

**Dynamics of Id, Ego, and Superego in Adolescence in  
*The Prince of Mist* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon**

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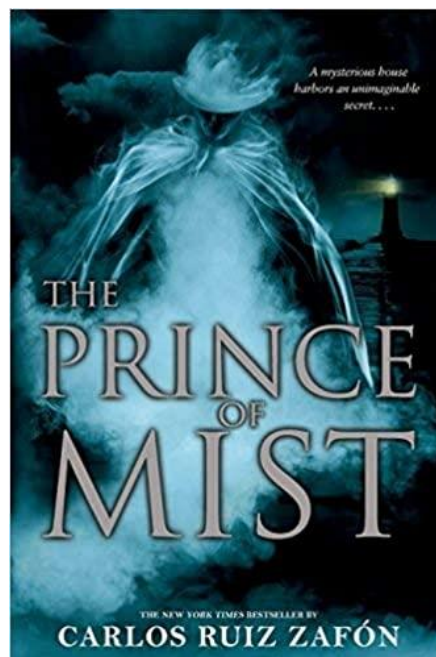
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**Abstract**

This paper addresses various facets of psychological changes observed in adolescence when they are propelled into a dangerous or uncertain situation. Based on Freud's tripartite structure of Ego psychology, the characters are studied concerning their age and other external factors. It also shows the dynamics of the Id, Ego and Superego in three adolescent characters in the novel *The Prince of Mist* (1993) written by the Spanish novelist

Carlos Ruiz Zafon and translated into English by Lucia Graves.

The plot is set during the Second World War and the young protagonist Max, his sister Alicia and their friend Roland are stuck in a ballgame unknown to them. While trying to unravel the mystery they face their greatest villain, their fears. These characters witness a series of ill-fated events that forces them to be on edge. The conflict between their moral and realistic visions results in impulsive actions which are examined using the three structures proposed by Sigmund Freud i.e., Id, Ego, and Superego.

**Keywords:** *The Prince of Mist*, Carlos Ruiz Zafon, Ego, adolescence, repression, transference, psychoanalysis.

Literature has embellished the world experiences in several shades for better understanding and to project the artistry. Likewise, scholars and writers began inspecting human values and psyche to answer the most substantial question, 'who am I'? If culture, economy, and harmony are the centre of society, then in the case of a human being, psyche is the vortex for development. The human psyche is the powerhouse which promotes the functions such as thinking, understanding, analysing and interpreting efficiently. The biological process navigates parallel to mental growth and presents the development of an individual. Psychologists have proved the certainty in the involvement of characteristics that differs and gives uniqueness during the development phase, which is a continuous process from neonatal to adulthood, however, the growth ceases after adolescence but is not an end for development.

Sigmund Freud proposed various concepts and ideas concerning the human mind and their psychological characterisation. Similarly, he formulated a way to understand the human psyche, called psychoanalysis or depth psychology. After Freud, many post-Freudian theorists worked on his theory on diverse aspects such as biological growth, society, culture, and so on. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, a psychological theory aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the interaction of the conscious and unconscious elements in the mind.

In literature, however, psychoanalytic criticism is used to understand and interpret the meaning behind the actions and their consequences from different perspectives. To comprehend the meaning behind a situation or an individual's action, the human psyche is considered the principal factor for analysis. Freud introduced the tripartite model for the structure of ego psychology, i.e., id, ego and superego. In addition to this, Freud in his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" introduces the concept of "Traumatic Neurosis" (Freud 6). These concepts aid in knowing the cause and repercussions that emerge due to the conflict of the ego and the superego in the characters of the novel, *The Prince of Mist* by the Spanish author Carlos Ruiz Zafon.

Zafon is known for his enigmatic style of writing portraying the hybridity with the inclusion of mystery, horror, and adventure. He, particularly, focuses on the geographical description which enhances the reader to picturize the situation and the scenery. Here, the novel has a silver lining of the Spanish Civil War, which forces the Carver family to move towards the coastal area. The principal characters in this novel are Max, Alicia and Roland belong to the formal operating stage or the adolescent stage and its main characteristics are curiosity and independence.

