

Introduction

The prestige and penetration into culture of Freud's ideas present the current-day reader with what appears to be a coherent topography of the unconscious. All was not so clear in the latter years of the nineteenth century, however, as psychological and neurological studies of the mind and the brain only gradually began to unravel the workings and locus of speech, memory, vision, etc., and hysteria research opened up more questions about the psyche than it answered. In France, well-publicized experiments in medical hypnotism seemed to liberate a second personality in patients, a visible proof that the unconscious existed. But was it, as some thought, a 'reflex unconscious', a quasi-muscular entity, embedded in our system of physical reflexes? Was it a 'cerebral unconscious', located (but unlocatable) in the physical brain? Was the unconscious simply a locus of amoral instincts and drives that the rational intelligence and willpower must contain and repress, or could it function, as a few suggested, as a reservoir of creative images and intuitions?

It is these two main currents – the unconscious as static and/or as an unstable source of danger and the unconscious as aesthetically productive – that I wish to trace, first in French medico-psychological discourse of the late nineteenth century, and then as they migrated outward and were challenged by or adapted into the discourse of fiction and into the creative stance of a number of French writers. Awareness of and anxiety about the unconscious materialized in a number of phenomena, figures that point to but do not really acknowledge the unconscious as we know it today: the mindset of the hysteric; posthypnotic suggestions and crimes; the double, or dual/multiple personality; the unknowable female psyche; even late nineteenth-century degeneration theory, which has been called an imaginary explanation of the unconscious overtaking the will.

In this work, I explore the impact that medico-psychological thinking and theories about the unconscious had on the thematics and creativity of both major and secondary French writers from 1850 to 1920. Although my

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initial focus will be the question of how various forms of mental duality were interpreted by doctors and psychologists, the bulk of my study interrogates how medicalized human duality began to show up in the fiction and in the creative theory of writers, particularly Flaubert, Maupassant and Proust. Critical work on the unconscious as a medico-psychological phenomenon is ubiquitous, but there is a gap in criticism connecting the unconscious and fiction, a gap that this study is intended to fill, at least in part.

The authoritative, encyclopaedic study of the history of the unconscious, both for the French and in the Anglo-Saxon world, remains *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970) by the Swiss medical historian Henri Ellenberger. The work is particularly good on pre-Freudian, nineteenth-century theory and luminaries, the latter including Drs Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet, both key characters in my project, and a further set of Ellenberger's essays, *Beyond the Unconscious* (1993), contains important French-oriented material as well. Mark Micale's *Approaching Hysteria* (1995) is also a significant contribution to the field. However, given French preoccupation with their own medical history in the nineteenth century – and a rich history it is – there are important French-language works that offer useful background to the study I propose. These include texts such as Élisabeth Roudinesco's now-classic *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France 1, 1885–1939* (1994), Marcel Gauchet's *L'Inconscient cérébral* (1992), Gauchet and Swain's *Le vrai Charcot* (1997), and Pierre-Henri Castel's *La Querelle de l'hystérie* (1998). More focused work on hypnotism and the unconscious has been done in Jacqueline Carroy's twin volumes *Hypnose, suggestion et psychologie* (1991) and *Les Personnalités doubles et multiples* (1993). Serge Nicolas' *Histoire de la psychologie française* (2002) is but one of a series of substantive studies, nineteenth-century reeditions and commentaries produced by this author in recent years.

Some aspects of the unconscious in fiction have received enough critical attention that I will not attempt to reexamine them in my own study. The dream and the fantastical tale are aspects of late-century French literature about which more than a little has been written. Jean Le Guennec has authored two studies on the irrational and the unconscious in the fantastical tale, *États de l'inconscient dans le récit fantastique 1800–1900* (2002) and *Raison et déraison dans le récit fantastique au XIXe siècle* (2003). Dreams and their interpretation have been examined in a plethora of authors, Nodier, Balzac, Gautier, Baudelaire, Hugo, Nerval, Rimbaud and Proust, to name just some. The figure of the double in Maupassant and European literature at large has drawn substantial essays from Wladimir Troubetzkoy in

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La Figure du double (1995) and *L'Ombre et la différence. Le double en Europe* (1996), though in a largely Freudian interpretation.

