psychoanalytic literary criticism emerges specifically from a therapeutic technique which the Viennese neurologist Sigmund Freud developed for the treatment of hysteria and neurosis at the end of the nineteenth century. A description of the cure, which one of Freud’s patients ingeniously called ‘the talking cure’, gives an idea of the unusual origin of this approach to literature. The therapy evolved from the initial observation that patients were relieved of their neurotic symptoms by recalling the memory of certain events and ideas related to infantile sexuality. During the cure, which consists of an interchange of words between a patient and an analyst, the latter draws the patient’s attention to signs of forgotten or repressed memories which perturb his or her speech. But, for the therapy to work, the patient must obey the fundamental rule: namely, he or she must say everything that comes into his or her mind, ‘even if it is disagreeable, even if it seems unimportant or actually nonsensical’. A first difficulty lies in the fact that I am pressed to tell embarrassing thoughts which I would rather keep quiet about. However, the greatest difficulty is that I am also curiously supposed to tell the analyst what ‘I do not know’—that is, thoughts which are so thoroughly unfamiliar to me that they appear to be anything but mine. These alien ideas intervene in my speech in all manner of ways, by making me repeat twice the same word or omit a crucial one, by making me say no instead of yes, do the opposite of what I aimed to do, just as neurotic symptoms do in the course of everyday actions. Their unfamiliarity comes from the fact that they both reveal and conceal something which is repressed or unconscious, and which tries to ‘return’.1 The cure also involves the process of transference, whereby the patient unconsciously takes the analyst to be the reincarnation of important figures from his or her childhood or past. With the analyst, the patient repeats repressed affective experiences. Symptoms, mental illness, and even normal mental life remain inexplicable for Freud without the hypothesis that unconscious mental activity permanently determines, gives a form to, and participates in our conscious life. From the 1890s onwards, psychoanalysis endeavoured to provide a theory for explaining this disturbing participation, and a theory for alleviating its pathological effects.

Since, according to psychoanalysis, there is a continuity between pathological and normal occurrences, what began as a therapeutic technique gradually developed into a theory of the human psyche and of human culture whereby everything—from the most anodyne to the most important occurrence—is meaningful and calls for interpretation.
Psychoanalysis studied neurotic symptoms in conjunction with dreams, jokes, and 'the psychopathology of everyday life'—that is, mistakes of all sorts, such as slips of the tongue or of the pen, bungled actions, forgettings (for example, 'the forgetting of proper names')—as well as art, literature, and religion, with a view towards establishing the laws of functioning of the 'mental apparatus', as Freud called his hypothetical model of the mind or the psyche. Psychoanalytic concepts and technique, then, are conceived as being generally valid for the interpretation of all types of human activity, including art and literature. Does literature really lend itself to a decipherment, in the way in which Freud believed that psychic phenomena do, with reference to unconscious life? Or is it impervious to psychoanalytic knowledge, or even to all forms of knowledge?

Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. Just as psychoanalytic theory has infiltrated the whole of culture and decisively marked our mode of thinking in many domains, so psychoanalysis has impacted on literary studies in a diffuse manner. However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature (and what closely relates to it: language, rhetoric, style, story-telling, poetry) is fundamentally intertwined with the psyche. Hence, understanding psychoanalytic approaches to literature requires us to reflect upon various ways in which this close connection is conceived. It requires us to question the putative proximity of, or even the identity between, unconscious psychical and literary processes as one of their most common theoretical assumptions.

