Psychoanalytical Criticism

Psychological Criticism
- Relates text to events in author’s life
  - ex: poem about sister may imply secret incestuous feelings
- Question why author wrote text, even upon receiving their answer
  - Real reason may actually be hidden in back of author’s mind
- Psychological Ideas
  - Isolation: Separating one’s own emotions from an unpleasant situation
    - Dad’s dead, but I can’t worry about it, I got a game on Sunday
  - Intellectualization: Analyzing a situation instead of reacting to it
    - Friend was in a car crash, I’m looking into how unsafe SUV’s are
  - Repression: Choosing to “forget” what is displeasing
    - So I broke my leg, doesn’t mean anything to me
  - Projection: Attributing one’s own emotions to someone else
    - I’m not jealous, I think she is though
  - Displacement: Shifting one’s own emotions to someone else
    - Don’t want to talk about my brother, I’m worried about Mom
  - Denial: Conjuring a false reality to suppress the true reality
    - I graduated from Harvard two years ago, I never dropped out
  - Reversal: Turning an emotion around
    - I’m not overreacting, you are
  - Reaction Formation: Behavioral pattern that continues to reverse the truth
    - I’ve been working here for so long, even after they put me in the basement

Freud’s Article: Fetishism
- Fetishes in men are a result of a form of castration anxiety
  - A form of Reaction Formation
  - Brought about when a young boy finds the absence of penis on his mother, and the next inanimate object he focuses on becomes the center of a fetish later in life
  - Fetish created to preserve extinction of boy’s penis
  - Acts as substitute for boy’s belief in a penis on his mother, which he still believes in the back of his mind

Applying Psychological Criticism: A Narrow Fellow in the Grass (pg. 206)
- Seems to be talking about a snake
  - Original title was “The Snake” (added in by an editor, not Dickinson)
  - Narrow fellow = snake
  - “Grass divides...” = snake moving through grass
  - “...Boggy Acre” = ideal place for a hiding snake
- Why’s the speaker a boy? (Source: Norton Anthology: American Literature Book C)
  - Religion was an essential part of Dickinson’s education
    - Reference to Jesus or Adam perhaps
  - Older brother, Austin, was one of her closest friends
  - Women still segregated during this time
  - Favorite poet that was alive in her time was John Keats
- What does the phrase “Zero at the Bone” mean?
  - Stanza’s second-to-last line is “Without a tighter breathing”
• Possibly talking about the effects of venom
• No more meat after reaching the bones
  • doesn’t seem right since snakes crush their food and swallow it whole
• First 2 lines in final stanza are “But never met this Fellow, Attended or alone”
  • Speaker never actually saw the snake, either alive or dead

• Possible meaning behind poem
• Some people are forgotten with time
  • 3rd line, 1st stanza, “You may have met Him-did you not...”
  • Grass = masses of people you may know
  • “It wrinkled, and was gone” = see their face for a moment, but then forget
  • Final stanza, “But never met this Fellow” = don’t remember them
• Many of Dickinson’s friends married and moved away during her lifetime
  • may have felt like she was left and forgotten by them