

■ 4 ■

The Psychological Approach: Freud

■ I. AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

Having discussed two of the basic approaches to literary understanding, the traditional and the formalistic, we now examine a third interpretive perspective, the psychological. Of all the critical approaches to literature, this has been one of the most controversial, the most abused, and—for many readers—the least appreciated. Yet, for all the difficulties involved in its proper application to interpretive analysis, the psychological approach can be fascinating and rewarding. Our purpose in this chapter is threefold: (1) to account briefly for the misunderstanding of psychological criticism; (2) to outline the psychological theory most commonly used as an interpretive tool by modern critics; and (3) to show by examples how readers may apply this mode of interpretation to enhance their understanding and appreciation of literature.

The idea of *enhancement* must be understood as a preface to our discussion. It is axiomatic that no single approach can exhaust the manifold interpretive possibilities of a worthwhile literary work; each approach has its own peculiar limitations. As we have already discovered, the limitations of the traditional approach lie in its tendency to overlook the structural intricacies of the work. The formalistic approach, on the other hand, often neglects historical and sociological contexts that may provide important insights into the meaning of the work.

In turn, the crucial limitation of the psychological approach is its aesthetic inadequacy: psychological interpretation can afford many profound clues toward solving a work's thematic and symbolic mysteries, but it can seldom account for the beautiful symmetry of a well-wrought poem or of a fictional masterpiece. Though the psychological approach is an excellent tool for reading beneath the lines, the interpretive craftsman must often use other tools, such as the traditional and the formalistic approaches, for a proper rendering of the lines themselves.

A. Abuses and Misunderstandings of the Psychological Approach

In the general sense of the word, there is nothing new about the psychological approach. As early as the fourth century B.C., Aristotle used it in setting forth his classic definition of tragedy as combining the emotions of pity and terror to produce catharsis. The "complete gentleman" of the English Renaissance, Sir Philip Sidney, with his statements about the moral effects of poetry, was psychologizing literature, as were such romantic poets as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley with their theories of the imagination. In this sense, then, virtually every literary critic has been concerned at some time with the psychology of writing or responding to literature.

During the twentieth century, however, psychological criticism has come to be associated with a particular school of thought: the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and his followers. (The currently most significant of these followers, Jacques Lacan, will be discussed in chapter 6.) From this association have derived most of the abuses and misunderstandings of the modern psychological approach to literature. Abuses of the approach have resulted from an excess of enthusiasm, which has been manifested in several ways. First, the practitioners of the Freudian approach often push their critical theses too hard, forcing literature into a Procrustean bed of psychoanalytic theory at the expense of other relevant considerations (for example, the work's total thematic and aesthetic context). Second, the literary criticism of the

psychoanalytic extremists has at times degenerated into a special occultism with its own mystique and jargon exclusively for the in-group. Third, many critics of the psychological school have been either literary scholars who have understood the principles of psychology imperfectly or professional psychologists who have had little feeling for literature as art: the former have abused Freudian insights through oversimplification and distortion; the latter have bruised our literary sensibilities.

These abuses have given rise to a widespread mistrust of the psychological approach as a tool for critical analysis. Conservative scholars and teachers of literature, often shocked by such terms as *anal eroticism*, *phallic symbol*, and *Oedipal complex*, and confused by the clinical diagnoses of literary problems (for example, the interpretation of Hamlet's character as a "severe case of hysteria on a cyclothymic basis"—that is, a manic-depressive psychosis), have rejected all psychological criticism, other than the commonsense type, as pretentious nonsense. By explaining a few of the principles of Freudian psychology that have been applied to literary interpretation and by providing some cautionary remarks, we hope to introduce the reader to a balanced critical perspective that will enable him or her to appreciate the instructive possibilities of the psychological approach while avoiding the pitfalls of either extremist attitude.

