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Ego Failure and ID Dominance in Danarto's Godlob: A Freudian Psychoanalytic Reading

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the failure of the ego to regulate id-dominated impulses in the father character in Danarto's short story Godlob through Sigmund Freud's structural model of personality. A qualitative interpretive textual analysis was conducted on the complete short story. Six excerpts were purposively selected because they represent instinctual demand, rationalization, moral inhibition, traumatic setting, interpersonal resistance, and social grievance. The data were coded into four analytical categories—id dominance, ego failure, superego weakening, and contextual pressure—and interpreted through repeated close reading and contextual comparison. The findings show a sequential psychological mechanism: repeated loss and wartime violence intensify the father's demand for recognition; the ego then ceases to mediate reality and instead rationalizes the id's destructive desire; and the superego is displaced by an ideology of heroism that converts filicide into an allegedly meaningful sacrifice. The study's novelty lies in tracing this mechanism as a narrative process rather than merely identifying separate examples of the id, ego, and superego. Theoretically, the analysis demonstrates that ego failure in the story is both intrapsychic and socially produced. Practically, the findings support the use of psychoanalytic reading in literary education to develop critical discussion of trauma, moral responsibility, violence, and ideological manipulation.

Keywords: Danarto; ego failure; Freudian psychoanalysis; Godlob; id dominance; literary psychology

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INTRODUCTION

Literature does more than represent external events; it also organizes desire, fear, memory, and moral conflict into narrative form. Character analysis is therefore central to literary psychology because a character's speech, decisions, and responses to crisis provide textual evidence of shifting motivations. Contemporary work on narrative understanding likewise emphasizes that personality cannot be inferred from a single isolated statement but develops through actions and context across a story (Yu et al., 2023).

Freud's structural model conceptualizes personality as a dynamic relation among the id, ego, and superego. The id seeks immediate satisfaction, the ego negotiates between instinctual pressure and external reality, and the superego represents internalized prohibitions and ideals (Freud, 1961). In literary criticism, these concepts can illuminate contradiction, rationalization, repression, and destructive action. However, psychoanalytic reading should not reduce a fictional character to a clinical patient; it must remain attentive to language, narrative structure, social pressure, and aesthetic ambiguity (Ellmann, 2014; Barry, 2017).

Danarto's Godlob situates its father character in a barren wartime landscape marked by death, repeated familial loss, and political indifference. The father's decision to kill his wounded son is presented through emotionally charged dialogue concerning heroism, sacrifice, and recognition. The act may initially appear to be an expression of mercy or patriotic conviction, yet the narrative repeatedly reveals anger, disappointment, and an expectation of symbolic compensation. This ambiguity makes the story especially appropriate for examining how unconscious desire becomes disguised as rational and moral reasoning.

Previous Indonesian psychoanalytic studies have often classified quotations under the categories of id, ego, and superego. Such classification is useful, but it can remain descriptive when the three structures are treated as separate labels rather than as an interacting process. Less attention has been given to how the ego itself may become an instrument of the id through rationalization, or to how social ideals such as heroism can weaken rather than strengthen moral restraint. International psychoanalytic scholarship also stresses that trauma and testimony are shaped by failures of language, witnessing, and symbolic recognition, not solely by individual impulse (Amir, 2018, 2021).

This study addresses that gap by tracing the psychological sequence through which repeated loss and social disappointment intensify instinctual demand, transform ego mediation into rationalization, and weaken the superego. Its novelty lies in interpreting ego failure as both an intrapsychic imbalance and a narrative critique of heroic ideology. The study asks: (1) how is id dominance represented in the father's speech and actions; (2) how does the ego rationalize rather than regulate destructive desire; and (3) how do war and political recognition contribute to the weakening of moral control? The analysis contributes to literary psychology, Indonesian literary criticism, and the teaching of psychologically complex fiction.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative interpretive design based on close textual analysis. The primary source was Danarto's short story Godlob, first published in the 1975 collection of the same title. The unit of analysis consisted of the father's dialogue, actions, and narrative descriptions directly related to loss, heroism, violence, moral judgment, and social recognition. No human participants were involved; therefore, the study did not require participant recruitment, interviews, or personal data collection.

Data were collected through repeated reading and note-taking. A passage was included when it met at least one of four criteria: (a) it expressed an urgent emotional or instinctual demand; (b) it showed reasoning used to justify or delay an action; (c) it contained a moral prohibition, moral failure, or resistance to violence; or (d) it represented environmental or social pressure that altered the character's judgment. Six excerpts met these criteria and were labeled E1–E6.

