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Psychoanalytic Approaches to Character and Conflict in English Literature

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Abstract

Psychoanalytic criticism offers a profound framework for understanding character development and conflict in English literature by exploring the unconscious motives, inner desires, and psychological tensions that shape human behavior. Drawing on the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan, this paper examines how literary characters embody repressed emotions, childhood experiences, and symbolic conflicts. The study highlights the role of concepts such as the unconscious, repression, dream symbolism, archetypes, and identity formation in interpreting narrative conflicts and character psychology. Through a psychoanalytic lens, literature becomes a space where internal struggles are externalized, revealing deeper meanings behind actions, relationships, and moral dilemmas. The paper argues that psychoanalytic approaches enrich literary analysis by providing insights into the complexity of the human psyche and the enduring psychological relevance of literary texts.

Keywords: Psychoanalytic Criticism, Character Analysis, Literary Conflict, Freud, Jung, Lacan, Unconscious Mind, English Literature

Introduction

Psychoanalytic Approaches to Character and Conflict in English Literature

Introduction

Psychoanalytic criticism offers insights into character and conflict deeply embedded in literary texts—ideas that originate in the unconscious. A psychoanalytic reading explores the unconscious psychic drives motivating characters' words and actions and the formative struggles that generate narrative conflict. Since characters are psychic constructs arising from intra- and transpsychic structures, their artful interplay evokes the drama of the mind itself. The approach, grounded in the concurrent developments of narrative and psychoanalysis throughout the twentieth century, remains pertinent to contemporary literature. Reading through the lens of multiple school's illuminates founding principles and associated tensions, broadening access to the nuanced discourse of psychoanalytic theory. Whether the unconscious is viewed as a treasure trove of repressed material, a well of ancestral archetypes, or a site of meaning encoded in language, its operation shapes the interanimation of text and psyche (Butchart, 2019); (Ikechukwu Emmanuel & Jane Nkechi, 2015); (Griffiths, 2008). Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) posits that the unconscious originates in the infantile drives of the body and is gradually lost to repression and sublimation. Consciously accessible historical domains give way to recurrent motifs that emerge both in dreams and in culture. The narrative function of these strikingly similar images expands beyond individual drives to the collective past of humanity, evoking the Jungian unconscious. Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) extends Freud's work in a different direction, positing a collective unconscious consisting of archetypal motifs circulating among individuals. For Jung, the unconscious envelops human potential, and characterisation symbols represent the psyche's wholeness. A third key figure in the development of psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), reframes Freud through the lens of language and the signifier. Human beings access the unconscious via the symbolic order—a universe structured entirely by signifiers. Language remains the privileged instrument through which desire is formulated and articulated.

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Repetition surfaces as a verbal material and a psychoanalytical concept. For Lacan, the interdependence of narrative and the unconscious remains paramount. Just as literary texts invoke the unconscious, the plot reflects trajectory-following desire. Characters fulfil the role of linguistic signifiers that, while singularly attached to the narrative, invoke the absent object of desire—the 'lost object';

Theoretical Foundations of Psychoanalytic Criticism

Conceptual foundations: psychoanalytic schools, general readings. Psychoanalytic theories encompass extensive systems that provoke varied interpretations of character and conflict. Establishing a psychoanalytic reading thus requires aligning with a specific framework and clarifying its implications for literature. Three foundational schools—Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian—yield distinct but occasionally overlapping insights on narrative construction and the representation of minds. Each possesses a well-defined literary relevance and suggests a methodology for exploring characters' inner lives. An overview of the central tenets and literary bearings of these theories facilitates their application to the languages and psychodynamics of characters. Freud's model identifies a hierarchical sequence of psychosexual developments—oral, anal, phallic, and latent—alongside the id, ego, and superego governing conflict resolution. The relevance of this scheme to character evolution, particularly the maturation of protagonists, remains widely acknowledged (Grujicic-Alatriste, 2013). Jungian concepts of character typologies and archetypes likewise resonate deeply. Typological theories delineate psychological preferences—thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition—while four archetypal motifs—hero, maiden, devil, mother—recur consistently across English literature. Lacan's notions of the subject, symbolisation, and discourse illuminate language's mediate role in self-formation and desire; textual signs or figures of speech become potential substitutes for the elusive self.

1. Freud and the Unconscious

Freud's theory of the unconscious has profoundly shaped modern thought, profoundly influencing literary works and criticism. Since the late nineteenth century, critiques of established norms have given rise to discourse exploring the complex undercurrents of psyche, society, and cultural belief. Psychoanalysis is a prominent response to the malaise of modernity. Literature delves into matters of the unconscious, and when this interplay extends to criticism that considers the unconscious in the text and the psychic landscape of reconstructed characters, the potential of the text is increasingly extended. Characters act as vehicles for representing collective and individual thought. A character may transmit authorial ideas or possess functions mistaken for the author. Psychoanalytic discourse enables readings of characters as constructs of the psychic realm. Although literary texts may suggest a figure has agency, they do not exist independently of forces governing the text. Rather than viewing plots and characters that unfold as independent on their own, reconstructing texts as configurations of textual constructs both follows the text accurately and permits coalescing a multi-voiced universe of

the divided and conflictual self, echoed by the multi-voiced representational structures found in both pre-modern and modern works of art (Nykänen et al., 2022). The exposition of character construction adheres more closely to earlier foundational principles and psychoanalytical theory, ultimately facilitating a discussion of psychoanalytic criticism that draws on the collective unconscious. Rather than expounding on techniques of twentieth-century engagement with the works of Freudian and Jungian theorists, it encompasses character and drive—a subject whose exploration may well interweave both theories (Griffiths, 2008).

