



STUDY ON PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

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Abstract: Psychoanalytic criticism begins from the publications of Sigmund Freud's "The Interpretations of Dreams" (1900). In this work we find the first example of applied psychoanalysis with Freud's interpretation of William Shakespeare's play "Hamlet". For Freud, "Hamlet" derives from repressed infantile sexual desire. Hamlet is the first modern psychopathological character on the English stage; he is a character who is able to perform any act except take vengeance on the man who did away with this father and took his father's place with his mother the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. Thus Hamlet reveals to us our deeply repressed oedipal desire. Freud's brief, interpretation of "Hamlet" has been criticized by Shakespearean scholars but at the same time it has remained a peculiarly enduring reading of the play.

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Introduction:

Psychoanalytic criticism (emerged in the 1960s), the most influential interpretative theory among the series of waves in the post war period is based on the specific premises of the workings of the mind, the instincts and sexuality, developed by the 19th century intellect, Austrian Sigmund Freud (who along with Marx, Darwin and Nietzsche, subverted the centres of Western society by boiling down the human individuality into an animalistic sex drive).

Freud, greatly influenced by the psychiatrists Jean-Martin Charcot (an exponent in hypnosis) and Josef Breuer (pioneer of "talking cure") proposed his theoretical opus, the notion of the unconscious mind (disseminated in his significant works like *The Ego and the Id*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Totem and Taboo* etc.), which proved fatal to the Enlightenment ideals, Auguste Comte's Positivism etc., the pivots of Western rationalism. This stream of criticism has become one of the most exciting and challenging areas of literary and cultural studies today.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and literary criticism which spans much of the 20th century is fundamentally concerned with the articulation of sexuality in language. It has moved through three main emphases in its pursuit of the "literary unconscious" — on the author (and its corollary character), on the reader and on the text. It started with Freud's analysis of the literary text as a "symptom of the artist", where the relationship between the author and the text is analogous to dreamers and their dreams.

Later it was remoulded by post-Freudian psychoanalytical Reader Response criticism where the psychological experience of the reader in relation to the text is foregrounded, but contested by CG Jung's "contra-Freud" archetypal criticism which states that the literary work is not a focus for the writer's or the reader's personal psychology, but a representation of the relationship between the personal and the collective unconscious, the images, myths, symbols and archetypes of past cultures.

More recently, this theoretical delineation has been reworked in Poststructuralist context by Jacques Lacan, who coupled the dynamic notion of desire with Structuralist Linguistics; this has been influentially innovative as echoed in the Feminist psychoanalytic criticism. The psychoanalytic impetus which is compatible with contemporary concerns of uncertainties of time, subjectivity and meaning gained a new critical currency in Postcolonial studies, where the interest in destabilized borders and identities is very much evident.

Classical/ Freudian Psychoanalysis

The uniqueness of Freud's explorations lies in his attributing to the unconscious a decisive role in the lives of human beings. The unconscious is the repository of traumatic experiences, emotions, unadmitted desires, fears, libidinal drives, unresolved conflicts etc. This unconscious comes into being at an early age, through the expunging of these unhappy psychic events from the consciousness, a process which Freud terms "repression". Repression is crucial to the operations of the unconscious (an idea later developed by Herbert Marcuse). There has been a consistent interest in

contemporary literary studies in the unconscious (eg. Frankfurt School's synthesis of Freud and Marx) and the notion and effects of repression linked often with debates on sexuality (eg. Foucault's rejection of Western belief that history of sexuality has been the history of repression).

However, Repression does not eliminate our fears, agonies and drives, but it gives them force by making them the organizers of our current experience. Through a similar process called Sublimation the repressed material is promoted into something more grand or is disguised as something noble. For instance, sexual urges may be given sublimated expression in the form of intense religious longings. A related neologism is defence mechanism which is a psychic procedure for avoiding painful admission or, recognition.

A well-known example of this is the Freudian slip, which Freud himself called the "parapraxis" whereby repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, pen or unintended actions. Thus, for psychoanalysis, the unconscious is not passive reservoir of neutral data; rather it is a dynamic entity that engages us at the deepest level of our being.

