

Standard Edition of the Complete Works of

# Sigmund Freud

Freud, S. (1916). [SEN309a1]Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 309-333

## Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work *Sigmund Freud*

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## Editor's Note to "Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work"

*James Strachey*

[SEN309a3](a) GERMAN EDITIONS:

[SEN309a4]1916 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit *Imago*, 4 (6), 317-336.

[SEN309a5]1918 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit S.K.S.N., 4, 521-552. (1922, 2nd ed.)

[SEN309a6]1924 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit G.S., 10, 287-314.

[SEN309a7]1924 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit Dichtung und Kunst, 59-86.

[SEN309a8]1925 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit Almanach, 1926 21-6. (Section I only.)

[SEN309a9]1935 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit Psychoan. Pädagog., 9, 193-4. (Section III only.)

[SEN309a10]**1946 Einige Charaktertypen Aus Der Psychoanalytischen Arbeit G.W., 10, 364-391.**

[SEN309a11](b) ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

[SEN309a12]'Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work' 1925 C.P., 4, 318-344. (Tr. E. C. Mayne.)

[SEN309a13]The present translation is based on the one published in 1925.

[SEN309a14]These three essays were published in the last issue of *Imago* for the year 1916. The third of them, although the shortest, has produced as many repercussions as any of Freud's non-medical writings, for it has thrown an entirely fresh light on the problems of the psychology of crime.

[SEN309a15]Extracts from the translation of this work published in 1925 were included in Rickman's *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud* (1937, 111-17).

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## Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work

[SEN309a17]WHEN a doctor carries out the psycho-analytic treatment of a neurotic, his interest is by no means directed in the first instance to the patient's character. He would much rather know what the symptoms mean, what instinctual impulses are concealed behind them and are satisfied by them, and what course was followed by the mysterious path that has led from the instinctual wishes to the symptoms. But the technique which he is obliged to follow soon compels him to direct his immediate curiosity towards other objectives. He observes that his investigation is threatened by resistances set up against him by the patient, and these resistances he may justly count as part of the latter's character. This now acquires the first claim on his interest.

[SEN309a18]What opposes the doctor's efforts is not always those traits of character which the patient recognizes in himself and which are attributed to him by people round him. Peculiarities in him which he had seemed to possess only to a modest degree are often brought to light in surprisingly increased intensity, or attitudes reveal themselves in him which had not been betrayed in other relations of life. The pages which follow will be devoted to describing and tracing back a few of these surprising traits of character.

### I The 'Exceptions'

[SEN309a20]PSYCHO-ANALYTIC work is continually confronted with the task of inducing the patient to renounce an immediate and directly attainable yield of pleasure. He is not asked to renounce all pleasure; that could not, perhaps, be expected of any human being, and even religion is obliged to support its demand that earthly pleasure shall be set aside by promising that it will provide instead an incomparably greater amount of superior pleasure in another world. No, the patient is only asked to

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[SEN309a21]renounce such satisfactions as will inevitably have detrimental consequences. His privation is only to be temporary; he has only to learn to exchange an immediate yield of pleasure for a better assured, even though a postponed one. Or, in other words, under the doctor's guidance he is asked to make the advance from the pleasure principle to the reality principle by which the mature human being is distinguished from the child. In this educative process, the doctor's clearer insight can hardly be said to play a decisive part; as a rule, he can only tell his patient what the latter's own reason can tell him. But it is not the same to know a thing in one's own mind and to hear it from someone outside. The doctor plays the part of this effective outsider; he makes use of the influence which one human being exercises over another. Or—recalling that it is the habit of psychoanalysis to replace what is derivative and etiolated by what is original and basic—let us say that the doctor, in his educative work, makes use of one of the components of love. In this work of after-education, he is probably doing no more than repeat the process which made education of any kind possible in the first instance. Side by side with the exigencies of life, love is the great educator; and it is by the love of those nearest him that the incomplete human being is induced to respect the decrees of necessity and to spare himself the punishment that follows any infringement of them.

[SEN309a22]When in this way one asks the patient to make a provisional renunciation of some pleasurable satisfaction, to make a sacrifice, to show his readiness to accept some temporary suffering for the sake of a better end, or even merely to make up his mind to submit to a necessity which applies to everyone, one comes upon individuals who resist such an appeal on a special ground. They say that they have renounced enough and suffered enough, and have a claim to be spared any further demands; they will submit no longer to any disagreeable necessity, for they are *exceptions* and, moreover, intend to remain so. In one such patient this claim was magnified into a conviction that a special providence watched over him, which would protect him from any painful sacrifices of the sort. The doctor's arguments will achieve nothing against an inner confidence which expresses itself as strongly as this; even *his* influence, indeed, is powerless at first, and it becomes clear to him that he must discover the sources from which this damaging prepossession is being fed.

[SEN309a23]Now it is no doubt true that everyone would like to consider himself an 'exception' and claim privileges over others. But precisely because of this there must be a particular reason, and one not universally present, if someone actually proclaims himself an exception and behaves as such. This reason may be of more than one kind; in the cases I investigated I succeeded in discovering a common peculiarity in the earlier experiences of these patients' lives. Their neuroses were connected with some experience or suffering to which they had been subjected in their earliest childhood, one in respect of which they knew themselves to be guiltless, and which they could look upon as an unjust disadvantage imposed upon them. The privileges that they claimed as a result of this injustice, and the rebelliousness it engendered, had contributed not a little to intensifying the conflicts leading to the outbreak of their neurosis. In one of these patients, a woman, the attitude towards life which I am discussing came to a head when she learnt that a painful organic trouble, which had hindered her from attaining her aims in life, was of congenital origin. So long as she looked upon this trouble as an accidental and late acquisition, she bore it patiently; as soon as she found that it was part of an innate inheritance, she became rebellious. The young man who believed that he was watched over by a special providence had in his infancy been the victim of an accidental infection from his wet-nurse, and had spent his whole later life making claims for compensation, an accident pension, as it were, without having any idea on what he based those claims. In his case the analysis, which constructed this event out of obscure mnemonic residues and interpretations of the symptoms, was confirmed objectively by information from his family.

