

: STRUCTURE :**5.0 Objectives****5.1 Introduction****5.2.1 The Beginnings****5.2.2 Kinds of Illumination****5.2.3 Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis****5.2.4 Major Concepts****5.2.5 At a Glance****5.2.6 Disadvantages****5.3 Let Us Sum Up****5.4 Key Words****5.5 Books Suggested****Answers**

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you to;

- appreciate the relationship between literature and psychology,
- understand the importance of psychology in literature,
- define major concepts in psychoanalysis.

After this unit, you will be able to;

- analyse writers and their characters from psychology,
- explain the actions of characters which seem implausible or inexplicable.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

If Psychology can be defined as the ‘study of human behaviour’ and literature as ‘writings in prose or verse especially writings having the excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest’, we can attempt to understand the mutual relationships between literature and psychology. Literature has existed ever since man had language. Psychology was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans though it reached the stature of discipline in Europe only in the 18th and 19th centuries. Literature and psychology are intertwined because both are interested in the human mind; the difference between the genres lay not in what stories they told, but in how they told them. Psychology researches human behaviours and their causes while literature depicts human behaviour through fiction. These two branches of social science, studying human behaviour are interrelated and mutually beneficial. It is important to distinguish between ‘psychology and literature’ and ‘psychology in literature’.

In this unit, we focus on the former. The latter would naturally refer to the psychological novel which is not being considered here.

One school of thought believes that the relationship between psychology and literature can be studied as : the first representing the lowest level of abstraction and involves ‘psychology in literature’ : literature as a source of psychological data, literature as a source of insights for psychology; the second involves literature as an independent variable, literature as a dependent variable or literature as understood through psychology; and the third, at the highest level of abstraction, involves psychology as culture-free and literature as culture-bound. We could take it one step further to explain literature as interested in possible worlds (the world as it could be) and psychology in actual worlds (the world as it is). The psychological approach is a unique form of criticism in that it draws upon psychological theories in its interpretation of a text. Linking the psychological and literary worlds bring a kind of scientific aspect into literary criticism. The three branches of psychological criticism are Psychoanalytic criticism, trauma and Cognitive criticism. The working of the writer's mind may be explained by the approach of trauma “...in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness.” Example of Jane Austen's novels where she continually has a father-figure, love-hate relationship between mother and daughter as well as the relationship among sisters could clarify this point. In attempting to understand the relationship between literature and psychology, do remember that we must pay attention both to the writers, to their characters and to some extent even the readers. We will be able to understand the importance of the readers’ reaction better in the third approach of psychological criticism which is the Cognitive Approach. Whereas the psychoanalytic approach focuses on the author and why they wrote and what they wrote. The cognitive approach focuses on the reader and how their mind works while reading literature. Ismet Emre gave the following explanation of the relationship between the two disciplines : Beside literature and psychology, there is no other branch of science which is engaged so much in the study of the relationship between human body and soul with its contradictions and dilemmas, making efforts to define the relationship in terms of specific rules, to know the mysterious aspects of the human soul and its subconscious areas by means of long and detailed journeys; at the same time both branches have been struggling in their existence between arts and science for about a century.

We could succinctly describe the relationship as being important because :

- (1) The application of psychological knowledge to art provides a more precise language with which to discuss the creative process.
- (2) The lives of the authors can be studied as a means of understanding their art.
- (3) The actions of the characters can be explained and understood better.

Please remember when we read about literature and psychology, this should not be confused with the psychological novel where the writer delves

deep into the mind of his characters as in Virginia Woolf's 'stream of consciousness' novels, James Joyce's *Ulysses* or the novels of Dostoyevsky.

In this unit, you will study the mutual relationship between psychology and literature.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

1. a) Which is older — literature or psychology ? How do you know ?

.....

1. b) Why is psychology culture-free ?

.....

2.A) MATCH THE WORDS IN COLUMN A WITH THE APPROPRIATE PHRASES IN COLUMN B.

A	B
i. Ismet Emre	(i) possible world
ii. Literature	(ii) actual world
iii. Psychology	(iii) relationship between 2 disciplines

5.2.1 The Beginnings :

A direct relationship between literature and psychology came neither from writers or critics but from an Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). The Psychoanalytical theory of Freud has had a significant effect on literature. However, the relationship is reciprocal, and the effect of Freud upon literature has been no greater than the effect of literature upon Freud. On the celebration of his seventieth birthday, Freud was greeted as the 'discoverer of the unconscious', he corrected the speaker and disclaimed the title. 'The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious', he said. 'What I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.' Freud offered a new terminology which helped writers and practitioners of the creative arts to probe deeper in their dramatisations of the human situation. To these early forays can be added the influence of Adler's concept of the inferiority complex, Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and theories of the unconscious, not of individual writer or character but of the race or culture, which is generally called the archetypal approach.

