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PSYCHOANALYTICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET* AND
MACBETH

Psychoanalytical approach of a literary text is quite noteworthy for the psychological cause of actions and behaviors performed by the characters of a play or a novel.. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories are often applied to literature in order to more fully understand characterization, motivation, and conflict. In the words of Peter Barry -" psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind. What questions do a psychoanalytic critic ask?

1. Are any oedipal dynamics or other family dynamics prevalent in the work? How do the characters behave?
2. How can these behaviours, narrative events, etc. be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts?
3. What does the work say about the author?
4. Are there any drastic emotional shifts within the characters?

Freud was not the discoverer of the unconscious: his uniqueness lies in his attributing to it such a decisive role in our lives.. Freud emphasized that language concealed, revealed or

modified hidden desires, anxieties and fears. His point was that desire does not express itself easily because culture does not allow or facilitate it, and we need to pay attention to language and other forms of symbolic expression-gestures, sounds, facial expression, writing-to discover it. In this, Freud was exploring a link between language and the unconscious-a move that was to become the core of both the psychoanalytic practice (described as the 'talking cure') and criticism. The conscious self projects the kind of image that is culturally and socially acceptable. But the unconscious finds ways and means to express itself too-and this is what literary texts and language allows. This was, in fact, Freud's greatest insight: The mechanisms of the unconscious, of desires and fears also required and acquired a language of their own. Freud distinguished three components of the human psyche:

1. the ego
2. the super ego
3. the id

1. The ego is the conscious mind, which we work with, use and are most aware of. It mediates between the unconscious id and the superego. It is the source of our decision-making and our rational thought.

2. The super ego is what can be called our conscience. It is drawn from social settings and cultural codes and influences the way the conscious works.

3. The id, Freud's favourite territory, is the area of instincts, dreams, desires and all that that does not come to the fore in our consciousness.' This is the unconscious.

Let us take the complex in sequence.

1. For Freud the problem with sexual desires begins with the child's dependence on the mother (it must be noted that Freud is here speaking of the male child). The love for/of the mother is the dominant theme in the child's psyche in the early years.
2. Soon the child begins to see his father as a rival for the mother's love. The father restricts the child's expression of love through a threat-a threat that the child imagines-of castration.
3. The child, therefore, begins to develop fantasies of killing his father so that he (the child) will have no rivals for his mother's love. This fantasy is what Freud famously (and controversially) called the Oedipus complex.
4. Soon the child sees the father as possessing the greater authority (especially because the father can castrate the child for excessive desire) in the relationship (child-mother-father). This marks the shift in affiliation: The child, now seeing the father as the source of all power and desire, shifts his focus to the father.
5. The desire for the mother is shut away in the unconscious when the child accepts the law that 'you shall not make love to your mother'. This law becomes the threshold of the conscious-unconscious.

For Freud the Oedipus complex is the source of all repressed desire, the emblem if all that is repressed because even love is antagonistic in nature when triangulated between the boy, the mother and the father. The Oedipus complex enabled Freud to argue that all desire, repression and anxiety are based on the condition of prohibition, or what he termed taboo. The child never really overcomes the complex, but merely shuts it away. " Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* can certainly be analyzed from this perspective. In this context *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* by Shakespeare forces us to ponder over psychological strains

especially the internal conflicts of the protagonists which lead them towards their downfall. Both Macbeth and Hamlet have tragic flaws which lead them to their disaster. Both Hamlet and Macbeth overridden and overruled by an excessive overpowering feeling and unable to get out of it. *Hamlet* has remained the most puzzling and baffling, as well as the most accepted of Shakespeare's major tragedies. Performed by frequently, the play has enticed critics with what has become known as the Hamlet mystery. Dr Ernest Jones turns to psychology to tackle the enigma that Hamlet seems to have become for the critics: why does Hamlet delay his revenge; whether he is really mad or just posing to be mad; whether Hamlet constitutes an artistic success or failure and so on.

