Psychoanalytical/Freudian Criticism Applied to Romeo and Juliet

Group Members:
1. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________
4. ______________________________________
5. ______________________________________
6. ______________________________________
7. ______________________________________
8. ______________________________________

Process
1. Read through the objectives, Notes, Essential Questions, and Points of Study
2. Your main group will be divided into two smaller groups: Group A and Group B. Each group will complete a portion of Activity 1.
3. The groups will be rearranged to share responses from Activity 1.
4. In your new groups, you will respond to a new set of questions.
5. You will return to your Groups A and B and complete Activity 2.
6. The groups will be rearranged to share responses from Activity 2.
7. The group will meet as a whole to work together on a group presentation of the Psychoanalytical/Freudian Criticism Approach Applied to Romeo and Juliet for the class.
8. Each member of the group will complete a written essay.
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Objectives: Students will be able to

- Compare and contrast the language used to describe Romeo’s love for Rosaline with the language used to describe his love for Juliet
- Examine the connection between love and hate and the psychological implications for Romeo and Juliet
- Study the significance of Rosaline’s silence
- Examine the connection between adolescence and the Freudian concepts of the id, and superego

Notes on the Psychoanalytical Theory

The terms “psychological” or “psychoanalytical” or “Freudian theory” seem to encompass essentially two almost contradictory critical theories. The first focuses solely on the text itself with no regard to outside influences, the second focuses on the author of the text.

According to the first view, reading and interpretation are limited to the work itself. One will understand the work by examining the conflicts, characters, dream sequences and symbols. In this way, the psychoanalytic theory of literature is very similar to the Formalist approach to literature. One will further understand that character’s outward behavior might conflict with inner desires, or might reflect as-yet-undiscovered inner desires.

Main areas of study/points of criticism of the first view:

- There are strong Oedipal connotations in this theory: the son’s desire for his mother, the father’s envy of the son and rivalry for the mother’s attention, the daughter’s desire for her father, the mother’s envy of the daughter and rivalry for the father’s attention. Of course, these all operate on a subconscious level, to avoid breaking a serious social more.
- There is an emphasis on the meaning of dreams. This is because psychoanalytic theory believes that dreams are where a person’s subconscious desires revealed. What a person cannot express or do because of social rules will be expressed and done in dreams, where there are not social rules. Most of the time, people are not even aware what it is they secretly desire until their subconscious goes unchecked in sleep.
- According to psychoanalytic theory, there are three parts to the subconscious, which is the largest part of the human personality. The three parts are:
  - The id – the basic desire. The id is the fundamental root of what each person wants. There is no sense of conscience in it, thus making it everyone’s “inner child.” Children, before they are taught social skills, operate entirely through the id. They cry in public, wet their diapers, and demand immediate gratification of their needs and desires.
  - The superego – the opposite of the id. This is the repository of all socially imposed behavior and sense of guilt. While the id is innate, the superego is learned through parental instruction and living in society. Humans develop a superego by having parents scold them and other members of society criticize or teach them.
  - The ego – reality. The balance between the id and the superego. The ego takes the desires of the id and filters them through the rule base in the superego and comes up with an action that satisfies both entities. The ego realizes that the id must be satisfied, but that there are certain socially acceptable ways to go about satisfying it.
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Main areas of study/points of criticism of the second view:
According to the second view, an essential relationship exists between the author of the work and the work itself. This view is in direct contrast to the Formalist approach to literature. In order to understand a work, one must fully understand the author’s life and emotional stance, and vice versa. Though a work might not be blatantly autobiographical, psychoanalysts argue that there is always something of the author in the work. Whether it is a character, character trait, theme, or motif. Often, authors will satirize people they dislike or will be overtly sympathetic to people they do like. This author bias often has an effect on the reader, which is exactly what the author wants. When reading, people are very vulnerable to the author’s chosen point of view (the only way they hear the story is through the author’s narrator). This view of the psychoanalytic view is a very subjective and controversial approach to literature, but the psychoanalysts of the world argue it is a valid and important type of literary study.

This type of psychoanalytic reading includes the following:
1. Reference to what is known or surmised about the author’s personality is used to explain and interpret a literary work. For example, Charles Dickens grew up poor and later wrote books very sympathetic to boys who grew up poor.
2. Reference to a literary work is made in order to establish an understanding of the mind of the author. For example, judging by Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, one might reasonably conclude that Harper Lee herself was sympathetic to the plight of black Americans.
3. Studying the literary work of an author is a means of knowing the author as a person. The more novels by Charles Dickens one reads, the clearer idea one can infer about the author’s beliefs, values, hopes, fears, etc.
4. An artist may put his or her repressed desires on the page in the form of actions performed by characters. Pay attention to behaviors that are not socially “normal” to see if there is any evidence of the id at work. For example, an author who consistently writes stories in which his female characters are weak, dependent, or unintelligent might be expressing latent misogynist tendencies. Likewise, an author might express latent misandry through weak, blatantly evil, or thoroughly inconsequential male characters.

