



Peter Casey’s “Parrot” and “Olivier in America” as a Psycho -Analytical work

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Abstract

This paper explores Peter Casey’s "Parrot and Olivier in America" through the lens of psychoanalysis, uncovering the intricate psychological dimensions of its characters and themes. The novel, a retelling of Alexis de Tocqueville’s journey to America, juxtaposes the perspectives of two disparate characters— Parrot, a roguish Englishman, and Olivier, a French aristocrat. By employing Freudian and Jungian theories, this paper examines the psychodynamics of their interactions, the manifestation of the unconscious, and the interplay between social class and personal identity. This analysis demonstrates how Casey’s narrative transcends historical fiction, offering profound insights into the human psyche.

Peter Casey's "Parrot and Olivier in America" stands as a rich, multi-layered narrative, weaving historical, political, and psychological threads into an elaborate tapestry. The story revolves around Olivier's reluctant journey to America, accompanied by Parrot, his English servant. On the surface, the novel chronicles the evolution of democracy through the eyes of a skeptical aristocrat and a pragmatic commoner. However, beneath its historical facade lies a complex interplay of psychological forces. This paper delves into these undercurrents, applying psychoanalytical theories to elucidate the characters' motivations, conflicts, and transformations.

Psychoanalysis, as developed by Sigmund Freud and later expanded by Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan, offers a potent framework for literary analysis. Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego provide a lens to examine character motivations and internal conflicts, while Jung's archetypes and collective unconscious enrich the understanding of universal themes. Lacan's focus on language and desire further enhances the exploration of identity and subjectivity.

Character Analysis

Olivier, modeled after Alexis de Tocqueville, embodies the superego—a figure constrained by societal expectations and familial obligations. His disdain for democracy stems not only from his aristocratic upbringing

but also from an unconscious fear of losing his identity. Freud's theory of defense mechanisms is evident in Olivier's projection of his insecurities onto the American political system, which he critiques as chaotic and undignified. His journey becomes a confrontation with his own ego, challenging his preconceptions and fostering self-awareness.

Parrot, by contrast, represents the id, characterized by instinct, spontaneity, and a desire for freedom. His background as a printer's apprentice and forger reflects a life shaped by survival instincts and rebellion against authority. Jung's concept of the shadow—the repressed, darker aspects of the self—is vividly depicted in Parrot's interactions with Olivier. Parrot's irreverence and pragmatism act as a counterbalance to Olivier's rigidity, forcing both characters to confront their inner contradictions.

The relationship between Parrot and Olivier serves as the novel's psychological fulcrum. Freud's notion of transference illuminates the mutual projection of unresolved emotions between the two. Olivier's condescension towards Parrot masks an unconscious envy of his servant's autonomy, while Parrot's resentment of Olivier's privilege belies a latent admiration for his intellectual refinement. This dynamic reflects Lacan's idea of the mirror stage, wherein each character sees in the other a distorted reflection of their own desires and fears.

Themes

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious finds resonance in Casey's portrayal of democracy as a shared cultural psyche. Olivier's initial resistance to American democracy stems from his inability to reconcile its chaotic vitality with his ingrained notions of hierarchical order. However, his gradual appreciation of democratic ideals mirrors a journey into the collective unconscious, where he discovers a sense of shared humanity.

The novel's exploration of identity is deeply rooted in psychoanalytic theory. Olivier's struggle to adapt to American society reflects a crisis of identity, exacerbated by the cultural and ideological dissonance he experiences. Parrot, on the other hand, embodies the concept of otherness, challenging the boundaries of identity through his subversive actions and irreverent commentary.

Parrot's role as a printer and artist underscores the link between the unconscious and creative expression. Freud's theory of sublimation—the transformation of repressed impulses into socially acceptable activities—is evident in Parrot's artistic endeavors, which serve as a conduit for his suppressed emotions and desires. Similarly, Olivier's writings on democracy reflect an attempt to reconcile his inner conflicts through intellectual exploration.

The titular parrot serves as a

multifaceted symbol, representing mimicry, freedom, and the interplay between nature and culture. Jung's archetype of the trickster is embodied in the parrot's unpredictable behavior, which disrupts the established order and provokes introspection in the characters.

America as the

America, with its vast landscapes and nascent democracy, symbolizes the unconscious—a realm of untapped potential and latent chaos. Olivier's journey across America parallels a descent into the unconscious, where he confronts his fears and aspirations.

The printing press, central to Parrot's identity, represents the dissemination of ideas and the democratization of knowledge. It also symbolizes the tension between tradition and innovation, mirroring the characters' internal struggles.

"Parrot and Olivier in America" transcends its historical context to offer a profound exploration of the human psyche. Through the interplay of Freud's, Jung's, and Lacan's theories, Casey crafts a narrative that delves into the unconscious motivations, fears, and desires of its characters. The novel's psychoanalytic dimensions enrich its portrayal of democracy, identity, and creativity, making it a compelling study of the interplay between individual and collective consciousness.

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