



PSYCHOANALYSIS OF “JENNIE GERHARDT” BY THEODORE DREISER

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ABSTRACT	KEY WORDS
This article gives information about psychoanalytic method, its origin, its significance in literature. An overview of this article will help in your understanding of psychoanalytic theory. A part from this, it discusses the psychoanalysis of “Jennie Gerhardt” by Theodore Dreiser.	psychoanalytic method, critic, protagonist, prototype, trauma, the bourgeoisie, Sigmund Freud, the id, the ego, the superego, the Oedipus complex.

It is clear that when a person experiences a trauma, this situation can inform how they react to the events in the short or long run. Although the person managed to get rid of that trauma, it can unconsciously impact their future behavior. For example, if one person has some difficulties in making friends, it means that he or she experienced an unpleasant event related to friendship in the past. Exactly such kind of situations are explored in psychoanalytic method.

Psychoanalytic method is a method of studying literature that was developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Austrian Neurologist Sigmund Freud. Freud began his psychoanalytic work in the 1880s while attempting to treat his patients` behavioral disorders. He thought that our behavior is affected by our unconscious, and our unconscious was affected by our childhood events. According to Sigmund Freud`s theories, human personality consists of three parts: id, ego and superego. They work together in order to create human behavior. The id creates demands, the ego adds the needs of reality, and the superego adds morality to the action which is taken. The id looks for pleasure for our needs, it represents our animalistic urges like the desire for food and sex. While the ego deals with reality, the superego is based on moral issues. The mind-body relationship to personality is a key component of psychoanalytic thought. Freud thought that the unconscious mind frequently influences on people`s decisions and that the conscious mind is only one of two components of the mind. Psychoanalytic literary criticism can focus on one or more of the following:

1. The author: the theory is used to analyze the author and his or her life and the literary work.
2. The characters: this theory is used to analyze one or more of the characters, the psychological theory becomes a tool that to explain the characters` behavior and motivations.
3. The audience: this theory is used to explain the appeal of the work for those who read it.
4. The text: this theory is used to analyze the role of language and symbolism in the work.

As Celine Surprenant writes, "Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature ... is fundamentally entwined with the psyche". With the help of psychoanalytic literary criticism, we can realize that psychoanalytic method examines the inner mind of people. When we analyze a work psychoanalytically, we can realize that the events of the work may be related to or based on the author's or characters' life in the past. There are lots of works of different authors where they used psychoanalytic method in their works. For example, D.H. Lawrence's "Sons and Lovers", Albert Camus' "The Stranger", Arthur Miller's plays, Walt Whitman's "The Sleepers", Theodore Dreiser's "Jennie Gerhardt" and "Sister Carrie", and Tokhir Malik's "Alvido bolalik" from Uzbek literature.

The novel "Sons and Lovers" is considered to be David Herbert Lawrence's most significant work. It is about the protagonist Paul Morel whose family is full of conflicts between love and hatred about family members. Paul's life gives us a reason for believing that the novel deals with Sigmund Freud's psychological theory, Oedipus complex. It is said in Encyclopedia Britannica that "the Oedipus complex, in psychoanalytic theory, is a desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and concomitant sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex, a crucial stage in the normal development process." [5] So, the dominant theme in this novel is the Oedipus complex.

Tokhir Malik's "Alvido bolalik" can also be a great example for the works in which were used psychoanalytic method. The protagonist Kamariddin is considered as a serious criminal in the novel due to the fact that he killed several people. As mentioned above, there is a connection between the main events of the work and the characters' past lifetime. That is why, if we analyze the novel with the help of psychoanalytic approach, we can realize that there are some reasons for why Kamariddin turned into such a dangerous criminal. By observing the character's past life, it is clear that he had a lot of family problems in his childhood. His parents were divorced and then, his mother became a prostitute who had several amorous relationships with strange men. It affected on the young boy very badly. And once he killed one of his mother's lovers. It was Kamariddin's first murder. After that event, he decided to kill such kind of immoral people that he would meet. Thus, we can see some psychological elements in this novel.

It is clear that "Jennie Gerhardt" by Theodore Dreiser is considered to be an example for psychoanalytic method. While studying the author's life and career, we can understand that there are a lot of psychological matters in his life and works. Dreiser is one of the most well-known American writers. Today, he has already turned into most readers' favourite writer. His works differ from others because of being very close to the real life, and exactly, they are appreciated owing to this characteristic feature. When we read Dreiser's works, we can realize that the author demonstrated social life and strata in a real and open way. "Jennie Gerhardt" is considered to be a good example for the works whose themes are about social life and its defects in the society. When Theodore Dreiser wrote this novel, it was the second time he had gone against American bourgeoisie. What I mean is that, for the first time the author was seriously criticized because of having written the novel "Sister Carrie". And "Jennie Gerhardt" was the second novel which faced to a huge criticism. Because the critics claimed that these works were not suitable for the society, and they were totally full of immoral ideas. But anyway, Dreiser published them, and became popular among readers.

Theodore Dreiser was born in a poor family, and he was the eleventh child out of twelve. After the author's parents had died early, the children had several problems in order to live and survive. Dreiser described Jennie and her siblings as ones who lived in poverty with a lot of shortcomings, which

indicated his and his sisters' own beggarly life. Apart from it, the author was so impressed by his two sisters' mistakes and bitter life that he repeated exactly these events with his characters in the novel. His elder sister, Mary, went against moral issues of the society and became pregnant from a well-known politician without any marriage. That politician abandoned this girl in order not to lose his high position in the society. In addition to this event in the author's family, after five years the same thing was repeated with Dreiser's another sister, Silvia. At that hard time, Theodore Dreiser was just 16 years old, and these troubles of the sisters badly influenced on his psyche. As the result, the writer addressed to this kind of themes in more than just one novel by him. For example, we can come across so situations in "Sister Carrie" which was Dreiser's previous novel. It means that the author's sisters, Mary and Silvia, are considered as prototypes for Jennie and Carrie.