**Essential Questions for a Psychoanalytic Reading**

1. What are the traits of the main character?
2. How does the author reveal those traits?
3. What do you learn about the character through the narrator?
4. What do you learn about the character from the way the other characters relate to him or her?
5. What do you infer about the character from his/her thoughts, actions, and speech?
6. What discrepancies exist between the author’s portrayal of the character and how other characters react to him or her?
7. What discrepancies exist between the author’s portrayal of the character and the reader’s inferences?
8. Is the main character a dynamic character (does he or she change throughout the course of the story)? If so, how and why?
9. How does the character view him or herself?
10. What discrepancies exist between a character’s view of him or herself and other characters’ reactions, the author’s portrayal, and/or reader inference?
11. How do the characters view one another?
12. Is there any discrepancy between a character’s personal opinion of himself and how others think about him?
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13. What types of relationships exist in the work?
14. What types of images are used in conjunction with the character? What do they symbolize?
15. What symbols are used in the course of the story? What do they symbolize?
16. Do any characters have dreams or inner monologues? What is revealed about a character through dreams that would not otherwise be revealed?
17. Are there any inner conflicts within the character? How are these conflicts revealed? How are they dealt with? Are they ever resolved? How?
18. Do any characters perform uncharacteristic actions? If so, what? What could these actions mean?
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**Activity One: Group A**

In your groups, reread the following sections:
- Romeo’s infatuation with Rosaline: Act 1, Scenes I & II
- Romeo’s confession of his love for Juliet to Benvolio and his declaration of love beneath Juliet’s balcony: Act 2, Scene 1 & II
- Romeo’s justification of love to Friar Laurence and his wedding with Juliet: Act 2, Scene III & VI

Note images and descriptions Romeo uses to express his love and passion for Rosaline and Juliet.

Respond in writing to the following questions comparing and contrasting the relationship between Romeo and Rosaline and Romeo and Juliet:

1. Why does Romeo employ the oxymoron of love/hate to describe his relationship with Rosaline?

2. What mood characterizes Romeo’s infatuation with Rosaline? Sad, exhilarated, hopeful, resigned, rebellious, etc.? Explain your response.

3. What negative images associated with love does Romeo connect with Rosaline? With Juliet?

4. Why does Shakespeare not give Rosaline a speaking role?

5. What psychological impact does Rosaline’s silence have on Romeo as a character? As a lover? How does the audience perceive Rosaline’s silence?

6. What does Romeo predict about the decline of Rosaline’s beauty? What psychological/physical desire does he reveal through his lamentation of her wasted beauty?

7. Why does Romeo describe Juliet as the “center” of his world immediately after meeting her?
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**Activity One: Group B**

In your groups, reread the following sections:
- Romeo’s infatuation with Rosaline: Act 1, Scenes I & II
- Romeo’s confession of his love for Juliet to Benvolio and his declaration of love beneath Juliet’s balcony: Act 2, Scene 1 & II
- Romeo’s justification of love to Friar Laurence and his wedding with Juliet: Act 2, Scene III & VI

Note images and descriptions Romeo uses to express his love and passion for Rosaline and Juliet.

Respond in writing to the following questions comparing and contrasting the relationship between Romeo and Rosaline and Romeo and Juliet:

1. What images associated with nature does Romeo attribute to Juliet? How are they different from the images he uses to describe Rosaline?

2. What events in the play determine whether Romeo uses positive or negative images and descriptions to refer to Juliet or to his love for Juliet?

3. What, according to Romeo, differentiates Juliet’s love from Rosaline’s love? What does Romeo’s assessment reveal about his own expectations with regard to love?

4. Why is Romeo willing to risk so much in order to complete his union with Juliet?

5. According to Romeo’s conversation with Friar Laurence, what psychological desire does the relationship with Juliet fulfill for Romeo?

6. Why does Romeo forget Rosaline so quickly once he meets Juliet? What does his haste reveal about his desire for a relationship? About his maturity as a lover? As a husband?

7. What does Romeo’s hasty decision to marry Juliet no matter what reveal about his relationship with his parents?
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### Jigsaw: Examining the Connection Between Love and Hate in the Play

**Step One:** discuss your analysis from Activity 1 depending on which group you were assigned to.

**Step Two:** Review the following sections from the play in context, paying particular attention to the interaction between love and hate:

- **Act 1, Scene 1:** Romeo’s unfulfilled love for Rosaline: “Here’s much to do with hate, but more with love. Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate! O any thing, of nothing first [create]! O heavy lightness! Serious vanity! Misshapen chaos of well-[seeming] forms.”
- **Act 1, Scene 5:** Romeo’s encounter with Juliet: “Is she a Capulet? O dear account! My life is my foe’s debt.”
- **Act 1, Scene 5:** Juliet’s assessment of her love for Romeo: “My only love, sprung from my only hate! Too early seen unknown, and known too late! Prodigious birth of love it is to me that I must love a loathed enemy.”
- **Act 2, Scene 6:** Friar Laurence’s fears with regard to the imminent wedding between Romeo and Juliet: “These violent delights have violent ends and in their triumph die, like fire and powder, which, as they kiss, consume. The sweetest honey is loathsome in his own deliciousness.”
- **Act III, Scene 5:** Juliet’s fear for Romeo’s wellbeing after hearing about Tybalt’s death: “Indeed I never shall be satisfied with Romeo, till I behold him—dead… O how my heart abhors to hear him nam’d and cannot come to him, to wreak the love I bore my cousin Tybalt upon his body that hath slaughter’d him!”
- **Act 5, Scene 3:** Prince Escalus after finding Romeo and Juliet deceased: “Capulet, Montague, see what a scourge is laid upon your hate, that heaven finds means to kill your joys with love!”

