

# Introduction

VERA J. CAMDEN

## Reading to Recover *Literature and Psychoanalysis*

Conceived within the cultural matrix of nineteenth-century Vienna, psychoanalysis was fostered by the European intellectual and social movements vanguard of the first part of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis went on to flourish in the American and European academies, first in medicine and then in the humanities.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the post–World War II medical establishment of the 1950s and 1960s, psychoanalysis dominated the theory and practice of psychiatry, especially in the United States, and entered the cultural and clinical mainstream as a prestigious and pervasive model of the mind. This was to change. By the 1970s, psychoanalysis would be banished from the prominent place it had once held in medicine, clinically employed by a remnant of followers by the end of the decade, and dwindling through the next decade.<sup>3</sup> Retreating under the increasing dominance of biological psychiatry and behavioral health models,<sup>4</sup> this once-queen of psychiatry departments, changed into different regalia, and was now coronated across campus from the medical schools in humanities departments.

In departments of philosophy, English, history, cultural studies, and modern languages for the next several decades, psychoanalysis held court in conferences, classrooms, and academic presses, presiding over a postmodern “turn to theory.”<sup>5</sup> The variety of psychoanalysis prevailing in this period was defined by the theories of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan who assumed the position of linguistic legate of Sigmund Freud. Shoshana Felman introduced English-speaking readers to Lacan’s theory that the “unconscious is structured like a language.”<sup>6</sup> And the “texts” of language, literature, and culture all came to reveal unconscious, unsettling, and unstable truths that fragment the “autonomous ego.”<sup>7</sup> For Felman, reading “otherwise” meant reading against the grain of conventional American literary criticism, resisting confidence in authorial intention and textual stability, and initiating the reader and critic into a new relation

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between literature and psychoanalysis. Freud had already pervaded popular culture, but for about three transformative decades at the end of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis as reinvented by Jacques Lacan became a tool to study culture – still a queen, but this time exiled from psychiatric practice and enthroned in humanities departments.<sup>8</sup>

Now, in the twenty-first century, things have, again, changed. There has been a swing in the pendulum of the academy, veering away from theory in general and psychoanalysis in particular. This, according to Marjorie Garber, may be a sign of “success”: psychoanalytic “concepts have naturalized, become adopted or adapted into the ordinary language and practice of our world. . . . This is what happens to ‘theory’ when it succeeds. It disappears, transmuted into the light of common day.”<sup>9</sup> However true this interesting notion may be regarding the naturalization of psychoanalytic concepts, it may also be that, to quote Jane Austen’s Mr. Knightley, success “should not, perhaps, have come so soon.”<sup>10</sup> Forty years after her landmark volume, Felman herself is hardly so sanguine as to the success of theory, especially as we confront the “barbarians at the gate of democracy.”<sup>11</sup> She writes,

In 1977 I proposed that we had to learn how to “read otherwise” psychoanalysis, and primarily how to “read otherwise” *through* psychoanalysis. In 2017 I am suggesting that, in our neoliberal age, what we must “read otherwise” – what I feel today it has become *most urgent to read otherwise* – is literature.<sup>12</sup>

*The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* takes up such urgent advice, avowing that psychoanalysis *itself* derives life and purpose from literature. If medical psychoanalysis repudiated Freud’s literary roots, the same can also be said for the dominion of postmodern critical theory<sup>13</sup> in “academia” – that it, too, neglects the literature Felman is now imploring us to read, and to read “closely.”

Christopher Bollas, both a literary scholar and a practicing psychoanalyst, shares the imperative to bring “meaning in our lives and in our societies, by making use of psychological insight, within the experience of democracy.”<sup>14</sup> To make his point he draws from E. M. Forster’s *Howard’s End*, which dramatizes how, at the turn of the twentieth century, the market-driven mentality that defined the emerging modern era separated words from feeling. Bollas offers an important correction to the conventional interpretation of Forster’s well-known phrase, “only connect”:

Forster’s intention is not always grasped. He does not mean that people should connect with one another – this is not an early step toward early relationalism – but that we need to connect our speech with our feelings. . . . “Live in fragments

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no longer” alludes to a psychological catastrophe in selves who no longer feel internally integrated.<sup>15</sup>

Such disconnection and dissociation indeed has become naturalized, culminating in the abandonment of insight and truth in our “fake news” era.<sup>16</sup> We have entered a different and dire moment in this strange new millennium.

