**20**

**PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY**

According to Jack Richardson, it is an approach to literature that draws upon psychoanalytic theories, especially those of Sigmund Freud or Jacques Lacan to understand more fully the text, the writer and the reader. The basis of this approach is the idea of the existence of a human unconscious-those impulses, desires and feelings about which a person is unaware but which influence emotions and behaviour. Critics use psychological approaches to explore the motivations of characters and the symbolic meanings of events, while biographers speculate about writer’s own motivations –conscious or unconscious – in a literary work. Psychological approaches are also used to describe and analyse the reader’s personal responses to a text.

This theory deals with the use of a psychological or psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic criticism, also called psychological criticism or Freudian theory, is a vast critical category, which often employs many approaches. First it investigates the creative process of the arts: what is the nature of literary genius, and how does it relate to normal mental functions? Such analysis may also focus on literature's effects on the reader. How does a particular work register its impact on the reader's mental and sensory faculties? The second approach involves the psychological study of a particular artist. Most modern literary biographers employ psychology to understand their subject's motivations and behaviour. The third common approach is the analysis of fictional characters. Sigmund Freud's study of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* in his work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1895), is an example of this approach, which tries to bring modern insights about human behaviour into the study of how fictional characters act. While psychoanalytical criticism carefully examines the surface of the literary work it customarily speculates on what lies underneath the text—the unspoken or perhaps even unspeakable memories, motives, and fears that covertly shape the work, especially in fictional characterisations.

**THE EMERGENCE OF PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY**

Psychoanalytic **(**also called psychological) literary criticism has its roots in the work of the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud (1856-1930). Freud was the first to employ this approach to the analysis of literature. Originally, psychoanalysis is a medical technique, a method of therapy for the treatment of mentally ill or distressed patients which helps them understand the source of their symptoms.

It is, in a way, a method of interpretation of the patient's words, actions and attitudes. Freud used examples from literature to diagnose his patient's illnesses. He referred to ‘Oedipus Complex’ to explain the natural erotic attachment of a young infant to the mother. Freud also propounded a “tripartite” model that the human psyche is not a single integrated entity but in fact consists of three very different parts. These three parts are: "id", "ego" and "superego". These three aspects of the mind have different goals and desires and operate according to different principles. The ‘id’ is the site of natural drives; it is a dark area of seething passion that knows only desire and has no sense of moderation or limitation. The 'ego’ moderates between the authoritarian demands of the ‘superego’ and the unmitigated desires of the ‘id’*.* The ‘ego’ is equivalent to the conscious thinking mind. It is the major interface between the psyche and the outside world. The ‘superego’ is an internalised representation of the authority of the father and of society. Freud's tripartite model has been applied to literature by critics. Freud also contended that dreams are an indication of repressed desires in the human unconscious. Dreams represent a leaking of the unconscious mind into consciousness. In his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams.* (1895), Freud deals with the techniques of interpreting dreams, and critics have found his techniques highly applicable to the interpretation of literary texts.

**THE INFLUENCE OF SIGMUND FREUD ON PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY**

Psychoanalysts analyse literature to reveal insights about the way the human mind works. It is based on the work of Sigmund Freud. It works well as a method of analysing characters’ actions and motivations. Psychoanalysis is based on the belief that all actions are influenced by the unconscious. Human beings must repress many of their desires to live peacefully with others. Repressed desires often surface in the unconscious, motivating actions. Freud is of the opinion that the content of dreams is so rich and complex that no dream can ever be completely interpreted, much in the same way that literary scholars have often emphasised that no single interpretation of a work of literature can ever be final or complete. Freud suggests that the making of a dream is like that of a literary text. A dream is constructed through the operation of four basic processes: condensation, displacement or disguise or symbolisation, considerations or representability or dream images, and further disguise of certain elements. It is very clear that all of the processes of dream-construction described by Freud have analogies in the construction of a work of literature. Condensation and interpretation of a literary work are as true or literature as in dream-world.

Literary works also rely on figurative language in ways that make interpretation necessary. Much of the work of the literary artist involves a search for images and motifs. Language is central both to the writing of literature and to the construction of the dream-world. The parallels between literary works and Freud's dream-work are really important. For Freud, the creation of art, like dreaming, is largely a mechanism for the release of unconscious psychic energies. Psychoanalytic critics study the psychological make-up of artists through an analysis of their art, because works or art reveal something about the psychology of their creator.

Contemporary psychological critics continue to find Freud's theories a rich source of ideas about literature, but, whereas earlier critics focused on authors and characters, recent critics have turned their attention to readers and texts. The critic, Norman Holland, for example, argues that readers' psyches respond subconsciously to certain aspects of works of literature. The reader in effect "makes" the text, so that the text is different for every reader. Like Holland, the French critic, Jacques Lacan, posits ideas about how readers respond to literary texts. Lacan combines Freud's theories of the unconscious with Saussurian linguistics. He holds that the human psyche is made up of language. Our conscious and sub-conscious minds are born into language, a system of signifiers. From in-fancy to adulthood, we grow toward what we think is a secure and coherent identity. But at the heart of the psyche is an unbridgeable gap between signifier and signified. As a result, our psyche is never fully coherent, our identity never stable.

