

Introduction to Literary Theory
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

Lecture – 25
Literature and Psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud (II)

Hello and welcome back again to this series on Literary Theory, from our previous lecture you know that we are trying to familiarize ourselves with the key concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis and our attempt is to study how psychoanalysis can help us gain a new perspective on literature, how to approach literature how literature is created etcetera.

Now, in our preceding lecture we have seen how Freud establishes the notion of unconscious as the site of repressed sexual desires and he does that first through his study of historic patience and then through his study of dream work. We have also seen how in both his study of hysteria and his study of dreams Freud focus has been on narratives and on the problematic of interpreting narratives. This as I have already pointed out to you establishes an obvious connection between Freud theory of psychoanalysis and the field of literary studies.

Today we are going to explore some more fundamental ideas underlying Freudian psychoanalysis and we are especially going to talk about Freud understanding of human sexual desires, which according to him please a guiding role in shaping our mental life and later as we will also see it also plays a guiding role in shaping literary creativity as far as Freud is concerned. In today's lecture we will also explore the map of the human mind that Freud came up with in order to provide a schema for his psychoanalytic theory. But before we delve into these topics we will start today's discussion by focusing on what is known as Para praxis or more commonly as Freudian slip.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:35)

Parapraxis is more commonly known as Freudian slip.

Now, as I have already mentioned in my previous lecture the unconscious and its workings became central elements in Freud's study of the human mind right from the days, when he started his research on hysteria. And whereas his book studies on hysteria referred to the unconscious only visibly the mental world of psychological patients in the interpretation of dreams Freud was using this concept of unconscious and repression of sexual desires in a much broader way, he was establishing them as universal phenomenon. Thus, if dreams are accepted to be manifestations of an unconscious latent content, then it is to be accepted that all of us have an unconscious because all of us dream.

In the next major work that Freud published after his the interpretation of dreams Freud asserts that the unconscious informs our lives in an even more ubiquitous manner than was earlier suggested. The argument here is that it was not only the psychological diseases or our dreams that are connected with the unconscious, but even our more mundane forgetfulness or everyday errors that we make while speaking and all of these also have their roots in the drama that is playing out in our unconscious mind. The book in which Freud delineated elaborated this thesis is therefore, very aptly titled the psychopathology of everyday life.

The keyword that Freud introduced in this new book to discuss the ubiquity of our unconscious was Para praxis. So, what is Para praxis? Well you must have noticed that in

our day today conversations, we often forget names, it often happens that we cannot recall words, words names which are otherwise very well known to us or sometimes we make errors in pronunciations known pronunciations or for instance we often end up substituting the wrong word for a right one.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:46)

Freud names slips or errors as parapraxes and argues that these errors are manifestations of the repressed emotions and memories that are shunted out from the conscious mind and relegated to the unconscious.

Freud names these slips, these errors as Para praxis and he argues that these errors are actually manifestations of the repressed emotions and memories that are shunted out from our conscious mind and that are relegated to our unconscious. So, just like the hysterics symptoms or the dreams which are distorted manifestations of an unconscious content. The everyday Para praxis to the everyday Freudian slips to are distorted manifestations of a hidden unconscious content. Now let us try and understand this by looking at an example provided by Freud which will help us in at least 2 distinct ways.

Firstly, of course it will help us to understand the phenomenon of Para praxis better. But secondly and perhaps more importantly for our purpose, it will help us to get a feel of what a psychoanalytic approach to literature might look like this is because in this example of Para praxis that we are going to discuss. We start with a narrative or a story which is then followed by Freuds analyzing the text of the story.

So, as to reveal it is deeper intricacies and its connections with the unconscious and this inner wave forms the bedrock of psychoanalytic literary criticism, where the critic engages with a literary text to uncover the drama of repressed and unconscious desires

and fears seething underneath the surface. So, first let us start with the story, the incident of Para praxis that Freud tells us has to do with the forgetting of a foreign word. Once on a train journey Freud struck up a conversation with a young man who like Freud was of Jewish ancestry. Now, this young man believed that the fact that he was a Jew in the contemporary society put him at a market disadvantage and as Freud writes he and I quote.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:21)

Freud's fellow traveler "bemoaned the fact that his generation", as he expressed it, "was destined to grow crippled, that it was prevented from developing its talents and from gratifying its desires".

Bemoaned the fact that his generation, as he expressed it, was destined to grow crippled, that it was prevented from developing its talents and from gratifying its desires. And to underline this lament the young man brought in the reference of another lament, the lament of dido as narrated by Virgil in his epic in it.

