

# A Dystopian View of Women

*How a Freudian reading of George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four can be used in Swedish EFL classrooms*



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## Abstract

This essay shows how Freudian psychoanalytic literary criticism can be used to analyze representations of what could be called literary characters' unconscious, i.e. their thoughts and dreams, to attempt to determine and explain their view of women. The analysis serves as an example of what EFL teachers can focus on regarding Freudian criticism. This is applied to Winston, the protagonist of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), by analyzing his descriptions of and interactions with women in his thoughts, dreams and reality using Freudian concepts through a qualitative reading of the novel. These concepts are *repression*, *projection*, *dream images*, *displacement*, *condensation* and *sublimation*. Although Freud's theories have been heavily criticized, the essay argues that they can still be used to provide different perspectives on literary subjects. The essay concludes that Winston is misogynistic, which can be explained by his mother's and sister's disappearance in his childhood and his unconscious projection of hatred towards the Party onto women in the novel, which leads to his misogynistic descriptions of, interactions with and thoughts about women. Furthermore, an argument is made to support the use of this type of analysis in the EFL classroom since it can provide a discussion about social issues such as gender equality, which is supposed to be a part of the education according to the Swedish curriculum for upper-secondary school.

**Keywords:** psychoanalytic literary criticism, Sigmund Freud, EFL, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell, literary criticism

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## 1 Introduction

When we read fiction, we generally want to experience the stories in the lives of literary characters (Warren, 1986, p. 62). Specifically, literary characters can make us understand or think about things that we ourselves might not. Although literary characters are not real human beings, they can be seen to represent the experiences of real human beings (Tyson, 2006, p. 35). Therefore, we can analyze these characters' motives and feelings to attempt to relate them to our own experiences, and human experiences in general.

Literary analysis is also something that English as a Foreign language, or EFL, students in Sweden are supposed to learn. In the syllabus for English in Swedish upper-secondary school, it is stated that students should develop “the ability to interpret content” (Skolverket<sup>1</sup>, 2011, p. 2). Furthermore, “different kinds of fiction” should be covered in the English 5 course (p. 3). Subsequently, different methods of literary analysis, i.e. critical theories, should be of interest to EFL teachers in Sweden since that will help students achieve the goals that are stated in the curriculum.

Another benefit that literary analysis and theories provide are different perspectives on distinct aspects of characters' lives. Seeing these different perspectives can help people understand themselves and the world better. Tyson (2006) presents this argument:

Theory can help us learn to see ourselves and our world in valuable new ways, ways that can influence how we educate our children, both as parents and teachers; how we view television, from the nightly news to situation comedies; how we behave as voters and consumers; how we react to others with whom we do not agree on social, religious, and political issues; and how we recognize and deal with our own motives, fears, and desires. (pp. 2-3)

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<sup>1</sup> The English name for Skolverket is “The Swedish National Agency for Education”. Skolverket will be used in this essay for convenience.

Similar to these ways in which theory can help us learn to see ourselves and the world, the Swedish curriculum mentions “Fundamental values and tasks of the school”, which states that school and teachers should, among other things, “promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise” (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4). Different methods for analysis, such as analysis of literary characters, can help the students develop understanding, empathy and other values that are important in Swedish upper-secondary school.

There are many different methods one can use to analyze literature in general, and literary characters in particular. If the focus lies on the thoughts, motives and experiences of literary characters, *psychoanalytic literary criticism* can be useful. This is because it provides an opportunity to analyze the potential unconscious motives behind people’s, and literary characters’, actions (Tyson, 2006, p. 11). Psychoanalytic literary criticism is based on *psychoanalysis*, a form of psychological therapy originally developed by Sigmund Freud. Although there are different schools of psychoanalysis, the original is often referred to as *Freudian* psychoanalytic theory. This is the essay’s primary theoretical framework. This theory is explained in the theoretical framework section.

The novel used as the primary source for this essay is George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Freudian psychoanalytic criticism can be applied to many different literary characters if the text in question provides some insight into their thoughts and feelings. The reason that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been chosen for this essay is partly that the protagonist, Winston Smith, is the focalizer, which means that the story is told from his perspective in third person. Thereby, he provides the reader with the necessary insights into his thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the novel is widely popular (Levenson, 2017) and considered a classic, which makes it suitable for EFL teachers.

Another argument for Freudian criticism’s suitability to EFL teachers in Sweden is that it can be used to uncover potential motives behind fictional characters’ actions, feelings

and reasons for how they view the world they inhabit, if we assume that fictional characters' have their own motives. Subsequently, teachers can use it to discuss issues that may arise from reading with students. Such issues in this novel can be the future, surveillance in society or, since gender equality is a relevant discussion topic in the world today, the portrayal of women. In the Swedish curriculum, it is stated that gender equality should be included in the education (Skolverket, 2013, p. 10). Furthermore, one of the aims of the English subject is that the students should learn about social issues in different parts of the world where English is used (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1), which entails gender equality. This essay shows how Freudian psychoanalytic criticism can explain the protagonist's view of women.

### **1.1 Aim and Research Questions**

The overarching aim of this essay is to demonstrate how psychoanalytic theory can be used to explain misogyny for the purposes of discussing gender equality as part of EFL teaching. This is done by considering the following question:

- How can a Freudian psychoanalytic reading of Winston Smith's unconscious in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* be used to explain his view of women?
- How can such a psychoanalytic reading be used to discuss gender equality in EFL teaching?

This question is answered by applying a Freudian psychoanalytic reading to Winston's thoughts about, descriptions of and interactions with women in the novel. The descriptions are found in his thoughts, memories and dreams. How these are found and analyzed is explained in the theory and method sections of the essay. The results of this reading are subsequently connected and compared to each other in order to show how the psychoanalytic concepts present in Winston's descriptions and interactions with women are related and what this indicates about his view of women.

