STUDYING LITERATURE AS AN AIDE TO PSYCHOLOGY: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HENRIK IBSEN AND VIJAY TENDULKAR

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ABSTRACT
The influence of literature over Psychology and vice versa cannot be denied. The great master Psychologist Sigmund Freud not only praised literary artists for their accurate observations of the subtlety and complexity of the human mind but he did not hesitate to give them credit for discovering certain phenomena before they became evident to the scientists. Going through a literary work dealing with complex human emotions is like looking at another perspective on psychological experiences. The case-study of literary characters showing abnormal tendencies can make otherwise abstruse and abstract information of the psychologists more real and concrete by giving implicit and vague ideas more substance and bringing coherence to the scattered and unorganized facts and concepts. By abstracting few examples from the works of great dramatists like Henrik Ibsen and Vijay Tendulkar, the present paper aims to seek and establish possible ways in which literature can prove to be a valuable aide to psychology believing that psychology and similar disciplines might gain useful insights from the analysis of literary texts.

INTRODUCTION
Long before psychology became an area of scientific study, the masters of literature developed many brilliant and moving characterizations of abnormal behavior, based on their keen observation of human actions. Due to their mastery and competence in treating psychosocial phenomena, authors of the literary texts emerge as bearers of a type of knowledge, which is different both from that of a scientist and that of an ordinary person, busy getting on with his everyday life. Psychologists tend to appreciate this ability of showing richness and depth by poets and writers when considering the psychic and affiliated aspects of life. The most frequent way in which psychology can use literature is as an illustration of psychological phenomena. Examples from literature can dramatically exemplify what is known about personality, neurosis and many other aspects relevant to psychology. The aim of the present paper is to seek and establish possible links between psychology and literature believing that psychology and similar disciplines might gain useful insights from the analysis of literary texts as well as provide new ways to study the texts themselves.
Points of Convergence

There are several points where the interests of literary scholars and psychologists converge. The most prominent point of convergence is the approach of psychoanalysis, which borrows examples from literature in order to illustrate clinical concepts. The unstated part of a literary character’s experience assumed a greater significance as much as that of the manifest actions after Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1890) had empirically proved the role the unconscious plays in our lives. Society compels every individual to repress his instinct and that way forgoes the chances of deriving pleasure in the act of living. If the individual happens to be too weak and sensitive and intellectually too ill equipped to openly defy such oppression he finds an alternative in neurosis which is a form of both suffering and protest (M. Rajeshwar, 1998). The world of literature is abounding with such characters. The case study of such characters can make otherwise abstruse information of psychologists more concrete by giving the conceptual ideas more substance and bringing coherence to scattered and unorganized facts as well as hypothesis. Thus through the ‘filter’ of an author’s writing, psychological phenomena have the possibility of being more refined.

Ibsen’s Stand-point

One author whose works appear to be most “psychologically Correct” is the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen’s play Hedda Gabler was written at roughly the same time, i.e., in the year 1890, when Freud was just beginning to publish his psychoanalytic theories. It is amazing to observe that certain fundamental ideas which are the foundation of Freud’s work: repression; neurosis; paranoia; etc., all these factors are present in Hedda Gabler. By applying Psychological theories to the character of Hedda, we discover that she is manifesting some pre defined behavior patterns thus establishing a connection between fiction and reality. The story of Hedda Gabler is that of a plight of a woman whose living in an extremely restrictive society produces inner conflicts that make her life unprolific and lead to her destructive behavior. In the beginning of the play, the dramatist has presented Hedda as a socially prominent woman who has a strong sense of propriety and who needs to maintain her dignity at all costs and who cannot bear the thought of anything happening in her life that would diminish her respectability. Her needs for assertion of free- will has perhaps resulted from an upbringing in a rigidly conventional, male dominated society, one that emphasizes propriety in woman and hinders the free spirit inside them. But the society fails in stifling her spirit and she becomes a rebel. The only reason why she married George Tesman was to capitalize on the benefits he offered, a fine house, a respectable calling and the promise of certain amenities. Since the marriage had taken place without a strong foundation of love, she felt bored with her husband and his research during their six months long wedding trip. She even denied acknowledging her pregnancy on her return. She often remembered her rejection of the love of Ejlert Lovborg who although catered to her romantic longings, lacked the tag of social respectability. When Hedda learns that Lovborg has struck up a relationship with Thea...
Elvsted, a woman she despises, she sets herself to the task of destroying them. After her success in destroying the manuscript of research by Lovborg (which was like an intellectual child to Lovborg and Thea), she even provides him the means to kill himself in his frustration. However, looking at the prospects of her getting caught and investigated, she commits suicide, which is again an attempt to assert her control over her ultimate destiny. As stated earlier, the study of Hedda’s character leads us to many psychological allusions specially that of “paranoia” which is a thought process heavily influenced by anxiety often to the point of irrationality. A paranoid person often has an exaggerated opinion of his own importance and may also reflect feelings of Jealousy (Richard.M. Suinn, 1970). Hedda’s actions can be aptly linked to various defense mechanisms related to a person suffering from such anxiety. The need of maintaining her dignity and propriety is so strong in Hedda that in order to achieve this she adopts certain Ego-defense methods, which are well defined in the world of psychology.

