

Freud, Psychoanalysis, and the Tragic Psyche of Lady Macbeth: A Psychoanalytic Literary Study

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Abstract— This work investigates the implementation psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud to the play *Macbeth* by Shakespeare, with focus to Lady Macbeth. The concepts of the repression, unconscious, and development of psychosexual, and the concepts of id, ego, and superego provide a route for exploring Lady Macbeth's psychological fall from ambition and manipulation into madness and guilt. This paper further considers the patriarchal framework and implications of gender and power dynamics in culture. By placing the character Lady Macbeth with the theory of Psychoanalysis, the paper reveals how her character represents the consequences of suppressed guilt, the conflict unresolved, and transgression of gender expectations.



Keywords— *Sigmund Freud; defence mechanism; Id-Ego-Superego; Lady Macbeth; psychological Conflict*

I. INTRODUCTION

The link between Literature and Psychology has provided a huge amount of materials for analysis. At the beginning of the twentieth century and the end of the nineteenth century Sigmund Freud developed a psychological framework named Psychoanalysis and this theory is often used in a wide range of literary studies. Sigmund's ideas about the repression, internal conflicts, and the unconscious have largely influenced both clinical views on the behaviour of human and the methods in humanities. Long before Freud, Shakespeare has created characters with complexity that corresponds well with the psychoanalytical theory of Freud. Lady Macbeth from the Play 'Macbeth' is a mysterious, ultimately tragic, and ambitious character. Studying her through Sigmund's theory of psychoanalysis highlights her Psychological struggles and shows that the study of psychoanalysis remains relevant in literature and criticism.

II. FREUD AND PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

An Austrian neurologist, developed psychoanalysis as a theory of the mind and as a therapeutic practice. His

contributions include the idea of the repressed desires in an unconscious mind, the ideas of id, ego, and superego, the concept of psychosexual development, and dream analysis to disclose the hidden meanings in thoughts.

Although many critics criticise Sigmund's theory for being valid scientifically and biased against women, they remain significant in learning literature and human psychology. His theory provides insight into the characters in tragic stories, where guilt, repression, and desires shape their stories. The character, Lady Macbeth, a deeply conflicted character, is useful in a case study.

III. AMBITION AND THE ID

The reaction of Lady Macbeth to Macbeth's letter about the prophecy of witches beings her role as the driving force behind the Drama's act of murder. Her cry to the spirits to "unsex" her shows her denial to kindness and femininity. This connects her to the desire for power. Her influence on Macbeth by challenging and questioning his masculinity, using his insecurities to push him into the act of murder. At this stage, Lady Macbeth is almost a pure representative of the Id, pushing out her fear, and morality

to attain her ambition without hesitation. Her mental strength in the beginning appears stronger and superior to that of her husband, who swither in doubt before her persuasion

IV. GUILT, THE SUPEREGO, AND COLLAPSE

In spite of her ruthless ambition, Lady Macbeth gradually becomes submerged by her guilt. Sigmund describes the Superego as the part that governs and rules our morality and conscience, punishing wrong actions with guilt and emotional pain. Post murder of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth's struggle in Morality becomes more visible.

Her psychological suffering is highlighted in the sleepwalking scene. Her frequent washing and rubbing of her hands and her visions of the "damned spot" shows the repressed conflicts of behaviour coming through her compulsive actions or unconscious proposed in the theory of Sigmund Freud. Lady Macbeth, once a strong character, gets consumed by her Superego, which implements severe Psychological punishment.

V. DREAMS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Sigmund's view on dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious" symbolises the hidden thoughts of hidden psyche. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking aligns with this idea; it acts like a wakeup dream where her repressed guilt surfaces uncontrollably. Her speech in her sleep reveals her unconscious confession of involvement in murder.

The recurring imagery of blood in her visions shows her guilt and the psychological behaviour of her actions. Her constant struggle to repress her inner conflict showcases Sigmund's belief that repressed thoughts occur back, often in harmful or disguised ways

VI. GENDER, POWER, AND REPRESSION

Lady Macbeth's ambition and quest for power challenges the gender roles from the times of Shakespeare. During that era, women were sought as submissive, passive, and nurturing characters. Lady Macbeth here tries to break this gender role by calling on spirits to erase her feminine feature. This goes against the norms set by the society where males are dominated.

However, her gradual downfall tries to validate her fears about female ambition, portraying it as harmful and unsettling. Sigmund's view of repression and hysteria in women has faced a lot of criticism for upholding these ideas of patriarchy. At the same time, the feminist psychoanalytic critics say that Lady Macbeth's tragedy portrays her internal struggles and wide societal issues

concerning the society established under the patriarchal roles.

VII. COMPARISON WITH MACBETH

The psychological comparison between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth shows their tragic partnership. In the initial stages of the play, Lady Macbeth takes charge; she is a ruthless, commanding, and ambitious character. On the other hand, Macbeth looks unsure and has a conflict with his morals. Likewise, as the story progresses, the roles get switched. Lady Macbeth falls under her burden of guilt, while Macbeth turns to violence form numb.

In accordance to the psychoanalytic view, the couple show a divided mind: Lady Macbeth incorporates the Id (the innate instinctive impulse), while Macbeth fights with his Ego. Gradually, Lady Macbeth drowns under the persistent demands of Superego. Their twisted but opposing ways reveal Shakespeare's exploration of guilt, ambition, and mental decline.

VIII. CRITIQUES OF FREUD AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Though Sigmund's theory offers practical tools for criticising and interpreting literature, they face significant challenges and criticism. Critics highlight the lack of Scientific Support and their beliefs in patriarchy. When psychoanalysis is applied without much enquires or questions, it makes literature as a platform for a case study under the clinical labels. The literature acts as a base to understand the behaviours of human nature. For example, when we see the character of Lady Macbeth, we can see spontaneous fluctuations of emotions and how unconscious motivations and repression makes a way for her destruction. This shows the on-going trends of Freud's ideas despite the debates around them

IX. CONCLUSION

In the play, 'Macbeth', we see the character 'Lady Macbeth' being overwhelmed by guilt. Initially we see her driven by the ambition of power but as the story proceeds we see this shift. This change illustrates the model of Human Conflict provided by Sigmund Freud. In the beginning, she incorporated the Id, persuading her husband to chase power without hesitation. However, she cannot ignore the demands of Superego, which gradually suppresses her with anxiety and despair.

This tragic portrayal depicts the ties with the ideas about repression and unconscious processes. Although Sigmund Freud's concept of Psychoanalysis has its own flaws, they

effectively highlight her Psychological decline. Lady Macbeth holds an important place in literary criticism and psychoanalytic study. She portrays and symbolises the harmful confrontation between her guilt and ambition, along with the clashes related to morality, human mind, and morality.

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