What has received only tangential treatment, and what represents a largely unresearched area that I will be exploring, is the permeability of French fiction, pre-Freud, to theory and doxa about the unconscious and about unconscious creativity. My objective is to provide a broader, better contextualized picture than now exists of the attentiveness of literature and its authors to evolving French medico-psychological theory concerning the structure of the psyche and the mind. The few studies that have touched on this subject include Pierre Citti's somewhat hostile *La Mésintelligence. Essais d'histoire de l'intelligence française du symbolisme à 1914* (2000), where (in chapter 14) he looks briefly at the figure of the double in Jean Lorrain, Marcel Schwob and Huysmans, and Jean Pierrot's classic *L'Imaginaire décadent 1880–1900* (1977), which has a chapter on sex and the unconscious. A recent study by Bertrand Marquer, *Les 'Romans' de la Salpêtrière: Réception d'une scénographie clinique: Jean-Martin Charcot dans l'imaginaire fin-de-siècle* (2008), on the impact of Charcot's public demonstrations and of the Salpêtrière's presence in the fin-de-siècle literary imagination, has been useful especially as background to Chapter 3, on Maupassant.

Chapter 1 begins with the emergence of theorizing about a spinal, 'reflex' unconscious, discussed by the British physiologists William Carpenter, Thomas Laycock and others in the 1830s and 1840s. Their research¹ suggested that because the brain is directly connected to the spinal column, the various cerebral centres must be subject to automatic, reflex action similar to that noted in the spinal column. The consequences of this apparently limited idea were to be significant. If automatism and reflex action enjoyed a physical link to the brain, the traditional, absolute role of the intellect and willpower in guiding human action was irresistibly called into question.

The chapter also examines other avatars of the late-century unconscious, the 'subliminal self' and what was called 'unconscious cerebration',² the latter widely spoken of and apparently understood as an activity in the brain that was exclusively physiological rather than involving the psyche. The morphology of the brain also intrigued researchers and encouraged some 'to envision the mind as somehow spatially congruent with the brain'.³ Could the unconscious be lodged, for example, in one of the brain's halves? Or was the cerebellum, the backmost, lowest part of the brain and closest to the spine, thus directly connected to our 'lower body functions'? Was it the seat of sexual function? Chapter 1 continues with an extended discussion of the 'Quarrel of the Unconscious', that is, the debate involving doctors, physiologists, philosophers and newly minted psychologists as to whether the

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unconscious existed and, if so, how it functioned. The final section is a coda tracing the French resistance, headed by Dr Pierre Janet, to Freudian thought.

Flaubert, the subject of Chapter 2, died in 1880, at the dawn of a decade that was to interrogate dualities and dualisms of every type, dual and multiple personalities, hysterical duality, the second selves visible in the hypnotized and mediums, etc. The sense of two selves we encounter in Flaubert is immediately visible in his admission that he was creatively conflicted, at once drawn to oversized, lyrical, emotional themes and subjects, yet chastened by a quasi-obsessive need to gather documents and objective facts. Of course, in the Romantic tradition, which so influenced Flaubert's youth, genius was androgynous, and in that sense the bi-gendered artist was not a newcomer on the scene, nor was the claim, made both by Baudelaire and Flaubert, that they themselves were hysterics. I reexamine Flaubert's claim to hysteria and bi-genderedness from two points of view: that of feminist criticism, which has accused Flaubert of 'critical cross-dressing' and 'male lesbianism', but also through the lens of major hysteria theorists of the mid-nineteenth century who all noted that the male hysteric did exist. I pay special attention to Dr Hector Landouzy because of Flaubert's close reading and annotation of his *Traité complet de l'hystérie*. I also engage, in this chapter, with the ideas of Mark Micale, Jan Goldstein and Benjamin Bart on the question of Flaubert and hysteria.⁴

The phenomenon of Flaubert's various dualities thus seems a natural entry point for an investigation of his writing stance. The hallucination offers yet another image of the writer as subject to dual states. It is now fairly well agreed that Flaubert suffered epileptic attacks characterized by vivid, hallucinatory visual effects. His contemporary Hippolyte Taine was aware of this as he gathered material for discussion of second states in his *De l'intelligence* and questioned Flaubert in 1866 in a set of letters about his experience. I explore the question of the hallucination, as an element of Flaubert's physical makeup, as a theme in his fiction and as a figure in his style, and argue that the invasion of self that occurs in the hallucinatory state is reconverted and redirected, in his writing, into a half-conscious openness to absorption into external phenomena.⁵ Adam Watt's idea of 'le délire de la lecture' ('reading as delirium') in Proust will be tested as possibly applicable to compositional delirium in Flaubert.⁶

Chapter 3 engages with a question that has been a subject of interest and conjecture on the part of many critics, that is, the impact that the encounter with Jean-Martin Charcot's hysteria research had on Maupassant and his literature. Élisabeth Roudinesco maintains that the structure