In the remainder of this chapter I introduce aspects of the psychoanalytical mode of thinking under six headings, each of which allows us to reflect upon its diffusion in literary studies. First, there are the earliest attempts at psychoanalytic literary criticism, which consisted in the application of psychoanalysis to literary works. Mostly inspired by Freud's essays on art and literature, these studies assumed that psychoanalysis dispenses a method for understanding art and literature, and that what call for elucidation are not the artistic and literary works themselves, but rather the psychopathology and biography of the artist, the writer, or fictional characters. However, the second section shows that psychoanalysis is not concerned only with psycho-biographical contents of works of art or literature, but just as crucially with the mechanisms of their fabrication. The development of psychoanalytic literary criticism is marked by a shift of emphasis from contents to formal aspects of texts. A consideration of Freud's analysis of a 'faulty action' illustrates, in the third section, the form which this psychoanalytical interest takes. The shift from contents to texts presupposes the idea that unconscious and literary processes resemble each other in ways that are differently conceived by successive generations of literary critics, as the fourth section explores. The shift from content to text is indebted to, among others, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who proposed a linguistic interpretation of the unconscious, which the fifth section presents briefly. Finally, the last section shows that the question of what constitutes the proper object of analysis (authors, readers, characters, texts), which permeates all psychoanalytic approaches to literature, has come to include Freud's theories themselves. Freud encouraged this development by associating scientific research with fiction. A significant, if
and the is of the proper the laws of the received as the field of the difficult question of what it means to devise theories of literature.

The application of psychoanalysis to literary works

Psychoanalytic literary criticism first developed as a type of ‘applied’ psychoanalysis. Under this heading, Freud and his collaborators—Otto Rank, Theodor Reik, Wilhelm Stekel, and Ernest Jones, among others—ventured into the study of literary works, as well as into anthropology, sociology, and religion during the first decades of the twentieth century. It emerged from Freud’s general idea that creative writings are the product of unconscious processes, and that it is possible to understand how the mechanisms of the psychological forces operate in them. The topics of these early psychoanalytic studies are telling, for example, they concern ‘Baudelaire’s incestuous love’, ‘Flaubert’s affectivity’, ‘Poetry and Neurosis’, or aim to provide a ‘Psycho-sexual Portrait of the Artist’. Approaching literary works in psychoanalytical terms in this vein consists in diagnosing the psychological health of the writer, the artist, or the character, by treating his or her work as a symptom of sexual frustrations and repressions. Works of art and literature become substitutes for the creator’s pathological ideas or affects, which must be elucidated by means of a specific method. In adopting this primarily biographical approach, one inevitably comes up with a repertoire of symbols and themes relating to the creator’s life (attachment to the mother, fear of castration, ambivalence towards the father, narcissism, etc.) which are believed to have motivated the creation of the work. The repertoire of themes is not necessarily the matter of individual writers. They belong to the mythological, religious, folk, and literary traditions of particular nations. For example, Freud in ‘The Uncanny’ (1919) and Otto Rank in ‘Narcissism and the Double’ have explored how literary representations of the double motif, as in the legend of Narcissus or in Oscar Wilde’s The Portrait of Dorian Gray, are related, among other things, to a defensive attitude towards love, to paranoia, to the fear of death.

Freud’s essay ‘Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood’ (1910) can be seen to represent what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, summing up a view now shared by many commentators, called the ‘bad’ psychoanalysis of art. Freud undertakes a psychoanalytical biography whereby the stages of Leonardo’s art and his extreme scientific curiosity are attributed to a regression to childhood fixations; intense love for his mother, which he represses but also preserves by identifying with her and developing a homosexual love for boys. The analysis hinges upon the unique childhood memory left by the painter in his notebooks: ‘while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail [coda], and struck me many times with its tail against my lips’. Given its improbable quality, and the fact that it dates from such an early age in childhood, the memory, Freud suggests, is a phantasy—that is, the ‘residual memory’ of an early experience which is altered and falsified. Leonardo’s wording needs to be ‘translated’ into ‘words that are generally understood’; since a tail, coda, is one of the most familiar symbols and
substitutive expressions for the male organ, the scene represents 'a sexual act', which is essentially passive, 'in which the penis is put into the mouth of the person involved'.

