

Literature review on psychological criticism

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Readings: The poems used for the lesson plan are namely: " America" by Claude McKay, " The Fish" by Elizabeth Bishop and " Coal" by Audre Lore.

Objective of lesson: Psychological criticism in literature observes the text and the author. The symbolism used in the writing is scrutinized and observed as workings of the human mind that are for interpretation. These writings are analyzed according to the author and the characters of the literary piece.

This kind of approach uses theories of those in the field of psychology.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis is often used in literary criticism. His theories are those concerning the unconscious mind, having power over thoughts and actions. The three poems that are analyzed relate to this type of theory because they portray how the authors see themselves. In order to be able to apply this kind of theory and criticism to a literary piece, it is essential that you understand the basics of the Freudian theory. There are three main ideas that need to be tackled in order for the psychological criticism to be used:

- The unconscious mind is above all
- Actions, thoughts, language and images are expressions of the unconscious mind
- Sexual desire plays a big role in human behavior

Description of assignment: He uses theories and techniques for dream interpretation to criticize literary texts. This type of criticism and theory allowed people to understand how wonderful the human mind really is.

These theories can be seen in the poems described below. Most of the authors are seen to have issues with how they perceive themselves. Using Freudian theory, the poems can be scrutinized according to the images and

language that they portray. Choose on poem and see how it relates to the theory of the unconscious mind.

Method of assessment: Students will be assessed on how well they analyze a literary piece using Freudian theory. The unconscious mind can be seen through the author's use of language, imagery and characters. The deeper the student tries to dissect meaning through literary forms in the piece, the better the criticism will be.

“ America” by Claude McKay

This piece by Claude McKay is a very vivid poem. He speaks of the land America and is torn between love and hate for the country. McKay provides deep personification for the land, as well as using several similes all throughout the piece. The imagery in this piece of literature can be related to the Freudian theory because of the anger and emotion of the writer.

Applying the psychological theory for criticism in this piece was a challenge because it is so short. The brief words from the author do not allow for a long dissection of the poem.

The poem is very angry and full of emotion. The author's anger came from his ethnic background – being a Jamaican living in America. You can claim that this is what the author feels about himself and the land he lives in.

Passionate feelings are a mix of positive and negative light in this poem. You can see that the author speaks of America, seeing the land in a female form. Or, from Freudian perspective, giving it motherly characteristics. It is safe to assume that the author feels the same way about how he was brought into this world. His feelings towards his mother may be evoked by how he sees America as a land. The land can be compared to a mother. He feels that his

mothers (America's) affection towards him are not how he wishes. He states that she does feed him, yet with "bread of bitterness" (McKay 1). This might mean that he believes he is only brought to life or raised out of obligation. The first three lines is how he attests of the hate of the land for him, yet he claims that he has "love [for] this cultured hell" (McKay 7). This poem might be the actions of thoughts of McKay's unconscious mind towards his own mother.

"The Fish" by Elizabeth Bishop

The Fish by Elizabeth Bishop was a good read, and out of the three was easier to relate to the Freudian theory. Automatically, you can see that the characters in the poem related to each other. The fisherman, which is the main character, comes across a fish that he could relate to in terms of obstacles in life. This poem was a bit more difficult to criticize because it was more of a story. You have to remember that the author is Bishop, and not the fisherman in the story. Before finishing the entire poem, I tried to analyze the fisherman and who he might have represented in the life of the author. However, this might not have been the case in this story. The author might be represented in the fish, instead of the fisherman.

If we assume that the fisherman in this poem is the father of the author, we can say that the author might have had a deeper connection with her father as compared to her mother. In the poem, it can be assumed that the fish tries to compare itself to the fisherman, but they have differences. This can be seen in the Electra complex used in Jung's theory. The fish can relate to the fisherman, yet she sees that they are not all the same. The fish is looking for acceptance in the fisherman and would want to be released. A form of

release in the poem is literal – that the fisherman would let the fish go.

Nearing the end of the poem, we see that the fisherman exclaims “Rainbow!” (Bishop 36). In literature, this can mean a lot of things. Rainbow can symbolize a new beginning, new hope or even a cleansing of nature. This might mean a new light for the author. However, the rainbow in the poem is seen from an oil spill near the engine of the boat (Bishop 30). This renewal might have been caused by negativity or untoward circumstances. The author still might not have been satisfied with her relationship with her father, yet feels that it is time to let go.

“ We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks

Freudian theory states that the unconscious actions of people can be traced from their childhood. This poem by Brooks is an interesting one because of the way it is set up. The way in which the poem is written suggests that the characters in the poem are young boys, who are trying to be cool. Being monosyllabic in use of words, the poem might suggest that the characters were not educated. They try to play cool because they are insecure with themselves, and even with their background (Brooks 10). The Freudian theory speaks of the unconscious mind dictating actions or words. We can see that the insecurities of the boys in the poem was because of their unconscious insecurities.

The boys in this poem are trying to cover up their lack of education by trying to be cool. They think that being delinquents is the way to go because they feel that they are being oppressed by society. Written during a time where this was what happened to young kids of color, it is no surprise that the poem was written in such a way. The poem is written in a way where the

characters suggest that they are old enough to support themselves.

However, coming from the socially oppressed area that they probably lived in, they will turn to illegal opportunities in order to support their families.

This poem was slightly more difficult to analyze because it is shorter and not much detail is given.

Works Cited

Claude McKay. " America". Poem Hunter. Web. 4 March 2013.

[http://www. poemhunter. com/poem/america-2/](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/america-2/)

Elizabeth Bishop. " The Fish". Poem Hunter. Web 4 March 2013.

[http://www. poemhunter. com/poem/the-fish/](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-fish/)

Gwendolyn Brooks. " We Real Cool". Poem Hunter. Web. 4 March 2013.

[http://www. poemhunter. com/poem/we-real-cool/](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/we-real-cool/)