It is also noteworthy to state that the theories of Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist, have also been employed by psychoanalytic literary critics. Jung suggests the idea that the unconscious mind also harbours "collective unconscious", that is, a repository or primitive desires common to the entire human race. In his cultural studies, Jung finds that certain images are present in myths and legends from all over the world. These myths are powerful because they appeal to unconscious desires in every culture, possibly inherited by all members of the human race. A number of fundamental images, motifs or archetypes are present in the collective unconscious; hence, it is clear that the archetypes appearing in myths and legends would also frequently appear in literary works.

**Fundamental premises of psychoanalytic theory**

Psychological criticism examines the behaviour of characters within the text in order to unearth its deeper meaning. Just as the economic theories of Karl Marx engendered Marxist criticism, the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud inspired psychoanalytic literary interpretation. Psychological criticism is usually applied in different ways. For instance, a work of literature can be viewed as a "dream", the expressive manifestation of the subconscious. By interpreting the symbolic nature of the work, we gain insight into the psyche of the author. Psychological criticism can also focus on the characters of a work, analysing their motives, desires and conflicts even though these characters are fictional. Characters, as well as their underlying traits, are often drawn from real people and therefore can display some of the same psychological patterns. Psychological theory also influences authors as they utilise these new ideas to create more complex characters. In addition, psychological criticism can also be used to interpret the relationship between the text and the reader. In this approach, the critic acknowledges that a work of literature functions as the secret expression of what the reader wants to hear. It is this aspect that creates our enjoyment of a book.

Psychoanalysis is geared towards understanding individuals by uncovering desires hidden deep within the mind and revealing their connections with the unconscious surface. In literature, however, psychoanalytic critics believe that the unconscious mind of the author is revealed in his works. Thus, the psychoanalytic critic may begin with a study of the elements in a writer's biography that shape his imagination and then apply this to the work. He may also use the work as the equivalent of a confession and then go on to draw conclusion about the writer from this. Psychoanalytic criticism believes that literature provides a fruitful and complex source for the analysis of the human mind. It helps to reveal to us things about the relation between the conscious and the unconscious mind, language and reality. A psychoanalytical interpretation of a work can help to solve the mysteries involved in complex and symbolic themes.

In subjecting a text to psychoanalytical reading, the questions to ask include: 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 desires, fears, wounds, or unresolved conflicts onto other characters, onto the setting, or onto the events portrayed? What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author? What might a given interpretation of a literary work suggest about the psychological motives of the reader? It is important to note that not all psychoanalytic critics will interpret the same work in the same way, even if they focus on the same psychoanalytic concepts. The overall goal is to use psychoanalysis to help enrich one’s reading of literary works, to help one see some important ideas they illustrate that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without psychoanalysis (Lois Tyson, 2006).

Criticism. Jide Balogun (2011) avers that psychoanalysis could be considered from the perspectives of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Jacques Lacan and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). The centrality of psychological criticism is to define literature as an expression of the author’s psyche pivoted on his or her unconscious being which requires an interpretation like a dream. Psychological criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the personality, state of mind, feelings, and desires of its author. The assumption of psychoanalytic critics is that a work of literature is correlated with its author's mental traits. In psychoanalytic criticism, reference to the author's personality is used to explain and interpret a literary work. Also, reference to literary works is made in order to establish, biographically, the personality of the author. The mode of reading a literary work itself is a way of experiencing the distinctive subjectivity or consciousness of its author. This theory requires that we investigate the psychology of a character or an author to figure out the meaning of a text. According to its followers, the meaning of a work of literature depends on the psyche and even on the neuroses of the author. Thus, a literary work is valued based on the author’s unconscious.

In literature, psychoanalytic critics believe that the unconscious mind of the author is revealed in his works. Thus, the psychoanalytic critic may begin with a study of the elements in a writer's biography that shape his imagination and then apply this to the work. He may also use the work as the equivalent of a confession and then go on to draw conclusion about the writer from this. Psychoanalytic criticism believes that literature provides a fruitful and complex source for the analysis of the human mind. It helps to reveal to us things about the relation between the conscious and the unconscious mind, language and reality. A psychoanalytical interpretation of a work can help to solve the mysteries involved in complex and symbolic themes. Furthermore, psychoanalytic criticism investigates the creative process of the arts, the nature of literary genius and its relation to normal mental functions. Such analysis may also focus on literature's effects on the reader. It also deals with how a particular work registers its impact on the reader's mental and sensory faculties. Another approach involves the psychological study of a particular artist. Most modern literary biographers employ psychology to understand their subject's motivations and behaviour. Finally, another common approach is the analysis of fictional characters like in Freud's study of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* in his work, *The Interpretation of Dreams.*