In his *Psychology and Literature*, Jung justifies the use of psychology for studying literature because all thought and expression are derived from the human psyche. The writer draws materials from the realm of human consciousness, according to Jung. Comparing a great piece of writing to a dream, Jung concludes : "It does not explain itself ... and we must draw our conclusions".

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

1.a) What was Freud's profession ?
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.....
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1.b) How was Freud greeted on his seventieth birthday ?
.....
.....
.....

1.c) What is the archetypal approach ?
.....
.....
.....

2. Give Reasons :

a.) Relationship between psychology and literature is reciprocal.
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.....

b) A great piece of writing is like a dream.
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.....

5.2.2 Kinds of Illumination :

Application of psychological knowledge can generate three kinds of illumination, as propounded by I. A. Richards, Edmund Wilson and F. L. Lucas. Firstly, as suggested by Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism*, the new field provides a more precise language with which to discuss the creative process. It can be further explained as a kind of equilibrium “a particular and harmonious kind of response in the audience, brought about by the stimulus of a work of art”. This kind of analysis will clarify ‘the unconscious relations between writer and reader’. A good example of this is Kenneth Burke's essay, *Antony in Behalf of the Play*, in which he brilliantly examines the unconscious relations between writer and reader.

Secondly, as Edmund Wilson pointed out in *The Wound and the Bow*, the study of the lives of authors helps us to understand their works of art. This means that literary biography is helped by psychology to speculate on the interior parts of life. The criticism that employs this approach works on the premise that an important part of the relationship between artist and art is similar between patient and analyst. D. H. Lawrence believes that the author has shed his sicknesses in his books. This may further help the critic or reader to understand the underlying patterns of a writer's work. A good

example of this can be found in Wilson's essays in *The Wound and the Bow*, where the writer exemplifies how effectively this approach can be used to lead us to understand not only the personal problems of the writers but also the underlying patterns of their writings.

Thirdly, as F. L. Lucas points out in *Literature and Psychology*, psychology can be used to explain the actions and reactions of created characters. Some of their actions may seem puzzling or implausible till we are able to become a psychoanalyst searching for the subconscious patterns which motivate a character. The best example of this is Ernest Jones' study of the character of Hamlet in *Hamlet and Oedipus*, where he provides an answer to the puzzle of Hamlet's delay in avenging his father. It needs to be reiterated here that this answer could not perhaps be conceived and expressed before the development of Freudian psychology.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

1.a) Who were the proponents of the three kinds of illumination ?

.....

1.b) Name the three works that are mentioned in reference to the three critics.

.....

2. **Explain :**

a) The creative process is a kind of equilibrium

.....

b) he author has shed his sickness.

.....

5.2.3 Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis :

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many critics became interested in the psychological interpretation of literature. And in this area, it is psychoanalysis which has been in the forefront. We can define psychoanalysis as a discipline founded on a procedure for the investigation of mental processes that are otherwise inaccessible because they are unconscious. Freud believes that society sublimates or channels its unconscious through the creative process. According to Freud as well as later theorists and critics who followed the psychoanalytical approach to the study of literature, the author's own childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts,

fixations, and such will be traceable within the behaviour of the characters in the literary work. But psychological material will be expressed indirectly, disguised, or encoded (as in dreams) through principles such as ‘symbolism’ (the repressed object represented in disguise), ‘condensation’ (several thoughts or persons represented in a single image), and ‘displacement’ (anxiety located onto another image by means of association).

Freud described the human mind as being of three levels, which he called the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. The three may be defined as –

Conscious : this is where our current thoughts, feelings, and focus live.

Preconscious (sometimes called the subconscious) : this is the home of everything we can recall or retrieve from our memory.

Unconscious : at the deepest level resides a repository of the processes that drive our behaviour, including primitive and instinctual desires.

Critics who use the psychoanalytic method base their analysis of characters on these three. It is to Freud's credit that he developed a language that described, and a model that explained, a theory that encompassed human psychology. This has helped both critics and readers to appreciate literature on a new level.

In addition to the three levels of the human mind, Freud made a clear distinction between ‘id’, ‘ego’ and ‘superego’. As he believed that the powers motivating men and women are mainly and normally unconscious, you must understand these three clearly. ‘Id’ (or it) is the predominantly irrational, unknown and unconscious part of our psyche. The ‘ego’ (or I) is the predominantly rational, logical, orderly, conscious part. ‘Superego’ is a projection of the ego and seems to be outside of the self and making moral judgements. Freud believed that the unconscious (and often the repressed in the life of the author) has a major role to play in creative writing.

