

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture - 14

Part C

Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Criticism

Hello and welcome to the 3rd and final module on Psychoanalytic literary criticism. In the last module, we looked at some chief Lacan Psychoanalytic principles and concepts and terms, and we understood how the Lacan distinction between the imaginary and symbolic. Might we have a bit of, might be compared to the psychoanalytic stages, psychosexual stages of development that we delineated by Sigmund Freud himself.

He looked at how a child enters the world of language, the world of symbolic, and how that is in opposition to the world of the imaginary. While, the symbolic represented by order and chaos and rules and associated with the further figure, the imaginary is more of a chaotic entity which has strong resonances with the maternal. Therefore, like we mentioned in the last class, the child now enters, what Lacan calls the world of the symbolic.

This distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary has been used extensively in literary studies by followers of Lachanian psychoanalysis. So, as you mentioned figures like Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustavo, Jacques Lacan. We must now be in a position to understand, how they borrow from each other and how they develop each other's ideas and how they also significantly differ from each other.

To some up like sword and critics, Lachanian critics also play close attention to the unconscious motives and feelings. However, instead of excavating for the motives that might be driving the characters or even the author himself as a Freudian critic would do. A Lachanian critic would in fact, search for that those of the text itself. They are interested in uncovering contradictory undercurrents of meaning that exist within the text, which like something like unconscious, which like subconscious beneath the

conscious of the text. This is as you can see, perhaps another way of defining the post structural process of reconstruction itself.

Lachanian critics also see the literary text has a site, where enactment the demonstration of Lachanian views about language and unconscious play out. They are particularly interested in the illusiveness of the signified as we explained in the previous module with the example of the tree, the perpetual edition of the signified under the signifier. There also interest in establishing thus, the centrality of the unconscious which in concern terms, the Lacan own terms is structured like a language.

Now, to illustrate some of the concerns of Lachanian approach on literature, we shall now attempt a psychoanalytic Lachanian reading of a prominent text, just the same way as we attempted Freudian reading of Shakespeare Hamlet. The text that we shall now take into consideration for our appreciation and analysis is Lacan's own well-known interpretation of a detective story written by Edgar Allan Poe, the story is called the purloined letter.

Now, as of the case of Hamlet, I will briefly run you through the basic premise and the plot of the story and we will then attempt psychoanalytic Lachanian reading of the very same. Now, there are five characters in this story, there is a queen, there is a king, there is a minister, who is employed by the king and the queen. There is a chief of police and there is a character called Dupin, who is detective. These are the five primary characters who figure in an Edgar Allan Poe's, the purloined letter.

Now, as the story opens we understand that the minister is in discussion with the queen in her own apartment and while, they are discussing affairs thus, the king enters unexpectedly. Now, the minister quickly notices that, the queen is becoming very nervous in the presence of the king and she is very anxious that the king should not see a letter that is lying in front of her on a desk.

Now, she is clearly in capable of concealing the letter of hiding it, because in doing so she would innovatively draw the king's attention to the letter, the very letter that she does not want the king to see. Now, the minister sees all of this happening and when the king and the queen are distracted in talk, he swiftly you know pockets the letter. And he substitutes a fake letter from his own pocket, which has a similar appearance to that of the letter that he stole from the queen's desk.

Now, soon after this, the queen discovers that letter has been stolen and she quickly realizes, who must be responsible for that theft. She realizes that the minister must have taken the letter. Now, after the minister leaves, she gets the chief of police and his man to search the minister's apartment thoroughly an attempt to retrieve the letter. However, in spite of employing his best man and in employing, in spite of sleeping in his room with an extensive and scientific research, they are unable to retrieve the letter.

And the queen naturally become frustrated, in desperation the queen asked for deductive Dupin help in getting back her letter. Now, Dupin visits the ministers' apartment and talks to the minister and realizes that, the minister would not really carry a letter with him on person, because it would be too risky. If he were to be apprehend, arrested and search that would reveal the letter immediately.

So, he must still have the letter on him in person, yet at the same time, he must have kept the letter in some place, where it would have been extremely easy for him to retrieve, because if he is not able to retrieve the letter itself, the very purpose of having the letter is defeated. Therefore, Dupin corrected reduces that the letter must be in the minister's house, but it must not be very well hidden, because if it had been extremely well hidden, the inspector would have discovered it in the first place.

He correctly reduces that the letter must have been hidden in plain sight. Thus, he goes back to the apartment and finds the letter very casually placed among the other letters that the minister has in his apartment. Now, Dupin steals the letter back, substitute a third fake letter in it is place and the original letter is returned to the queen. Order is restored and the minister's plane is spoiled. This is in effect the bit of the story that we are interested.

Thus, if you attempt a psychoanalytic Lacanian reading of this story, we understand that the stolen letter becomes an emblem of the unconscious itself. Because, in the story, we find out nothing about the contents of the letter, we do not know what the letter contains. However, we do see that the effect that the letter is capable of eliciting character in the plain, it is capable of evoking a strong emotion from almost all the character within the story.

Likewise by comparison, the content of the unconscious is by definition unknowable to us. But everything we do is affected by what are unconscious wholes. We can all guess

at the nature of this content by observing its effects, just as the same way, we can reduce the general nature of the letters content by looking at the anxiety that it generates. Similarly, a Lacanian critic would point out that, all letters are thus, all words are thus, like purloin letters, we can never open them and we can never see the accountants.

However, we do have the signifiers which are the verbal envelopes or the concepts themselves. So, it is speak, but this concept, these envelopes cannot be unsealed, we cannot open them we cannot get to see their contents. So, that the signified will always remain hidden, the signified will always slide it is in present slide of the signified under the signifier, just like the content of the praline letter in Edgar Allan Poe's tale.

Therefore, we understand that comparing the Freudian and Lacanian examples discussed in this chapter, in this lecture, will make it immediately apparent. That even though they are they stem from the same original body of Freudian theory and Freudian psychoanalysis. There is an immense gap and there is immense gulf that exists between these two approaches and that is the very beauty of psychoanalytic criticism.

Even though, it basically stand from the same key concepts, it differs significantly from Freudian analysis to the psychoanalysis developed by Carl Gustav Jung. And eventually to those that are continued to this day by Lacan and Kristeva and other such theories. And that concludes are short discussion and lecture on psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Thank you very much, see you in next lecture.