The essays included in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* were gathered together in a period of quarantine for contributors and editors alike – what we are now calling “Covid Time.”<sup>17</sup> Our correspondence coincided with losses, spoken and unspoken, with grief and uncertainty both professionally and personally. These realities bring gravity and grace to the chapters that unfold, in which one might suggest feeling is reconnected with words as each author reads literature and psychoanalysis through this shared crisis. Along with the pandemic, we have witnessed environmental disasters amidst social, political, and cultural upheaval across the globe. The psychological toll on the world’s population from this concatenation may be incalculable. In such troubled times, what can a companion volume on literature and psychoanalysis offer us?

The answer, one hopes, is that it can propose what the Anglo-American Puritans called a companionate marriage,<sup>18</sup> in this case, not between two minds, but between two mentalities, two languages of human meaning. Literature and psychoanalysis draw from the heart of each other and in doing so foster new creations. For if psychoanalysis is a practice that offers amelioration of human suffering, literature is the source of that practice. Retrieving that source offers us a way to connect language not only with feeling, but also with action. As Felman asks,

Can we rekindle the torch of literature and revitalize its dialogue with psychoanalysis, in rejuvenating and renewing both our search for, and our contact with, their common truth, as a perpetual reminder of what can never be forgotten, and simultaneously, as an act that is yet to come?<sup>19</sup>

Freud, of course, depended upon literature for the defining “paradigm” of the prototypical event in the psychic life of the human subject. Writing to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897, he identifies the “gripping power” of the Oedipus complex discovered in his readings of Sophocles (and later confirmed in his reading of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*): “the Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion of which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself.”<sup>20</sup> In the power of literature to “seize” upon our humanity, and bring *anagnorisis*, or the recognition of truth in us and in our world, Freud recovered a tool for self-analysis from which he derived insights that led to scientific discoveries and clinical methods.

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Literature remains the generative core and repository of the creativity that makes us human. For it was, after all, Freud who admitted, “Before the problem of the creative artist, analysis must, alas, lay down its arms.”<sup>21</sup> Such surrender strengthens practitioners of all stripes. Adam Phillips summarizes the situation:

Indeed, so remarkable is [psychoanalysts’ transference to literature] . . . that it is perhaps the one thing that could be said to unite the increasingly disparate schools of psychoanalysis. Freud, Jung, Lacan, Winnicott, Bion, Meltzer, Milner, Segal, among many others, all agree in their privileging of the poetic.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of this bond has often been elided in academic as well as clinical discussions of psychoanalytic theory. Pierre Bayard puts it this way: “As it is often practiced, the psychoanalytical approach to texts places knowledge on the side of psychoanalysis and not on that of literature. In doing so, it risks diminishing literature and underestimating literature’s own ability to produce knowledge.”<sup>23</sup> Against this trend, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* places literature at the center of psychoanalytic thought. The authors who have written for this volume are literary critics and clinical practitioners, each of whom in their own way, pays respect to the creativity of mutual recognition, and in literature’s ability to produce knowledge.

Freud himself wrote great and lasting literature. His cases brought him admiration, but also notoriety as a storyteller.<sup>24</sup> Somewhat to his chagrin, he won the Goethe Prize for literature in 1930. He may have denied his pleasure in being called a novelist, yet he was the first to admit his reverence for the narrative method; his tendency to let his discoveries unfold, scene by scene, as in a detective story, has often linked him to Sherlock Holmes.<sup>25</sup> While contemporary psychoanalytic thinkers may not share Freud’s erudition any more than they share his genius, they are heirs to his psychology of the mind and to his technique of treatment. That psychology and that technique were shaped by an intellectual legacy imbued with a humanistic as well as scientific view of human experience. The consilience between literature and psychoanalysis predicated Freud’s discoveries of the unconscious. This same family bond can foster revelatory and revolutionary truths for the next generation.<sup>26</sup>

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As a psychoanalyst and professor, I stay “awake to the uses of fictions”<sup>27</sup> to learn how literary knowledge can impact, inform, and advance the psychoanalytic process as a treatment for the individual *and* the society. The historical imbrication of psychoanalytic theory and practice within the full

