

Lecture 27

Literature and Psychoanalysis: Carl Jung

Hello friends and welcome back to another new lecture on literary theory. In our past few meetings we have been discussing the topic of Freudian psychoanalysis and how that can provide a theoretical framework for understanding literature. In this lecture as well as in the following one we are going to move beyond Freud and see how psychoanalysts working after Freud contributed to the field of literary theory. And our focus today will be on the work of the influential psychoanalyst named Carl Gustav Jung.

Jung

Jung was born in 1875 in Switzerland to a family of German descent. He was by training a physician. But from very early in his career as a doctor, he was interested in psychological diseases primarily because it allowed him to access from a scientific perspective the phenomenon of spiritual experiences. Being the son of a clergyman and a mother who frequently complained of being possessed by spirits, both the spiritual and the supra-rational played a formative role in his childhood. This in a way explains his doctoral work which was published in 1903 under the title *On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomenon*.

By 1906, Jung's work on human psychology had already attracted the attention of Freud and for more than eight years after that Jung remained one of the closest associates of Freud. But Jung's approach to psychoanalysis proved to be crucially different from Freudian psychoanalysis and this divergence became prominently expressed in Jung's 1912 publication *Psychology of the Unconscious*. The two most impressive figures of early twentieth-century psychoanalytic movements, Freud and Jung, therefore parted ways in 1913. The dissociation with Freud was a

significant blow to Jung and he could recover from it only after the First World War. However, from 1920s onwards, Jung was again prolific in his research output. This period in Jung's career was also marked by travels to distant places which included the United States, Africa, as well as India.

Now, as I had suggested in my introductory lecture, one of the things that I would like to do through this lecture series would be to try and read India and Indian influences in this evolving story of literary theory so that it does not appear to us Indian students as a completely alien field of enquiry. This discussion on Jung provides me with one such opportunity to foreground India in the story of literary theory. As early as 1912 we find evidences of Jung engaging with Hindu religious philosophy and folding in interpretations of passages from Upanishads and the Rig Veda into his psychoanalytic theories. This interest in Indian religion and philosophy only deepened during the course of the next few decades and culminated in his visit to India in 1936-37. But even before he visited India, Jung delivered a series of lectures on India yogic practices to the Psychology Club in Zurich, which were published in 1932 under the title *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*. In the winter of 1936-37 Jung toured India and extensively discussed about Indian religion and spiritual practices with its various practitioners. On his return, Jung kept up his interest on India, and we can see interesting glimpses of his sustained engagement with this country and its spiritual heritage in pieces like the 1939 article "What India Can Teach Us" or the 1943 essay "The Psychology of Eastern Meditation".

Jung died in 1961 in Zurich and left behind not only copious volumes of published materials but also a significant amount of unpublished texts which are gradually being made public today. Out of these unpublished materials which are now seeing the light of the day, the most enigmatic is perhaps a text which is usually referred to as Jung's *Red Book* or *Liber Novus* which literally

translates into the “new book”. This is a book which records Jung’s imaginative experiences between 1913 and 1917 and was only published in 2009. The book is interesting for a number of reasons, one of them being that it helps Jung scholars to understand more clearly what was going on in Jung’s mind during the period after his break-up with Freud when he had retreated into a cocoon. But for me the most fascinating aspect of that book is the wonderfully brilliant paintings with which Jung decorated the calligraphic text. Some of these paintings can be seen online, and I whole heartedly recommend you to look them up to experience for yourself some of the most fascinating displays of colour and forms.

Collective Unconscious and Archetypal Criticism

Now let us come to Jung’s psychoanalytic theory. As I have mentioned, Jung was deeply influenced in his conceptualization of human psychology by Freud. But there were also crucial differences. And one of the best ways to understand both the linkages as well as the difference between Jungian and Freudian psychoanalysis is through one of his own dreams that Jung describes in his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. In this particular dream, Jung finds himself in a two storied house which he immediately identifies as “my house” though the house is unknown to him. Looking around Jung could see that he was in an elegantly furnished salon or living room situated on the second storey. It was decorated in the luxuriant rococo style, which dominated European taste during the eighteenth century, and it had a number of precious old paintings hanging from the wall. Jung is then struck in his dream by a desire to explore the whole house and he climbs down to the ground floor. The ground floor is decorated in a style that is different and historically older to the style which had been predominant in the second-storey living room. Here, in the ground floor, the furnishing looks medieval and everything is rather dark. While exploring these rooms, Jung encounters a door that leads him to the cellar or

the basement which has walls dating back to the ancient Roman time. But Jung soon discovers that the cellar is not the lowest level of his dream house. Indeed, he finds in this floor another narrow stairway that leads him to a cave which is scattered with bones and broken potteries that are reminiscent of some primitive culture. It is while he is at this level of the house that Jung wakes up and his dream breaks.

Now, in his autobiography, Jung explains this dream as a representative of a new model of human mind which was both derived from the Freudian model and was importantly different from it. Let me quote from the text:

It was plain to me that the house represented a kind of image of the psyche [...].

Consciousness was represented by the salon. It had an inhabited atmosphere, in spite of its antiquated style.

The ground floor stood for the first level of the unconscious. The deeper I went, the more alien and the darker the scene became. In the cave, I discovered remains of a primitive culture, that is, the world of the primitive man within myself—a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness. The primitive psyche of man borders on the life of the animal soul, just as the caves of prehistoric times were usually inhabited by animals before men laid claim to them.

