

DESIRE, IDENTITY, AND THE SUPEREGO: A FREUDIAN ANALYSIS OF MIGUEL'S PSYCHOLOGICAL JOURNEY IN PIXAR'S *COCO* (2017)

Fisya Ananta Sheila Ningrum

English Education Study Program of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, PGRI
Silampari University, Lubuklinggau, Sumatera Selatan – Indonesia

E-mail: Fisyalesungbatu@gmail.com

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Abstract: This analysis focuses on Miguel, the protagonist of the film *Coco* (2017), and his development throughout the narrative. Utilizing Sigmund Freud's framework of the psyche—which includes the id (instincts), ego (self-control), and superego (ethical constraints) this research elucidates Miguel's internal struggles. Initially, Miguel's family prohibits music due to a distressing history. This familial decree, primarily upheld by his grandmother, symbolizes the superego. Conversely, Miguel possesses an intense passion for music, representing his id, or intrinsic yearning. As he ventures out to pursue his aspirations, he begins to clarify his values and priorities. In the Land of the Dead, Miguel discovers how to reconcile his passion for music with his affection for his family, illustrating the emergence of the ego guiding his choices. Through significant symbols like the guitar and family photograph, the film depicts Miguel mending familial scars and uncovering his authentic identity. This research demonstrates that *Coco* transcends mere musical themes; it is an impactful narrative about kinship, personal identity, and the pursuit of one's desires. The findings indicate that Miguel's internal journey reflects Freud's structural theory of personality, illustrating how animated films can portray complex psychological development. This contributes to a deeper understanding of identity formation in family-centred narratives within popular media.

Keywords: *Movie, Family Dynamics, Freudian Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Music and Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, animated movies have progressed from mere entertainment to present viewers with intricate stories that explore emotional, psychological, and cultural topics. Studios like Pixar and Disney have ingrained profound themes in their narratives, utilizing

animation to investigate the human experience via symbolism, character evolution, and ethical dilemmas. According to (Furniss, 2007), These movies engage not just younger audiences but also offer valuable content for scholarly examination in areas like psychology, cultural studies, and literary criticism. This scholarly interest has led to the application of various theoretical frameworks in film analysis.

Psychological theories, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, have emerged as a significant framework for analyzing film narratives. According to Freud (1923), the human psyche is regulated by the interaction of the id (instinct), ego (reality), and superego (morality). The evolution of analytical psychology, which was explained by Carl Gustav Jung, a student of Sigmund Freud, is defined as a technique for exploring the unconscious mind of an individual and advancing the process of individuation (Azhar Shakti Tufan, 2024). These forces are evident in the behaviors, internal struggles, and identity development of characters. Psychoanalytic film theory has been widely applied to examine how movie characters reflect repressed desires, buried memories, and internal struggles with authority and identity.

The first review literature is taken from a thesis entitled “An Analysis of Id, Ego, and Superego by Sigmund Freud Through Kat Stratford’s Character in 10 Things I Hate About You Movie” which was written by Sheryl Norifly Loway (2023). The similarities and differences between both studies lie in analyzing the id, ego, and superego in a film narrative. Loway used 10 Things I Hate About You as the data source, while the writer uses Coco as the data source. Both studies apply psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1923/1949).

The second review literature is taken from a thesis entitled “Id, Ego, and Superego in McCarthy’s Novel The Road” by Baraa Nazim Jamal (2023). The similarities and differences between the studies are that both analyze psychoanalytic theory, and both use the same Freudian framework. However, Jamal’s study uses a novel as the data source, while the writer uses a movie.

Coco is one of the most famous movies produced through Pixar Animation Studios and released by Disney also it is directed by Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina aired in 2017 (Kusnadi, 2022). *Coco* (2017) presents a nuanced exploration of themes such as familial bonds, cultural memory, tradition, and individual identity through the protagonist, Miguel. Set within the vibrant context of Mexican culture and the Día de los Muertos (Day of the

Dead) celebration, the narrative follows Miguel's journey into the Land of the Dead as he seeks to uncover his ancestral roots and pursue his suppressed passion for music. While the film is celebrated for its cultural richness and emotional resonance, it also offers a psychologically layered narrative that highlights Miguel's internal struggle between personal aspiration and adherence to familial expectations.