## **2 Background**

The following sections present the concepts of Freudian psychoanalytic literary criticism used in this essay, as well as a brief historical background to psychoanalysis. Previous research is then presented on psychoanalytic literary criticism in general, the theory's application to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in particular, and attitudes towards women in the novel. Furthermore, this essay's connection to the practice of teaching is discussed in order to clarify the essay's relevance to teachers.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

This essay applies Freudian theory to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by focusing on specific psychoanalytic concepts that can uncover how Winston views women. These concepts are used to find relevant passages for analysis in the novel. Specifically, they are *repression*, *projection*, *dream images*, *displacement*, *condensation* and *sublimation*. Consequently, passages are chosen for analysis that are subjectively deemed relevant according to how these concepts are described here. In this section, psychoanalytic literary criticism, Freud's general theories and aspects of them that are relevant to this essay are explained.

#### ***Freudian Theory***

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) developed what are often called Freudian psychoanalytic theory during his lifetime. This theory entails the idea that all individuals have “a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family” and “adolescent and adult behavior that are the direct result of that early experience” (Tyson, 2006, p. 12). Psychoanalysis is originally a method of therapy that is based on “specific theories of how the mind, the instincts and sexuality work”, which can also be used to analyze literature (Barry, 2009, p.

92). In the case of this essay, Freudian theory provides a framework that is used to exemplify how Freudian literary criticism can be applied to a character in a novel.

Since psychoanalytic literary criticism is based on the psychoanalytic method of therapy but different in that the therapy was used on real people, a definition is needed of what this type of literary criticism focuses on. According to Barry (2009), some concepts that Freudian psychoanalytic critics investigate are “the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind” and “unconscious motives and feelings, whether these be (a) those of the author, or (b) those of the characters depicted in the work” (p. 100). This essay focuses on Winston’s view of women, which is found through the analysis of his thoughts about, descriptions of and interactions with female characters in reality, memories and his dreams.

Furthermore, while psychoanalytic criticism is based on psychoanalytic therapy, there are specific questions literary critics focus on that are different from what might be the focus in therapy sessions. Tyson (2006) exemplifies some of these questions, such as how repression and unconscious motives operate in the novel, how a character’s family experiences in the childhood relate to his or her adult behavior, how this can be explained with psychoanalytic concepts, and how dreams are significant to the character’s unconscious motives (p. 38). This forms the basis for this essay’s analysis.

Freud explains this central part of his theories, the unconscious, as a part of our mind that we are not aware of, which affects what we do. According to Freud (1926), the unconscious plays a major part in our decision-making (p. 11). He argued that humans are driven by factors that originate from negative experiences that happened when we were young. These negative experiences are unconsciously repressed and act as motivators for our actions later in life (Freud, 1926, p. 12). Furthermore, the unconscious is highly related to the family and how we view our position in that social group. Freud theorized that the conflicts we have within the group are connected to developmental stages that we all go through. If we



do not move on from these, however, we develop psychological issues (Tyson, 2006, pp. 13-14). The family aspect is important to look at in the context of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, since Winston thinks about his family frequently throughout the novel. His thoughts about his mother and sister can be useful to analyze in order to uncover his view of women.

Another important aspect of the unconscious is that it is a part of Freud's three-part model of the psyche, which includes the *ego*, the *super-ego* and the *id* (Freud, 1926, p. 34). The super-ego refers to the conscience and the id refers to the unconscious (Barry, 2009, p. 93). The ego represents the consciousness, which controls and represses thoughts and feelings that are connected to negative experiences. This part of the psyche is in control for most of the day. Even when we sleep, the ego censors our dreams, disguising repressed feelings and experiences to protect us (Freud, 1926, pp. 15-16). This can be related to Oceania, the society in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which is constructed similarly with citizens being surveyed by the ruling Party and having to hide their thoughts and feelings, much like the ego controls our thoughts and dreams. Thus, this type of literary criticism can be especially fitting to apply on a novel like this.

These repressed feelings, which are the results of repression, are a key aspect of the unconscious. Barry (2009) defines this as "the 'forgetting' or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness into the realm of the unconscious" (pp. 92-93). This kind of *defense* exists to protect us from understanding or changing our negative behavior because such behavior is what our identities are based on. It also protects us from *anxiety* (Tyson, 2006, p. 15). Therefore, according to Freudian theory, the unconscious defenses are important to analyze when trying to uncover a person's or a character's unconscious motives and feelings. Another defense is called sublimation, which is similar to repression. This is when the unconscious makes what has been repressed into something good. Barry (2009) exemplifies this with

sexual urges that are viewed as “religious experiences or longings” instead of something negative (p. 93). This is another example of what the unconscious does for protection against anxiety.

Freud also argued that dreams are important to analyze. His definition of *dream work* is when feelings or events from real life are portrayed in a dream image (Freud, 1913; Barry, 2009, p. 94). When we are sleeping, our unconscious is unable to actively protect us from the negative feelings that are repressed when we are awake. It still manages, however, to provide some protection through the use of displacement and condensation. Displacement is described as when people or events from real life are represented by something similar to them in the dream, e.g. if you dream about the king, he might represent your father. Condensation is when several factors, such as people or events, are fused together into one representation in a dream, e.g. it looks like one person, acts like another and wears a third one’s clothes (Freud, 1913). This means that we can analyze Winston’s dreams in order to uncover his motives and repressed feelings. Subsequently, we can use this to attempt to draw conclusions about his view of women.

The final concept that is dealt with in this essay is projection. It is described as a defense that protects us from identifying negative traits in ourselves. Instead, they are projected onto someone else (Barry, 2009, p. 93). These traits can be different feelings, such as fears or guilty desires (Tyson, 2006, p. 15). One example of projection is if you hate a person, but your super-ego does not view that feeling as something acceptable. In order to deal with this, your hatred is ascribed to that person. Thereby, you believe that person actually hates you instead of the opposite, which protects you from anxiety.

