

LITERARY THEORY

PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

Definition and Description:

When looking through a Psychoanalytical lens, a critic is going to focus on the human psyche, which has been defined in several ways by different critics. The basic idea is that the mind has three controlling factors, whether it is the ego, superego, and id, or the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. A psychoanalytic critic can look at a character with either of those two concepts in mind, delving into the how's and why's of the human development that is taking place within the character. Or, a critic can look at a text as if the text were the unconscious desires of an author and do a psychobiography on the author. Whatever a critic decides to focus on, he will find that all will deal with symbolism, images brought up and suggested, possibly archetypes, and development of the human psyche. All in all, a critic will be looking for a particular pattern in the development of a character (or author) and how that character has been defined through that pattern.

Key People:

- Alfred Alder
- Carl G. Jung
- Ernest Jones
- Gilbert Murray
- Harold Bloom
- Jacques Lacan
- Marie Bonaparte
- Norman Holland
- Northrop Frye
- Peter Brooks
- Sigmund Freud

Websites:

- <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/nmh/mindbook.htm>
- <http://www.cgjungpage.org>
- <http://www.daimon.ch/>
- <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey>
- <http://www.mythweb.com/>
- <http://www.colorado.edu/English/courses/ENGL2012Klages/lacan.html>
- <http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/english/courses/60a/psycho.html>
- <http://web.olivet.edu/English/rbelcher/lit310/310psy.htm>
- <http://www.sou.edu/English/IDTC/timeline/uslit.htm>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/psychoanalysis>

Questions

- How does a specific literary text represent the self and its construction?
- How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work? What unconscious motives are operating in the main character(s); what core issues are thereby illustrated; and how do these core issues structure or inform the piece?
- Are there any oedipal dynamics—or any other family dynamics—at work in the text? How do these patterns of behavior and family dynamics operate and what do they reveal?

- How can characters' behavior, narrative events, and/or images be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind? (for example, regression, crisis, projection, fear of or fascination with death, sexuality—which includes love and romance as well as sexual behaviors—as primary indicator of psychological identity or the operations of ego-id-superego)
- In what ways can we view a literary work as analogous to a dream? That is, how might recurrent or striking dream symbols reveal the ways in which the narrator or speaker is projecting his or her unconscious desire, fears, wounds, or unresolved conflicts onto other characters, onto the setting, or onto the events portrayed?

(Freudian theory)

- What do you see as the main trait of the character? How are those traits revealed?
- What does the narrator reveal about the character? In the course of the narrative does he change? If so, how and why?
- Does the character come to understand something not understood at the outset?
- How does the character view himself? How is he viewed by the other characters? Do the two views agree?
- What images are associated with the character?
- What are the main symbols?
- Which symbols are connected with the character or forces that affect the character?
- Does the character have any interior monologues or dreams? If so, what do you learn about the character that is not revealed by outward behavior or conversation?
- Are there conflicts between what is observable and what is going on inside the character? Are there any revealing symbols in them?
- Where do the characters act in ways that are inconsistent with the way they are described by the narrator or perceived by the other characters?
- How can you explain a character's irrational behavior? What causes do you find? What motivation?

(Archetypal approach)

- What similarities do you find among the characters, situations, and settings of the text under consideration and other works that you have read?
- What commonly encountered archetypes do you recognize?
- Is the narrative like any classic myths you know?
- Where do you find evidence of the protagonist's persona? Anima/animus? Shadow?
- Does the protagonist at any point reject some part of her personality and project it onto someone or something else?

(Lacanian approach)

- Where do you recognize the appearance of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic orders?
- Is the character aware of the lack or absence of something significant in the self?
- Are there objects that symbolize what is missing or lacking?