Id, Ego, Superego

Later in his career, Freud suggested a tripartite model of the psyche, dividing it into id, ego and superego. The id, being entirely in the unconscious is the most inaccessible and obscure part of our personality. It is the receptacle of our libido, the primary source of our psychic energy. Its function is to fulfil the primordial life principle, which is the pleasure principle. It is entirely without rationality and has a tremendous amorphous kind of vitality. Ego, governed by the reality principle, is defined as the rational governing force of the psyche. It is mostly conscious and protects the individual from the id. It is the site of reason and introspection. It is the intermediary between the world within (id) and the world outside (superego). The superego, which is another regulatory agent, protects the society from id. It is partly conscious and in moral parlance, can be called as the conscience of the individual. It is governed by the "morality principle" and represses the incestual, sexual passions, aggressiveness etc. Being a repository of pride, self esteem etc., it compels the individual to move towards perfection.

Psychosexual development

Many of Freud's ideas are concerned with aspects of libido, human sexual drive, which he calls eros and places in opposition to thanatos, the death drive. This is exemplified in his postulate of infantile sexuality. Freud believes that sexuality arrives not at puberty with physical maturing, but in infancy, especially with the infant's relationship with mother. Drawing from mythology and contemporary ethnography, Freud proposes his theory of psychosexual development

(critiqued for its explicit phallogocentrism) in which the infant passes through a series of stages, each defined by an erogenous zone of the body. If the infant is reluctant or unable to move from one stage to another, s/he is said to be fixated at that stage of development. The stages of psychosexual development include:

1) **Oral Stage:** The first stage of psychosexual development lasts approximately from birth to 2 years. During this stage, the principle source of pleasure for the infant is the mouth and the pleasure is derived through sucking, biting, swallowing etc. A person fixated at this stage will be prone to obsession with oral activities (like eating, drinking, smoking, kissing etc.) and or excessive pessimism, hostility etc. Oral stage ends at the time of weaning and the infant's focus is shifted.

2) **Anal Stage:** Here, anus is the prime source of pleasure. Elimination of faeces gives pleasure to the child, but with the onset of toilet training, s/he is forced to postpone or delay this pleasure. A fixation at this stage is identified as the reason for the development of an "anal retentive" personality described as being stubborn and stingy

3) **Phallic Stage:** Children aged from 4-5 years seem to spend a good deal of time exploring and manipulating the genitals — their own and others. Pleasure is derived from the phallic region, through behaviours such as masturbation and through fantasies. The basic conflict of the phallic stage centres around the unconscious incestuous desire of the child for the parent of the opposite sex, which is corollary with the child's desire to replace or annihilate the parent of the same sex. Out of this conflict, arises one of Freud's theoretical pivots, the Oedipus complex, where the male child conceives the incestuous longing for the mother, and the desire to eliminate the father, his rival. Through both fantasy and overt behaviour, he exhibits his sexual longings for the mother.

Applied Psychoanalysis

Applied Psychoanalysis broadly designates two related forms of criticism: first, literature as "illustrative" of "psychoanalytic concepts" and, second, the "psycho-biography" Ernest Jones, "Hamlet and Oedipus" describes Hamlet's Oedipal conflict as a direct expression of Shakespeare's own unresolved Oedipal complex. These unconscious Oedipal desires then in turn resonate with the unconscious desires of the audience, which, he argues accounts for the play's universal appeal and timelessness.

The text as a symptom of the authors unconscious is central to the notion of "psycho biography". In the "The life and work of Edgar Alan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation" (1949), Marie Bonaparte argued that the literary work is analogous to a dream and thus it reveals author's psychopathology. Bonaparte identifies two incidents that irrevocably marked Poe's life: first, the sight of his dead mother and

his subsequent infatuation with her; second, a night he spent in the same room as consumptive niece and the desire this aroused in him.

In "creative writers and Day-Dreaming" Freud says that children have dreams about play activities and thus they have wish fulfillment. He further suggested that a parallel between the process of day dreaming and creative writing existed. In creative writing the author imaginatively represents his or her most secret and hidden desires and thus makes them both acceptable and accessible to a wider audience.

Archetypal Criticism

Analytical psychology, as Jung distinguished his practice from Freudianism proper has developed what is known as "archetypal criticism". An archetype is a primordial image that does not exist in individual psyches as such but in what Jung called the collective unconscious", which is Trans cultural and trans-historical. These archetypes or privileged symbols could be seen to recur not only in the unconscious of individuals but also in our myths and fictional representations. Northrop Frye in his "Anatomy of criticism" tells that literature is structured around four "pregeneric" archetypes or narrative categories the romantic (summer), the tragic (autumn), the ironic (winter), and the comic (spring). Frye saw each of these "mythoi" as governed by a particular narrative structure and ultimately representing the fulfillment of an unconscious desire.

