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**RESEARCH PAPER****Indecision and Psychological Conflict in Hamlet: A Freudian Interpretation**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the psychological side of Hamlet by William Shakespeare, and it will focus on the theme of indecision and a conflict with self that the main character faces. According to the play, Hamlet is a tragic hero whose indecisiveness to take action against the killing of his father poses relevant psychological issues. This paper uses psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud especially the concept of unconscious mind, repression and the Oedipus complex to analyze the hesitation and emotional conflicts of Hamlet. This is to establish that Hamlet delays are based on moral issues or deep seated psychological problems. The study can be appreciated because it offers a deeper insight into the character of Hamlet than the traditional moralist approaches and emphasizes the importance of psychoanalytic criticism in the field of analysis of literary works. It specifically dwells on a Freudian interpretation, and largely looks into the relationships between Hamlet and Gertrude and Hamlet and Claudius.

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**KEYWORDS** Psychology, Confusion, Oedipus Complex, Inner Conflict

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**Introduction**

Humanity, their emotions, and psychic complications always echoed in literature. William Shakespeare takes one of the leading places in the list of the greatest dramatists in the English literature due to his deep knowledge of human nature and inner struggle. Hamlet is his tragic play that is regarded to be one of the most discussed pieces of the literary history. The story being recounted in the play is that of Prince Hamlet of Denmark who decides to take revenge by killing his father. His uncle Claudius has murdered his father King Hamlet and married Queen Gertrude, his mother. But instead, Hamlet is not a man who takes, as the traditional revenge hero is supposed to immediate action. It is a topic of controversy within the circles of critics and scholars that his delay has been centuries late. The key puzzle remains the same, why is Hamlet hesitating?

The character of Hamlet is a terribly complex and intellectual one. He is contemplative, impressionable, philosophic, and emotionally charged. He comes out as a sad individual since the first pages of the play, as he is grieving the loss of his father and is extremely sensitive to the remarriage of his mother. His internal conflict, his moral confusion and his psychological unrest is revealed in his well-known soliloquies, especially, To be, or not to be. Hamlet is self-reflective, questioning, and doubting unlike other Shakespearean heroes who take decisive actions. His indecisiveness turns out to be the main aspect of the tragedy and eventually causes several deaths including his.

Conventional critical interpretations tend to dwell on issues like revenge, morality, corruption and political turmoil. Nevertheless, the character of Hamlet has been analyzed in modern literary criticism, using the psychological approach. The psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud helps to make sense of the unconscious motivations of Hamlet. Freud believed that human behavior is determined by the unconscious mind, the suppressed desires, childhood experience and inner conflict. People do not know much about the fears and desires that they have that are hidden.

A highly influential psychoanalytic reading has it that the indecisiveness on the part of Hamlet is based on the Oedipus complex. Freud believed that all children subconsciously have a desire to the opposite sex parent and a competition to the same sex parent. In the example of Hamlet, Claudius commits the same wrong that Hamlet might have subconsciously wanted to commit, that is, killing the father and marrying the mother. As a result, Hamlet struggles to subject Claudius to any kind of punishment since on unconscious level, he sees himself in him. This internal struggle brings guilt, repression and mental paralysis. Later developed by one of the followers of Freud, Ernest Jones, who stated that the delay of Hamlet was caused not due to cowardice and over thinking, but due to the repressed desires and emotional contradiction.

The research examine the hesitation and psychological conflict of Hamlet in a Freudian perspective. In the course of the play, his actions are full of repressions, melancholy, disgust of himself and anxiety. His cruel behavior towards Ophelia, sensitivity towards her mother being sexual and philosophical ideologies about life and death are all indicators of inner conflicts that were not resolved. Duty and desire, action and fear, morality and unconscious impulses, battle in his mind. Using the psychoanalytic criticism, this research paper aims to find out the darker aspects of Hamlet character and reconsider his indecision as a mental disorder and not as the simple case of a weakness of morality.