There are, of course, many other aspects of Freudian theory that can be focused on in an analysis like this one. However, this essay focuses on the above-mentioned concepts since they are considered relevant to the aim and research questions. Other analysts can probably

get useful results by applying other Freudian concepts or psychoanalytic theories to different aspects of the novel.

### ***The Debate about Freudian Psychoanalysis***

Something that needs to be remembered about Freudian theories is that they have been frequently criticized since their inception over 100 years ago. One criticism is that the theories are outdated, meaning that they have been superseded by Freud's students and other psychoanalysts. Furthermore, there are other psychological theories that have emerged since then. Freud's theories have, in fact, recently been dismissed by other psychologists. An example of the debate regarding Freud can be found in *Dagens Nyheter*, a Swedish newspaper. A Swedish example is used since this essay focuses on Swedish EFL teaching. The debate concerns whether Freud's ideas are actually a bad influence on the field of psychology. One could also connect the debate to psychoanalytic literary criticism, since this is based on Freud's psychological ideas. Nine psychologists, psychiatrists and organization representatives from the psychology community in Sweden argue that Freudian psychoanalysis is not relevant in modern science-based psychology. They also claim that Freud's work cannot even be called science because he is said to have lied about his patients' improvements, which he did not have scientific evidence for. Furthermore, they claim that none of the primary recommended methods for psychological therapy today in Sweden are theoretically connected to psychoanalysis (Böckman et al., 2020). While this might be the case, this essay does not claim that psychoanalytic therapy should be used today but that the literary criticism that is based on these ideas can be used in the English classroom to get a unique perspective on literary analysis.

There are, however, others who disagree with the nine psychology representatives' opinions. In a reply to this article, Johansson (2020) argues that old classic texts can still be

useful to us if we put them in their context and relate them to contemporary society. Furthermore, he argues that it is important to let students learn about the history of science and the history of ideas. Evidently, it can be useful to try different perspectives and theories in order to learn and discover new things regarding science, psychology and ideas. Moreover, regardless of whether or not psychologists should use psychoanalysis in therapy, the theory can still be useful for analyzing literature since the characters in novels will not be psychologically affected by the analysis. Regarding the outdatedness of the theories, the same criticism can be applied to many other ideas that are often still considered relevant and useful today, such as Greek philosophy. While Greek philosophy is mostly studied as part of the history of ideas today, some would argue that such ideas are also still useful. Different theories can be important to consider regardless of how old they are, since they can still give us new insights from different aspects of literary work, such as characters' feelings and motives.

Another issue that has to be dealt with regarding psychoanalytic criticism is that since this essay focuses on view of women and misogyny in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it should be pointed out that Freud's ideas themselves can be accused of being, if not misogynist, then at least sexist. For example, this can be found in the idea that girls suffer from penis envy, which means that they are envious of the fact that boys have penises. This is because male genitals are connected to gender roles and the power that men get but women do not. According to Tyson (2006), this can be tied to the cultural context that Freud was active in, which may have affected his observations (p. 26). The students would have to be made aware of this issue when learning about psychoanalytic literary criticism.

### **2.3 Previous research**

This section provides an overview of the research field regarding psychoanalytic literary criticism in the classroom, the criticism in connection to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and misogyny in the novel. It starts with research that investigates the use of psychoanalytic literary criticism in the classroom. This is followed by research of the criticism in relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in order to show some psychoanalytic aspects that have been analyzed in the novel. Finally, research on attitudes towards women in the novel is presented and connected to the Swedish school context.

### ***Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism in the English Classroom***

The usefulness of psychoanalytic literary criticism has been researched in the Swedish school context. In a student essay, Edmonds (2017) investigated the usefulness of one type of psychoanalytic literary criticism in the English classroom in Sweden by applying Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to two works by Percy Bysshe Shelley. The results of this analysis were then used to didactically reflect on the use of literary theory in the classroom by comparing them with Langer's theory of literate thinking (p. 31). Edmonds concludes that it is beneficial to use psychoanalytic criticism in the classroom and that the teacher's role should be to broaden the students' perspectives by "introducing new ideas and poking at the insulating bubbles that surround the pupils' perceptions of the surrounding world" (p. 32). The study contributes with knowledge about psychoanalytic literary analysis in the classroom context and considers implications for teaching English literature in Sweden. Therefore, a similar study applying Freudian psychoanalytic criticism should deepen the knowledge about psychoanalytic literary criticism and further inform the pedagogical implications.

### ***Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism and Nineteen Eighty-Four***

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been the subject of many different approaches to literary analysis. If one wants to investigate the feelings and motives of characters in the novel, Freudian psychoanalytic criticism can be used. Köseman (2016) uses Freudian models of the psyche and Jungian ideas about the collective unconscious to argue that Orwell portrays oppressed individuals that are psychologically affected by big changes in the world and become rebellious because of this (pp. 868-869). Winston's psyche is influenced by the oppressive system of Oceania, which leads to him trying to join the rebel faction The Brotherhood and overthrow the regime. The background to these rebellious acts can be traced to his constant obsession with the past, which "manifests a psychoanalytical assessment and signifies repression and fears in psychological orientation" (Köseman, 2016, p. 876). Köseman's study shows that Freudian psychoanalytic concepts can be applied to the novel and that Winston's actions are affected by unconscious motives related to the society's oppressive system. It does not, however, investigate how his personal past and present life can reveal his unconscious motives and feelings.

Smith (1968) argues that Winston's behavior can be connected to what he concludes is the meaning of the novel by using Freudian psychoanalytic theories in particular. Smith (1968) uses such theories to argue that Winston's development follows "Oedipal lines", meaning that such psychoanalytic theories are inherent to the text (p. 423). Furthermore, the analysis shows that the novel focuses on Winston's rebellion against the Party, although it happens accidentally and is not a conscious choice that he makes. Smith (1968) concludes that neither Winston nor the Party wins in the end since the Party fails to change Winston's nature and "he is never a threat to the Party's control" (p. 433). Smith's analysis focuses on Winston's psychological development and can be seen as an example of how a Freudian analysis of the character can be done. Although the study entails Freudian concepts, it does not use the concepts to analyze Winston's unconscious motives and feelings.