Now, in Virgil's epic dido is a queen who falls in love with the protagonist Aeneas and her love is initially reciprocated by Aeneas and they even start living like a couple. But this was resented by one king ibises who had earlier tried to unsuccessfully woo dido, Ibises father was the god Jupiter and ibises appealed to his father that dido and Aeneas be separated. Jupiter in order to keep his sons request ordered Aeneas to leave the land in which he was living with dido and Aeneas being a loyal person loyal to god obeyed Jupiter. Now, Aeneas is leaving dido of course infuriated her quite understandably and dido threw herself in a funeral pyre while cursing Aeneas with the Latin line that you can. Now see on the slide in English this line would translate into the sentence.

Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor

(Refer Slide Time: 10:22)

“Let someone arise as an avenger from my
bones”.

Let someone arise as an avenger from my bones, the young man of Jewish origin whom Freud met in the train wanted to end his lament his personal lament by quoting this particular line from Virgil.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:43)

Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor

But, the problem was that he could not recall the word that you see underlined in the slide and the word is Aliquis and this word of course was later provided to him by Freud. Now, this forgetting of the Latin word is interpreted by Freud as an instance of Parapraxis.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:10)

The way Freud connects this parapraxis with the repressed unconscious is through "free association".

The way Freud connects this Parapraxis this particular instance of Parapraxis with the repressed unconscious of the young man is through a method called free association. Now a free association was a method that Freud had initially developed during his

research on hysteria, but then he continued using this method throughout his career as a psychoanalyst and this is in fact a very important aspect of Freud's approach to the mental life.

So, what is a free association well it is a method in which one is encouraged to see unhesitatingly all that comes to the mind without trying to control either the stream of thoughts or trying to create a logically coherent discourse. When Freud asked his fellow traveler to do a free association and tell him whatever comes to his mind when he thinks of the word Aliquis, the young man first came up with a string of words which were reliques, liquidation, liquidity fluid.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:26)

“reliques – liquidation – liquidity – fluid”

Now, this reveals that these other words the words that I have just mentioned, though initially absent from the discourse these are words that do not appear in the Latin original. So, they were absent from the discourse, but nevertheless they had cast a shadow on the word Aliquis, which the young man had wanted to utter, but could not.

Now for those of you who are familiar with Derrida and you will be familiar with Derrida if you have been following this lecture series, then you will notice that relics liquidation liquefy these words fluid. They resemble a chain of signifiers over which the meaning of the word Aliquis is both deferred and deferred. The traces of these other words haunt the word Aliquis right this should be very clear if you know your Derrida

and it is these traces that Freud explores to bring out the connection between the forgetting of the Latin word and the young man's unconscious.

Now, apart from the chain of words that I just mentioned the young man also came up during the course of his free association with the names of a number of Christian saints including most notably that of saint Januaries. In fact, he even narrated to Freud a ritual associated with this saint, the young man told Freud that a file of blood was kept in a church in Naples as the relic of saint Januaries, which means that it was believed that the blood contained in that file is the blood of the saint and this file of blood this relique was associated with an annual ritual.

What was the ritual well every year at certain specified dates a miracle would happen and the miracle was that the clotted blood of the saint would start to liquefy again would start converting into a fluid. The young man also told that if this liquefaction of the blood does not happen, then it gives rise to great consternation and worry among the believers.

Finally, the young man also mentioned to Freud that during his free association he was also reminded of a woman that he knew indeed, he was actually dreading that he might receive a message from that woman which can be really very worrisome to him. Freud connected all these thoughts ideas and words that the free association had thrown up and that has haunted the young man's remembering of the word Aliquis and he related all of this to one particular thing which was the young man's worried about the woman of his acquaintance becoming pregnant.

So, as I told you in my previous lecture psychoanalysis precedes something like detective work, where you have a number of scattered clues and then they are related to one event which is repressed in the unconscious. In this case the repressed memory that Freud refers to is the fear of the woman becoming pregnant.

Now, the fear that the young man had repressed actually from his conscious mind is that the woman that he knew might have missed her regular menstrual cycle, which would be a sure sign of her being pregnant by him. This fear had got attached with the word a Aliquis because, the young man separated the Latin word into a and Aliquis and then associated that with fluid and with the process of liquefaction and in his chain of association this was further connected with the ritual of liquefaction of saint Januaries blood which in itself is evocative of a woman's menstrual cycle.