[SEN309a24]For reasons which will be easily understood I cannot communicate very much about these or other case histories. Nor do I propose to go into the obvious analogy between deformities of character resulting from protracted sickness in childhood and the behaviour of whole nations whose past history has been full of suffering. Instead, however, I will take the opportunity of pointing to a figure created by the greatest of poets—a figure in whose character the claim to be an exception is closely bound up with and is motivated by the circumstance of congenital disadvantage.

[SEN309a25]In the opening soliloquy to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Gloucester, who subsequently becomes King, says:

[SEN309a26]But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,  
[SEN309a27]Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;  
[SEN309a28]I that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty  
[SEN309a29]To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;  
[SEN309a30]I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,  
[SEN309a31]Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,  
[SEN309a32]Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
[SEN309a33]Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
[SEN309a34]And that so lamely and unfashionable,  
[SEN309a35]That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;  
[SEN309a36]And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,  
[SEN309a37]To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
[SEN309a38]I am determined to prove a villain,  
[SEN309a39]And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

[SEN309a40]At a first glance this tirade may perhaps seem unrelated to our present theme. Richard seems to say nothing more than: 'I find these idle times tedious, and I want to enjoy myself. As I cannot play the lover on account of my deformity, I will play the villain; I will intrigue, murder and do anything else I please.' Such a frivolous motivation could not but stifle any stirring of sympathy in the audience, if it were not a screen for something much more serious. Otherwise the play would be psychologically impossible, for the writer must know how to furnish us with a secret background of sympathy for his hero, if we are to admire his boldness and adroitness without inward protest; and such sympathy can only be based on understanding or on a sense of a possible inner fellow-feeling for him

[SEN309a41]I think, therefore, that Richard's soliloquy does not say everything; it merely gives a hint, and leaves us to fill in what it hints at. When we do so, however, the appearance of frivolity vanishes, the bitterness and minuteness with which Richard has depicted his deformity make their full effect, and we clearly perceive the fellow-feeling which compels our sympathy even with a villain like him. What the soliloquy thus means is: 'Nature has done me a grievous wrong in denying me the beauty of form which wins human love. Life owes me reparation for this, and I will see that I get it. I have a right to be an exception, to disregard the scruples by which others let themselves be

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[SEN309a42]held back. I may do wrong myself, since wrong has been done to me.' And now we feel that we ourselves might become like Richard, that on a small scale, indeed, we are already like him. Richard is an enormous magnification of something we find in ourselves as well. We all think we have reason to reproach Nature and our destiny for congenital and infantile disadvantages; we all demand reparation for early wounds to our narcissism, our self-love. Why did not Nature give us the golden curls of Balder or the strength of Siegfried or the lofty brow of genius or the noble profile of aristocracy? Why were we born in a middle-class home instead of in a royal palace? We could carry off beauty and distinction quite as well as any of those whom we are now obliged to envy for these qualities.

[SEN309a43]It is, however, a subtle economy of art in the poet that he does not permit his hero to give open and complete expression to all his secret motives. By this means he obliges us to supplement them; he engages our intellectual activity, diverts it from critical reflection and keeps us firmly identified with his hero. A bungler in his place would give conscious expression to all that he wishes to reveal to us, and would then find himself confronted by our cool, untrammelled intelligence, which would preclude any deepening of the illusion.

[SEN309a44]Before leaving the 'exceptions', however, we may point out that the claim of women to privileges and to exemption from so many of the importunities of life rests upon the same foundation. As we learn from psycho-analytic work, women regard themselves as having been damaged in infancy, as having been undeservedly cut short of something and unfairly treated; and the embitterment of so many daughters against their mother derives, ultimately, from the reproach against her of having brought them into the world as women instead of as men.

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## II [SEN309a45]Those Wrecked By Success

[SEN309a46]PSYCHO-ANALYTIC work has furnished us with the thesis that people fall ill of a neurosis as a result of *frustration*.<sup>1</sup> What is meant is the frustration of the satisfaction of their libidinal wishes, and some digression is necessary in order to make the thesis intelligible. For a neurosis to be generated there must be a conflict between a person's libidinal wishes and the part of his personality we call his ego, which

is the expression of his instinct of self-preservation and which also includes his *ideals* of his personality. A pathogenic conflict of this kind takes place only when the libido tries to follow paths and aims which the ego has long since overcome and condemned and has therefore prohibited for ever; and this the libido only does if it is deprived of the possibility of an ideal ego-syntonic satisfaction. Hence privation, frustration of a real satisfaction, is the first condition for the generation of a neurosis, although, indeed, it is far from being the only one.

[SEN309a47]So much the more surprising, and indeed bewildering, must it appear when as a doctor one makes the discovery that people occasionally fall ill precisely when a deeply-rooted and long-cherished wish has come to fulfilment. It seems then as though they were not able to tolerate their happiness; for there can be no question that there is a causal connection between their success and their falling ill.

