

# THE FREUD ENCYCLOPEDIA

## Theory, Therapy, and Culture

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grandchildren. Given that natural selection would select the genes only of sons who succeeded in this way, sexy-son behavior could provide an evolutionary rationale for the male Oedipus complex.

Surprisingly enough, it could also do so for the female equivalent. This is because, if preferential parental investment is directed by parents to such sexy sons, daughters discriminated against on the basis of their sex should be selected, first to diagnose their own and siblings' sex reliably, and second to be motivated to compete for resources that brothers may be receiving by virtue of being male. Such might be the evolutionary basis of *penis envy*, particularly in view of Freud's report that women often link complaints about the lack of a penis with a further, surprising one "that her mother did not give her enough milk, did not suckle her long enough" (1931, p. 234).

At the very least, these suggestions are enough to show that it would be premature to write off infantile sexuality as wholly without biological justification, however strange it may seem to the minds of adults (Badcock, 1994). Certainly, it was Freud's view that "all our provisional ideas in psychology will presumably some day be based on an organic substructure" (1914, p. 78). Whether this will be so in the case of the libido theory remains to be seen, but current developments suggest that major surprises may yet be in store and that Freud's thinking on this central issue will continue to receive attention for a considerable time to come.

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- CHRISTOPHER BADCOCK

### Literature, and Psychoanalysis

Whatever may be the fate of psychoanalysis as a psychological theory, literary historians of the future will surely regard its influence as one of the signatures of twentieth-century writing. Almost from the beginning of the century, the literary world greeted Freud as the bringer of revolutionary insights into the working of the mind. The enthusiasm with which Freud was received betrays the profound affinity between his point of view and the reigning assumptions of modern artistic culture; Freud did not so much change the course of literary production as crystallize and deepen its central tendencies. To illustrate the character of Freud's influence, it will suffice to examine three prominent motifs: the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, and repression.

#### The Unconscious

The term "unconscious," signifying a hidden order of mind, enjoyed currency more than a hundred years before the beginning of psychoanalysis. It was closely related to the romantic notion of genius—a capacity for artistic practice that, while purposeful and orderly, can give no account of itself nor be reduced to rules or intellectual principles. Post-romantic culture invested great significance in spontaneous imagination, in the mysteries of fantasy and dream. Idealist philosophers from Schelling onward glimpsed "unconscious" structures of order, or the "ruse of reason," as Hegel put it, behind the surface of appearances. The tendency to discover hidden orders took on an aggressive cast with the "unmasking critiques" of Marx, Nietzsche, and, finally, Freud, all of whom sought to show the importance of what was concealed beneath the polite surface of social existence.

For the twentieth century, Freud's conception of the unconscious provided writers with a powerful validation for the promptings of intuition, the sense of inner significance and complexity, as well as the deceptiveness of appearances. They frequently saw themselves as following Freud in a difficult, even heroic process of self-discovery and self-revelation. Getting in touch with the

unconscious became a formula for literary power, and many solicited the "dark gods" D. H. Lawrence thought to dwell beneath the surface of the conscious mind. Some writers and artists, under the banner of "surrealism," attempted not only to make contact with the unconscious but to give themselves over to its logic; their method was to censor all conscious inhibitions and accustomed associations to produce an impression of liberating shock and disorientation. Thanks to their efforts, the imitation of dream logic, the disjointed logic of the unconscious, has become a common element of literary and artistic rhetoric. Since the 1960s, it has been visible through the whole range of culture, from television commercials to the "magic realism" of Latin American fiction. Twentieth-century writers could not have striven more singlemindedly to make the unconscious mind a conscious reality.

#### Oedipus Complex

It was by no means discouraging to the literary imagination to be told by an eminent scientist that the foundation of unconscious thought could be glimpsed in a figure out of myth—the figure of Oedipus. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers of fiction had largely attempted to renounce mythology in favor of an empirical version of "realism," but Freud helped provide a basis upon which myth could be reclaimed as part of a realistic psychology. After Freud, writers of fiction could more readily gain access to mythological materials by sounding the depths of the unconscious, there to excavate the lingering effects of the Oedipal drama and the "family romance." The depiction of psychology through mythological fantasy and delusion was a technique at least as old as Cervantes—one of Freud's favorite authors—but in the hands of novelists like James Joyce and Thomas Mann it became a hallmark of modernism, the defining artistic movement of the first half of the twentieth century. Modernist writers shared with Freud the assertion of startling originality and daring, a militant emphasis on the centrality of the body to human existence, as well as the sense of having gotten down to the bottom of human nature by recovering access to its most primitive mythological and psychological strata.