Freud, aware of the indignation that such an interpretation is bound to provoke, since it might tarnish the image of the great artist, none the less maintains that the phantasy 'must have some meaning, in the same way as any other psychical creation: a dream, a vision or a delirium'. The memory repeats the act of suckling at the mother's breast, our first experience of pleasure in life. Freud explores the connection between the representation of the mother by the ancient Egyptians and the vulture. (Is it a coincidence, he asks, if a mother goddess possessing a vulture's head was called Mut, which comes so near the German Mutter?) In brief, the phantasy tells us, by various means, about Leonardo's excessive attachment to his mother. These pieces of analysis should indicate the way in which the artist's works are interpreted (let us recall that one of the tasks of psychoanalysis is 'to lift the veil of amnesia which hides the earliest years of childhood' since everything present can be explained with reference to the past).

One of the most representative pieces of 'applied psychoanalysis' is the 1933 study of Poe entitled The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, by Marie Bonaparte. Bonaparte proposed a clinical portrait of the writer, which was supposed to account for his works, in line with the idea that in creative writing the author's complexes are projected into the work, albeit in masked form. For example, the enigmatic hero of The Man in the Crowd is a portrait of Poe's foster-father John Allan, who, by means of various distortions, is transformed from a bourgeois into a criminal whose crime cannot be told. She links the avarice of the hero in the story to the greed of Poe's foster-father and finds in the biographical details concerning the writer's life with the Allans justifications for the suspense which the tale maintains about the deeds of the 'sinister and avaricious old man'. In so far as it is thought to make Poe's works a catalogue of biographical and psychological data, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe now serves as a negative model for applied psychoanalytic criticism.

The main grievances against this particular study, and more generally against works of 'applied' psychoanalysis, are that they neglect the formal aspects of their object of research and limit their inquiry to the relationship between authors and their works. Such studies trace certain themes and motifs of the work back to repressed experiences in early childhood, as the hero of The Man in the Crowd is traced back to Poe's sinister foster-father, but they do not focus sufficiently on the specific literary transformation which this entails (not all difficult relations to a foster-father give rise to a short fiction such as The Man in the Crowd). In other words, studies such as Bonaparte's are not so much concerned with the nature of the connection between psychology and aesthetics. They merely assume that there is a connection, and interpret works on the basis of this perplexing assumption.

From contents to texts

In 'Leonardo', Freud interestingly points out that there are limitations to the psychoanalytic interpretations of literary and artistic works. His warnings, however, do not
pertain to the neglect of form, as do the grievances of the opponents of applied psychoanalysis such as the art historians Clive Bell and Roger Fry in the 1930s and the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in the 1970s. On the contrary, Freud's warning encourages, albeit indirectly, a formal view of art and literature on which, *mutatis mutandis*, psychoanalytic approaches to literature, at least since the 1950s, have drawn. Freud notes the uncertainty of the methods with respect to the 'profound transformations through which an impression in an artist's life has to pass before it is allowed to make a contribution to a work of art'. There is no easy passage from life to work. Works of art or of literature, says Freud, express the artist's or the writer's 'most secret mental impulses', but they do so according to a peculiar kind of expression. What is expressed is a distortion of a repressed impulse, of a thwarted wish, the falsification, the substitution of an unpleasurable impression, and ways have to be devised to overcome the resistance of consciousness.

Freud's task, therefore, is to describe the 'unconscious dexterity', the talent which the unconscious has for transforming impulses, hidden motives, 'intentions', instinctual forces (the many names for what causes movement in the psyche) into verbal and visual forms. It is most profoundly in this capacity that Freud's theory of the mind has had an impact on the study of literature, rather than for the embarrassing repertoire of set meanings which it has unwillingly created. For to literature, too, is attributed a complicated power of transformation, which has given rise, at least since Aristotle's *Poetics*, to treatises about how it functions. The focus of attention is, accordingly, not the artist's or the writer's psychical biography, but the creative and ingenious functioning of the 'mental apparatus'. The method developed by Freud works on the principle that the meaning of a psychical manifestation, such as a work of literature, lies in its means of production. Interpreting a dream or a delirium, for example, is to spell out how the dream or the delirium was formed. Knowledge of the dream's meaning is knowledge of its construction.

