

FREUD'S LITERARY CULTURE

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CHAPTER ONE

The unconscious of psychoanalysis: Freud's literary allusions

FUNCTION AND FORM

In a letter written in 1906 Freud answers a publisher's request to name ten 'good' books. As he openly declares he has deliberately excluded books of purely aesthetic value, the list offers only a limited insight into his literary tastes. He cannot, however, resist mentioning some works he would have included in a list of the very greatest works of literature: Sophocles' tragedies, Goethe's *Faust*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.¹ Anyone familiar with Freud's own writings will immediately recognize that these are, by far, the works to which he most commonly alludes. The author he most frequently refers to is undoubtedly Goethe. Although over half of these references are to *Faust*, only one is to the second part of that tragedy, and this – the epigraph to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* – was suggested by his friend Fliess. (Freud did not usually need such prompting; indeed, Fliess had to dissuade him from using a Goethe quotation as the epigraph to *The Interpretation of Dreams*.) Only Shakespeare comes close to Goethe as a source of allusions, and, although Freud refers to about fifteen of his plays, again half of the references are to one work, *Hamlet*. Mainly due to *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Heine is the next most quoted author, followed very closely by Schiller. Goethe, Heine, and Schiller apart, though, Freud is more likely to refer to classical Greek and Roman literature than to any other German author. Most of these references are again to a single play, this time Sophocles' *Oedipus*. Even this brief survey reveals that there is nothing eccentric about the kind of works to which Freud tends to allude; they are all absolutely central to the literary canon of his age.

When referring to works by Goethe, Shakespeare, and so on, Freud rarely identifies the source. Nor does he tend to give German translations of passages quoted in English, French, Italian, Latin, and even Greek. He clearly assumes his reader shares his own highly literary

Bildung and can automatically understand quotations and place allusions. To an important extent, his literary culture was the common property of the well-educated German bourgeoisie of his age. It is often remarked that his tastes were far more conservative than his literary criticism, but the question of 'taste' is less significant here than the consideration that Freud was influenced most powerfully by the canonical works on which he was raised in *childhood*. For example, the intriguing discrepancy between the number of allusions to the two parts of *Faust* may simply be the result of his having read the first part at a more impressionable age. In relaxed letters he clearly enjoys referring to *Faust II*; it is just that he never does so during the intensely creative bursts in which he produced his psychoanalytical texts.

Although his tastes were conditioned by social factors, above all his classical German *Bildung*, the extent to which he was imbued with literature was also the result of certain idiosyncratic character traits. From the age of seven, books were Freud's passion and his only indulgence. His appetite for reading remained voracious and extended far beyond his clinical field. Furthermore, it was in his youth that his extraordinary powers of memory were at their height: he could quote verbatim long passages from books he had only skimmed through (VI, 135).² Of course, Freud read a great deal of contemporary literature, and the fact that he rarely mentions it in his own texts indicates a strong personal inclination towards classical literature. By alluding to the classics in the context of his scientific theories he can suggest a universality and a timelessness which modern literature would fail to evoke. His tendency to reach back to works from his childhood may be 'preconscious', then, but it is also most expedient.

Even in non-literary analyses Freud makes allusions with the same unerring frequency. Clearly literature is more than just an object of analysis for him, it is a key feature of his thought processes. He wrote at great speed, intensely and erratically, and the presence of small inaccuracies in some of his quotations indicates not a lack of sensitivity, but rather the immediacy with which the lines suggest themselves to him. Of course, many quotations are the result of some deliberation. A letter to his fiancée, Martha Bernays, reveals how methodically he developed his literary cultivation: he tells her of a play he has seen in Paris which he despises because it contains 'hardly a word anyone would want to commit to memory'.³ Nevertheless, his predilection for quoting the works he first explored in his youth suggests that his allusions are drawn from sources beyond his conscious control. He imputes a special degree

of 'truth' to these works, and again this may be attributed to the impressionable age at which he encountered them. They were received by a mind still evolving from what Freud himself calls a 'primary' mode of thinking, in which there is little or no distinction between truth and emotionally charged fiction. Such assertions are rather speculative, but there can be no doubt that an analysis of Freud's use of allusions would offer an excellent initial orientation in a study of his literary culture.

Freud integrates quotations from his favourite works of literature into his own texts with great ease; indeed, his use of certain allusions seems to be almost automatic. Not surprisingly, then, many of these are used with little regard for their literary context or their specifically aesthetic qualities. Freud often simply takes advantage of his rich literary culture to express his own ideas more impressively. The very first literary allusion in his psychological works appears in the *Studies on Hysteria*, published in 1895, where he claims phobias commonly involve 'all the vermin of which Mephistopheles boasted himself master' (II, 87). Clearly this allusion to *Faust* is little more than an ornate circumlocution. And yet even the most cursory analysis reveals that Freud's literary references serve a wide variety of important functions. One more substantial use he makes of certain literary passages is to provide an analogy to some aspect of his theory, as in *The Interpretation of Dreams* when he claims that absurdity in a dream often signifies a disdainful judgement in the dream-thoughts. The dream, then, is parodying the absurdity of whoever is targeted by this criticism, and as an analogy of this mode of expression Freud quotes four lines of poetry in which Heine heightens his mockery of King Ludwig's dreadful poetry by expressing it in even poorer verse (V, 435n.). Here the use of a quotation is really more felicitous than Freud's original idea. The presence of intractable absurdity in dreams is perfectly understandable as the result of highly complex processes of condensation, displacement, and so on. Freud's need to view it as a deliberate, self-contained, and coherent expression such as is found in conscious thought seems to be related to a mania for interpretation which was no doubt an element of his genius but which could also lead him astray. It could be argued that the parallel between an absurd dream and the work of a poet as sophisticated and self-conscious as Heine is singularly inappropriate, but it is so cleverly drawn that it helps suspend potential criticism. This is reminiscent of the mechanism Freud describes in his theory of 'harmless' wit, whereby a weak idea can be made to seem inherently impressive solely by virtue of its witty formulation. In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* he claims: 'The thought

