Oedipus in Ireland

Betrayal and Reconciliation

in Neil Jordan’s Sunrise with Sea Monster

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Abstract

In this essay I argue that the plot in *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, written by Irish writer Neil Jordan, is based on the Oedipal myth, such as interpreted by Freud and psychoanalyst literary theory. By applying aspects of this theory we discover meanings buried within the novel. The Oedipus situation arises when the main character Donal falls in love with his piano teacher Rose, but so does his father, who decides to marry her. The desire both men have for the same woman creates a conflict of interest, as well as leading to a series of betrayals, of which the worst and ultimate one is of the father, Sam, by the son, Donal. The situation is not helped further by the lack of communication which exists between the two men. When the Oedipal stage is overcome, when both Rose and Sam are out of the picture, this leads to a sort of reconciliation between Sam and Donal. Betrayal and reconciliation are the two main themes and these are governed by the Oedipal framework of the novel. I also argue that the imagery, in particular that of water and what it is connected to adds depth to the novel as well as closely relating to the main themes and the Oedipal background: the diverse aspects of the Oedipal conflict are expressed symbolically, metaphorically etc. in the novel.
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Introduction

Neil Jordan is an Irish author who perhaps is more known as a film director than an author of novels (Grassi 102) and he wrote *Sunrise with Sea Monster* in 1992.

The main character in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* is the young Irish man Donal Gore and at the start of the novel he finds himself awaiting execution in a monastery courtyard. He has travelled to Spain with a faction of the Irish republican movement, to fight in the Spanish Civil War, but has been caught. Left back home in Ireland is his father, Sam Gore, once an IRA-man, who gave up his dream of a southern and northern Ireland united in a republic and thus became a member of the Pro-Treaty party. Donal feels his father betrays both his own beliefs, as well as his own son: back in the same home as his father is also his former piano teacher Rose, whom both Donal and his father have affectionate feelings for. However, Sam decides to propose to Rose and this is the determining factor of Donal’s leaving for Spain: “You are leaving [Sam said], because you hate me, not because of any nebulous political ideas. And though it might have been true, I [Donal] said it wasn’t. And you [Donal] think you hate me [Sam] because of her, but in fact you hate me because I am simply me, your father” (Jordan 57). Donal even admits it to himself when comrades in the brigade ask him why he has come to Spain: “I told them I came here because of all courses of actions I could have taken it was the only one I knew with certainty that my father would have disapproved of” (Jordan 16-17). This shows us one of the novel’s key subjects; the failing relationship between Donal and Sam and how they both betray each other. Donal is later asked to commit to another betrayal when a German called Hans contacts him and offers him an escape from his imprisonment. In exchange for this Donal has to promise to make contact with the Irish republican movement, because as Hans says “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity” (Jordan 64).

Throughout this essay I will argue that the novel is based on the Oedipal myth, such as interpreted by Freud and psychoanalysis. However, this is not done altogether consciously by the author. By using a psychoanalytic literary perspective, this situation is seen more clearly. What is also focused on here is that the imagery, such as symbolism, metaphors and metonymy play important roles in conveying its main themes: betrayal and reconciliation. These two themes combined with a lack of communication that exists throughout the novel are what make up the plot.

Betrayal is also at the core of the Greek Oedipus myth in which the son of the family wants his mother for his own and sees his father as competition for her love (Barry 96). This
aspect is shown in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* when Donal betrays his father and takes revenge on him as a way of punishing him for stealing “his woman”, Rose. Although Rose is not Donal’s mother, I believe she can be seen as a replacement for her. The Oedipal conflict is furthermore what triggers all events throughout the novel. This explains my main argument: the novel is governed by this conflict and this conflict is what sets off the rest of the novel’s themes as well as influencing its language.

One of the novel’s most prominent themes is betrayal, as well as later: reconciliation. Donal goes to Spain because his father does not want him to, Sam marries the woman Donal loves, and Donal agrees to cooperate with three different parties at the same time: the Germans, the Irish republican movement and the Irish secret service while deceiving most of them simultaneously. However, in the last few pages of the novel Donal and his father are reconciled with each other (Jordan 181-183). According to Grassi the theme reconciliation is something that has been fairly characteristic for Neil Jordan’s previous works in fiction (109).

As mentioned earlier much of the novel’s power lies in its use of imagery, as in symbolism, metaphor, metonym etc, and in the way that these help convey the themes of the novel: betrayal, reconciliation, the difficulty to communicate and the relationship between the main character Donal and his father. Using particular elements of imagery makes the novel into “a work of considerable imaginative richness, raising historical questions of the highest importance and carrying an enormous emotional charge” (Kerrigan). Natural phenomena in the novel, especially that of water in form of storms, rain and the sea seem to always be there, in the background or at the centre of the plot. One example is when Donal is caught in a storm while he is out fishing (Jordan 119-120). What makes this more interesting is that this storm takes place just before the plot takes its final turn - Donal decides to go to Lisdoonvarna Spa and the final betrayal of his father takes place; when he leaves him on the beach (Jordan 161). Another example of where it is obvious that imagery is important aspect of the novel is towards the end when Donal’s father appears when Donal is collecting his catch from the nightlines. Donal first sees an odd looking fish caught on the fish line and shortly after sees his father emerge from the water (Jordan 175), thus connecting his father with the fish and the water.

The psychoanalytic literary theory has been chosen as a framework to help interpret the novel and its use of imagery. One of the main reasons for this is that looking at for example both symbolism (a form of imagery) and dreams are aspects central in psychoanalytic criticism (Ellman 6). Donal meets his father again in a *dream* or vision and this scene in particular is an important part of the novel. Moreover, Freudian psychoanalytic critics are
more interested in conflicts between generations, rather than those between social classes, like Marxist critics are (Barry 105). For this reason, Donal’s relationship with his father Sam becomes more interesting looking at it with your psychoanalyst glasses on.