[SEN309a48]I had an opportunity of obtaining an insight into a woman's history, which I propose to describe as typical of these tragic occurrences. She was of good birth and well brought-up, but as quite a young girl she could not restrain her zest for life; she ran away from home and roved about the world in search of adventures, till she made the acquaintance of an artist who could appreciate her feminine charms but could also divine, in spite of what she had fallen to, the finer qualities she possessed. He took her to live with him, and she proved a faithful companion to him, and seemed only to need social rehabilitation to achieve complete happiness. After many years of life together,

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1 [SEN309a49][See 'Types of Onset of Neurosis' (1912c).]

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[SEN309a50]he succeeded in getting his family reconciled to her, and was then prepared to make her his legal wife. At that moment she began to go to pieces. She neglected the house of which she was now about to become the rightful mistress, imagined herself persecuted by his relatives, who wanted to take her into the family, debarred her lover, through her senseless jealousy, from all social intercourse, hindered him in his artistic work, and soon succumbed to an incurable mental illness.

[SEN309a51]On another occasion I came across the case of a most respectable man who, himself an academic teacher, had for many years cherished the natural wish to succeed the master who had initiated him into his own studies. When this older man retired, and his colleagues informed him that it was he who was chosen as successor, he began to hesitate, depreciated his merits, declared himself unworthy to fill the position designed for him, and fell into a melancholia which unfitted him for all activity for some years.

[SEN309a52]Different as these two cases are in other respects, they yet agree in this one point: the illness followed close upon the fulfilment of a wish and put an end to all enjoyment of it.

[SEN309a53]The contradiction between such experiences and the rule that what induces illness is frustration is not insoluble. It disappears if we make a distinction between an *external* and an *internal* frustration. If the object in which the libido can find its satisfaction is withheld *in reality*, this is an external frustration. In itself it is inoperative, not pathogenic, until an internal frustration is joined to it. This latter must proceed from the ego, and must dispute the access by the libido to other objects, which it now seeks to get hold of. Only then does a conflict arise, and the possibility of a neurotic illness, i.e. of a substitutive satisfaction reached circuitously by way of the repressed unconscious. Internal frustration is potentially present, therefore, in every case, only it does not come into operation until external, real frustration has prepared the ground for it. In those exceptional cases in which people are made ill by success, the internal frustration has operated by itself; indeed it has only made its appearance after an external frustration has been replaced by fulfilment of a wish. At first sight there is something strange about this; but on closer consideration we shall reflect 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

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[SEN309a54]fulfilment, whereas the ego will defend itself hotly against such a wish as soon as it approaches fulfilment and threatens to become a reality. The distinction between this and familiar situations in neurosis-formation is merely that ordinarily it is internal intensifications of the libidinal cathexis that turn the phantasy, which has hitherto been thought little of and tolerated, into a dreaded opponent; while in these cases of ours the signal for the outbreak of conflict is given by a real external change.

[SEN309a55]Analytic work has no difficulty in showing us that it is forces of conscience which forbid the subject to gain the long hoped-for advantage from the fortunate change in reality. It is a difficult task, however, to discover the essence and origin of these judging and punishing trends, which so often surprise us by their existence where we do not expect to find them. For the usual reasons I shall not discuss what we know or conjecture on the point in relation to cases of clinical observation, but in relation to figures which great writers have created from the wealth of their knowledge of the mind.

[SEN309a56]We may take as an example of a person who collapses on reaching success, after striving for it with single-minded energy, the figure of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Beforehand there is no hesitation, no sign of any internal conflict in her, no endeavour but that of overcoming the scruples of her ambitious and yet tender-minded husband. She is ready to sacrifice even her womanliness to her murderous intention, without reflecting on the decisive part which this womanliness must play when the question afterwards arises of preserving the aim of her ambition, which has been attained through a crime.

*[SEN309a57]Come, you spirits*

[SEN309a58]That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
[SEN309a59]...Come to my woman's breasts,  
[SEN309a60]And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers!  
(Act I, Sc. 5.)

[SEN309a61]... I have given suck, and know  
[SEN309a62]How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
[SEN309a63]I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
[SEN309a64]Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,  
[SEN309a65]And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you  
[SEN309a66]Have done to this.  
(Act I, Sc. 7.)

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[SEN309a67]One solitary faint stirring of reluctance comes over her before the deed:

[SEN309a68]...Had he not resembled  
[SEN309a69]My father as he slept, I had done it ...  
(Act II, Sc. 2.)

[SEN309a70]Then, when she has become Queen through the murder of Duncan, she betrays for a moment something like disappointment, something like disillusionment. We cannot tell why.

[SEN309a71]...Nought's had, all's spent,  
[SEN309a72]Where our desire is got without content:  
[SEN309a73]'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,  
[SEN309a74]Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.  
(Act III, Sc. 2.)

[SEN309a75]Nevertheless, she holds out. In the banqueting scene which follows on these words, she alone keeps her head, cloaks her husband's state of confusion and finds a pretext for dismissing the guests. And then she disappears from view. We next see her in the sleep-walking scene in the last Act, fixated to the impressions of the night of the murder. Once again, as then, she seeks to put heart into her husband:

*[SEN309a76]'Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when*

*none can call our power to account?'*

(Act V, Sc. 1.)

[SEN309a77]She hears the knocking at the door, which terrified her husband after the deed. But at the same time she strives to 'undo the deed which cannot be undone'. She washes her hands, which are blood-stained and smell of blood, and is conscious of the futility of the attempt. She who had seemed so remorseless seems to have been borne down by remorse. When she dies, Macbeth, who meanwhile has become as inexorable as she had been in the beginning, can only find a brief epitaph for her:

[SEN309a78]*She should have died hereafter;*

[SEN309a79]*There would have been a time for such a word.*

(Act V, Sc. 5.)