Miguel's journey can be understood as a symbolic representation of Freudian psychological structures. His id drives his deep desire to become a musician, inspired by his admiration for Ernesto de la Cruz. However, this desire clashes with the moral constraints imposed by his family, particularly the matriarch Abuelita, who embodies the superego through strict enforcement of familial rules and traditions. Miguel's inner turmoil and actions reflect the ego's role in mediating between these conflicting forces, navigating both societal pressures and personal ambition.

Miguel's family ban on music represents a generational repression of trauma specifically, the abandonment of the great-great-grandfather, Héctor. From a Freudian perspective, this repression of painful memory shapes the family's superego-like rules, creating a system that Miguel must challenge to develop his identity.

As Miguel journeys through the Land of the Dead, he encounters lost truths, reclaims forgotten memories, and ultimately asserts his own identity. This process can be interpreted as a psychoanalytic journey toward individuation the integration of unconscious material into conscious selfhood (Jung, 1964). By confronting family history and breaking the taboo against music, Miguel resolves the tension between desire and duty, forming a more balanced ego and reconfiguring his place within the family narrative.

While *Coco* has been studied for its cultural representation and emotional depth, there is limited scholarship exploring the film through a Freudian psychoanalytic lens. Most existing analyses focus on themes of heritage, memory, or visual aesthetics, leaving a gap in understanding the film's psychological dimension. Alavi (2022) argues that classical psychoanalytic theory remains underused in animated film criticism, despite its usefulness in uncovering hidden emotional structures and character conflicts. This perspective invites further analysis of how psychological frameworks, particularly Freud's, can deepen our understanding of character development in family-centered narratives like *Coco*.

This research is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the limited body of literature that applies Freudian psychoanalysis to animated films,

particularly those aimed at family audiences. While psychoanalysis is often applied to live-action cinema or literary texts, this research reveals how animated narratives like *Coco* can embody deep psychological conflicts involving identity, desire, and morality. Practically, this research offers an interpretive framework that can be used by educators, psychologists, and cultural analysts to examine emotional development and generational trauma in children's media. Understanding such films through a psychoanalytic lens allows for deeper insight into how media helps audiences especially younger ones navigate internal struggles and values formation.

This research contributes to the field by applying Freud's structural model of the psyche such as id, ego, and superego to Miguel's character arc in *Coco* (2017). By doing so, it offers a new perspective on how symbolic storytelling in animated films can reflect psychological growth, the resolution of internal conflict, and the reconstruction of personal and collective memory. It also bridges the gap between classical psychoanalytic theory and modern visual narratives, encouraging further interdisciplinary research in literature, film, and psychology.

Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following research question:

How does Miguel's psychological journey reflect the interaction between the id, ego, and superego within Freud's psychoanalytic framework?

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Freudian psychoanalytic theory to analyze the character development and internal conflict of Miguel, the protagonist in Pixar's *Coco* (2017). As this study focuses on symbolic meaning, emotional growth, and the representation of unconscious drives within a narrative, a qualitative method is best suited to capture the depth and nuance of the film's psychological layers. The film is treated as a text for interpretation, where character actions, visual elements, and thematic structures are examined through the lens of psychoanalysis. This allows for an in-depth exploration of how desire, identity, and moral authority are portrayed in Miguel's psychological journey.

The analysis centers on Freud's structural model of the psyche, which consists of the id, ego, and superego. These elements are used to trace Miguel's evolving identity and emotional conflict throughout the film. The id represents Miguel's innate desire to pursue music, while the superego reflects the internalized moral restrictions imposed by his family. The ego, in

turn, is seen in his efforts to mediate between his passion and his need for acceptance. Specific scenes such as Miguel's defiance of family rules, his encounters in the Land of the Dead, and the final act of reconciliation are analyzed to reveal how this Freudian tension unfolds. The film's symbols, such as the guitar, the marigold bridge, and the family photo, are also explored as visual expressions of psychological themes.

The primary source for this study is the film itself, with attention paid to both narrative and visual elements. The analysis involves a close reading of selected scenes, character dialogues, and symbolic imagery to reveal psychological meaning. While no human participants were involved, relevant academic sources were used to support the theoretical framework and strengthen the interpretation. These include studies on psychoanalysis in film, Freudian theory in narrative structure, and recent discussions about character development in animated movies. By combining psychoanalytic theory with detailed film analysis, this study aims to reveal how *Coco* presents a complex and emotionally resonant portrayal of identity formation within the constraints of family and tradition.