B. Freud's Theories

The foundation of Freud's contribution to modern psychology is his emphasis on the unconscious aspects of the human psyche. A brilliant creative genius, Freud provided convincing evidence, through his many carefully recorded case studies, that most of our actions are motivated by psychological forces over which we have very limited control. He demonstrated that, like the iceberg, the human mind is structured so that its great weight and density lie beneath the surface (below the level of consciousness). In "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality," Freud discriminates between the levels of conscious and unconscious mental activity:

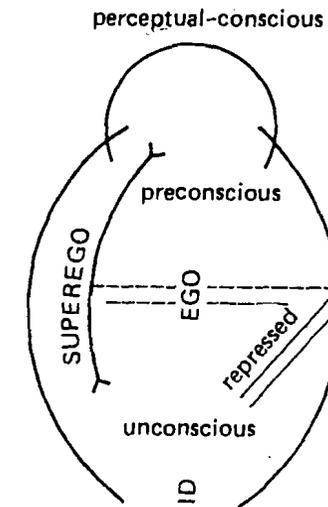
The oldest and best meaning of the word "unconscious" is the descriptive one; we call "unconscious" any mental process the existence of which we are obligated to assume—because, for instance, we infer it in some way from its effects—but of which we are not directly aware. . . . If we want to be more accurate, we should modify the statement by saying that we call a process "unconscious" when we have to assume that it was active at a certain time, although at that time we knew nothing about it. (99–100)

Freud further emphasizes the importance of the unconscious by pointing out that even the "most conscious processes are conscious for only a short period; quite soon they become *latent*, though they can easily become conscious again" (100). In view of this, Freud defines two kinds of unconscious:

one which is transformed into conscious material easily and under conditions which frequently arise, and another in the case of which such a transformation is difficult, can only come about with a considerable expenditure of energy, or may never occur at all. . . . We call the unconscious which is only latent, and so can easily become conscious, the "preconscious," and keep the name "unconscious" for the other. (101)

That most of the individual's mental processes are unconscious is thus Freud's first major premise. The second (which has been rejected by a great many professional psychologists, including some of Freud's own disciples—for example, Carl Gustav Jung and Alfred Adler) is that all human behavior is motivated ultimately by what we would call sexuality. Freud designates the prime psychic force as libido, or sexual energy. His third major premise is that because of the powerful social taboos attached to certain sexual impulses, many of our desires and memories are repressed (that is, actively excluded from conscious awareness).

Starting from these three premises, we may examine several corollaries of Freudian theory. Principal among these is Freud's assignment of the mental processes to three psychic zones: the id, the ego, and the superego. An explanation of these zones may be illustrated with Freud's own diagram:



The diagram reveals immediately the vast portion of the mental apparatus that is not conscious. Furthermore, it helps to clarify the relationship between ego, id, and superego, as well as their collective relationship to the conscious and the unconscious. We should note that the id is entirely unconscious and that only a small portion of the ego and the superego is conscious. With this diagram as a guide, we may define the nature and functions of the three psychic zones.

1. The *id* is the reservoir of libido, the primary source of all psychic energy. It functions to fulfill the primordial life principle, which Freud considers to be the *pleasure principle*. Without consciousness or semblance of rational order, the id is characterized by a tremendous and amorphous vitality. Speaking metaphorically, Freud explains this "obscure inaccessible part of our personality" as "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement [with] no organization and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the pleasure principle" (103–4). He further stresses that the "laws of logic—above all, the law of contradiction—do not hold for processes of the id. Contradictory impulses exist side by side without neutralizing each other or

drawing apart. . . . Naturally, the id knows no values, no good and evil, no morality" (104-5).

The id is, in short, the source of all our aggressions and desires. It is lawless, asocial, and amoral. Its function is to gratify our instincts for pleasure without regard for social conventions, legal ethics, or moral restraint. Unchecked, it would lead us to any lengths—to destruction and even self-destruction—to satisfy its impulses for pleasure. Safety for the self and for others does not lie within the province of the id; its concern is purely for instinctual gratification, heedless of consequence. For centuries before Freud, this force was recognized in human nature but often attributed to supernatural and external rather than natural and internal forces: the id as defined by Freud is identical in many respects to the Devil as defined by theologians. Thus there is a certain psychological validity in the old saying that a rambunctious child (whose id has not yet been brought under control by ego and superego) is "full of the devil." We may also see in young children (and neurotic adults) certain uncontrolled impulses toward pleasure that often lead to excessive self-indulgence and even to self-injury.