The essay is divided into different sections. First there will be a look at the basic elements of psychoanalytic literary theory, in particular those that deal with dreams and the Oedipal conflict. This is to provide us with a framework to analyse the novel through. The second section deals with the Oedipal love triangle of Sam, Rose and Donal, and then we look at how this conflict creates the themes of betrayal and reconciliation. Interweaved in all this is the different aspects of the author’s use of imagery, how these connect to the themes and the Oedipal conflict. Belonging to this is also a section which examines the issue regarding lack of communication, which is what makes the Oedipal conflict so difficult to resolve. Towards the end of the essay there is also a brief discussion on Donal’s unconscious and how the meaning of the title *Sunrise with Sea Monster* might be interpreted.

**Psychoanalysis**

The therapy version of psychoanalysis makes its patient talk openly to their therapist, so that any hidden fears or thoughts are drawn up to the surface (Barry 96). Psychoanalytic literary criticism however is “a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature” (Barry 96). What is most important in psychoanalysis is that it is based on the notion that there is such a thing as an unconscious. Also central to this is that what lies within the unconscious is in need of interpretation before we can understand it. The same can be said about analysing and reading literature. A literary text does not speak directly to the reader, but conveys its messages through such things as imagery: symbolism and metaphors etc (Barry 102).

The unconscious is the part of our mind of which we are not aware of, but that still influences our lives and how we think and act. According to Freud the idea of the unconscious is coupled with the idea of *repression*, which is when secret desires, traumatic memories etc which are too hard to admit or handle are forced, repressed out into the unconscious (Barry 96). Williams explains this further in her book on psychoanalytic literary theory:

> In becoming repressed, and then returning to consciousness in some form, repressed elements are subjects to transformations enacted by the unconscious – displacement, symbolism, condensation, as meanings and the meanings attached
to memories shift and are warped by the mind’s constant reinterpretation of itself.
(Williams 24)

This means that repressed ideas and thoughts can manifest themselves in many different ways. As mentioned in the above quote, two of the most important terms within dream work and how hidden feelings and thoughts can be manifested in are displacement and condensation. Displacement means that when we dream “one person or event is represented by another which is in some way linked or associated with it” (Barry 98). This person, event or even “forbidden” thought could therefore be represented like a metaphor or a metonym (Barry 98). In Sunrise with Sea Monster an example of displacement is the fish Donal finds in his dream, just before he meets his father who also emerges from the water. The fish can here be seen as a sort of metonym for his father as Donal associates him with fishing and the sea.

The other term, condensation, means that many thoughts and events are put together and presented as a single image in the dream (Barry 98), like a symbol. Repressed ideas can also be shown in something that Freud called sublimation. This manifests itself by one’s channelling of the repressed material into something else, like hard work or very devoted religiousness (Barry 97). Thoughts suppressed into the unconscious can also slip out to the conscious again through so called Freudian slips of the tongue, when you want to say something, but instead say something else than intended and thus expressing what you were really thinking (Barry 98).

Analysing dreams is also something that Freudian psychoanalysts are very much interested in. This is because “the interpretation of dreams lies at the heart of psychoanalysis” (Ellman 6). Freud meant that all dreams are fulfilments of secret wishes or dreams a person has. The person him-or herself might not be able to admit these wishes to themselves, but when they relax in their sleep, these wishes can reveal themselves in dreams (Barry 98). We can see this particularly in the end of Sunrise with Sea Monster when Sam has disappeared and Donal dreams he meets his father on the beach. Later the two of them share a reconciling meal together (Jordan 177). Donal’s wish to make up with his father could not come true when his father was alive, so it takes place in a dream instead.

These things aside, the most important aspect of psychoanalysis, in regards to this essay’s main argument, is the importance it gives to the so-called Oedipus complex. This theory is derived from the myth about prince Oedipus who fulfils a prophecy that says that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Freud interpreted and developed the myth into a theory. This theory talks about how a male child has an unconscious desire to have the
exclusive love of his mother, to the extent that he wants to get rid of the father, and by doing so he gets the mother entirely to himself (Barry 97). This is brought up to explain my main argument further: *Sunrise with Sea Monster* is based on an Oedipal conflict and it is this conflict that triggers the novel’s themes and events. The following section deals with the Oedipal complex and how this can be related to the relationship between Donal, Rose and Sam in the novel.

**The Oedipus complex in the Donal-Rose-Sam love triangle**

This section aims mainly at showing how one might look at the triangular relationship between Donal, Rose and Sam in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* through a psychoanalytical angle, with the emphasis on the Oedipal situation. This situation arises when Donal and Sam fall in love with the same woman: Rose, the piano teacher. The reason that Donal decides to leave is because Sam proposes to her and Donal cannot stand living in the same house with the two of them any longer (Jordan 19). In his review of the novel Rockett mentions that the novel “explores the triangular relationship of father, son and stepmother/lover, and issues around desire, jealousy and betrayal” (1). Using his interpretation, the triangular drama here does not only refer to the triangular drama between three people, but is furthermore expressed in three different kind of emotions: first the desire both men have for Rose, then the jealousy they feel for each other, which then in its turn leads to the series of betrayals.

