A Psychological Lens Of Criticism On Macbeth

My paper will entail a psychological lens of criticism on Macbeth. In the play of Macbeth, the Macbeth's exemplify the Freudian principles of the unconscious. The use of symbolism in this play, grasps the reality of the characters choices. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth go through many situations where they battle their guilty conscious. This is the result of Freud's theory of uncontrollable actions. My paper about psychoanalysis on the play Macbeth, the reader can expect to see how Macbeth's hunger for power is the result of uncontrollable actions.

The play of Macbeth gives a thorough overview of how the guilty conscious affects your actions, and consciousness, contributing to a good and evil side to every person.

Shakespeare creates a wonderful and thought-provoking play. When the reader gets a hold of the play, they must clench onto what is really happening. There are so many stances on Macbeth, and that's the great thing about it. There is so many transactions in the play, so you really have to pay attention to the characters words, attitudes and behaviors.

Freud's psychoanalytical studies go well with this play because of all the different characters and backgrounds. Shakespeare created these two main characters that hold a substantial amount of impact on the play. In my paper, you will find that Shakespeare's characters are suffering from the effects of the unconscious.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory is that the unconscious mind is a basin of thoughts, feelings, urges, and memories in which our conscious awareness is on the outside. The conscious awareness cannot see these things and that is why we are easily influenced by feelings of anxiety, pain, or struggle. The unconscious will always sway our behavior as we are unaware of the underlying impacts. The unconscious is hidden from the conscious mind. The conscious does not realize what is underneath.

These influences come from beneath the surface. The awareness is above the surface, and whatever is below the surface represents the unconscious. We don't know what is beneath the surface, so this is why sometimes we don't know why we do certain things. This is why Freud believed in the importance of dreams and symbols because in those instances, the hidden desires and feelings tend to show themselves. This is true in Macbeth. We see this happen when Lady Macbeth sleepwalks. I believe this is where we can see the id, superego, and ego at work as well.

Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and involves herself in something quite symbolic. She rubs her hands together as if she is washing them. She is trying to "get the blood off her hands" from the killing of Duncan. The term blood on your hands essentially means guilty. The doctor and the other person on the outside thinks that she is absurd. This character views themselves as "normal". She is fine throughout the day, at first. These two views do not agree because they are the opposite of each other. In that scene, I can learn that the character is unaware of what's causing their actions. They essentially don't even know that the unconscious from Freud exists. I think Shakespeare created these characters to show dominance and the psychoanalytic theory is a good way to show the progression of characters in this play.

In a book solely, about the actions of Lady Macbeth, the author speaks about why she things and acts the way she does. “In the first place, it has been demonstrated that there is a rigid det erminism in the mental world and that psychophysical processes are the absolute result of a cer tain chain of causation, either conscious or unconscious. That is to say, mental processes are n ot arbitrary, accidental or due to chance, bt are closely related to one another. This is as true of dreams or of slips of the tongue in everyday life as in the more complex manifestations of hyster ia. A certain mental state or idea does not arise in a haphazard fashion out of the conscious or t he unconscious, but is predetermined by certain experiences or groups of ideas.” (Coriat 5). This sleepwalking scene is a prime example. This is telling us that her actions were thought out, whether conscious or unconscious. She didn’t just wash the blood off her hands because it came to her mind in that instant, it is something that lingered in her mind, it was something haunting her mind. She performs this action because of thoughts that came from beneath the surface. We know this because she does it while sleeping/in her dreams. Dreams are important symbols because it speaks to the human and brings to light what can be below. This also ties into her guilty conscious. Something separate from the Freudian conscious. I feel that these two types of consciousness go hand and hand in creating a good and evil side to every human being.

Macbeth see’s the ghost of Banquo after he finds out he’s dead. His guilt is so strong, he even speaks to it in front of everyone and basically forgets who and what is in front of him. This scene is also an example of hallucination and symbolism. It is also an example of a Freudian slip. Only he is seeing this ghost, and when he sees it, he is experiencing the unconscious that Freud tells us about. He experiences this in Act 3, Scene 4. In this instance, it is the guilty conscious of Macbeth is causing this to happen. He wonders why this is happening and is sort of confused, but I think he knows deep down, the guilt is eating up Macbeth. Lady Macbeth tries to cover it up by making excuses, and trying to explain Macbeth to everyone at that dinner. At this point, the Macbeth’s are both going through the effects of the unconscious and are battling reality.

After this event, Macbeth beings to consult the witches. It’s like Macbeth will believe anything that the witches say. When he believes in them, this shows us that he is willing to do whatever he can to get to the throne. I think that his determination to be king has driven him to be able to go through these involvements.

I don’t believe that Macbeth was introduced as a bad character at all. He was a heroic criminal. Shakespeare’s play shows that there is a bad and evil side to everyone. How can someone be a hero, yet a criminal? In a book focusing on Macbeth, John Russell Brown speaks on the thoughts of the Macbeth’s. He also agrees that Macbeth’s thoughts are being haunted by moral thoughts. Russell also points out that sometimes Macbeth does get a taste of awareness.

He explains how Macbeth has no moral sense and awareness of it’s existence.