- Denial of Reality: In this mechanism an attempt is made to “screen out” disagreeable realities by ignoring or refusing to acknowledge them (Coleman, 1969). Under this category can be counted Hedda’s refusal to acknowledge her pregnancy, which according to her was the sign of “domestication” of women.
- Repression: It is often referred to as “Selective forgetting” (Coleman, 1969) by means of which threatening or painful thoughts and desires are excluded from consciousness. This includes Hedda’s preference to forget about her deep love for Ejlert Lovborg which however she fails to erase from her memory.
- Rationalization: This mechanism includes justifying maladaptive behavior by faulty logic and ascribing it to noble motive that did not in fact inspire it (Richard.M. Suinn, 1970). This can be related to Hedda’s deliberately hiding Ejlert’s manuscript and urging him to commit suicide telling him to let his end be ‘beautiful’ she believed it to be “an act of deliberate courage- an act of spontaneous beauty” (Hedda Gabler, Act IV)
- Displacement: In displacement, impulses are discharged by means of a substitute object (Coleman 1969). This becomes explicit in the courses of the play when Hedda wants to achieve those objectives through Ejlert, which she cannot attain herself. In Act II we find that Hedda cannot bear to see him afraid because she wants him to lead the free, uninhibited life that she cannot lead herself.

Thus we can see that the knowledge of these psychological elements enables us to understand motivation and explains behavior of the complex characters like Hedda.

TENDULKAR’S STAND-POINT
The contemporary Indian Drama also offers us a wide spectrum of life. Amongst the prominent progenitors of Indian Drama, Vijay Tendulkar is perhaps the most prolific playwright. According to Indulekha Roy Barman, it is his fanatic passion for the ‘real’ that makes him present life in the ‘raw’ sans any sugar coating. (Indulekha. R. Burman,
Tendulkar’s play Sakharam Binder sensitized the readers to many of the beastly aspects of human nature. Each character in the play is like the combination of strength and weakness, good and evil.

Sakharam had a sad childhood. Due to the constant inhuman beating of his father, he left his home at the age of eleven. The frustrated household life in his childhood left him having no belief in the institution of marriage and he turned out to be an unconventional man who scoured the rural village of his province in India looking for abandoned wives whom he would offer a place in his home and the use of whom he would take in exchange (Shalija B. Wadikar, 2008). The play highlights the complex relationships of Sakharam with two women Laxmi and Champa. He claims to be the savior of women by offering them a better life than the earlier one, but he is neither a savior, nor a rebel but a self centered pleasure seeker who wants his women to slave for him day and night, to respect his wishes and to satisfy his lust. Probing into the character of Sakharam, one finds traces of “Masochism” which is both a psychological as well as a literary term named after the Austrian novelist Leopold Masoch (1836-1895). This term includes the case of dwelling lovingly on the sexual pleasure of pain (Coleman, 1969).

The relationship between Sakharam and these ladies can also be studied under a type of pathogenic interpersonal relationship that has seriously detrimental effects on both the partners. The relationships in this play can be put under the category of “Collusion”. In collusion a relationship is established and maintained only because the partners tacitly agree to follow certain maladaptive rules and norms of their own choosing, rather than socially established adaptive ones, under this one person usually takes the initiative in outlining the rules and norms which both partners are then expected to follow. (Coleman, 1969). The result of such a contract are likely to be highly detrimental to the persons involved as happens in the play when at the instigation of Laxmi, Sakharam ends up killing Champa.

CONCLUSION

Thus the study of the psychotic patterns in the characters of Hedda Gabler and Sakharam Binder proves that literature offers a first-hand information to the field of psychology by maintaining the context in which events occur and people behave. The intricacies of the Human nature that are only represented in the form of black and white data of empirical studies can be colorfully exhibited by literature. Although fact gathering and hypothesis generating for Psychological experiments are not the goals of the humanities and it will be committing “the literary fallacy” to use literature as data provider for psychology, it certainly won’t be an exaggeration to state that whenever Psychology stands at a loss as how to proceed with a particular hypothesis, the literary hunches may prove out to be invaluable guides by pointing the way towards otherwise vaguely known facts about experiences and motives of people. As I. Evans states, the writer does not give us facts, but he can interpret whatever is valuable within human
experience extending beyond the range of the observed to all the imagination can achieve (I. Evans, 1954).

REFERENCES