

The Mirror of Hidden Desires: A Psychoanalytic Study of Characters in the Diamond Necklace

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Abstract

This study investigates the psychological dynamics of the main character, Mathilde Loisel, in Guy de Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace* using Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The study applied psychological criticism as the approach of the research and employed a library research as research method. The study used content analysis to examine how the character's thoughts and dialogues are structured through the interaction of the id, ego, and superego. The findings indicate that Mathilde's pronounced inclination towards luxury is indicative of the preeminence of the id, while the strategic choices in navigating reality are indicative of the presence of the ego. Eventually, the superego manifests in the moral decision to endure hardship as a form of redemption. This study demonstrated the efficacy of Freudian personality structure as a tool for literary character analysis, particularly in the context of realist fiction. This study contributes to the field of literary psychology by demonstrating how unconscious drives and identity conflicts are embedded in narrative structures.

Keywords: A Psychoanalytic Study, Diamond Necklace, Personality Structure.

INTRODUCTION

Literature reflects the inner condition of humans because it is born from the subjective experiences of the author, which are influenced by individual and social psychological dynamics. Psychological trauma during adolescence significantly shapes emotional development and identity formation (Khotimah, Aini, & Rohmana, 2023). At the same time, social structures and cultural expectations impose constraints that affect female autonomy and contribute to internalized conflicts, influencing character behavior and interpersonal dynamics in literature (Kuspiyah, Kurniati, & Febrianti, 2025). With this complex psychological background, authors often express inner conflicts and emotional tensions through their fictional works, projecting these psychological dynamics onto the characters and narratives they create (Alfarisi et al., 2022). Literature is an expression of inner life that undergoes aesthetic transformation through language (Richards, 2017). Furthermore, literary psychology also shows that authors often insert representations of personal experiences that are not directly expressed but rather conveyed through symbols, dialogue, and the actions of characters (Endraswara, 2016). These insights into the relationship between literature and the human psyche provide a framework for understanding how authors embed complex psychological dynamics within their works. Such psychological eruptions in literature are often interpreted as manifestations of internal conflict and unresolved desires within the human psyche (Ginting, 2021; Ahmadi, 2015). This concept is clearly illustrated in Guy de Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace*, where the character Mathilde Loisel becomes a prime example of how unresolved inner conflicts and repressed desires shape the trajectory of the narrative.

The main psychological tension experienced by Mathilde Loisel in *The Diamond Necklace* stems from the gap between the ideal self-image she has constructed and the social reality in which she finds herself. Mathilde imagines herself as part of the upper class, born for luxury, even though in reality she is the wife of an ordinary ministry employee who lives a modest life (De Maupassant, 1992). This ideal self-image is not merely a superficial desire for material possessions, but reflects a psychological structure driven by the need for symbolic recognition within the social order (Rahman et al., 2022; Yadav, 2019). According to Freud's theory, the ideal self-image is formed through

identification with values considered high in the social environment, and conflict arises when reality fails to meet these standards (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). In Mathilde's case, this tension manifests itself in feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and rejection of her ordinary family life. She does not feel "good enough" as herself, and the gap between her expectations and reality causes constant frustration. From a social psychology perspective, this conflict can also be understood as a form of cognitive dissonance, which is the inner discomfort that arises when personal beliefs do not align with objective reality (Ahmadi, 2015; Rosmila et al., 2020). Thus, Mathilde's failure to accept her social status is not merely an economic issue but a deep psychological problem rooted in an inner conflict (Izhar et al., 2023). This tension serves as the primary foundation for the subsequent conflicts in the story, including the impulsive actions she takes in pursuit of an image she has never truly possessed (Irawan, 2019; Yadav, 2019). The inner constellation experienced by Mathilde, comprising desire, denial, and impulsive actions, can be analysed more structurally through a psychoanalytic approach, particularly Freud's concept of personality: the id, the ego, and the superego.