The secret resides in Hamlet's multiplex behaviour, most notably his hesitancy and his disinclination to act. Freudian critics have located their motivation psychodynamic triad of father-mother-son relationship. In the light of psycho-analytic view Hamlet is disturbed and deranged by his Oedipal covetousness and jealousy of the uncle who has done what, we are to believe, all sons long to do themselves. Some critics have taken the more ordinary method of identifying Hamlet's hamartia as a lack of courage or moral resolution. In this view Hamlet's indecision is a sign of moral equivocation and vacillation which he overcomes too late. On the other hand Macbeth is not a moral monster, he is a sensitive and able man driven by a fixation with an unexamined ambition to do what he knows to be evil and what at first his whole nature shrinks from. Of course he becomes bloodier as he proceeds, for that is the nature of crime, but the real tragedy lies in his discovery of the meaninglessness of his ambition almost as soon as it achieved and his condemnation to carry on and pay over and over again to the price for what he knows is worthless. He is left with nothing at all but physical courage. Shakespeare in *Macbeth* creates a whole symphony of meaning by patterns of recurring images in the play and overtones of suggestion of the nature of good and evil, of problems of choice and responsibility, of the natural order, of appearance and reality and

many other things besides. Now, in analyzing Hamlet, ' the Oedipus Complex ' is clearly visible to the reader. As a son Hamlet always conveyed the deepest affection(which is full of zeal and intensity) to his mother which contained elements of veiled and masked erotic quality, especially seen in the bed chamber scene with his mother.

Procrastination in murdering Claudius because Hamlet finds his own image in his uncle Claudius and Hamlet recognizes that Claudius's action of murdering his brother and marrying her mother, mimicked his (Hamlet's) inner unconscious desires. All of Hamlet's once hidden feelings seems to surface in spite of all of the "suppressing forces", when he cries out :

"Oh my prophetic soul: My uncle !. "

These are the causes of the procrastination in the murder of Claudius because Hamlet becomes neurotic and is in dilemma that whether to murder Claudius or not and this dilemma and internal conflict is well reflected by the following speech.

"To be, or not to be, that is the question:

Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles... "

The long-awaited event can only take place when Gertrude had died. Hamlet is then free to act because the cause of his repressed guilt has been eliminated, and he kills Claudius immediately. Even after killing Claudius immediately. Even after killing Claudius Hamlet wants to be recognized as innocent when he addresses Horatio-

" If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,

Absent thee from felicity a while,

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pains.

To tell my story. "

The play seems to be characterized by the transfer of 'psychic forces' from one person to another. Lady Macbeth's thoughts are primarily representative of the *Id*, presaging and foreshadowing the "illness that should attend" the ambition of murdering King Duncan, while Macbeth is far more taken by the *Superego*, with such thoughts restrained and replaced with a sense of morality..

However, the transfer of the *Id* to Macbeth, and the ensuing loss of identity for Lady Macbeth, is clearly visible most after he presumes the throne. She is crestfallen by the completion of her desire, losing her sleep and ultimately her sanity, while he goes on to act out of blind passion, vowing that "The very firstlings of my heart shall be ... The firstlings of my hand". This provides an almost-metaphysical level of elucidation and illustration to what some might initially regard as abrupt changes of character. Macbeth, having quelled his desire as well as guilt, longs for as is evident in the following line: "Life's but a walking shadow ... Signifying nothing." This suggests, on Shakespeare's part, an acute awareness of the mental commotion and ferment that accompanies human thought and the effective use of it to breathe life into the play. Macbeth wanting to become King, knows that he would have to murder Duncan to become king, yet he is willing to do so anyway. Duncan is a good king and very fair and loyal to his people, but Macbeth only has his own interest in mind and is willing to kill this beloved leader to gain his own power. His *Ego* recites him that he shouldn't decimate and extirpate Duncan because he's a guest in his home and that's inconsiderate. His *Super-Ego* tells him that it's morally wrong to kill another person.. Freud said that if the *Id* was too strong, it would cause wild impulses that weren't socially right. Macbeth's compelling *Id* is what caused him to murder Duncan and the others. A polarity of *Id*, *Ego*, *Superego* is what causes unwise and unpleasant decisions to be made. The fictitious and virtual dagger and Banquo's ghost could have been part of Macbeth's unconscious. What

Lady Macbeth said while she was sleep-walking may have been her preconscious revealing itself.

Although Macbeth had achieved his goal and become king yet he was not happy and finally lives a life full of fear and regret. He persistently wonders if someone will find out what he has done and always experiences guilt for murdering Duncan.

"First, I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed; then, as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife himself." (Act I, Scene VII)

When Macbeth continues with his bloody course, there is little excuse and extenuation in his brief failure of nerve. But it does become ever more difficult to break the chain of the events which are rushing him toward moral and physical destruction. As he degenerates, he becomes more deluded about his invulnerability and more emboldened. When he dies, he seems almost to be released from the imprisonment of his own evil.

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