2. Jungian Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

Carl Jung's (1875–1961) multidimensional perspective on the psyche extended Freud's classic model and encompassed typology, symbols, and mythic structures. Jung's psychodynamics placed the collective unconscious, populated by archetypes, at the generative centre of psychic and cultural life. Heroes, shadows, and trickster motifs—archetypal characters that recur across folklore, fairy tales, dreams, and fictional texts—remain frequent subjects of literary criticism. Applied to the study of character, Jungian concepts reveal configurations of persona and shadow, which dramatise the interplay of an automatic surface self and a deeper, often-forbidden identity (LoBianco-Bartalis, 2016). Jung's emphasis on symbols, images, and mythic motifs also complements the narrow textual focus that typified several decades of psychoanalytic textual studies stemming from Freud's theory of 'the signifier' (Butchart, 2019).

Jung theorised that the psyche encompasses a trinity of structures: ego, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. The ego forms the conscious awareness of the individual, while the personal unconscious comprises memorised experience, repressed material, and dissociated personal content. The collective unconscious, viewed as both archaic and evolutionary, gathers and preserves tendencies and behaviours that arise universally in human experience. Jung formulated a subdivision of the collective unconscious: archetypes and the primordial images associated with them. He defined archetypes as universal, inherited modes of personality expression; remnants of 'animal experience' that re-emerge as humans evolve; and active determinants of human behaviour, akin to instinctual drives (Covington, 2018). Archetypes embody certain roles that characterise wide-ranging narrative and experiential constellations: the Hero, the mother, the Shadow, and the Wise Old Man, among others. Primordial images reflect the specific content attributable to particular archetypes, informing more elaborate and culturally-imprinted mythological or literary forms.

3. Lacanian Perspectives on Language and Desire

Language, for Lacan, plays a foundational role in the construction of the subject: "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other". This perspective emphasizes two crucial aspects. First, the subject begins with a fundamental encounter with the Other and, subsequently, the choice of an object of desire. Second, the language of desire never



conveys an individual's isolated wishes, but always involves an Other. The Other here pertains not to any individual person, but to the community at large, including social conventions and cultural tropes. Psychoanalysis, therefore, cannot satisfy the desire for literary scholarship to seek literature as vehicle to elucidate the inner workings of a specific individual, such as Shakespeare, Austen, or anyone else. Nor would it address the appetite of the literary scholar who analyzes the society surrounding an author's works. Although such endeavors may garner fascination, psychoanalysis can offer richer and more appropriate terrains to explore. The Lacanian perspective on desire underscores the fundamental Lacanian insight that every textual sign, every word uttered, consists of a "something" presented by a "window" in a "something else". In Lacanian terms, the subject never arrives fully into being at some fixed point in a text. In the experience of reading, it operates and occupies a dash after the letter in and after words given in every line. Textual significance, like the essence of humanity, unfolds and gives rise to formative experiences of subjectivity via the ongoing interplay of language and sensation between the reader and the material (Feng, 2022). Lacan's work reveals that the totality of textual signs remains signified by a "whole," a "whole" that remains unattainable and, thus, marks an irreducible lack deposited at the very heart of the lexical. The reader of a text would, therefore, instinctually pursue the elusive "whole" an author may have inscribed therein. Such a pursuit cannot conclude with the fading of literature, for it acquires a more urgent and distinct existential meaning. It is consequently vital to scrutinize how and why literature reflects on and constructs the essential nature of human beings within the texts themselves.

Character as Psychic Construct

Psychoanalytic approaches to character, conflict, and form in literature offer rich insights into how individuals are rendered through linguistic structures, both in the work itself and as a mode of drawing attention to the elsewhere and the unsaid. Whether characters are understood as a wholly distinct third person or as a construct that originates within the author, the marks that they leave on the narrative allow a reader to explore possibilities for self-definition while remaining distanced from the imperative to identify. The concept of analysis itself may be defined to capture both the nature of character and the nature of the process undertaken. Referring to the inner structures that yield multiple drives, thoughts, and relations—either remaining fully formed or taking shape through movement and change across the narrative—may be seen as the psychodynamics of internal constructions that engage with their own and each other's drives, thoughts, and relations and play against or pivot into an external aspect involving other characters. Such internal structures, commingled with those of the external aspect, deliver a range of motivational continuities and discontinuities forming a complex relationship among some of the characters, interactions, and events; together they constitute the psychic matrix of the text and provide a form of artistic resolution in the etymological sense—drawing back to

capture particular aspects—and, thereby, an opportunity for the reader to explore the dynamic of emergent and competing forces that inform self-definition as proposed first in the narrative of a character.