Max and Alicia were heartbroken after learning about their relocation. Though, there was a change in Max's spirit when he befriended Roland, a native of the place. The Fleischmann house which they have moved projects a mysterious reception, which also includes the abandoned garden in their backyard. Roland welcomes Max and Alicia to his sea adventure, where they collect articles from the abandoned ship at the end of the coast. But momentarily these adventures evolved to be intense as they entangle themselves in dangerous situations resulting in unanticipated repercussions. These incidents prompt the characters to make decisions that may or may not have the desired effect, which is comprehended through psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis, here, helps in the understanding the significance and characteristics of a particular developmental stage. The formal operating stage is between the onset of puberty and the beginning of adulthood. Some major factors can be drawn through natural analysis i.e., the changes in physical growth which vary according to gender. A girl who reaches a particular age desperately waits for her menstruation to start and, in the case of boys, the development of facial hairs and growth spurts. These transitions are the onset process of how they act, feel, think and perceive the world.

Mental growth and development are social and culturally conditioned as it creates a platform for the maturation of a child's psyche. However, it becomes an obligation for a parent to provide a supportive environment for the child's evolution into a responsible and functional member of society. Besides, the intermediate stage of adulthood creates a stupor, leading them to be in an unidentified status. During this process, the child faces certain confusions and doubts, as they are encountered by the society's rules and beliefs as well as their conscience. The invisible pressure laid upon them forces them to understand and make decisions on their own, which introduces them to the facet of 'self'. In the novel, Max's parents treat him as an adult by letting him decide and voice his opinions. For instance, "Well, Max. What is the verdict?' 'It's too soon to tell', he answered. 'It looks like a model, like those ones you see in a toy-shop window.' 'Maybe it is.' His mother smiled" (Zafon 8). Here, his mother gives him the liberty to voice his opinion and acclimatise to the new changes. To support this, P. Van Heeswyk in his work *Analyzing Adolescence* comments: "Adolescence begins with biology and ends with psychology. It is kick-started by puberty and cruises slowly to a halt at adult identity, the point at which the petrol is getting low, and we need to think about saving it for the long, straight road ahead" (qtd. in Horne 38).

The objective of cognitive development is analysed with Freud's tripartite structure of ego. First, the id or the unconscious consists of the dark and inaccessible parts of one's personality, commonly known as the "Pleasure-principle" (Freud 1). It conceptualizes biological unconscious drives and repressed thoughts. In simpler terms, it is the primitive and instinctual part of the human psyche. The id concerts with gratification without any regard to the external world.

Freud clarifies that the ego can only be modified but not nullified. Due to the id's "lack of concern for external reality and safety, the ego assumes the role of an executing agent" (Boag 2). Ego compromises the pleasure-seeking, id by modifying an impulsive action into socially acceptable behaviour. The ego, which is the conscious part of the mind, works on the reality principle. It is structured, organised and controls the compilation and unification process taking place in the human psyche. It does not only initiate the action but also pays attention to the safety of the individual and equal importance to the close kins. It is the empathetic part of the psyche which values the emotions of others and acts according to them. Ego prioritises the actions according to their importance and the anticipated outcome. This can be understood by the following lines from the novel:

'You see?' his father replied excitedly. 'We've only just arrived and already there's work for us.'

His mother gave a faint smile, as she always did when Maximillian Caver had one of his bursts of radiant optimism, but Max could see a hint ...