The importance of the research is that it is an effort to make a contribution to psychoanalytic literary criticism at the undergraduate level. Despite the fact that Hamlet has been analyzed through the moral, political, and existential standpoints, a Freudian approach can be used to understand the motivation of characters in a little bit deeper way. This approach does not just expand the meaning of texts but it also accentuates the connection between psychology and literature. The character of Hamlet by Shakespeare shows great understanding of how the human mind was complicated centuries before the psychoanalysis theory was formulated.

Moreover, this paper focuses on the topicality of the play nowadays. Existence of psychological conflict, indecision, anxiety and identity crisis is universal to humans. Hamlet and his confusion and emotional torment can be still related to modern readers. This study, through a psychoanalytic reading, highlights that literature is not always a source of amusement but it is a strong tool of delving into the mental and emotional realities.

This research concentrates on Freudian psychoanalysis and no interaction is done with other theories like feminism, Marxism, and existentialism. The main theme is centered on the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude and Claudius since he is having a conflict with both in an unconscious manner. Close textual analysis and applicable psychoanalytic concepts are the primary basis of the research to provide support to the arguments.

Hamlet has been considered as one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare mostly due to the depth which the play has when it comes to psychology. There is nothing merely

dramatic about Hamlet hesitating, it is rather a manifestation of his inner psychological conflict. Basing on the theory of the unconscious by Freud and Oedipus complex, the research paper aims to illustrate that Hamlet is indecisive due to suppressed desires and emotions. By conducting this analysis, the research will seek to offer a better insight into the tragic nature of Hamlet as well as reiterate the relevance of psychoanalytic criticism as a literary criticism.

### **Literature Review**

One of the major changes in critical history occurred when the psychoanalytic theory was developed. The concepts of Sigmund Freud, in particular the theory of the unconscious, the repression and the Oedipal complex, influenced the literary criticism of the XX century very strongly. In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud made a brief reference to Hamlet and suggested that the indecisiveness of the prince may be connected to any suppressed desires. Freud believed that all children on a subconscious level play around with the parent of the opposite sex and experienced competition with the parent of the same sex, a phenomenon, known Oedipus complex. The argument raised by Freud is that Hamlet cannot murder Claudius because Claudius has fulfilled the other repressed desire of Hamlet, who wanted to kill his father and marry his mother. Therefore, Hamlet subconsciously associates himself with Claudius and feels veiled with guilt. This mental fight within makes him fail to act decisively.

Critical history was significantly altered with the emergence of psychoanalytic theory. Sigmund Freud, his concept of the unconscious, repression and the Oedipus complex were influential in the twentieth-century literary criticism. In *The Interpretation of dreams*, Freud mentions Hamlet briefly but assumes that the failure to act on time by the prince could be connected to the unconscious desires. He indicates that all children subconsciously desire the opposite sex parent and competition with the same sex parent, which has been known as the Oedipus complex. Freud has argued that Hamlet is indecisive to kill Claudius since Claudius has fulfilled the repressed desire of Hamlet to kill his father and have his mother as a wife. As a result, Hamlet unconsciously follows Claudius and struggles with the deep sense of guilt. This inner conflict of psyche makes him unable to take any action.

Ernest Jones followed up on the theory of Freud in his essay *Hamlet and Oedipus*. Jones has claimed that the desire of Hamlet is repressed, which is why he procrastinates rather than experiences indecisiveness and fear of something wrong. He pointed out that Hamlet is overwhelmed by the remarriage of his mother and that it is beyond the normal grieving. The fact that he became very sensitive about the sexuality of Gertrude and that he abused her using harsh words suggests that he is psychologically troubled. Jones argues that Claudius represents hidden desires in Hamlet; hence, by killing Claudius, Hamlet would be facing these desires of prohibition. In this text, Hamlet stands out as an indecisive character between what he is supposed to do and how he feels.

