

Nia Griffin

Dr. Laura Buchholz

ENGL 333

21 October 2018

Midterm Article Review: Psychoanalyst

Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History concentrated heavily on classic psychoanalysts. Astle focuses on the ego's construction in relation to another, and the manifestation of the ego through action (98). Astle's theorizes that the "Oedipus complex" (a triangle of relations) and the "Oedipus scenario" (a dream of incest and parricide) are synchronic and diachronic representations of the individual subject's insertion into "our" own culture (98). The theory assumes the position of the family-complex. Astle viewpoints express the fact that the "birth" of the unconscious lies in the way we perceive ourselves within our own familial structures (Tyson 13). Astle links together Lacan's schemas R with Freud's Group Psychology to further emphasize his perspective on characterology (98). He used the two theories to provide explanation by example of schema R and to show the rise of the "Oedipus complex" as a determinant of bourgeois psychology in the nineteenth century (98).

Astle breaks apart the power dynamic of the main characters through identifying the "Oedipal" complexes that course throughout out the narrative. Astle uses Freud's analysis in Totem and Taboo to explain the "primal horde": a conflict between two fathers and/or father and son (99). Astle demonstrates Jonathan Harker's character is

being controlled by his subconscious longing for his father's position and approval. Jonathan longs for approval from his father, Quincy Harker, and unconsciously actively seeks the approval from his boss Arthur Holmwoods. Astle digs deeper into man's primitive desire for security by consistently referring to the "bourgeois" facade which all the characters reside in (100). As Harker longed for his position of prominence in society, it is really the idea of security he seeks. This outwardly manifest through Harker's relationship to work, and his misplaced value on the material. Dracula's role as the "totemic monster" is then realized through the death of Arthur Holmwoods. Harker's latent fears of responsibility and accountability are now pushed into the forefront after the murder of Holmwood, forcing Harker to confront his inner "demons" much like he has to confront Dracula (100). Through the usage of this example, Astle was able to also convey the idea of displacement as well (Tyson 15).

Astle was able to exemplify displacement of emotions through Harker's character by Harker's fixation on Holmwoods's death rather than his unstable sense of self and avoidance (Tyson 16). Since Jonathan Harker is actually the person who slays Dracula he becomes the "heroic ego", leaving Van Helsing to represent the aspect of the "good-father authority figure" (102). The use of characterization plays on the intended reader's preconceived notions of status and achievement. Harker's "business-like" demeanor and appearance causes him to be more worthy of respect in the eyes of other characters, yet in the breath making him "unfit" for the role of vampire slayer (103). This points to the underlying anxiety that Freud discusses when trying to solidify security within society (Tyson 17). He continues his argument on schema by discussing castration. Astle claims that Quincey Harker and Quincey Morris become the constituted subject by doing this.

The identity of the two Quinceys is stressed which creates a repeating trope of suppression, repression, and sublimation (103). Again, the unconscious fears that are latent inside the characters rear itself through the killing of Dracula. Furthermore, Astle continues to harp on the importance of the role of the family structure and the “Oedipal” complexes. Astle takes a deeper look at the idea of Quincey Harker’s mother, and how she is presented. Quincey Harker’s mother seems to have this gift of foresight or “secret beliefs” that allowed her more access to what is truly going on inside the situation. His mother is the object of hidden affection and desire as well: “This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is...” (103). The entire gang of men were subconsciously longing for her affections though she already belonged to other. Harker’s mother lives in the realm of the unconscious; therefore, making her character in the narrative more of symbol than that person. Through this perspective, Quincey, who was the leader of their vampire killing militia, is returned to a child-like state, becoming the castrated subject deprived of his excessive independence and reinserted as a part of society through his familial group (103).

Astle carries out the finalization of his critique through a historical and geographical lens. He presses on the idea of the lost that came as a direct result to the double castration: the dead represent geographical extremes, Texas and Transylvania. Astle explains the origins of Transylvania being apart of Austria. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a vestige of feudalism, and England’s world-historical enemy at the turn of the century. Therefore, Transylvania represents the eminent fear of death, the unknown, and change. Texas represents extreme freedom to the point of anarchy because the state continuously fought for its independence. According to Astle, it could be theorized that

Texas too was castrated due to having to comply with federal law and join the Union as a state. Astle as inferred that *Dracula* praises the Monroe Doctrine, which was a newer American-style imperialism that replaced the older form in Austro-Hungary.

Beginning the opening of the article with a clear view of psychoanalysts' main objectives in criticizing modern literature aids the budding theorist. Astle pinpoints that in totality it is truly only characterology and plot that is used to determine the "Oedipal scenario" (99). This distinction creates a better lens in which the critic can use while dissecting the literature for him or herself. Astle use of jargon is helpful to further identify psychoanalytic aspects of any story including *Dracula*. Astle used Lacan's schema and Freud's group psychology. By using this as the overarching theme of his entire article, Astle mimics structuralism by his constant use of binaries by going back to the idea of two factors for everything affecting the characters. This method of critique aids the reader by allowing them to bounce back and forth between the examples that he provides. Again, aiding the reader in understanding the theory. Each example that Astle provided was concise with the thesis, and guided the reader's thought process. Astle hardly stepped outside of the realm of explanation by example, which leaves little room for his thesis to be argued. His writing style was informative yet choppy due to fact that he had to use so many sub-points to solidify one thought which could confuse readers. Some readers may find the use of sub-points helpful, as there are many chances for comprehension within the article. The use of chart at the end of the article was slightly questionable. The scatter plot is visually unpleasant and hard to focus in on, but if understood properly seems to aid the visual learner. It is a helpful tool in the sense, but seems to be inappropriate for this style of formal writing. His points were proven enough

before the chart. Astle seemed as if he over emphasized some points like castration. There were other aspects of psychoanalytic criticism that he could have tackled. This article would probably be better suited for a beginner to psychoanalytic criticism. He seemed to be using some of the more basic aspects of the theory.

Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History was an informative critique analysis. Astle had a defined thesis, which stated that the “Oedipus complex”(a triangle of relations) and the “Oedipus scenario” (a dream of incest and parricide) are synchronic and diachronic representations of the individual subject’s insertion into “our” own culture (98). Astle used an explanation by example system in his article to convey his points. His points were clear and easily identifiable. Astle starts with the discussion of the “family structure” and the “Oedipal” complex. He works his way to the “father figure” and latent fear. He also incorporates socioeconomic status and the need for security. Then, he concludes with castration and the “Oedipal” complex again with historical and geographical backing. Overall, Richard Astle’s article would continue to be a useful study aid to budding scholars.

Works Cited

- Astle, Richard. "Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History." *SubStance*, vol. 8, no. 4, Issue 25, 1 Jan. 1979, pp. 98–105., doi:03/02/2015.
- Tyson, Lois (2014-10-10). *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (p. 11-16). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.