

## The Psychoanalytic Literary Theory

### **I. The Freudian Theory:**

#### **Introduction:**

According to Sigmund Freud, we cannot claim fully to comprehend even ourselves, why we act as we do. Even when we think we are acting from a given motive, we may be deluding ourselves; and much of our thought and action is not freely determined by us but driven by unconscious forces which we can barely fathom. Clearly, this general problematization of conventional notions extends to literature: if the unconscious is a founding factor of our psyche, we can no longer talk unequivocally of an author's intention. We cannot assume that we are fully in control of what we say or that readers are fully in control of their responses.

#### **Repression and the Unconscious:**

Reasoning that everything forgotten by a patient must have been somehow distressing (alarming, painful, shameful), Freud concluded that this was precisely why it had been expunged from the conscious memory. Freud hypothesized that, any powerful impulse or instinct which was embarrassing continued to operate in the realm of the unconscious where it retained its full investment of energy.

This instinct began to seek substitutive satisfaction by circuitous routes and would produce neurotic symptoms. This is the process that Freud called repression, which he regarded as a primary mechanism of defense whereby the ego was obliged to protect itself against any renewed threat of the repressed impulse by a permanent investment of energy.

#### **Interpretation of Dreams:**

Modern science regarded the reading of dreams as belonging to the realm of superstition. Yet psychoanalysis insisted that dreams could be scientifically interpreted. From the associations produced by the dreamer, the analyst could infer a thought structure, composed of *latent dream thoughts*. These were expressed not directly but only as translated and distorted into the *manifest* dream, which was composed largely of visual images. In his study *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he shows that the latent dream thought is a wishful impulse and the dream represents the satisfaction of this impulse. Freud argued, the ego is focused on withdrawing energy from all the interests of life, and relaxes its expenditure of energy upon repression. The unconscious impulse uses this opportunity to make its way into consciousness via the dream. But the ego maintains some of its repressive resistance as a kind of censorship of the dream: the latent dream thoughts are obliged to undergo alteration, a process Freud called *dream distortion*, so that the forbidden meaning of the dream is unrecognizable. Hence, Freud defined a dream as the disguised fulfillment of a repressed wish.

#### **The Theory of the Instincts**

In some of his later works, such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), and *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud considered a new account of the operation of the instincts. He used the word *eros* (Greek for "love") to designate the instincts of self-preservation as pertaining to both the individual and the species. He opposed this instinct to another

instinct of death or destruction, which he called *thanatos* (Greek for “death”). He viewed these two forces as engaged in a constant struggle, which is the broader context of our mental experience.

### **The Structure of Mind: Freud's Id, Ego, & Superego:**

#### **The Id**

Personality is composed of three elements. These three elements of personality--known as the id, the ego and the superego--work together to create complex human behaviors. The id is the only component of personality that is present from birth. This aspect of personality is entirely unconscious and includes of the instinctive and primitive behaviours. According to Freud, the id is the source of all psychic energy, making it the primary component of personality. The id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state anxiety or tension. For example, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. However, immediately satisfying these needs is not always realistic or even possible. If we were ruled entirely by the pleasure principle, we might find ourselves grabbing things we want out of other people's hands to satisfy our own cravings. This sort of behaviour would be both disruptive and socially unacceptable.

#### **The Ego**

According to Freud, the ego ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world. The ego operates based on the reality principle, which strives to satisfy the id's desires in realistic and socially appropriate ways. The reality principle weighs the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act upon or abandon impulses. In many cases, the id's impulses can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification--the ego will eventually allow the behaviour, but only in the appropriate time and place.

#### **The Superego**

The superego is the aspect of personality that holds all of our internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from both parents and society--our sense of right and wrong. The superego provides guidelines for making judgments. According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age five. The superego acts to perfect and civilize our behaviour. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the id and struggles to make the ego act upon idealistic standards rather than upon realistic principles.

#### **The Oedipus Complex:**

Of all theories of relationships, Sigmund Freud's oedipal complex has probably caused the most controversy. The Oedipal complex is named after Sophocles' protagonist, who unwittingly murders his father and marries his mother. Later researchers used the term Electra complex for the complex in girls. According to Greek legend, a woman named Electra helped plan the murder of her mother.