The psychoanalytic criticism was appealing due to the fact that it provided a convincing answer to the indecisiveness of Hamlet. It transformed the emphasis on the external situation to the internal psychological struggle. This approach does not ask the question of whether Hamlet is a coward or a brave man but it explores the forces that lie beyond his actions. Such a method expanded the range of character study and stimulated deeper delving into the reason behind the motivation.

The play has symbolic imagery and emotional intensity, which the readers are prompted to develop.

However, there has been a challenge to psychoanalytic interpretations. Other researchers believe that the use of the modern theories of psychology to a Renaissance piece could be historically wrong. Shakespeare has never been a Freudian, and there is no reason to believe that he deliberate could incorporate the ideas of psychoanalysis. Critics argue that the interpretations of Freudians may force the meaning that was not intended by the author. They suggest that dramatic structure, political situation, or moral thinking may also be used to explain the procrastination of Hamlet.

As an example, uncertainty and the struggle to find the truth are the two themes noted by some contemporary critics in the play. In this view, Hamlet is indecisive since he wants to be assured of the guilt of Claudius. The play-within-the-play scene shows how he logically attempts to seek evidence first then acts. In this light, his hesitation is considered to be thoughtful and rational instead of being psychologically disturbed.

Other researchers examine the play in the existential perspective. According to them, Hamlet is struggling with great questions of life, death, and the meaning of existence. His soliloquy that is famous, To be, or not to be, is a form of philosophical doubt and not unintentional desire. In this sense, Hamlet turns out to be an embodiment of the contemporary existential anxiety.

In spite of these other interpretations, psychoanalytic criticism still has some important value. The psychological analyses are supported by the high family relationships depicted in the play. Hamlet is not a simple person with his feelings towards his mother. His reaction to Gertrude suggests that he has an emotional struggle exceeding moral disillusionment which supports the psychoanalytic approach.

The other important element of discussion is the melancholy of Hamlet. He is also depressed, self-loathing, and isolated throughout the play. His feelings go up and down in anger, sadness and sarcasm; some critics view this as a case of psychological instability. Psychoanalytic theory considers melancholy to be a result of lostness internalized and unresolved emotional attachment.

After Freud and Jones, other psychoanalytic critics explored the theme of repression, anxiety, and identity crisis. According to them, his insanity, either actual or pretended, is the image of a broken self of Hamlet. His unpredictable behavior and speech are more emphasized by the fact that there is something mysterious about his personality as he is governed by internal conflict.

Finally, Hamlet is a play that can be interpreted in different ways. The psychoanalytic approach is, however, the most involving since it explores the emotional and psychological depth of the main character. Hamlet is not just the revenge hero, he is also a sensitive and thoughtful person whose mind turns into the actual battlefield of tragedy.

In the context of this research, the Freudian theory is especially relevant since it touches upon the issue of the hesitation directly. Delay is not a sign of weakness as it is seen through the psychoanalytic opinion but rather a sign of unconscious struggle. This view gives a greater insight regarding the character of Hamlet and highlights the fact that Shakespeare was a keen insight into human psychology.

The history of the critical period surrounding Hamlet is an example of how the play can be reinterpreted. The scope of moral critique to Romantic appreciation of the text is the extent of existential analysis to psychoanalytic theories, which add new dimensions to the

text. Freudian analysis is one of these interpretations that offer a solid structure to analyze the inner conflict and indecisiveness of Hamlet. Although it is not the only explanation, it is still an interesting and authoritative way of examining the complexity of this tragic character. This research is based on these psychoanalytic meanings and the key themes in this research are hesitation, and psychological conflict.

### **Material and Methods**

It is a qualitative research based on the textual analysis. The primary text that has been selected in this research is Hamlet by William Shakespeare. Since the main emphasis is on the psychological conflict and the indecisiveness, the qualitative strategy is the most appropriate since it is possible to deeply interpret characters, themes, and language rather than rely on numerical data or the statistical approach. This paper takes a closer look at Hamlet and his character, his conversation, his monologues, and how he interacts with other characters through the play.