The analysis followed five stages. First, the complete story was read to identify the sequence of conflict and the father's changing motivations. Second, relevant excerpts were extracted without separating them from their immediate narrative context. Third, each excerpt was coded using four categories: ID for pleasure-driven or aggressive impulse; EGO for mediation, reality testing, or rationalization; SUP for moral prohibition or its weakening; and CTX for wartime, political, or interpersonal pressure. Fourth, the coded excerpts were compared to identify causal and narrative relations among the categories. Fifth, the interpretation was synthesized into a psychological sequence linking grievance, desire for recognition, rationalization, and destructive action.

Analytical credibility was strengthened in three ways. Interpretations were checked against Freud's operational definitions rather than based solely on emotional vocabulary; each quotation was read within the complete narrative sequence; and an alternative-reading test was applied to passages that could suggest compassion or mercy. The child's resistance in E5 was treated as a negative case because it demonstrates that moral judgment remains narratively available even when the father rejects it. This procedure reduces the risk of treating every intense emotion as evidence of the id and improves the transparency of the interpretation.

All English quotations from Godlob are translations of the Indonesian passages cited in the manuscript. The translations preserve the central semantic content used in the analysis rather than attempting a stylistic replacement of Danarto's original language.

RESULTS

The analysis produced four related themes: id dominance through the demand for recognition, ego failure through rationalization, superego weakening through moral displacement, and contextual intensification through war and political disappointment. Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the selected textual evidence and the psychoanalytic interpretation.

Table 1. Thematic synthesis of the father's psychological conflict

Code	Textual evidence	Primary code	Analytical meaning
E1	"I do not want my son to die in vain! He must die as a hero!"	ID / EGO	The demand for heroic recognition overrides the son's survival; ego language gives the impulse a socially acceptable form.
E2	"If he dies now, people will remember him as a fighter."	EGO	Reality testing is replaced by rationalization: imagined public memory is used to justify immediate violence.
E3	"I will end his suffering myself."	EGO / SUP	A destructive act is reframed as compassion, showing moral displacement and weakened prohibition.
E4	"The rotten, fishy smell stretched tensely across the whole barren field ..."	CTX	The grotesque wartime setting normalizes death and intensifies psychic pressure.
E5	"Father, enough."	SUP / negative case	The child's protest shows that an alternative moral judgment remains possible within the narrative.
E6	"I have already surrendered four of my children's lives to the Politician, and I have received nothing."	ID / CTX	Grief is converted into grievance and transactional expectation, exposing the desire for symbolic compensation.

Id Dominance: Grief Becomes a Demand for Recognition

"I do not want my son to die in vain! He must die as a hero!" (E1)

The exclamation does not simply express paternal grief. Its grammar converts the son from a suffering person into an object through which the father can recover meaning and recognition. The repeated modal demand—"must"—reveals an impulse that tolerates neither delay nor contradiction. In Freudian terms, the id is visible not because the father feels anger, but because his desire seeks immediate discharge without accepting the independent needs of the son or the irreversible consequences of the act.

"I have already surrendered four of my children's lives to the Politician, and I have received nothing." (E6)

E6 clarifies the object of the father's desire. The language of surrender and return makes sacrifice resemble an exchange: lives have been given, but recognition has not been received. The father's frustration is therefore directed not only at war but also at the failed promise that loss

will produce honor. Repeated bereavement becomes a grievance that intensifies the demand for symbolic compensation.

Ego Failure: Rationalization Replaces Reality Testing

"If he dies now, people will remember him as a fighter." (E2)

The father's statement has the appearance of deliberation because it connects an action with a future social consequence. Yet the reasoning does not mediate between desire and reality. It selects an imagined outcome—public remembrance—while excluding immediate reality: the son is alive, wounded, and capable of speaking. The ego thus becomes subordinate to the id. Rather than delaying or redirecting the impulse, it manufactures a narrative that makes the impulse appear reasonable.

"I will end his suffering myself." (E3)

E3 intensifies the rationalization by introducing the language of mercy. The phrase "end his suffering" could support an alternative interpretation of compassionate action. However, when read together with E1, E2, and E6, compassion is not the dominant motive. The father repeatedly foregrounds heroism, public memory, and political return. The mercy explanation therefore functions as a defense that masks aggression and protects the father from confronting the moral meaning of his choice.

Superego Weakening and the Displacement of Moral Authority

"Father, enough." (E5)

The child's brief protest is structurally important because it prevents the story from presenting violence as inevitable. The utterance marks a moral boundary and demonstrates that the wartime context has not eliminated the possibility of restraint. The father's refusal to recognize this boundary indicates not the absence of moral knowledge but the displacement of moral authority. Heroic ideology replaces the prohibition against killing: an act becomes acceptable when it can be named sacrifice.