What triggers the Oedipal situation then? Ellman offers a possible suggestion to this in her discussion on the Oedipus complex in her introduction to psychoanalytic literary criticism. One of the things she claims is that the Oedipus complex implies that love in rarely is something that happens between only two people (13):

> but [is] always a contest of three, even if the third is present only as a physical obstacle. Almost all these triangles involve two men competing for the favours of a woman: [...] the bond between the rivals is often more intense than the bond that draws them both to the beloved. Thus the woman, ostensibly the object of desire, is reduced to the go-between in an erotic tug-of-war between the men. What is more, the beloved is often chosen by the lover, not because of her intrinsic charms, but because she is the object of another man’s infatuation. (Ellman, 13)

This is certainly true in the case of Donal, Rose and Sam’s triangular love drama. At first Donal likes Rose and appreciates that his father sometimes walks her to the train station after
the piano lesson. He even secretly wishes that the two will start liking each other (Jordan 30-31). This is illustrated in the following quote:

I [...] was glad of a feminine presence other than Maisie in the house, wished to reinvent the mother I had lost perhaps, wished to complete this household in a way I’d never known. So maybe that would be the retrospective truth, the posthumous truth that when I saw them greet each other on the promenade through the patina of rain I hoped that something in her would gladden him. (Jordan 30)

According to Ellman’s theory (13) Donal’s view of Sam and Rose’s relationship is only changed later because he sees that Sam actually grows to desire her too and this evokes jealousy. This work the other way around too: Sam knows about Donal’s feelings for Rose and this could be a reason why he decides to ask her to marry him. Possibly he does not realise to what extent Donal likes his piano teacher. Consequently, Sam likes Rose because Donal does, and the other way around. Another reason for Sam’s affection for Rose and his decision to marry her could be due to the fact that she is more or less the only woman, except the housekeeper Maise, he is in contact with after the death of his wife (Schwall 38). Schwall also makes the connection between Donal’s mother and Rose when she says that both Donal and Sam associates them both with the piano and the sea, and that this might be why they find Rose so attractive (37-38). Grassi also mentions something along the same lines when she writes that “the piano is all that is left to Donal of his mother. In the same way Sam seems to fall in love with Rose only because she plays the piano” (108). Thus, part of Donal’s fascination with Rose originates from the fact that his mother, whom he loved dearly, also played the piano and thus sees his mother in her. Donal and Rose do not speak often, at least not during the lessons, and when they do all their communication and concentration is centred on how the piano is played.

Since both Donal and Sam are in love with the same woman, the situation takes an interesting turn indeed when Sam decides to marry Rose. She then becomes some sort of substitute mother figure for Donal. However, on one occasion during Donal’s adolescence he and Rose have sexual relations. This would implicate that he has had sexual relations with the woman who supposedly is the replacement for his mother. This is very much like in the Oedipus myth: the way the son loves his mother to the extent that he wants her to his own and
the two men compete for the “mother’s” (Rose’s) attention and love (Barry 97). The one thing that differs from the myth is that Rose is not Donal’s biological mother.

However, when Donal comes back from Spain and finds Sam paralysed, the father-son roles are completely reversed. Donal is now what we can call his own “father’s father”, forced into being the head of the family, taking care of putting food on the table and while Sam is like “a great immobile child” (Grassi 108). Even if Donal has not “eliminated” his own father in means of actually killing him, his leaving contributes, in some way, to Sam’s stroke, which leaves him immobile and unable to speak (Jordan 180). If one looks at this situation with the Oedipal background still in mind, this would mean Donal has eliminated his father from the competition for Rose’s attention, although perhaps not consciously. He knows his father does not want him to leave, but he does anyway.

An additional possible angle to look at the Oedipal love triangle of Donal, Sam and Rose from is brought up by Möller in her essay on *Sunrise with Sea Monster*. In this case she draws parallels between some of the countries mentioned in the novel: Ireland, Spain and Britain, to the triangular relationship between Donal, Sam and Rose:

Histologically, Ireland, England and Spain have been embroiled in political fighting. [...] The triangular relationship between Ireland, Spain and England then takes on a marked Oedipal slant in the novel when we discover that it is paralleled within young Donal Gore’s family. Donal and his father used to live in an atmosphere of neutral but brooding silence after the premature death of Donal’s mother, who is later replaced in the household by an attractive young piano teacher to whom both men feel drawn. When the father actually marries the piano teacher, Donal’s twisted loyalties make him go all the way to Spain to fight on the Republican side, in a defiant gesture aimed at his father. (Möller)

The parallel lies in the fact that Spain for a long time was the Catholic arch enemy of Protestant England, and for Ireland a tempting possible ally, considering the religion, Catholicism, was one of the main reasons why Ireland was able to resist British colonialism for so long (Möller). However, what Möller probably means here with the “Oedipal slant” over the relationship between the three countries, is how much the relationship during that time reminds us of the situation in the Gore family, on the note of betrayal. Donal could stand to represent Ireland, while Sam could stand for Britain and Rose, the “tempting ally”, Spain. Irish Donal betrays his father by dealing with fascist Spain (Rose) when he decides to go there
to revolt against his father (Britain). Donal also betrays his father by having an affair with Rose when he is back. He also deals with Germany, who was supported by Spain during WW2, thus going behind the back of his own country and Britain, the country Ireland more or less had belonged to for many years (Wills 5). The only difference is that Ireland never did officially support Spain or Germany before or during WW2 (Wills 5). Wills discusses the relationship between Ireland and Britain during this time further, when she speaks of Ireland’s decision to stay neutral during the war (5). The popular opinion in Britain at the time was that Ireland was in ways betraying Britain by choosing not to take part of the war or stand on its side. For Ireland this was more of an issue of surviving as it was fairly new as an independent state and had a very small army and little possibilities of actually defending itself or fend off a possible attack (Wills 5). Donal does stay true to his country in the end, as he hands over both the Irish republican movement people and Hans in his submarine to the Irish secret service (Jordan 161-162). As shown above the Oedipal situation is not just represented within the Gore household, but also paralleled with another triangular relationship, the one between three countries in Europe. The situation of the Gore household however is caused by the Oedipal situation that arises when Donal and Sam fall in love with the same woman, Rose. Nothing of this sort happens, so to speak, between the different countries. However, it is the Oedipal situation in the Gore household that later leads to a series of betrayals which is what the next section will discuss.