In addition to Freudian theories, Lacanian psychoanalytic theories have been applied to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) developed a new, non-traditional take on psychoanalysis, based on Freud's work (Barry, 2009, p. 26). This theory is used by Carpentier (2014), who discusses the novel by applying a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach and argues that Winston's memories are used as an "attempt to evade the Symbolic" (p. 179). In this case, the symbolic can be seen as the dystopian society the story is set in. The author's actions and Winston's thoughts and memories are discussed. Carpentier concludes that the novel illustrates a patriarchal state that forces Winston to take a "masochistic feminized position", which leads to him dying without being able to "restore the phallus to the mother" (p. 193). Although the essay provides a unique psychoanalytic perspective on Winston's thoughts and memories, which can be valuable to similar studies of the character, one might object to the focus on the author's intentions, since a wide-spread view among critical theorists today is that the author is "dead". Furthermore, although the Lacanian approach is based on Freudian theories, there is still a research gap concerning using Freudian psychoanalytic criticism to analyze Winston's unconscious with the purpose of discussing gender equality in EFL teaching.

### ***Misogyny in the Novel***

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects that have been researched, other literary critics have pointed out that the portrayal of women in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a sign of misogyny, particularly regarding Winston's view of women. Patai (1982) argues that Winston uses Julia to rebel against the party, viewing their sexual relationship as a political act (p. 860). This is a symptom of a bigger trend in male-written dystopian novels, according to Atwood (2004). She claims that, in these novels, women "have been either sexless automatons or rebels who've defied the sex rules of the regime" and function as "temptresses of the male

protagonist". In the case of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Atwood argues that Julia can be regarded as Winston's "temptress" (p. 516). In conclusion, Patai (1982) and Atwood (2004) argue that misogyny is present in the novel. This means that uncovering the roots of the misogyny with the help of different literary theories, such as Freudian criticism, can be useful. Moreover, the fact that misogyny is argued to be present in the novel makes Winston's view of women interesting to investigate since education in Sweden should include gender equality (Skolverket, 2013, p. 10) and make it possible for EFL students to "discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 1).

### **3 Methodology and Material**

In the following sections, the essay's methodology, materials and limitations are presented and discussed. Firstly, the methodology regarding the psychoanalytic reading of the novel is explained. This is related to how the curriculum will be used in comparison with the results of the analysis. Then follows a discussion of why this particular novel is used in the essay, as well as a discussion about analyzing a fictional character. Lastly, potential limitations of the study's method are presented and discussed.

#### **3.1 Methodology**

The primary source for this essay is the classic dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell. First, a Freudian psychoanalytic reading is applied to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by analyzing Winston Smith's thoughts, memories and dreams, which represent what can be called his unconscious, and what it implies about his view of women. The discussion relates the relevant Freudian concepts to each other, previous research and the Swedish curriculum. Finally, an attempt is made to determine Winston's view of women and how a



Freudian reading of Winston's unconscious is useful for teachers in upper-secondary EFL classrooms in Sweden.

This essay applies a qualitative method of research. Specifically, a qualitative content analysis is used. This means that the content is subjectively interpreted in a systemic manner (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 1). This essay is systemic in that the research questions determine what passages are analyzed in the novel. This is done using the Freudian concepts and a subjective interpretation of relevant passages based on the research questions and the concepts. Furthermore, the analysis includes identifying "important themes or categories within a body of content" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 11). The focus is on the protagonist's unconscious motives and feelings, which are used to identify important themes, i.e. which, in this case, are his view of women and how this is explained with the help of Freudian concepts.

Regarding the novel, Freudian criticism is applied to passages in the text that include Winston's descriptions of and interactions with female characters. The passages are analyzed with the help of Freudian concepts, specifically repression, sublimation, dream images, displacement, condensation and projection. In the discussion, the results from the analysis are compared to each other, which makes a conclusion possible to draw regarding what the pedagogical implications are of using a Freudian reading of Winston's unconscious in the EFL classroom.

### ***3.2 Nineteen Eighty-Four***

There are several reasons for choosing to analyze this particular novel. One of them is that many consider it a classic. This is evident by the fact that *Time Magazine* included it in their list of the best English-language novels published since 1923 (Grossman & Lacayo, 2010). Although this in itself does not mean that it necessarily fits for this or any other type of

analysis, the novel is widely popular and has been since its release (Levenson, 2017).

Consequently, it has been read by many people and will probably be read by many more. This means that there must be something enticing in the story that makes so many different people from different times read it. Furthermore, the novel being a classic makes it probable to turn up on many schools' reading lists.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, there are possible educational insights to be gained since aspects of the novel can be connected to the Swedish curriculum. One such aspect is that it has been criticized for being misogynistic (Patai, 1982; Atwood, 2004). This is interesting to focus on, since gender equality is a highly relevant topic of discussion in the world today. This is also mentioned in the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2013), meaning that teachers should include such discussions in their teaching. EFL classrooms can, therefore, benefit from a literary analysis that focuses on trying to explain views of women in novels such as this one in a critical way.

### **3.3 Analyzing a Fictional Character**

Since this essay does not intend to analyze the author's own motives, thoughts and feelings, a discussion of how to approach the analysis of a fictional character needs to be included.

Winston cannot be argued to be the narrator in the novel, because although readers get an insight into his and no other characters' motives, thoughts and feelings, the story is told from a third-person perspective. The narrator provides this insight, however, which means that they are accessible and can be analyzed. Thus, an analysis of Winston's unconscious is possible.

