The Theory of Psychoanalysis and The Character of Hamlet

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The theory of psychoanalysis refers to the way of understanding personality traits and behaviors of human beings based on the ideas of psychodynamic theorists including Sigmund Freud and his followers. The theory explores the unconscious conflicts and motives of the individuals that shape their feelings, thoughts, actions, and reactions. Based on the psychoanalytic theory, Hamlet is a well-known fictional character that could be analyzed using the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and the alternative psychoanalytic theory of Jung to depict that Hamlet's actions and emotions are influenced by his unconscious conflicts, desires, and traumas as well as his individuation and archetypes.

Demographics of the Character

Hamlet, Shakespeare's famous melancholic character, is the grieving son of the recently deceased king of Denmark and is now the prince of Denmark in Shakespeare's monumental tragedy. He is the son of Queen Gertrude with the late King Hamlet and the nephew as well as the stepson of Claudius, who marries the Queen after his brother's (late King Hamlet) demise, which the prince of Denmark, Hamlet, considers an act of treachery. The character of Hamlet due to Shakespeare's skillful characterization is consumed by his grief, dressed in black to signify his mourning, obsessed with death, deceived while comprehending his mother's treacherous actions, and pained to think that everyone has forgotten his murdered father so quickly. As the story unfolds, Hamlet idealizes the king in death as a ghost who reveals that the king's brother, Claudius has killed him to take the throne due to which Hamlet vows to avenge the king's murder out of hate for his uncle, Claudius. Hamlet feels disoriented by the turn of events when his mother marries her brother-in-law, Claudius, and cannot balance his overwhelming anger, hatred, and feelings of revenge against his uncle Claudius, which leads him to emotional turmoil and a moral paradox. In Act 5, Hamlet has turned into an individual with cool rationality and a distinctive perspective as compared to the person he was with emotional chaos and anxiety before going to exile. By the end, Hamlet understands that killing Claudius is his destiny which cannot be further delayed "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will" (Shakespeare, 1703). The psychological emergence and character development of Hamlet in time is a truly remarkable feat Shakespeare has penned to date.

Personal History

During my childhood, I vividly remember a time in my life when I was overwhelmed by the feelings and weight of existential crisis like the character of Hamlet. I used to ask myself existential questions about the concepts of mortality and immortality, grappling with the existence of an afterlife, and contemplating the meaning and purpose of life while sitting alone in my room. During that time, I had a chance to read William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" which made me realize how Hamlet's inner turmoil and constant reflection actually resonated with me while I mirrored my own thoughts and struggles. It was during this introspective moment in my life when I found solace in every page of "The Tragedy of Hamlet, The Prince of Denmark" and every action of Prince Hamlet. I realized I needed to work on myself while questioning the existence, purpose, mortality, and the complexities of human nature just like the character of Hamlet used to grapple with his thoughts in Shakespearean drama.

Problem

The character of Hamlet is a complex and conflicted character who faces multifaceted problems including the struggle with his father's death, his mother's marriage with his uncle Claudius, his uncle's usurpation, Claudius' murdering of his brother to take the late king's throne, his love for Ophelia, his sanity, and his disoriented feelings to avenge his father's death. However, the major problem that the character of Hamlet faces throughout the drama is the Oedipus Complex that pushes him to an existential crisis which leads him to have difficult and disorienting questions about self, human nature, and mortality that cannot be answered with certainty.

Analysis of the Problem

The psychology of human nature depends on the psychological distinction of how an individual handles his feelings and how that handling is represented in everyday life. Freudian psychology, therefore, resides in the feelings that a male child shows and how these feelings or primeval wishes are fulfilled in his childhood. The Oedipal feeling Freud believed every male child experiences can be analyzed in the character of Hamlet although he never fulfills his desires throughout the play. During his childhood, Hamlet always expresses his fondness and warmest affection towards his mother, Queen Gertrude but these adoration elements are always in disguise. The scene when Hamlet could be seen in the bed chamber with his mother as well as the depiction of his mother's fondness and sensual nature towards her son reflect how they both share the relationship beyond the mother-son bond. Moreover, Hamlet's feelings of repression due to his character development from a child who has the independence of the idea of sexuality with the Queen to an adult who feels disgusted when his mother remarries cannot be hidden from Hamlet's consciousness (Gottschalk, 2014). So, the long "repressed" desire to gain his mother's devotion and take his father's place after the king's death is stimulated to an unconscious attempt without Hamlet being aware of his feelings and desire after the

marriage of his mother to his uncle, which leads Hamlet to the mental suffering and self-torture while he questions his existence. Thus, the psychoanalytic theory of Freud suggests that the character of Hamlet presents the inner psychological struggles of the protagonist because he develops an existential crisis due to the Oedipus complex that could be seen in Hamlet's procrastination, desire for revenge, fondness for his mother, indecision, and inner conflict of his moral conscience.

Alternative Analysis of the Problem

Carl Jung's psychoanalytic approach to Shakespearean Hamlet is based on the idea that the character of Hamlet has an Oedipus complex, as he struggles with the authority of his father and his uncle, which pushes him to severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Due to this complex, his character is drawn to have an unconscious desire for his mother and the same complex affects his decisions and actions which explore Jung's archetypes of character in an individual character. Throughout the play, Hamlet is drawn towards philosophical themes to explore existential questions about himself and the nature of human actions through the exploration of the themes of skepticism, relativism, and existentialism through the individuation process (Jordan, 2003). Hamlet's feelings of resentment for his father's death, his suicidal thoughts, and his decision to take revengeful action a little late in the play, even though he has found the evidence of Claudius' murdering his father, reflect his doubts and conflicts about his own identity and purpose of life.

References

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