One of the main foundations of psychoanalysis is the personality structure developed by Sigmund Freud, namely the id, ego, and superego (Ahmadi, 2019; Freud, 2014; Ratna, 2015). These three components play a constant and conflicting role in regulating human psychological dynamics. The id is the centre of instinctual drives oriented toward the immediate and irrational fulfilment of desires; the ego functions as a mediator operating according to the reality principle, while the superego represents moral values and social norms internalised since childhood (Ahmadi, 2015; Maftuhah, 2019; Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021). In this context, inner conflict arises when the id prompts the individual to fulfil desires that are opposed by the superego, and the ego is compelled to find a realistic compromise (Dani & Adji, 2021). The structure of the id, ego, and superego not only operates in real individuals but is also reflected in the dynamics of literary characters, where internal conflicts often represent the latent struggle between instinctual drives and social control (Handayani & Rahmawati, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022). For example, in many classical literary works, characters face moral dilemmas or make extreme decisions due to the dominance of one aspect of this personality structure (Bennett & Royle, 2023). Understanding the framework of the id, ego, and superego enables literary researchers to read texts more deeply as representations of human inner struggles. With this theoretical foundation, an analysis of Mathilde Loisel in *The Diamond Necklace* will reveal how these three structures work to drive and hinder her actions.

Although *The Diamond Necklace* has been widely discussed in classical literary studies, most research tends to highlight social, feminist, or narrative morality aspects without delving deeply into the psychological dynamics of the characters through the framework of classical Freudian psychoanalysis (Arrosyid et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2022). Previous studies have primarily focused on the irony of the story and criticism of the social structure of the French middle class in the 19th century through historical approaches (Nurhidayah & Prihantini, 2020). Unfortunately, few studies do not explore how Mathilde Loisel's internal conflict reflects the latent struggle between the id, ego, and superego as psychological structures that shape the character's motivations and actions. This gap in the existing literature suggests the need for a more nuanced exploration of the psychological dimensions of the character, particularly in terms of unconscious drives and identity crises. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by applying Freud's personality theory to analyze Mathilde Loisel's inner conflict and the psychological structure that drives her decisions in the narrative.

Based on the gaps identified in previous studies, this research aims to analyse the psychological dynamics of the character Mathilde Loisel in Guy de Maupassant's short story *The Diamond Necklace* through a classical Freudian psychoanalytic approach, specifically the id, ego, and superego. The primary focus of this study is to describe how the character's inner tension is expressed through their speech and quotation, which reflect the conflict between instinctual drives and internalised social norms. This study also seeks to reveal unconscious mechanisms, such as repression and projection, that appear in the narrative as a form of defence against a reality that does not align with the character's ideal self-image. Using this approach, the study is expected to make a conceptual

contribution to the enrichment of character studies in literature while expanding the scope of literary and psychological interpretation. This approach can also serve as an alternative to classical literary analysis, which tends to be thematic or structural, by offering a deeper understanding of the psychological dimensions of characters.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen as the research method because it is capable of exploring the depth of the characters' psychology in "The Necklace," emphasizing an in-depth interpretation of their actions, behaviours, and words that can reveal their personality structures (Ahmadi, 2019; Ratna, 2015). This approach enables a broader understanding of the character's inner conflicts, which is the primary focus of this study. The short story the necklace was chosen as the object of study because the character Mathilde Loisel depicts significant psychological tension, which can be analyzed through psychoanalytic criticism. This work also reflects social and individual issues relevant to the discussion of inner conflict between personal desires and social norms. This study employs Freud's personality structure theory, which comprises the id, ego, and superego, to analyze how these three components influence the behaviour and decisions of the character Mathilde Loisel (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). The primary focus of this study is to explore how the tension between these three components is reflected in the moral and psychological decisions made by the character, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of the inner conflict experienced by Mathilde. The data analysis technique involves collecting data through content analysis, which entails identifying themes related to personality structure in the text, such as the depiction of the id, ego, and superego in the character's dialogue, actions, and narration (Endaswara, 2013). After relevant quotations are collected, the data are grouped according to Freud's Theory and analyzed to identify patterns of behaviour that illustrate psychological tension. To ensure validity and reliability, this study uses a verification procedure through cross-checking between quotations and established analytical categories (Endaswara, 2013; Ratna, 2015). The results of the analysis will be presented based on thematic categories related to Freud's personality structure (id, ego, superego) and how each of these aspects develops throughout the story. The presentation of results will include interpretations of Mathilde Loisel's actions and words, which will be mapped to psychoanalytic components to explore deeper psychological layers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Personality of Id Mathilde Loisel

The author describes the psychological condition of the main character, Mathilde Loisel, who is trapped in a lower-middle-class life despite her potent fantasy of living in luxury.