Freud's detailed account of psychical mechanisms, found especially in his early works such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), and *Jokes and their Relations to the Unconscious* (1905), turns out to resemble an *ars poetica*: unconscious mechanisms (displacement, distortion, condensation, etc.) produce poetical effects which can be analysed thanks to a method that comes close to literary analysis.

**'The Subtleties of a Faulty Action'**

The development of psychoanalytic approaches to literature proceeds from the shift of emphasis from 'content' to the fabric of artistic and literary works. A short text by Freud entitled 'The Subtleties of a Faulty Action' (1935) shows strikingly the style of interpretation that psychoanalysis develops, whereby it is not psycho-sexual contents that predominate but a formal interest in unconscious means of action. The 'faulty action'
illustrates the extent to which Freud's work involves the reader in a myriad stories. The narration pertains to the preparation of a birthday present for a woman friend, consisting of 'a small engraved gem for insertion into a ring'. The gem is attached to a piece of cardboard on which Freud writes: ‘“Voucher for the supply of Messrs. L., jewellers, of a gold ring ... for the attached stone bearing an engraved ship with sail and oars”’. Between 'ring' and 'for', however, Freud inadvertently adds an 'entirely irrelevant' word: 'between “ring” and “for” there stood a word which I was obliged to cross out ... It was the little word “bis” [the German for ‘till’ and the Latin “bis”—for a “second time”].’ Why has Freud written that word at all?

The 'faulty action' is an error of style, an 'aesthetic difficulty', as Freud puts it, and the analysis must therefore be partly stylistic. This fairly simple instance of an unconscious construction allows us to see the slow progress of a psychoanalytical interpretation in so far as it starts again three times, according to the associations which successively present themselves to the analyst. At first, the error is considered as a stylistic matter. In reading his inscription, Freud notes the repetition of the word 'for' ['før'], which 'sounded ugly'. He had therefore probably substituted 'bis' to avoid a 'stylistic awkwardness'. However, 'bis' [the German word for 'till'] can in no way replace 'for' if the sentence is to make sense. Freud surmises that the unrelated word 'bis' must in fact be the Latin 'bis', which means 'for the second time', and that 'bis' acts as a stylistic warning against the repetition of the same word, that it acts as a criticism of his writing. The error fulfills a curative function, since the stylistic inelegance can easily be corrected by crossing out the superfluous word.

Second, the slip of the pen is attributed an aesthetic function. For Freud, works of art serve the function of lifting inhibitions and are pleasurable in precisely that capacity. Yet, the work of art lifts inhibitions only indirectly, through the aesthetic form. The latter procures enjoyment. It offers, as Freud puts it, an 'incentive bonus' or a 'fore-pleasure'—that is to say, it bribes us into experiencing a certain kind of pleasure so as to allow the release of still greater pleasure arising from the lifting of more recalcitrant repressions. It is in this sense that Freud attributes an aesthetic function to the 'faulty action': the concern for a beautiful style is a diversion from an instinctual conflict, from incompatible ideas or wishes. Freud submits the result of his analysis to his daughter, who suggests that the word 'bis' does not signal the repetition of the same word, but rather that of the same present. However, this is not the meaning of the slip, for Freud finally comes to the conclusion that it conceals the real motive of the mistake: namely, the wish not to give the gem away at all, because Freud 'liked it very much' himself. The conflict between two wishes—to offer and to keep a gem—has created an 'aesthetic difficulty'.