Ego Psychology

Ego Psychologists abandoned Freud's emphasis on unconscious processes, concentrating their work on strengthening the ego whereas Freud located the meaning of literary text in the unconscious fantasy of the author but the ego psychologists think that meaning does not rest in the psyche of the author but in the conventions between reader and text; this kind of criticism is closely aligned with "reader-response theory". In "The Dynamics of Literary Response" (1968), Norman N. Holland initially argued that the literary text was a kind of fundamental fantasy shared by both author and reader but in subsequent revision of his work, "Poem in Person" and "Five Readers Reading", he placed the emphasis for meaning firmly on the side of the reader. In line with ego psychology, Holland has been concerned with the way in which readers adapt their identity in the process of interpretation and thereby confirm a sense of self and autonomy.

Lacanian Criticism

Lacan is a well known French psychoanalyst. He has written on a number of literary texts including, "Antigone", "Hamlet" Lacan's most influential piece of literary criticism is his seminar on Poe's. "The Purloined Letters". In this seminar he demonstrates how the human

subject is constituted through language and within a symbolic order. His interpretation of Poe's tale focused upon two main themes: first, the anomalous nature of the letter itself, the contents of which are never revealed to the reader; second, the way in which possession of the letter by individual characters immediately sets them within a triangular relationship with the other main characters. Lacan also highlights the way in which Poe's tale repeats itself, reworking the same triangular scenario but in a slightly different form. According to Lacan the contents of the letter remain a secret because it is a pure signifier (representation) without a signified (meaning) and it is the signifier that captivates the individual character and positions them as subject in the chain of signification. This, for Lacan is the meaning of Poe's tale, the insistence of the signifying chain and the determination of the subject by the signifier.

Thus Lacan's significance for literary studies rests upon his transposition of the Freudian notion of the unconscious and repressed desire from the individual to the realm of language and a transindividual symbolic order. Lacan said that unconscious functions according to rules of language, primarily metaphor and metonymy.

Transference And the Text

Transference is essentially the process whereby within analysis, the analysand and transfers onto his or her relationship with the analyst infantile sexual fantasies. Within the transference something of the past is reconstructed, or reenacted in the present. According to Brooks, transference creates an intermediate region that is neither past nor present, it is neither outside nor inside, neither fiction nor reality. Transference is a symbolic reconstruction of past experiences, it is textual through and through just as much as the text is fundamentally transference. Readers are involved in a dialogue with the text and, according to Brooks the reader must grasp not only what is said but also what is left unsaid within the narrative, what is absent from the discourse but must be reconstructed if the reader is to understand how a text is working upon him or herself.

Psychoanalytic criticism has thus come full circle, from initially providing the hermeneutic key that reveals the true meaning of literature, as Freud said of "Hamlet", to providing a dynamic model of how unconscious fantasy and desire works within language and text on to resist any fixed or determinate meaning.

Reference:

Berger, Arthur Asa. (2000). The Hamlet case: The murders at the MLA. New York: Xlibris. In this comic academic novel, a demented English professor murders all the members of the editorial board of Shakespeare Studies, the journal he edits, but not before each of them (a semiotician, a psychoanalytic theorist, a Marxist critic, a sociological critic, a feminist critic, a historical critic, and a literary theorist) has offered a different

interpretation of Hamlet.

Bettelheim, Bruno. (1977). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York: Vintage. This is an excellent example of the application of psychoanalytic theory (Freudian, in particular) to an important literary genre. Extended and perceptive readings of some of the most important Western fairy tales appear in the second half of the book.

Brenner, Charles. (1974). *An elementary textbook of psychoanalysis*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. This is a classic textbook on psychoanalytic theory, authoritative and relatively easy to read and understand.

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Freud, Sigmund. (1965). *The interpretation of dreams*. New York: Avon. This book, originally published in 1900, is considered Freud's greatest publication—a fascinating and controversial analysis of the nature of dreams and the role they play in our lives. Freud's discussions of symbols, condensation, displacement, and distortion are of particular interest to those interested in visual communication.

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