Furthermore, if the goal is to analyze Winston's motives, thoughts and feelings, we need to consider the fact that he is not a real human being and can, therefore, not be said to have motives, thoughts and feelings of his own. As was stated in the introduction, however, the experiences of fictional characters can be seen to represent real human beings'

experiences. Thus, we can attempt to relate their experiences to our own (Tyson, 2006, p. 35). This means that Winston's experiences in the novel can be related to humans', and therefore also EFL students', experiences.

### **3.4 Limitations**

There are some limitations to this essay that should be addressed. Conducting an analysis of this kind, with only one analyst who interprets the content of a novel, means that the results will be based on subjective interpretations. Furthermore, the Freudian concepts as well as the passages in the novel are subject to interpretation, which means that other analysts might arrive at different results.

To ensure internal and external validity in this essay, the theories and methods that are used are explained and discussed before they are applied to the content. Thus, the descriptions and discussions that are provided should ensure that the results are transferable to other studies, which means that the "four criteria for evaluating interpretive research work" have been considered. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, as mentioned in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6). The information provided in this essay's background, methodology and subsequent sections should ensure its trustworthiness in terms of the four criteria. Regarding transferability, the intention is to provide "rich enough" descriptions of what is found in the analysis. These descriptions should also ensure the confirmability by readers, as well as provide the "coherence of the internal process", that is the dependability. Relevant concepts that are used in the analysis are accounted for to ensure the essay's credibility (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 6).

Finally, the scope of this essay can only cover so much. An analysis of Winston's unconscious using and comparing other Freudian concepts could be informative. Because of the scope of this essay, however, the concepts have been limited to the mentioned ones

through reading the novel while considering Freudian theories that might explain Winston's view of women. Other potential problems and limitations with the Freudian theories are discussed in the theory section.

## **4 Analysis**

In these sections, different concepts of Freudian psychoanalytic criticism are applied to Winston's descriptions of and interactions with female characters in the novel to exemplify such an analysis to EFL teachers. The sections begin with his mother and sister since the roots of his view of women can be explained by analyzing his thoughts about them, according to Freudian psychoanalysis. Subsequently, Julia, Katharine and the other women in the novel are analyzed. These interactions and descriptions form the basis for the interpretation that can explain Winston's view of women and how analysts can explain this view by using Freudian concepts to analyze his unconscious. Each section begins with a brief description of the character and their relationship to Winston.

### **4.1 Winston's Mother and Sister**

As previously mentioned, Freudian psychoanalytic theories focus heavily on the family, especially family members that are the opposite gender of the patient. Therefore, this section of results and analysis starts with a look at Winston's descriptions of his mother and sister. Specifically, this section shows how his descriptions and dreams of these family members are signs of the repressed feelings that are present in his unconscious.

Winston's family consists of his unnamed mother, father and sister. He has not seen them since he was around ten years old. The parents are described as follows:

She was a tall, statuesque, rather silent woman with slow movements and magnificent fair hair. His father he remembered more vaguely as dark and thin, dressed always in neat dark clothes (Winston remembered especially the very thin soles of his father's

shoes) and wearing spectacles. The two of them must evidently have been swallowed up in one of the first great purges of the fifties. (Orwell, 1949, p. 36)

His sister was two or three years old when Winston was separated from them. At first, he only remembers her as a “tiny, feeble baby, always silent, with large, watchful eyes” (p. 36). Later, however, he remembers that she had been sick and in need of food when he demanded a larger portion of their rations (p. 186). The fact that Winston realizes and notices that she needed food combined with the previous repression of this memory could be an indication of how he feels guilty about demanding food that his sick sister needs.

Winston’s dreams about his mother and sister can uncover aspects of his unconscious. According to Freudian theories, dreams can uncover parts of the unconscious that are hidden to us when we are awake (Tyson, 2006, p. 18). Therefore, these dreams can be analyzed to reveal otherwise unavailable aspects of his unconscious, such as repressed feelings, thoughts and memories of his family. One of the dreams suggests that Winston feels guilty about his mother’s and sister’s disappearance. In this dream, Winston’s mother and sister are sinking underwater while looking up at him on the surface:

He was out in the light and air while they were being sucked down to death, and they were down there because he was up here. He knew it and they knew it, and he could see the knowledge in their faces. There was no reproach either in their faces or in their hearts, only the knowledge that they must die in order that he might remain alive, and that this was part of the unavoidable order of things. (Orwell, 1949, pp. 36-37)

This dream refers to the last memory that Winston has of them, which is the disappearance of her and his sister when he was “ten or eleven years old” (p. 36). The dream consequently shows that Winston feels guilty about the disappearances, or deaths, of his mother and sister. This is because repressed feelings that exist in the unconscious can resurface in dreams through displacement, which can be viewed as the representation of one event through

another event (Barry, 2009, p. 94). The dream can thus be seen as evidence that he has repressed feelings of guilt which resurface in his dream. In the dream, however, the mother and sister do not reproach him. This can be read as a sign that he does not have repressed feelings of guilt regarding their disappearance. Instead, he views it as a noble and loyal sacrifice. An argument against this can be that it is actually a case of sublimation since his unconscious has created the noble sacrificial image of them sinking without reproaching him in order to protect his conscious from anxiety. Winston's subsequent thoughts about the sacrifice shows that the sublimation does not work when he wakes up:

His mother's memory tore at his heart because she had died loving him, when he was too young and selfish to love her in return, and because somehow, he did not remember how, she had sacrificed herself to a conception of loyalty that was private and unalterable. (p. 37)

This indicates that he still feels guilty about how he was too selfish to reciprocate his mother's love when he was young. That her memory "tore at his heart because she had died loving him" is strong evidence that he is sad and regrets stealing rations from his sister and running away from his mother and sister the day they disappeared.