1. Id, Ego, Superego in Literary Figures

Freud's model of psychic topography distinguishes among three structures: the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious. The unconscious comprises repressed drives and memories, while preconscious contents remain available yet outside awareness. The conscious reflects present awareness: events, perceptions, and thoughts within immediate attention and thought. The topography also applies to the constitution of individuals. A destination of psychic projections, the interior structure must consist of an unconscious and a preconscious. Freudian literary criticism traces such psychic and narrative structures in literary works; it attends high-romantic poetry and the evolution of genre. The proposed approach similarly interprets English literature through a Freudian lens but concentrates on three writers' poetic craft and revision, treating structure and, most important, drive as central to the 11a0a6da-c748-406e-8ba2-a1d5fe34a88c maturation of the work. The approach begins with the premise that each work embodies a unity—in the vocabulary of Freud, that each work delivers a single drive—and there 11a0a6da-c748-406e-8ba2-a1d5fe34a88ce interprets the evolution of characters and the unfolding of their narrative as subsidiary to this central 11a0a6da-c748-406e-8ba2-a1d5fe34a88c maturation. The layer most pertinent to such a unity comprises what, following Freud, one might term the governing psychic construct, broadly describable as a constellation of drives. Further development of an English psychoanalytic approach can trace other texts and broader bodies of work across any interval from the Gothic period to the twenty-first century (for Translation & Literary Studies et al., 2021). The three psychic functions surface as one of the more straight 11a0a6da-c748-406e-8ba2-a1d5fe34a88cward grounds 11a0a6da-c748-406e-8ba2-a1d5fe34a88c curriculum design. The id, associated with the pleasure principle, constitutes a drive to resolve dissatisfaction through immediate and unmediated action. The ego, conversely, assumes the task of satisfying a drive only in ways permitted and ultimately determined by the social matrix. The superego represents conscience as well as moral ideals and, when the individual arrives at a position of internal exile, motivates a return to a prior state of bliss. Ambivalence toward the superego constricts certain alternative trajectories; amidst diverse scholarly tendencies, it might remain relatively undiscussed. The id, the ego, and the superego constitute the very basis of the scientific literature framing an introductory discourse on questions of character and conflict. In the case of each fiction, consideration focuses on how that scientific scaffold and system may manifest through groupings of protagonists and antagonists.

2. Repression, Sublimation, and Symbolism

The first dimension of character analysis traces the dynamic interplay of repression, sublimation, and symbolism at both plot and imagery levels. Narrative elements emerge as "regressive" efforts to express repressed

drives. Sublimations advance the plot as transformative displacements. The second dimension examines the frequency and consistency of dreams and fantasies in narratives replete with other inner constructs. Dramas of erotic yearning intertwined with attendance to humane responsibilities occur alongside melancholic preoccupations with psychic loss, bound together by the relaxation of authority and expressed through characters experiencing illness. Psychoanalytic criticism in literature arises from the unresolved dilemmas of constituting inner processes in an external world. Juxtaposing received systems concerned with character, selfish fulfilment and nonretaliation, the psychoanalytic approach articulates drive conflict, honouring the freedom of drive descants, lifestyle choices, and collective perspectives outside guilted parameters. Works by Shakespeare and George Eliot exemplify this approach; psychoanalysis selects freedom as the orthodoxy that drives textually bound readings yet remains at odds with the sobering universals that Freud and Kristeva posit (Griffiths, 2008).

3. Dreams, Fantasies, and Illness as Narrative Devices

Reconciling dualities—dichotomies, opposites, freedoms—remains a pervasive concern in literature from Classical to contemporary writing and across the geographic spectrum. Emergent manifestations of this duality resonate within the substantial corpus of English literature and extend into the literature of the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, and South Asia, with some of the more widely acknowledged representations executed in work by Christopher Marlowe or William Shakespeare, Maryse Condé, Jamaica Kincaid, Jean Rhys, and V. S. Naipaul. The unconscious motivates behavior, but the traces of its activity are also inscribed within the narrative architecture itself. Psychoanalytic writing has long sought to chart the nature and implications of this activity, routinely adopting extensive gambits that meticulously unravel psychological entanglements sustained by a dramatic, character-centred surface.

Turning attention to dreams, Fantasies, and experiences of illness in satisfying character construction enables further illumination of the unconscious dimensions of narrative discourse. Characters conceived at the level of psychic dynamics also invite scrutiny of the more general processes of repression and discharge through which a textual narrative unfolds (Griffiths, 2008); (R Gonzalez, 2018).

Conflict and the Psychodynamics of Drive

Juxtaposing Freud's model of development with Lacan's drive theory illuminates internal and external aspects of conflict emerging from drive dynamics: relationships between conflicting drives shape identity and influence decisions, while opposing positions within the social field generate conflicts with others. Guilt, shame, and ethical considerations derive from one's choices, establishing a moral dimension that further complicates these dynamics and opens out different modalities for the narrative's conclusion.

Process-oriented reading reveals multiple paths for character development. As conflict unfolds, it also articulates the relation between the inner and outer drives

that configure the character's identity. Past choices create shifts in both the inner and outer dynamics of drive, determining the direction taken towards final resolution. Textual evidence connects these structural features to narrative effects across various genres and periods. Consequently, clarification of these interrelations not only contributes to psychoanalytic criticism but also enhances wider engagement with the reading experience.