seeks to wrap itself in a joke . . . because this wrapping bribes our powers of criticism and confuses them' (VIII, 132). Something analogous is clearly at work in some of Freud's wittier uses of literary quotation. To support the same theory about absurd dreams he goes on to quote from *Hamlet*, tempting us to surmise that he is more likely to have recourse to this kind of literary stratagem when he needs to shore up a more vulnerable piece of theory.

Such references are used by Freud largely independently of their literary context, but many of his more interesting allusions seem to invoke the texts from which they are taken. In 1923 Freud, enthusiastic about applying the nomenclature established in *The Ego and the Id* to clinical observation, writes in a passage in his very next paper, 'Neurosis and Psychosis':

Such an application of the hypothesis might also bring with it a profitable return from grey theory to the perpetual green of experience. (XIX, 149)

This allusion to Mephistopheles' advice to the student in *Faust* demands, by its very indirectness, some work on the part of the reader to place it. This helps establish a deeper literary communion between Freud and his reader, no doubt enhancing the effectiveness of an allusion whatever its function is intended to be. Some quotations, moreover, seem to evoke important subtexts independently of Freud's conscious rhetorical intent. To exemplify the concept of ambivalence, for example, Freud often quotes Brutus' famous speech from *Julius Caesar* in which he justifies killing the friend he loved. This would seem to be an inaccurate analogy: in Brutus both emotions are fully conscious and rationally justified, that is, they modify rather than contradict each other. However, there is little doubt that Freud's choice of Brutus to illustrate ambivalence is overdetermined by a deeply personal factor. At the age of fourteen he gave a performance of the Brutus–Caesar dialogue from Schiller's first version of *The Robbers*, and the part of Caesar was played by his nephew John. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud admits that the most deeply ambivalent of his adult friendships were modelled on John, 'this first figure who "früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt" (long since appeared before my troubled gaze)' (V, 483).⁴ Brutus' ambivalent feelings, then, are Freud's own towards his nephew – his quotation from the Dedication of *Faust* here only confirms the depths to which this identification can be traced in him.

This well-documented example of the personal determinants of an apparently superficial reference provides some justification for looking at the literary context of other allusions. At one point in his paper on the

'demonological' neurosis Freud admits that this text will not convince non-analysts, and he claims this does not concern him. The only proof which he believes is necessary is the fact that psychoanalysis alone can improve the condition of neurotic patients, and, with Odysseus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, he claims: "'These shafts can conquer Troy, these shafts alone'" (XIX, 84). This quotation appears to be used in a superficial and merely tendentious fashion; however, if the character of Philoctetes is considered more carefully, then a deeper determinant begins to reveal itself. Due to his terrible wound Philoctetes aroused such revulsion that his Greek comrades forced him to live on an uninhabited island. His wretched isolation there continued for ten years until it was revealed that only he possessed the invincible arrows needed to take Troy. In his own 'splendid isolation' – which he claimed lasted ten years – it is not unlikely that Freud identified himself with this classical hero, a man who suffered at the hands of his intolerant comrades, but who was ultimately vindicated when the power which he alone possessed was recognized for its unique practical value. Such speculation may be idle, but it is at least clear, if only from the many literary 'free associations' in the analyses of his own dreams, that characters and situations from literature exercised a deep influence on Freud independently of his conscious awareness.

With this reflection in mind, one of the most intriguing aspects of Freud's literary allusions is the fact that most of his quotations from *Faust* can be traced back to the character of Mephistopheles. This can, in part, be attributed to a certain carelessness, as in *The Interpretation of Dreams* when, regarding distortion in dreams, he offers one of his favourite quotations:

Das Beste, was du wissen kannst,
darfst du den Buben doch nicht sagen.

(After all, the best of what you know
may not be told to boys.) IV, 142

Freud claims this complaint is made by 'the poet', whereas it is, strictly speaking, made by Goethe's devil, Mephistopheles. Occasionally, this imprecision works against Freud, as in his Dora analysis when, apologizing for the long duration of a psychoanalysis, he quotes the following lines:

Nicht Kunst und Wissenschaft allein,
Geduld will bei dem Werke sein!

(Not Art and Science serve, alone;
Patience must in the work be shown.) VII, 16

Clearly Freud again believes he is speaking with Goethe, but, given the already formidable resistances aroused by psychoanalysis, the context of these lines is particularly unfortunate. Not only are they, again, spoken by Mephistopheles, the work the devil refers to here is witchcraft.