In the novel "Jennie Gerhardt", Jennie is a good-tempered, kind and very beautiful girl who is the eldest daughter in her family. She always cares about her family that live in poverty. Let's look through the work in a psychological way. Jennie is a poor girl who belongs to low stratum in the society. And the author was born in the same social class with his character. Dreiser addressed such low strata in his most works, so, as you see, it is related to the author's childhood. Theodore Dreiser's family had a lot of difficulties in earning money, feeding children, and supplying the daily expenses of the family. Jennie's family experience a great deal of troubles with the lack of money too. And we can understand that the author's psyche urged him to enliven his past life in the characters' life in his works. Moreover, in "Jennie Gerhardt" we paid attention to Jennie's father, Gerhardt's words which he said to the Senator:

"I don't want to talk to you any more," returned Gerhardt, who was checked but not overawed. "My daughter is my daughter. I am the one who will say whether she shall go out at night, or whether she shall marry you, either. I know what you politicians are. When I first met you, I thought you were a fine man, but now, since I see the way you conduct yourself with my daughter, I don't want anything more to do with you. Just you go and stay away from here. That's all I ask of you" [7; 49].

According to Gerhardt's words, it is clear that he has some bad opinions about politicians. As we see, politicians badly impressed on him during his life beforehand. That's why, now he has already had an unpleasant attitude towards political people whether the Senator Brander is a good one or not.

William Gerhardt is an honest person who respect his nationality and the religion. While he was living with Jennie and Lester Kane in the Hyde Park home, he was always displeased with Americans like Lester. Because in Gerhardt's mind, they wasted everything too much. And he thought that it was a sinful extravagance. Gerhardt complained about Americans:

"Such extravagance! Such waste! No good can come of anything like that, it will mean want one of these days... These Americans, they know nothing of economy. They ought to live in Germany awhile. Then they would know what a dollar can do" [7; 197].

"Another grievance was Lester's extravagant use of matches. He had the habit of striking a match, holding it while he talked, instead of lighting his cigar, and then throwing it away. Sometimes he would begin to light a cigar two or three minutes before he would actually do so, tossing aside match after match. There was a place out in one corner of the veranda where he liked to sit of a spring or summer evening, smoking and throwing away half-burned matches. ... At one time, while engaged in cutting the grass, Gerhardt found, to his horror, not a handful, but literally boxes of half-burned match-sticks lying unconsumed and decaying under the fallen blades. He was discouraged, to say the least. He

gathered up this damning evidence in a newspaper and carried it back into the sitting-room where Jennie was sewing” [7; 197-198].

Gerhardt economized everything, he cared for every item in the house. Even there was never any expense for his clothing, because he would wear the same suit of black- cut down from one of Lester`s expensive investments of years before- every Sunday for a couple of years. He wore Lester`s shoes, ties shirts and socks. In this way he fought against waste. And at this juncture, we have a question: Why? Why was Gerhardt so thrifty?

If we analyze Gerhardt`s behavior psychoanalytically, we can realize that it may be related to an event in his past life. Gerhardt was not rich, he always had difficulties in supplying family to live. Although he worked hard without stopping, anyway, he had a lot of debts from some neighbors and the owners of some shops.

“Having suffered the reverses so common in the lower walks of life, this man was forced to see his wife and his six children, and himself dependent for the necessities of life upon whatever windfall of fortune the morning of each recurring day might bring. He himself was sick in bed” [7; 3]. So, it is known that Gerhardt`s attitude towards life was influenced by his hard life in the past.

Therefore, the oldest child of the family, Bass or Sebastian is also a character who can be observed in a psychological way. What I mean is that he is considered as a complex character in the novel, and he is a hard-working, strong and clever one who can find his own way to live. All family members respect his opinions owing to the fact that he does not do anything if he doesn`t know. An important characteristic about Bass is that he isn`t a sensitive person, conversely, his heart is like a stone in most cases. And why so? Like his father, William Gerhardt, Sebastian faced so many difficulties in living and supplying the family financially. Even he had to steal coal from the carriages every day. Because of these reasons, Bass was educated hard by the life itself.

“While the supper was being eaten Sebastian offered a suggestion, and his larger experience in social and commercial matters made his proposition worth considering. Though only a car-builder`s apprentice, without any education except such as pertained to Lutheran doctrine, to which he objected very strongly, he was imbued with American color and energy” [7; 8]. According to his views, to succeed one must do something, one must associate, or at least seem to associate, with those who were foremost in the world of appearances.

As I mentioned above, psychoanalytic method examines the inner mind, feelings and behavior of not only the characters of the work but also the author himself. So, we can come to a conclusion that some kind of events in the author`s life could inspire him to write “Jennie Gerhardt” and its characters with this kind of complicated fate. If we analyze the author`s personal life, we can find the answer to the question why the author wrote his novel with this theme.

Most readers have a common opinion about Theodore Dreiser`s novels: they are dedicated to delve into the defects of the society and social life, some characters` life and fates are similar to each other very much. But investigations into the author`s life and experience show that there are some significant reasons for writing in this way and demonstrating the people`s life in different social strata. Psychoanalytic method helps readers understand exactly these matters. It is clear that psychoanalytic method is considered to be a significant one among others in Literature. Because, when the writers use this method in their works, and when we analyze them psychoanalytically, it will be much easier and more interesting to both read and understand the real gist of the work. Whenever we find the reason for why the author created his work in that way, we can really take gratification from Literature.

Therefore, it will be much more useful for readers to read by analyzing rather than read for just pleasure.

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