

Literary Criticism

Chapters 1-10

Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism: Freudian Theory

- Sigmund Freud (1836- 1939) believed that the unconscious mind is the source of human motivation – whether they be simple desires for food, neurotic compulsions, or the motives of an artist or a scientist.
- To be a mature, self-actualized person, man must become conscious of his unconscious desires and control them.
- If a person experiences a trauma that he/she feels does not comply with societal expectations, then the person could bury these emotions in the unconscious mind. If buried, this could result in neurosis.
- Freud believed that these memories can be brought to the conscious mind through talk therapy, art, writing, dreams and hypnosis. Then, the patient can confront the trauma to find healing for a stronger, healthier personal identity.

Connection to the text:

- In Chapter 1, Saul is encouraged to join a circle to participate in talk therapy, but he refuses because he admits, “I can’t tell mine in a circle. I know that. There’s too much to sort out and sift through” (3). Here, Saul admits that there are elements in his preconscious and unconscious that he has to reconcile in order to have a secure enough sense of self to share. In response, Moses encourages him to write out his thoughts in the hopes that he can bring his unconscious trauma to the forefront of his conscious mind. This novel acts as a form of therapy for the narrator so the reader is encouraged to join Saul on his journey of self discovery as he uncovers the traumas buried in his unconscious, all the while learning how the unconscious mind motivates behaviour.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In the quote, “treaty men” made us sign our names to the register” connotes the loss of sovereignty because the fact that the men “made” them sign indicates that the treaties were broken because an equal can't force another sovereign nation to comply - there has to be cooperation. This makes the reader infer that the community's sense of security is removed. Furthermore, the loss of children and familial connections through residential schools leads to a loss of security and a broken sense of belonging. According to Maslow, if these are removed, then the individual's ability to achieve a positive self esteem and self actualization are hampered. Chapters 1-10 explores how these two stages in the hierarchy of needs are broken down (the causes). The rest of the novel will explore the impact this has on identity (the effects).

Marxist Literary Criticism

The “white man” claims ownership over “The Horse”, the guns, speedboats, the work camps, the residential schools. This results in them overpowering the indigenous people. Their position of entitlement gives them opportunity to oppress and rebellion results:

1. The Zhaunagush see the indigenous people as thieves and lesser people because they didn't own the horses but acquired one indirectly
2. The ownership of motor boats and guns results in oppression (children stolen away). The rebellion is that the father turns to alcohol.
3. The poorest “white” man has more than Saul's family who were “tossed” “Indian Work” (13)
4. When Saul's father obtained materials, he regained hope (14)
5. When the family lives off the land rather than focusing on European ownership, they are

Significance?

In applying Marxist theory to the text, the reader is able to recognize the faults associated with power that is achieved through the acquisition of material things and is encouraged to support the concept of equality and notice the benefits of traditional practices of living off the land.