

Lecture Sheet

Freudian Psychoanalysis of "Macbeth"

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Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst. He introduced several key concepts that are still influential in psychology and psychotherapy today, including the concepts of the id, ego, and superego, often depicted using the metaphor of an iceberg.

1. **Id:** The id is the primitive, instinctual part of the mind that operates on the pleasure principle. It seeks immediate gratification of basic needs and desires, without concern for consequences or societal norms. The id is unconscious and is driven by biological drives and impulses.
2. **Ego:** The ego is the part of the mind that acts as a mediator between the demands of the id and the realities of the external world. It operates on the reality principle, seeking to satisfy the id's desires in a way that is realistic and socially acceptable. The ego helps to manage conflicts between the id and the superego.
3. **Superego:** The superego represents the internalized societal and parental standards of morality and conscience. It acts as a kind of moral compass, striving for perfection and upholding ideals. It can lead to feelings of guilt or pride based on whether one's actions align with its standards.



Id:
Instincts



Ego:
Reality

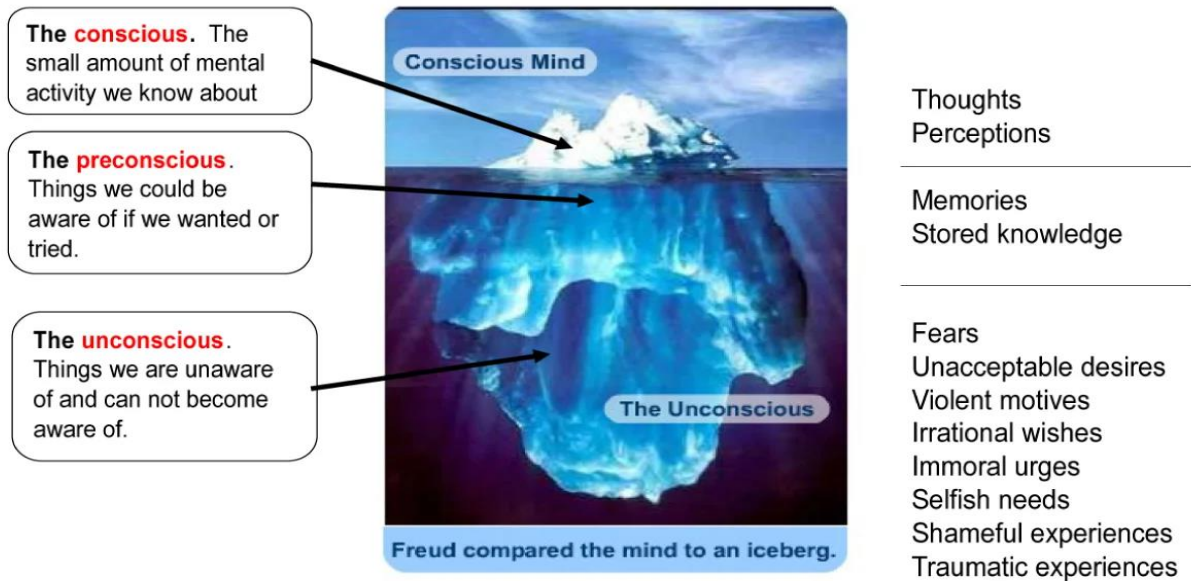


Superego:
Morality

The metaphor of the iceberg is often used to illustrate these concepts:

- **Conscious Mind:** This is the small part of the iceberg that is visible above the water. It represents our conscious awareness, including thoughts, perceptions, and feelings that we are currently aware of.
- **Preconscious/Subconscious Mind:** This is the part of the iceberg that is just below the water's surface. It holds thoughts and memories that are not in our immediate awareness but can be brought to consciousness with some effort.
- **Unconscious Mind:** This is the largest and deepest part of the iceberg, hidden beneath the water. It contains thoughts, feelings, memories, and desires that are outside of our conscious awareness. The id resides in the unconscious mind, as do various defense mechanisms that the ego uses to cope with internal conflicts.