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matrix of cultural knowledge should not be relegated to history or to the inspiration of its early founder and his followers. It should instead inspire continued theoretical innovation and application as a method of research and practice. Such alertness to culture will take us into public places and creative spaces. And it will teach us how to “connect” language to feeling. What would it mean, Adam Phillips asks, for an analyst to be more like a poet in her practice? “[W]hat would be the cure for a poet-analyst?”<sup>28</sup> Freud answers this question in his idea of a “psychoanalytic university,” offering a model curriculum for such a “poet-analyst.” He writes,

[A]nalytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine [such as] . . . the history of civilization, the psychology of religion, and the science of literature – unless he is well at home in these subjects, an analyst cannot make anything of a large amount of his material.<sup>29</sup>

He made this rarely cited appeal in the face of the “medicalization” of psychoanalysis in the United States, as noted above.<sup>30</sup> Though a devoted physician and rigorous scientist, Freud nevertheless depended upon the cultural knowledge stored in myth, literature, religion, and philosophy for the strength of his healing techniques and the depths of his research in the past of the individual as well as human civilization. He is adamant that his method should allow for an analysis of the very foundations of civilization, as well as the cutting-edge research of scientists and physicians who grapple with myriad dimensions of the human condition.

For the purposes of this collection, it is important to note that Freud’s admiration and utilization of the truths of creative writing did not exclusively cluster around the “greats.” Words will “travel hither and thither,” says Virginia Woolf, who with her husband, Leonard, first published Freud in the Hogarth Press they ran out of their London living room. Words will go “a-roving,” and will “gad” about.<sup>31</sup> Somewhat of a gad-about reader himself, Freud often drew upon popular literature and culture to make his points.<sup>32</sup> For instance, in his analysis of Jensen’s *Gradiva* (a book Stanley Hyman unfairly calls “an absurd little novel”<sup>33</sup>), Freud identifies creative writing as his source and ally:

But creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science.<sup>34</sup>

In accord, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* offers readings that are rooted in literary history but also branch out into

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contemporary literacies, media, and mentalities, recognizing that creative forms are produced daily of which we can hardly dream.

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The alliance of storytelling with psychoanalysis has produced powerful testimonials from creative writers themselves. As an opening for the reader into this companion volume, I thus offer a brief discussion of the American poet, Hilda Doolittle's (H. D.) record of her analysis with Freud during the cataclysmic years of the 1930s in Vienna before the War. Her *Tribute to Freud* was proclaimed by Freud's first biographer, Ernest Jones, as "the most delightful and precious appreciation of Freud's personality that is ever likely to be written."<sup>35</sup> Here, H. D. reveals that Freud regarded her – the renowned poet – as much a student as a patient. Perhaps for this reason, he wanted her to know the sheer value of his discoveries to human history and human thought. She writes,

One day he said, "I struck oil. It was I who struck oil. But the contents of the oil wells have only just been sampled. There is oil enough, material enough for research and exploitation to last fifty years, to last one hundred years, or longer. . . . You [H. D.] discovered for yourself what I discovered for the [human] race."<sup>36</sup>

She does not take up this claim at this moment because, she said, she had been "shattered" by the intensity of his challenges to her ("My bat-like thought-wings would beat painfully in that sudden searchlight"). But she returns to his "struck oil" metaphor at some length later in her *Tribute*, in reflections that sustain the link between literature and psychoanalysis. For what she pursues in her examination of the meaning, as well as the impact of this oil metaphor upon her own imagination and her own treatment, deepens one's sense of Freud's debt to culture in his discoveries and the prospect of its impact on future generations. At first H. D. objects to the crude and mechanical image of the oil strike to capture the discoveries of psychoanalysis. As a poet, she prefers the metaphor of water – the ancient wellspring of life, the living waters of biblical mythology – to Freud's modern "Texas gold." Her objections to Freud's repeated comparison of his discoveries to the oil boom reveal the poet's conviction that the sources of psychoanalysis lay deep in cultural repositories, as she remarks:

They called it "a well of living water" in the old days, or simply "the still waters". The Professor spoke of this source of inspiration in terms of oil. It focused the abstraction, made it concrete, a modern business symbol. . . . He used the idiom or slang of the counting-house, of Wall Street . . . . We visualize stark uprights and skeleton-like steel cages . . . .