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of duality in Maupassant's writings is visible in the differing treatment afforded by his novels (detailed realism) as compared with his short fiction (wild hallucinatory swings). It is the encounter with Charcot and the doctrines of La Salpêtrière hospital, she argues, that triggered this hallucinatory current.⁷ Maupassant is said to have attended Charcot's lectures from 1883 to 1886⁸ and to have been diplomatically excluded from them in late 1887 and early 1888, because of criticisms of Charcot and behavioural problems of which Charcot had been informed.⁹

A major purpose of the Maupassant chapter is to provide a clearer and more exact medico/cultural context to Maupassant's fiction and to his famous story *Le Horla*, than we have seen to date. *Le Horla* owes more to the hypnosis research of the Nancy school under Dr Hippolyte Bernheim than it does to the practices at La Salpêtrière where, in the mid- to late 1880s, Charcot and his assistants were turning away from posthypnotic suggestion in part because of Dr Bernheim's contention that Salpêtrière-style hysteria was itself a suggested, cultivated behaviour.¹⁰

In Chapter 3, I document the society-wide infatuation with apparently paranormal phenomena by focusing on the furor created in 1885–86 in the French medical and scientific communities by the successful experiments in what appeared to be mental telepathy carried out by Pierre Janet and a colleague in Le Havre. Not yet a medical doctor, Janet would later distance himself from these experiments, but the behaviours he induced in his famous patient Léonie included clairvoyance, and in particular an ability to 'see' objects held behind her back. Maupassant's Mme Sablé in *Le Horla* is invested with similar psychic powers. I also review, as a contemporary pendant to Maupassant's stories, paranormal fiction by Dr Charles Richet (under the pseudonym of Charles Epheyre).¹¹ In addition, I explore a so far unexamined aspect of Maupassant's fascination with the paranormal, his interest in the powers, hypnotic and perhaps psychic, of itinerant 'magnétiseurs' active in the 1880s, including in particular the Belgian Pickmann, whose impact on the Maupassantian psyche may have been as powerful as that of the more prestigious Charcot.

What figure represents most aptly the idea of the unconscious in Maupassant? This subject has been treated with ingenuity by a number of critics. I end the chapter confronting the viewpoints on this question of Jean-Louis Cabanès, Sandra Janssen and Pierre Bayard.¹² These critics perceive the Maupassantian unconscious variously as a malevolent force, personified and feared as the Horla itself; a kind of depossession of the soul; a voracious parasitism in the brain; and perhaps, most interestingly, a psychic strangeness characterized by its undecidability.

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How the female herself became a figure of the unconscious in the nineteenth century is the subject of Chapter 4. She was perceived as governed by whim, caprice and emotion, and the application to her of the label 'inconsciente' ('thoughtless', 'unconscious') was a commonplace of male discourse in the late nineteenth century, both socially and in literature. It was principally medical discourse that, noting the reduced size and thus physiological inferiority of the female brain compared with that of men, stipulated in addition that her brain functioned inefficiently. I examine here the claims of hysteria experts Pierre Briquet, Jean-Louis Brachet and others¹³ who theorized that extreme sensibility and impressionability meant that the female brain was subject to a stream of continuous sensations to which it unfailingly reacted, leaving her unable to 'reflect'. Her exaggerated stimulus/response mechanism also suggested that her behaviour was related to the reflex, automatic unconscious.

Another aspect of this medical doctrine was that if adolescent girls or young women, saddled with this highly reactive and exhausting cerebral function, attempted too much intellectual work, they could damage their childbearing abilities. In a woman, went the watchword, a fertile mind always led to physical sterility, and vice versa. Here, the chapter follows the migration of physiological theory into the debate over female education that characterized the 1880s and 1890s, a debate strongly coloured by the failing French birth rate¹⁴ and male fear of women displacing men from male careers. I explore the ideas on female non-educability of philosophers such as Alfred Fouillée, of philosopher and self-appointed sociologist Jean-Marie Guyau, of Sorbonne education chair Henri Marion and Harvard education professor Edward H. Clarke (who argued in the 1870s that Vassar students were headed for procreational grief), and of the politician Henri Thulié, who stated baldly that political involvement for the female caused sterility.¹⁵

The chapter concludes with a discussion of four women who actively – and sometimes confusedly – agreed with medical doxa about female intellectual inferiority. These women based their reasoning on their own interpretation of ambient medical thinking and illustrated those judgements in their writing. Three of the women are novelists and one a medical doctor. In Georges de Peyrebrune, who authored some thirty-five novels, I examine an implied theory of female mental and emotional (in)capacity. I analyze the novel *Névrosée* by Daniel Lesueur (Jeanne Lapauze, née Loiseau), which paints the damning portrait of an ambitious protagonist whose overly intense education causes her hysteria, miscarriage and suicide. Georgette Déga defended a medical thesis that appears to argue the