2. In view of the id's dangerous potentialities, it is necessary that other psychic agencies protect the individual and society. The first of these regulating agencies, that which protects the individual, is the *ego*. This is the rational governing agent of the psyche. Though the ego lacks the strong vitality of the id, it regulates the instinctual drives of the id so that they may be released in nondestructive behavioral patterns. And though a large portion of the ego is unconscious, the ego nevertheless comprises what we ordinarily think of as the conscious mind. As Freud points out, "In popular language, we may say that the ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the id stands for the untamed passions." Whereas the id is governed solely by the pleasure principle, the ego is governed by the *reality principle*. Consequently, the ego serves as intermediary between the world within and the world without.

3. The other regulating agent, that which primarily functions to protect society, is the *superego*. Largely unconscious, the superego is the moral censoring agency, the repository of conscience and pride. It is, as Freud says in "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality," the "representative of all moral restrictions, the advocate of the impulse toward perfection, in

short it is as much as we have been able to apprehend psychologically of what people call the 'higher' things in human life" (95). Acting either directly or through the ego, the superego serves to repress or inhibit the drives of the id, to block off and thrust back into the unconscious those impulses toward pleasure that society regards as unacceptable, such as overt aggression, sexual passions, and the Oedipal instinct. Freud attributes the development of the superego to the parental influence that manifests itself in terms of punishment for what society considers to be bad behavior and reward for what society considers good behavior. An overactive superego creates an unconscious sense of guilt (hence the familiar term *guilt complex* and the popular misconception that Freud advocated the relaxing of all moral inhibitions and social restraints). Whereas the id is dominated by the pleasure principle and the ego by the reality principle, the superego is dominated by the *morality principle*. We might say that the id would make us devils, that the superego would have us behave as angels (or, worse, as creatures of absolute social conformity), and that it remains for the ego to keep us healthy human beings by maintaining a balance between these two opposing forces. It was this balance that Freud advocated—not a complete removal of inhibiting factors.

One of the most instructive applications of this Freudian tripartition to literary criticism is the well-known essay "In Nomine Diaboli" by Henry A. Murray (435-52), a knowledgeable psychoanalyst and a sensitive literary critic as well. In analyzing Herman Melville's masterpiece *Moby-Dick* with the tools provided by Freud, Murray explains the White Whale as a symbolic embodiment of the strict conscience of New England Puritanism (that is, as a projection of Melville's own superego). Captain Ahab, the monomaniac who leads the crew of the *Pequod* to destruction through his insane compulsion to pursue and strike back at the creature who has injured him, is interpreted as the symbol of a rapacious and uncontrollable id. Starbuck, the sane Christian and first mate who struggles to mediate between the forces embodied in *Moby-Dick* and Ahab, symbolizes a balanced and sensible rationalism (that is, the ego).

Though many scholars are reluctant to accept Freud's tripartition of the human psyche, they have not reacted against this

aspect of psychoanalytic criticism so strongly as against the application of his sexual theories to the symbolic interpretation of literature. Let us briefly examine the highlights of such theories. Perhaps the most controversial (and, to many persons, the most offensive) facet of psychoanalytic criticism is its tendency to interpret imagery in terms of sexuality. Following Freud's example in his interpretation of dreams, the psychoanalytic critic tends to see all concave images (ponds, flowers, cups or vases, caves, and hollows) as female or yonic symbols, and all images whose length exceeds their diameter (towers, mountain peaks, snakes, knives, lances, and swords) as male or phallic symbols. Perhaps even more objectionable to some is the interpretation of such activities as dancing, riding, and flying as symbols of sexual pleasure: for example, in *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation*, Marie Bonaparte interprets the figure of Psyche in "Ulalume" as an ambivalent mother figure, both the longed-for mother and the mother as superego who shields her son from his incestuous instincts, concluding with the following startling observation: "Psyche's drooping, trailing wings in this poem symbolise in concrete form Poe's physical impotence. We know that flying, to all races, unconsciously symbolises the sex act, and that antiquity often represented the penis erect and winged." For the skeptical reader Bonaparte provides this explanation:

