

An Analysis of Hamlet's Contradictory Personality from Freudian Personality Theory

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Keywords: Hamlet, Personality, Freudian Personality Theory

Abstract: in the paper, hamlet's contradictory personality is analyzed from the perspective of freudian personality theory. Based on the theory, hamlet's personality will be analyzed from the four aspects: his revenge, his attitude towards his mother, his affection to ophelia and friendship. Hamlet's contradictory personality was the inevitable result produced by three contradictory elements of his personality: id, ego and superego. The thesis is aimed to provide a new interpretation of hamlet's personality and to expand the research angle of psychoanalysis in classic literature works.

1. Introduction

The psychoanalysis originated from the clinical psychology, which was set up by Sigmund Freud (1856~1939), an Austria psychiatrist at the end of 19th century. It belongs to the psychodynamics which is an important school of modern psychology in the west. It is considered as a school of nonacademic psychology because it stemmed from the curing practice instead of the laboratory. It draws a new explanation of human's personalities and mentalities when Freud analyzed and cured the psychotics.

The substance of the theory is to find the determined reasons, which always conceal behind psychic behaviors in the ways of analyzing them. As Freud pointed out, psychoanalysis was a cure initially, then it became a new science that is not only the methods of cure the neurotic persons but also the theory of studying unconscious behaviors. In addition, Freud employed the theory into the different areas. Recognized as a philosophy or worldview without encompassing, it has constituted a kind of main trend of thoughts now.

Psychoanalysis aims to understand individuals by uncovering desires hidden deeply within the mind and revealing their connections with the conscious surface. It is a psychoanalytical approach which can be used to analyze and understand the character's thoughts, feelings, views or the relationships between characters in literature works.

2. The Personality Theory

The personality theories, which were presented by Freud in 1923, held that the primary structure of the personality was composed of three mental forces-the id, ego and superego. The mission of id is to follow the "pleasure principle" to meet the instinctive needs. The "pleasure principle" is to release instinctive impulse and suppressed desires to meet the pleasure. The id is recognized as the source of energy in people's mental area. Owing to comply with hedonics, it forces people to satisfy with its requirements to seek pleasant feelings. Freud thought that the id was the essence of human beings, and it was the most basis of composing the personality structure.

The communication between the people and surroundings forms a new psychological system called "the ego". The mission of the ego are not only to meet the needs among the reality, the id and the superego at the same time, but also to coordination them. The ego follows the "reality principle", whose duties are adaptation and submission. The purpose of the "reality principle" is to delay and stopping tenseness, until the needs are satisfied and found. In other words, the ego postpones implementing behaviors according to the "pleasure principle". It means that the ego can bear the tenseness, whereas it does not mean the ego to abolish the "pleasure principle". The ego just put off

the action desired by the id because of reality.

The most top leader of the personality is “the superego” which represents conscience, social criterion and self-ideal. It is according to “the good principal” that its function is to supervise the instinct of the id and to limit the decision of the ego. Following the “ideal principle” it seems to be the judicial department to make the ideals and conscience come true.

The id can be pondered as the indulgent lust; the ego can be recognized as sense and cautiousness, and superego can be considered as conscience, sense of morality and honor. The ego is like a servant, and service the id, the superego and the reality. The ego is the center of the personality structures. The ego not only adjusts the id and reality, but also prevents against the harm or avoiding conflicting between the id and social morality.

3. An Analysis of Hamlet’s Contradictory Personality

Hamlet’s hesitancy was the inevitable result produced by three contradictory elements of his personality: id, ego and superego. His hesitancy is the external expression of his inner contradiction. It is the strong struggle among the three elements of his personalities that cause his hesitancy.

3.1 An Analysis of Hamlet’s Revenge

After he discovered the truth of his father’s death, Hamlet is determined to revenge for his father and kill his uncle. But at the moment, he is sinking into pondering because his three mental elements of personality have respective opinions, and strongly struggle with each other.

His id implements the “pleasure principle”, and thinks that Hamlet should immediately kill the king and revenge for his father instead of considering anything else.

The superego measures everything with standard of conscience and morality, and act according to the “ideal principle”. His superego thinks that Hamlet should obey moral standard and religious demand not to kill his uncle.

It is immoral to kill a king and his own uncle in view of moral standard. To kill a king is a kind of committing crime, which not only violates his internal conviction but also might harm the hierarchy order of a country. Hamlet clearly knows the importance of the king to the country.

As far as religious belief, if Hamlet kills the king, he will violate the religious principle of prohibiting to killing another human being. “Revenge” means a sin in Christian creeds. Christianity declares that only God can punish villain. If one person, instead of God, punishes another one, his behavior will be regarded as the sin of blasphemy and the person will be seriously punished. “If Hamlet were to kill Claudius, he would be violating a central religious principle against murdering another human being. This would make him feel guilt at having violated religious coda.” Hamlet was born and lived in the country where people believe Christianity, so Christianity rooted deeply in Hamlet’s mind. Furthermore, Hamlet was a kind, pure and virtuous prince, so the superego wanted to abide the demand of morality and religions, Hamlet should give up revenging.

