
Hieronimo and Othello as Freudian Characters

Introduction

A Revenge Tragedy is known as a drama in which the protagonist seeks revenge for the bloody actions of the antagonist and the revelation of the murder or crime comes to the protagonist through superficial appearances such as ghosts. In the process of seeking revenge, the main character might witness insanity, murder, suicide, philosophical debates etc. and in the end there will be the death of the antagonist and the protagonist or a dear one related to the protagonist. Hieronimo of *The Spanish Tragedy* and Othello of *Othello* were also the revenge-seeking characters. How they reached to the revenge and how their psychology developed can be explained by the Psychoanalytical Theory of Sigmund Freud. Analyzing the very two characters by the relatable theories of Freud, they are considered as Freudian characters and who was more logical in taking revenge was identified.

Discussion

Hieronimo, the character of *The Spanish Tragedy* and Othello, the protagonist of *Othello*, were the two very characters who took revenge being driven by their mental instability. The reasons or situations behind their taking revenge were different. But their decisions of taking revenge were the ultimate outcome of their psychology. Both of the character is analyzed as a Freudian character to find out who was more logical to take revenge or how much they could control their instincts.

Freud believed that the human psyche was composed of three elements. The conscious mind contains ideas, thoughts and feelings of which we are aware and this makes up 10% of our psyche. 50-60% of the psyche is the sub or pre-conscious mind which contains material that can easily be recalled. The remaining 30-40% of the psyche is the unconscious mind which is well below the surface of awareness and contains repressed memories, traumatic experiences, unacceptable urges and all of our primitive instincts and desires. According to Freud, there are three basic structures of personality. They are- id, ego and super-ego. These three elements work together to create complex behaviors and have a powerful behavior on individuals. Although each part of personality comprises of unique features, they interact to form a whole and each part makes relative contribution to an individual's overall personality and behavior. If the ego is able to adequately moderate between the demands of the reality, the id and super-ego a healthy and well-adjusted personality emerge.

Freud considered that an imbalance between these elements would lead to a maladaptive personality. It is easy to say how conflict may arise among id, ego and super-ego. When the ego is unable to deal with the demand of constraints of the reality and the moral standard of super-ego, an unpleasant inner state of anxiety arises. This anxiety acts as a signal to the ego that things are not going the way they should. As a result, the ego employs defense mechanism to help in reducing these feeling of anxiety. Such as- repression, denial, projection etc. Besides, our defense momentarily breaks down and this is why we experience anxiety. Anxiety can be an important experience because it can reveal our core issues. Some common core issues which have relation with anxiety are- Fear of intimacy, Fear of abandonment, Low self-esteem,

Oedipal fixation etc.

In Othello, conflicts among id, ego, and superego arose in Othello's unconscious mind. Conflicts came in various ways like slip of the tongue, dreams, jokes, jealousy, anger, anxiety and defense mechanisms. To deal with conflicts and situations in life, the ego employs a range of defense mechanism. As Othello was becoming more jealous, angry and tensed, his ego applied some defense mechanisms like projection, intellectualization, displacement, denial regression, rationalism etc. Some examples of which are stated later in this paper.

Some critics identified Othello's gullibility as a tragic flaw while others regarded jealousy as Othello's 'tragic flaw'. Jealousy is a strong emotion that strikes humans with its lethal venom. But Othello did not provoke jealousy himself. Rather, it originated from Othello's psychology of inferiority. Like jealousy, Othello's inferiority complex shaped his personality and behavior. He is often referred to as the "Moor" (I.i.116), "the Barbary Horse" (I.i.111), "old black ram" (I.i.8), "Thick-lips" (I.i.66). Othello was a black moor who was living in a white society. He concerned over his race, poor language and age. (Salauddin, 38). He also thinks that he does not deserve Desdemona as he is black. He says-

"I am black, and have not those soft parts of conversation". (Act 1, Scene 2)

This inferiority complex of Othello can be with the core issues and their relationship to anxiety which were explained by Freud. One of the core issues is "Insecure or unstable sense of self" which is to sustain a feeling of personal identity, to sustain a sense of knowing ourselves. This core issue makes one very vulnerable to the influence of other people and he may find himself continually changing the way he looks or behaves as he becomes involved with different individuals or groups. (Tyson, 16-17)

Another defense mechanism used by Othello was "Denial". According to Freud, seeing desires in other people generally results from an inability to accept such desires within oneself. The likely cause of the rapid fruition of Othello's jealousy is therefore a denial of his own desires. () In act3 scene 3, Othello said-

"Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw/ The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt."