[SEN309a80]And now we ask ourselves what it was that broke this character which had seemed forged from the toughest metal? Is it only disillusionment—the different aspect shown by the accomplished deed<sup>1</sup>—and are we to infer that even in Lady Macbeth

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1 [SEN309a81][An allusion to two lines in Schiller's *Die Braut von Messina*, IV, 5.]

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[SEN309a82]an originally gentle and womanly nature had been worked up to a concentration and high tension which could not endure for long, or ought we to seek for signs of a deeper motivation which will make this collapse more humanly intelligible to us?

[SEN309a83]It seems to me impossible to come to any decision. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a *pièce d'occasion*, written for the accession of James, who had hitherto been King of Scotland. The plot was ready-made, and had been handled by other contemporary writers, whose work Shakespeare probably made use of in his customary manner. It offered remarkable analogies to the actual situation. The 'virginal' Elizabeth, of whom it was rumoured that she had never been capable of child-bearing and who had once described herself as 'a barren stock',<sup>1</sup> in an anguished outcry at the news of James's birth, was obliged by this very childlessness of hers to make the Scottish king her successor. And he was the son of the Mary Stuart whose execution she, even though reluctantly, had ordered, and who, in spite of the clouding of their relations by political concerns, was nevertheless of her blood and might be called her guest.

[SEN309a84]The accession of James I was like a demonstration of the curse of unfruitfulness and the blessings of continuous generation. And the action of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is based on this same contrast.<sup>2</sup>

[SEN309a85]The Weird Sisters assured Macbeth that he himself should be king, but to Banquo they promised that his children should succeed to the crown. Macbeth is incensed by this decree of destiny. He is not content with the satisfaction of his own ambition. He wants to found a dynasty—not to have murdered for the benefit of strangers. This point is overlooked if Shakespeare's play is regarded only as a tragedy of ambition. It is clear that Macbeth cannot live for ever, and thus there is but one way for him to invalidate the part of the prophecy which opposes him—namely, to have children himself who can succeed

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1 [SEN309a86]Cf. *Macbeth*, Act III, Sc. 1:

[SEN309a87]Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,

[SEN309a88]And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,

[SEN309a89]Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,

[SEN309a90]No son of mine succeeding ...

2 [SEN309a91][Freud had already suggested this in the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 4, 266.]

[SEN309a92]him. And he seems to expect them from his indomitable wife:

[SEN309a93]Bring forth men-children only!

[SEN309a94]For thy undaunted mettle should compose

[SEN309a95]Nothing but males....

(Act I, Sc. 7.)

[SEN309a96]And equally it is clear that if he is deceived in this expectation he must submit to destiny; otherwise his actions lose all purpose and are transformed into the blind fury of one doomed to destruction, who is resolved to destroy beforehand all that he can reach. We watch Macbeth pass through this development, and at the height of the tragedy we hear Macduff's shattering cry, which has so often been recognized to be ambiguous and which may perhaps contain the key to the change in Macbeth:

[SEN309a97]*He has no children!*

(Act IV, Sc. 3.)

[SEN309a98]There is no doubt that this means: 'Only because he is himself childless could he murder my children.' But more may be implied in it, and above all it might lay bare the deepest motive which not only forces Macbeth to go far beyond his own nature, but also touches the hard character of his wife at its only weak point. If one surveys the whole play from the summit marked by these words of Macduff's, one sees that it is sown with references to the father-children relation. The murder of the kindly Duncan is little else than parricide; in Banquo's case, Macbeth kills the father while the son escapes him; and in Macduff's, he kills the children because the father has fled from him. A bloody child, and then a crowned one, are shown him by the witches in the apparition scene; the armed head which is seen earlier is no doubt Macbeth himself. But in the background rises the sinister form of the avenger, Macduff, who is himself an exception to the laws of generation, since he was not born of his mother but ripp'd from her womb.

[SEN309a99]It would be a perfect example of poetic justice in the manner of the talion if the childlessness of Macbeth and the barrenness of his Lady were the punishment for their crimes against the sanctity of generation—if Macbeth could not become a father because he had robbed children of their father and a father of his children, and if Lady Macbeth suffered the unsexing she had demanded of the spirits of murder. I believe Lady Macbeth's

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[SEN309a100]illness, the transformation of her callousness into penitence, could be explained directly as a reaction to her childlessness, by which she is convinced of her impotence against the decrees of nature, and at the same time reminded that it is through her own fault if her crime has been robbed of the better part of its fruits.

[SEN309a101]In Holinshed's Chronicle (1577), from which Shakespeare took the plot of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is only once mentioned as the ambitious wife who instigates her husband to murder in order that she may herself become queen. There is no mention of her subsequent fate and of the development of her character. On the other hand, it would seem that the change of Macbeth's character into a bloodthirsty tyrant is ascribed to the same motives as we have suggested here. For in Holinshed *ten years* pass between the murder of Duncan, through which Macbeth becomes king, and his further misdeeds; and in these ten years he is shown as a stern but just ruler. It is not until after this lapse of time that the change begins in him, under the influence of the tormenting fear that the prophecy to Banquo may be fulfilled just as the prophecy of his own destiny has been. Only then does he contrive the murder of Banquo, and, as in Shakespeare, is driven from one crime to another. It is not expressly stated in Holinshed that it was his childlessness which urged him to these courses, but enough time and room is given for that plausible motive. Not so in Shakespeare. Events crowd upon us in the tragedy with breathless haste so that, to judge by the statements made by the characters in it, the course of its action covers about *one week*.<sup>1</sup> This

acceleration takes the ground from under all our constructions of the motives for the change in the characters of Macbeth and his wife. There is no time for a long-drawn-out disappointment of their hopes of offspring to break the woman down and drive the man to defiant rage; and the contradiction remains that though so many subtle interrelations in the plot, and between it and its occasion, point to a common origin of them in the theme of childlessness, nevertheless the economy of time in the tragedy expressly precludes a development of character from any motives but those inherent in the action itself.