Correspondences between literary and unconscious processes

The shift 'from content to text' goes together with the idea that the unconscious and, more generally, the functioning of the mental apparatus and literary processes are
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aologous, and that, like the 'faulty action', they require analogous methods of analysis. But what exactly is analogous to what? Freud himself does not provide a clear answer. He sometimes likens artistic activities to children's play or to phantasy, and literary or artistic works to dreams, to neurotic symptoms, or warns against too rigid an association between the artist and the neurotic. It is perhaps the very indefiniteness of the analogy that prompted successive generations of literary critics and psychoanalysts to bring together elements of Freud's theories of the mind with those of literature, on the lasting assumption that they belong together. For example, Marie Bonaparte focused exclusively on the relationship between author and text because she, like many others, believed that literary works can be compared to dreams. Just as a dream tells us about the dreamer's infantile wishes, a literary work tells us about the infantile wishes of the author. After Bonaparte, literary critics such as Ernst Kris and Norman Holland in the 1950s and the 1960s proposed considering literary works in terms of Freud's structural model of the mind elaborated in the 1920s. Here, the mental apparatus is composed of three agencies which interact with each other: the id, the seat of instinctual drives; the ego, which wards off the intrusion of the id; and the superego, which accumulates traces of authorial figures and acts as a critical agency towards the ego. The relationships between these agencies provided literary critics with a model by means of which to consider the relationship between readers and texts, whereby the formal aspects of texts are thought both to conceal from and attract the reader towards inadmissible desires and wishes.

More recently, the literary critic Peter Brooks proposed that it is in the affective relationship that develops during the cure between the analyst and the analysand—the relationship of transference—that one finds the most useful model of the text. 'Transference, as he explains in 'The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism' (1988), is for him the best psychoanalytic concept for understanding the way in which 'we constitute ourselves as human subjects in part through our fictions'. Transference consists in the representation of the past in the present situation of the cure. In recounting, the analysand repeats disconnected past events involving the analyst, because he or she is unable to remember the painful and repressed past. The analyst helps the analysand remember by ordering the events into a narrative, by presenting to the analysand what Freud calls 'constructions', which are tentative reconstitutions of the past. Elements of these stories might coincide with repressed thoughts from the analysand's past and prompt him or her to remember. For Brooks, repetition is a basic feature both of the process of transference and of the experience of literature, since 'most of its tropes [rhyme, alliteration, assonance, meter, refrain] are in some manner repetitions'. Transference produces an 'intermediate region' between illness and reality (since it creates an artificial illness amenable to the intervention of the analyst), and this 'makes it sound very much like a literary text'. For the literary text too gives rise to a dialogue in an intermediate space of sorts. With the transference model, the object of analysis is no longer either the author or the reader, but 'reading', since 'meaning is not simply in the text' nor wholly the fabrication of a reader (or community of readers) but comes into being in the dialogic struggle and collaboration of the two, in the activation of textual
possibilities in the process of reading. These few examples rely on comparisons between different elements of the psyche and literary ones. Are these comparisons compatible with each other? Can the dream-work and the process of transference, for example, both simultaneously be 'like the literary text'? The inconsistent superimpositions of literature and the psyche oblige us to expand our understanding of Freud's theories and of what we mean by 'literary text'. Indeed, what kind of literary texts, and what kind of psychical life, are entailed by the numerous comparisons between texts and literature propounded by literary critics?

Language

The gradual move away from 'persons' (authors, readers, or fictive characters) towards text and towards reading and writing operations marks the development of psychoanalytic literary criticism. This development is indebted to a large extent to the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who proposed in the 1950s a 'linguistic' interpretation of Freud. Freud's theories, according to Lacan, give us a radical view of human subjects and motivations, but his greatest insights are stifled by being couched in terms of instinct, 'mental apparatus', impulses, 'intentions', etc., and by being attached to traditional psychological and philosophical conceptions of the self, which are incompatible with the idea of the unconscious. One of Freud's most striking psychoanalytic teachings, for Lacan, is that 'the subject is divided' insofar as it is a speaking subject—that is, in so far as it takes part in the process of signification by relating to other subjects through language. Hence, psychoanalysis is concerned primarily with the intermingling of human subjects and language. This complicated insight, which is Freud's greatest achievement, but which is obscured by the concepts which Freud borrows from the natural sciences, must be released from Freud.