Although these examples appear to belong to the category of allusions made independently of their context, Goethe's Mephistopheles actually represents much more than any narrowly conceived archetype of evil, and Freud's predilection for speaking with his voice should not be explained away as carelessness. Mephistopheles exposes hypocritical pretensions and reveals the sensual roots of that which the pious consider to be sublime. No doubt Freud relished such a character – the scene he quotes from most often is the one between Mephistopheles and the student, in which the devil's cynicism is at its most outrageous. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, for example, Freud finds himself denying the existence of an instinct for perfection which 'in the poet's words, "ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt" (presses ever forward unsubdued)' (XVIII, 42). He claims instead that this phenomenon is merely the result of repression. Of course, Faust himself displays very few moral inhibitions, and his striving is certainly not appeased by any of the worldly gratifications offered by Mephistopheles. More important than Faust's character here, though, is the fact that Freud is speaking with Mephistopheles. This subliminally underpins his assertion that the drive for perfection is rooted in erotic instincts.

Privately, Freud indulged in the identification with Mephistopheles more openly. In a letter to Jung, who was becoming uneasy about probing the sexual history of his patients, he quotes: 'In league with the Devil and yet you fear fire?'⁵ – a remonstrance he repeated to Lou Andreas-Salomé almost a decade later. And in a subsequent letter to Jung, commenting on the need for outside expertise before analysis can be applied to mythology, Freud again quotes from *Faust*: 'Although it was the Devil who taught her, / He cannot do it by himself.'⁶

In fact, some of Freud's most felicitous allusions come from this fondness for speaking with Mephistopheles. Of the various allusions to Goethe's *Faust* made in the paper 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', one in particular, again some words of Mephistopheles, helps convey a crucial perspective on neurosis. The 'defence mechanisms' are designed to protect the ego, but, because they tend to overreact or to become reactivated when they have outlived their usefulness, they are also instrumental in generating neurotic symptoms. Thus: "Vernunft wird Unsinn, Wohltat Plage" (Reason becomes unreason, kindness

torment) as the poet complains' (XXIII, 238). Mephistopheles is actually satirizing the legal system here, but the analogy is a good one. The defence mechanisms regulate conduct according to socially established decrees of morality, but these decrees quickly become fossilized and out of touch with instinctual needs (as, indeed, Mephistopheles goes on to protest). Thus the quotation Freud uses contains the very kernel of his theory: the torment of neurosis is the result of repression which is initially intended as benevolent; and the unreason of a neurotic symptom is actually meaningful, based on an outdated and decentred 'reason'.

Quotations such as these are undeniably more effective for evoking their original context, but they still represent only a plundering of literary texts for the ideas they contain. Yet, despite Freud's regular protestations to the contrary, he was not insensitive to aesthetic qualities, and this, too, is evident in his use of allusions. The very presence of so many quotations in his works speaks for his appreciation of the literary originals, and within his own texts they lend Freud's ideas a concreteness and an economy of expression that he appreciates for its own sake. They are an essential part of his own style, evincing his characteristically acute sensitivity towards the responses of his reader. This is made explicit in a 1917 introductory lecture when, after a long section of difficult theory on narcissism, Freud reveals his strategy:

You will find it refreshing, I believe, if, after what is the essentially dry imagery of science, I present you with a poetic representation of the economic contrast between narcissism and being in love. (XVI, 418)

He goes on to quote a full twenty lines from Goethe's *West Eastern Divan*. The quotation adds nothing to Freud's own exposition, nor does it necessarily corroborate his theory, but he clearly feels its poetic qualities alone qualify it for inclusion.

Freud does not always merely draw on the aesthetic resources of others, he also uses literary allusions to increase the impact of his own stylistic techniques. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he uses the following quotation from *Faust* to illustrate overdetermination:

Ein Tritt tausend Fäden regt,
Die Schifflein herüber, hinüber schießen,
Die Fäden ungesehen fließen,
Ein Schlag tausend Verbindungen schlägt.

(. . . a thousand threads one treadle throws,
Where fly the shuttles hither and thither,
Unseen the threads are knit together,
And an infinite combination grows.) IV, 283

The context of this quotation could again be considered unfortunate: Mephistopheles is satirizing the 'Collegium Logicum' and the kind of rigid determinism that in fact underlies Freud's own theory of overdetermination. He even goes on to attack analysts who destroy that which they wish to describe by taking it to pieces. The quotation, however, works very well *in its own right*. Mephistopheles' intention of confusing the student is very much consonant with one of Freud's own stylistic devices. He would often give a survey of the baffling complexities of a subject in order to make his reader more receptive to his own reassuringly lucid insights. The above quotation works in the same vein by affirming the complexity of overdetermination. More importantly, the rhythm, repetition, alliteration, and rhyme employed in the quotation evoke, by sheer intensity of aesthetic economy, the very process of condensation itself.