"She suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born for all the delicacies and all the luxuries." (P.1)

The phrase "she suffered ceaselessly" not only implies a complaint about socio-economic conditions but more deeply expresses an unfulfilled unconscious drive the need to enjoy luxury, beauty, and social attention, which she considers a right that should have been hers "from birth." From a Freud psychoanalytic, this statement is a powerful representation of the id, the part of the psychic structure that houses instinctual drives and primitive desires (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021). The id operates irrationally, instinctively, and hedonistically, guided by the pleasure principle and always demanding immediate gratification without regard for reality or social norms (Dani & Adji, 2021).

In Mathilde's case, the desire for luxury is not based on realistic needs but on idealized fantasies formed without an objective basis. The feeling of being "born for all the delights and luxuries" reflects how the id within Mathilde dominates her perception of herself and the world; she not only wants luxury but believes she is entitled to it a belief that is not controlled by the ego or superego. This statement is considered part of the id domain because it contains unregulated desires that do not take reality into

account which is the fact that Mathilde is the wife of a low-ranking employee. It is emotional, intense, and repetitive.

Mathilde Loisel visited Madame Forestier's house and was invited to choose jewelry from Madame Foreister's closet. Among the many choices, her gaze fell on a diamond necklace. Mathilde's physical and emotional reactions, her heart pounding and her hands trembling with excessive desire, revealed the peak of an irrational attraction that originated from her subconscious.

"Her heart began to beat with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it." (P.2)

Mathilde's desire for the necklace is not merely aesthetic. It serves as a symbol of social status and her ideal image, something she craves but has never actually possessed. The phrase "immoderate desire" literally means that the desire is excessive, immeasurable, and uncontrollable, the main characteristics of the id. The trembling of her body and hands shows that the conflict between desire and reality is beginning to create internal tension, but there is no ego intervention yet to calm it down.

From the perspective of Freud's psychoanalytic Theory, this quote represents the dominance of the id; the part of the psyche that contains instinctual impulses, aggression, and basic desires that operate outside of consciousness (Rahman et al., 2022). The id operates on the pleasure principle, driving individuals to satisfy their desires immediately and absolutely without regard for norms, ethics, or social reality and contains intense, impulsive drives that are not controlled by logic (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021). It shows no consideration for reality or the consequences of actions, and there is no moral resistance or social norms.

Personality of Ego Mathilde Loisel

Mathilde Loisel felt disappointed because she didn't have a suitable dress to attend a very exclusive party. After crying and feeling desperate as an emotional reaction driven by her desire to look perfect, her husband offered a solution: to buy her a new dress.

"Finally, she replied, hesitatingly: 'I do not know exactly, but I think I could manage it with four hundred francs.'" (P.1)

The expression "I think I could manage it with four hundred francs" shows a process of compromise. Mathilde does not immediately mention a high or unrealistic figure. She seems to be thinking strategically, adjusting her desires to the limits of what is possible, namely the amount of money that her husband is likely to accept. The word "hesitatingly" is also psychologically important, showing that she is not entirely driven by impulsive desire but is consciously negotiating with reality.

Mathilde's statement indicates ego work, which is part of the personality structure in Freud's psychoanalytic theory that serves to mediate between the id's impulses and the demands of reality. The ego operates according to the reality principle, which considers what is possible, appropriate, and achievable within the context of real-world conditions (Maftuhah, 2019). Additionally, the character is balancing the desire for appearance with the existing economic situation and is using rational considerations and social calculations characteristic of ego function, acting not impulsively but with careful deliberation.

Mathilde and her husband realized that the necklace borrowed from Madame Forestier was missing. This situation triggered an emotional crisis and immense pressure. In this situation, Mathilde's husband took control of the situation and proposed a pragmatic solution: to lie for technical reasons to buy time.

"You must write to your friend," said he, "that you have broken the clasp of her necklace and that you are having it mended." (P.6)

Loisel's words reveal the workings of the ego, which is the part of the human psyche responsible for dealing with reality rationally, regulating reactions to the demands of the id, and adjusting behavior to external norms (Maftuhah, 2019). In addition, the above statement suggests telling a small lie, not to deceive maliciously, but as a mechanism to delay consequences, allowing time to find a better solution.