In order to emphasize the centrality of language, Lacan transposed Freudian concepts into the language of structural linguistics initiated by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. (He also articulated Freud's ideas alongside those of philosophers such as Hegel, Descartes, and Heidegger, concerned in their own ways with human subjects and language.) In his Course in General Linguistics (1916), based on his teachings between 1906 and 1911, Saussure introduced a theory of the sign which renewed the fields of linguistics, anthropology, literary theory, and psychoanalysis. Saussure's view of language as a system of signs has made of language a model for the understanding of all forms of social and cultural life. Structuralism in all these fields was based on the idea that the latter, including literature, could also be analysed as systems of signs. For Saussure, the sign is made up of the inseparable union of a signifier and a signified (like the recto and the verso of a sheet of paper). It unites two realms (the signifier is the sound realm and the signified, the thought realm), which are made up of undifferentiated sounds and ideas. Language does not represent things in the world. Rather, we distinguish between differ-
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ent classes of objects in the world by virtue of signs. Meaning does not lie in any one isolated sign, but in a differential relationship between signs, for ‘in language there are only differences without positive terms’. Language is a collective and anonymous property, which results from the accumulation since time immemorial of individual acts of speech.

The transposition of Freudian ideas on to concepts in linguistics and philosophy underlies all of Lacan’s work, but is spelled out most clearly in two major texts: ‘The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis’ (1953) and ‘The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious’ (1957). Saussure’s concepts, which are considerably reworked, can replace fruitfully Freud’s biological terminology. As Malcolm Bowie shows in Lacan (1991), the redesign of Saussure’s definition of the sign prepares the ground for the reworking of Freud’s description of the dynamics of the mind. Whereas in Saussure, the signified and the signifier are accorded equal importance, Lacan introduces a ‘disproportion’ between the two, and gives prominence to the relationship between signifiers over any other relationship. The importance accorded to signifiers (their belonging to a constraining, signifying chain which nevertheless comprises possibilities of freedom) allows for a comparison of the functioning of language with literature and poetry, which prepares the ground for the comparison between unconscious processes and language (literature and poetry, for Lacan, provided a theoretical and practical model for the psychoanalyst). For the two aspects of language are associated with two axes (vertical and horizontal) and given a rhetorical function (metaphor and metonymy). The ‘law of the signifier’ is the law according to which meaning is produced along these two axes.

These few elements from Lacan’s emendation of Saussure’s theory should suffice to make comprehensible his famous formula that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’. For it emerges from the idea that the dream-work, and therefore unconscious processes, as Freud describes them in The Interpretation of Dreams (especially the processes of condensation and displacement), follow ‘the law of the signifier’. They too correspond to the rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy (as the linguists Émile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson argued mutatis mutandis). Modified Saussurean concepts provide the framework in which to describe what Freud presents as drives and impulses. Lacan’s related notions of the ‘divided subject’, of the Other, and of desire, ensue from the structuring role given to language. The movements of desire are detached irresponsibly from instinctual contents, but reside in language, over which individuals have no control.

Literary critics, independently of Lacan, have explored the link between unconscious mechanisms, language, and rhetoric. In ‘Freud and Literature’ (1947), Lionel Trilling argued that Freud had made ‘poetry indigenous to the very constitution of the mind’, by discovering ‘in the very organization of the mind those mechanisms by which art makes its effects, such as the condensation of meanings and displacements’. For the historian Hayden White in ‘Freud’s Tropology of Dreaming’ (1999), the crucial chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams on ‘The Dream-work’, is a major ‘contribution to the general field
of theory of figuration', since Freud's descriptions tally with nineteenth-century traditional theories of tropes, which his work somehow reinvents. The literary critic Harold Bloom, on the other hand, had assimilated the dynamics of tropes to that of the mechanisms of defence, rather than to the operations of dream-work. Defences are operations which aim to protect the ego from internal invasions of excitations. Bloom explains defence mechanisms as movements of withdrawal, of limitation, which are contradicted by the move forwards of the drives. For Bloom, Freud's book Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) shows the clash of these two movements, which coincide with what he calls the 'poetic will'.9 Kenneth Burke too, in 'The Philosophy of Literary Form' (1967), has explored the ingenuity of Freud's ideas in helping us to understand the operations of poetry whilst drawing attention to the divergences between neurosis and poetry.

