



PSYCHOANALYTICAL READINGS

Secret River
Mrs Ryan 2023

WHAT IS A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING?

A psychoanalytical reading is one which explores the ways that psychological issues are played out in the characters.

Everyone has psychological 'issues' to some degree, because everyone experiences conflict in their life. Psychological problems are a natural and unavoidable part of being human.

Knowledge is power; by identifying and discussing these issues we can better understand ourselves and 'heal'.

Analyzing characters psychoanalytically helps us understand the effects of family and society on the individual and their behaviour.



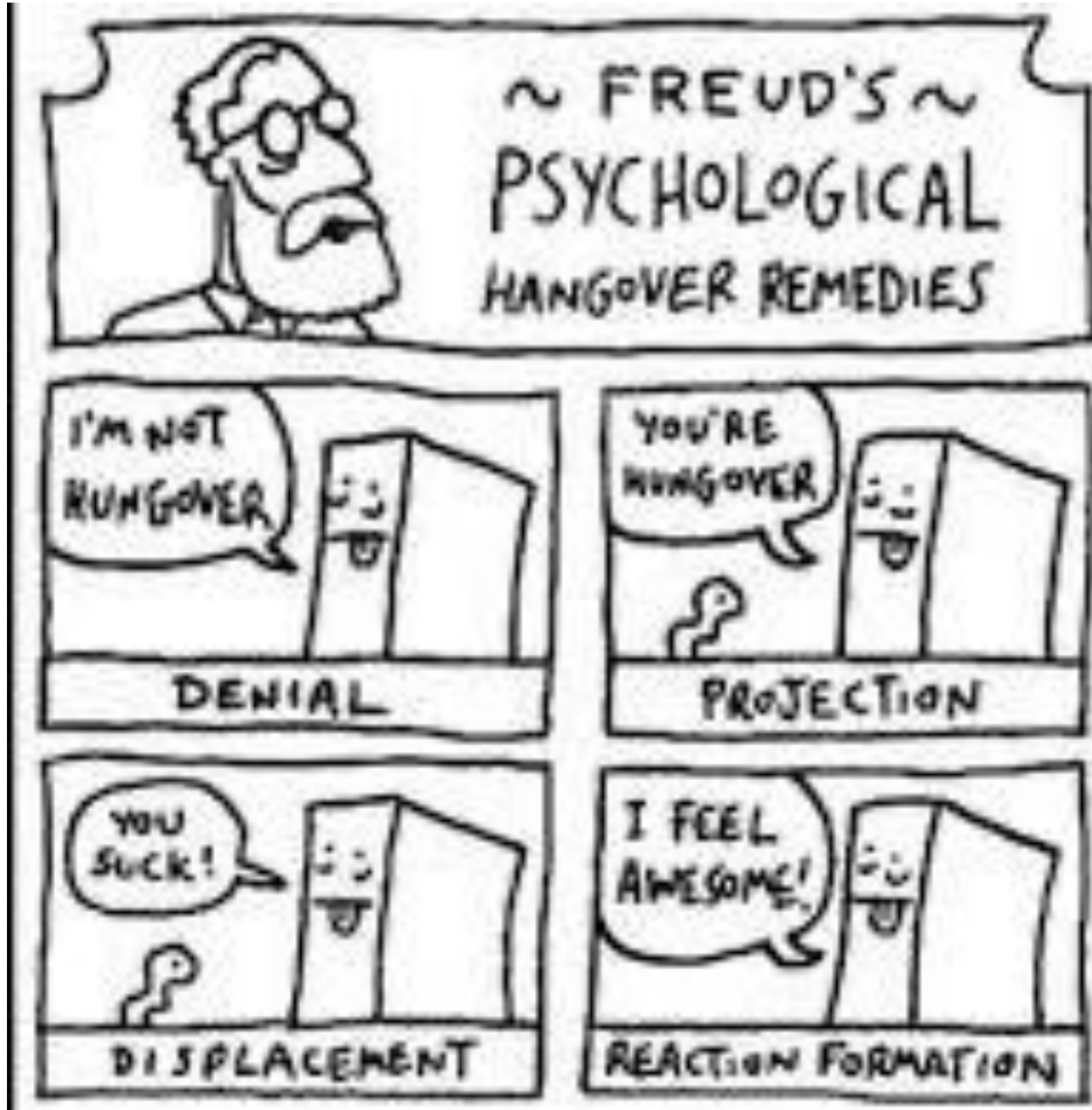
MAIN PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR...

1. **Family:** childhood and relationships with parents.
2. **Repression:**
 - “Emotion denied, is emotion deferred”.
 - We tend to deny, repress, and push out of sight those experiences that are most distressing to us.
 - This can lead to unconscious patterns in self-destructive behaviour.
 - We enact, or play out, our problems in our relationships with other people.