Freud theorised that all small boys select their mother as their primary object of desire. They subconsciously wish to usurp their fathers and become their mothers' lover. Typically, these desires emerge between the ages of three and five, when a boy is in what Freud defined as the "phallic" stage of development. Because the child suspects that acting on these feelings would lead to danger, desires are repressed, leading to anxiety. The boy **represses** his incestuous desire, adjusts to the **reality principle**, and waits for the day when he will be the patriarch. In this way the boy identifies with his father and the symbolic role of manhood.

## Freud and Literature:

Even in his earlier work, Freud had appealed to literary texts – notably *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* – not only to exemplify and illuminate, but even to ground some of his theoretical notions. He saw Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* as expressing a “universal law of mental life.” He also saw the Oedipus complex as governing the tragedy of *Hamlet*. As for poetic and artistic creation in general, Freud wrote a paper, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1907), which viewed works of art as the imaginary satisfactions of unconscious wishes, just as dreams were. What the psychoanalyst can do is to piece together the various elements of an artist's life and his works, and to construct from these the artist's mental constitution and his instinctual impulses.

Freud admits at the outset that the creative writer is a “strange being” who himself cannot explain his power to arouse new and intense emotions in us. He suggests that, in seeking an explanation, we might think of an analogy between creative activity and some activity of “normal” people. He suggests that the “first traces of imaginative activity” can be discerned in childhood: “every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, re-arranges the things of this world in a new way which pleases him.” The child takes this “play” very seriously, investing it with much emotion. Freud's inquiry moves to the connection between the life of a writer and his works.

He applies to the creative artist his earlier formula for phantasies: “A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfillment in the creative work.” Freud points out that his emphasis on a writer's childhood memories derives from his assumption that a creative work is “a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood”. For example, despite T. S. Eliot's disclaiming insistence on writing “impersonal” poetry, his poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” might be analyzed in terms of the history of Eliot's own attitudes toward women and the derivation of these attitudes from his childhood relationship with his mother and father.

Some critics share Freud's belief that we can “...read psychoanalytically...to see which concepts are operating in the text in such a way as to enrich our understanding of the work and, if we plan to write a paper about it, to yield a meaningful, coherent psychoanalytic interpretation” (Tyson 29). Tyson provides some insightful and applicable questions to help guide our understanding of psychoanalytic criticism.

## II. The Lacanian Theory:

### **Introduction:**

The work of the French psychoanalyst **Jacques Lacan** centers around his extensive re-reading of **Freud** in the light of insights furnished by linguistics and structuralism. He studied medicine, after which he undertook training in psychiatry. In 1939 he joined the Psychoanalytic Society of Paris and became president of this organization in 1953. He was criticized, however, for his irregular techniques and was eventually made something of **an outcast**. He responded by establishing his own **Freudian School**, which he himself dissolved in 1980, just before his death.

### **Theorists who influenced the Lacanian Theory:**

Apart from Freud, the main influences on Lacan's work were **Saussure**, **Roman Jakobson**, and **Hegel**. Lacan's reputation was established by his publication of *Écrits* (1966), a large collection of essays and papers.

### **Lacan's impact on theorists :**

Lacan's influence not only has extended over the field of psychoanalysis but also reaches into the work of **Marxists** such as **Louis Althusser** (whose theories were influenced by Lacan and who, ironically, became Lacan's patient, after which, even more ironically, he killed his wife) and feminists

such as **Julia Kristeva** and **Jane Gallop**, as well as deconstructive thinkers such as **Barbara Johnson**. Other feminists have reacted strongly against the **phallogocentric thrust** (a not altogether inapt expression) of Lacan's own work.

### **Lacan's Three Orders:**

Lacan posits three orders or states of human mental disposition: the *imaginary* order, the *symbolic* order, and the *real*. The imaginary order is a **pre-Oedipal** phase where an infant is as yet unable to distinguish itself from its mother's body or to recognize the lines of demarcation between itself and objects in the world; indeed, it does not as yet know itself as a coherent entity or self. Hence, the imaginary phase is one of **unity** (between the child and its surroundings), as well as of **immediate possession** (of the mother and objects), a condition of **reassuring plenitude**, a world consisting **wholly of images** (hence "imaginary") that is not **fragmented or mediated by difference, by categories, in a word, by language and signs**.