Of course, the longer a literary quotation is, the more likely it is to display this kind of intrinsic aesthetic value. Of all the quotations Freud uses from *Faust*, the longest is to be found in his Schreber analysis. Here he quotes eleven lines in which the chorus of spirits laments that Faust, having cursed all things that humans value, has destroyed the world, and it bids him to rebuild it in his own bosom (XII, 70). Freud offers this as a metaphor of paranoia, where the sufferer withdraws all libido from the outside world and inhabits instead a complex delusional system. Again this is not an appropriate 'diagnosis' of Faust; Freud even claims that Faust's character provides evidence that such detachment of the libido does not necessarily lead to paranoia. Nevertheless, the quotation *in itself* expresses the grandiosity, the inwardness, and the dramatic psychogenesis of paranoid delusions so forcefully and with such an economy of means that it remains the most abiding formulation of the illness that the reader is likely to take away from the text. Freud's willingness to devote a dozen lines of his text to quoting poetry at least demonstrates his awareness that literary allusions are integral to the aesthetic dimension of his own writing.

THE POLEMICS OF ALLUSION

Although Freud uses literary quotations for both their content and form, their most important function in his texts is quite independent of this superficial distinction. This function is best explained by extending the analogy with his own theory of wit. His most straightforward allusions resemble the most basic form of wit, where the key factor is the pleasure

gained from playing with words and ideas. Freud often simply draws on his literary culture to give himself a pleasure from making connections that is an end in itself. In its next stage of development, wit circumvents our increasingly inhibitive critical judgement by expressing an idea that is of some value. As with Freud's more effective literary quotations, the wit here performs the function of causing the idea to appear more valuable than it actually is. Finally, wit develops still further when it gains access to the deepest sources of pleasure by circumventing resistances and suspending repression, becoming what Freud calls tendentious wit. Similarly, the most important function of Freud's literary allusions is 'tendentious' or polemical; and, by conferring respectability on himself through association with great poets, he is specifically contriving to overcome resistances in his reader by making such allusions.

In the very first paragraph of *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* Freud tries to forestall any objections to his producing a pathography of such a great artist by quoting from Schiller. He claims he does not wish 'To blacken the radiant and drag the sublime into the dust' (XI, 63). The quotation itself, however, contains absolutely nothing that justifies Freud. He clearly hopes that simply by knowing his Schiller he can demonstrate his respect for the brilliant and the sublime. Of course, this alone could not remove the odium aroused by his dealing with such subjects as incest and perverse sexuality, but here, too, Freud often seeks help from great authors. References to *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*, for example, tend *immediately* to follow every new exposition of Oedipus-complex theory; Freud's intention of thus encouraging receptivity and deflecting potential indignation is perfectly manifest.

After *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud's richest text for literary allusions is *Civilization and its Discontents*. In this book, after a lifetime of dealing with the sore point of sexuality, he opens up a new wound: innate human aggression. Plautus's 'homo homini lupus', Galsworthy's 'The Apple Tree', and a long Heine quotation (in which among the simple pleasures in life the poet numbers a few enemies hanging from a beautiful tree) all help to suspend the possible objection that Freud is once again arbitrarily undermining human dignity. He does not deny that this is his tactic, claiming of the Heine quotation:

A great imaginative writer may permit himself to give expression – jokingly, at all events – to psychological truths that are severely proscribed. (XXI, 110n.)

It has always been Freud's conviction that artists work by presenting primary sexual and aggressive material, but in such a way as to disarm

outrage and circumvent revulsion. He keenly regrets his frequent failure to do the same in his capacity as a scientist, and he does not hesitate to enlist the help of poets to do this work for him. After he has triumphantly developed his theory of aggression to its climax – namely, the formula that life consists in the conflict between Eros and Death – he is careful to give the final word to the same poet:

And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven [Eiapoepia vom Himmel]. (XXI, 122)

This reference to Heine's *Deutschland* brings Freud's unrestrainedly philosophical flight of theory back into a world with which his readers are familiar. More importantly, despite the fact that in Heine the battle is socio-political, the reference also seems to help corroborate Freud's bleak philosophical conclusion. Only literature could serve this dual purpose so efficiently.

It was, of course, the odium aroused by the topic of sexuality that Freud most needed to avert, and here no poet stood him in better stead than Goethe, the great apologist for the liberation of elemental nature from conventional moral prejudices. For example, in the analysis of his dream of three women in a kitchen, Freud links the pleasure of university study to that of being fed by his mother. This radical and potentially scandalous association seems more respectable following, as it does, this quotation:

So wird's Euch an der Weisheit *Brüsten*
mit jedem Tage mehr gelüsten.

(Thus, at the *breasts* of Wisdom clinging,
Thou'lt find each day a greater rapture bringing.)

IV, 206 (original emphasis)

Again there is a deep irony in that Mephistopheles' advice to the student (concerning the study of medicine, no less) is far more shocking than anything in Freud's dream analysis. However, by unmasking sublimation the devil is in possession of an important truth. Incidentally, the objection that this quotation is a free association, not a deliberate allusion, is as weak as the distinction between the two itself. Not only has Freud consciously chosen to present this and not another association, his allusions often themselves appear as if spontaneously, again much like witticisms.