Betrayal

An intergenerational conflict, especially one between a father and son, is something that has been central in the development of the narrative in Jordan’s earlier novels and this is specifically obvious in *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (Grassi 102). As mentioned earlier, this theme has been part of an Irish literary tradition: Lanters speaks about this when he says that father-son relationships are “a familiar theme in Irish literature, and for that matter, in much postcolonial writing” (Lanters in Schwall 31). Jordan thus continues this tradition, but adds a twist: the betrayal is not only one-sided, but multi-faceted, everyone seem to betray each other, Donal especially.

This section aims to investigate one of the novel’s main themes and how this is conveyed through the novel. One of *Sunrise with Sea Monster’s* main themes is *betrayal* in different forms. However, since my claim is that all situations that arise between the three main characters in the novel are caused by this Oedipal love triangle, we should begin by
looking at how the theme betrayal is related to this triangle, before we move onto the main discussion of the theme.

If Rose had not come into Donal and Sam’s lives, Donal would most likely not have gone to Spain and the series of betrayals would never have taken place, at least not to the extent they do in the current situation. One might often think of what would and what would not have been if this or that did not happen, but in this case it is essential to see the difference it could have made. Before Rose arrives to the household the father and son have been dealing with each other and the situation through a quiet understanding of sorts, one that required no speech. After Rose arrives, this quiet understanding becomes an awkward silence where each of the two knows what the other person thinks, but dares not to speak about it (Möller). How Rose interrupts this “brooding silence” (Möller) is further underlined by the novel’s imagery and its use of the water aspect. Rose is very much connected to this element and draws attention to herself by making her first appearance when it is raining and the sea is storming:

Rose, whom I first saw from the top window, her damp hair lifted in the wind like a flock of starlings. It was just after a spring tide and it was spring too, for the waves were crashing with celebrative bursts along the whole length of the promenade. [...] A wave hit her, nearly knocked her sideways and she stopped a moment to regain her breath. I knew she was bound for our house, by the music case. So she gripped one hand against the railings, her hair wet, the gabardine clinging to her body [...] I decided only someone exceptional would let themselves get that wet. Only someone exceptional would wrap a man’s coat around them, dry their hair in front of me by the stove and smile even though her stockings were drying on it. [...] There was a light rain falling when she left, the kind that created a veil over the head, and the waves had died down. I assumed the tide had changed. (Jordan 25-29)

The quote above is taken from the section of the book which introduces the reader to Rose. A young girl, Rose has been invited to the Gore house to teach Donal to play the piano, the instrument his mother played. This visit changes the lives of both of the Gore household inhabitants. Not only is there another person in the house every now and then, but it is a woman who evokes feelings in both Donal and his father. Rose is only the second woman after his mother and their housekeeper Maise, that Donal has ever met and this obviously makes a deep impression on him (Schwall 38). By connecting Rose to the element of water it
is made clear that Rose is a person that will play an important role in the novel. Also by connecting Rose to the same element as his mother it is as if they are connected, and somewhat the same person. Water in the form of rain is there the first time Donal meets Rose. She is wet from the rain. Being wet can also have erotic connotations and be connected to desire. That Rose is wet when she first arrives could be a foreshadowing of the desire Donal will begin to feel for Rose later in his life. However, although Donal desires Rose, he cannot have her, as firstly, she is older than him, and secondly, she decides to marry his father instead. This is what leads to the Oedipal conflict which is what triggers the rest of the events in the novel.

The main theme betrayal centres not only on the family situation in the Gore household, but is also something we are reminded of throughout the entire novel. It is committed by all three of the novel’s main characters: Sam, Donal and even Rose. We start off with Sam. When he first meets Donal’s mother he is a member of the Irish republican movement, and more specifically the IRA (Irish Republican Army), who fought for an Irish republic free from the governance of Britain. But after the Treaty debates and the Civil War that follows his meeting with Donal’s mother, he decides to join the pro-Treaty party, in a way betraying his own personal beliefs (Jordan 22-23). But before Sam switches sides on the Treaty, he commits another betrayal of sorts: although he is from a Protestant family in the north, he still fights for a Republic of Ireland, in a way then betraying his origins (Jordan 22-23). This is quite contradictory, as Protestants in the north of Ireland was traditionally connected to betrayal by Irish people in the southern parts of the island (Möller), since a large part of the population in the northern counties did not support the idea of a united republic. Furthermore, in order to marry Donal’s mother, who is a Catholic, Sam converts to Catholicism (Jordan 22). A few years later, when Donal is about six years old, Sam’s wife dies of tuberculosis. Sam then decides to hire someone to teach Donal the piano, and Rose enters their lives.

