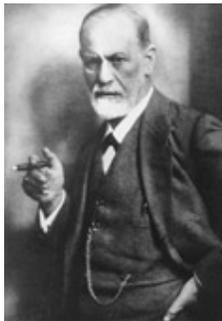


Chapter 7: Minding the Work

Psychological Criticism

English 104: Critical Thinking & Writing About Literature
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Psychological Criticism



1856 - 1939

- Begins with Sigmund Freud's work in psychology, especially:
 - *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)
 - *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905)
 - *The Ego and the Id* (1923)

Psychological Criticism



1875 - 1961

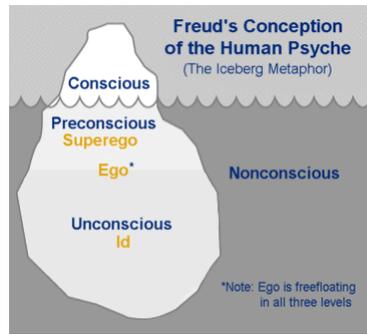
- Carl Jung's influence:
 - the *collective unconscious*
 - *archetypes*—universal symbols or images that transcend cultural boundaries
 - Recurring themes and images

Psychological Concepts

- *the unconscious*—
 - Freud assumes the unconscious is inherently sexual
 - Not just the sexual act (behavior) but the drive towards sexual pleasure
 - repression results from the conflict between the drive for pleasure & opposing social, cultural, political, religious forces
 - degree of successful containment of repressed material in unconscious determines the degree of mental illness/health:

mental illness |-----| "normal" mental health
 - unconscious leaks out repressed energy in the form of dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue (Freudian slip), & creative writing

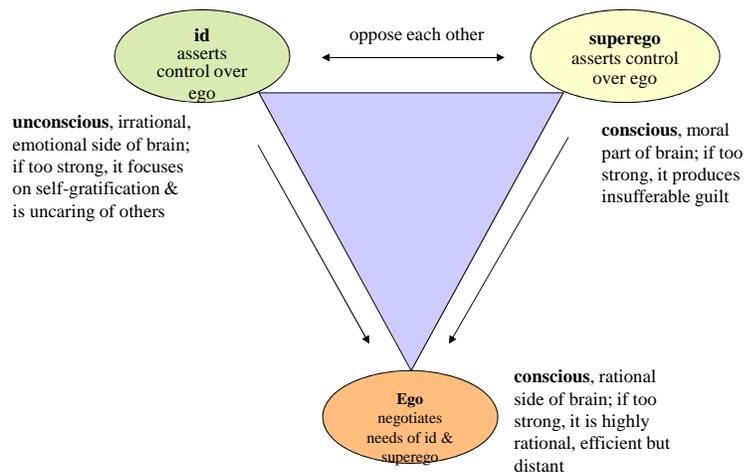
Psychological Concepts



<http://allpsych.com/psychology101/ego.html>

- *id*—primitive impulses that are indulgent, spontaneous, raucous
- *ego*—maintains the balance between the id and superego
- *superego*—conscious self; moral part of our minds

Freud's Structure of the Mind



Psychological Concepts

- *Oedipus complex*
 - Boy desires mother
 - Boy is blocked by father's authority
 - Boy desires to kill father
 - disastrous consequences if these desires are repressed or even acted out
- *Electra complex*

Psychology and Literature

- Freud believes creative writing is shaped by the unconscious mind
- doctor—literary critic metaphor
- we are in a way reconstructing the underlying significance/meaning (the unconscious)
- we can gain insight into an author's intentions, but it's always only a hypothesis, a well formulated guess
- imagination and creativity from the critic are required=> no right/wrong answer since we are reconstructing by definition the unknown
- psychological criticism should "loosen" the interpretive imagination because of the almost limitless possibilities

Psychology and Literature

- Plato
 - believes that poets indulge in “madness” that stirs up audience’s passions
 - thinks a well-ordered republic would be better off without poets
- Aristotle
 - believes poets produce a necessary psychological effect on audiences, purging them of excessive fear and pity
- Longinus
 - believes literature can cultivate the audience’s sense of the sublime and refine their sensibilities

Psychological Terms

- *repression*—mental strategy for hiding desires and fears (ones we ought not acknowledge);
- *isolation*—experiencing an event without any of the expected responses (disconnection) denial, too
- *sublimation*—channeling an unacceptable urge into an artistic creation or fantasy

Psychological Terms

- *displacement*—substituting a safe object of emotion for a dangerous one
- *projection*—asserting onto someone else one's own unacceptable behavior or impulses
- *intellectualization*—isolation for intellectuals—avoiding uncomfortable emotions by analyzing them to death

Psychological Terms

- *reaction formation*—convinced that the opposite of a terrible situation is actually the case. See Brooks' "The Mother" poem in chapter 3



Responding to a Text

1. How does the work relate to psychologically significant events in the author's life?
2. How might repressed material be expressed in the work's patterns of imagery or symbols? What commonly encountered archetypes do you see?
3. What are explicit or implicit motivations of the author, characters, or even readers?
4. What developmental concepts (the Oedipal complex, anal retentiveness, castration anxiety, gender confusion) might help to explain a character's behavior?
5. Do any of the characters have definite psychological quirks or problems? Do they have any dreams or clearly repressed desires?