#### Repression

It will be necessary here to distinguish between Freud's understanding of repression and the spirit in which the concept has been employed by others. Freud shared

and fostered the sense, prevalent in Western culture since Rousseau, that society and social life exact great costs from human nature. He believed that each individual, in the process of maturing, must either repress the natural force of instinct or direct it, by "sublimation," into socially approved activities. This process inevitably causes regrettable complications—a preference for public delusions like religion and metaphysics, or, where these have been discredited, a vulnerability to neurosis, paranoia, and other forms of mental illness. In spite of such complications, however, Freud does not see an alternative to repression; it is simply necessary for civilized life.

The Victorian rehabilitation of the subject of sex was already in vogue at the turn of the century when Freud was writing his early psychological studies, but he integrated it with science more persuasively than any other and gave it respectability beyond the ambit of the cultural avant-garde. For many artists and other devotees of Freud, their awareness of the concept of repression fueled the Rousseauian resentment against culture and gave rise to an ideology of sexual liberation. This ideology is a relentless element in twentieth-century literature; Lawrence, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, and Erica Jong are just a few of many examples. As a result, the eroticism and bodily exhibitionism of post-Freudian writing have a relentlessly moralizing, even utopian character. Up through the 1960s, its vocabulary of repression and liberation made psychoanalysis attractive to writers on the left and even to feminists, who have generally found a good deal to criticize in Freud's view of women.

#### Literary Criticism

Finally, Freud's way of thinking has had no less of an impact upon academic literary criticism than upon literary practice. Freud showed critics the way in a number of famous essays on artistic psychology and in ambitious attempts to bring psychoanalytic insight to bear on the works of major artists such as Leonardo, Shakespeare, and Dostoyevsky. In fact, psychoanalysis as a technique for interpreting unconscious motives largely came into being in an act of literary criticism when, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud attempted to explain the expressive power of *Oedipus the King* as emanating from an incestuous and parricidal wish that all of us share with Sophocles' hero.

Just as the psychoanalytic interpreter of dreams seeks the latent significance behind the manifest content

of the dream, so psychoanalytic criticism aims to discover the latent psychological meaning beneath the surface of a literary work. As with dreams in Freud's theory, literary works reveal the fulfillment of a wish and the complications that arise from the struggle to express that wish in the face of censorship. Literature is an affair of pleasure and guilt, revelation and disguise. The psychoanalytic critic can analyze its dynamics in one of two directions. The first is to imitate Freud's analysis of *Oedipus the King* by interrogating the work itself to discover the sources of its appeal for its audience. What is involved is primarily an application of psychoanalytic theory, though some literary critics have attempted to develop their own theories of literary response based upon interpretations of Freud. The second application of psychoanalysis to literature is to use the work as a source of insight into the author's peculiar psychological complexes and neuroses, as Freud did in his studies of Dostoyevsky and Leonardo. With this type of treatment, the work becomes a repository of motifs from early childhood, and particularly a source for investigating the writer's way of coming to terms with the frustration of his or her early incestuous wishes. Often in these narratives literary achievement comes to be seen as a form of compensation for other, more basic emotional satisfactions denied early in life; the ideology of sexual liberation also plays a prominent role. It was partly because of psychoanalysis that literary biography has become such an important cultural institution in the twentieth century and that it acquired its peculiar character. It is no longer the admiring record of the genius's triumph over adversity—the narrative that gratified the sensibility of the nineteenth century—but rather the biographer's attempt to confront the public persona of the artist with the hidden motives of private life, to search behind the apparent strength, generosity, and power of the genius to discover the common psychological needs that foster the creative process.

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### Little Hans

Little Hans, also referred to by Freud (1907) as "little Herbert," was the subject of Freud's first published case of a child psychoanalysis, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year Old Boy* (1909).

Little Hans's father wrote to Freud in 1908 that his son, then 5, had developed a "nervous disorder." The boy was afraid to go out into the street and feared that a horse would bite him. His father theorized that "this fear seems somehow to his being frightened by a large penis" (p. 22). Freud responded by laying down the general lines of the appropriate treatment, which was then carried out not by Freud but by the boy's father. Freud saw the boy but once; his analysis of the disorder is based on his interpretation of notes sent to him by the father.

The father's first reports concerning Hans date from when he was not quite three years old. Hans showed, Freud says, a lively interest in his penis, which he called his "widdler." He also asked his mother if she too had a widdler. When Hans was three and a half, his mother found him with his hand on his penis and told him "If you do that, I shall send for Dr. A to cut off your widdler. And then what'll you widdle with?" (Freud, 1909: 7–8). This was the occasion, Freud reports, when Hans acquired the castration complex (see "Castration Complex," this volume).

Approximately two years later, on January 7, 1908, Little Hans went out with his nursemaid, but began to cry and asked to be taken home to "coax" (i.e., cuddle) with his mummy. His mother took him out the next day, but he became frightened and began to cry, saying that he was afraid that a horse would bite him; after returning home, he expressed fear that the horse would come into his room.

After receiving the notes from Hans's father, Freud arranged with him that he should tell the boy that "all