### **The symbolic order:**

It is the world of **predefined social roles** and **gender differences**, the world of subjects and objects, the world of **language**. In this way, Lacan effectively reformulates in linguistic terms Freud's account of the **Oedipus complex**. Freud had posited that the infant's desire for its mother is prohibited by the father, who threatens the infant with castration. Faced with this threat, the infant represses his desire, thereby opening up the dimension of the unconscious, which is for Lacan (and Freud as seen through Lacan) not a "place" but a relation to the social world of law, morality, religion, and conscience. According to Freud, the child internalizes through the father's commands (what Lacan calls the **Law of the Father**) the **appropriate standards of socially acceptable** thought and behavior.

Freud calls these standards internalized as conscience the child's "**superego**." The child now identifies with the father, sliding into his own gendered role, in the knowledge that he too is destined for **fatherhood**. Of course, the repressed desire(s) continue to exert their influence on conscious life. As Lacan rewrites this process, the child, in passing from the imaginary to the symbolic order, continues **to long for the security and wholeness** it previously felt: it is now no longer in full possession of its mother and of entities in the world; rather, **it is distinguished** from them in and through a **network of signification**.

### **The "real":**

Lacan never accurately describes the "**real**": he seems to think of it as what lies **beyond the world of signification**, perhaps a **primordial immediacy of experience prior to language**. For Lacan, the real is the **impossible**. It is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order. This character of impossibility to symbolization lends the real its traumatic quality.

### **The mirror stage:**

When does the mirror stage occur? Lacan locates it in the development of a child between the ages of 6 and 18 months. Such a child can "recognize as such his own image in a mirror." In the case of intelligent animals such as monkeys, this act of recognition is self-exhausting and its implications extend no further. In the case of the child, however, this recognition has a profound and enduring impact: in his mirrored gestures and his reflected play, the child experiences "the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him" (*Écrits*, 1). In other words, whereas the monkey sees in the mirror simply another monkey, the child sees reflected *himself* and his relationship with his environment.

The child is "**jubilant**" because the image reflected in the mirror is what Lacan calls "**the Ideal-I**," an idealized, coherent, and unified version of itself. The child's ego is precipitated into the symbolic matrix of language, the symbolic order: the word "primordial" indicates that the experience of the child is somewhat premature, anticipating its entry into language, and into the entire relation of subject

and object which will govern its engagement in the world. In other words, the mirror stage occurs prior to the child's actual acquisition of a sense of self, a sense of itself as subject in distinction from objects in the world: the child experiences, as projected in its mirror image, itself and its surroundings as an integrated unity. **It has not consciously entered the symbolic order, even though it is already surrounded by the effects of that order and even though that order indeed governs its present experience.**

In other words, the passing of the mirror stage marks the transition from the child's jubilant and comforting assumption of his satisfying total image or "I" in the mirror to his entry into the social world. As Lacan puts it, the ending of the mirror stage "inaugurates . . . the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations" (*Écrits*, 5). Lacan adds that this moment corresponds to a "natural maturation," which itself is normalized by "cultural mediation" as in the case of the Oedipus complex (*Écrits*, 5–6). The child has effectively passed from the imaginary order to the symbolic order.

### **III. The Jungian Theory:**

#### **Introduction:**

The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961) was interested in the way in which symbols and common myths permeate our thinking on both conscious and subconscious levels. Jung initially worked with fellow psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, whose 1899 work *The Interpretation of Dreams* had attached significance to the recurring themes and motifs in people's dreams, and sought to understand their relevance to subjects' psyches and their mental wellbeing. However, Jung and Freud later took different paths, with the former disagreeing with Freud's emphasis on the influence of biological factors such as libido on behavior and personality.

#### **The Jungian Theory :**

Instead, Jung looked at areas of the mind that constitute the *psyche*, and the way in which they influenced one another. He distinguished the *persona*, or the image of ourselves that we present to the world, from our *shadow*, which may be comprised of hidden anxieties and repressed thoughts. Jung also noted the relationship between our *personal unconscious*, which contains an individual's personal memories and ideas, and a *collective unconscious*, a set of memories and ideas that is shared amongst all of humanity. Shared concepts, which Jung described as *archetypes*, permeate the collective unconscious and emerge as themes and characters in our dreams and surface in our culture - in myths, books, films and paintings, for example.