Infinite are the symbols man has the capacity to create, as indeed, the dreams and religions of the savage and civilized well show. Every natural object may be utilised to this end yet, despite their multiple shapes, the objects and relations to which they attach are relatively few: these include the beings we loved first, such as mother, father, brothers or sisters and their bodies, but mainly our own bodies and genitals, and theirs. Almost all symbolism is sexual, in its widest sense, taking the word as the deeply-buried primal urge behind all expressions of love, from the cradle to the grave. (294)

Although such observations as these may have a sound psychoanalytic basis, their relevance to sound critical analysis has been questioned by many scholars. We may sympathize with their incredulousness when we encounter the Freudian essay that interprets even a seemingly innocent fairy tale like "Little

Red Riding Hood" as an allegory of the age-old conflict between male and female in which the plucky young virgin, whose red cap is a menstrual symbol, outwits the ruthless, sex-hungry "wolf" (Fromm 235-41).

Perhaps even more controversial than Freudian dream symbolism are Freud's theories concerning child psychology. Contrary to traditional beliefs, Freud found infancy and childhood a period of intense sexual experience, sexual in a sense much broader than is commonly attached to the term. During the first five years of life, the child passes through a series of phases in erotic development, each phase being characterized by emphasis on a particular *erogenous zone* (that is, a portion of the body in which sexual pleasure becomes localized). Freud indicated three such zones: the *oral*, the *anal*, and the *genital*. (Note that the uninitiated layman, unfamiliar with the breadth of Freud's term, generally restricts the meaning of "sexuality" to "genital sexuality.") These zones are associated not only with pleasure in stimulation but also with the gratification of our vital needs: eating, elimination, and reproduction. If for some reason the individual is frustrated in gratifying these needs during childhood, the adult personality may be warped accordingly (that is, development may be arrested or *fixated*). For example, adults who are compulsively fastidious may suffer, according to the psychoanalyst, from an anal fixation traceable to overly strict toilet training during early childhood. Likewise, compulsive cigarette smoking may be interpreted as a symptom of oral fixation traceable to premature weaning. Even among "normal" adults, sublimated responses occur when the individual is vicariously stimulated by images associated with one of the major erogenous zones. In his *Fiction and the Unconscious*, Simon O. Lesser suggests that the anal-erotic quality in *Robinson Crusoe* (manifested in the hero's scrupulous record keeping and orderliness) accounts at least partially for the unconscious appeal of Defoe's masterpiece (306).

According to Freud, the child reaches the stage of genital primacy around age five, at which time the Oedipus complex manifests itself. In simple terms, the Oedipus complex derives from the boy's unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother. Freud borrowed the term from the classic Sophoclean tragedy in which the hero unwittingly murders his

father and marries his mother. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud describes the complex as follows:

... the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships [the child's devotion to his mother and identification with his father] proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. Henceforward his relation to his father is ambivalent; it seems as if the ambivalence inherent in the identification from the beginning had become manifest. An ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother make up the content of the simple positive Oedipus complex in a boy. (21-22)

Further ramifications of the Oedipus complex are a fear of castration and an identification of the father with strict authority in all forms; subsequent hostility to authority is therefore associated with the Oedipal ambivalence to which Freud refers. (The Oedipus complex figures strongly in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory [see chapter 6].) A story like Nathaniel Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," for instance, has been interpreted by Lesser as essentially a symbolic rebellion against the father figure. And with this insight we may find meaning in the young hero's disturbing outburst of laughter as he watches the cruel tarring and feathering of his once-respected relative: the youth is expressing his unconscious joy in being released from parental authority. Now he is free, as the friendly stranger suggests, to make his own way in the adult world without the help (and restraint) of his kinsman.

II. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH IN PRACTICE

A. *Hamlet*: The Oedipus Complex

Although Freud himself made some applications of his theories to art and literature, it remained for an English disciple, the psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, to provide the first full-scale

psychoanalytic treatment of a major literary work. Jones's *Hamlet and Oedipus*, originally published as an essay in *The American Journal of Psychology* in 1910, was later revised and enlarged.

Jones bases his argument on the thesis that Hamlet's much-debated delay in killing his uncle, Claudius, is to be explained in terms of internal rather than external circumstances and that the "play is mainly concerned with a hero's unavailing fight against what can only be called a disordered mind." In his carefully documented essay Jones builds a highly persuasive case history of Hamlet as a psychoneurotic who suffers from manic-depressive hysteria combined with an *abulia* (an inability to exercise willpower and come to decisions)—all of which may be traced to the hero's severely repressed Oedipal feelings. Jones points out that no really satisfying argument has ever been substantiated for the idea that Hamlet avenges his father's murder as quickly as practicable. Shakespeare makes Claudius's guilt as well as Hamlet's duty perfectly clear from the outset—if we are to trust the words of the ghost and the gloomy insights of the hero himself. The fact is, however, that Hamlet does not fulfill this duty until absolutely forced to do so by physical circumstances—and even then only after Gertrude, his mother, is dead. Jones also elucidates the strong misogyny that Hamlet displays throughout the play, especially as it is directed against Ophelia, and his almost physical revulsion to sex. All of this adds up to a classic example of the neurotically repressed Oedipus complex.

The ambivalence that typifies the child's attitude toward his father is dramatized in the characters of the ghost (the good, lovable father with whom the boy identifies) and Claudius (the hated father as tyrant and rival), both of whom are dramatic projections of the hero's own conscious-unconscious ambivalence toward the father figure. The ghost represents the conscious ideal of fatherhood, the image that is socially acceptable:

See, what a grace was seated on this brow:
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,

A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man:
This was your husband. (III.iv)

His view of Claudius, on the other hand, represents Hamlet's repressed hostility toward his father as a rival for his mother's affection. This new king-father is the symbolic perpetrator of the very deeds toward which the son is impelled by his own unconscious motives: murder of his father and incest with his mother. Hamlet cannot bring himself to kill Claudius because to do so he must, in a psychological sense, kill himself. His delay and frustration in trying to fulfill the ghost's demand for vengeance may therefore be explained by the fact that, as Jones puts it, the "thought of incest and parricide combined is too intolerable to be borne. One part of him tries to carry out the task, the other flinches inexorably from the thought of it" (78-79).

Norman N. Holland neatly summed up the reasons both for Hamlet's delay and also for our three-hundred-year delay in comprehending Hamlet's true motives:

Now what do critics mean when they say that Hamlet cannot act because of his Oedipus complex? The argument is very simple, very elegant. One, people over the centuries have been unable to say why Hamlet delays in killing the man who murdered his father and married his mother. Two, psychoanalytic experience shows that every child wants to do just exactly that. Three, Hamlet delays because he cannot punish Claudius for doing what he himself wished to do as a child and, unconsciously, still wishes to do: he would be punishing himself. Four, the fact that this wish is unconscious explains why people could not explain Hamlet's delay. (158)

A corollary to the Oedipal problem in *Hamlet* is the pronounced misogyny in Hamlet's character. Because of his mother's abnormally sensual affection for her son, an affection that would have deeply marked Hamlet as a child with an Oedipal neurosis, he has in the course of his psychic development repressed his incestuous impulses so severely that this repression colors his attitude toward all women: "The total re-

action culminates in the bitter misogyny of his outburst against Ophelia, who is devastated at having to bear a reaction so wholly out of proportion to her own offense and has no idea that in reviling her Hamlet is really expressing his bitter resentment against his mother" (Jones 96). The famous "Get thee to a nunnery" speech has even more sinister overtones than are generally recognized, explains Jones, when we understand the pathological degree of Hamlet's conditions and read "nunnery" as Elizabethan slang for brothel.