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She finds his analogy crude and unexpected, and in her initial disparagement sounds like the Texas rancher who, when he happened upon oil while digging for water for his cattle, was downright mad: “I wanted water, and they got me oil. I tell you I was mad, mad clean through. We needed water for ourselves and for our cattle to drink.”<sup>37</sup> Despite her distaste for the mechanical and materialistic image of the oil well, H. D. accepts the resilience and utility of Freud’s metaphor of modernity. Psychoanalysis gushes from below the rocks, sediment, and shale of thousands of years of “casual, slack or even wrong or evil thinking.”<sup>38</sup> And she admits “it is difficult to imagine the Professor saying solemnly, ‘I drew by right of inheritance from the great source of inspiration of Israel and the Psalmist— . . . I stumbled upon a well of living water, the river of life . . .’ But no, that was not the Professor’s way of talking.” Freud announces to H. D. that she is a student of “the greatest mind of this, and perhaps succeeding generations.” She, however, emphasizes his debt to human history: “the point is that for all of [Freud’s] . . . amazing originality,” he was drawing from a deep well of human consciousness that “others – long ago – had dipped into,” placing him in the pantheon of the Psalmist, Socrates, and Sophocles.<sup>39</sup>

H. D.’s contribution to literature and psychoanalysis, the *Tribute* to her professor that links her to him for posterity, owes its original conception to Freud’s late-life resignation to being misunderstood. She captures an intriguing moment in her treatment in the following scene:

He does not lay down the law, only this once – this one law. He says, “Please never – I mean never, at any time, in any circumstance, endeavor to defend me, if and when you hear about abusive remarks made about me and my work.”

He explained it carefully. He might have been giving me a lesson in geometry or demonstrating the inevitable course of a disease once the virus has entered the system. At this point, he seemed to indicate (as if there were a chart of a fever patient, pinned on the wall before us), at the least suggestion that you may be about to being a counter-argument in my defense, the anger or the frustration of the assailant will be driven deeper. You will do no good to the detractor by mistakenly beginning a logical defense. You will drive the hatred or the fear or the prejudice deeper. You will do no good to yourself, for you will only expose your own feelings – I take for granted that you have deep feelings about my discoveries, or you would not be here . . .<sup>40</sup>

Freud warns his patient, the poet, of the tribulations of defending psychoanalysis: a defense will only further distance his critics from the theories and practice of psychoanalysis. They will be distanced, and she exposed. As if he is charting a diagnosis of “fever patients” who argue against his discoveries, Freud cautions against robust apology for psychoanalysis. Thus, we are to

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understand, rather than expose herself by writing a defense, H. D. writes a *Tribute to Freud*. This companion volume, in its turn, aspires to pay tribute to the powerful synergy of literature and psychoanalysis.

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Students are deeply interested in the psychological underpinnings, implications, and interpretations of literary texts of all sorts and often take literature courses in search of personal identity. Literary and cultural encounters from diverse contexts deepen students' access to their own inner resources within the context of their *communitas*. Psychoanalytic paradigms, when unself-consciously introduced to students hungry for a way to speak about their search for meaning, allow for a frank exploration of human experience that helps make sense of their world. Anxious about what is true and what is false in received knowledge, students are preoccupied with personal identity in a constantly changing world dominated by social media and an endangered political, economic, and environmental future. As Bollas points out, "Since the 1980s, neoliberalism<sup>41</sup> had progressively abandoned the notion that human beings could guide their future, transferring society's collective ambition to 'market forces' that came to determine the nature, value, and outcome of the world in which we live."<sup>42</sup> In such a world, art and literature are at risk of becoming at best commodities, at worst irrelevant. We risk the loss of our culture and fall into melancholia. "Even though youth will try to find the bright side of life, our melancholia seeps into their veins."<sup>43</sup>

*The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* holds as self-evident that a young person might want and even need to read Shakespeare, Toni Morrison, Art Spiegelman, or Sa'adat Hasan Manto – to name a few of the authors represented in the pages that follow – to ameliorate the melancholia that seeps into their veins. In a recent piece in the *New Yorker*, Alexandra Schwartz writes her own tribute to the critic Vivian Gornick in a wide ranging, largely biographical essay whose narrative flow pivots on its main question: how might one "use" literature to live? Schwartz writes,

I asked Gornick how she knew that literature was something worthy of study. She looked at me as if I had asked how she knew that clean water was good to drink. I felt ashamed. . . . I was thinking in terms of the market, and she in terms of the soul.