3. Defenses:

- Strategies we have for protecting ourselves emotionally.
- The means by which we keep ourselves from becoming conscious of the experiences we've repressed.
- These can be destructive as they stop us from dealing with our issues and therefore healing.
- Common defenses include:
 - *Denial* – refusing to admit there is a problem
 - *Avoidance* – staying away from the people, places or situations that may 'trigger' us.
 - *Displacement* – Taking our negative feelings out on others.
 - *Projection* – When we see our own issues in other people and attack them for it to prove to ourselves that we don't have that issue. E.g., attacking someone for 'being gay', to prove to ourselves and others that we are not gay (when we are).



CORE CONFLICTS/ISSUES



At the basis of self-destructive behaviour, there is a core issue or conflict.

Common core issues include:

Low self-esteem and a sense of not being worthy

Insecure or unstable sense of self and identity

Oedipal fixation – a dysfunctional fixation or emotional bond with the parent of the opposite sex

Fear of intimacy and emotional closeness

Fear of abandonment, emotional or physical

TO RECAP....

A distressing event or situation that occurs in our youth is repressed into our unconscious because we don't feel we can face it consciously.

We keep our repressed experiences buried in our unconscious through the use of our defenses.

If the experience buried in our unconscious affects us powerfully enough it will become a core issue – a fundamental part of our personality.

Core issues result in the repetition of certain self-destructive behaviors.

WHEN DENIAL IS YOUR DEFENSE
MECHANISM AND



SOMEONE ASKS "ARE YOU
OKAY?"

TIME TO PUT YOUR PSYCH HAT ON...

Pretend you have a character laying on your psychologist's couch, and you want to get to the bottom of the psychological drives of their behaviour. You could ask:

1. Is there any traumatic experiences in their childhood?
2. Are they exhibiting any defensive behaviour that would indicate repression (denial, avoidance, displacement, projection)?
3. What is their core issue (low self-esteem, unstable identity, oedipal complex, fear of abandonment and intimacy)?
4. What destructive behaviours may be caused by this core issue?

When you make a joke in front of your psychologist & instead of laughing, she starts writing it down

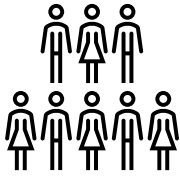


Thornhill



1. Is there any traumatic experience in their childhood?

Yes, poverty and deprivation. His mother was distant and he grew up amongst crime and immorality. He was sentenced to death but then exiled instead.



2. Are they exhibiting any defensive behaviour that would indicate repression (denial, avoidance, displacement, projection)?

Avoidance: Doesn't want to return to London or see Smasher after he discovers the sex slave.

Displacement: Enjoys the power of owning convicts and making them work in the sun.

Projection: doesn't want to believe that what he is doing is wrong so tries to believe that he is the victim and the Indigenous people are the aggressors, justifying their massacre.



3. What is their core issue (low self-esteem, unstable identity, oedipal complex, fear of abandonment and intimacy)?

Low self-esteem: Tries to make himself look big by spending money, getting portraits painted of himself etc.



4. What destructive behaviors may be caused by this core issue?

Not acting on his knowledge of the sex slave.

Taking part in the massacre at Blackwood's

Lying to and distancing from his wife.

Guilt towards the Indigenous man 'Jack'

Beats son.

SO WHAT IF A MADE-UP CHARACTER NEEDS THERAPY?

Literature is a reflection of ourselves.

Like reading about other aspects of the human condition such as ethics, love and aging, psychoanalytical readings help us to understand *ourselves* better.

They also help us to understand society influences our psychology as individuals.

For instance, by combining a class and analytical reading you could seek to explain how in many ways the inequality and poverty of the lower classes in Victorian society produced dysfunctional and immoral adults.

A post-colonial lens with psychoanalytical insights could seek to understand how human beings could justify treating each other so horrifically, and the ramifications of that.

When your therapist ignores your decoy issue and starts to shed light on the Real Issue



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT?

What are some lessons you have learnt from
psychoanalyzing Thornhill?

Consider...

Class

Colonialism

Power

Guilt

Poverty

Violence



OTHER
PSYCHOANALYTICAL
APPROACHES TO
CONSIDER...

Thanatos – the death drive

Libido/eros – the sex drive

Superego, id and ego

Dreams

Jungian Archetypes

Me at home thinking about how the one person all my problems have in common is me



THANATOS — THE DEATH DRIVE (DUN DUN DUN!)

The idea that humans have an inborn compulsion to seek oblivion, otherwise why would we exhibit self-destructive behaviors?

Paradoxically, this is linked to the fear of death, and therefore the fear of abandonment. After all, death is the ultimate abandonment.

No matter how important, popular and loved we are, we die alone. Even if we die physically next to someone.

One of the greatest comforts of religion is that we will NOT die alone, that god will not abandon us.

This fear can lead to defensive behaviours: If I don't get too close to people it won't hurt as much when they die. In this way fear of death can lead to fear of intimacy, emotions and life itself.

How to deal with death is a psychological challenge at the heart of the human condition.