[SEN309a102]What, however, these motives can have been which in so short a space of time could turn the hesitating, ambitious man

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page 377  
1 [SEN309a103]Darmesteter (1881, Ixxv).

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[SEN309a104]into an unbridled tyrant, and his steely-hearted instigator into a sick woman gnawed by remorse, it is, in my view, impossible to guess. We must, I think, give up any hope of penetrating the triple layer of obscurity into which the bad preservation of the text, the unknown intention of the dramatist, and the hidden purport of the legend have become condensed. But I should not subscribe to the objection that investigations like these are idle in face of the powerful effect which the tragedy has upon the spectator. The dramatist can indeed, during the representation, overwhelm us by his art and paralyse our powers of reflection; but he cannot prevent us from attempting subsequently to grasp its effect by studying its psychological mechanism. Nor does the contention that a dramatist is at liberty to shorten at will the natural chronology of the events he brings before us, if by the sacrifice of common probability he can enhance the dramatic effect, seem to me relevant in this instance. For such a sacrifice is justified only when it merely interferes with probability,<sup>1</sup> and not when it breaks the causal connection; moreover, the dramatic effect would hardly have suffered if the passage of time had been left indeterminate, instead of being expressly limited to a few days.

[SEN309a105]One is so unwilling to dismiss a problem like that of *Macbeth* as insoluble that I will venture to bring up a fresh point, which may offer another way out of the difficulty. Ludwig Jekels, in a recent Shakespearean study,<sup>2</sup> thinks he has discovered a particular technique of the poet's, and this might apply to *Macbeth*. He believes that Shakespeare often splits a character up into two personages, which, taken separately, are not completely understandable and do not become so until they are brought together once more into a unity. This might be so with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. In that case it would of course be pointless to regard her as an independent character and seek to discover the motives for her change, without considering the Macbeth who completes her. I shall not follow this clue any further, but I should, nevertheless, like to point out something which

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 10, Page 378

1 [SEN309a106]As in Richard III's wooing of Anne beside the bier of the King whom he has murdered.

2 [SEN309a107][This does not appear to have been published. In a later paper on *Macbeth* Jekels (1917) barely refers to this theory, apart from quoting the present paragraph. In a still later paper, on 'The Psychology of Comedy', Jekels (1926) returns to the subject, but again very briefly.]

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[SEN309a108]strikingly confirms this view: the germs of fear which break out in Macbeth on the night of the murder do not develop further in *him* but in *her*.<sup>1</sup> It is he who has the hallucination of the dagger before the crime; but it is she who afterwards falls ill of a mental disorder. It is he who after the murder hears the cry in the house: 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep ...' and so 'Macbeth shall sleep no more'; but we never hear that *he* slept no more, while the Queen, as we see, rises from her bed and, talking in her sleep, betrays her guilt. It is he who stands helpless with bloody hands, lamenting that 'all great Neptune's ocean' will not wash them clean, while she comforts him: 'A little water clears us of this deed'; but later it

is she who washes her hands for a quarter of an hour and cannot get rid of the bloodstains: 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.' Thus what he feared in his pangs of conscience is fulfilled in her; she becomes all remorse and he all defiance. Together they exhaust the possibilities of reaction to the crime, like two disunited parts of a single psychical individuality, and it may be that they are both copied from a single prototype.

[SEN309a109]If we have been unable to give any answer to the question why Lady Macbeth should collapse after her success, we may perhaps have a better chance when we turn to the creation of another great dramatist, who loves to pursue problems of psychological responsibility with unrelenting rigour.

[SEN309a110]Rebecca Gamvik, the daughter of a midwife, has been brought up by her adopted father, Dr. West, to be a freethinker and to despise the restrictions which a morality founded on religious belief seeks to impose on the desires of life. After the doctor's death she finds a position at Rosmersholm, the home for many generations of an ancient family whose members know nothing of laughter and have sacrificed joy to a rigid fulfilment of duty. Its occupants are Johannes Rosmer, a former pastor, and his invalid wife, the childless Beata. Overcome by 'a wild, uncontrollable passion'<sup>2</sup> for the love of the high-born Rosmer, Rebecca resolves to remove the wife who stands in her way, and to this end makes use of her 'fearless, free' will, which is restrained by no scruples. She contrives that Beata shall read a

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1 [SEN309a111]Cf. Darmesteter (**1881, lxxv**).

2 [SEN309a112][The quotations are based on William Archer's English translation.]

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[SEN309a113]medical book in which the aim of marriage is represented to be the begetting of offspring, so that the poor woman begins to doubt whether her own marriage is justifiable. Rebecca then hints that Rosmer, whose studies and ideas she shares, is about to abandon the old faith and join the 'party of enlightenment'; and after she has thus shaken the wife's confidence in her husband's moral integrity, gives her finally to understand that she, Rebecca, will soon leave the house in order to conceal the consequences of her illicit intercourse with Rosmer. The criminal scheme succeeds. The poor wife, who has passed for depressed and irresponsible, throws herself from the path beside the mill into the mill-race, possessed by the sense of her own worthlessness and wishing no longer to stand between her beloved husband and his happiness.