The selection of scenes was based on their psychological significance, particularly those involving conflict, decision-making, and symbolic representation. Data analysis involved close-reading and interpretative strategies to reveal underlying psychological tensions. This interpretive framework is consistent with recent qualitative approaches in psychoanalytic film studies, which emphasize emotional subtext and symbolic elements (Khafidhoh et al., 2023; Tufan, 2024).

RESEARCH RESULT

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study, which analyse Miguel's psychological development using Freud's structural model of the psyche—id, ego, and superego. Through a close reading of selected scenes and character dialogues, the study reveals how Miguel's inner conflict, desires, and evolving identity are shaped by unconscious drives and moral constraints. By categorizing specific moments from the film under each Freudian concept, this analysis aims to uncover the emotional and symbolic layers embedded within the narrative of *Coco* (2017).

No	Freudian Concept	Scene/Quote	Timestamp	Description
1	Superego	“He wants no part of your music, mariachi. You keep away from him!” (Abuelita)	00:08:14	Suppression of desire by family authority
2	Superego	“Like if he could play music, maybe someday, I could too. If it wasn’t for my family” Miguel VO	00:06:40)	External conflict from moral expectations
3	Superego	“No one’s going anywhere. Tonight is about family!”	00:09:39	Internal conflict from moral expectations
4	Id	“I don’t want to be in this family! (Miguel)	00:18:16	Inner desire and frustration
5	Ego	“I know I’m not supposed to love music... but it’s not my fault!” (Miguel)	00:04:53	Balancing passion with purpose
6	Ego	“But my whole life, there’s been something that made me different.” (Miguel)	01:14:20	Physical symbol of the id
7	Symbolism	Marigold bridge	00:25:31	Crossing into unconscious self
8	Symbolism	Family photo missing Héctor	00:16:18	Integration of identity (ego & unconscious)
9	Symbolism	Miguel’s self-made guitar	00:13:03	Physical symbol of the id
10	Resolution	“Remember me, though I have to say goodbye...” - Miguel	01:30:46	Integration of the Ego and Resolution of the

				Superego Conflict
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Table of Freudian Analysis of Miguel in Coco (2017)




<i>The Guitar (00:13:03)</i>	<i>The Marigold Bridge (00:25:31)</i>	<i>The Family Photo (00:16:18)</i>
		

Table of Symbolisms in Coco Movie (2017)

DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study based on a Freudian psychoanalytic analysis of Miguel's psychological journey in Coco (2017). By applying Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, the study explores how Miguel navigates internal desires, external expectations, and ultimately forms a balanced identity. The analysis draws upon selected quotes and moments from the film's script to support each point.

1. The Superego: Family Tradition as a Moral Authority

At the beginning of the film, Miguel is shown to live in a family that strictly prohibits music. This ban has been passed down for generations and is rooted in the traumatic story of his great-great-grandfather, who abandoned the family to pursue music. The family's disapproval is strongly enforced by Abuelita, who serves as a symbol of the superego, the internalized moral code shaped by societal and parental expectations.

This is reflected when Abuelita aggressively interrupts Miguel's interaction with Mariachi musicians, shouting:



Abuelita: *“He wants no part of your music, mariachi. You keep away from him!”* (00:08:14)

(Shouted while smashing Miguel’s interaction with the mariachi musician in the plaza.)

The destruction of Miguel’s guitar and the enforcement of the music ban represent how the superego suppresses desires considered unacceptable. Miguel narrates:



Miguel (voice-over): *“Like if he could play music, maybe someday, I could too. If it wasn’t for my family.”* (00:06:40)

(Reflects Miguel’s inner emotional suppression due to rigid familial expectations).

This quote highlights Miguel’s inner conflict. Although he wants to respect his family, he also feels misunderstood and emotionally stifled by their rigid rules.



Abuelita: *“No one’s going anywhere. Tonight is about family!”* (00:09:39)

This line reflects Abuelita's strict enforcement of family traditions and values, especially the family's longstanding ban on music. When Miguel expresses his desire to participate in the talent show—an act that involves music—Abuelita reacts strongly because she believes music is a harmful influence that once tore their family apart. By saying “No one’s going anywhere”, she is exerting control and forbidding Miguel from leaving the house, especially to do something related to music.