The next step in Sam’s betrayal is when he decides to ask Rose to marry him. He says it is because “I’ve let you [Donal] run wild” (Jordan 15), meaning he feels Donal should have some sort of mother figure in his life to give him stability and love he feels his son needs. Donal plays the piano for her for many years, but after not before long he is as good as her or even better. Despite this, Rose stays on, after Donal insists she does need the money. Donal also takes a liking to her and at one point they sleep together, camouflaged by a gramophone record playing (Jordan 17). Sam might not be aware of the fact that Donal is in love with Rose, but regardless of this, Donal sees it as a betrayal towards him when his father asks Rose to marry him. To punish his father for the injustice he feels he suffers, he leaves Ireland for
Spain and we are back to where the novel starts: Donal is awaiting execution in a Spanish monastery, is then saved by the German Hans and upon his return to Ireland the long line of different betrayals starts to unfold. As Grassi sums it up: “betrayal as a leitmotif implies a betrayal of fathers, a betrayal of sons, and a betrayal of each other’s causes. Donal feels his father has betrayed Ireland, so he betrays him; then, both of them betray the other as well as their mother/wife by falling in love with Rose” (108). The novel therefore starts off with a betrayal which only starts off new betrayals. Donal mentions at one point that “maybe the sins of fathers are visited on their sons” (Jordan 62). Possibly what he means is that his father betrayed not only his beliefs and his origin, but also his son and this is exactly what Donal is bound to do too, as if it is in his genes: being his father’s son. Donal then escapes reality by going to Spain, which is the direct opposite of what Donal’s father, his origin so to speak, would do. Despite saying he is a republican and that is why he goes to Spain, he does deceive the republicans he is in contact with upon his return as well, to help the Irish secret service by capturing Hans the German and the men from the republican movement on the west coast of Ireland (Jordan 158-159).

In other words, what betrayal Sam starts, Donal continues. When Donal comes back to Ireland from Spain he finds his father paralysed. He moves back in with his father and Rose, with whom he slowly picks up things where they left them before going to Spain, and yet again betraying his father, as Rose is now Sam’s wife. Although he knows it is wrong, he does not always feel that way: “I could say I felt some guilt, but that would be a lie” (Jordan 125). He does not tell his father of what is happening of course, but small movements and glints in Sam’s eyes gives away that he must know what is going on between Rose and Donal. On one occasion when Donal is giving Sam his dinner Sam pushes the sugar bowl over so the sugar spills over the table, and then, with some effort, spells “kill me” in capital letters on the table (Jordan 132). If this is because he knows about Donal and Rose’s relationship and therefore wants to end his life is a matter of interpretation. The most likely cause is that he is aware of the situation between his son and his new wife as well as realising he must be a burden for the couple. Donal believes his father understands what is going on and feels Sam’s eyes on him time and time again (Jordan 136-137). Perhaps Sam is simply sick of living in the state of a vegetable as well and this is the reason why he asks his son to kill him. Donal actually does end up fulfilling his father’s wish in the end by killing Sam when he leaves him on the beach. This happens when the tide is about to come back up as Donal is meeting the republicans and the Germans arrives in a submarine on the west coast of Ireland (Jordan163-164). Unconsciously then, he has done what his father wishes, and perhaps what he wishes for
his father as well. In psychoanalytic terms Sam’s wish was hidden in Donal’s unconscious and he fulfilled it without thinking that maybe deep down he wanted to help him. However, the thought was so forbidden that he had repressed it into his unconscious, but as things that have been repressed for a long time can do, it made its way back into his consciousness by “forgetting” to move his father further up the beach, which he should have done if he did not want him to be washed away with the tide.

Donal’s betrayal of his father as well as his country continues when he is contacted by the republican movement, who have somehow found out that Donal is in contact with the Germans, who in turn want to get in touch with the republican movement (Jordan 113-116). Some time after talking with the republican movement he is contacted by yet another group, which is to be assumed to be this secret service. They have been intercepting letters that the German Hans is sending to Donal and want to know what is going on. They also ask him to cooperate with the republicans, but still report to the secret service (Jordan 104-108). In the end however, Donal does not betray his country as such, but “only” the republican movement and the Germans when he cooperates with the secret service and agrees to arrange a meeting between the Germans and the republicans on the Irish west coast (Jordan 138-139). It is close to a spa in Lisdoonvarna, where you can bathe in special sulphur waters, which are supposed to heal many different illnesses (Jordan 140). The following quote shows how the republicans convince Donal to go to Lisdoonvarna, and later Donal uses the same arguments to convince himself that he can justify going there, as well as making himself feel better about not actually caring if his father will be cured by the sulphur waters or not:

Check into the Spa Hotel, Lisdoonvarna, the tall one said. Three days before. Wait there for word. Why Lisdoonvarna? I asked. Why not Spanish Point? Only draw attention to yourself. [he said] You’ve got a wife, haven’t you? And an invalid father. Perfect. You’re taking the waters, if anyone asks. What waters? [Donal asks] The spa waters, you numbskull. The sulphur waters. The cure. For gout, arthritis, ringworm. Any ailment you can think of. (Jordan 140)

As mentioned earlier, close to their meeting point is a traditional Irish spa: Lisdoonvarna, where sick people go to “take the waters”. Donal convinces Rose that maybe these sulphur waters there will help his father (Jordan 141-142), but it is really only an excuse for Donal to be there when the Germans and the republicans meet. He tries to convince himself that the
real reason they are going is to try to cure his father, but he is only betraying himself by doing so:

I imagined those sulphur springs like that tide, creeping slowly over his inert body, and thought why not try it, who knows, it might do him some good. Then I felt ashamed at the thought, justifying this honeycomb of betrayals I’d made through some half-baked hope for him. The tide crept in further as I walked back, the kind of movement you imagine you see, and the water seemed to whisper the tale of its curative powers. But this is sea water, I thought, brine that cures nothing. (Jordan, 141)