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exact opposite of the message of *Névrosée*: Déga felt that a young girl's 'native' inability to concentrate could be reversed only by an intense education, preferably in mathematics, and that such an ability to concentrate would *prevent* her from becoming a hysteric. The third novelist is Rachilde (Marguerite Eymery), who reflected cogently on the powerful role the unconscious played in her ability to create fictional narratives, but who remained unconvinced that women possessed the intellectual and emotional stability to reason like men.¹⁶

The impact of experimental, medical hypnotism on French fiction and on thinking about dual personality and the unconscious is the subject of Chapter 5. In Paris in the mid-1880s not only Charcot at La Salpêtrière but Dr Jules Luys at La Charité hospital and Amédée Dumontpallier at La Pitié welcomed students, foreign visitors, the press, writers and fellow medical men to observe the behaviours of hypnotized subjects. In Nancy Dr Hippolyte Bernheim and his team received a similar range of visitors. One particular aspect of such behaviours that caught the attention of doctors, the newspaper-reading public and writers of fiction alike was the experimental or suggested crime, that is, a criminal action committed posthypnotically. Observers were fascinated to learn that, hypnotized and under suggestion, subjects seemed to slip into a second personality and blindly followed instructions they had been given, even if the latter were eccentric or illegal. Subjects would also carry out suggested actions in the future at the time and place prescribed, but have no memory of what they had done when returned to a normal state.

I study first how the debate over whether posthypnotic suggestion could actually override a subject's sense of right and wrong became a subject of bitter disagreement between the Charcot school and the Nancy group. The arena in which this debate took place was often the courtroom, and I examine a number of court cases, including the famous murder trial of Michel Eyraud and his hypnosis-attuned accomplice Gabrielle Bompard, which brought the full forces of medical reputations into play. Bernheim's representative at the trial, Jules Liégeois, a lawyer who strongly believed in suggested crime,¹⁷ lost this court debate to the defenders of Salpêtrian views. But at the same time Bernheim was also insisting ever more tellingly that the multistage, Charcot-defined hysteria attack was a cultivated behaviour produced by either unconscious suggestion or actual coaching on the part of Charcot's staff.

Crime was a significant element in scientific and societal thinking in the 1880s with the creation of Alexandre Lacassagne's *Archives de l'anthropologie criminelle* (1886) and the French translations of a number of Cesare

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Lombroso's works, *L'Homme criminel* (1887), *L'Homme de génie* (1889) and *La Femme criminelle et la prostituée* (1896). Fiction that highlighted dualities of personality and suggested crimes flowered during the decade, and this chapter analyzes a three-stage development of such works. I begin with *La Faustin* (1882) by Edmond de Goncourt, a kind of predecessor of the novel of dual personality presenting an actress whose roles begin to inhabit her and displace her everyday personality. An impressive number of novels juxtapose hypnosis and crime. When the hypnotist/doctor figure is evil, characters are often rescued by a benevolent figure with similar hypnotic gifts. *Jean Mornas* (1885) by Jules Claretie and *Alphonsine* (1887) by Adolphe Belot, both set in a highly medicalized frame where actual doctors are juxtaposed with fictional characters, are classics of this novel of mind control, but other second-drawer novelists provide far-fetched, often exhilarating examples of hypnosis, alter egos and crime. I end the chapter with a focus on the 1890s where, in the novels of Paul Bourget and Marcel Prévost, second personality in the hypnotized is replaced by psychological dualities, the latter a more realistic plot pivot that looks forward to the conscious versus unconscious dualism that characterizes Proust's Narrator in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

The subject of Chapter 6 is Marcel Proust, who famously described *À la recherche du temps perdu* as 'a series of novels of the unconscious'. He was a man of prodigious intellectual abilities and at the same time someone very wary of intellectualism. An initial part of the chapter assesses Proust's position in the wave of anti-intellectualism that swept over France as the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth. Here, I investigate the attack on so-called intellectuals (or supporters of Dreyfus) led by conservative anti-Dreyfusard writers such as Maurice Barrès and Ferdinand Brunetière. The Dreyfus Affair provides one reason for the devaluation of the term 'intellectual'. But as critics such as Pierre Citti have pointed out,¹⁸ at the turn of the century the word 'intellectual' took on, quite independently, the connotation of something not profound but rather artificial. Writers like Valéry, Gide and Proust prized not the intellectual but what was more dynamic and unpredictable, and thus authentic, something intuitive and unconscious.

