

The Battle of Egocentrism: It's my delusion and I'll see it through thank you very much

One possible approach we can take to analyzing and understanding literature is to approach it as a kind of psychological study of character. It is not necessary to have a deep background in psychology to be able to do this. One of the first ideas is to get a handle on two figures in a narrative: the first is the narrator the second is the main character or protagonist. At times these are one in the same, at times the latter is a difficult figure to pin down.

Let's take a look at some possible topics of observation on your part as a reader.

What happens when the construct a character decides upon to inform and inhabit his life is a questionable or even delusional construct? What's a reader to do?

- Don Quixote *Don Quixote*
- Willie Lowman *Death of a Salesman*
- Jay Gatsby *The Great Gatsby*
- Lennie Smalls *Of Mice and Men*
- John the Savage *Brave New World*
- Seymour Levov (The Swede) *American Pastoral*
- Kurtz *Heart of Darkness*
- Gregor Samsa *The Metamorphosis*
- King Lear *King Lear*
- The Underground Man *Notes from the Underground*

Some questions to ask:

- What is the genesis of the delusion?
- How delusional thinking begins is often a key to unlocking the reliability of a character and the view of life that character might hold. Whatever rupture occurs, and generally that rupture is alluded to but rarely fully revealed, it serves to cause the character to abandon the norm and seek either comfort or safety in the arms of an alternative ideal.

Is there anything that continually ensnares the character and returns him/her to this moment?

What triggers exist which trap this individual?

Are these triggers environmental, cultural, communal, self-imposed, or the work of a nefarious antagonist?

What does not kill me...well it can kill me

The ego is often destroyed or at least injured when it is forced to confront a world populated by figures who do not see the world in the same way. This destruction may come after defiance and fight and even loss. It may mean death. Or may mean a giving up. At the very least it marks a recognition, even if dimly in the character's understanding. That recognition is at the very root of tragedy. A character must have a glimmer of understanding of what has occurred. Otherwise the tragedy devolves into mere cruelty.

Ego Blinds But It Also Binds

Egocentrism often prevents a character from seeing reality, the set of experiences the writer places them in, clearly. For the egotist Love is not pure or true it is tainted or perverted in some measure. Harm or injury is magnified to be viewed as the product of malicious intent, the balance that must exist for successful relationships to take place is marginalized to a cost benefit ratio. As Martin Burber might lament the I, THOU relationship denigrates to the ME, you.

Often the problem being worked out by the writer through the character is not the blindness of the character to the damaging effects of the egocentrism, but rather the binding that affixes the character to this view. The roots that fasten him steadfast to this line of thinking and believing and living.

Narcissism

The hallmarks of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) are grandiosity, a lack of empathy for other people, and a need for admiration. People with this condition are frequently described as arrogant, self-centered, manipulative, and demanding. Although often depicted as highly intelligent, a character's narcissism can lead to alienation and antisocial behavior. Isolation through the eyes of the narcissist is simply society's failure to recognize greatness. This individual is often unaware of how their behavior and interactions with others are damaging. In general, there is a lack of empathy toward others, and a writer developing this type of characters may need a very big shock event or encounter to resolve this disorder in the character, if that is the writer's intent.