With Lacan, the analogy between literature and unconscious processes, which has preoccupied us so far, is absorbed into the broader project of demonstrating that the fundamental trait of human subjects is language, and that the object of any theory of the subject is by necessity a theory of language. The enormous influence which his work has had in the field of literary study may be explained partly by the way in which he obliges us to question explicitly the various comparisons between literature and unconscious processes which underlie psychoanalytic criticism. With this emphasis, Freud's theories become a place from which to raise questions of interpretation, rhetoric, style, and figuration.

**Freud's theories**

The power of invention, the capacity for 'ingenuity and wit' of the unconscious, is manifest not only in accidental events such as slips of the pen or in literary works. It can be envisaged on another scale, as a factor, so to speak, of historical development. At this level too, psychoanalysis encounters fiction and literary concerns. Freud's controversial book Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays (1939 [1934–8]), is an ambitious attempt to show that the return of the repressed and processes of distortion determine the formation of religious and historical thought. As a case in point, Freud considers the history of the Jewish people. Freud called his book a 'historical novel' because he associates novels with speculative scientific research, but also because history and tradition too have something in common with the formation of phantasy, dreams, and neurotic symptoms. History and tradition are akin to 'works of fiction' or 'imaginative stories', as the stories which children invent about their parents in 'Family Romances' (1909 [1908]) show. (Note that, for Freud, the case study, the reports on the cure, such as 'Dora' or 'The Little Hans', also reads like a novel.) Freud is not suggesting, however, that history is altogether fictional, as some commentators might say, but rather that under-
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Freud keeps calling attention to the resemblance between aspects of his research on
the psyche to fiction making. He repeatedly underlines how his mode of exposition
comes close to fiction, story-telling, or even mythology, given the way in which his
object of study—unconscious psychical life—seemingly interferes with classical forms of
theorization. One well-known example of this kind of remark is found in a letter to
Wilhelm Fliess in which Freud expresses the nature of the difficulty he had in writing The
Interpretation of Dreams (1900) in the following manner: 'what I dislike about [the book]
is the style. I was quite unable to express myself with noble simplicity, but lapsed into a
facetious, circumlocutory straining after the picturesque', which ensues from the dream
itself.10 Freud, moreover, designates his early attempt at providing an account of mem-
ory in the Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) as a ‘neurological fiction’ to mark both
its reliance on and its distance from existing neurology.

Freud's pairing of scientific research and fiction has encouraged commentators and
literary theorists to concentrate on the construction of Freud's theories themselves.
Literary critics have studied Freud's writings in order to analyse his rhetoric of persua-
sion, to praise the literary qualities of his texts, or to show that the theory of psycho-
analysis is inseparable from a reflection upon problems of writing, form, and expression.
This approach to Freud entails drawing our attention to the reciprocity between psycho-
analysis and literature, and submitting psychoanalysis itself to the style of interpretation
which it has taught us. (The interest in Freud's mode of exposition and theorization is
not carried out necessarily under the heading of 'literary theory'—as, for example, in
Jacques Derrida's influential essay 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' (1966), which exam-
ines the relationship between Freud's concept of the unconscious and of memory, and
the metaphor of writing.)

The shift of emphasis from contents to texts, which, as we saw, characterizes the
development of psychoanalytic literary criticism, is matched by a shift of emphasis
from the 'content' of Freudian psychoanalytic theory to its formal aspects. Psychoanaly-
lytic approaches to literature have become inseparable from the question as to how
theories relate to their object of research, and Freud's work raises this problem relent-
lessly. Rather than providing a ready-made method for the interpretation of literature,
Freudian thought continues to present itself as an obvious place in which questions
concerning the interpretation of literature are constantly relaunched.

FURTHER READING

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NOTES