[SEN309a114]For more than a year Rebecca and Rosmer have been living alone at Rosmersholm in a relationship which he wishes to regard as a purely intellectual and ideal friendship. But when this relationship begins to be darkened from outside by the first shadow of gossip, and at the same time tormenting doubts arise in Rosmer about the motives for which his wife put an end to herself, he begs Rebecca to become his second wife, so that they may counter the unhappy past with a new living reality (Act II). For an instant she exclaims with joy at his proposal, but immediately afterwards declares that it can never be, and that if he urges her further she will 'go the way Beata went'. Rosmer cannot understand this rejection; and still less can we, who know more of Rebecca's actions and designs. All we can be certain of is that her 'no' is meant in earnest.

[SEN309a115]How could it come about that the adventuress with the 'fearless, free will', who forged her way ruthlessly to her desired goal, should now refuse to pluck the fruit of success when it is offered to her? She herself gives us the explanation in the fourth Act: '*This* is the terrible part of it: that now, when all life's happiness is within my grasp—my heart is changed and my own past cuts me off from it.' That is to say, she has in the meantime become a different being; her conscience has awakened, she has acquired a sense of guilt which debars her from enjoyment.

[SEN309a116]And what has awakened her conscience? Let us listen to her herself, and then consider whether we can believe her entirely. 'It is the Rosmer view of life—or your view of life at any rate—that has infected my will.... And made it sick. Enslaved it to

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[SEN309a117]laws that had no power over me before. You—life with you—has ennobled my mind.’

[SEN309a118]This influence, we are further to understand, has only become effective since she has been able to live alone with Rosmer: ‘In quiet—in solitude—when you showed me all your thoughts without reserve—every tender and delicate feeling, just as it came to you—*then* the great change came over me.’

[SEN309a119]Shortly before this she has lamented the other aspect of the change: ‘Because Rosmersholm has sapped my strength. My old fearless will has had its wings clipped here. It is crippled! The time is past when I had courage for anything in the world. I have lost the power of action, Rosmer.’

[SEN309a120]Rebecca makes this declaration after she had revealed herself as a criminal in a voluntary confession to Rosmer and Rector Kroll, the brother of the woman she has got rid of. Ibsen has made it clear by small touches of masterly subtlety that Rebecca does not actually tell lies, but is never entirely straightforward. Just as, in spite of all her freedom from prejudices, she has understated her age by a year, so her confession to the two men is incomplete, and as a result of Kroll's insistence it is supplemented on some important points. Hence it is open to us to suppose that her explanation of her renunciation exposes one motive only to conceal another.

[SEN309a121]Certainly, we have no reason to disbelieve her when she declares that the atmosphere of Rosmersholm and her association with the high-minded Rosmer have ennobled—and crippled—her. She is here expressing what she knows and has felt. But this is not necessarily all that has happened in her, nor need she have understood all that has happened. Rosmer's influence may only have been a cloak, which concealed another influence that was operative, and a remarkable indication points in this other direction.

[SEN309a122]Even after her confession, Rosmer, in their last conversation which brings the play to an end, again beseeches her to be his wife. He forgives her the crime she has committed for love of him. And now she does not answer, as she should, that no forgiveness can rid her of the feeling of guilt she has incurred from her malignant deception of poor Beata; but she charges herself with another reproach which affects us as coming strangely from this freethinking woman, and is far from deserving the importance which Rebecca attaches to it: ‘Dear—never speak

[SEN309a123]of this again! It is impossible! For you must know, Rosmer, I have a—a past behind me.’ She means, of course, that she has had sexual relations with another man; and we do not fail to observe that these relations, which occurred at a time when she was free and accountable to nobody, seem to her a greater hindrance to the union with Rosmer than her truly criminal behaviour to his wife.

[SEN309a124]Rosmer refuses to hear anything about this past. We can guess what it was, though everything that refers to it in the play is, so to speak, subterranean and has to be pieced together from hints. But nevertheless they are hints inserted with such art that it is impossible to misunderstand them.

[SEN309a125]Between Rebecca's first refusal and her confession something occurs which has a decisive influence on her future destiny. Rector Kroll arrives one day at the house on purpose to humiliate Rebecca by telling her that he knows she is an illegitimate child, the daughter of the very Dr. West who adopted her after her mother's death. Hate has sharpened his perceptions, yet he does not suppose that this is any news to her. ‘I really did not suppose you were ignorant of this, otherwise it would have been very odd that you should have let Dr. West adopt you ...’ ‘And then he takes you into his house—as soon as your mother dies. He treats you harshly. And yet you stay with him. You know that he won't leave you a halfpenny—as a matter of fact you got only a case of books—and yet you stay on; you bear with him; you nurse him to the last.’ ... ‘I attribute your care for him to the natural filial instinct of a daughter. Indeed, I

believe your whole conduct is a natural result of your origin.’

[SEN309a126]But Kroll is mistaken. Rebecca had no idea at all that she could be Dr. West’s daughter. When Kroll began with dark hints at her past, she must have thought he was referring to something else. After she has gathered what he means, she can still retain her composure for a while, for she is able to suppose that her enemy is basing his calculations on her age, which she had given falsely on an earlier visit of his. But Kroll demolishes this objection by saying: ‘Well, so be it, but my calculation may be right, none the less; for Dr. West was up there on a short visit the year before he got the appointment.’ After this new information, she loses her self-possession. ‘It is not true!’ She walks about wringing her hands. ‘It is impossible. You want to

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[SEN309a127]cheat me into believing it. This can never, never be true. It cannot be true. Never in this world!—’ Her agitation is so extreme that Kroll cannot attribute it to his information alone.