#### **The Personal Unconscious :**

Jung's idea of the *personal unconscious* is comparable to the *unconscious* that Freud and other psychoanalysts referred to. To Jung, it is personal, as opposed to the *collective unconscious*, which is shared amongst all persons. The personal unconscious contains memories which are unaware we still possess, often as a result of repression. As we exist in a conscious state, we do not have direct access to our personal unconscious, but it emerges in our dreams or in a hypnotic state of regression.

#### **The Collective Unconscious :**

The *collective unconscious* is key to Jung's theories of the mind as it contains the *archetypes*. Rather than being born as a *tabula rasa* (a 'blank slate' in Latin) and being influenced purely by our environment, as the English philosopher John Locke believed, Jung proposed that we are each born with a collective unconscious. This contains a set of shared memories and ideas, which we can all

identify with, regardless of the culture that we were born into or the time period in which we live. We cannot communicate *through* the collective unconscious, but we recognise some of the same ideas innately, including archetypes. For example, many cultures have cultivated similar myths independently of one another, which feature similar characters and themes, such as the creation of the universe.

### **Archetypes:**

Jung noted that within the collective unconscious there exist a number of *archetypes* which we can all recognise. An archetype is the model image of a person or role and includes the mother figure, father, wise old man and clown/joker, amongst others. The mother figure, for example, has caring qualities; she is dependable and compassionate. We all hold similar ideas of the mother figure and we see her across cultures and in our language - such as the term 'mother nature'. Archetypes are often incarnated as characters in myths, novels and films - in the James Bond spy series, 'M' embodies the mother archetype, whom the spy trusts and returns to. Similar, archetypes permeate the cards of a Tarot deck: the mother archetype is seen in the qualities of the Empress card, whilst the Hermit embodies the wise old man archetype.

### **The Persona:**

Distinct from our inner self, Jung noted that we each have a *persona* - an identity which we wish to project to others. He used the Latin term, which can refer either to a person's personality the mask of an actor, intentionally, as the persona can be constructed from archetypes in the collective unconscious, or be influenced by ideas of social roles in society. For example, a father may adopt traits which he considers to be typical of a father - serious or disciplining, for example - rather than those which reflect his actual personality. Philip Zimbardo's study of social roles in a prison situation (1971) further demonstrated the effect that our role has on our persona. Assigned a role, such as that of a prison guard, people often behave as they would expect someone in their role to act. As the persona is not a true reflection of our consciousness, but rather an idealised image which people aspire to, identifying too much with a persona can lead to inner conflicts and a repression of our own individuality, which Jung claimed could be resolved through *individuation*.

### **The Shadow :**

The *shadow* archetype is composed primarily of the elements of ourselves that we consider to be negative. We do not show this side of the self to the outside world as it can be a source of anxiety or shame. The shadow may contain repressed ideas or thoughts which we do not wish to integrate into our outward *persona*, but these must be resolved in order to achieve *individuation*. However, it may also include positive traits, such as perceived weaknesses (for example, empathy) which may not fit into the 'toughness' that a person wants to present as a part of their persona.

In literature, the shadow is often presented as a villainous character - for instance, as the snake in the Garden of Eden or *The Jungle Book*. Jung also observed Hyde, whom Dr. Jekyll transforms into, as representing the character's shadow in Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

### **Anima/Animus archetypes:**

The anima (in males) or animus (in females) represents the opposite gender to a person's self. As a person develops a gender identity, such as that of being male, they repress the aspects of their personality which might be considered to be feminine, such as empathy in social situations. Whilst these traits form part of the true, united *self*, they are held back from our persona and are represented

in the form of the feminine archetype *anima* in males or the masculine archetype *animus* in females. The anima and animus are idealised impressions of the male or female, which emerge from the collective unconscious in dreams and inform our ideas of the opposite gender. As we age, they bring us into touch with the aspects of our personality repressed during the formation of a gender identity. For example, a man may allow their empathy to show more after the development of their masculine persona. The anima and animus can be found throughout our culture - Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, presents the anima archetype as the idealised Mr Darcy.

### **Individuation:**

Jung believed that by acquiring the qualities of an archetype from the collective unconscious, we repress those attributes of our true self which do not conform to the archetype. To achieve individuation and realise our true self, he claimed that, rather than repressing these traits, we must 'integrate' them by allowing them to surface from the shadow and to coexist with those in the *ego*, or true self. Analytical psychologists may encourage this integration, or individuation, through therapy including free association.