Another dream shows evidence of repression but can also be seen to represent the safety and comfort that Winston connects to his mother. Winston describes the dream as "a vast, luminous dream in which his whole life seemed to stretch out before him like a landscape on a summer evening after rain" (Orwell, 1949, p. 184). It presents a repressed memory which Winston suddenly remembers. This memory is about the last time he saw his mother, which is something he thought he "must have deliberately pushed out of his consciousness over many years" (p. 185), meaning the memory has been repressed to his unconscious. This is the memory of his mother's and sister's disappearance after he had taken chocolate from his sister (p. 187). The reason that this painful memory resurfaces is that

Winston, after remembering the event, realizes that he was not responsible for his mother's probable physical death (p. 184). Since he emphasizes that he did not murder her physically, he obviously still feels responsible for some aspect of her death. However, the brightness of the landscape has arguably positive connotations. Furthermore, he relates a gesture that his mother makes in the dream to that of a Jewish woman on a news film he has seen. The woman is "trying to shelter the small boy from the bullets" (p. 184). This displacement suggests that Winston, as can be thought to be represented by the small boy, feels protected and safe with his mother. Also, one could argue that Winston projects the responsibility of his mother's death onto the Party in order to protect him from anxiety, since he thinks that "they" could have taken her to a "forced-labour camp" (p. 188). "They" implies the Party.

#### **4.2 Julia**

Julia becomes Winston's lover in the novel. In his first encounters with her, he only refers to her as "the dark-haired girl". He does not know much about her other than that she works in the Fiction department with "some mechanical job on one of the novel-writing machines". Furthermore, he describes her appearance as follows:

She was a bold-looking girl, of about twenty-seven, with thick hair, a freckled face, and swift, athletic movements. A narrow scarlet sash, emblem of the Junior Anti-Sex League, was wound several times round the waist of her overalls, just tightly enough to bring out the shapeliness of her hips. (p. 15)

This description shows that Julia seems to be a typical female member of the Party since she is supposedly also a member of the Party's Junior Anti-Sex League. Winston, although being a member of the Party himself, clearly dislikes it, since he turns his hatred from Goldstein, which he was supposed to hate during the "Two Minute Hate" (p. 19), towards Big Brother and the Party (p. 20). Therefore, one can argue that Winston projects this hatred against the

Party towards Julia when he first sees her. Furthermore, Winston's first impressions of Julia can be seen as indicative of misogyny. In these impressions, it is stated that "he disliked nearly all women, and especially the young and pretty ones" (Orwell, 1949, p. 15). This in itself is obviously misogynous, but one can also connect it to the description of her as "bold-looking" and "the shapeliness of her hips". These are usually positive traits but can, because of his dislike of women, be argued to be negative. Furthermore, traits such as shapely hips are usually connected to women. Thus, Winston describes a female trait negatively, which might not be considered directly misogynous but at least objectifying. One can explain these feelings with displacement since Winston views these usually positive descriptions in a negative way to protect himself from the fact that he thinks Julia looks good, which he needs to do to uphold his distancing from women in the Party.

Another significant sign of Winston's misogyny is when he tells Julia directly what he thought of her when he first saw her:

'I hated the sight of you,' he said. 'I wanted to rape you and then murder you afterwards. Two weeks ago I thought seriously of smashing your head in with a cobblestone. If you really want to know, I imagined that you had something to do with the Thought Police.' (p. 139)

His initial thoughts about her are extremely misogynistic since he wanted to carry out such violent acts on her because she is a woman, as is inferred by his earlier stated dislike of "young and pretty" women, and that she might be a member of the Thought Police. The fact that he mentions the Thought Police is a sign that he believes her to be so heavily indoctrinated by the Party that she is actually a hunter of people whose thoughts fail to align with the Party's doctrines. The reason behind his aggressive thoughts about her is indicative of his misogyny. This reason is his feeling of guilt regarding his mother and sister, whose disappearance he feels responsible for. Therefore, his misogyny is a further sign of this



repressed guilt that he unconsciously uses Julia as displacement for. It can also be related to his unconscious projection of the hatred towards the Party onto Julia.

An interesting aspect of Winston's relationship with Julia is that he thinks negative thoughts about her, while simultaneously dreaming about her in a positive way. When he dreams of her, he sees her in a field which he calls the Golden Country. This is a place he dreams about a lot (p. 37). In the dream, Julia tears her clothes off with a gesture that Winston admires:

With its grace and carelessness it seemed to annihilate a whole culture, a whole system of thought, as though Big Brother and the Party and the Thought Police could all be swept into nothingness by a single splendid movement of the arm. (p. 38)

This admiration as well as his unconscious placing her in his ideal world can be seen as signs that he does not have the hateful feelings that he expresses. On the other hand, the passage might also indicate that Winston views Julia as a tool that can be used to overthrow the Party. This is a further sign that, although he later cares about her, he views her as a political tool and not as an equal. This is strengthened by Winston's thoughts about Julia when they have both been captured: "He loved her and would not betray her; but that was only a fact, known as he knew the rules of arithmetic. He felt no love for her, and he hardly even wondered what was happening to her" (p. 260).

The gesture that Julia makes in the dream, as well as the positive setting, can be connected to Winston's dream about his mother and the gesture that is connected to her. Winston unconsciously displaces his mother onto Julia, which means that the positive feelings associated with the mother is ascribed to Julia in the dream. This is a sign that he idolizes his mother. A fact that reinforces this argument is that she died when Winston was young, so he might have a distorted image of her. Moreover, the gesture and the positive setting might

indicate sublimation since the memory of Winston's mother has positive connotations instead of possible negative ones, such as feeling abandoned by her.

In conclusion, Winston's thoughts about Julia are, in several cases, indicative of misogyny but can also be seen as projection of hatred towards the Party onto her. He dreams positively about her, which can be seen as either an argument against hateful feelings or that he views her as a tool to overthrow the Party. The dream can also be a sign that Winston ascribes positive feelings for his mother onto Julia. In the end, however, he feels no love for her.