[SEN309a128]‘KROLL: *But, my dear Miss West—why in Heaven’s name are you so terribly excited? You quite frighten me. What am I to think—to believe—?*

[SEN309a129]‘REBECCA: *Nothing. You are to think and believe nothing.*

[SEN309a130]‘KROLL: *Then you must really tell me how you can take this affair—this possibility—so terribly to heart.*

[SEN309a131]‘REBECCA (*controlling herself*): *It is perfectly simple, Rector Kroll. I have no wish to be taken for an illegitimate child.*’

[SEN309a132]The enigma of Rebecca’s behaviour is susceptible of only one solution. The news that Dr. West was her father is the heaviest blow that can befall her, for she was not only his adopted daughter, but had been his mistress. When Kroll began to speak, she thought that he was hinting at these relations, the truth of which she would probably have admitted and justified by her emancipated ideas. But this was far from the Rector’s intention; he knew nothing of the love-affair with Dr. West, just as she knew nothing of Dr. West’s being her father. She *cannot* have had anything else in her mind but this love-affair when she accounted for her final rejection of Rosmer on the ground that she had a past which made her unworthy to be his wife. And probably, if Rosmer had consented to hear of that past, she would have confessed half her secret only and have kept silence on the more serious part of it.

[SEN309a133]But now we understand, of course, that this past must seem to her the more serious obstacle to their union—the more serious crime.

[SEN309a134]After she has learnt that she has been the mistress of her own father, she surrenders herself wholly to her now overmastering sense of guilt. She makes the confession to Rosmer and Kroll which stamps her as a murderess; she rejects for ever the happiness to which she has paved the way by crime, and prepares for departure. But the true motive of her sense of guilt, which results in her being wrecked by success, remains a secret. As we have seen, it is something quite other than the atmosphere of Rosmersholm and the refining influence of Rosmer.

[SEN309a135]At this point no one who has followed us will fail to bring forward an objection which may justify some doubts. Rebecca’s first refusal of Rosmer occurs before Kroll’s second visit, and

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[SEN309a136]therefore before his exposure of her illegitimate origin and at a time when she as yet knows nothing of her incest—if we have rightly understood the dramatist. Yet this first refusal is energetic and

seriously meant. The sense of guilt which bids her renounce the fruit of her actions is thus effective before she knows anything of her cardinal crime; and if we grant so much, we ought perhaps entirely to set aside her incest as a source of that sense of guilt.

[SEN309a137]So far we have treated Rebecca West as if she were a living person and not a creation of Ibsen's imagination, which is always directed by the most critical intelligence. We may therefore attempt to maintain the same position in dealing with the objection that has been raised. The objection is valid: before the knowledge of her incest, conscience was already in part awakened in Rebecca; and there is nothing to prevent our making the influence which is acknowledged and blamed by Rebecca herself responsible for this change. But this does not exempt us from recognizing the second motive. Rebecca's behaviour when she hears what Kroll has to tell her, the confession which is her immediate reaction, leave no doubt that then only does the stronger and decisive motive for renunciation begin to take effect. It is in fact a case of multiple motivation, in which a deeper motive comes into view behind the more superficial one. Laws of poetic economy necessitate this way of presenting the situation, for this deeper motive could not be explicitly enunciated. It had to remain concealed, kept from the easy perception of the spectator or the reader; otherwise serious resistances, based on the most distressing emotions, would have arisen, which might have imperilled the effect of the drama.

[SEN309a138]We have, however, a right to demand that the explicit motive shall not be without an internal connection with the concealed one, but shall appear as a mitigation of, and a derivation from, the latter. And if we may rely on the fact that the dramatist's conscious creative combination arose logically from unconscious premisses, we may now make an attempt to show that he has fulfilled this demand. Rebecca's feeling of guilt has its source in the reproach of incest, even before Kroll, with analytical perspicacity, has made her conscious of it. If we reconstruct her past, expanding and filling in the author's hints, we may feel sure that she cannot have been without some inkling of the

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[SEN309a139]intimate relation between her mother and Dr. West. It must have made a great impression on her when she became her mother's successor with this man. She stood under the domination of the Oedipus complex, even though she did not know that this universal phantasy had in her case become a reality. When she came to Rosmersholm, the inner force of this first experience drove her into bringing about, by vigorous action, the same situation which had been realized in the original instance through no doing of hers—into getting rid of the wife and mother, so that she might take her place with the husband and father. She describes with a convincing insistence how, against her will, she was obliged to proceed, step by step, to the removal of Beata.

[SEN309a140]'You think then that I was cool and calculating and self-possessed all the time! I was not the same woman then that I am now, as I stand here telling it all. Besides, there are two sorts of will in us, I believe! I wanted Beata away, by one means or another; but I never really believed that it would come to pass. As I felt my way forward, at each step I ventured, I seemed to hear something within me cry out: No farther! Not a step farther! And yet I *could* not stop. I *had* to venture the least little bit farther. And only one hair's-breadth more. And then one more—and always one more. And then it happened.—That is the way such things come about.'

[SEN309a141]That is not an embellishment, but an authentic description. Everything that happened to her at Rosmersholm, her falling in love with Rosmer and her hostility to his wife, was from the first a consequence of the Oedipus complex—an inevitable replica of her relations with her mother and Dr. West.