The theoretical framework of the research is the psychoanalytic literary criticism, especially, with references to the ideas of the unconscious and Oedipus complex suggested by Sigmund Freud. The thoughts of Freud with regard to repression, guilt, unconscious desire, and internal conflict are used to explain that Hamlet procrastinates to take revenge. Also, a psychoanalytic approach to Hamlet by Ernest Jones is deemed to expound on the theories by Freud. These theoretical understandings constitute the main structure of understanding the psychological state of Hamlet.

Both primary and secondary sources are used in this study. The play Hamlet is the first source and is carefully examined to find the passages that demonstrate the inner conflict in Hamlet, his emotional instability and indecisive nature in taking actions. Such major soliloquies as To be, or not to be, as well as those involving Gertrude and Claudius are also examined in detail because they reveal some inner tensions and emotional conflicts of Hamlet. The choice of quotations of the text is used as evidence to support the research argument.

Some of the secondary sources will be scholarly books, journal articles, and essays on psychoanalytic criticism and other interpretations of Hamlet. These materials can be used to understand how various critics have interpreted Hamlet delay and state of mind. The purpose of using secondary literature is to support the argument in the research academically and place this study in the greater context of literary criticism. However, it primarily focuses on an independent and original analysis of the text as opposed to The research method starts with the identification of the principal themes associated with the indecision and psychological conflict and then the interpretation of these themes according to the Freudian perspective. The paper begins by examining the emotional response of Hamlet when his father and mother died and his mother remarried. It then discusses why he does not kill Claudius despite several opportunities that he had got. His language, imagery, symbolism and tone are given special attention since such aspects are used in literature to show the hidden psychological tension. Through the combination of textual material with psychoanalytic theory, the study aims at demonstrating that Hamlet is inactive not only due to his frailty of moral nature but also unconscious conflict.

This research paper is limited to a Freudian psychoanalytic method and lacks other theoretical accounts ideas like feminism, Marxism and structuralism. This limitation facilitates making a focused and detailed analysis of the selected theory. All in all, this approach gives a systematic interpretative approach to the psychological depth of Hamlet.

## **Results and Discussion**

This chapter offers the outcomes of a textual analysis of a play Hamlet by William Shakespeare. Exploring the character of Hamlet in terms of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, one can see that his indecisiveness when it comes to avenging is not only caused by the moral doubt but is rooted in the psychological conflict in the first place. It has been shown in the analysis that repression, unconscious desire, guilt, melancholy and internal division are important factors in determining not only the actions but the inactions of Hamlet as well.

### **Melancholy and Psychological Instability in Hamlet.**

The main observation in this study is the constant melancholy of Hamlet. Even at the beginning of the play, he seems to be troubled emotionally. He puts on black clothes, secluded and displays deep sorrow over the death of his father. His grief, however, appears to be much more exceptional than normal mourning. His words are a despair, disgust, and frustration. He writes that the world is weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable and implies not only sadness, but also a feeling of psychological exhaustion.

Sigmund Freud claimed that such deep melancholy can be attributed to repressions. When an individual is not able to express forbidden feelings, then these feelings are inverted and cause depression. The fact that Hamlet is struggling to address his subconscious world may increase his emotional instability. His sorrow is also mixed with anger at his mother which means that his pain is caused not only due to loss but because of some internal struggle.

### **There is attachment to Gertrude and Oedipus Complex.**

A notable observation is that Hamlet has a weird relationship with his mother, Queen Gertrude. He is very violent in his reaction about her getting remarried. He is repeatedly derogatory of her sexuality and talks of her affair with Claudius in very sultry and startling terms. Apparently, he is more troubled with the marriage of his mother than the killing of his father.