Personality of Superego Mathilde Loisel

Mathilde and her husband failed to find the lost necklace and decided to replace it with a similar one that was very expensive. In that situation, Mathilde no longer complained or avoided the issue. She accepted the harsh reality and began living in extreme poverty to pay off the debt over ten years, a decision that demanded great sacrifice and moral discipline.

"She would pay it. They dismissed their servant; they changed their lodgings; they rented a garret under the roof." (P.3)

This quote represents the work of the superego, which is the aspect of personality that functions as a moral compass and internalizes social values, ethics, and cultural ideals (Ahmadi, 2015; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). The superego suppresses egoistic drives and directs individuals to act in accordance with norms, a sense of responsibility, and guilt (Ahmadi, 2015; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020).

Mathilde's decision to "pay her own way" and endure extreme suffering, such as firing her maid, moving to the attic, and doing manual labor, was not a momentary emotional response but rather a long-term moral commitment. This shows that Mathilde was not merely driven by fear or practical logic (ego) but by a sense of internal obligation and guilt, which are core elements of the superego.

Mathilde Loisel finally meets with Madame Forestier after ten years of poverty caused by replacing a necklace that turned out to be fake. This sentence is an outburst of pent-up emotions, but not ordinary anger; rather, it is an accumulation of guilt, moral burden, and inner suffering that she has carried for a decade.

"Yes, I have had days hard enough, since I have seen you, days wretched enough and that because of you!" (P.4)

The use of the phrase "because of you!" is not simply blaming others but contains a mechanism of moral projection, in which Mathilde transfers her deep guilt outside herself because she is unable to face the reality that all her suffering is the result of her own impulsive decisions and social illusions.

This quote marks the dominance of the superego, which is the aspect of personality in Freud's theory that regulates morality, social norms, and internal ideals inherited from the environment or authoritative figures (Ahmadi, 2015; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). The superego appears in two forms: conscience and the ideal ego. This sentence revealed how Mathilde's conscience speaks through self-abuse and acknowledgment of the suffering she endures because of her belief that she must "pay" for her mistakes.

DISCUSSION

The Role of the Superego and Internalized Guilt in Mathilde Loisel

Mathilde Loisel's psychological transformation throughout *The Diamond Necklace* vividly illustrates the power of the superego as an internalized moral authority. After losing the necklace and choosing to replace it with a costly replica, Mathilde accepts a harsh reality marked by extreme poverty and personal sacrifice. This decision is not merely practical but deeply rooted in an internalized sense of guilt, a manifestation of the superego's dominance. The superego functions to enforce moral standards and social norms learned since childhood, generating feelings of guilt and shame when those standards are violated (Ahmadi, 2015; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). In Mathilde's case, this internal moral compass compels her to atone for her perceived wrongdoing through prolonged suffering: dismissing

the servant, moving to a garret, and laboring tirelessly to repay the debt. This self-imposed punishment exemplifies the superego's capacity to induce guilt so intense that it shapes behavior over a decade.

Furthermore, Mathilde's outburst upon meeting Madame Forestier "Yes, *I have had days hard enough, because of you!*" (p.4), the statement reflected a psychological process of projection, where her internalized guilt and shame are displaced onto another person. Unable to fully acknowledge her responsibility, Mathilde externalizes blame, a defense mechanism consistent with superego conflict (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021). This internalized guilt is central to understanding Mathilde's inner conflict, highlighting how deeply social and moral expectations are embedded within the psyche, influencing actions and self-perception. The superego's pressure thus creates an enduring tension that fuels both her suffering and moral resolve, underscoring the complexity of her character's psychological dynamics.