Me: I'm actually doing fine this week

my therapist:

me:

me and my therapist:



When your
shampoo says
'Repairs damage'
but you're still
broken on the
inside



“LET’S TALK ABOUT SEX BABY, LET’S
TALK ABOUT YOU AND ME..”

Eros or libido is not just about sex, it is about the affirmation of life, opposing the death drive.

Psychoanalysts do not approach sex as merely physical desire; it is primarily *psychological* and therefore a good indicator of the psychological state in general.

Sexuality is a cultural construct, and what is deemed 'normal', and 'deviant' is dependent on society's views. Individuals who do not conform to society's expectations are conditioned to feel guilt and shame.

Questions to consider:

Does the character use sex to 'purchase' something from their partner?

Does the character withhold sex to 'punish' their partner?

Is the character promiscuous?

Does the character avoid sexual encounters entirely?

What is the emotional response of the character after sex?



FREUD AND THE SUPEREGO, EGO AND ID.

Superego: the repository of society's values and taboos by which we feel guilty. Our conscious and moral compass.

Id: The psychological reservoir of forbidden desires and appetites for sex, power, food and amusement.

Ego: The conscious decision-making self that experiences the world through the senses and is the source of our self-image. It referees the conflict between the superego and id.

DREAMS

We can interpret literary texts as dreams, as they have 'dreamed up' the story.

Common dream symbols include:

- Water = emotions/sexuality and unpredictability.
- Buildings = Self, body
- Basements = The unconscious, repressed unpleasant memories.
- Attics = Intellect, conscious mind. Can also be the opposite: the storage place for unwanted repressed memories.
- Phallic symbols = penis-shaped things, e.g., towers, guns, serpents, swords etc. associated with masculinity.
- Womb imagery = enclosed spaces that are a sanctuary e.g., walled gardens, caves, hearth/home, cocoons etc.

Psychologist: All dreams have a meaning.

my dreams:



THE 12 JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES

THE INNOCENT



MOTTO: FREE TO BE YOU AND ME
DESIRE: TO GET TO PARADISE
GOAL: TO BE HAPPY
FLAW: TOO TRUSTING

THE ORPHAN



MOTTO: ALL ARE EQUAL
DESIRE: TO BE CONNECTED
GOAL: TO BELONG
FLAW: CYNICAL

THE HERO



MOTTO: EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE
DESIRE: COURAGEOUS ACTS
GOAL: TO IMPROVE THE WORLD
FLAW: ARROGANCE

THE CAREGIVER



MOTTO: LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR
DESIRE: TO PROTECT AND CARE
GOAL: TO HELP OTHERS
FLAW: BEING EXPLOITED

THE EXPLORER



MOTTO: DON'T FENCE ME IN
DESIRE: EXPLORING THE WORLD
GOAL: A BETTER LIFE
FLAW: BECOMING A MISFIT

THE REBEL



MOTTO: TO BROKE THE RULES
DESIRE: REVOLUTION
GOAL: TO OVERTURN
FLAW: THE DARK SIDE, CRIME

THE LOVER



MOTTO: YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE
DESIRE: INTIMACY
GOAL: BEING IN A RELATIONSHIP
FLAW: DESIRE TO PLEASE ALL

THE CREATOR



MOTTO: TO IMAGINE
DESIRE: TO CREATE
GOAL: TO REALIZE A VISION
FLAW: PERFECTIONISM

THE JESTER



MOTTO: YOU LIVE ONLY ONCE
DESIRE: TO LIVE IN THE MOMENT
GOAL: TO HAVE A GREAT TIME
FLAW: FRIVOLITY, WASTING TIME

THE SAGE



MOTTO: TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE
DESIRE: TO FIND THE TRUTH
GOAL: TO USE INTELLIGENCE
FLAW: AFRAID OF ACTION

THE MAGICIAN



MOTTO: I MAKE THINGS HAPPEN
DESIRE: TO UNDERSTAND
GOAL: TO REALIZE DREAMS
FLAW: BECOMING MANIPULATIVE

THE RULER



MOTTO: POWER
DESIRE: CONTROL
GOAL: CREATE A COMMUNITY
FLAW: BEING AUTHORITARIAN

The psychiatrist Carl Jung turned away from Freudian ideas and explored ancestral roots and the collective unconscious.

To define his 12 archetypes of personality, Jung studied the symbols and myths of many different cultures.

These archetypes represent behaviour patterns that make up different ways of being.

They're cultural symbols and images that exist in our collective unconscious.

Literary characters often fall into these archetypes: women in literature most commonly fall into the mother, maiden and seductress archetypes.

THORNHILL — FINAL REFLECTION

Does Thornhill have a death drive/fear of death?
How does this affect his behavior?

What is Thornhill's sexual relationship like? Does it change over the course of the novel?

How does his ego, id and superego interact?
Which tends to win?

Are there any dream symbols in the novel? What could they symbolize?

What archetype do you think he fits into?