The Oedipus complex as put forward by Freud offers some insight into the same. According to this theory, a son has an unconscious desire of his mother and perceives his father as a rival. In the case of Hamlet, Claudius has killed the father and claims the mother thus completing what Freud calls the repressed desire of the son. Such a situation creates unexplainable guilt in Hamlet because Claudius represents his repressed desire and it is psychologically difficult to harm him.

This meaning is highly encouraged in the confrontation scene in Gertrude chamber. The speech of Hamlet reflects the jealousy and emotional passion and not the moral indignation. His response reveals deep psychological dichotomy and associates his indecision with an unconscious, identification with Claudius.

### **Decision paralysis and the Repression that Works.**

In the play, Hamlet experiences a number of opportunities to kill Claudius but he never takes any action. The prayer scene is one of the bright examples of this. Hamlet has a good opportunity to kill Claudius, as he is alone and unguarded, but he does not kill him anyway. According to him, assassinating Claudius when he is in prayer will take his soul to heaven. Nevertheless, this argument can be merely the cover-up of underlying psychological resistance.

Freud believes that repression inhibits people to do something that goes against the figures that represent their suppressed desires. In this instance, Hamlet has his inner desires that are symbolised by Claudius. To kill destroying a portion of himself would be symbolic on his part. So the hesitation of Hamlet does not simply imply weakness but as a defense mechanism based on psychology.

### **Soliloquies and The Expression of the Unconscious.**

The soliloquies of Hamlet provide the first-hand insight into his mind. In the To be, or not to be soliloquy, he considers the meaning of life and death, which is whether it is more dignified to live with pain or to commit suicide. The speech is one that is full of existential anxiety but also demonstrates a feeling of a mental paralysis as well.

According to Freud, it is the desire that conflicts with duty causing anxiety. Hamlet is torn into two parts of his internal struggle of avenging his father, and his unconscious revolt against Claudius. This torment in his mind does not allow him to act decisively. This divided self is spoken out in his soliloquies.

### **Craziness and Self Division.**

Although Hamlet says that he is acting mad, in other instances his behaviour reflects that he is actually psychologically ill. He treats Ophelia harshly, changes his moods abruptly and speaks ambiguously which shows his emotional instability.

According to psychoanalytic perspective, this action can be explained by displacement defense mechanism whereby the person will direct anger to a less harmful object. Hamlet could also be transferring his anger that he has not been able to resolve towards his mother or himself to Ophelia. Consequently, his relations are affected because of this conflicting nature with him.

Also, Hamlet frequently resorts to disease, corruption and decay imagery. Such pictures not only represent the moral decadence in Denmark but also show his poor state of mind.

### **Guilt and Self-Loathing**

The criticism also reveals the extreme self disgust that Hamlet experiences. He constantly complains that he is cowardly and weak. He also calls himself a rogue and peasant slave after having seen the passionate subject of the actor. This self-criticism is intense and is full of guilt.

Freud states that guilt occurs when there is a clash between the unconscious desires and the morality. Hamlet might be guilty because of the subconscious association with Claudius. This is a way of destroying his strength of will, rather than putting his anger outwardly, he puts it inwardly and indulges in self-blame.

Last Action and Psychological Release Hamlet finally slays Claudius although this happens after Gertrude has died and in the confusion. He is also injured and is nearing death. His move appears to be abrupt and emotional than premeditated and is indicative of external forces driving him to take action and not a psychological closure.

Psychoanalytically, this can be an indication of the collapse of repression. Once his mother has died and he is even dealing with his own mortality, the internal warfare no

longer holds him in place. The fact that he still cannot hold the psychological tension any longer marks the end of the delay.

### **Findings**

It is a research that proves that Hamlet is hesitant owing to a psychological conflict within him. It cannot be explained by moral thinking, fear, and philosophical skepticism only. Repression, unconscious desire, guilt, emotional attachment to his mother are some of the factors that make him face an internal struggle. Oedipus complex offers a very good model of explaining his weird behavior towards Gertrude and Claudius.