Perverse sexuality is, of course, an even more controversial subject, but in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, for example, Freud manages to locate fetishism in the realm of normal behaviour by quoting a passage in

which Faust demands Gretchen's scarf or garter. In fact, the quotation rather ennobles this perversion – after all, if Freud only wants to exemplify normality, the allusion to Faust, a character both fictional and superhuman, is not ideal. It is, however, not the literary context, but the invocation of *Goethe* that is the keynote here. Shortly after this quotation Freud again tries to suspend moral judgements on sexual perversions by asserting:

The highest and the lowest are always closest to each other in the sphere of sexuality: 'vom Himmel durch die Welt zur Hölle' (From Heaven, across the world, to Hell.) (VII, 161–2)

It is difficult to see why Freud implies that his use of this quotation is self-explanatory here. It may correspond to an interpretation of the whole of *Faust* as an allegory of sublimation. However, many of his readers who are unable to make such a connection will still recognize the words as Goethe's, and this alone is enough to serve Freud's primary purpose of undermining moral objections.

Adverse opinion never caused Freud to falter in his investigations into sexuality. He only ever displays reticence – purely out of practical considerations for the psychoanalytical movement – about publishing his theories on religion, which in the post-Enlightenment age were actually much less explosive. In this and other fields, however, poets could serve even more directly polemical purposes. Tendentious allusions like those cited above work on a mainly subliminal level, merely lending Freud an air of respectability. As far as this is directed towards his potential adversaries, it is intended to create something like a temporary cease-fire during which he can produce his own arguments more freely. Freud is also aware, however, that his knowledge of literature is just as useful in open combat – as a supply of ammunition. When, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, he returns to his argument calling for the removal of religion from modern culture, his first thought is 'the well-known saying of one of our great poets and thinkers', namely Goethe:

Wer Wissenschaft und Kunst besitzt, hat auch Religion;
Wer jene beide [*sic*] nicht besitzt, der habe Religion!

(He who possesses science and art also has religion;
but he who possesses neither of those two, let him have religion!)

XXI, 74

He interprets this as an apology for religion and regrets: 'If we also set out to deprive the common man of his religion, we shall clearly not have

the poet's authority on our side.' This statement is in need of interpretation. Firstly, it reveals that, to Freud, a poet does indeed represent an *authority*, but it would also seem to suggest that this authority is not absolute. Freud goes on partly to vindicate the Goethe quotation by pointing out the interchangeability of religion, art, and science, all of which can function as 'auxiliary constructions'. However, Goethe's epigram says far more than this. The poet clearly uses the word 'religion' twice in order to signify two different things. The first usage refers to a pantheistic awe before the beauty of creation, the second to a blind cleaving to doctrine and tradition. It is the latter which Freud is attacking, and he must be aware that in this he does have the 'poet's authority' firmly on his side. It is difficult to imagine him using the quotation otherwise.

A literary quotation he uses in *The Future of an Illusion*, his most direct assault on religion, is more telling. He says 'with one of our fellow-unbelievers':

Den Himmel überlassen wir
Den Engeln und den Spatzen.

(We leave Heaven
to the angels and the sparrows.) XXI, 50

With extreme economy he borrows much of the force of Heine's crusade for sensual emancipation from religious morality. He does not even need to mention the poet's name; the word fellow-unbeliever (Unglaubensgenossen) bears the unmistakable stamp of Heine's irreverent wit. When criticizing a less formidable 'enemy', abstract philosophy, Freud regularly alludes to the section in Heine's 'Die Heimkehr' about the German professor who finds the world too fragmentary and therefore:

Mit seinen Nachtmützen und Schlafrockfetzen
Stopft er die Lücken des Weltenbaus.

(With his nightcaps and the tatters of his dressing-gown
he patches up the gaps in the structure of the universe.)

XXII, 161

Again Heine is using the comic technique which Freud calls degradation. The nightcaps and the sparrows are used to deflate grandiose intellectual schemes, philosophical and religious, by juxtaposing them with the banality of everyday reality, a bathetic tendency that Freud especially relished. The latter quotation, however, has a poignancy that is more than just sardonic. In a letter to Jung in 1908 Freud admits that he

himself has fought off the temptation to 'fill in the gaps in the universe'.⁷ The quotation, then, is aimed primarily at a tendency within himself.

No doubt the materialist doctrine of 'hunger and love' helped Freud to suppress his speculative urge. He sometimes calls this 'popular', but at other times admits it is formulated 'in the words of the poet'. It is actually taken from Schiller's 'Die Weltweisen', and this context is revealing: the poem is another satire against those philosophers abstracted from the sensual reality of nature. If only on a subliminal level, it seems Freud knows how to use the polemical weight of a literary quotation against himself. He would have been the first to admit that a choice of allusion can never be wholly arbitrary. It is likely to be overdetermined by unconscious factors, and sometimes it is the polemic which is latent. In a letter to Werner Achelis Freud denies that there is anything 'Promethean' about his use of the line from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 'Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo', as the epigraph to his dream book.⁸ He claims it refers only to the dynamics of the dream. There can, however, be no real doubt that it simultaneously expresses his defiance of the authorities in Vienna which he felt were denying him official recognition.

