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## Lacanian Theory in Literary Criticism.

### Abstract

The foremost Post-Freudian Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) has established a significant practice of psychoanalysis on the basis of unconscious and language. This model of Psychoanalysis on the basis of structural linguistics has been utilized by Lacan himself in criticizing a work of literature as well as formulating a theory of unconscious through literary expressions. In this model of Lacanian psychoanalysis where the theory of unconscious and the theory of literature defining each other establishes a Post-Freudian model of psychoanalytic criticism. This model which further interrogates into the literary text through the language in order to examine the unconscious of both the writer and the reader is made possible. The present essay considers outlining the Lacanian model of literary criticism.

**Keywords:** *Post-Freudian, Jacques Lacan, literature criticism, unconscious, language.*

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) founded a new discipline and treatment called Psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis has two closely related aspects: clinical work and academic work. Clinical work is carried out with patients suffer from a problem such as obsessions, impatience, anxiety, phobias and hallucination. Psychoanalysts' uses only words in their treatments, in this regard language plays an important role in psychoanalysis, because psychoanalysis is carried out exclusively with words. The client speaks with that analyst also speak for this reason French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan says "psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by the subject...man is the subject captured and tortured by language" (Hill 2008: 34). Where Academic psychoanalysis aims to study mental life in general, and it includes studies of literature and social sciences. For both Freud and Lacan literary text given the base for their psychoanalysis. The foremost post-Freudian Jacques Lacan has established a significant practice of literary criticism on the basis of Unconscious and Language. With this theoretical aspect, my paper attempts to present Lacanian method of psychoanalytic criticism.

Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst whose work has had an extraordinary influence on many aspects of the recent literary theory. Lacan began his career by taking a medical degree and then training in psychiatry. His thesis was on a detailed case study of a female paranoid psychotic whose delusions centered upon her fantasies of becoming a great poet, and who was institutionalized after attempting to murder a famous French actress (Pelt 1997: 58). Considering Lacan for the second language English speaking nation is a challenging task because most of the lectures of Lacan was in French and translation of that lecture to English, the psychoanalytic school found mistakes in the translation. Many leading psychoanalysts attended Lacan lectures. Listeners of Lacan lectures complained that his use of German, Hebrew, Chinese and Ancient Greek.

### **Signifier and Signified**

Structuralism and semiotics encouraged the use of the linguistic theories of Swiss Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Lacan takes the term 'signifier' from the work of the Saussure. According to Saussure, the signifier is the phonological element of the SIGN; not the actual sound itself, but the mental image of such a sound... the signifier is the 'acoustic image'

which signifies a SIGNIFIED (Saussure,1916). The signified has the same status as the SIGNIFIER both from equal sides of the sign.

Lacan, on the other hand, asserts the supremacy of the signifier and argues that the signified is a mere effect of the play of signifiers, an effect of the process of signification produced by metaphor. In other words, the “signified is not given but produced” (Evan 2006: 189). Lacan argues that the relation between signifier and signified is highly volatile. Secondly, Lacan asserts the existence of an order of ‘pure signifiers,’ where signifiers exist before signified, this order of purely logical structure is the unconscious. This amounts to a destruction of Saussure’s concept of the sign; for Lacan, a language is not composed of the sign but of signifiers. This is why a word’s meaning changes over time. Lacan argued that we are represented by language, by special objects called ‘words.’ Lacan’s technical term for ‘word’ is ‘signifier’ Lacan says that “the signifier represents the subject for another signifier” (Hill 2008: 30).

### **The Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic**

This concept is one of the crucial concepts in Lacanian theory. By the 1960s Lacan had a broad theory of the psyche or mind, with three different categories “the imaginary, the symbolic and the real.” Lacan use of the term ‘real’ as substantive dates back to an early paper, published in 1936. “The real is not an account of reality or the ‘objective world’ but a kind of recurring impossibility, a return of the repressed...The real is about impossibilities the impossibilities of language and life”( Hill 2008: 48).

The sense of unified selfhood is one of the most significant defining movements in the development of subjectivity. Before the sense of self-emerges, the young child exists in a realm which Lacan calls the ‘imaginary,’ in which there is no distinction between self and other, and there is a kind of idealized identification with the mother. Then between six months and eighteen months comes what he calls the ‘mirror stage.’ When the child sees its reflection in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself as a unified being, separate from the rest of the world. At this stage, the child enters into the language system, essentially a system which is concerned with lack and separation(Barry 2015: 109). The real emerges as that which is outside the language and inassimilable to symbolization. The real is ‘the impossible’ because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain anyway.