1. Internal Conflict and Self-Constellation

Characters often grapple with opposing drives, ideals, or fears, leading to psychological clashes that hinder authentic expression. Freud's model of the tripartite psyche suggests that such struggles usually occur between the desires of the id, ego, and superego and manifest in the form of inner conflict. Pioneering narratives of self-growth or maturation thus explore the gradual constellating of the ego through the acknowledgement of one's inner complexity and the negotiating of inner contradictions. The Jungian concept of individuation similarly posits that authenticity stems from the conscious integration of the competing aspects of the self represented by the archetypes of the persona and the shadow. Yet the movement toward individual resolution and wholeness can remain blocked by internal conflict, risking fragmentation and even madness, as these different moments of the psyche strive toward opposing goals. Carl Jung's typology of functions and attitudes can help to understand the disintegration of identity contextually represented in characters that fail to reconcile their different inner aspects. Each character's split can be traced through their echoes in action and plot: repetition, sabotage, or mirroring signalling an inner situation of which the character themselves is unaware. Furthermore, as Jung emphasises, connection and communion are not only unitary goals but essential conditions for authenticity, wholeness, and individuation, for when the Person remains either too dominant or falls away entirely the Shadow can take on a life of its own and become the agent of action. For just as the simultaneous presence of feminine and masculine principles inside every individual can promote harmony and richness, the denial of one side can lead to paroxysms of the other that break the stable character as portrayed by the author.

2. External Conflict, Power, and the Other

Human conduct is inseparable from systems of power that support and deploy coercive asymmetry. Accordingly, people perceive, navigate, and resist social order in both private and public realms. External conflict often arises from a systematic threat to another individual's freedom or well-being. Such encroachments, supports, and the struggle to subvert them remain central to the motivations of characters, especially in their interactions with the Other (World English Journal et al., 2022). Modern societies shape interaction through the fixation of external norms, thus forming systems of power and cultural inclusion and exclusion difficult to resist. These systems penetrate intimate domains like sexual choice, religious conviction, and ceremonial practice. Characters resisting such systems thus grapple with the desire to freely determine their own identity alongside the recognition that

that freedom involves the potential to impact others without encumbrment. Power relations rendering the character utterly objective and causal furthermore sharpen moral ambiguity and the boundary between devotion and coercion.

3. **Guilt, Shame, and Moral Ambiguity**

Psychoanalysis affords an avenue for illuminating the ethical quandaries facing protagonists in various works of fiction. Within narratives, characters often experience conflicted motivations, burdened by the competing and contradictory demands of self-interest and historical obligation. Individual subjectivity is not merely the exclusive concern of modern literature; rather it is entwined with the exploration of moral ambiguity in the context of character-driven narratives. Psychoanalytic theory equally addresses issues of personal identity, and in conjunction with the disjunction between competing drives and values articulated within a text, a more nuanced appraisal of characters' ethical dilemmas and the consequences thereof emerge. Each of the authors selected as subjects for textual analyses utilises moral indecision and ethical imbalance to dynamically shape narrative events whilst simultaneously interrogating the conditions contributory to those challenges. Guilt and shame emerge as two of the more prominent and consequential concepts allied to ethical conflict within distinct psychoanalytic frameworks, each exercising a radical influence over opportunity, decision-making, and resolution. Guilt typically aligns with the imposition of ethical obligation upon the subject—often holding sway when self-interest confronts a historical precedent such as a contract or duty. Guilt tends to instigate a desire for atonement, the correlative drive to restore the damage inflicted, and the need to reach a narrative resolution that acknowledges those principles. Shame, by contrast, arises from the self-assignment of a negative value to one's motives or the fear of the exposure of those motives in circumstances where the subject believes such disclosure contravenes a perceived cultural norm. Heightened in competitive scenarios where the subject occupies a visible position diversely interpreted by others, shame not only compels concealment of those motives but may readily accelerate toward avoidance behaviours that compromise the possibility of redress. Each of these impulses imparts an existential tension upon individuals confronted by amoral agents or silencing authorities—Individual choices remain vitally present, yet the agent operates under a disorientating stricture alien to the preconditions typically mobilised at the inception of a narrative.

Methodology and Close Reading

To establish a psychoanalytic reading practice while still retaining some theoretical distance, the following measures can be taken. Textual evidence should be drawn from published editions, preferably from the first or early posthumous editions, rather than from editorially revised or annotated editions. The selection of textual evidence should be limited to those details that are already remarkably rich and that offer a strong foundation for revealing the unconscious. Multiple intertextual connections should be pursued throughout, while the theoretical readings seek to explore how the chosen texts yield insights into the nature

of character and conflict and how they resonate with the questions that drove the psychoanalytic theory in the first place. Psychoanalytic readings are often dismissed on ethical grounds, either on the assumption that the reading divulges hidden truths about the author or on the fear that the approach closes off openness and multiplicity. A non-ethically oriented reading, however, strives to remain ethical by leaving the question of the author, biographical details, and social context aside. An ethical boundary can be established by deliberately focusing on the text, on character construction, and on the unconscious workings that the text reveals. The reading can incorporate somatic, social, political, cultural, and historical contexts in order to enrich the account without raising ethical concerns regarding the text itself and its construction of character. (Grujicic-Alatriste, 2013)