Othello probably lusted after someone else but seeing the immorality in his desire, failed to accept that it ever crossed his mind. To defend his ego he projected these desires onto his wife, becoming very suspicious of her interactions with others. He said-

"She's gone: I am abused." (Act 3, Scene 3)

Othello then convinces himself of his wife's infidelity by displacing a hatred of himself onto Desdemona. It is another use of defense mechanism which is known as "Projection" which is ascribing one's fear, problem or guilty desire to someone else and then condemning him or her for it, in order to deny that one has it oneself. (Tyson, 15) He said-

"my relief/ Must be to loathe her," (Act 3, Scene 3)

He meant (consciously or unconsciously) that his ego had to defend itself by transferring this hatred onto Desdemona. Othello was therefore making his personal discomfort less threatening

by hating Desdemona instead of himself.

Othello murders his wife as justice for her infidelity as well as out of jealousy. By the Freudian philosophy, in killing her, Othello projected his death instinct out towards Desdemona, and exercised his plan for regression when killing himself. Before killing Desdemona, Othello spoke of the peace and beauty of death. He spoke of Desdemona's skin as being

“smooth as monumental alabaster.” (Act 5, Scene 2)

Referring to Desdemona as though she were a stone monument suggested his desire to make her still and everlasting with no more needs or desires. In Freud's view, murdering others is an outward projection of an unconscious desire to die. So, Othello himself wanted to die, but in projecting his self-hatred to Desdemona, also projected his death instinct. ('Freudian Interpretation of Othello — Samedaypapers.Me')

After murdering Desdemona, Othello shows remorse and devastation-

“O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!” (Act 5, Scene 2)

Being faced with the stress of unjustly murdering the one he loves, Othello executes justice upon himself. By the Freudian philosophy, when one is faced with stress, they can find relief in regressing to a previous psychological time. By committing suicide, Othello is regressing to a previous psychological time – the time before he was born. The stress of the murder led him to retreat to the time before birth, where he felt safe and secure. This regression is also a manifestation of the death instinct.

The story of Hieronimo of The Spanish Tragedy corresponds with the theories of Freud in a different way. Hieronimo was not seen to be much active before the death of his own son, Horatio. But after Horatio's death, he started to seek justice which ultimately led him to take revenge. While expecting for justice, his psychology varied a lot. When he found his son dead, he said to his wife-

“For in revenge my heart would find relief.” (Act II, Scene v)

But one of the defense mechanisms known as “Rationalization” worked when Hieronimo was convinced of divine justice by his wife Isabella. As she said-

“The heavens are just, murder cannot be hid.” (Act II, Scene v)

He thought for a particular period of time that as he could not trace the murderers, divine justice would come. But with time, Hieronimo understood that divine justice was nothing but a myth. As he was the Knight Marshal of Spain whom people would come for justice, he started to have one of the core issues which is “Insecure or unstable sense of self”. This issue deals with the inability to sustain a feeling of personal identity which reflects in his monologue-

“Where shall I run to breathe abroad my woes?” (Act III, Scene vii)

Time and again, he wanted to approach the king for having justice but Lorenzo brought an obstacle every time which did not allow Hieronimo to get justice. So, he altered the strategy and

took “Reaction Formation” as the defense mechanism according to Freud. In this mechanism, anxiety is reduced by adopting beliefs contradictory to one’s own beliefs. Hieronimo acted with Lorenzo as he forgot all about his son’s murder.

Hieronimo at last adopted “Projection” as defense mechanism. Projection is the mechanism which ascribes one’s fear, problem or guilty desire to someone else and then condemning him or her for it, in order to deny that one has it oneself. After losing his son and wife, probably he lost the wish to survive which was projected in his taking revenge. Taking revenge, his last sentence was-

“First take my tongue, and afterwards my heart.” (Act IV, Scene iv)

So, Hieronimo and Othello both committed suicide. Though they were provoked to take revenge driven by different issues, their adopted defense mechanism got matched. As a result, both of them can be considered as Freudian characters.

Conclusion

The revenges by Hieronimo and Othello were the ultimate outcome of their outrage. Hieronimo was evoked to take revenge for his son’s murder as he did not get that legally and almost got mad with grief. The most notable quality of Hieronimo was that he did not make his mind unstable only getting an anonymous letter. Rather he took time and had a cross check in recognizing his son’s murderer. Moreover, he waited for legal form of justice. Being failure in getting it he took it himself going against religion. But in case of Othello, his jealousy, inferiority complex created an obstacle to have a cross check. He even recognized himself as an unpardonable sinner. Othello suffered mentally more by his nature than Hieronimo and his revenge brought him more restlessness. So, undoubtedly, it can be said that Hieronimo’s revenge was more justified than Othello.

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