Although Freud will often, implicitly or explicitly, manipulate a poet's words in this fashion to reinforce the impact of his own assertions, the most important category of polemical allusions depends on him remaining, or at least appearing to remain, absolutely faithful to the poet's insight. For example, to support his remarkable theory that the Wolf Man's dream of wolves in a tree is based on a voyeuristic experience of the primal scene, he 'proves' that a tree is a symbol of voyeurism by referring the reader to 'Boccaccio's well-known story' (XVII, 43n.). This presumes not only the existence of universal symbols, but also that a *Dichter* has mysterious access to them, otherwise the tree in Boccaccio's tale would be nothing more than a story device. Here the authority Freud imputes to writers is of a different order; their 'evidence' is sufficient to prove a scientific theory. In his book on parapraxes he uses examples from Schiller's *Piccolomini* and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* to show that these authors actually understand the mechanism of parapraxes. When in 1916 he comes to condense this very long book into brief popular lectures, he retains these lengthy examples in full. Clearly he believes this particular kind of literary sanction to be his most valuable evidence. However, when he claims it represents the 'support of great poets' (Parteinahme der großen Dichter) for the psychoanalytical theory (VI, 98), the phrase is somewhat tendentious, not to mention anachronistic.

Similarly, when referring to the 'correctly' formulated dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*, Freud claims the agreement between this work and the assumptions of his theory is 'evidence in favour of the correctness of my analysis of dreams' (IV, 97n.). In his essay on the novella he once again speaks of the 'support given by writers' (IX, 8), and, although he has now omitted the word 'great', he does not admit, as he does elsewhere, that he considers Jensen to be a poor novelist. Indeed, on the very next page he simply refers to poets as 'the deepest observers [tiefste Kenner] of the human mind'. It seems that even a second-rate literary authority can satisfy his need for prestigious sanction. And yet Freud is disregarding a serious problem which arises, however 'great' the author. Details in plays and novels are overdetermined in accordance not with observations from actual experience, but rather with established literary conventions. Novellas in particular condense 'meaning' with great intensity, and this is excessively evident in Jensen's *Gradiva*, marred as it is by contrived coincidences and a general lack of subtlety. This consideration does not necessarily harm Freud's theories of parapraxes or dreams, but it makes questionable his use of literature as a source of direct evidence for them.

Other attempts by Freud to find 'evidence' in literature are equally problematical. To corroborate his ingenious theory that Moses actually gave the Jews the Egyptian monotheism of his pharaoh, he cites a line of poetry in which Heine describes Judaism as 'the unhealthy beliefs of Ancient Egypt' (XXIII, 30n.). There is, in fact, no reason whatsoever to believe that Heine's wording implies any contradiction of the biblical narrative, and Freud fails, furthermore, to see any irony in his looking to Heine for objective evidence about the history of Judaism. More controversially, his hypothesis depends on the Jews having murdered Moses. He claims that his source for this was Sellin, and Ernest Jones confirms that it was indeed this Hebrew scholar's thesis that sparked off the writing of *Moses and Monotheism*. However, Freud remarks that the idea of Moses' murder had already been postulated 'by the young Goethe without any evidence', and he gives an unusually detailed reference to the whereabouts of the passage in 'Israel in the Wilderness' (XXIII, 89). Generally he does not even mention an author's name; here he gives the edition, the volume, and the page number, revealing, perhaps, how much prestige he believes the passage can lend to his own hypothesis. It is only after the mention of Goethe that Freud admits the murder of Moses is now 'an indispensable part of our construction'. Indeed, it is particularly revealing that this admission is made in the very same *sentence* as the reference to Goethe. Freud himself would grant that this kind of temporal

contiguity often signifies a more profound – and unconscious – causal connection. The corroboration from Goethe is clearly instrumental in encouraging Freud to create this bronze statue on feet of clay.

Literature can supply Freud with more convincing evidence if it is used not as an oracle, but as the raw material from which theories are inferred. This approach is strikingly evident in his 1918 paper 'The Taboo of Virginity', where his analysis of this archaic phenomenon as it occurs in various guises in modern German literature – in Schnitzler, Hebbel, and so on – is almost as detailed as his study of the anthropological material itself. Indeed, in his 'Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work' Freud eventually forgets the title of his essay and produces protracted analyses of characters met with in *literature*; his fullest illustration of 'the exception', for example, is Shakespeare's Richard III. Despite the obvious problem of Richard being fully conscious of how the bitterness caused by his deformity fuels his motivation to 'prove a villain', he is presented as a paradigm of this character type. Freud's justification for this choice is that discretion prevents him from using real case histories. Not only is this claim patently belied by his own publication of full case histories, Freud positively relishes the literary substitute – and he goes on to make a specifically literary analysis of the way in which Shakespeare subtly facilitates our identification with Richard. When he comes on to 'those wrecked by success', he actually produces the Macbeth essay he has long wanted to write, and his allusions have developed into literary criticism proper. To justify this he now merely tries to blur the distinction between clinical cases and literary characters 'which great writers have created from the wealth of their knowledge of the mind' (XIV, 318). He does return to clinical experience, albeit five lines from the end of his analysis, almost as if he has to apologize for indulging in pure literary criticism. Even in the final section, 'Criminals from a Sense of Guilt', the only example offered comes from 'Zarathustra's sayings "On the Pale Criminal"' (XIV, 332). Freud would, of course, have vigorously denied that any of his original sources were literary. Accordingly, he is careful to attribute the discovery of the passage in Nietzsche to 'a friend', a tactic he commonly employed in his attempt to keep any suggestion of literary influence at arm's length. In the first edition Freud actually wrote 'Zarathustra's obscure sayings', but in 1924 he took the trouble of having the word *dunklen* struck out, thus removing any taint of a personal encounter with this particular author.