Repression as an Unconscious Defense Mechanism in Mathilde Loisel

Beyond the overt psychological dynamics of the id, ego, and superego, Mathilde Loisel's character exemplifies repression as a key unconscious defense mechanism. Repression functions as the unconscious blocking of painful realities and emotions that Mathilde finds intolerable. One prominent form of repression is the suppression of her true emotional reality. For instance, the narrative states, "*She suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born for all the delicacies and all the luxuries*" (p.1), the statement reflected her denial of her actual modest social status. Instead of consciously facing this painful truth, Mathilde retreats into fantasies of wealth and grandeur, repressing feelings of shame and dissatisfaction (Ahmadi, 2015; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). Moreover, Mathilde demonstrates repression of personal responsibility after losing the necklace. Rather than confronting the consequences of her impulsive action, she and her husband choose to conceal the truth, as shown in the line: "*You must write to your friend,*" said he, "*that you have broken the clasp of her necklace and that you are having it mended*" (p.6). This act of concealment indicates repression, shielding Mathilde's conscious awareness from the full weight of guilt and accountability (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021). Additionally, repression manifests in Mathilde's avoidance of anxiety and fear related to her social decline and economic hardship. Her eagerness to borrow expensive jewelry to attend the ball despite financial limitations suggests an unconscious denial of reality, leading to impulsive decisions that exacerbate her plight (Ahmadi, 2015).

Previous psychoanalytic literary studies emphasize repression as a fundamental defense mechanism whereby characters avoid distressing emotional truths to protect their psyche (Rachman & Wahyuniarti, 2021; Syam & Rosaliza, 2020). Mathilde's repression underscores how unconscious processes complicate her psychological development and narrative trajectory, enriching the depth of psychoanalytic character analysis.

The Symbolic Meaning of the Necklace in Psychoanalytic Perspective

The diamond necklace in Maupassant's story functions as a powerful symbol that transcends its material value, embodying the complex psychological dynamics within Mathilde Loisel. From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, the necklace represents Mathilde's unconscious desires, fantasies, and conflicts.

Firstly, the necklace symbolizes the id's longing for immediate gratification and luxury—an instinctual desire for status, beauty, and social recognition that Mathilde craves but cannot attain in reality. Her intense emotional and physical reaction upon seeing the necklace, "*Her heart began to beat with an immoderate desire*". *Her hands trembled as she took it*"(p.2), the statement reflected the overpowering force of the id's impulses, which override rational thought and social constraints. Secondly, the necklace acts as a site of ego conflict, where Mathilde negotiates between her desires and the harsh social reality. Borrowing the necklace to maintain appearances is a strategic compromise, illustrating the ego's attempt to mediate between wish fulfillment and practical limitations.

In conclusion, the necklace also embodies the superego's moral judgement and consequent

guilt. The loss of the necklace and the decade-long debt repayment become symbolic penance for Mathilde's transgression against social norms and self-acceptance. This suffering reflects the superego's internalized moral standards, compelling Mathilde to endure hardship as a form of self-punishment. Moreover, the revelation that the necklace is fake adds a layer of tragic irony and symbolic deception, underscoring the illusory nature of social status and material wealth. This ironic twist highlights the tension between fantasy and reality, a core theme in psychoanalytic criticism emphasizing how unconscious desires and defenses shape human behavior. Thus, the necklace serves as a multifaceted psychoanalytic symbol encapsulating the interplay of desire, reality, and morality in Mathilde's psyche. Expanding the symbolic interpretation deepens the understanding of the narrative's psychological layers and enriches the literary analysis through the Freudian lens.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the psychological dynamics of Mathilde Loisel in *The Diamond Necklace* are predominantly controlled by the conflict between the id, ego, and superego personality structures as formulated by Sigmund Freud. Mathilde's desire for a luxurious life and social recognition reflects the strong and uncontrolled work of the id. On the other hand, the ego functions as a bridge to reality, evident in her efforts to compromise with economic limitations and strategic actions to avoid the immediate consequences of losing the necklace. However, as the story unfolds, the superego takes over through guilt and moral redemption, manifested in Mathilde's decision to live in poverty as a form of responsibility.

This finding suggests that classical literary works like *The Diamond Necklace* contain deep psychological layers that can be unraveled through a classical psychoanalytic approach. This study not only provides a psychological reinterpretation of the character of Mathilde but also demonstrates how Freud's personality structure can be operationalized in the interpretation of fictional characters, particularly within the context of social pressure, identity, and defense mechanisms. Thus, this study contributes to expanding the horizons of psychology-based literary criticism and opens up possibilities for further research on other literary characters using a similar approach, including the exploration of more complex unconscious mechanisms such as repression, sublimation, or projection in realist fiction narratives.

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