Now, if you recall the story of Dido that I have told you will realize how the young man's fear could have been unconsciously triggered because, in the Dido story Aeneas went away from Dido like an unfaithful lover much like the young man was going away from the woman of his acquaintance. The word *Aliquis* appears in the speech of Dido which he uses to curse Aeneas, for the young man the fear of this curse gets transmuted into the fear of an embarrassing incident of pregnancy.

Now since, the young man was trying to repress this fear it becomes difficult for him to remember the word *Aliquis* which had got entangled in his unconscious mind with the feared pregnancy. This is what according to Freud led to this particular instance of *Parapraxis* resulting in the young man's inability to remember a very known word.

Now, this discussion of *Parapraxis* brings us to one of the fundamental points of Freudian psychoanalytic literary theory, which is that any discourse or to use Sigmund Freud's term any *parole* be it the speech of lament produced by Freud's young acquaintance on the train or a more patiently crafted piece of literature is underlined by the unconscious desires and fears of the speaker or the author.

The aim of psychoanalytic literary theory which takes its cue from Freud is to dwell upon this connection between the text and the author's unconscious. So, as I had pointed out in some of my previous lectures that though the general thrust of 20th century literary theory has been to move away, from the figure of the author psychoanalytic theory has kept alive our interest in the author's mind and in its deep intricacies. This connection between literature and the author's unconscious would of course become even more evident in our next lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:04)

“Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”

When we take up for discussion Freud’s essay on creative writers and daydreaming, but for now let us move on to the understanding of sexual desires which is at the very core of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory.

Now, one of the most controversial claims made by Freud was that sexuality is not something that developed in human beings with the onset of puberty, rather according to Freud sexual desire was something that characterizes every human being even while he or she is just a baby. This basic instinctual sex drive which informs our existence right from our childhood is what Freud identifies as libido. Freud argues that as a child each of us direct this libido towards our mother who being our first care giver and provider of food is also the closest person that we know. The focus of this libido is initially on the activity of breastfeeding and as Freud points out, a baby comes to feed on the breasts of its mother not merely to draw nourishment, but also to experience pleasure which goes beyond the mere requirement of food and this is what Freud writes.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:38)

“The baby’s obstinate persistence in sucking gives evidence at an early stage of a need for satisfaction which, though it originates from and is instigated by the taking of nourishment, nevertheless strives to obtain pleasure independently of nourishment and for that reason may and should be termed *sexual*.”

The baby’s obstinate persistence in sucking gives evidence at an early stage of a need for satisfaction which though it originates from and is instigated by the taking of nourishment, nevertheless strives to obtain pleasure independently of nourishment and for that reason me and should be termed sexual. Now within the family structure a baby soon realizes that the mother is not exclusively occupied with it, the father is also someone who demands and receives the attention and care from the mother.

This leads the baby to conceive its father as an opponent who is vying with him for the love and attention of the mother figure. And this result in what Freud famously identifies as the Oedipus complex. Now here the reference is of course to the Greek myth of Oedipus which we have already discussed in details in our lecture on Levi Strauss and if you recall that lecture you will know that Oedipus was a figure who killed his own father Leos and married his own mother Jocasta.

Now according to Freud a baby while growing up resembles something like this mythic figure Oedipus who wants to quote, unquote kill its father or at the very least remove the father from the scene, so that it can receive the undisputed undisrupted love and care of its mother. Now with the introduction of the father in the scene, the baby’s desire for its mother also gets underlined by a sense of fear.

It realizes that the father is a much stronger person and can potentially cause harm, for the baby who by this time has discovered its penis as one of the primary locus of sexual

pleasure. This fear of being harmed by the father takes a very specific shape, it translates into the fear of being castrated by the father this fear of castration or castration complex Freud calls it is according to Freud one of the fundamental aspects of our psychoanalytic life.

Now, as the baby grows up and gets acquainted with the social expectations and prohibitions, it realizes that harboring murderous intentions towards one's own father is socially tabooed. The baby therefore represses this desire into the unconscious and rather than treating the father as a competitor comes to regard him as a role model. The baby comes to believe that if it can become like the father, it will be able to win complete love and affection of one someone like its mother. Now the reason I said someone like its mother and not the mother herself is because, the baby also realizes that sexually desiring one's own mother is again socially tabooed and therefore that too needs to be repressed in the unconscious. The best one can consciously you wish for is a lady who will be the substitute of the original mother figure.