1. **Textual Evidence and Interpretive Rigor**

Psychoanalytic Approaches to Character and Conflict in English Literature Textual Evidence and Interpretive Rigor Psychoanalytic criticism derived from the theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan addresses the interplay of large-scale structures and minute detail in literary works. Emphasis on textual evidence is consistent with interpretive rigor deemed essential by Freud, whose wide-ranging analyses of literature stress the importance of the original text. The intrusion of reader and biographical considerations into criticism is unnecessary when concerns are confined to the work.

Psychoanalytic approaches emphasize internal conflict and character as psychic structures with a narrative function in fiction and drama, requirements that poetry often precludes. The literary applicability of central theories is therefore the starting point. Freud's model of psychosexual development, subsequently extended by Eric Fromm and Françoise Dolto, shapes character arcs in prose and verse. Jung's typologies of introversion and extraversion as well as the paradigmatically Romantic notion of the hero facilitate the classification of protagonists and antagonists. Lacanian concepts of the subject, symbolisation, and discourse furnish insight into the relationship of language to desire and the role of textual signs, illustrations, and the graphic surface in lyric works. Interpretation proceeds by mapping general structures onto specific texts, naming dimensions at the outset, and tracing complex intra- and interrelationships among hundreds of individual elements (Grujicic-Alatriste, 2013).

2. **Intertextual and Contextual Considerations**

Psychoanalytic criticism of English literature can be refined further still by integrating intertextual and contextual considerations into theoretical readings. Such engagement not only grounds psychoanalytic arguments in their extratextual circumstances but also ensures alignment with the contemporary momentum towards the consideration of literature's intertextual nature and a broader understanding of the works' contemporary contexts. Intertextuality and the wider contexts of authorship, publication, and reception are even more relevant to the psychoanalytic reading of literature than to



the study of texts produced more recently than a century ago. The psychoanalytical perspectives of Freud, Jung, and Lacan formulated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented radical departures from previous critical approaches. Nevertheless, literature was a long-established field of psychoanalytical investigation, and a substantial proportion of canonical works enjoyed high visibility across the psychoanalytical spectrum. The relevance of the broader set of texts drawn upon in such examinations constitutes a separate issue. Psychoanalytical readings rooted in the theoretical systems articulated by Freud, Jung, and Lacan often invite their own interrogation within the texts produced by earlier thinkers. Consideration of the textual surfaces of earlier works of significant psychoanalytical thought has therefore still more urgent salience in cases where the psychoanalytical approach seems destined to elicit, rather than merely encapsulate, intertextuality and contextuality. Such dual prospects present opposing interpretative orientations yet remain cognate. An early set of Freudian case studies, intending to demonstrate therapeutic practices and empirical findings, lent itself to the self-critique of a developing science and, moreover, to the ethics of the therapist–patient relationship. It is at least arguable that Lacan’s view of literature as the sole parallel domain to psychoanalysis continues, by some interpretations, to hold.

Describing a subject that resolves itself between the two orientations, the investigation of the linguistic surfaces of works by Freud, Lacan, and Hegel—whose discourse-analytic conception of phenomena resonates across a much wider field—exemplifies an additional independence of approach. The latter concern represents a test case more than a proposition. Nevertheless, psychoanalysts remain prominent figures on the literary and visual-artistic scene at the point of, and subsequently beyond, the divide commemorated by the title *Modernist and post-colonial works* have been subjected to psychoanalytical reading. Such case studies frequently take account of neighbouring disciplines, where a culture can lend stimulus to neighbouring countries though prohibitive factors can enter and currency from one reflection to the next.

(Griffiths, 2008)

3. Ethics and Limits of Psychoanalytic Interpretation

Freud’s pioneering insights sparked multiple avenues of psychoanalytic thought. Recent waves of criticism have interrogated aspects of his work and its continuing relevance. Such evolutions of theory invite caution, for psychoanalysis remains a seductive lens, its speculative depths encouraging lengthy explorations of tenuous connections. The following section aims to define an ethical dimension: excessive exploration shifts the interpretive focus away from the text itself. The risk of imposing quarrelsome psychicseemingly irrelevant avenues, disturbing the contract between writer, reader, and language. The exposition can generate screenplays, glossthe ideas are piquant and highlight vital aspects of more substantial. Psychoanalytic interpretations chart conflict between parts of the proverbial self: Jung identified various “functions,” “attitudes,” and “archetypes” by which

conflicting aspects are embodied. clase; the psychoanalysts developed approaches, and each expounded significant concept. Freud thought model an individual’s psychic apparatus, tracing disparate motivational, regulating, and evaluating components unto characters. Narrative ontwikkelingsleemten, Oudtestamentischmodellen, Vorwahn, Psychoanalyse, construct unemployment, Campbell formulæ, aligned sequences art crisis, Jung’s thought has tended energies.