The second part, “Tonight is about family!”, reveals her intention to keep the family united, especially during Día de los Muertos, a sacred family holiday. From her perspective, Miguel wanting to go to a talent show represents a rejection of family unity and values in favor of something she sees as selfish and dangerous.

2. The Id: Repressed Desire and Impulse Toward Music

Despite the pressure to conform, Miguel has a deep passion for music, a desire he keeps hidden from his family. According to Freud, this longing represents the id, the part of the psyche driven by instinct, passion, and the pursuit of pleasure.

His admiration for Ernesto de la Cruz, a famous musician he believes is his ancestor, fuels this desire. In one of the early confrontations with his family, Miguel declares:



Miguel: *“I don’t want to be in this family!”* (00:18:16)

(Said during a heated argument with his family before running away).

This moment is a direct expression of his repressed desire finally breaking free. Later, when Miguel steals Ernesto’s guitar from the mausoleum to join the music competition, it symbolizes the id overpowering the restrictions of the superego. The impulsiveness of this act shows Miguel acting on emotion rather than reason a hallmark of the id’s influence.

3. The Ego: Mediating Desire and Responsibility

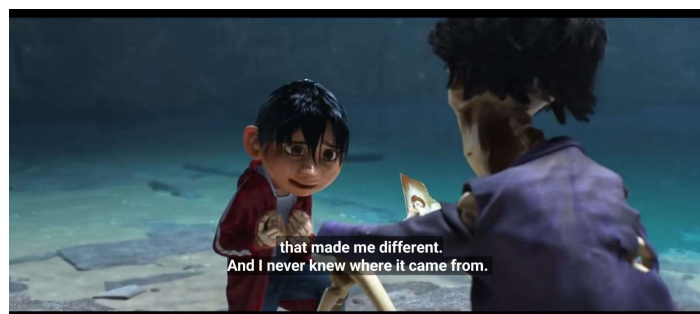
As the story progresses and Miguel enters the Land of the Dead, his ego begins to develop. Freud describes the ego as the rational part of the psyche that negotiates between the id and the superego. Miguel begins to make more thoughtful decisions, trying to balance his personal dream with the needs of his family.



Miguel: *“I know I’m not supposed to love music... but it’s not my fault!”*
(00:04:53)

In the scene where Miguel says, “I know I’m not supposed to love music... but it’s not my fault!”, the conflict between his personal desires and his family’s expectations becomes evident. According to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, this moment reflects the role of the ego as a mediator between the id and the superego. Miguel’s deep passion for music represents the id, which seeks pleasure and self-expression. At the same time, he acknowledges that loving music goes against what his family expects of him—this represents the superego, which upholds moral values and social rules. Instead of reacting with anger or total obedience, Miguel attempts to explain his feelings, showing how the ego is working to balance these opposing forces. The ego allows Miguel to express his desire while still being aware of the consequences and values imposed by his family. This line captures the inner struggle of a young boy torn between identity and loyalty, making it a clear example of the ego's role in shaping behavior.

In his conversation with Héctor, he expresses guilt for defying his family:



Miguel: *“But my whole life, there’s been something that made me different.”*
(01:14:20)

In the line “But my whole life, there’s been something that made me different,” Miguel reflects on his sense of individuality in contrast to his family’s traditions. This moment reveals the operation of the ego, which acts as the rational part of the psyche mediating between the id—Miguel’s inner passion for music—and the superego, which is represented by his family’s strict ban on music. Rather than impulsively rejecting his family’s values (as the id might drive him to do), Miguel expresses his difference in a thoughtful and reflective way. This shows that his ego is trying to reconcile his internal desires with the external pressures placed on him. By acknowledging that he has always felt different, Miguel begins a process of self-awareness and identity formation that does not immediately lead to rebellion, but instead to understanding. This balance between expressing personal truth and respecting family expectations is a clear demonstration of the ego working to find harmony between the id and superego.

