

PSYCHOANALYTICAL CRITICISM AND ITS APPLICATION TO SHAKESPEARE'S 'HAMLET'

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In explaining the nature of a work of literary art, the critic is often led into psychology, into a discussion of the state of mind out of which literary creation uses. Psychology comes into criticism in two ways, in this investigation of the act of creation and in the psychological study of particular authors to show the relationship between their attitudes and states of mind and the special qualities of their work. The first and more general, use of psychology in criticism is the older and the more widespread. Few critics have gone for an investigation of imaginative literature as an activity without having to deal with psychological factors. Aristotle is less concerned with how men come to write tragedies than with what tragedies are. But Plato, in his *Ion*, is in a sense giving a psychological account of literary criticism. The Romantic critics were particularly interested in this aspect of criticism.

Various schools of modern psychology have each had something to say about the psychological conditions out of which art arises. Lionel Trilling in his essay "Art and Neurosis" points out that "writers are more available to psychoanalytic explanation than others because they are more articulate about themselves but if we are to use the abundant material about themselves which they provide for us to prove that there are derives from their being in some way mentally sick, we must make the same assumption about all the other kinds of intellectual activity".

Psychoanalytical criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorder 'by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious element in the mind'. The classical method of doing this is to get the patient talk freely, in such a way that the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced rather than remaining 'buried' in the unconscious. This practice is based upon specific theories of how the mind, the instinct, and sexuality works. These theories were developed by the Austrian, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud's work depends upon the notion of the 'unconscious' which is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our action. He attributes in to have a decisive role in our lives. Linked with this is the idea of 'repression' which is the forgetting or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic part events so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious. A similar process is that of 'sublimation', whereby the repressed material is 'promoted into something grander of is disguised as something 'noble'. Later, Freud suggested a three-part, rather than a two-part, model of the psyche, diving it into the suggested a three-part, rather than a two-part, model of the psyche, diving it into the ego, the super-ego and the id these three 'levels' of the personality roughly corresponding to, respectively the consciousness, then conscience, and the unconscious.

Several key terms concern what might be called psychic processes, such as transference, the phenomenon whereby the patient under analysis redirects the emotions recalled in analysis towards the psychoanalyst: thus, the antagonism or resentment felt towards a parental figure in the past might be reactivated, but directed against the analyst. Another such mechanism is projection, when aspects of ourselves (usually negative ones) are not recognized as part of ourselves but are perceived in or attributed to another, our own desires or antagonisms, for instance, may be 'disowned' in this way. Both these might be seen as defence mechanisms, that it is as psychic memory, which is a trivial or inconsequential memory whose function is to obliterate a more significant one. A well-known example of these mechanisms is a 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, slips of the pen, or unintended actions.

A final example of important Freudian terminology is the framework: the process by which real events or desires are transformed into dream images. These include displacement, whereby one person or event is represented by another which is in some way linked or associated with it second is condensation, whereby a number of people, events or meanings are combined and represented by a single image in the dream. Thus characters, motivations, and events are represented in dreams in a very 'literary' way, involving the translation, by the dream work, of abstract ideas or feelings into concrete images.

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The professional psychologist need not, however, confine his interest in literature to attempts to psychoanalyze the author through his works. They can use this knowledge of psychological problems and situations to interpret a work of literature without any reference to its author's biography. We can look at the behavior confirms what we know about the subtleties of the human mind. We can use modern theories as a means of elucidating and interpreting the work. If Hamlet behaves according to a pattern which says, Freud, discovered to be characteristic of certain kinds of circumstances, this does not mean Shakespeare knew Freud's theories, but it does confirm Shakespeare's remarkable insight into human nature.

Freudian psychoanalytic criticism lets take Shakespeare's Hamlet. It is an example which is so well known that it has become a cliché. In the play, Hamlet's father is murdered by his own brother, Hamlet's uncle, who then marries Hamlet's mother. The ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Hamlet and tells him to take revenge by killing his uncle. Obviously, there is no difficulty in doing so, but Hamlet spends more of the play delaying and making excuses. Hamlet gathers external evidence that the ghost is telling him the truth. Psychoanalytic criticism offers a neat and simple solution for this delay: Hamlet cannot avenge this crime because he is guilty of wanting to commit the same crime himself. He has an Oedipus complex, that is, a repressed sexual desire for his own mother, and a consequent wish to do away his father. Thus, the uncle has merely done what Hamlet himself secretly wished to hence, the difficulty for him being the avenger. This view of the play was first sketched out by Freud in 'The Interpretation of Dreams' (1900). As Freud summarizes the matter, Hamlet is unable to "take vengeance on the man who did away

with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed. Wishes of his own childhood realized. Thus, the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner he is to punish".

As evidence for this view of the play, the psychoanalytic critic points to the bedroom scene in which Hamlet shows an intense and unusual awareness of his mother's sexuality. Freud links the situation of Hamlet in the play to that of Shakespeare himself (It can, of course, only be the poet's own mind which confronts us on Hamlet). He cites the view that it was written immediately after the death of Shakespeare's own father in 1601 ("while his childhood feelings about his father had been freshly revised") and he adds, 'It is known too, that Shakespeare's own son who died at an early age bore the name of 'Hamnet' which is identical with 'Hamlet'. All the same, it is Hamlet the character in whom the Oedipal conflict is detected, not Shakespeare the author. Here, then is a famous problem in the literature, to which psychoanalysis can offer the basis of a solution. The sketch for an interpretation of that play put forward by Freud was later developed by his British colleagues Ernest Jones in *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949).

On the basis of psychoanalytic criticism to 'Hamlet,' we give central importance to –

- 1.) The distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind,
- 2.) Seeing in the work 'Hamlet' an embodiment of classic psychoanalytic conditions, and,
- 3.) Uncovering the unconscious motives of the characters.

Thus, we get a neat and simple solution of Hamlet's delaying in taking revenge for his father's murder on the basis of psychoanalytic criticism.

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