'Everything's going to be alright, Mum,' he said, feeling like an idiot the moment, he'd spoken. (Zafon 9)

The psyche of an adolescent is in the progress of establishing the self and searching for one's identity. The child is provided with a podium to constitute his/her decisions. Despite the natural effort of ego, strife might emerge between the conscience and morals during a crisis. Here, the moralistic part of the mind is the third element in the tripartite structure, the superego. It can be conceptualized in terms of the moral belief that guides the ego in possible sources. The superego can be considered, metaphorically, as a purifier, as it analyses the situation and acts based on moral values and concepts. Before considering an action, the ego must work on the instinctual satisfaction of the id and look for the dangers of the external world along with the super-ego's objective of staying in line with society. The superego when failing to establish the moral values in action pushes the ego to punish itself for its betrayal through the feeling of guilt and shame. However, during the stages of adolescence, as pointed out earlier, emerges various struggles in decision making. As the ego and superego compete for the upper hand during an impasse, this might lead to catastrophe. The ego which acts as the gateway struggles to process the situation and deliver a reaction. These struggles might result in certain reactions during or after the time of crisis,

known as traumatic neurosis.

Freud in his essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” characterizes traumatic neurosis by three synonymous expressions: apprehension, fear and fright. He describes “apprehension (Angst) which denotes a condition as of anticipation of danger and preparation for it, even though it is an unknown one.” For instance, Max and Alicia’s distress upon seeing the Fleischmann’s beach house. Then, “fear (Furcht) requires a distinct object of which one is afraid.” The same way, Max and Alicia’s unnerving feeling when they saw Irina’s cat and the clown statue in the garden. Finally, “fright (Schreck) is the name of the condition to which one is reduced if one encounters a danger without being prepared for it; it lays stress on the element of surprise” (Freud 6). Max, Alicia and Roland never anticipated that their summer vacation might change their life, they also never did realise that a diabolical magician, Dr Cain, would come to claim Roland’s life. Throughout the novel, Max and Alicia are affected by the eerie feeling of the house and they suppressed their urge to make others know about their thoughts.

Even though Max, Alicia and Roland were warned about the dangers prevailing in the ocean and near the abandoned ship, their curiosity crippled their thinking, and this is the id’s way of satisfaction. This is Max, Alicia and Roland in a state of apprehension, anticipating the danger. Max who wanted his sister to come out of her angered state included her to explore the ship.

At the beginning of the novel, Alicia exhibits the signs of “transference, the phenomenon whereby the patient under analysis redirects the emotions recalled in analysis towards the psychoanalyst” (Barry 98). Alicia, herein, is frustrated by her father’s decision, hence she transposes her anger towards her mother for supporting her little sister, Irina and criticizes her love for the cat. The intensity of her anger can be witnessed from these lines, “We’ve only just got here and already you’ve picked up some disgusting beast. God knows what it is infested with’ Alicia snapped” (Zafon 10).

Later in the novel, Max and Alicia started observing some strange activities that propelled them into a state of fright and panic: the cat, the circus crew statues in the garden, their sister’s accident and finally their dreams. Max, Alicia and Roland go to the beach to have fun, when Roland proposes the idea of going to Orpheus, the sunken ship again, Max hesitates but he wants Alicia to be happy again like the way she was in their old town. “Max was trying to think of a crushing reply – he thought it was a terrible idea to go driving around *Orpheus* once more – but Alicia answered it first. ‘We’ll be there,’ she said softly. A sixth sense told Max that the plural she had used was just her way of being polite” (Zafon 120). The transparency proves that Max gave into his id’s satisfaction rather than the ego’s safety blanket. However, during their adventure to the bottom of the ocean, Max panicked when he saw a dark distorted figure following Roland. Even after reaching the surface, Max was alarmed by the image he witnessed.

Similarly, when Max, Alicia and Roland go back to the ship to retrieve a sextant, Roland is caught by a paranormal figure that haunts the sunken ship, Orpheus. Max, who was also caught in an emotional dilemma, jumped into the ocean to rescue his friend and Alicia's lover, Roland. At this point, the urge to save Roland was more important than thinking about his safety.