Three distinct strains of character conflict can thus be identified, corresponding to forces traditionally associated with the three regions of Freud’s mapping. Internal disharmonies generated by developmental pressures exert strong influence, and significant and pervasive (Griffiths, 2008).

Case Studies in English Literature

The preceding sections have outlined a method of psychoanalytic reading as an approach to character, conflict, and narrative. The final section offers illustrative case studies drawn from English literature. The first examines character duality in three Shakespearean heroes, who reflect, contest, and refract drives associated with the id, ego, and superego. The second identifies indirect yet pervasive manifestations of unconscious motifs in the protagonists and projected selves of selected Romantic and Gothic texts, linking these patterns to narrative transformations. The third engages with voices from the Modernist and postcolonial eras, exploring how new discursive contexts facilitate and yet simultaneously underscore the tenacity of earlier concerns. Psychoanalytic readings thus illuminate a diverse range of literary phenomena across genres and periods. Psychoanalytic schools differ in their models of the psyche, the nature of the subject, and the evolution of the individual over time, resulting in distinct emphases and ramifications at the level of character. The present reading reconciles such divergences by focusing on the interplay of inner processes and narrative form, revealing how psychoanalysis can collaborate productively with wider critical approaches. Consequently, when characters and conflict are approached from this insightful perspective, the potential for collaboration with other frameworks becomes apparent. The psychoanalytic approach examines the changes wrought in a character by narrative events—the transformations of circumstance that reshape personality. Such shifts, pivotal in their own right, often parallel the more comprehensive, subtle, and gradual interior developments that the narrative traces. The thematic focus thus remains on processes of grouping, crystallisation, emergence, reconfiguration, and dissolution within the character’s psychic economy. (Butchart, 2019)

1. Character Duality in the Shakespearean Hero

Shakespearean heroes demonstrate profound character duality, each embodying contrasting tendencies with far-reaching implications. The protagonists oscillate between opposing drives—expressed through passion, deliberation, ambition, and scruples—that propel their respective narratives. Romeo of *Romeo and Juliet* alternates between impulsive yearning 3c58f167-b92c-4a1d-a728-c4a3b1099287 Juliet, nurtured through idealistic

devotion, and sustained affection 3c58f167-b92c-4a1d-a728-c4a3b1099287 Rosaline, tinged with superficiality. Military commanders such as Coriolanus, Henry V, and Macbeth grapple with the interplay of personal grandeur, momentous duty, and moral inhibition. The emergence of such duality corresponds with broader societal trans3c58f167-b92c-4a1d-a728-c4a3b1099287mations, notably the waning authority of the Church and the advent of secular humanism, prompting exploration of individual potentials beyond existential designs. The Shakespearean hero embodies yet another duality, one that connects avant-garde production and reception practices to avant-garde drama. This duality materializes through competing motives—the quest 3c58f167-b92c-4a1d-a728-c4a3b1099287 identity, self-protection, vengeance, agitation, and so 3c58f167-b92c-4a1d-a728-c4a3b1099287th—all of which intersect with external contestations. A fully realized, unified identity emerges only upon definitive public recognition. Juliet seeks youthful love; Macbeth craves dominion over life and death; Hamlet's predicaments converge upon filial, political, and moral dimensions. These multiplicities become accessible in Shakespeare's texts, where actors, directors, and audiences uncover varied sympathies, even within the confines of established traditions (for Translation & Literary Studies & AlShalan, 2024).

2. The Unconscious Motifs in Romantic and Gothic Protagonists

Romantic and Gothic protagonists often exhibit significant dualities and internal conflict, providing meaning beyond their individual narratives. The Byronic hero embodies rebellion against authority and paradoxically embodies some of that authority, suggesting a demand for submission. Gothic characters such as Milton's Adam, Keats's Lamia, and Mary Shelley's Creature project repressed desires while seeking freedom from the constraints of abusive relationships (Frazell, 2018). By contrast, happy endings allow protagonists to embrace autonomy, owning their desires in ways consistent with ego formation and social interaction, rather than surrendering them entirely. The unconscious, the repressed, and the taboo materialise in violent desires for the other and mythical beings representing the primitive. Such figures as Varney the Vampyre, Count Dracula, and Lord Ruthven affirm the Other, yet signify a primal violence, exploit the weak, and remain unloved, preventing any possibility of access to the desired. In these tales, the dangerous imaginary enhances narrative fascination while still prohibiting access to the sought-after figure (Butler, 2011).

3. Psychoanalytic Readings of Modernist and Postcolonial Voices

Modernist and postcolonial narratives employ language, structure, and theme to entangle tensions between the conscious mind and deeper psychological states. In Hanif Kureishi's work, excess desire collides with interpersonal representation and cultural restriction. Sigmund Freud's and Melanie Klein's analyses of this disjunction develop an interrelated understanding of the culturally constructed vicissitudes of the psyche, itself founded on innate impulses (Ejupi et al., 2014).