The id and the superego conflict sharply in Hamlet’s inner world. At last, the ego coordinates the conflict between the id and the superego, but not to reach an agreement. The ego just postpones implementing behaviors of acting the pleasure principle because of the superego. He must choose an appropriate opportunity to revenge.

For example, he could kill the king on his way to his mother’s chamber when he comes upon the king alone, keeling and conscience-stricken to pray. He wanted to kill the king, but he stopped.

“Now night I do it pat. Now he is praying.

And now I’ll do it, and so he goes to heaven;

And so am I revenged that would be scanned;

A villain kills my father; and for that,

I, his son do this same villain send to heaven.

Why, this is hive and salary, not revenge!”^{[5]P193}

He gave up the revenging opportunity, because he did not want to send his soul to heaven. He must wait for proper opportunity to revenge. For example, when he was drunk asleep or in his rage, or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed; at gambling, swearing or about some act. That has no relish

of salvation in it.

In order to choose an appropriate opportunity to revenge, Hamlet fell into the situation of over-thought. He said:

“ Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.
And thus the native hue of resolution.
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry.
And lose the name of action.”^[5]
So Hamlet just delayed his revenging.

Until Hamlet was stabbed by poisonous sword and knew that the person who smeared the poison on the sword was the king, he stabbed the king with this poisonous sword and revenged. But at the same time, he died too. Only this opportunity fit his standard of religions, that is, if he kills the king when he did bad thing, “his soul may be as damn and black as hell.”^{[5]P194}

Therefore, the main reason why he delayed his action was to choose an appropriate opportunity to revenge when his id, ego, superego reached an agreement.

3.2 An Analysis of Hamlet’s Contradictory Attitude Towards His Mother

As far as the id is concerned, Hamlet’s affection to his mother is complex. Before the death of his father, his mother is beloved by him. He considers his mother as an embodiment of beauty, wisdom and benevolence. However, his mother gets married to his uncle immediately and sleeps in an “incestuous bed” after his father passed away. In the end, he hates his lovely mother because of his mother’s infidelity.

The superego measures everything with standard of conscious and morality, and act according to the “ideal principle”. The superego thinks that Hamlet should conform to moral standard and religious demand. From the ethics, he should respect and do some favors to his mother, let alone hurts her life. As a result, the ego is in a dilemma of controversy. At the end, Hamlet refuses to talk with his dearly mother and he deeply wants his mother to keep her innocent.

3.3 An Analysis of Hamlet’s Affection to Ophelia

As far as the id is concerned, on the one hand, Hamlet’s affection to Ophelia is so deep that he wants to gain the purity love from Ophelia; and on the other hand, his mother’s marrying of Claudius the murderer, along with Ophelia’s impact on his mind, hinders his ability to kill Claudius. His disappointment of love makes him weary and estranges the relationship between him and Ophelia, and he perceived deeply the women’s emotional weakness which in turn makes him tired of women in general. In reality, his Ophelia is used as a weapon to attack him by her immoral father.

Hamlet’s superego earnestly wants Ophelia to be far from the fighting in order to protect her from the disaster because she is so innocent, beautiful, loyal and friendly. Since the ego is the servant of the id, the superego and reality, Hamlet decides to separate from Ophelia and commands her to go to the nunnery.

3.4 An Analysis of Hamlet’s Friendship with His Friends

As far as the id is concerned, Hamlet wants to keep the friendship with his old friends. However, they participate in his uncle’s faction and become his enemies after his father’s death. Hamlet is trapped in the plot of his uncle by his old friends.

The superego of Hamlet does not want to revenge on them. Being a humanist, he thinks that there is no difference between king and beggar and they all have equal value. According to the Christianity, he must do favors to others.

The ego decides to protect him from their hurt.

Although his mother and Ophelia don’t want to hurt him in their deep heart, they are used as weapon by his uncle to attack him. He is suffered the torments from the family, the love and friendship in his mind. He thinks over and over so that he can’t make a choice between the reality

and his thoughts, so he delays his action of revenge.

In a word, his inner conflict is one of the reasons why Hamlet delays.

4. Conclusion

Hamlet's contradictory personality is the inevitable result produced by three contradictory elements of his personality: id, ego and superego. Concerning about his revenge, his id thought that Hamlet should immediately kill the king and revenge for his father instead of considering anything else. But his superego thinks that Hamlet should obey moral standard and religious demand not to kill his uncle. His ego coordinates the conflict between his id and his superego, but fails to reach an agreement, so decides to postpone implementing behaviors until Hamlet found a good opportunity and right time when his id, ego, superego could reach an agreement. At the same time, his emotional world is confused. His id, ego, superego couldn't form a consistent attitude towards his mother, Ophelia, and his friends. Owing to the confusion, he has too many thoughts and became more contradictory, and his ability of action is weakened. Therefore, the main reason why he delays his action of revenge is that his id, ego, superego strongly struggle against each other and don't reach an agreement. His hesitancy is the external expression of his inner contradiction of id, ego and superego.

The thesis is aimed to provide a new interpretation of Hamlet's hesitancy, to expand the research angle of this play and extend the study scope of psychoanalysis in classic literature works.

Acknowledgment

The Scientific Research Foundation of Department of Education of Yunnan Province, China (No. 2017ZDX259).

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