The Unconscious Mind



Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego, as well as the iceberg metaphor, provides a framework for understanding the complexity of human behavior, motivations, and the internal conflicts that can arise within the mind. While his theories have been subject to criticism and modification over time, they have also had a profound impact on the field of psychology and continue to be discussed and studied.

The 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 that aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind.

Shakespeare once mentioned that *"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves"*. He explains that fate does not control our actions but our own will is what takes jurisdiction of it. Essentially, one's mental thoughts are what drives one's behavior. The human psyche is composed of the id, ego, and superego. These three aspects of the human psyche are what control our actions and determine our personality. Published in 1623, Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* illustrates Macbeth as the id, Lady Macbeth as the superego, and Macduff as the ego. Lady Macbeth's actions in making Macbeth want to murder were led by her superego.

Macbeth is a timeless Shakespearean tragedy that can be dissected through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which includes the concepts of id, ego, and superego. These

psychological elements play a pivotal role in understanding the characters and their actions within the play.

Id:

The id represents the primal, instinctual part of human nature, driven by immediate gratification of desires and impulses. Macbeth, the titular character, exemplifies the id throughout the play. His unchecked ambition and desire for power lead him to commit heinous acts, starting with the murder of King Duncan. Macbeth's inner turmoil is evident when he contemplates the murder:

"I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat." (Act 1, Scene 7)

Here, Macbeth's id-driven desire for the throne overrides his moral considerations. The witches' prophecies further ignite his id, compelling him to take ruthless actions to secure his position.

Ego:

The ego is the rational, reality-oriented part of the psyche, which strives to balance the demands of the id with the constraints of the superego. Lady Macbeth serves as a character who embodies the ego. Initially, she encourages Macbeth to follow his ambitions, but she also recognizes the need for careful planning and concealment:



*"Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent
under it." (Act 1, Scene 5)*

Lady Macbeth advises Macbeth to wear a facade, showing her understanding of the necessity to navigate between the id's desires and the superego's moral norms. However, as the play progresses, her own guilt and deteriorating mental state reveal the ego's inability to maintain this balance.

Superego:

The superego represents the moral and societal constraints that guide human behavior. Macduff is a character who embodies the superego in "Macbeth." He is driven by a strong sense of duty to Scotland and a desire to restore order.

Macduff's commitment to his country and his resolve to challenge Macbeth's tyrannical rule illustrates the superego's influence. He represents the conscience that compels individuals to act in accordance with higher ethical standards.

In the climax of the play, Macbeth's internal struggle between the id and superego reaches its zenith. He acknowledges his own moral degradation when he exclaims:

"I am in blood"

*Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er." (Act 3, Scene 4)*

Macbeth's id-driven actions have led him to a point of no return, where the superego's moral constraints no longer hold sway.

In conclusion, Shakespeare's "Macbeth" is a profound exploration of human psychology through the id, ego, and superego. The characters' internal conflicts and external actions are shaped by these psychological forces, ultimately leading to their tragic outcomes. Macbeth's descent into darkness, Lady Macbeth's mental unraveling, and Macduff's unwavering commitment to justice illustrate the complex interplay of these psychological elements in a tale that continues to captivate audiences and resonate with the human experience.

The Oedipus complex:

Macbeth not only provides a compelling framework for understanding the id, ego, and superego but also offers a nuanced exploration of the Oedipus complex. This Freudian concept, derived from Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex," suggests that individuals may harbor unconscious, unresolved feelings of desire and rivalry toward their same-sex parent while simultaneously identifying with the opposite-sex parent. In "Macbeth," we can detect hints of the Oedipus complex, particularly in Macbeth's complex relationship with his wife, Lady Macbeth.

The Oedipus complex, also known as the Oedipal complex, is a concept introduced by Sigmund Freud in his theory of psychosexual development. It is named after the character Oedipus from Greek mythology, who unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. The Oedipus complex is a central element of Freud's theory and is considered one of his most controversial and influential ideas.

The Oedipus complex is a psychological phenomenon that occurs during the phallic stage of psychosexual development (typically around ages 3 to 6). According to Freud, during this stage, children experience unconscious sexual desires for the parent of the opposite sex, along with feelings of rivalry and jealousy toward the parent of the same sex. The complex is thought to involve three key components:

The Child's Desire for the Parent of the Opposite Sex (Erotic Attraction): In the Oedipus complex, a young boy experiences feeling of affection and attraction toward his mother. He develops unconscious sexual desires for her and wishes to possess her exclusively, viewing his father as a rival for her attention and affection.