#### **4.3 Katharine**

Katharine is Winston's wife that he has separated from some ten years prior to the events of the novel. They are not divorced, however, since that is not possible for Party members. Winston describes her as "a tall, fair-haired girl, very straight, with splendid movements. She had a bold, aquiline face, a face that one might have called noble until one discovered that there was as nearly as possible nothing behind it" (p. 78). The final line in his description of Katharine can be seen as another indication of misogyny if one connects it to his earlier stated dislike of women. This is because it is yet another occasion where Winston describes a woman in a negative way. The description can not necessarily only be connected to women, but considering his feelings towards them generally, it can be argued to be the case. Although the description starts off in a positive manner, he indicates that she is unintelligent with "nothing behind" her face and willing to swallow anything that the Party says:

Very early in her married life he had decided — though perhaps it was only that he knew her more intimately than he knew most people — that she had without exception the most stupid, vulgar, empty mind that he had ever encountered. She had not a thought in her head that was not a slogan, and there was no imbecility, absolutely

none that she was not capable of swallowing if the Party handed it out to her. ‘The human sound-track’ he nicknamed her in his own mind. (p. 78)

He relates her to both the Party’s slogans and his negative views of the Party and its female members, claiming that “the women of the Party were all alike. Chastity was as deep ingrained in them as Party loyalty.” (p. 79). Thereby, Winston labels loyalty to the party as both negative and female. This can be explained by projection since he ascribes the negative feelings he has for the Party onto Katharine.

Another way that his misogyny shows is in his view of sex with his wife. Although she wants to sleep with him in order to perform their “duty to the party” (p. 79), Winston describes how “she would lie there with shut eyes, neither resisting nor co-operating but SUBMITTING” (p. 78). This indicates that women in the Party are manipulated and forced to have sex with their husbands to procreate. While Winston criticizes this overall, his negative description of Katharine seems to indicate that she represents the Party and is, therefore, to blame for Winston’s feelings about sex with her. In conclusion, he projects his negative feelings towards the Party onto Katharine in order to explain why he dislikes her.

#### **4.4 Other Women**

In this section, other women who are not as close to Winston as the previous four, or that have not been included in some way in previous sections, but still described are included and analyzed. They are included in their order of appearance in the novel for simplicity, starting with the exercise instructor on the telescreen. The subsequent women in order of appearance are Mrs. Parsons, two talking prole women, the singing prole woman, and Mrs. Smith.

The exercise instructor is a female Party member who appears every morning on the telescreen and forces the Party members to do a morning exercise that is called “The Physical Jerks”. She does this by shouting at them and getting them to follow along with her moves.

Winston describes her as “a youngish woman, scrawny but muscular, dressed in tunic and gym-shoes” (p. 39). It is clear that he connects her to the Party, which means that he does not like her. It is not clear, however, that this indicates something about his view of women, other than that she is another woman he dislikes. This dislike goes for most members of the Party.

Mrs. Parsons is, as Winston states, “the wife of a neighbour on the same floor”. She is introduced when she knocks on his door and asks for his help with her sink. Winston describes her as “a colourless, crushed-looking woman, with wispy hair and a lined face” and “a woman of about thirty, but looking much older. One had the impression that there was dust in the creases of her face” (p. 26). His description presents a negative view of this character as well. Although this does not necessarily mean that there is any underlying misogyny, it is yet another example of how he describes a woman negatively.

In the novel, the lowest class of people are called “proles”. Winston watches one of the prole women, who is hanging laundry and singing, from the room above Mr. Charrington’s shop. She is described as “a monstrous woman, solid as a Norman pillar, with brawny red forearms and a sacking apron strapped about her middle” (p. 158). The word “monstrous” is negative and can be argued to indicate misogyny since Winston uses it in conjunction with “woman”. He also uses “monstrous” to describe two other prole women earlier in the novel, which might strengthen the misogyny. The description of her as “solid as a Norman pillar” further indicates that he views her body shape as something negative. Although he later says that she is beautiful and can be argued to connect her to his mother since she is described as a mother figure, having raised children and grandchildren (p. 249), Winston is not necessarily misogynistic since he only focuses on her appearance, e.g. “the body of a woman of fifty” (p. 249). Winston’s changing description of the prole woman can be explained by him unconsciously projecting the positive feelings about his mother and his thoughts about rebelling against the Party onto her. That he starts to think that the woman is

beautiful is a sign of sublimation since the traits that were previously perceived as negative are turned into something positive.

When Winston is captured and put in a cell, he meets a woman who says that her name also is Smith. She is “an enormous wreck of a woman, aged about sixty, with great tumbling breasts and thick coils of white hair which had come down in her struggles” (p. 258). This description also indicates misogyny since she is described in a negative manner. Furthermore, Winston’s description of her breasts, which are connected to women, as large and “tumbling”, in connection with his remark that she is an “enormous wreck”, which is negative, are additional signs of misogyny. When she finds out that Winston is also called Smith, she says that she could be his mother. In his thoughts, he agrees with this. However, he indicates that if that is the case, she is not the same as she used to be since she would have been at the forced-labor camp for twenty years (p. 259). The woman is connected to Winston’s mother and the reason for her degradation is the Party’s treatment of her. His unconscious protects him from feeling guilty about what has possibly happened to his mother since he abandoned her by projecting the guilt onto the Party.

## **5 Discussion**

In this section, the results from the analysis are connected, compared and discussed. This is done in order to show how the psychoanalytic concepts that are present in Winston’s descriptions of and interactions with women are related and what this means regarding his view of women. Furthermore, a short example of how teachers could use an analysis like this in EFL teaching is included. Finally, the results are discussed regarding how they relate to previous research.

As we have seen, Winston’s misogyny can be related to repressed feelings of guilt, regret and sorrow regarding what happened to his mother and sister. These negative feelings

are exemplified the first time that he sees Julia, where it is stated that “he disliked nearly all women, and especially the young and pretty ones” (Orwell, 1949, p. 15). His unconscious represses these feelings by using displacement to replace the mother and sister with women in general in this case. This dislike of women, however, can also be connected to his hatred towards the Party. His first impressions of Julia indicate this, as well as how he relates the Party to Katharine and the exercise instructor.