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Key Terms

- **Anal Phase:** (second phase of Freud's pre-oedipal complex) Realizes separation from mother; anal region is predominant erotogenic zone
- **Animus:** The masculine in the female; (**Anima:** the feminine in the male)
- **Anti-romance phase:** (winter story) story of bondage, imprisonment, frustration and fear
- **Archetypes:** Patterns or images of repeated human experiences that express themselves in our stories, dreams, religion and fantasies, thought to come about from the collective unconscious
- **Autumn /Fall Phase:** tragic; hero doesn't triumph; meets death or defeat; fall from the romance phase and from happiness and freedom to disaster
- **Castration Complex:** Child fears castration from his father so he represses his desire for his mother and tries to identify with his father in hopes of having his own woman.
- **Collective Unconscious:** the inherited collective experience of the human race
- **Condensation:** a process to veil a direct meaning of a symbol in a dream
- **Conscious:** perceives and records external reality and is the reasoning part of the mind
- **Displacement:** using another image to gear an emotion towards a real person, like hating a Mr. Apple and dreaming about rotting apples; symbols that take the place of original desire
- **Dynamic Model:** the dichotomy consisting of the conscious (the rational) and the unconscious (the irrational)
- **Economic model:** similar to the dynamic model in that the unconscious and conscious battle for control of a person's actions but also deals with the pleasure and reality principles
- **Ego:** Operates according to reality and acts as a regulating agency of the id and supervises and resists the id's drives
- **Electra complex:** female grows attachment to father but comes to identify with mother because she realizes she is already castrated, and she seeks to have a man like her mother has
- **Erogenous zone:** A portion of the body in which sexual pleasures become localized: oral, anal, and genital are erogenous zones
- **Id:** irrational, instinctual, unknown, and unconscious part of the psyche that is also the repository of the libido that operates without thought of consequences and demands swift satisfaction and fulfillment of desires.
- **Imaginary Order:** A term used by Jacques Lacan to refer to the psyche stage during which the infant begins to recognize its separateness from other objects and to develop a sense of self
- **Individuation:** successful discovery, acceptance, and integration of one's own shadow, anima/animus, and persona; a psychological maturation
- **Latent Content:** the dream's underlying meaning; what the images mean which is hidden by displacement and condensation
- **Libido:** the source of our psychosexual desires and all our psychic energy; housed in the id.
- **Looking glass/mirror stage:** (6-18 months) we literally see ourselves in a mirror while metaphorically seeing ourselves in our mother's image;
- **Monomyth:** idea portrayed by Northrop Frye that literature is one complete and whole story that can be diagramed as a circle containing four separate phases, or mythoi; each phase corresponds with a season of the year. (Romance, anti-romance, spring, and fall phases)
- **Mythoi:** four types of literature that are each analogous with the four seasons of the year
- **Oedipus complex:** manifestations of boy having rivalry with father for the love of his mother
- **Oral Phase:** (the first phase of Freud's pre-oedipal complex) as infants our sexuality is activated from sucking on our mother's breast making the mouth the predominant erotogenic site
- **Persona:** Jung's term for the social part of an individual's personality. It is the being that other people know as one's self.
- **Personal conscious:** A state of awareness of the present moment that, once past, becomes part of the individual's unique personal unconscious
- **Personal unconscious:** the place where images or thoughts from the personal conscious are stored
- **Phallic stage:** (third phase of Freud's pre-oedipal complex) A child's sexual desires, or libido, are directed towards the genitals when the child learns the pleasures that result from stimulating one's sexual organs.
- **Phallic Symbol:** A masculine symbol. It is recognizable because its length exceeds its diameter
- **Pleasure Principle:** craves only pleasures and instantaneous satisfaction of instinctual drives ignoring moral and sexual boundaries established by society
- **Preconscious:** imprints and memories of experiences
- **Real order:** (third phase in Lacan's Human psyche) physical world beyond the individual, language, or representation because in it there is no loss, lack, or absence.
- **Reality Principle:** the part of the psyche that recognizes the need for societal standards and regulations on pleasure
- **Romance phase:** (summer story) all wishes are fulfilled, we can achieve total happiness
- **Spring phase:** Comedy; relates story of our rise from anti-romance and frustration to freedom and happiness
- **Superego:** the part of the psyche acts as a filtering agent for the id by following rules—set by society and parents—that forces unacceptable desires back into the unconscious
- **Symbolic order:** (second phase in Lacan's Human psyche) an individual learns language and it shapes his identity
- **Unconscious:** control a large part of our actions; receives and restores our hidden desires, ambitions, fears, passions, and irrational thoughts
- **Yonic Symbol:** a feminine symbol. It is recognizable because it is concave