[SEN309a142]And so the sense of guilt which first causes her to reject Rosmer's proposal is at bottom no different from the greater one which drives her to her confession after Kroll has opened her eyes. But just as under the influence of Dr. West she had become a freethinker and despiser of religious morality, so she is transformed by her love for Rosmer into a being of conscience and nobility. This much of the mental processes within her she herself understands, and so she is justified in describing Rosmer's influence as the motive for her change—the motive that had become accessible to her.

[SEN309a143]The practising psycho-analytic physician knows how frequently, or how invariably, a girl who enters a household as

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[SEN309a144]servant, companion or governess, will consciously or unconsciously weave a day-dream, which derives from the Oedipus complex, of the mistress of the house disappearing and the master taking the newcomer as his wife in her place.<sup>1</sup> *Rosmersholm* is the greatest work of art of the class that treats of this common phantasy in girls. What makes it into a tragic drama is the extra circumstance that the heroine's day-dream had been preceded in her childhood by a precisely corresponding reality.<sup>2</sup>

[SEN309a145]After this long digression into literature, let us return to clinical experience—but only to establish in a few words the complete agreement between them. Psycho-analytic work teaches that the forces of conscience which induce illness in consequence of success, instead of, as normally, in consequence of frustration, are closely connected with the Oedipus complex, the relation to father and mother—as perhaps, indeed, is our sense of guilt in general.<sup>3</sup>

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1 [SEN309a146][Cf. the case of Miss Lucy R. in the *Studies on Hysteria* (**1895d**), *Standard Ed.*, **2**, **116** ff.]

2 [SEN309a147]The presence of the theme of incest in *Rosmersholm* has already been demonstrated by the same arguments as mine in Otto Rank's extremely comprehensive *Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage* (**1912**, [**404-5**]).

3 [SEN309a148][Some twenty years later, in his Open Letter to Romain Rolland describing his first visit to the Acropolis at Athens (**1936a**) Freud compared the feeling of something being 'too good to be true' with the situation analysed in the present paper.]

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### III [SEN309a149]Criminals From a Sense of Guilt

[SEN309a150]IN telling me about their early youth, particularly before puberty, people who have afterwards often become very respectable have informed me of forbidden actions which they committed at that time—such as thefts, frauds and even arson. I was in the habit of dismissing these statements with the comment that we are familiar with the weakness of moral inhibitions at that period of life, and I made no attempt to find a place for them in any more significant context. But eventually I was led to make a more thorough study of such incidents by some glaring and more accessible cases in which the misdeeds were committed while the patients were actually under my treatment, and were no longer so youthful. Analytic work then brought the surprising discovery that such deeds were done principally because they were forbidden, and because their execution was accompanied by mental relief for their doer. He was suffering from an oppressive feeling of guilt, of which he did not know the origin, and after he had committed a misdeed this oppression was mitigated. His sense of guilt was at least attached to something.

[SEN309a151]Paradoxical as it may sound, I must maintain that the sense of guilt was present before the misdeed, that it did not arise from it, but conversely—the misdeed arose from the sense of guilt. These people might justly be described as criminals from a sense of guilt. The pre-existence of the guilty feeling had of course been demonstrated by a whole set of other manifestations and effects.

[SEN309a152]But scientific work is not satisfied with the establishment of a curious fact. There are two further questions to answer: what is the origin of this obscure sense of guilt before the deed, and is it probable that this kind of causation plays any considerable part in human crime?

[SEN309a153]An examination of the first question held out the promise of bringing us information about the source of mankind's sense of guilt in general. The invariable outcome of analytic work was to show that this obscure sense of guilt derived from the Oedipus

[SEN309a154]complex and was a reaction to the two great criminal intentions of killing the father and having sexual relations with the mother. In comparison with these two, the crimes committed in order to fix the sense of guilt to something came as a relief to the sufferers. We must remember in this connection that parricide and incest with the mother are the two great human crimes, the only ones which, as such, are pursued and abhorred in primitive communities. And we must remember, too, how close other investigations have brought us to the hypothesis that the conscience of mankind, which now appears as an inherited mental force, was acquired in connection with the Oedipus complex.

[SEN309a155]In order to answer the second question we must go beyond the scope of psycho-analytic work. With children it is easy to observe that they are often 'naughty' on purpose to provoke punishment, and are quiet and contented after they have been punished. Later analytic investigation can often put us on the track of the guilty feeling which induced them to seek punishment. Among adult criminals we must not doubt except those who commit crimes without any sense of guilt, who have either developed no moral inhibitions or who, in their conflict with society, consider themselves justified in their action. But as regards the majority of other criminals, those for whom punitive measures are really designed, such a motivation for crime might very well be taken into consideration; it might throw light on some obscure points in the psychology of the criminal, and furnish punishment with a new psychological basis.

[SEN309a156]A friend has since called my attention to the fact that the 'criminal from a sense of guilt' was known to Nietzsche too. The pre-existence of the feeling of guilt, and the utilization of a deed in order to rationalize this feeling, glimmer before us in Zarathustra's sayings<sup>1</sup> 'On the Pale Criminal'. Let us leave it to future research to decide how many criminals are to be reckoned among these 'pale' ones.

<sup>1</sup> [SEN309a157][In the editions before 1924, 'obscure sayings'.—A hint at the idea of the sense of guilt being a motive for misdeeds is already to be found in the case history of 'Little Hans' (**1909b**), *Standard Ed.*, **10**, **42**, as well as in that of the 'Wolf Man' (**1918b**), *Standard Ed.*, **17**, **28**, which, though published later than the present paper, was in fact mostly written in the year before it. In this latter passage the complicating factor of masochism is introduced.]