There are instances in the novel that provide an argument against Winston’s misogyny, however. He does, for instance, describe his mother in a positive way on several occasions in the novel. The first time he mentions her, she is described with words such as “statuesque” and “magnificent” (p. 36), which have positive connotations. His sorrow and regret about her disappearance, or death, not only shows his resurfacing repressed feelings but also portrays her positively. In addition to Winston’s portrayal of his mother and Julia in a positive manner, an argument can be made that Julia represents the mother through displacement in the dream where she stands in a field. This is indicative of a positive view of women since the descriptions are positive in these cases.

However, the fact that he portrays some women in a positive manner is not enough to disprove his misogyny. For example, in the beginning of the novel, Winston views Julia as all other women in the Party. He cannot get her and, therefore, he hates her. As the story progresses, however, he starts to like her. Winston focuses on the sexual aspect of their relationship. Him starting to like her can be connected to when she starts to show interest in him and wants to have sex with him. He hates Julia when he cannot have her. Thus, he only likes her when he thinks that he might get her. Furthermore, he views her as a political tool that can be used to overthrow the Party. This strengthens the argument that he is a misogynist since he uses her in order to rebel against the Party and, thereby, uses sublimation to verify viewing Julia as a political tool.

The misogyny that this essay points to is in line with Patai's (1982) conclusion that Winston views his sexual relationship with Julia as a political act (p. 860), as well as Atwood's (2004) claim that Julia only functions as Winston's temptress. The latter is, however, more an indication of misogyny in Orwell, which might take focus away from Winston but could also be seen as a way of explaining his misogyny. The argument is strengthened by the fact that Winston's views of other women in the novel can also be seen as misogynistic in different ways. For example, he describes Katharine in a clearly negative way, the singing prole woman is objectified, and Mrs. Smith's female body parts are negatively described. Subsequently, the cases of Winston's misogyny this essay points to outweigh the few cases where he describes women in a positive manner. Although this is in line with previous research, this essay provides a new perspective on how to explain this misogyny by looking through a specific Freudian lens. In conclusion, Winston's misogyny can be argued to originate in his childhood since he feels guilty about his mother's and sister's disappearance, which leads to him unconsciously repressing these memories and turning this negative feeling into a general dislike of women. Furthermore, his hatred towards the Party is projected onto Julia, Katharine and other women, which is another explanation for his misogyny.

In order to answer the research question of how a psychoanalytic reading like this can be used to discuss gender equality in EFL teaching, a short example is included here. The teacher can present some or all of the psychoanalytic concepts to a group of students, as well as introduce some basic knowledge about Freud. The teacher then gives them a sheet of questions regarding gender equality and Winston's misogyny to think about while reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Following this, the students can discuss their answers in groups or something similar. This discussion can be related to the students' own opinions and thoughts, as well as problems with Freud's ideas.

Regarding the research field of psychoanalytic criticism and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this essay contributes with a new perspective in that an attempt is made to explain Winston's view of women with the help of Freudian theories. As Köseman (2016) and Smith (1968) concludes, psychoanalytic concepts can be found in the novel and used to uncover certain aspects of it. In this essay, such concepts have been used to uncover Winston's view of women and an explanation for this.

## 6 Conclusion

This essay's aim has been to demonstrate how psychoanalytic theory can be used to explain misogyny for the purposes of discussing gender equality as part of EFL teaching. The research questions that were used to reach the aim were:

- How can a Freudian psychoanalytic reading of Winston Smith's unconscious in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* be used to explain his view of women?
- How can such a psychoanalytic reading be used to discuss gender equality in EFL teaching?

The aim has been fulfilled since a Freudian reading has been applied to the novel and, thereby, demonstrated how Freudian concepts can be used to explain Winston's misogyny that is found in his thoughts about, descriptions of, and interactions with most women.

Regarding the first research question, the analysis shows that Winston's thoughts, descriptions and interactions point to misogyny, which can be traced back to and explained by his guilt regarding his mother's and sister's disappearance in his childhood. The unconscious projections of hatred towards the Party onto Julia, Katharine and other women further explain his misogyny. There are examples of positive descriptions of women in the novel, but these are not enough to disprove the many cases of misogyny that occur. However, the results of this essay are based on subjective interpretations of passages in the novel and Freudian



concepts. Subsequently, they should not be seen as an absolute truth, but rather as an alternative to how one can try to explain misogyny in a novel.

Regarding the second research question, an example of how teachers could use this type of analysis in EFL teaching is included in the discussion. Considering the results of the analysis and what is stated in the Swedish curriculum and syllabus for English, this analysis can be used by teachers to discuss social issues such as gender equality and misogyny with students in order to achieve the goals in the official documents. These goals are that social issues in different parts of the English-speaking world should be covered, as well as that gender equality should be included in the education in Swedish upper-secondary school. Other people can, of course, also benefit from thinking about such things when analyzing novels. Moreover, if we agree that teachers should try to broaden the students' perspectives, as Edmonds (2017) argues, using Freudian concepts in a similar way as has been done in this essay should benefit this broadening and encourage teachers to try applying the Freudian approach when teaching literary analysis.

Future research could go in several directions. Following this essay, interviewing teachers and students that have used this type of analysis in the classroom and ask them if they found it useful would be interesting. This could be done with other novels than *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well, since Freudian concepts can be applied to other fictional characters. Furthermore, one could try to explain Winston's misogyny by analyzing Orwell by looking at his other work, although that would be quite extensive. Another aspect that would be interesting as a research subject is to compare Winston's descriptions of women to the descriptions of men in an attempt to determine if there are any connections that might invalidate the argument that he is misogynistic.

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