So, as you can see here the growing a process according to Freud results in the repression of a number of desires and fears which then inform our unconscious and which manifest themselves in distorted forms through symptoms of psychological diseases or through our dreams or through our everyday Para praxis. Now here we need to note 2 things, the first is that the explanation of how Freud conceptualized sexual desire vis a vis the growing up of a child, already gives us answers to 2 questions that we had raised in our previous lecture. The first question if you remember was what constitutes the unconscious latent content that ultimately gets revealed in the form of the manifest content of the dreams well.

Now, we know that the latent content is constituted by the repressed libidinal desires and fears that I have just outlined the second question was why was this latent content distorted by the dream work. Well as we can understand now the latent content of the unconscious is too disturbing to be admitted by the conscious mind of a grown up human being. In our dreaming state the mechanism of censorship through which we prevent the repressed contents of our unconscious from making way into our conscious mind relaxes, a little which is why we get a glimpse of the unconscious desires and fears through our dreams. But we will have to remember that even in the dreaming state the mechanism of censorship is not completely switched off, therefore the unconscious content cannot be

transparently reflected in our dreams, it still remains too troublesome for that. Consequently the reflection is muddled and distorted through the process of dream work which we have already discussed in our previous lecture.

The second thing that I wanted you to notice here is that Freud while explaining the sexual desire of a child takes as his example a male child, the masculine sexuality is the norm as far as Freud's psychoanalysis is concerned. Freud does work on female sexuality, but he clearly treats it as a distorted version of the normative male sexuality, we do not have enough time at our disposal to go into the details of Freud's explanation of female sexuality. But if you read it you will very well understand why it remains a fiercely disputed theory especially contested by the feminists.

Let us now take up Freud's mapping of the human mind which will be the final topic of our discussion today. Throughout his career Freud kept revising the structure underlying the human mental activities. So, if we read the complete works of Freud it is unlikely that we will arrive at a definitive version of Freud's map of human mind. But more or less the basic contour of this mind map created by Freud is well established.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:36)

Our mental activities, according to Freud, when taken together have three aspects. They are:

- Id
- Ego
- Super-ego.

Our mental activities according to Freud when taken together, has 3 broad aspects they are the id, the ego and the super ego. Now, here it is important to note that these 3 names that I just mentioned are 3 aspects of the mental dynamics and they are not physical parts of our brain. In other words id, ego and super ego do not have a specific physical

locations within the anatomy of our brain. So, now that we know what they are not let us try and understand what they really are and let us start with Id. According to Freud id is constituted of all our instinctual desires that I have identified a few moments earlier as libido.

The main guiding principle of id is a what Freud calls the pleasure principle, in other words the instinctual drives informing the id always seeks pleasure and it comes across as something like a petulant and demanding child who keeps repeating the phrase I want this I want that etcetera and indeed this metaphor is not very superfluous, because if we look at it from the Freudian perspective then we will see that the unchecked manifestation of the desires informing the id is what characterizes our state of childhood. At that early stage we do not need to control or repress the id because we are at the center of our parents especially our mother's attention and all our demands for pleasure are almost immediately satisfied.

It is only when we grow up and learn to negotiate the world as independent social beings that we realize that all our desires cannot be instantaneously met and indeed some desires like the killing of our fathers or the marrying of our own mothers cannot be met at all. At that stage we come to develop what Freud calls the ego, which tries to negotiate between the constant demands of the id and the social realities, so it tries to find a middle ground this is how Freud explains the relationship between the id and the ego and I quote.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:29)

This is how Freud explains the relationship between the id and the ego:

"Thus in its relation to the id, [ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own."

Thus in its relation to the id, ego is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse, with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go. So, in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming that id's will into action as if it were its own.

The final aspect that informs the human mental process is as I mentioned super ego and superego in its turn is constituted by an awareness of all the restrictions, prohibitions, taboos and interdictions that the society imposes upon us and upon our desires. This is actually the borrowed forces that Freud mentions in the lines that I have just quoted. Now remember here that according to Freudian psychoanalysis while growing up we first learn to restrict and repress our desires out of a fear of our father.

Consequently at a later stage when we have a strongly developed super ego we often associate it with the dictum of the father and since god is often assumed to be our universal father super ego is often perceived as a moral restrictions lead down by god himself. So, with this elaboration of the Freudian map of our mind we come to the end of our lecture today. In our next lecture we will take up for discussion Freud's analysis of literary creativity.

Thank you.