**Step Three:** Record your responses to the following questions by clearly referring to passages from the text:

1. To what extent is the wish to find love amidst a raging family feud psychologically problematic or psychologically advantageous for Romeo and/or Juliet?

2. What do Romeo and Juliet hope to gain through their relationship? Do Romeo and Juliet believe in the possibility of a successful relationship? Do they enter into the relationship even though they have a clear understanding of its inevitable failure?

3. Why do Romeo and Juliet feel compelled to view love only in connection with hate? What does this compulsion reveal about their fears? Anxieties? Hopes? Inadequacies?

4. To what extent can the passion between Romeo and Juliet be considered an example of teenage rebellion against parental influence?

5. What do Romeo’s references to his family’s hatred of the Capulets in connection with his love for Juliet reveal about his obsession with pleasing his parents? Rebell ing against his parents? Possession of another human being? Control over another human being? Inability to escape the framework of his family and the family feud?
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>6. In how far does the struggle between love and family feud in the relationship between Romeo and Juliet mirror the teenagers’ attempt to come to terms with the Freudian concepts of the id, ego, and superego?</td>
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<td>7. What discrepancies exist between Romeo’s view of his own relationship with Juliet and the way other characters view his passion.</td>
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<td>8. Would Romeo and Juliet fall in love if their families were not involved in a feud? Why or why not?</td>
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## Activity Two

Review Act 2, Scene 2.

In the space below, record your group’s responses to the following questions:

1. What emotions characterize the exchange between Romeo and Juliet?


4. How typical is the love banter exchanged between Romeo and Juliet of any teenage romance? Which expressions seems over the top? Exaggerated? Out of date?

5. What is the basis for the love between Romeo and Juliet? On what foundation does their love rest?

6. What fears and anxieties do both partners express in their exchange?

7. What symbols or images are used in this scene to describe the love between Romeo and Juliet?

8. What actions or expressions in this scene appear irrational? Dangerous? Reckless?

9. Are Romeo and Juliet in love?

10. Do any actions or expressions in this scene foreshadow the tragedy that is to follow?
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### Group Presentation

Directions: answer the following questions in your group. After you have discussed them in length, collaborate on a presentation in which you introduce the mythological/archetypal approach to analyzing Romeo and Juliet, and present your findings to the questions below to the rest of the class. Each member of your group is required to present some portion of the discussion. Consider in what ways you can make the information visually attractive on a poster.

1. Can Romeo and Juliet’s decision to marry without the permission of their parents be considered an act of teenage rebellion rather than a desire to fulfill a deep romantic passion?
2. What is the significance of sexuality in the relationship between Romeo and Juliet and Rosaline? To what extent do the characters deny or repress their sexual desires?
3. How does the relationship between Romeo and Juliet mirror a modern teenage romance? How is it different and why?
4. To what extent are Romeo and Juliet adolescents trying to come to terms with their id, ego, and superego?
5. Does Romeo change as a character as he shifts his love interest from Rosaline to Juliet?
6. To what extent is the family feud responsible for the fatal outcome of the play? To what extent are Romeo and Juliet responsible?
7. To what extent are the relationships between family members presented in Romeo and Juliet similar to relationships between family members today? Consider particular examples and points of comparison.
8. Consider the psychological depth of the characters in Romeo and Juliet: Do they have sufficient psychological depth? Are the characters too one-dimensional or predictable? Are the characters either only good or only bad?

### Writing Assignments

Directions: Choose one of the following essay prompts to respond to with a well-written, fully developed five paragraph essay that introduces your topic in the introduction, presents and thesis, and develops the thesis using relevant evidence cited from the text.

1. Write an essay in which you outline whether or not Romeo and Juliet’s obsession with their families’ hatred is psychologically responsible for their obsession with one another.
2. Write an essay in which you speculate how Romeo and Juliet’s actions would be different if their parents—particularly their mothers—fulfilled a more nurturing, caring, supportive role in their lives.
3. Discuss why Romeo does not consult his friends Benvolio and Mercutio when it comes to making decisions about his relationship and intended wedding with Juliet. Pay particular attention to instances when Mercutio, Benvolio, and Romeo’s parents discuss his tendency to withdraw from society to deal with his own grief.
4. In Act 2, Scene 3, Friar Laurence says, “Young men’s love then lies not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.” Explain whether or not you agree with Friar Laurence’s assessment of Romeo’s love for Juliet. What evidence in the text confirms or refutes Friar Laurence’s claim?