The paper also demonstrates that Shakespeare was able to portray the complexities of human mind even before the modern psychology was born. Hamlet is not just a poor hero, he is a psychologically divided man whose tragedy begins in his internal disagreement.

This study justifies the perspective that the procrastination of Hamlet lies deeply within the aspect of psychology. The psychoanalytic theory by Freud can be effectively applied to his melancholy and indecisiveness and internal division. The combination of both textual and psychoanalytic ideas in the study reveals the importance of unconscious motivation in determining the behavior of human beings. As a result, Hamlet comes out not only as a revenge story but also as an in-depth literary exploration of the human mind.

### **Conclusion**

The present study attempted to explore the motif of indecision and mental conflict in the play Hamlet by William Shakespeare using Freudian psychoanalytic theory. This research was mainly aimed at establishing whether the reason why Hamlet did not want to take revenge against the murder of his father is because of moral indecision or a deeper psychological issue. Through a close reading of the text and using Freudian theory concepts, repression, unconscious mind, guilt, and Oedipus complex, the results indicate that Hamlet is too indecisive to be considered weak or overthinking but rather, the indecisive state lies within the inner psychological conflict.

All through the play, Hamlet is portrayed as an emotionally disturbed and mentally confused character. His severe sorrow at the death of his father, his extreme displeasure at his mother being remarried and his constant self-blame indicate a troubled inner world. The common interpretations of Hamlet are also traditional that tend to describe him as a weak or over philosophical character who thinks too much but acts too little. Nevertheless, this study suggests that his indecisiveness can be better explained by repression and resistance by the unconscious. His reluctance to kill Claudius is not an outcome of his fear or moral uncertainty but it is associated with some underlying psychological forces operating in his mind.

The bond that exists between Hamlet and his mother, Gertrude, is essential in knowing his actions. It appears that he is more emotional about her marriage to Claudius than he is to the death of his father, all by himself. According to the Freudian theory, this response may be explained in terms of the Oedipus complex. This theory states that Hamlet subconsciously aligns himself with Claudius who has fulfilled a suppressed desire of marrying Gertrude. This subconscious recognition brings out the feelings of guilt and self-doubt that eventually make Hamlet fail to act with further action. His fight is therefore external and very psychological.

In addition, soliloquies of Hamlet give great information about his split mind. With these monologues, the readers get to understand his philosophical thoughts, insecurities, and emotional imbalance. His famous contemplations demonstrate the contradiction between his feeling of responsibility and his subconscious needs. Hamlet is caught up in the rut of observing and contemplating, instead of making decisive action. He keeps on procrastinating even in situations where he has clear chances to kill Claudius.

This helps in supporting the argument that he is not able to get revenge because of psychological problems that are stopping him. When it comes to action, Hamlet does not do it until the very last act, and again only when there are external factors that decrease his emotional and psychological resistance.

This analysis contributes to the knowledge of Hamlet as it focuses on the psychological facet of the tragedy. Shakespeare introduces a very intricate character the actions of which are determined by concealed feelings and inner struggle. Although psychoanalysis interpretation is not the only interpretation of the play, it offers valuable and interesting insights as to why Hamlet was so indecisive. The study also shows the intersectional nature of literature and psychology and helps to understand that the human behavior is frequently motivated by some unconscious reasons.

The tragedy of Hamlet is not merely a result of events that happen around him but also it is the chaos in his own mind. His indecisiveness is not a simple expression of weakness or fear but an indication of repression, guilt and emotional attachment. Through the Freudian theory, this study shows that the indecision portrayed by Hamlet has deeper psychological causes. The play is not out of date since it explores universal human experience themes, such as doubt, anxiety, and inner conflict. The portrayal of Hamlet made by Shakespeare remained relevant to readers even nowadays, which supports the idea that the complexity of human mind is one of the key themes in literature and life.

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