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| **DEFINITION OF PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM** |
| http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/images/definition_subtitle.gif |
| http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/images/shim.gifPsychoanalytic criticism originated in the work of Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who pioneered the technique of psychoanalysis. Freud developed a language that described, a model that explained, and a theory that encompassed human psychology. His theories are directly and indirectly concerned with the nature of the unconscious mind. http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/images/shim.gifThe psychoanalytic approach to literature not only rests on the theories of Freud; it may even be said to have *begun* with Freud, who wrote literary criticism as well as psychoanalytic theory. Probably because of Freud’s characterization of the artist’s mind as “one urged on by instincts that are too clamorous,” psychoanalytic criticism written before 1950 tended to psychoanalyze the individual author. Literary works were read—sometimes unconvincingly—as fantasies that allowed authors to indulge repressed wishes, to protect themselves from deep-seated anxieties, or both. http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/images/shim.gifAfter 1950, psychoanalytic critics began to emphasize the ways in which authors create works that appeal to readers’ repressed wishes and fantasies. Consequently, they shifted their focus away from the author’s psyche toward the psychology of the reader and the text. Norman Holland’s theories, concerned more with the reader than with the text, helped to establish reader-response criticism. Critics influenced by D.W. Winnicott, an object-relations theorist, have questioned the tendency to see the reader/text as an either/or construct; instead, they have seen reader and text (or audience and play) in terms of a relationship taking place in what Winnicott calls a “transitional” or “potential space”—space in which binary oppositions like real/illusory and objective/subjective have little or no meaning. http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/images/shim.gifJacques Lacan, another post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorist, focused on language and language-related issues. Lacan treats the unconscious as a language; consequently, he views the dream not as Freud did (that is, as a form and symptom of repression) but rather as a form of discourse. Thus we may study dreams psychoanalytically in order to learn about literature, even as we may study literature in order to learn more about the unconscious. Lacan also revised Freud’s concept of the Oedipus complex—the childhood wish to displace the parent of one’s own sex and take his or her place in the affections of the parent of the opposite sex—by relating it to the issue of language. He argues that the pre-oedipal stage is also a preverbal or “mirror stage,” a stage he associates with the *imaginary order*. He associates the subsequent oedipal stage—which roughly coincides with the child’s entry into language—with what he calls the *symbolic order,* in which words are not the things they stand for but substitutes for those things. The *imaginary order* and the *symbolic order* are two of Lacan’s three orders of subjectivity, the third being the real, which involves intractable and substantial things or states that cannot be imagined, symbolized, or known directly (such as death). |