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# Exploring the Development of Moral Value Using Sigmund Freud and Shakespeare's King Lear

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## Abstract

Sigmund Freud concludes in the fourth lecture of his "Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" that children develop psychosocially in a pattern, learning standards of morality from their parents. "King Lear" is a Shakespearian tragedy that illustrates the role of parents in their children's lives through the depiction of an elderly King Lear and his relationship with his favorite daughter Cordelia. Using Freud to consider Lear and Cordelia's relationship I explore what responsibility parents should have in shaping their children's moral values.



Cordelia in the Court of King Lear (1873) by Sir John Gilbert

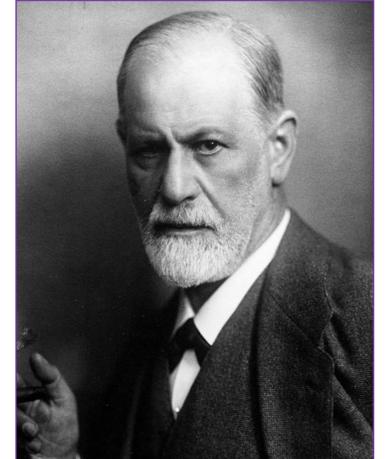
## Introduction

While these two works vary greatly in style and era they each investigate the function parents play in molding their children's standards of morality in adulthood. Much of Shakespeare's work explores Lear's thoughts, visions, and eventual psychosis which begins with a transformative opening scene in which he demands to witness Cordelia's flattery. I use Freud to consider how Lear's psychosis is a manifestation of sexual repression and abnormal psychosocial development, and particularly how this affects his relationship with his daughter and her morality.

Freud's Conclusions	Comparison in Lear
Morality is learned when a child internalizes the authority figure of their parents as they are punished or praised for their behavior.	King Lear's ethics are the basis of Cordelia's super-ego and internalized moral value.
Parental affection of the young exhibits all the markings of eroticism and a child should eventually detach from this aspect of the relationship.	The first object of Cordelia's love was Lear but in adulthood she questions why her father demands all her love when she can only give part of it if she wishes to marry.
Detachment is essential if a child is to have normal psychosocial development.	Lear fails to let go of controlling Cordelia and is preoccupied with being the only object of her love which complicates this pattern and prevents her normal psychosocial development, particularly in aspects of moral value.
Psychoanalysis traces patient's symptoms with surprising regularity to impressions from erotic life, revealed often when repressions reach consciousness.	Lear displays classic neurotic behavior which could indicate he is suffering a psychological disturbance sexual in nature. When Cordelia refuses to flatter him his repressed desires for a mother-wife figure in his daughter trigger a psychotic break.



William Shakespeare, The Cobbe Portrait (1610)



Sigmund Freud, Max Halberstadt (1932)

## Freud:

"a child's libido should not remain fixated to these first objects (its parents); later on, it should merely take them as a model and should make a gradual transition from them on to extraneous people when the time for the final choice of an object arrives" (52)

## King Lear:

" I loved her most, and thought to set my rest  
On her kind nursery. To Cordelia. Hence and avoid  
my sight!—  
So be my grave my peace, as here I give  
Her father's heart from her. " (1.1.135-141)

## References

- Freud, Sigmund. Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Norton, 1997.
- Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. The Super Ego and the Id. Norton, 1989.
- Shakespeare. King Lear. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

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