As well as betraying himself here, he also betrays Rose in a way, by saying he believes that these waters could actually cure his father, when he does not really believe in what he says. The final betrayal takes place on that beach which is where they have arranged a meeting point between the republicans and the Germans. Donal brings his father with him, and leaves him on the beach as he is rushed into a boat by the republicans to meet Hans, who arrives to their meeting point in a submarine (Jordan 158-159). Too late Donal realises what he has done: “As the two brothers rowed I watched his diminishing figure in the wheelchair, immobile by the water’s edge, eyes staring at me almost pleading, as if I was leaving him forever. What if the tide comes in? I shouted with sudden panic” (Jordan, 161). When they are back on the beach, Sam is no longer in the wheelchair. One can assume that the tide came in and dragged him out to sea, where he most probably drowned. Because Donal does not want to realise the terrible thing that he most probably is responsible for he thinks that maybe Sam got up and walked or swam into the sea (Jordan 164).

As mentioned briefly earlier, an optional interpretation of this could be that Donal unconsciously leaves his father on the beach, knowing that the tide will come in at some point during the day. Thinking logically he must have known that this would mean dragging his father out to sea, or the water coming up over his head and thus drowning him. Looking back to the section about the love triangle between Donal, Rose and Sam and the aspect of Oedipal conflict, this action can be read symbolically as the male child getting rid of his opponent in the battle for his “mother’s” love (Barry 97), which is, looking from a psychoanalytic perspective and the angle of this essay, the ultimate betrayal and mission accomplished.

The imagery in this scene is used as a way to emphasise the main theme of betrayal, but also to mark the beginning of a closure and the reconciliation between father and son that it leads to in the end. Sam disappears into the sea, the water, which itself has many connotations
and qualities. Brenneman brings up its “ability to dissolve things [and being] a symbol of purity” (789). The water thus “dissolves” Sam and his troubles as he disappears on the beach and into the water. When he comes back to see Donal in his (Donal’s) dream towards the end of the novel it is as if he can finally speak and everything feels so much easier again and all his difficulties of expressing what he feels is washed away (Jordan 178). As Brenneman further discusses; water is very much connected with life and death because of its “ability to both give birth to life and to dissolve it, water takes on a circular quality. We see this most clearly in the tidal nature of the sea” (Brenneman 789). Sam is swept away with the tide and brought back with it, thus completing a full circle. When he disappears into the water another way to look at this is to say it is as if he is returning to the water he once came from, considering “we, as humans, all emerged from the salt-sea within our mother’s womb” (Brenneman 789).

Lack of communication and the symbolism of nightlines

For a conflict to be resolved, what is most often required is some sort of communication between the two parties, where each party gets to have their say of what they think about the situation. Then each part knows how the other feels and the two parties can more easily understand each other and reach a conclusion, agreement or similar. However, in Sunrise with Sea Monster such communication does not exist, as there is a lack of this between Donal and his father. This is not anything that is new to the son and father, as they always had a very silent relationship more or less. Instead of speaking to each other, they seem to have found another way to be together: they lay nightlines on the beach and it is as if “the sea substitutes the silence that characterises Donal’s relationship with his father, Sam” (Grassi 107). Laying nightlines is an old way of catching fish, where you stick two wooden sticks into the sand of the beach when the tide is low. Between the sticks there are fish lines with hooks. When they are left out during the night, the tide comes in and the fish get caught. Then in the morning you collect your catch (Jordan 2).

The significance of laying out the nightlines is major within the novel, as they are there as a binding link throughout the novel. They are there in the very beginning, when Donal starts telling us his story: “I remember my father and what got me here. We would lay nightlines, in our rare moments of tranquillity, on the beach below the terrace where our house was” (Jordan, 2). Even in the midst of awaiting execution, he thinks of his father. And maybe if they would have spoken and actually said what they had thought, not withholding what were on their minds, maybe Donal would not have gone to Spain to fight in their Civil
War at all. After the death of Donal’s mother however, we learn, they stop laying out nightlines together. Instead Donal starts going to church with his father every week (Jordan 17), which is another kind of ritual of sorts, where no speech is needed either between the two of them it seems. The nightlines thus play an important role throughout the novel as they serve as a kind of replacement for speech:

Silence is twofold – on one hand, it reveals an impossible relationship, an impossible affection which is always associated in Donal’s mind, with the positive memory of his father and himself out fishing: when silence was more important than any speech. On the other hand, Donal’s childhood memories trouble him, since they remind him of his mother’s death. They also remind him of Rose and she becomes a pretext for the motif of father-son betrayal throughout the novel. (Grassi, 107)

Thus, the laying of the nightlines is a ritual which is in place instead of the direct communication between Donal and his father Sam. What is ironic about this is that when they are physically able to talk to each other, they do not. But when Donal returns home from Spain and finds his father paralysed in a wheelchair, his father has lost the ability to speak. And it is not until now, when his father is physically unable to speak, that Donal now feels he needs to speak to him and can do so. He does feel that it is easier to talk to his father when he knows he cannot talk back, quite contradictorily (Jordan 99):

I walked again, and saw another tear gather. I thought paradoxically how pleasurable his silence was. Not because I wouldn’t hear him speak, but because it was only his infirmity that allowed me to approach him without embarrassment, circumspection, and all of those awkwardness’s that had made us to what we were. (Jordan 99)

The lack of direct communication between Donal and Sam is what adds more complexity to the situation when the Oedipal situation arises and because they do not communicate the situation is even more difficult to resolve. It may seem like an easy solution just to talk to each other, but since they have never had the tradition or custom to do so, this issue is not resolved so easily. However, towards the end of the novel, when Sam comes back from the dead in a dream or vision of Donal’s, Sam says to him that when he had disappeared into the sea he had done so because he had felt that “if he were to die, he told me, he would rather die
in that element which had given voice to all we never said. It was our language” (Jordan 178). This is what works out to be the solution of their problem, although one might think this is slightly too late, as Sam is no longer is alive. However, the main point here is that the lack of communication goes from not being a problem for the father and the son, as they have worked out another way to communicate instead. Then it goes to being a problem when Sam decides to marry Rose and the Oedipal situation arises. It continues to be a problem all throughout the novel until the end, when the Oedipal stage is overcome, as Sam disappears into the sea and Rose decides to go back home to Sligo (Jordan 166). The problem ceases to be a problem when they finally speak and this is how this part is related to the two major themes of the novel – betrayal and reconciliation.

