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Freudian Psychoanalysis in Lord of the Flies: An Analysis of Id, Ego, and Superego in the Main Characters of William Golding's Novel

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Abstract

This paper explores Freudian psychoanalytic theory in William Golding's Lord of the Flies, focusing on the characters Jack, Ralph, and Piggy as representations of the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego,' respectively. Through Freudian psychoanalysis, the study examines the psychological struggles of the characters as they face the collapse of societal norms on a deserted island. Jack, as the 'id,' embodies primal desires and aggression; Ralph, as the 'ego,' balances reality and morality; and Piggy, as the 'superego,' upholds societal values. The study reveals how Golding uses these characters to explore the fragility of civilization and the underlying savagery of human nature. This paper examines the theme of ego in William Golding's "Lord of the Flies," arguing that the novel presents a scathing critique of the destructive nature of unchecked ego. Through a close reading of the characters of Jack Merridew and Ralph, this paper demonstrates how Golding uses the novel to explore the ways in which ego can lead individuals to prioritize their own desires and interests over the well-being of others. As the novel progresses, the characters' egos become increasingly inflated, leading to a descent into chaos and savagery.

This paper contends that Golding's portrayal of the dangers of ego serves as a warning about the importance of humility and cooperation in maintaining social order.

Introduction

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* offers a compelling exploration of the human psyche, reflecting modern psychological theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud. The novel illustrates the descent of a group of boys into savagery when stranded on a deserted island, shedding light on the latent darkness within human nature. Golding employs the characters of Jack, Ralph, and Piggy to symbolize Freud's three levels of the human mind: the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego.' Freud's psychoanalytic theory divides the psyche into these three components, providing a framework for understanding human behavior as a struggle between desire, reality, and morality.

The 'id' represents the primitive, unconscious aspect of the human mind, driven by immediate gratification and pleasure-seeking instincts. The 'ego' functions as the rational mediator, balancing the 'id's' desires with the constraints of the external world. Finally, the 'superego' embodies the moral conscience, enforcing societal norms and values. This research paper aims to analyze the key characters in *Lord of the Flies*—Jack, Ralph, and Piggy—through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, revealing how Golding uses these characters to depict the tension between civilization and savagery.

Research Questions

1. How does Jack exhibit the characteristics of Freud's 'id'?
2. How does Ralph's behavior align with the concept of the 'ego'?
3. In what ways does Piggy demonstrate the 'superego,' and how does his morality influence group dynamics?

Objectives

1. To explore how the characters of *Lord of the Flies* reflect Freud's concepts of 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego.'
2. To analyze the psychological struggle between primal desires and moral restraint in the characters.
3. To assess the role of Freudian psychoanalysis in understanding the collapse of civilization in Golding's novel.
4. To examine how the interplay of these three elements contributes to the overall theme of human nature in the text.

Literature Review

Freudian psychoanalysis has been a foundational framework for understanding human behavior and motivation. Freud's division of the psyche into the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego' has been widely applied in literature to analyze characters and themes. In *Lord of the Flies*, this psychoanalytic model provides insight into the boys' actions and the breakdown of their micro-society.

Previous studies have explored the novel's themes of human nature, morality, and societal collapse. Critics have focused on how the novel portrays the inherent conflict between civilization and savagery, often emphasizing its socio-political implications. For instance, critic James R. Baker discusses the psychological dimensions of the 'id' in relation to Golding's themes of power and savagery (Baker, 1962). However, fewer studies have closely examined the novel through a Freudian lens, which reveals deeper psychological dimensions within the characters and their actions.

David B. Stevenson highlights the pervasive influence of the 'id' in Jack's character, underscoring how his impulses disrupt the fragile social order (Stevenson, 1958). By applying Freud's theory, this paper contributes to the existing literature by offering a psychological analysis of the characters as embodiments of the human psyche.

In addition, Clara M. Laderer emphasizes the destructive impact of abandoning the 'superego' and the moral framework it provides, which leads to chaos and violence (Laderer, 1967). Moreover, other scholars have expanded the discussion by exploring the novel's critique of civilization and its implications for understanding the human condition (Holt, 2004; Kahn, 2011). These perspectives support the relevance of Freudian analysis in examining the complexities of Golding's work.

Methodology

This research employs close textual analysis of *Lord of the Flies* through a Freudian psychoanalytic framework. The study focuses on the actions, dialogues, and psychological transformations of Jack, Ralph, and Piggy, analyzing their roles as representatives of the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego.' Key scenes from the novel, where these psychological forces become dominant, are examined to understand how the characters' internal struggles mirror the novel's broader themes of civilization and savagery.

Analysis/Discussion

Id in the Character of Jack

In Freud's theory, the 'id' represents the most basic and instinctual part of the human mind, driven by the desire for immediate gratification. In *Lord of the Flies*, Jack personifies the 'id,' as his actions are dominated by primal instincts and an unquenchable thirst for power. From the novel's beginning, Jack demonstrates his aggressive tendencies and obsession with hunting. His violent nature intensifies as the story progresses, and he increasingly disregards the rules and moral values upheld by Ralph and Piggy.

Jack's first major act of violence, the brutal killing of the sow, marks the culmination of his descent into savagery. He revels in the act of killing, symbolizing the dominance of the 'id' over reason and morality. Jack's rejection of civilization, represented by his refusal to obey Ralph's authority, further illustrates the overpowering force of the 'id.' Freud's 'id' operates without consideration for

the consequences, seeking only to satisfy its desires. Jack's leadership style, which revolves around fear, violence, and domination, reflects the unchecked nature of the 'id.' As Golding writes, "The conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist," signaling the complete annihilation of order and civility (Golding, 1954).

