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Intro to Critical Theory
19 October 2018

Article Review Essay

Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus, and History sheds light on a new system of complex ideas like psychoanalytic criticism and structuralism. The thesis of this in depth article review is to clarify two different aspects of a binary form complexities of Gothic Literature in hopes to explore by example the rise of the awareness of the conscious mind through the lens of a psychoanalytic. Lois Tyson says, "In addition, we have access to our unconscious if we know how to use it, throughout dreams and through any creative activities we engage in because both our dreams and our creativity, independent of our conscious will or desire, draw directly on the unconscious" (12). This portrays the struggles, ambiguities, and social conflict that *Dracula* and the article review ponders. The theory of psychoanalytic principles is intertwined throughout *Dracula* and puts societal, cultural materialism to rest. The article review of *Dracula* parallels Stoker's literary facets with complex examples, metaphors, and analogies that Freud and Lacan constructed that gave rise to the oedipus complex.

Of course, a complex theory like this one will come with its own set of questions, concerns, and liabilities. Psychoanalysis's goal is to reveal the psychological conflicts as the ultimate source of our experiences and consciousness. Two examples of questions that psychoanalytic critics may ask is: What family dynamics are present? How do the operations of oppression structure the work? This is truly a subjective theory and many people take it differently and however they please. To tie this back with *Dracula*, Tyson explains this idea of talk therapy and how that language directly spawns from the unconscious and anxiety, fear, and

repression that represents the development and symptoms of these characters. There are still concerns because Stoker does stress a myriad of topics to analyze deeply but where could we draw the line at being overly intuitive, just scraping at the surface, or just plain wrong? In the article review by Richard Astle a point of his, is that we look for situations of symbols that are relevant to death and sexuality. Freud and Lacan, both masters of criticism, were examined thoroughly within the review and one thing that stuck out was, in what way can we analyze a piece of literary work as a dream and what part of the brain was used to diagnose these themes of sexuality, fear, and the consequence of modernity. The article review touched on all of the basics of reviewing psychoanalysis criticism and therefore the infamous *Dracula* was revived as Stoker's words of wisdom, confusion, and horror, lives to be dissected till another day.

Richard Astle draws on this theory using many different examples and definitions. He mentions ID, ego, and superego which are big indicators of the stance that he is analyzing. Within this topic he categorizes the importance of the mind, body, and soul. "He is our first self-identification in the text, the "narrator" of the first four chapters. Seward says about him (and this is part of what situates Seward as the ego of which Jonathan is the ideal)" (Astle 101). This one is interesting because at some points it is hard to find that sense of narrator but in the article review it was broken down as to who is what and what is that. This is a great example of how Astle used examples of the theory. He discussed the characters put them into categories using the ideas of Id, ego, and superego. Richard Astle says this in regards to character development and the expansion of psychoanalysis, "Seward as ego is situated by his idealization of Jonathan's virtues, by his (Cartesian-Baconian) skepticism, and by his relation to a particular other, a double or "specular image." For Lacan the Cartesian and Freudian egos are essentially the same. And

since the reader can hardly doubt the existence of vampires in the text, Seward's skepticism represents ours" (101). The characters are different and all draw on a form of the outside world, societal integrities, and complex consciousness.

This journal article also has some overlap of structuralism. Richard Astle is looking at *Dracula* with a sense of freedom and wonder. He broke down *Dracula* and looked at the signs to reveal a sense of literary relevancy to discover the underlying meaning and tone. He acknowledged that these characters were developed through metaphors. He is saying to understand *Dracula* you must obliterate your obvious notions of the text and start off with the deep messages that are not available on the surface. These are some of the similarities within these two theories. "His death, simultaneous with Dracula's, is a metaphor of the castration (itself a metaphor) constitutive (for Freud and Lacan) of subjectivity in the Oedipal matrix" (Astle 100). This sentence is important because it proves how this theory of psychoanalysis is effective to give us a new sense of perspective and insight as contemporary readers.

On topic that is focused on in the article review is the diffusion and the relationship to the characters through schema. All the characters played an astounding role in the arrogant success of this graphic novel. Van Helsing is one of the more interesting character to try and analyze however, Richard Astle gives us a compact insight on his character development and perspective through the eyes of a psychoanalytic critic. Along with Jonathan, Quincey, and Mina. Since this is a gothic piece some of the subject matter may be horrifying and include some particular elements of the supernatural. Astle explains, "But he has, as the victim's husband, a symbolic function, and the climactic moment is his: "on the instant came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked [it is Mina writing] as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same

moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart" (p. 415)" (102). This is a sneak peak into the morbid and unpredictable era of gothic literature. This specific novel of literature specializes in the adaptation of sexual undertones, elements and symbols of Christian theology, the complex identities of people in Victorian Society.

Lois Tyson begs the question in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly guide*, "Are there any oedipal dynamics-or any family dynamics-at work here? That is, is it possible to relate a character's patterns of adult behavior to early experiences in the family as represented in the story? This is important because Richard Astle applies the idea of the complex of Oedipus throughout the duration of the article review. Within the article review he describes the feelings and emotions that is brought on within this complex that may be different than most examples. Stoker strictly identifies the evil that is oppressed within this story and it is that where we see Dracula's real identity. "What could be more "Oedipal" than this hesitation, which Jonathan can be said to overcome only in the defeat of Dracula?" (Astle 100). This article plays on the conscious mind in order to understand the sexuality, ideologies, and the actions of the characters in *Dracula*.

As touched on some already, Richard Astle makes it a priority to delve into the characters and to show us the real identities of them through the lens of a psychoanalytic. There are not many flaws within this informative article. Strong points and evidence scattered throughout the review that may question the first perspective and reading of *Dracula*. One thing that might be useful to analyze in a larger audience is the point of view and to construct the idea of Oedipus through the eyes a female reader. It may be interesting because a female reader may dissect and analyze the values of sexuality different then a male would. That would then cause a conflict

because the stereotypes would be tested. In the Victorian time period, it was thought of vampires creeping around in the night, preying on the blood of young woman. Also, another interesting topic would be to take out the repression and conflict. Without the horror and sexual undertones, what kind of story would we have? Stoker knew what he was doing with the conflict and characters in *Dracula* but one question we as readers could ask is, was he conscious of his own novels sexual undertones? This is a part of the theory of psychoanalysis that is explained very well within the article review. One of the strengths were connecting the Id, ego, and superego to the characters themselves to create a sense of balance and relatability. All three of these ideas played a role on the actions and mindsets of the characters that this theory preaches on in hopes to uncover the true unconsciousness of these characters.

Richard Astle is very effective with his diagnosis and psychological approach to the structuring of these characters. This article gave grave insight on the psychosexual aspects of the story and it provoked deep thought as it picked apart the stereotypical complexities of Stoker's *Dracula*.

Works Cited

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