

Exploring Amir's Triple Personality from the Psychoanalytic Critical Perspective

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Abstract: *The Kite Runner* is the debut novel by Afghan-American writer Khaled Hosseini. The novel, with the first-person perspective, tells a story of an Afghan child in the United States who makes mistakes as a child and begins to try to redeem his soul as an adult. This paper aims to use Freud's Theory of Personality Structure to further explore the personality of Amir, the hero in *The Kite Runner*, from the id, ego and superego, so as to help people better understand the character image of Amir.

Keywords: Psychoanalytic Criticism; *The Kite Runner*; Personality Structure

1. Introduction

Afghan writer Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 to a wealthy family in Kabul, Afghanistan, and later fled to the United States with his father to escape the war. *The Kite Runner*, his first published novel, tells the first-person story of the mistakes made by the protagonist Amir in his youth and his spiritual redemption as an adult of his childhood mistakes. Similar to an autobiographical novel, Hosseini incorporated some of his own life experiences into the novel, with vivid characters and a shocking storyline, which was well acclaimed after publication. As a child, Amir was very eager to get his father's love, but his father was always hard on him. On the contrary, his father's love for Hassan, the son of a servant, aroused the jealousy of young Amir. The mentally unbalanced protagonist later used disgraceful means to frame Hassan, which eventually led to the sad departure of Hassan and his father Ali. Later, with the encouragement of his father's good friend Rahim Khan on his deathbed, Amir returned to Afghanistan to make up for the mistakes he had made.

2. Freud's psychoanalytic doctrine

Freud was one of the most influential scientists of the 20th century, and his psychoanalytic theory focused on the development of human psychological mechanisms. Since its inception, Freud, its advocate, had broken through the boundaries of clinical medicine and creatively applied it to the analysis of literary works. Freud's psychoanalytic criticism mainly includes: (1) the theory of the unconscious; (2) the doctrine of triple personality structure; (3) Oedipus complex; (4) the theory of dreams; (5) Literature art and daydreaming.^[1]

In 1923, he published the famous theoretical work *The Ego and Id*. In this book, Freud proposed the theory of personality structure, that is, the personality structure includes three levels: id, ego and superego. The id is at the bottom of the subconscious level, representing the individual's most primitive and direct desire, and is also the basis for building personality. It follows the Pleasure Principle and is based on satisfying needs. The ego is the most important force in the mental structure. First of all, the constraint of the reality principle acts between the id and the superego, and forms the interaction and balance with the external world. The superego, which is also a subconscious internalized embodiment of social morality, is responsible for suppressing the unreasonable demands of the self, and belongs to the highest state of personality structure, including conscience and self-ideals. Freud focused on the dynamics of the three parts, especially the way in which they clash.^[2] Based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this article attempts to analyze the character of the

protagonist Amir from the perspective of triple personality.

3. Amir's triple personality

3.1 "Id" – The dark side of Amir's humanity

The id, which refers to the primitive self, contains the basic desires, impulses, and life forces necessary for survival. The self is the source of all mental energy. The id acts according to the Pleasure Principle, which ignores the constraints of social morality and transcends external norms of behavior, and its only requirement is to pursue inner and external happiness and avoid earthly suffering. The young Amir's ego has been hovering between the desires of the id and the moral requirements of the superego, tormented, and eventually the superego is abandoned, and his id is satisfied by various means.^[3]

Compared with the simple and kind Hassan, Amir's heart was much deeper and more complex as a child. Amir could have been a kind child. However, because his father thought he was a weak child who could only read, his character went against his father's expectations, and his father would compare him with Hassan from time to time, which made Amir jealous of Hassan. Over time, this jealousy turned into resentment. On the other hand, Amir desperately longed for his father's love, believing that his father loves Hassan more than he loves him, as if he is not his father's son, Hassan is. It was under these complicated emotions that Amir's attitude towards Hassan reached the extreme. Although he considered Hassan a good friend, he believed that Hassan was "always just a servant." Subconsciously, he felt that he was the master, and what Hassan said "For you, a thousands times over", Amir took it for granted.

According to Freud's personality analysis, when the desires of the id are suppressed and conflicted, the ego will produce various self-defense mechanisms, such as projection mechanisms and so on.^[1] Projection is the mechanism by which some unpleasant thoughts, motives, desires, or emotions that are essentially part of oneself are projected onto others or things. Amir projects his pent-up emotions and desires onto Hassan, who spends his days and nights with him. The qualities that Amir lacks from himself but desperately desires to possess, such as decisiveness, bravery, defiance of blood and violence, which are appreciated by his father, are all present in Hassan. Hassan is only one of his own servants, but he receives special love from his father. And the doctor is specially invited to treat his illness. Hassan is happy every day, but Amir is often upset and entangled. The strong contrasts constantly remind Amir of the aspects of his own personality that dissatisfied both his father and himself, making him feel unpleasant and depressed. So Amir has a deep dislike and jealousy for Hassan. In the end, in the face of getting his father's love and Hassan's dignity, Amir finally chose the former, and Amir's most true "id" can also be seen here.

Young Amir, the id is always dominant. His choices are based on the principle of self-interest, to protect himself, sacrificing Hassan in exchange for victory and winning his father's love. Amir is selfish, cowardly and even despicable. From the analysis of Freud's triple personality structure, the young Amir is just a poor child who has been manipulated by the id, and his personality is unsound.