Reconciliation

As hinted and mentioned earlier, Donal reconciles with his father, Sam in the end. Donal has some sort of vision or dream, where he “fish” his father from the sea, has a meal with him and later sees him walking towards his mother in the water. “Through the accident of fishing, I had brought him back, I knew, from whatever place he had inhabited” (Jordan 186). That they share their last meal together eating makes sense, because it has been via catching this animal they have communicated with each other and lived off, so why not say all that they always wanted to say but not been able to say over just this meal? The fish is also a common Christian symbol, and by having a meal of this with his father it is like Donal is holding a last communion with his father (Möller), much like the ones he takes when he starts going to church with his father each week, after the death of his mother (Jordan 17). The ritual of laying out the nightlines is replaced by another ritual: attending church services (Schwall 43). This is also what makes him accept his faith once trapped in the monastery in Spain awaiting execution: “I welcome them [the rituals of the priest during the church service] as a hint of home” (Jordan 17).

Donal’s dream towards the end of the novel is an important turning point of the novel, as this is where father and son make peace with each other as well as with themselves. According to psychoanalytical theory, it is in dreams that wishes or desires we have earlier suppressed come to the surface (Ellman 6). In Donal’s case his dream or vision represents his wish to see and talk to his father again, as well as being able to say goodbye to him. This chance was never given to them when his father was still alive. The dream he has also represents the fact that Donal wishes to see his parents back together. The love between them was the real one and the love between Sam and Rose was not as important. Sam even says to
Donal that marrying Rose had been a mistake and he had regretted it because “he [Sam] had
married her for me [Donal], she had married him for me” (Jordan 179). The whole thing had
been a big mistake. He had married Rose because he felt Donal needed a mother figure, and
Donal had gotten on so well with her.

In psychoanalysis theory displacement is, as we already have seen Barry discussing
earlier, when “one person or event is represented by another which is in some way linked or
associated with it” (Barry 98). This person, event or even “forbidden” thought could therefore
be represented like a metaphor or a metonym. In \textit{Sunrise with Sea Monster} displacement for
Donal is the fish he catches in his dream, just before he meets his father, who also emerge
from the water later. The fish is here a metonym for his father as Donal associates him with
fishing and the sea. Seeing this odd-looking fishing is also a way of foreshadowing what is
about to happen: Sam appears in the water and they are to share one last meal together. It is
also in the context of fishing and the sea Sam appears for Donal, as illustrated in the quote
below:

\begin{quote}
Between them [the other fish] was a larger one, elemental, that I couldn’t
recognise. As I came closer it revealed itself, outsize and majestic, a hooked
creature from some lower depths, shuddering occasionally in the morning breeze,
quite silver scaled, eyes bulging and distended, tulip-mouthed, on its forehead a
curved and perfect horn. [...] I tried to place it, this outlandish shape silhouetted
against the morning sun over the sea, when I saw something else emerge from the
water behind it, from beyond the tulip mouth, from the line of lazily washing tide.
[...] He took one step towards me, then stopped, the hooks touching his waistcoat,
his eyes inchoate, his mouth serene. (Jordan 174-175)
\end{quote}

That water and the sea mean very much to Donal is further underlined by the novel’s imagery
as well as setting. To quote Kerrigan and his review of the novel: “The sea is a constant
presence here. Every page seems permeated by the drear, muddy chill or the Irish sea by the
family home at Bray. Described in the bleakest of terms, it is none the less a source of
comfort” (Kerrigan). It is comforting for Donal in the sense that it is one thing that is always
there and he can trust to stay the same. Part of the reason for this is that it is to this element
Donal thinks his mother went when she died, instead of to heaven. It is as if this is a more
sacred and safe place than heaven. The following quote illustrates this further:
I knew that if she had gone anywhere it was into that sea from which we had plucked so many fish. [...] And I could see her as time went on gathering crusts of things the way objects do that are exposed to the tide. [...] Then I would think the opposite: that she would become hard and smooth like a pebble or a piece of glass that loses its edges with the movement of the water, acquire the water’s pale green colour, become something between water and stone. (Jordan, 10)

The sea is also where Donal sees and believes his father goes back into as well when he dies, reuniting with his wife. His mother is to reappear at the end of the novel, in exactly the same element where Donal thinks she would be: in the sea. This is also the element with which he associates his father after his death. Not only does he disappear into the sea, he reappears and in the very last pages walks back into the waves again (Jordan 184). In this way his father and mother are reunited again. It is as if Donal’s mother has been waiting there for his father ever since she died. In a way, the reunion between mother and father is yet another representation of reconciliation within the novel. Sam finally forgiving himself for all the wrongs and mistakes made in life and is welcomed to the life after this one with his first wife.