The superego is therefore weakened in a specific way. It is not simply silent; it is appropriated by a socially prestigious ideal. The father's conscience no longer asks whether the act preserves human life but whether it produces a heroic image. This transformation explains how the character can perceive himself as purposeful while committing an extreme moral violation.

War and Social Pressure as Psychological Intensifiers

"The rotten, fishy smell stretched tensely across the whole barren field ..." (E4)

The sensory description constructs a world in which death is physically pervasive. The barren field, odor, and tension do more than provide background; they shape the conditions under which the father interprets loss. Psychoanalytic studies of traumatic testimony emphasize that overwhelming violence can disrupt symbolic processing and make experience difficult to

integrate into coherent language (Amir, 2018). In Godlob, the father attempts to restore coherence by transforming private loss into a public heroic narrative.

The external environment does not mechanically cause the murder, but it supplies the symbolic vocabulary through which the act is justified. War normalizes sacrifice, while political indifference produces resentment. The destructive decision emerges from the interaction of personal grief, instinctual demand, failed ego mediation, and a social discourse that assigns value to death through heroism.

DISCUSSION

The findings extend a conventional id–ego–superego classification by identifying a narrative mechanism. The father's psychological conflict develops through four connected movements: repeated loss produces grievance; grievance generates an urgent demand for recognition; the ego rationalizes this demand through heroic and compassionate language; and the superego is displaced by an ideological ideal of sacrifice. Ego failure is therefore not a simple absence of reason. The father reasons continuously, but reason is recruited to serve the impulse it should regulate.

This interpretation supports Freud's account of the ego as a structure pressured by instinct, moral demand, and reality (Freud, 1961), while also demonstrating a limitation of purely intrapsychic reading. The father's desire is culturally mediated. He wants not only emotional relief but a socially recognized identity as the father of a hero. The story thus shows how collective language can supply the ego with rationalizations. Psychoanalytic literary criticism is most productive here when it connects psychic conflict with rhetoric and social meaning rather than treating the character as a decontextualized clinical case (Ellmann, 2014).

An alternative interpretation could read the killing primarily as an act of mercy toward a wounded child. E3 makes such a reading plausible. Nevertheless, the surrounding evidence weakens it: E1 insists on heroic death, E2 imagines public remembrance, and E6 reveals disappointment over an unrewarded sacrifice. The mercy explanation does not disappear, but it is subordinated to the father's need to recover status and meaning. This alternative-reading test deepens the analysis by showing that the father's motive is psychologically overdetermined rather than reducible to a single emotion.

The result also contributes to understanding Danarto's characterization. The father is not developed through extensive psychological exposition. Instead, compressed dialogue, grotesque sensory imagery, and ironic reversals allow the reader to infer a fragmented interior life. The story's literary force emerges from the gap between the father's language of honor and the violence that language conceals. Heroism becomes grotesque when it requires the deliberate destruction of the person it claims to honor.

Within the wider field of literary psychology, the study demonstrates why character interpretation requires sequence and context. A quotation cannot be categorized only by its emotional tone; it must be related to prior loss, subsequent action, competing voices, and the

symbolic environment. Contemporary research on fictional-character understanding likewise emphasizes the importance of long narrative context for interpreting personality and motive (Yu et al., 2023).

The analysis has practical value for literary education. Godlob can be used to teach students how theoretical concepts must be supported by textual evidence, how alternative interpretations can be tested, and how psychological conflict intersects with ideology. Discussion can move beyond identifying the id, ego, and superego toward ethical questions concerning grief, responsibility, political manipulation, and the language used to legitimize violence.

CONCLUSION

The father in Danarto's Godlob exhibits a patterned failure of ego regulation. Repeated bereavement and political disappointment intensify the id's demand for recognition; the ego then rationalizes destructive desire through the language of heroism, remembrance, and mercy; and the superego is weakened when moral prohibition is displaced by an idealized image of sacrifice. War functions as a psychological and ideological context that normalizes death and supplies the father with a vocabulary for converting filicide into supposed heroism.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in explaining ego failure as an active process of rationalization rather than merely the passive defeat of reason. It also shows that the imbalance among the id, ego, and superego is socially mediated: psychic conflict is intensified by political neglect and cultural narratives of heroic death. For literary education, the findings provide a model for integrating close reading, psychological theory, alternative interpretations, and ethical reflection.

This study is limited to one character, one short story, and Freud's structural model. It does not claim to diagnose the author or to establish a universal psychological explanation of violence. Future research may compare the father with other characters in Danarto's works, apply trauma theory, object-relations theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis, or moral psychology, and conduct comparative analyses of war narratives in Indonesian and international literature.

AI Declaration

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