In Act 2, Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth not to let his guilt overtake him, but in act 5, she finds herself in the same situation. This work makes the reader think, “what would I do?” It makes the characters wonder what they would do as well. Lady Macbeth ends up feeling the same way as he once did. Now they are both in the same experience. I feel that since they are both hallucinating and having apparitions, they both feel like it is real. Act 2, Scene 2 Macbeth “murderers sleep”. “Methought I heard a voice cry, “Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep”—the innocent sleep, Sleep that knits up the raveled sleave of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath, Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast." I think this means that he can no longer sleep because of what he did. He cannot sleep at night and it is due to his guilty conscience. This happens to a lot of people in real life where they have done something so wrong that it gets into their heads and causes them lack of sleep and consciousness. Lady Macbeth questions him and his words. Macbeth then goes on to say, "I am afraid to think what I have done." With that being said, it seems that Macbeth is aware of something, but we know that he still doesn't know what is beneath.

Macbeth wants the throne forever, but he knows that his seat isn't so affixed. With this, Macbeth becomes very anxious. He begins to get very riled up and this is what I mean when his mind controls his thoughts and actions to cause him to experience these things. His hallucinations are in fact a result of Macbeth's guilty conscience and unconsciousness and it can be viewed as symbolism. We can see this in Act 2, Scene 1. "Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. I have thee not, and yet I see thee still. He draws his dagger. A bell rings. He exits. Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but A dagger of the mind, a false creation Proceeding from the heat- oppressèd brain? I see thee yet, in form as palpable As this which now I draw." What's happening here is that Macbeth is struggling to differentiate misapprehensions from reality. This is like an illusion and so is the scene where he sees Banquo's ghost. Theses illusions symbolize Macbeth's guilty conscious and unawareness of the unconscious. In that scene, the dagger is a symbol of what is real, and what is not, for Macbeth. Symbolism plays an important role in this play because it shows what is really going on deep down. It shows that a person can easily be influenced by their dreams and inner thoughts. That can take over and lead to two parts of a person, similar to a split identity. In the article about psychopathetic characters in Macbeth, Chiu explains speaks upon Freud's conclusion on Macbeth. He explains that Freud's conclusion is that Shakespeare tends to split a character into two dignitaries. I can see where he would come to this conclusion. I think that they are just a dominant duo. However, in the article by Marina Favila, she too kind of gathers the thoughts of the Macbeth's and writes about how they kind of feed off of each other in the play. It seems like they get into each other's heads. All this couple thinks of is death and killing. They don't necessarily have to be "one person", but together, they can make a very formidable team. It's not like Macbeth is trying to become a better person, per say, he wants to be the best person and reign forever. He doesn't want to get rid of the evilness.

When we are experiencing the unconscious, we don't essentially know what's going on and our minds are mutilated. Freud's research lets us know that the unconscious plays a major role in what we do, feel, and say all the time. This is found to be true in Shakespeare's play through his characters. The mind is a very powerful thing and the characters in this play have been victims of guilty consciousness.

In an article about "feeling criminal" in Macbeth, Kevin Curran explains that Macbeth is going through a sensible crime. "This is not to say that Macbeth does not think himself into the criminal event, but that the thinking he does he does with his body." (Curran).

I would like to agree and disagree with this point. I can see that Macbeth is feeling felonious and his consciousness is aiding in distributing that feeling by acting upon it, which leads him to perform criminal activities such as killing a man. In Act 4, scene 1, Macbeth plainly tells us this.

“To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:”. I think this means that as he thinks certain things, he needs to act them out as well. At the same time, he lets his mind do all the talking and it goes on and on. He lets his mind take control over every aspect of his life, and in my opinion, lots of things are taking place in his mind. It seems like there is a constant battle between imagining and reality. Chin-jung Chiu writes a journal about Freud on Shakespeare’s work, he focuses on the psychopathetic characters. “Freud first points out the bewildering phenomenon that “people occasionally fall ill precisely when a deeply-rooted and long-cherished wish has come to fulfillment. Freud goes further to suggest that it is not at all unusual for the ego to tolerate a wish as harmless so long as it exists in phantasy alone and seems remote from fulfillment, whereas the ego will defend itself hotly against such a wish as soon as it approaches fulfillment and threatens to become a reality.” (Chiu 42).

Throughout the play, Macbeth seems to have become “haunted” and we see that as the play progresses. His thoughts and condition gets worse, as it seems he has some sort of illness.

In reality, it’s probably just the guilty conscious and the effects of the unconscious messing with his mind. He fulfills the thought of getting rid of others so that he can become the one and only king. He cannot get this goal out of his haunted thoughts. It drives him to do more harm and commit crimes. This then leads him to create a very evil side of himself and his wife.

Freudian theories exists in many of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare shows us that the characters of Macbeth are very unaware of what’s below the surface. We know this because of the way they behave. This kind of relates to the phrase, “actions speak louder than words”. The actions of the characters of Macbeth are performing actions due to the feelings and thoughts that are inside, or below the surface. The characters in this play have some sort of difficulty distinguishing what is a dream/imagined and what is reality. They are unable to control what is under the surface, therefore, they partake in unusual actions. As a result of their doings, we are able to see that the unconscious; what’s below, gives the characters two sides to each of them, a good and an evil.