Before jumping in, he exchanged one last glance with Alicia. His sister was clearly caught between her wishes to save Roland and the panic at the thought that her brother might share the same fate. Before common sense could dissuade them both, Max jumped into the waters of the bay above the hull of the Orpheus. (Zafon 150)

From the above expression, the stifle between the ego and super-ego can be identified. The moralistic part wants to obstruct the ego which sympathises, as Roland was his friend and attempts to consider the instinctual drive to save him. Considering they are adolescent, they are capable of hypothetical reasoning and can think about abstract concepts. During the medieval period, a child was considered a small adult. However, Aristotle, in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, argued that children, unlike adults, are not capable of true happiness because they have not developed the ability to use their intelligence to guide their actions. This substantiates that Max, Alicia and Roland's inability to realize the consequences of their action was the reason for their impulsive and uncontrolled behaviours which resulted in a catastrophe.

William Stekel, in *The Depths of the Soul: Psycho-analytical studies*, comments about friendship in the chapter 'Childhood Friendship': "Let no one say that it is an easy matter to read the souls of children! That their emotions are simple, that their soul's an open book! We can discover all the puzzling roots of love, even in the friendships of children, e.g., sympathy, cruelty, desire, humility, and subjection" (74). Even though Max saves Roland, all three were traumatised by the incident.

When they approached Roland's grandfather, they were astonished by the deeply buried secrets. In reality, Roland was the son of the Fleischmann couple who was declared dead. Roland, in the past, almost drowned in the hands of a notorious and cunning Magician, Dr Cain. But when he was rescued, he remembered nothing including his identity. This is the way of the unconscious blocking the unwanted and traumatic event from remembering or surfacing. Freud named the term "Repression" (Barry 97), a defence mechanism which tries to minimize the feeling of anxiety by blocking or forgetting the unwanted and tragic events. The Fear creeps in, as the individual was not ready to encounter the object of fear, here, the Magician.

When the magician returned to claim Roland, the result was not the same as the earlier attempts, the conflict between the id and super-ego dominated the ego. Unless there

is a balance between the two extremes, the id and super-ego, the ego fails in the execution of the desired outcome. The imbalance might cause internal conflict as well as undesired events or situations. Max and Alicia's discomfort due to relocation was displaced by their friend Roland. However, the curiosity and impertinence toward Roland's grandfather's words were the cause of the catastrophe.

Each character tries to cope with their loss and guilt in different ways. Max feels guilty about the death of his potential best friend, Roland, as he was not able to save his friend. Even when the ego forced him to jump out of the boat, neither his selfish id nor the moralistic superego intertwined with the decision.

When drawing his mental growth, Max has grown from the state of being indifferent to his sister to the brother he wanted to be. He tries to ground himself with the memories of Roland and the lighthouse which has become significant for Roland and his grandfather. Alicia lost her to-be-boyfriend; she feels an extreme amount of guilt as Roland was killed when he tried to save Alicia from the Magician. This loss resulted in guilt, repressed thoughts and unresolved questions. Alicia's ego longs for Roland and pushes her to consider the emotions of the people around her, but the resultant surplus of guilt and the subsequent distancing of self arises from the victory of the dominant superego. Alicia suppresses her thoughts and emotions as the ego and superego work simultaneously to bring peace to her mind. She realizes the importance of family as a result of the guilt and loss. This is the ego's path of neutralizing the disturbance or conflict.

The Ego must act as the intermediate bridge between the id and superego. It is the ego's part to consider the id's desire along with the clearance of the super-ego's moral values and produce the result that satisfies both id and ego. This concludes to say that, there will be a constant conflict between pleasure, safety and emotion and finally the social values and constructs. But this will be achieved when the individual or the child grows to understand and interpret their thoughts and act accordingly. However, when the child is forced into a fight or flight situation, the result would be based on the nature of their surroundings, individuals influencing them and the society they live in. Many other external forces such as their peers, neighbours and so on, also play a major role in the growth and development of a child's mentality. Children learn the basics of vision and imitation; therefore, one can understand the change in a child's behaviour when there is a change in the surrounding.

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