The final years of the nineteenth century saw a flurry of publications focused on the connection between the unconscious and creativity, a theme that would form the centerpiece of Proustian aesthetic theory. In this segment, I investigate works focused on the capabilities of the unconscious by a philosopher/psychologist, a medical doctor, a writer and journalist, and a mathematician. Théodule Ribot's *Essai sur l'imagination*

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créatrice (1900) made a direct connection between the dynamic operations of the unconscious and individual creative abilities; Proust had already read with great admiration Ribot's *Les Maladies de la volonté* (1883). The medical thesis of Dr Paul Chabaneix, *Le Subconscient chez les artistes, les savants et les écrivains* (1897), polled a cross-section of artists and scientists about the role of the unconscious in their writing (writers such as Paul Adam, Sully Prudhomme and Rachilde responded). Already known as a writer in whose work the unconscious plays a key role, Remy de Gourmont reviewed Chabaneix's work very positively in his essay 'La Création subconsciente'.¹⁹ Most interestingly, the mathematician Henri Poincaré argued strenuously for the importance of the unconscious in scientific thinking in works such as *La Valeur de la science* (1905) and *Science et méthode* (1908).²⁰

It is often forgotten that Proust's early, unfinished novel *Jean Santeuil* provided a kind of mystical underpinning for the mature work, in that nature, natural scenes, sunbathed moments, etc. drew from Jean's unconscious impressions and memories of moments already lived but obscured. About nature-based inspiration, Proust wrote, 'Seule, en nous faisant sentir ce que nous avons senti une fois, [la nature] nous mène droit à quelque point de ce monde fabuleux de nos souvenirs qui est devenu le monde de la vérité'²¹ ('[Nature] alone, by allowing us to feel what we have felt before, leads us directly to some point in that fabulous world of our memories which has become the world of truth.') I explore in this chapter the way the diminished but still powerful prestige of nature is preserved in Proust's discussions of certain natural scenes. Here as well, I investigate the impact that the reading of Maurice Maeterlinck's essays had on Proust, focusing in particular on a text from *L'Intelligence des fleurs* (1907), which offers a key to the steeples and trees theme in *À la recherche*, and on a chapter titled 'La Chance' from *Le Temple enseveli*²² in which, in very Proustian style, Maeterlinck insists on the need to plumb the depths of the deep, unconscious self and describes the magical prestige and appeal of the past. For Proust, Maeterlinck's style is, very much like his own, 'irrational', by which he means instinctively, metaphorically apt, yet unexpectedly, magically allusive.

Memory, the involuntary and the unconscious, elements so integral to Proust's own aesthetic system, were viewed by at least one late-century psycho-philosophical school not only as specifically incapable of generating creativity but as part of a syndrome that pathologized the individual who depended on them. In the preface to the second edition of his authoritative philosophy thesis, *L'Automatisme psychologique*, Pierre Janet noted that his study was focused on identifying, in human mental activity, the difference

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between the creative and the non-creative, the opposition between the inventive and the 'reproductive' or automatic. Towards the end of the same work, he analyzes examples of this automatism, each labelled an 'inferior mental activity': lack of attention or lack of concentration; instinct; passion; habit, to which he equates memory (463). Although Proust would have agreed with this negative categorization of habitual, conscious memory, involuntary memory and these other 'inferior' activities of the mind constitute fundamental pillars of creativity in the aesthetic theory rolled out in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Interestingly, Proust's novel was brought to Janet's attention in the 1920s, and he judged the work to be pathologically emotional.

Even in 1914, a year after the publication of *Du Côté de chez Swann*, Théodule Ribot noted that many doctors and psychologists still denied the existence of 'affective' (involuntary) memory. When, therefore, Proust defines the essence of his creative position as the distinction between the voluntary (unproductive) and the involuntary (authentic and rich, because arriving from the unconscious), his is not only an aesthetic statement but a defiant volley in an ongoing medico-psychological debate. For Proust, the unconscious is what is deep, behind, within, beyond. Above all, what arrives involuntarily from an unconscious layer of the mind bears with it an imperative: its obscure message must be converted into an equivalent, perhaps first a bodily, mimetic gesture, then a metaphor, and finally language. The language of everyday reason and logic is helpless to effect such expression. The unconscious is a set of deeply personal, individual structures in the mind of each of us, but without articulation and elucidation they remain forever mute.