3.2 "Ego" – Amir's rational side

The ego is the part of self that performs thinking, feeling, judgment or memory. The function of the ego is to desire the satisfaction of the "id impulses", while protecting the whole organism from harm.^[1] The Reality Principle it follows is at the service of the id. A strong ego is able to face up to the "following happiness" of the id, and will not blindly hide and evade the mistakes made by the id for the sake of "self-esteem", honor, social norms, and moral customs of the "superego".

Amir's powerful ego can be formed because of the following three factors. First, Amir is a child with a conscience. Every time he teased Hassan or played a prank, he always felt extremely guilty, and wanted to do something to make amends. After the unforgivable mistake he made against Hassan, he has been living in pain and self-blame. Although Amir and Soraya have been married for fifteen years without children, he refuses to adopt a child. Amir's reason was that "maybe somewhere, somebody, because of something, decided to take away my right to be a father in retaliation for what I had done. Maybe it's my retribution, maybe it's deserved."

Second, Soraya's complementarity to his personality. Amir's wife, Soraya, confessed her inglorious past to Amir before

marriage, and gained Amir's understanding and tolerance. The reason why Amir can accept Soraya's past and love her deeply is closely related to his own crimes that he has always wanted to hide and lingered in his heart. He forgave Soraya because he understood the weaknesses and contradictions of human nature, the "difference in thought" when "sowing the fruit of evil", the inner torment when carrying sin. He also understood that it took great courage to speak up and face up to what she had done. Amir fervently hoped that one day he would have the courage to confess his crimes, and his crimes would be forgiven, and like Soraya, he would be able to untie his shackles and start a truly happy life.

Third, the support of Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan was a good friend of Amir's father, and he played the role of Amir's spiritual father throughout Amir's upbringing. When Amir was confused, he always gave him spiritual support in time, pulling Amir's superego to overcome the id. As he was about to reach the end of his life, Rahim Khan called Amir, "Come on. Here's the way to be good again."

In the process of saving Sohrab, Amir paid the price of blood, and the bright red blood flowing from Amir's body washed away Amir's former crimes, as well as the crimes of Amir's father, and even the "crimes" of the entire Afghan nation. It not only brought new life to Sohrab, but also purified Amir's soul, making Amir complete the redemption of himself.

3.3 "Superego" – the growth of Amir's mind

The superego is formed by the internalization of moral norms and the values of the social and cultural environment in the process of individual growth.^[1] At a higher level in the structure of personality, it is considered to be the judging body of personality. Its function is mainly to supervise power and regulate its own behavior. The superego is also largely unconscious, it requires the ego to satisfy the id in a socially acceptable way, and it follows Moral Principles.

In Freud's view, the superego comes from the influence of parents, teachers, etc., and the formation of the superego in children is actually the inheritance of the superego of parents and other educators.^[1] Amir lost his mother at an early age, and his father was the only guardian, which was an important condition affecting the formation of his personality. In fact, Amir's father in the novel plays the role of the superego incarnation. Due to the loss of his mother, his father became the model of the superego who could influence him the most. However, it was his father's excessively harsh requirements on Amir that eventually pushed Amir into the abyss of loss. It can be said that it is the harshness of the superego that once again leads to the imbalance of Amir's personality, making him further and further down the road of loss. In addition, the serious ethnic prejudice in Afghanistan at that time also affected Amir's personality development to a certain extent, making him always inevitably wear colored glasses when looking at things around him.

When Amir faces a difficult decisional situation of whether to save his brother Hassan's son, his id and superego enter the pinnacle of direct conflict: the ego of Amir desperately wants to maintain his rare peace and comfort, grasping everything that has not come easily. The moral call for atonement and salvation at the superego level is equally strong. The moral requirements and consciences of individual socialization tell him that he must save Sohrab for the sake of friendship with Hassan, for Hassan's selflessness and loyalty to himself, and to compensate for the harm he has done to Hassan. He remembers his sins once again, with deep repentance, he resolutely chose to face the difficulty and redeem himself bravely.

So when he was beaten by Assef, he felt that his sins were duly punished. Even in the end, he finally recognized his identity and the relationship between himself and Hassan, and no longer minded the emotional difference and understood this difference between the father and the two sons. Here Amir has completed the moral atonement as an individual, realized the superego of the individual personality, highlighted and transformed the ideal of self-conscience and moral achievement into reality. Amir also chased his own kite and became the person he really expected.

4. Conclusion

By using Freud's theory of triple personality structure to interpret Amir's personality in *The Kite Runner*, we can see his complex psychological changes and his personality development trajectory.

Many of us may be like Amir, when we were young and ignorant, driven by our id, to selfishly hurt those around us in order to satisfy our heart's desires. Out of concern for the world, mistakes are quietly buried in our heart, and in the end,

what lingers is the feeling of guilt that rises in the heart from time to time. Thus we lose the direction of the “kite” in our hearts. However, as long as we face up to our mistakes, take heart of grace sincerely and start anew, we will all be free from the shackles of harsh reality like Amir. In the end, all of us will have a truly strong ego, save ourselves from the sins of the past, and become happy kite runners.

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