The underlying theme relates ultimately to the splitting of the mother image which the infantile unconscious effects into two opposite pictures: one of a virginal Madonna, an inaccessible saint towards whom all sensual approaches are unthinkable, and the other of a sensual creature accessible to everyone. . . . When sexual repression is highly pronounced, as with Hamlet, then both types of women are felt to be hostile: the pure one out of resentment at her repulses, the sensual one out of the temptation she offers to plunge into guiltiness. Misogyny, as in the play, is the inevitable result. (97-98)

Although it has been attacked by the anti-Freudians and occasionally disparaged as "obsolete" by the neo-Freudians, Jones's critical tour de force has nevertheless attained the status of a modern classic. "Both as an important seminal work which led to a considerable re-examination of *Hamlet*, and as an example of a thorough and intelligent application of psychoanalysis to drama," writes Claudia C. Morrison, "Jones's essay stands as the single most important Freudian study of literature to appear in America . . ." (175).

B. Rebellion against the Father in *Huckleberry Finn*

Mark Twain's great novel has this in common with Shakespeare's masterpiece: both are concerned with the theme of rebellion—with a hostile treatment of the father figure. In both works the father figure is finally slain, and knowledge of his death brings a curious sense of relief—and release—for the reader. As we have seen, from the psychoanalytic viewpoint all rebellion is in essence a rejection of parental, especially pa-

ternal, authority. Sociologically speaking, Huck rebels against the unjust, inhumane restrictions of a society that condones slavery, hypocrisy, and cruelty. However, Mark Twain showed a remarkable pre-Freudian insight when he dramatized this theme of rebellion in the portrayal of Huck's detestable father as the lowest common denominator of social authority. The main plot of the novel is launched with Huck's escape from pap Finn ("pap," in keeping with the reductive treatment of this father figure, is not capitalized), a flight that coincides with Jim's escape from Miss Watson.

Symbolically, Huck and Jim, in order to gain freedom and to regain prelapsarian bliss (the happiness enjoyed by Adam before the Fall), must escape whatever is represented by Miss Watson and pap Finn (who reminds Huck of Adam all covered with mud—that is, Adam after the Fall). Despite their superficial and rather melodramatic differences, Miss Watson and pap Finn have much in common. They represent extremes of authority: authority at its most respectable and at its most contemptible. What is more, they both represent social and legal morality, again in the extremes of the social spectrum. Notwithstanding his obvious worthlessness, pap Finn is still Huck's sole guardian by law and holds near-absolute power over him, an authority condoned by society, just as Miss Watson has a similar power over Jim. In the light of such authority both Miss Watson and pap Finn may be said to represent the superego (for example, when Huck goes against his conscience by refusing to turn Jim in to the authorities, it is the letter to Miss Watson that he tears up). In this sense, then, it is to escape the oppressive tyranny and cruel restraints of the superego that Huck and Jim take flight on the river.

Huckleberry Finn cannot by any means be read as a psychological allegory, and it would be foolish to set up a strict one-to-one relationship of characters and events to ideas, particularly because Mark Twain wrote the book with no notion of Freudian concepts. But like most great writers, Twain knew human nature; and from the psychoanalytic perspective, a "linked analogy" can be seen between the structure of his novel and the Freudian structure of the human psyche. Water in any form is generally interpreted by the psychoanalysts as a female symbol, more specifically as a maternal symbol. From

the superegoistic milieu of society Huck and Jim flee to the river, where they find freedom. Except when invaded by men, the river is characterized by a strange, fluid, dreamlike peacefulness; Huck's most lyrical comments are those describing the beauty of the river:

Two or three days and nights went by; I reckon I might say they swum by, they slid along so quiet and smooth and lovely. . . . Not a sound anywheres—perfectly still—just like the whole world was asleep. . . . [Then] the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh and sweet to smell on account of the woods and flowers; but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars and such, and they do get pretty rank. . . . [And] we would watch the lonesomeness of the river, and kind of lazy along, and by and by lazy off to sleep. . . . It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made or only just happened. . . . Jim said the moon could 'a' laid them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done. (ch. 19)

The foregoing passage is redolent with female-maternal imagery; it also suggests the dark, mysterious serenity associated with the prenatal state, as well as with death, in psychoanalytic interpretation. The tension between land and water may be seen as analogous to that between the conscious and the unconscious in Freudian theory. Lacking a real mother, Huck finds his symbolic mother in the river; in Freudian terms, he returns to the womb. From this matrix he undergoes a series of symbolic deaths and rebirths, punctuated structurally by the episodes on land. As James M. Cox (389–405) has pointed out, Huck's fake murder in escaping from pap Finn is crucial to our understanding the central informing pattern of death and rebirth: "Having killed himself, Huck is 'dead' throughout the entire journey down the river. He is indeed the man without identity who is reborn at almost every river bend, not because he desires a new role, but because he must re-create himself to elude the forces which close in on him from every side. The rebirth theme which began with pap's reform becomes the

driving idea behind the entire action." Enhancing this pattern is the hermaphroditic figure of Jim, Huck's adopted friend and parent, whose blackness coincides with the darkness associated with death, the unconscious, and the maternal. (We are reminded of Whitman's celebration of death as the Dark Mother in such famous poems as "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd.") Jim's qualities are more maternal than paternal. He possesses the gentleness, unquestioning loyalty, and loving kindness that we traditionally ascribe to the mother, in sharp contrast to the brutal authoritarianism of pap.

Viewed from a slightly different psychological angle, *Huckleberry Finn* is a story of the child as victim, embodying the betrayal-of-innocence theme that has become one of the chief motifs in American fiction. Philip Young has detected similarities between Huck's plight and that of the Hemingway hero. Young sees Huck as the wounded child, permanently scarred by traumas of death and violence; he has counted thirteen corpses in the novel and observes that virtually every major episode in the book ends with violence or death. Young makes explicit the causal relationship between the traumatic experiences suffered by Huck (and later by Hemingway's protagonists) and the growing preoccupation with death that dominates much modern literature:

[Huck] is a wounded and damaged boy. He will never get over the terror he has seen and been through, is guilt-ridden and can't sleep at night for his thoughts. When he is able to sleep he is tortured with bad dreams. . . . This is a boy who has undergone an unhappy process of growing up, and has grown clean out of his creator's grasp. . . . Precisely as Clemens could never solve his own complications, save in the unmitigated but sophomoric pessimism of his last books, so he could not solve them for Huck, who had got too hot to handle and was dropped. What the man never realized was that in his journey by water he had been hinting at a solution all along: an excessive exposure to violence and death produced first a compulsive fascination with dying, and finally an ideal symbol for it. (200–201)

This ideal symbol is the dark river itself, which is suggestive of the Freudian death instinct, the unconscious instinct in all liv-

ing things to return to the nonliving state and thereby achieve permanent surcease from the pain of living.

Our recognition of these symbolic implications does not, by any means, exhaust the interpretive potential of Twain's novel, nor does it preclude insights gained from other critical approaches. Such recognition should *enhance* our appreciation of the greatness of *Huckleberry Finn* by revealing that Mark Twain produced a masterwork that, intentionally or not, has appealed in a profound psychological way to many generations of readers. The Freudian reading—particularly in its focus on the death of the Father and the search for the Feminine—has enjoyed renewed attention from feminist psychoanalytic critics (see chapter 6, "Feminist Approaches").