The Child's Rivalry with the Parent of the Same Sex (Jealousy and Fear): The boy also experiences jealousy and fear toward his father, viewing him as a threat to his desires for his mother. This leads to a fear that the father will discover the son's feelings and retaliate in some way.

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* illustrates Macbeth's struggle over his masculine identity. Because Macbeth struggles to find his view on what it means to be a "man", Lady Macbeth forces her view that a man must be ferocious and do what is necessary without question onto Macbeth. Because Macbeth maintains guilt and does not want to murder, Lady Macbeth must scold him for not acting like a "man". Thus, Lady Macbeth becomes more of a maternal figure

than a wife to Macbeth, especially when she demands his obedience for the murder of Duncan and Banquo. Through the murder of his surrogate father Duncan and his "brother" Banquo, Macbeth fulfills his Oedipal desires, suppressing his ego and becoming solely driven by id; thus, revealing the internal conflict in Macbeth's psyche and explaining the collapse of his mind into neurosis.

According to Freud, the Oedipus complex is the unconscious, sexual desire for a parent of the opposite sex. Eventually, the Oedipus Complex is dissolved, and "Its place may be filled by one of two things: either an identification with his mother or an intensification of his identification with his father" (Beckman 934). By increasing identification with the father, male adolescents begin to imitate the father, eventually attaining his sense of morals, thus forming a superego. Beckman suggests, "...the dissolution of the Oedipus complex would consolidate the masculinity in a boy's character" (934-935). Furthermore, masculinity forms through the imitation of the father after the Oedipus Complex. Because the superego is formed from a desire to imitate the father, masculinity becomes the basis for social standards and morals in the psyche. However, if not fully resolved, remnants of the positive Oedipus complex in males cause the drive for sexual interaction with maternal figures, creating competition for the mother between a father and son, as well as any siblings.



In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth functions as Macbeth's mother. Lady Macbeth is very devoted to her husband. Surh states, "*The lack of a true father figure results in Macbeth relying upon 'the mother' figure diffused within Lady Macbeth as a source of both protection and nurturing; however, Lady Macbeth is also a means by which masculinity is enforced within Macbeth*".

Because Macbeth does not demonstrate masculine characteristics, Lady Macbeth is forced to step in and direct the actions of her "child", as a mother would. As a maternal figure, Lady Macbeth wants her husband to succeed in his political goals. To teach Macbeth a lesson, Lady Macbeth tells him, "*I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you*" (Mac. 1.7.56-58). By saying she would bash a babe's head so long as she has sworn it, Lady Macbeth wishes to help Macbeth be a "man". Similarly, Lady Macbeth scolded Macbeth for being afraid of killing Duncan by saying, "*And live a coward in thine own esteem, / Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,' / Like the poor cat i' the adage*" (Mac. 1.7.43-45). By scolding Macbeth, she hopes to teach him to be masculine enough to murder. After the death of Banquo, the emergence of his ghost left Macbeth horrified at the banquet causing Lady Macbeth to question Macbeth's manhood for being afraid. After the banquet, Lady Macbeth sends him to bed like a mother would by saying, "*You lack the season of all natures, sleep*" (Mac. 3.4.140). Furthermore, Lady Macbeth resembles mothers who are concerned with their children's future, support their child's goals, and punishes them after disobedience. By taking up the motherly role, Lady Macbeth aims to help nurture Macbeth to become a "man" and take the throne.

In Conclusion, *Macbeth* serves as a rich tapestry of human psychology, where the id, ego, superego, and even elements of the Oedipus complex converge to create a tragic narrative. The

characters' internal struggles and external actions are not only a product of their ambitions and moral dilemmas but also a reflection of their deeper, hidden desires and unresolved conflicts. Shakespeare's masterpiece continues to be a timeless exploration of the intricate web of human emotions and motivations, inviting us to delve deeper into the complexities of the human psyche.