The importance of Freud in the general study of any writing can be understood better when we realise those words, he introduced through his theories are now used by everyday people, such as anal (personality), libido, denial, repression, cathartic, Freudian slip, and neurotic.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4

1.a) Define ‘psychoanalysis’.

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1.b) Mention the three levels of the human mind, according to Freud.

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.....
.....

2. Distinguish the terms— id, ego, superego

5.2.4 Major Concepts :

In order to understand the relationship between psychology and literature and to apply the appropriate tools for a psychological study of literature, you must understand a few more concepts.

- (a) **Manifest Content :** As the purpose of creative writing is seen as a desire to gratify some forbidden wish, the literal surface of the work is called ‘manifest content’ or ‘dream story’.
- (b) **Figurative Language :** Something that evolves as the writer's conscious mind resists what the unconscious mind tells it to picture or describe.
- (c) **Libido :** The force by which the sexual instinct is represented in the mind.
- (d) **Symbol :** Messages from the unconscious; an act or process of representing an order or an idea by a substitute object, sign or signal.

It is important to remember that many of these concepts will be used by many other theorists but have a special meaning and significance in the context of psychoanalysis.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 5

1.a) Define : libido, manifest content

.....

.....

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5.2.5 AT A GLANCE :

All psychoanalytic approaches to literature have one thing in common the critics begin with a full psychological theory of how and why people behave as they do, a theory that has been developed by a psychologist/psychiatrist/psychoanalyst outside of the realm of literature, and they apply this psychological theory as a standard to interpret and evaluate a literary work. The developer of the theory and the details of the theory will vary, but the theories are all universalist in scope, positing patterns of behaviour that are not dependent on specific times, places, and cultures. Psychoanalytic literary criticism can focus on one or more of the following :

The author : the theory is used to analyse the author and his/her life, and the literary work is seen to supply evidence for this analysis. This is often called “psychobiography.”

The characters : the theory is used to analyse one or more of the characters; the psychological theory becomes a tool to explain the characters’ behaviour and motivations. The more closely the theory seems to apply to the characters, the more realistic the work appears.

The audience : the theory is used to explain the appeal of the work for those who read it; the work is seen to embody universal human psychological processes and motivations, to which the readers respond unconsciously.

The text : The theory is used to analyse the role of language and symbolism in work.

5.2.6 DISADVANTAGES :

As with any other approach, the psychological approach too is not without its innate dangers or drawbacks.

Firstly, an oversimplification. This was a serious drawback in the early period when this approach was gaining ground, the tools were new and the users uncritical.

Secondly, art is significantly different from dreams as the artist is largely in control of his product while the dreamer is not. Art is composed expression. Dream may be compulsive confession.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 7

1.a Mention the two main disadvantages.

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1.b. How is art different from a dream ?

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.....

5.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt;
the relationship between psychology and literature,
the major proponents of psychoanalysis,
the concepts to understand this theory.

5.4 KEY WORDS

Psychoanalysis : method of treating somebody with mental illness by asking about past experience.

Dream : a series of pictures or images that happen in your mind when asleep

Id : personality component made up of unconscious energy

Ego : psychological component of personality made up of conscious decision making process

Symbols : sign or image that represents something

Behaviour : the way in which one acts or conducts oneself

5.5 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*

Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*

Sachdev Rita, *A handbook of Literary Criticism*

Scott, Wilbur S. *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*

ANSWERS

I

- 1.a. Literature is older as Psychology was developed as a discipline only in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- 1.b As it explains the world as it is
- 2.a (i–iii), (ii–i), (iii–ii)

II

- 1.a Neurologist
- 1.b ‘discoverer of the unconscious’
- 1.c ‘collective unconscious or theories of the unconscious of race or culture’
- 2.a As both help in understanding the other
- 2.b Neither of them explains themselves, and we must draw our conclusions

III

- 1.a) I.A. Richards, Edmund Wilson, F.L. Lucas
- 1.b) Principles of Literary Criticism, The Wound and the Bow, Literature and Psychology
- 2.a) ‘the kind of response brought about by stimulus of a work of art’
- 2.b) By giving expression to all that has been repressed

IV

- 1.a) ‘a discipline founded on a procedure for the investigation of mental processes that are otherwise inaccessible because they are unconscious’
- 1.b) Conscious, Pre–conscious, Unconscious
2. **id** : irrational, unknown, unconscious part of the psyche
ego : rational, logical, orderly, conscious part of the psyche
superego : projection of the ego, outside of self, making moral judgements

V

- 1.a) (i) **Libido** : The force by which the sexual instinct is represented in mind.
- (ii) **Manifest Content** : As the purpose of creative writing is seen as a desire to gratify some forbidden wish, the literal surface of the work is called ‘manifest content’ or ‘dream story’.

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