Even apart from the question of Freud's sources, there is no doubt that in this essay, ostensibly on characterology, literary references alter the

very course of the text. The importance of literary allusions in Freud's works is nowhere better demonstrated than in those passages which appear to have been written for the sole purpose of making an allusion possible. The most striking example of this is to be found at the end of the last essay of *Totem and Taboo*. After relating the dramatic hypothesis of 'The Return of Totemism in Childhood' he concludes by discussing its weaknesses. As a rhetorical strategy this would seem to be rather anti-climactic, or even positively detrimental. To believe this, however, would be seriously to underestimate Freud's polemical skill. He is, as always, fully aware of the overriding importance of his readers' objections. His tactic is deliberately to highlight them, then turn them dramatically to his own advantage. This he achieves with the help of two quotations from *Faust*. He first tackles the formidable problem of his assumption of an inherited sense of guilt. He counters it with the suggestion that only dispositions are inherited, and that these are then reactivated by individual experiences. This is hardly less problematical than the initial assumption, but he adds:

This may be the meaning of the poet's words:

Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,
Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.

(What thou hast inherited from thy fathers,
acquire it to make it thine.) XIII, 158

Now, this clearly is not Faust's meaning; he is rather cursing the ineffectualness of all that he has inherited. However, torn from its context, the quotation helps Freud to bridge the theoretical gap between ontogenetic experience and phylogenetic inheritance. The rhetorical effect is, in fact, heightened by the obscurity and ambiguity of the line.

His use of a second quotation is more strategic and decidedly more effective. It is employed to counter a second, equally justified objection, namely that there is no need to assume the murder of the primal father was actual, especially in the light of Freud's own discoveries about the decisive significance of wishes in primary thought processes. He responds by pointing out that, to primitive man, action stands in the place of thought. This retort works well at the end of a text full of tenuous and selective argumentation – above all because he consolidates it with Faust's famous: 'Im Anfang war die Tat (In the beginning was the Deed)' (XIII, 161). In fact, the line is so appropriate and effective that its use demands closer inspection. It can then be seen that Freud's desire to

make use of this quotation has determined the direction of the entire passage and, to some extent, the structure of the whole essay. I have already suggested that Freud has deliberately raised these particular objections at the end of his text precisely because he knows how to dismiss them with the aid of two of his favourite lines from Goethe. However, the manipulation goes even further. The initial objection is that primitives may have *wished* to kill the primal father without having done so. Freud deliberately confuses this distinction with the one between *thought* and action. The line from Goethe, then, is used to make the claim that primitives do not 'think', this being rather more convincing than the one he would actually need to make: that primitives have no thwarted wishes. Even more deliberate is his placing of the *Faust* quotation at the very end of the essay; indeed, these are the final words of the entire book. In this way their dramatic force and resonance is cunningly conferred onto the hypothesis of the primal parricide as a whole. Again this seems to be a deliberate manipulation. Why else would Freud deal with this somewhat extraneous objection so prominently, at the very end of his text? The line itself is quite divorced from its original context. Faust is expressing his dissatisfaction with language and, in attempting a translation, is actually rewriting St John's Gospel to correspond with his own needs. It is ironic rather than appropriate that Freud uses a fictional character's conception of creation to assert the reality of an act of destruction. Due to this loss of context, Goethe cannot stand as an authority here. However, Freud's brilliantly strategic use of the quotation, the most striking line from Goethe's greatest work, conveys the impression that the poet is indeed championing Freud's entire hypothesis.

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Although Freud uses allusions very deliberately to serve manifold polemical purposes, and although they convey a general impression of great cultivation very much consonant with his desire to be seen to transcend pathology, all the evidence suggests that there was no affectation in his habit of making literary references. His conversation and his private correspondence were similarly replete with them, regardless of whether he was making jokes or revealing his most intimate concerns. A week after the death of his daughter Sophie, in a letter to his closest friend Ferenczi, he quotes both Goethe's *Egmont* and Schiller's *Piccolomini*.⁹ There is no cleverness in his use of quotations such as these, they clearly give Freud moral support in his grief. Even on his death-bed literary quotations

helped him to express what may otherwise have remained inexpressible for him. His doctor reports that, when close to death, he quoted these lines from Goethe's 'Wandrer's Nachtlied':

Süßer Friede,
Komm, ach komm in meine Brust!

(Sweet peace,
Come, oh come into my heart!)¹⁰

Although these quotations demonstrate the point most unequivocally, it is actually unlikely that any of his literary allusions, even those whose effect he calculated most carefully, were ever merely ostentatious.

Nevertheless, Freud is fully aware of the effect these references have on his reader. Great writers were father-figures to him and his attitude towards them involves a particular kind of highly sublimated ambivalence. In his use of literary allusions, however, he tends to display only the most humbly reverential aspect of this ambivalence, often causing him to present the *Dichter* as some kind of oracular authority. His respect for this mysterious, inspired genius is the closest Freud comes to having religion, or at least a kind of *ersatz* totem – something to be consulted and revered but not interfered with. Of course, this quasi-theological conception of the artist was endemic in his culture. It is only surprising that Freud, the thinker who contributed so substantially to the overthrow of such unquestioningly patriarchal and mystical attitudes, should himself ostensibly share this conception. There is clearly a polemical motive underlying his deference to the literary ideology of his projected reader. The contrast between this and his controversial ventures into literary criticism is indeed striking, but his professed reverence for the *Dichter* is not dishonest. It is more a case of a safe manifest truth screening a latent 'threat'.