4. Symbolism and the Unconscious Mind Several symbols throughout the film support the psychological journey Miguel undergoes. Each symbol represents an element of the unconscious or the internal struggle between the id, ego, and superego:
 - a. The Guitar (00:13:03) represents Miguel’s repressed desire the object that connects him to his past and his passion.
 - b. The Marigold Bridge (00:25:31) serves as a metaphor for crossing into the unconscious mind, where hidden memories and emotions reside.
 - c. The Family Photo (00:16:18) is a key to restoring memory and healing generational trauma. It holds the missing piece Héctor whose removal from the photo symbolizes the suppression of truth. It shows Miguel beginning to integrate repressed family history into his personal identity. His unconscious desire for music and connection to Héctor are now becoming conscious and accepted.

These symbolic elements reinforce the layered psychological journey of Miguel, illustrating how his identity is reconstructed through emotional insight and unconscious recognition.

5. Resolution: Integration of Identity and Psychological Balance

Miguel’s increasing self-awareness can be interpreted as an ego development process that enables negotiation between unconscious drives and external realities. This reflects what Freud (1923) described as the ego’s role in adapting to reality while managing internal tensions. Similar findings are echoed in recent studies of animated characters who experience transformation through negotiation of desire and duty (Aritonang & Heriyati, 2022; Wardhani et al., 2023). These transitions illustrate how the ego strengthens in the face of conflict and matures as the character gains insight.

By the end of the film, Miguel's psychological conflict is resolved. He gains his family's acceptance, not by rejecting them, but by helping them heal. In the final, emotional scene, Miguel sings to Mamá Coco:



Miguel (singing): “Remember me, though I have to say goodbye...” (01:30:46)

At this climactic moment, Miguel uses music, the very thing his family has banned to restore a lost connection and heal generational trauma. By singing "Remember Me" to Mamá Coco, he brings back her memory of Héctor, her father, which helps restore the truth that was repressed and misunderstood by the family.

Through this act, he not only revives Mamá Coco's memory but also restores the broken link in his family's past. Héctor's photo is returned to the ofrenda, symbolizing the return of a forgotten truth. This reconciliation marks Miguel's successful development of a balanced ego, one that honors both his desire for music and his loyalty to family.

The film ends with the family accepting music again, showing that even the superego has shifted. Instead of being a rigid force of repression, it now evolves into a more compassionate moral guide that allows room for individuality and growth.

CONCLUSION

Miguel's journey in *Coco* (2017) effectively illustrates the internal psychological conflict faced by individuals attempting to balance personal desire with societal and familial expectations. Through the lens of Freud's theory, the id, ego, and superego, we see Miguel grow emotionally and find his true self.

At first, Miguel is trapped by his family's rule against music, especially enforced by Abuelita, who represents the superego the part of us shaped by morals and rules (Aritonang & Heriyati, 2022). But even with that pressure, Miguel's passion for music the id stays

strong. He secretly admires Ernesto de la Cruz, showing how deep his dreams run, just like recent studies say about characters driven by hidden desires (Wardhani & Saptanto, 2023).

When Miguel enters the Land of the Dead, he starts thinking more about his actions. His ego begins to grow helping him balance his love for music with his care for family (Gunadarma & Nurochman, 2023). His journey is not just about chasing a dream, but learning to respect his roots while also being true to himself.

Symbols in the film also reflect his growth. The marigold bridge and the missing photo piece represent memory, truth, and healing from old wounds. This mirrors how people face their past to become whole again, as shown in recent psychological research (Khafidhoh et al., 2022).

One of the most touching parts is when Miguel sings “Remember Me” to Mamá Coco. That simple act brings back her memories and helps the family reconnect with their history. It shows how love and truth can heal something supported by modern psychoanalytic ideas (Wardhani, 2023).

These findings confirm that *Coco* can be analyzed not only as a cultural text but also as a psychological narrative, offering insights into how familial norms shape personal identity. As supported by Alfi Nur Khafidhoh et al. (2023), characters in animation can serve as mirrors of repressed trauma and moral transformation, making them suitable subjects for psychoanalytic exploration.

Moreover, this study underscores the value of applying Freudian theory to children’s media, as such content often embeds adult emotional themes beneath family-friendly storytelling. This perspective aligns with Alavi (2022), who emphasized the latent psychological depth of animated cinema.

In the end, music is no longer forbidden, and Miguel’s family supports his passion. This shows that true identity is about finding harmony between what we feel inside and the values we grow up with. Miguel’s story reflects the kind of emotional journey many people face trying to be themselves while staying connected to those they love (Gunadarma, 2023).

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