrapes. Now, while it is true that a lot of the time the problems he creates for himself are completely his own fault, he does manage to come up with spectacular solutions time and time again. Mr. Bean's car, a 1976 British Leyland Mark 3 Mini 1000, developed its own character of sorts over the series and was central to several antics, such as Mr. Bean's getting dressed in it, driving while sitting in an armchair strapped to the roof, starting it with a number of locks and keys, or attempting to avoid a car park fee by driving out through the entrance. The Mini also had a number of innovative security measures. For example, Bean uses a bolt-latch and padlock, rather than the lock fitted to the car, and removes the steering wheel instead of the key. His original thinking and problem solving abilities do certainly point to some sort sort of above-average intelligence. All things taken into account, Mr Bean’s main disorder – if you can call it that – is probably High Functioning Autism.

**Conclusion**

Mr. Bean has reached the grand old age of 25! He's one of the most treasured characters in TV history and a true comedy legend, with a massive following both in the UK and worldwide. Whether stuffing the turkey or preparing for a meeting with royalty, over the last 25 years he has kept us constantly entertained and in stitches. Speaking greatly to the popularity of the character, Mr. Bean was part of the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games in London, via a skit in which he's part of the orchestra playing the theme from Chariots of Fire. That turned out to be Mr. Bean's farewell, as Atkinson said in November 2012 that he was retiring the character, citing among other reasons the problem of playing a childlike man as he continues to age.

Sigmund Freud is arguably the most well known psychologist of the 20th century. As the founder of psychoanalysis, he has greatly impacted the development of psychotherapy and treatment methods through the course of the century. His influence on the field remains strong and his theory continues to generate controversy. Its redeeming factor is the legacy it leaves behind, as it has furthered the therapeutic field in unimaginable ways. Psychoanalysis fostered interest in human emotional and psychological development traced back to a young age. The human can be seen from a much more holistic viewpoint as one looks at the psychoanalytic theory, which combines the inner workings of the mind and attempts to explain them in the context of a dynamic social environment.

The objective of this paper was to look at the character of Mr. Bean from a different perspective by using the theory of psychoanalysis to understand and diagnose his behaviour, if in fact he was a real person living in the real world. For the most part it is entertainment, but it is quite interesting to use a theory like psychoanalysis and look into a very well known character’s behaviour. I feel like I’ve written so little on The Whole Bean, yet I’ve used a lot of big, abstract words in doing so. Truly, perhaps the written word can’t describe Mr. Bean. He has to be seen to be believed. New or young audiences can enjoy for the first time, and old school fans can revisit The Whole Bean again. Behold the man who is a bean, indeed.

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