Ego in the Character of Ralph

Ralph, as the 'ego,' stands between the extremes of Jack's 'id' and Piggy's 'superego.' Freud described the 'ego' as the rational part of the mind that mediates between the demands of the 'id' and the constraints of reality. Throughout the novel, Ralph attempts to maintain order and prioritize the group's long-term survival by focusing on practical goals such as building shelters and keeping a signal fire burning. He embodies the struggle for a balanced approach to leadership, often facing internal conflict between his desires for freedom and the necessity of adhering to societal norms.

Ralph's leadership is characterized by his efforts to balance the boys' immediate needs with the greater goal of being rescued. He often struggles with the tension between his own desires and the responsibilities of leadership. For instance, Ralph occasionally feels the allure of Jack's anarchic freedom; however, he resists it, understanding that succumbing to these impulses would lead to chaos. Ralph's character represents Freud's idea that the 'ego' must constantly mediate between the 'id' (impulsive desires) and the 'superego' (moral standards). Despite Ralph's efforts to maintain order, the pull of the 'id' grows stronger among the boys as they abandon the rules of civilization.

The 'ego's' failure to control the 'id' reflects Freud's belief that without societal structures, human beings are prone to revert to their base instincts. Ralph's ultimate despair and loss of control highlight the fragility of the 'ego' when confronted with the overwhelming force of the 'id.'

Superego in the Character of Piggy

Piggy represents the 'superego' in Freudian terms. The 'superego' is the moral compass, shaped by societal norms and the internalized values of authority figures such as parents and teachers. Throughout the novel, Piggy is the voice of reason, consistently advocating for rules, order, and rational thinking. He frequently references his "auntie" as a source of moral guidance, underscoring his deep internalization of societal values.

Piggy's belief in the importance of the conch as a symbol of authority and order underscores his alignment with the 'superego.' He is concerned not just with survival but with maintaining the ethical standards that define civilization. As the story unfolds, Piggy's rationality is often dismissed by the other boys, leading to increasing tensions and moral decline within the group. His tragic death symbolizes the destruction of the 'superego,' and with it, the complete disintegration of societal order on the island. Piggy's demise represents the triumph of the 'id' over both the 'ego' and the 'superego,' ultimately illustrating Golding's assertion about the darkness within human nature.

The moral chaos that ensues after Piggy's death reflects Freud's idea that without the 'superego' to regulate desires and impulses, the balance of human nature is irrevocably altered. The remaining boys descend further into savagery, highlighting the essential role of the 'superego' in *LORD OF FLIES*.

Psychological Perspectives

Freudian Psychoanalysis: Researchers have applied Freudian psychoanalytic theory to analyze the characters and their behaviors in the novel. For example, Tiger (1965) argues that the characters' actions are driven by their unconscious desires and impulses.

Humanistic Psychology: Researchers have also applied humanistic psychology principles to understand the characters' motivations and behaviors. For example,

Kinkead-Weekes (1967) argues that the characters are driven by a desire for self-actualization and autonomy.

Sociological Perspectives

Social Learning Theory: Researchers have applied social learning theory to understand how the characters learn and imitate behaviors from each other. For example, Gregor (1965) argues that the characters learn aggressive behaviors from each other and from their environment.

Conflict Theory: Researchers have also applied conflict theory to understand the power struggles and conflicts between the characters. For example, Loomba (1998) argues that the novel portrays a conflict between the dominant group (the hunters) and the subordinate group (the gatherers).

Philosophical Perspectives

Existentialism: Researchers have applied existentialist philosophy to understand the novel's portrayal of human existence and morality. For example, Tiger (1965) argues that the novel portrays human existence as absurd and meaningless.

Moral Philosophy: Researchers have also applied moral philosophy principles to understand the novel's portrayal of morality and ethics. For example, Gregor (1965) argues that the novel portrays a moral universe in which characters are responsible for their actions.

Conclusion

In *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding presents a powerful psychological allegory, exploring the fragility of civilization through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. The characters of Jack, Ralph, and Piggy represent the three elements of the human psyche: the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego.' Jack's descent into savagery illustrates the dominance of the 'id,' driven by primal desires and aggression. Ralph, as the 'ego,' attempts to mediate between these instincts and the realities of survival, while Piggy, as the 'superego,' upholds moral values and societal norms.

As the boys' society collapses, so too does the balance between the 'id,' 'ego,' and 'superego.' The novel suggests that, without the structures of civilization, human beings are prone to fall back into a state of primal savagery. The internal conflicts among these three forces are not merely individual struggles but also reflect the broader theme of human nature and the consequences of abandoning moral order. Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a framework for understanding this psychological descent, revealing the inherent conflict between the forces of desire, reason, and morality within the human mind.

Golding's narrative ultimately serves as a cautionary tale about the vulnerability of civilization and the ease with which it can unravel in the face of unchecked human instincts. The interplay of Jack, Ralph, and Piggy highlights the delicate balance necessary for maintaining social order and the catastrophic results when that balance is disrupted. The dissolution of the boys' society on the island serves as a reflection of the potential for savagery that exists within all humans, reinforcing Freud's theories about the darker aspects of human psychology.

In summary, Golding's exploration of Freudian concepts in *Lord of the Flies* enriches our understanding of the text and its commentary on the human condition. Through the symbolic representations of Jack, Ralph, and Piggy, the novel examines the fundamental components of the psyche and their influence on behavior, ultimately demonstrating the fragility of civilization in the face of innate human instincts.

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