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Toward a Critique of Western Psychoanalysis; Indigenous Mythology and the Interpretation of the Human Psyche

Ali Nikoei

Assistant Professor, Department of Science and Art History, Nazar Research Center for Art, Architecture and Urbanism, Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

This paper adopts a critical-analytical approach to examine the structural relationship between myth and modern psychoanalysis, arguing that within the psychoanalytic tradition, myth functions not merely as a literary element but as a conceptual model for understanding unconscious conflicts. Drawing upon the works of Sigmund Freud, this study demonstrates how myths—such as those of Oedipus, Narcissus, Medusa, and Persephone—serve as condensed paradigmatic forms within the Freudian framework to explain concepts including the conflict between desire and law, libidinal investment, castration anxiety, and cycles of loss. The discussion subsequently transitions to the theoretical perspective of Carl Gustav Jung, where the archetype is conceptualized as an a priori structure of the psyche that manifests through diverse mythological forms and ultimately shapes the process of individuation. It is argued that, despite the explanatory power of these models, the mythological foundations of classical psychoanalysis rest predominantly upon ancient Greek mythology, thereby possessing a distinctly Western cultural character. The direct transposition of such models into other cultural contexts risks semantic reduction or interpretive distortion, as every myth is inextricably rooted in a specific network of historical experiences and cultural values. Ultimately, this paper emphasizes the necessity of an indigenous psychoanalysis—an approach wherein the analysis of the psyche is firmly grounded in the specific mythic and cultural narratives of a given society. Such a localized framework yields a more precise, meaningful, and interpretively robust understanding of unconscious forces and psychological conflicts, meticulously contextualized within the unique historical and cultural matrix of individual communities.

Keywords: Myth, Conceptual Model, The Unconscious, Archetype, Indigenous Psychoanalysis.

Email: ali.nikoei1981@gmail.com.

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Can the psychoanalytic model grounded in Greek mythology, as formulated in the works of Sigmund Freud and subsequently consolidated within the theoretical framework of Carl Gustav Jung, be regarded as universally valid across diverse cultural contexts?

Extended Abstract

This paper examines the role of myth as a structural and conceptual model within classical psychoanalysis, emphasizing its analytical utility over its aesthetic value. Modern psychology has long utilized mythology as a heuristic instrument to decipher intrapsychic conflicts. Within the Freudian corpus, myths such as Oedipus and Narcissus serve as condensed paradigmatic frameworks for conceptualizing complex psychodynamics, including the tension between desire and authority, libidinal investment, and castration anxiety. Similarly, in Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, this paradigm is systematized through archetypes—a priori psychic structures manifested across cultures. Here, mythological narratives illustrate universal psychological processes, such as encountering the shadow, which ultimately inform individuation.

Despite their formidable explanatory power, classical psychoanalytic models remain inextricably anchored in Greco-Roman and Western mythologies, thereby reflecting a culturally specific epistemic framework. The uncritical transposition of these Western models into non-Western contexts—including Hindu, Semitic, or Iranian cultures—risks interpretive distortion and semantic reduction. Since myths are deeply embedded within specific networks of localized cultural values and historical experiences, this epistemic limitation underscores the imperative for an indigenous psychoanalysis. This approach demands that psychological analysis be fundamentally grounded in the distinct myths, archetypes, and narrative traditions of the host culture. By contextualizing methodologies within local mythic frameworks, indigenous psychoanalysis preserves both symbolic integrity and analytical efficacy. This localized framework successfully reconciles the universality of psychic structures with the multiplicity of cultural expressions, fostering a more precise, interpretively robust, and culturally attuned analytical practice. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that myth is a dynamic instrument for comprehending the psyche, whose optimal efficacy is realized only when situated within its appropriate cultural horizon. Consequently, the comparative study of cross-cultural mythologies emerges as a vital trajectory for advancing psychoanalytic theory within a globally pluralistic landscape.

Myths in classical psychoanalysis function not as literary elements but as conceptual models for understanding unconscious conflicts, serving an analytical role comparable to that of scientific models. Classical psychoanalysis, largely grounded in Greek and broader Western mythological traditions, cannot be automatically applied to other cultural contexts. A meaningful understanding of the human psyche within any given society therefore requires the creative recontextualization and indigenization of these models through their integration with the indigenous myths and cultural narratives of that society.

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