Now time to tie the theme of reconciliation back to the Oedipal situation. The Oedipal theme is there to form a frame around the novel’s main themes. While the main theme is betrayal its complete opposite is reconciliation. At a first glance the Oedipal situation might not too obviously connected both of these two themes; however, there is a link. The Oedipal background starts off with both Donal and Sam desiring the same woman, Rose, which leads them both to betray and hurt each other. However, it is not until one of them gives up their desire for her that the two men can reconcile with each other. At this stage the Oedipal situation is overcome.

**Donal’s unconscious and the novel’s title**

Another important role water plays in the novel, especially where it is represented in the form of the sea, is when it provides us with a view of Donal’s unconscious, reflecting what he really feels. This is the most obvious when Donal and his helpers are caught out in a storm after his arrival back to Ireland (Jordan 119-120). This is also just before he decides he will take Sam and Rose with him to Lisdoonvarna and where the ultimate betrayal is to take place. Their fishing boat is caught in a storm and they almost capsize and find themselves completely off course when the weather clears again (Jordan 119-120). The storm could work as a way of foreshadowing the tumultuous events about to come. It could also serve to show
how messed up and confused Donal is, it is not until after the storm that he start to see things more clearly: “The wet and freshened air, an unnatural, clean severity about it all, not a breath moving, but the slow reluctant swells of the water as if it remembered what had gone before” (Jordan 120). Another way of looking at water and the sea is to see them as representation of Donal’s subconscious. The narrator tells us how Donal feels, but the other characters in the novel only see the surface and his deepest secrets and thoughts are suppressed under the surface. Donal’s biggest secret literally emerges as a sea monster of sorts from the depths, like the Germans’ submarine. As psychoanalysts claim: what is suppressed long enough will emerge (Barry 96).

The title *Sunrise with Sea Monster* is also the title of a painting by J. M. W. Turner, which “depicts a strange fish-like creature heralded by the promise of a new dawn as it rises from the sea” (Möller). Perhaps Jordan was inspired by both the painting and its title and decided to borrow it. The title could also refer to Donal’s reconciliation with his father towards the end of the novel, where his father emerges like a fish from the depths of the sea in the morning (Jordan 175). The sea monster thus might refer to Sam, whom Donal finds in the sea while fishing. With a psychoanalytical perspective in mind the sea monster could also be some sort of condensation of the father, meaning that the exotic looking fish would represent Sam at first, before he appears. We are afraid of what we do not understand, and what we do not understand can be exaggerated into something far worse than it is. Donal does not understand his father at all times, and perhaps this could be the reason Sam at first appears as a “sea monster”.

**Conclusion**

In this essay the main claim is that the novel *Sunrise with Sea Monster*, written by Neil Jordan, is based on an Oedipal myth, such as interpreted by Freud and psychoanalytic literary theory. The situation arises in the Gore household when Rose, the new piano teacher arrives. Both men in the household, Donal and Sam develop feelings for her, which causes a conflict. This conflict is however not verbal, since father and son do not speak to each other. They “communicate” instead by performing “rituals” of sorts together. An example of this is when the two of them lay out the nightlines. When Donal’s mother dies this ritual is changed into another one: going to church. It seems as if these rituals are of great importance for both Donal and Sam as this is the only way they know how to be together. When they do not know how to communicate, the conflict they have becomes very hard to resolve. Sam’s solution to this is to ask Rose to marry him, mistaking Donal’s affection for her being of the mother-son-
kind-of-nature. However, Donal’s feelings for her are much stronger than a son’s love for his mother and in an extreme way of trying to punish his father for betraying him Donal joins a faction of Irish republicans going to Spain and fight in their Civil War. Thus by avoiding conflict at home, he goes to deal with another, much bigger one abroad. This in a psychoanalytic term could be a form of sublimination: Donal’s strong feelings of anger towards his father are brought out in another way than actually dealing with them and talking to his father (Barry 97). Yet, Sam is not the only one to commit a betrayal, Donal seem to take on this as well when he says he’ll cooperate with the Germans, the Irish republican movement and the Irish secret service all at once. When he arrives home he starts deceiving his father again, when sleeping with his wife, while his father cannot do anything since he is paralysed after a stroke he had just after Donal left for Spain. This can be seen as a way of getting rid of his father, so that he can have his “mother” to himself (Barry 97), though this is probably not consciously done so by Donal. Thus, the whole narrative is full of betrayal that seems never-ending. Nevertheless this is not only the case, as it is shown later in the novel, that forgiveness and reconciliation is possible, no matter the seriousness of the betrayal. What is unfortunate for Donal and Sam though is that this reconciliation does not happen between Donal and his father until after his (Sam’s) death.

All through the novel’s narrative the text and its imagery is filled with references to water in its many forms as well as things related to water, such as the fish father and son catch together. Obviously Ireland is an island and that the sea is close-by is not so strange. Still it seems as if the imagery of this particular element plays an important role: Donal connects both his mother and Rose with the sea and being wet. He connects his mother with the sea because it is where he believes she has gone after her death and where she stands waiting for his father in Donal’s dream in the end (Jordan 184). Rose is also connected to this element and makes an especially deep impression on Donal when she first arrives to the Gore household. Connected to Rose is also the desire he feels for her and in this case the water and being wet has sexual undertones. Connecting this to the governing Oedipal theme it becomes very interesting when you realise Donal connects Rose and his mother with the same element.

The water imagery in general is also used to emphasise the two main themes of betrayal and reconciliation, especially the last one. Water is connected with purity and is also what is used in rituals such as baptising (Brenneman 789). In this way Sam’s appearing in the water and walking back into it could signify cleansing. All his sins are washed away and all is forgiven.
Works cited