So, how is this similar or different to the Freudian map of the mind? Well as far as Freud was concerned, the mind was divided into two sections – the conscious and the unconscious. And here please note that I am not talking about the Freudian dynamics of human mind which was divided into three sections the id, ego, and the superego. That is a different idea altogether, so

please don't get confused here. Anyway coming back to the distinction between conscious mind and unconscious mind, Freud believed that the unconscious was purely personal. In other words, the constitution of each individual's unconscious was determined by that individual's personal experiences and memories especially during the childhood years. These are the experiences, which for Freud determined the unique nature of an individual's repressed desires. So for instance, even though Freud talks about something like the oedipal complex as a universal phenomenon, he also asserts that the precise nature in which the oedipal complex will form and operate in a person's psychological life will be largely determined by the specific relations that the person has had with his parents.

Jung, on the other hand, asserts that the Freudian personal unconscious is only a part of the totality of the unconscious that forms the human mind. Indeed, there are deeper levels of unconsciousness than those elaborated by Freud. These are the levels that Jung seemed to be accessing as he went down the staircase first to the cellar and then to the cave beneath it. And what is important to note here is that as one keeps descending into the deeper layers of unconscious one keeps moving from the personal memories, experiences and repressions to an "animal soul". This soul is not shaped by one's individual experiences but seems to be the residue of the primitive mind of our ancestors from whom we evolved. And thus this is an aspect of the unconscious that is shared by everyone of us who constitute the human race. This deeper layer of the unconscious is what is referred to as the "collective unconscious" and this is one of key aspects of Jungian psychoanalysis.

Collective Unconscious

Describing his use of the term “collective unconscious”, Jung writes:

I have chosen the term “collective” because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.

What Jung is saying here is that all of us collectively carry in our minds a psychic substratum that is formed not by our personal development but rather by the development of human beings as a race. Take for instance the fear of darkness. All human beings share an innate fear of darkness and it can be argued that this collective fear of darkness is an imprint of the memories and experiences of the most primitive human beings and how they evolved. In a primitive world, darkness would have been fearful because it hid a number of threats, like for instance the threat of being attacked by unseen animals or the threat of losing one’s bearings and getting lost. From a Jungian perspective, one may argue that even in the modern world when these threats are much less, darkness remains fearful because our mind is shaped by the fears and desires of our primitive ancestors. These fears, desires, memories and experiences form the shared substratum that Jung identifies as collective unconscious.

Archetype

But how do we know that a collective unconscious exists? Well we know it by observing the influence of archetypes in our psychological life. Here again, in the word archetype we come across a crucial term of Jungian psychoanalysis. So what are archetypes? Well, archetypes are

the primordial images and patterns which create the basic grooves for human behavior, motivation for action and development of personalities.

To give you an example, one of the archetypes that Jung talks about is the Persona archetype.

One of the basic characteristic features of human personality, irrespective of his or her individual upbringing, is an attempt to portray his image as likeable and socially acceptable. This is what Jung refers to as the “persona”. This is shaped and maintained meticulously by an individual to protect his ego from any negative criticism and according to Jung it is a psychological imperative that is imprinted in our collective unconscious.

Another example of the Jungian archetype will be the Father archetype. According to Jung, we all carry the image of an authoritative, stern, and powerful figure in the deeper levels of our psyche which is identified as the Father archetype. Now, here please note that this father archetype exists in all of us irrespective how our individual relationship with our own father is. Indeed, this archetype would also influence the psychological dynamics of a person who has lost his father before his birth and therefore has no personal memory of his own father. This Father archetype has its origin in the primitive human experiences of social life and is therefore part of our racial memory.

Now the reason why these archetypes are important from the perspective of literary theory is because according to Jung these archetypes form the basis of our literary narratives, especially of narratives like myths and fairy tales. This marks a profound shift from Freud’s analysis of literature as modified day-dreams. Now day-dreams, as you will remember from our earlier discussion, is connected to, what we are now calling after Jung, the “personal unconscious”. This means that as far as Freud is concerned, day-dreams provide the specific individual who is engaged in the dreaming process with a high degree of pleasure by allowing him to

imaginatively fulfill his personal wishes and desires. This, however, creates a problem if we read literature as day-dream of the author. That is because if say a novel emerges out of the day-dream of the novelist then how does it manage to give pleasure to the reader? A novel should only give pleasure to its novelist. To bypass this problem Freud had to come up with concepts like “incentive bonus” and the softening and disguising of the author’s ego. The Jungian answer to why literature is enjoyed by people other than its author is more straight forward. From the Jungian perspective, literature is an expression of the author’s unconscious but not merely the personal unconscious. Literature is informed by the deep recesses of the collective unconscious possessed by the author. And this collective unconscious finds expression in literature through the underlying presence of the archetypes. In other words, if we were to study literature from the Freudian perspective we would try to look beneath the surface of the narrative to find the seething forces of the author’s personal desires, fears and wishes. But if we were to study literature from the Jungian perspective, we would find beneath the surface of the literary narrative archetypal images and patterns. Now since these archetypes are expressions of the collective unconscious they, are much more relatable by the reader. That is because the reader too shares the same collective unconscious with the author and is psychologically guided by the same set of archetypes as the author and his text. This approach towards literature via archetypes has in fact come to form an independent strand of literary theory called archetypal criticism. I will not be able to deal with this unique branch of literary theory any further in this course. But if you are interested to know more about it, the entry on archetypal criticism in M.H. Abrams’ *A Glossary of Literary Terms* will provide you with a wonderful starting point. So with this, we end our discussion on Jung. In the next lecture we will wrap up our section on literature and psychoanalysis with a discussion on Jacques Lacan. Thank you.