**Lacan concept of Need, Demand, and Desire.**

Lacan divides the psychological development of a child into three different stages they are 'need' 'demand' and 'desire.' According to Lacan newly born child is mostly in need of food, a mother feeds him. When an infant gets older mother feeds him less, and talks to that child more. In this stage, a mother is feeding his child language, words, and signifiers. Lacan says "less feeding convert into the pleasure of language" (Hill 2008: 62). What child does, a child starts learning language swallowing the signifiers that mother has been feeding him, with pain and pleasure. In this way, the baby identifies the management of his suffering 'motherer,' with mother tongue. After completing the first phase of 'need,' there is a kind of progression from 'need' to 'demand.' The English word 'demand' is perhaps closer to the English words 'ask for' and 'request.' In the 1956-57 seminar that Lacan discusses this issue and says "baby's cry to the mother...cry is not merely an institutional signal but is inserted in a synchronic world of cries organized in a linguistic structure long before the child is capable of articulating recognizable words" (Evan 2006: 37). After child learning a language, it starts demanding the objects. For example, a child asks for some 'banana' and after giving 'banana' child ask for 'chocolate' even giving 'banana,' and 'chocolate' child demand will not fulfill. According to Lacan "Child is asking for the object that doesn't exist" (Hill 2008: 64). After this stage, there is a kind of psychological progression in a child, from 'need' to 'demand' and then on to desire. Before going to the details on Lacan concept of 'desire,' I will explain the Lacanian concept of 'symbolic father.'

The symbolic father is not the same as the biological father. The symbolic father is any agency that separated the young from its mother. For example, mother going to the 'job,' 'job' becomes the symbolic father. Lacan theory of the 'symbolic father' is necessary for understand the relation of 'need,' 'demand,' and 'desire.' Desire is another difficult idea Lacan argued because according to him desire is another word for 'lack.' Desire can be something which is missing, desire often hides, and it can be something lacking. According to him, desire will be revealed in dreams, slips of the tongue and symptoms. Once a child got the proof that mother cannot provide all that things the child demands for, and then a child is able to begin to start identifying its own desire. However, when Lacan talks about desire, it is not any kind of desire he is referring to, but always he is talks of unconscious desire.

“This is not because Lacan sees conscious desire as unimportant, but simply because it is unconscious desire that forms the central concern of psychoanalysis. Unconscious desire is entirely sexual; the motives of the unconscious are limited... to sexual desire... The other great generic desire, that of hunger, is not represented” (Evan 2006: 38).

The aim of psychoanalytic treatment is to lead the analysand to recognize the truth about his desire.

### **Jouissance**

Jouissance is a French word meaning ‘enjoyment,’ but it has a sexual connotation that is ‘orgasm.’ The term appears in Lacan’s work of seminar of 1953 to 1955, Lacan uses the term occasionally, usually in the context of the Hegelian dialectic of the ‘MASTER’ and the ‘Slave’: the slave is forced to work to provide objects for the master’s enjoyment. Lacan used this word because he thought that people take a sexual enjoyment in their symptoms, usually secretly. According to Lacan, jouissance is often an unconscious enjoyment, in this regard, Lacan argued along with Freud. That people often take sexual satisfaction or jouissance in all sorts of activities that appear to have nothing to do with sexual intercourse. Sexual for Lacan is a technical term; it means more than sexual intercourse. People and animals can get enjoyment or sexual satisfaction from smells, images, sensations, but the only man can get sexual enjoyment from words from language and an extraordinarily diverse range of objects including smartphones, silk, leather jacket.

### **Conclusion**

Sigmund Freud being the father of psychoanalysis advocated the structure of unconscious. Through the interpretation of dreams, slips of tongues and jokes... Lacan theories have revolutionized the clinical practice of psychoanalysis and continue to have a significant impact in fields as diverse as philosophy, literary criticism, and film studies. Lacanian model of psychoanalysis on the basis of language is found to be an effective tool of literary criticism in order to probe into the very act of creating a work of literature by an author as well as experiencing a work of literature by a reader.

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