Psychoanalytic attention to space, sexuality, and the corporeal drives of the id provides a capacious lens for examining character function and conflict. Modernist literature is pervaded by psychologism and foregrounded tension between inner and outer. D. H. Lawrence's texts probe ever-fissuring identities, while troubled characters attempt to articulate individual truths. Joyce's ambitious odyssey traces a manifold and mutating subject, delving deep into the psyche as it responds to environment, culture, and other selves. Psychoanalytic approaches elucidate the complex interplay of landscapes, bodies, and social factors shaping experience as the character endeavours toward physical and creative fulfilment (Griffiths, 2008).

Conflict Resolution and Character Development

Conflict marks a crucial moment in narrative progression. Characters enter a state of turmoil, drama ensues, and an eventual resolution restores order. Psychoanalytic criticism examines not only the nature of internal and external conflict but also the modalities of resolution and their implications for character and narrative. Consideration of the conflict-curve reveals a correspondence between inner conflict and character constellations—Bernard's model of the self can sometimes elucidate this dynamic. From a narrative standpoint, resolution may encompass reconciliation with the other, reconstitution of the self, or disengagement from both the other and the self. The precise nature of resolution and the dynamics of conflict further elucidate character development, autonomy, and ethical orientation. Psychoanalytic reading has a strong tradition in children's literature, exploring the interplay between character development and the acquisition of autonomy. Resnick identifies a developmental trajectory spanning the act of witnessing, the parallel struggle for personal autonomy typically enacted by the protagonist, and the eventual acknowledgment of interpersonal coordinates. Existing psychoanalytic paradigms afford varying degrees of purchase on the dynamics of development, autonomy, and ethical orientation. Bernard's model, with its emphasis on the fundamental dilemma of coordination between the self and the other, animates both inner and outer conflict without neglecting moral dimensions or the temptation toward ethical solipsism (A.J. Mohr, 1993).

1. Catharsis, Transformation, and Endings

Psychoanalytical approaches frequently observe narrative instances of catharsis or transformation in character and conflict resolution, hinting at interrelations between characters, drives, and plot developments that self-replicate across genres and periods. Catharsis denotes a sense of relief, as if a burden has been lifted, whereas transformation refers to a character's fundamental change into a new being. Closely linked to catharsis, reconciliation depicts a state marked by union with another character. Regression marks the opposite of transformation—it signifies a return to primal drives, often appearing in tragedies. Catharsis, transformation, and regression impact the configuration of external conflicts, inclusively connected to moral frameworks. Areas highlighted by the psychoanalytical critique include character duality, instances of drive cessation, and factors surrounding human

extinction. Even within diurnal habits, a soliloquy such as “To be or not to be” exhibits a comprehensive existential confrontation, encompassing the two central poles of character networks. Psychoanalytical insights envisage literary developments as articulations of the inner psyche, whereby authors’ afflictions articulate the uncontainable. Physics no longer enables primary restraints to landscape deterioration; the psyche now reveals pressure and bursts into character realization. Although catharsis and cathartic trivialization punctuate non-abstract national narratives, character reflexivity manifests within hybridized texts displaying imperial, post-colonial, regional, or nomad fusions. Within the colonial dialectic, cross-colonial interfaces communicate cope through catastrophe and sustain opposite consciousness (Butchart, 2019).

2. Reconciliation, Regression, and Autonomy

Characters in prose are constructs of narrative and text, yet remain rooted in a psychic substrate extrinsic to the discourse. Such considerations apply equally to the wider textual space, since entire stories are likewise vehicles that express something “behind” or “beneath” the verbal surface or syntactic façade—covert psychological structures that shape, inform, and govern the narrative process and its durations, materials, and attention. Events verify this psychological overlay: characters behave, interact, grapple, and transform, reflecting innate dynamics, modes, impulses, and conflicts rendered visible through an understanding of the interconnections uniting theme, struggle, and textual form. These inner forms bear sufficient poetic or rhetorical autonomy that literary studies freely examine them in isolation from the surrounding plots, motifs, or images engaged elsewhere (Butchart, 2019).

Implications for Literary Theory and Pedagogy

Literary approaches deriving from psychological theory and inquiry find regular employment within university-level English curricula. When such methods receive consideration, psychoanalytic concepts, particularly Freudian notions, prevail over a broader set of potential theoretical lenses (Grujicic-Alatrliste, 2013). Such frequent deployment has prompted educators to reexamine the specific contributions psychoanalytically oriented research makes to the study of literature and to the teaching of writing. The discipline of literature now often receives insufficient intellectual consideration. Despite its decline in formal attention, literature remains critical to examining complex ideas—not least because the pedagogical value of building both verbal and conceptual fluency endures. Several frameworks permit the examination of psychological and psychoanalytic themes beyond literary narratives themselves. Nevertheless, many such frameworks hold distinct tacit premises; introducing the language of psychoanalytic theory into the discussion of Hammadi’s work such frameworks appears particularly apt (Young, 1996).

1. Psychoanalytic Reading in Curricula

Psychoanalytic reading can enhance readers’ engagement with unanticipated texts and guide discussion of personal responses. Psychoanalytic reading of literary

texts draws on psychoanalytic theories of inner life. The selection of texts for which psychoanalytic reading can be a starting point may also shift in significant ways. Psychoanalytic criticism examines literature as a vehicle for tracing the unconscious. Psychoanalytic reading of literature focuses on the relationship between the inner psychic world and outer social reality. Psychoanalytic criticism explores the role of literature in creating and sustaining meaning in the face of inner conflicts or disruptive social forces. It attends to both the conflicts recognized and to those which remain unconscious.