Given the polemical aspect of Freud's literary allusions, it is not surprising that when he makes them he tends to mask more radical psychoanalytical attitudes towards literature with a piety which he assumes he shares with his reader. This establishing of a cultural common ground can only further serve the fundamental purpose of all these allusions: to facilitate the reception of his own texts. The advantages he gains range from mere ornamentation and aesthetic relief to a much fuller literary communion with his reader. All of these vitally increase the accessibility of his own texts. Even more importantly, the allusions can disarm potential outrage and offer the prestigious sanction of a literary authority. This polemical support is only rarely available, but its source makes

it particularly valuable to Freud. It represents corroboration from a non-pathological sphere, helping to extend the realm of psychoanalysis far beyond mental illness. Indeed, references to the canon of classical authors are the single most effective means of suggesting the universal validity of psychoanalysis.

Although any association with the *Dichter* is most welcome to Freud, he is always at pains to distance himself from any suggestion of dependence on them. In his *Gradiva* analysis he claims it 'certainly never . . . occurred to me to look for a confirmation of my findings in imaginative writings' (IX, 54), one of several unprovoked denials which reveal just how sensitive the issue is for him. He is usually careful to attribute striking finds in literature to other analysts, hence it is Rank who discovered the letter in which Schiller prefigures free-association technique, and most of the examples from literature given in his book on parapraxes are similarly attributed to pupils. The same is true even of much of Freud's literary criticism: it is Jung who prompts the study of *Gradiva*, Jentsch who causes him to analyse 'The Sand-Man', and Rank who suggests the *Rosmersholm* analysis. He feels a strong need to assert that his own sources are empirical, not literary. Nevertheless, the most revealing allusions in Freud's texts clearly belong to a study of literary influences on the actual *formulation* of psychoanalytical theory. For example, his speech in acceptance of the Goethe prize in 1930 contains a wealth of allusions. They are offered as insights, treated by Goethe as self-evident, which support Freud's relatively innocuous hypothesis that, if the poet were alive, he would be receptive to psychoanalysis. Here Freud is blithely disregarding the fact that Goethe preceded him, and that he himself was raised knowing much of the poet's work by heart. Whatever was 'self-evident' to the great man was equally so for his youthful admirer. With this consideration in mind, the references to Goethe's work made in this speech shed light on a much more important issue than any idle hypothesis about how Goethe would have responded to psychoanalysis. Along with many of the most resonant literary allusions in Freud's own texts, they raise the highly problematical but crucial question of the unconscious sources of Freudian theory itself.

DEFERRED ACTION: FROM SEDUCTION TO OEDIPUS

Freud's references to literature clearly demonstrate the abiding presence of authors such as Goethe, Sophocles, and Shakespeare within his texts, to the extent that they sometimes determine the very structure of his

own works. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these allusions, however, is not that they serve such varied and pervasive functions, but that they so overwhelmingly outnumber his references to any scientific authors. Their sheer frequency calls for a far more radical evaluation of the role played by literature in Freud's development of psychoanalysis. Many allusions are, of course, made with the implicit assumption that poets have substantially anticipated psychoanalytical theory. The critic Leo Bersani argues, therefore, that Freud prefers 'an art of secure statement' and quotes, say, Goethe for 'a kind of versified confirmation of certain doctrinal points'.¹¹ Although Freud himself would probably have concurred with this description, I would question whether this process is as superficial and as one-sided as Bersani implies. For this purpose I shall focus attention on Freud's emergence from certain theoretical crises, such as the collapse of his 'seduction theory' and his postulation of primary narcissism. During such crises literary influences can most clearly be seen to affect – perhaps unconsciously – the very *formulation* of psychoanalytical theory.

In the speech he wrote for Freud's eightieth birthday Thomas Mann praises Freud precisely because he has *not* drawn on great literature for the creation of psychoanalysis. Such a problematic declaration from so formidable a figure deserves quoting in full:

Indeed we know that the genius in whose honour we are gathered here, Sigmund Freud, . . . trod the difficult path of his discoveries quite alone, quite independently, solely as a doctor and scientist, unaware of the comfort and reinforcement which great literature would have been able to provide for him. He did not know Nietzsche, whose works abound with anticipatory flashes of Freudian insight; nor Novalis, whose Romantic-biological day-dreams and inspirations so often come astonishingly close to psychoanalytical ideas; nor Kierkegaard, whose Christian courage to explore psychological extremes would have spoken so profoundly and so beneficially to him; nor, to be sure, did he know Schopenhauer, that melancholy symphonist of a philosophy of instincts striving for transformation and redemption . . . Indeed it had to be this way.¹²

When Mann delivered his address in person at Berggasse 19, Freud was delighted by it. Despite this apparent sanction, however, the above statement must be at least heavily qualified. The contention, for example, that Freud was unaware of Novalis is easily refuted. Apart from his intimate knowledge of the German Romantics in general, Freud actually quotes Novalis approvingly in the opening chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (IV, 83).¹³ In the same chapter he also commends Schopenhauer's assertion in *Parerga und Paralipomena* that impulses which remain unconscious