Some hesitation surrounds the use of psychoanalytic approaches in the study of literature. Psychoanalytic scholarship in literature addresses questions within psychoanalysis, such as whether textual layers of meaning map onto layers of psychic activity and whether teleological models of narrative structure remain valid. In the case of psychoanalysis, pedagogy as a specific application of psychoanalytic theory might be one option for fruitful exploration (Grujicic-Alatrliste, 2013).

2. Limitations and Complementary Approaches

Throughout the history of psychoanalysis, various theories have arisen that resonate with literary texts examined in the previous sections but diverge from the framework set forth. While still psychoanalytic, Alfred Adler’s, Melanie Klein’s, and Amanda L. W. Griffiths’s reading of George Eliot’s multilayered characters (Griffiths, 2008) emphasise some aspects Freddie of character development at the expense of Lacan’s other registers, placing a heavier focus on infantile attachment. Karen Horney’s arguments centre on the neurotic character structure that displaces a central void and its associated inner drives; E. H. Bick’s proposal of a character Triumvirate—generalised but specifically id-oriented substructures labelled Feminine, Outlaw, and Sacred—connects with Jungian intuitions. Readers interested in feminist perspectives may follow the Lacan-influenced trajectory sketched by Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, and Kristeva, often labelled post-Lacanian. G. M. C. van der Heijden’s examination of character language, similar to Bakhtinian genre-theory-focused approaches, aligns with a Lacanian ground to dialectical socio-cultural, yet historical, analysis and drifts away from psychoanalytic emphasis on individual driving forces. Several trajectories lie outside the main compartmentalisation of the psyche yet remain consistent with its spherical contours sketched by Lacan, including Bertolt Brecht’s polyphonic emphasis on publicly-discursive (including internally-prompted) developments that steer clear of intimate subjectivity; Fernando de Saussure’s exploration of commercial dynamics and logistics as articulated by Jacques Ellul; N. Geoffrey Levi’s interpretation of alienness as being incompatible with subjectivity, incrementally nudging it toward periphery; and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s scrutiny of cultural oppositions from which various driven chains, including the psychoanalytical one, emerge, closely related to the trilectics of these sections yet detoxicated from Galen-project fecundity.

Conclusion

The significant findings presented throughout this study substantiate the critical, psychoanalytic reading of English literature across various genres and periods as a worthwhile and enriching interpretative practice. Like the many psychoanalytic initiatives undertaken since Freud, such exploration of the unconscious applies to the personal and cultural resourcing of symbolic materials circulating within art. Every text clearly expresses the textual structures and tensions explicitly embodied in its speech and articulation as well as implicitly operating within the sense-making elaboration of its sentiment and designation. Together, the motivations situated within characters at imaginative points in the narrative bring judgements of individual taste concerning the dimensions of self-resourcing and the degree of psychic fulfilment sought. Insights relating to character duality and competing drives—so resounding in the reading of Shakespearean heroes—continue to resonate within later authors such as Hardy and through to Modernism at the textual juncture between the industrial revolution and the reestablishment of colonialism. Accessing additional psychoanalytic discourses, the inner freedom and tranquillity voiced through the established frames of longing, desire, and repossession firmly articulate the cultural connection unearthed. The many motifs harnessing the energies of dreams, bodily ailments, and the uncanny recircuit Modernism on an even wider scale.

In much more recent works, culturally hybrid preoccupations around budding agency and parasitism point to a strict contemporary compliance at the political and intellectual margins of text. The earlier, heroic fragmentation at the quality of mind reopens overbearing contact globally to exploit. Juxtaposing these major movements of political agency within post-colonial posture emerges an undeclared tension probing the longitude of self-reconstitution and symptomatic fulfilment even farther apart. Aftershocks, even felt much earlier within character-location, alongside arterial relations and aesthetic capacity—broadly shared amongst sabotaged, recourse narratives alike—defer, repeat or eventually revisit. Central to artefacts of time, place, and character, built into tenets so often stated, together with exits and traces, characterisation emerges repeatedly more fundamental again. Reappearing considerations articulated suddenly themselves in-between, alongside, surrounding, subsequent, even omitted recollections or reflections, return post-landmark without yet disallowing or diminishing concomitant closure avenues bound elsewhere. Such hare-like amenability across infinitely-large domains—and as all three of fitment, affliction, investigation circulate mostly unconcerned through wave-like should the wider and longer span stay solely peripheral—renders broader and deeper all but anywhere, momentarily or further. When explicit and also recurrent, present multiple character-dimensions enact engagement alongside elsewhere praise, involvement, candidness, caricature, fallacy or pithy economy. Spacings signal parity between lane-division plus psychochemical chamber, without limitation, along both the even opening to cloud-chain recursion articulated persistently contained—array, outline, outline—whilst iconographic mirrors attract

instrumental elaboration dispersed from larger expenditure dealt hence and forth equally (Butchart, 2019).

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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