"Because it was so thrilling. Because it made me feel alive," she said. "And as if I was in the presence of exciting and absorbing realities. The way people feel when they get religious."



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Gornick identifies the wellspring that H. D. felt resonated with Freud's metaphor of the riches beneath the earth's surface: "I felt that there was a story beneath the surface of ordinary, everyday life. And the books that contain that story. And, if I can get to it, life will be rich."<sup>44</sup>

Psychoanalyst, D. W. Winnicott, in one of his most influential papers, "The Fear of Breakdown," posits a mode of diagnosing and treating traumatic memory by witnessing its living remnants in patients who fear psychic collapse. He ends up describing in his "lapidary"<sup>45</sup> prose, the natural companionship of literature and psychoanalysis. Winnicott says that what he is about to describe has already been "dealt with" by the poets: "Naturally, if what I say has truth in it, this will already have been dealt with by the world's poets, but the flashes of insight that come in poetry cannot absolve us from our painful task of getting step by step away from ignorance towards our goal."<sup>46</sup> For the poets may have found, and indeed dealt with the truth of unknown or unspoken things – giving them "a local habitation and a name,"<sup>47</sup> but the psychoanalyst, by dint of often long and laborious discovery and formulation, can enlist those truths to offer a way out of ignorance, and toward psychological and even social transformation. Therefore, Winnicott is not as modest as he may sound in assigning the psychoanalyst the step-by-step work of uncovering in his analysis and the unspoken truths that the poet may already have found. T. S. Eliot's claims, in "Virgil and the Christian World" that the poet may well "know," but may not understand the ways that the reader (analyst) may utilize his gripping truths:

... if the word "inspiration" is to have any meaning, it must mean just this, that the speaker or writer is uttering something which he does not wholly understand – or which he may even misinterpret when the inspiration has departed from him. ... A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience ... yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation. He need not know what his poetry will come to mean to others.<sup>48</sup>

Exceeding the author's expression, intention, or even knowledge, literature offers transformation in the midst of suffering and oppression. James Baldwin, for instance, witnesses the power of literature in his own development, but also offers a social dimension of literary transformation:

You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was Dostoevsky and Dickens who taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who ever had been alive. Only if we face

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these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people. An artist is a sort of emotional or spiritual historian. His role is to make you realize the doom and glory of knowing who you are and what you are. He has to tell, because nobody else in the world *can* tell what it is like to be alive.<sup>49</sup>

*The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* avers that psychoanalysis, like literature, needs no defense, nor should it wield its powers in offense. Here H. D., once again, identifies another, final characteristic of this volume. She reflects:

This was the gist of the matter. In our talks together he rarely used any of the now rather overworked technical terms, invented by himself and elaborated on by the growing body of doctors, psychologists, and nerve specialists who form the somewhat formidable body of the International Psycho-Analytical Association.<sup>50</sup>

Her association to Freud's refraining from use of the language of psychoanalysis here is intriguing, stressing how he refuses to encapsulate orthodoxies in special terms. She rather offers us a Freud who speaks directly: authoritative, yes, but accessible. By the time he was treating H. D., it might be suggested that Freud was himself tired of the very nomenclature he himself had coined. It must be admitted that there is a large body of jargon-filled work by psychoanalytic literary critics who have long "elaborated upon" the "overworked technical terms" of psychoanalysis. I need not review this vast literature here. For any reader of psychoanalytic criticism will find many such examples of psychoanalytic interpretations of literature that strain to contain or even reduce creativity within theories of mental disorders. Such essays in psychoanalytic orthodoxies do not appear in this collection. Rather, contributors to this volume avoid using psychoanalysis to excavate literature of its life or of its power to startle. Nor do they use an overwrought model of psychoanalysis that speaks over literature, putting it in its place. Rather, as readers will see, their pairing of literature and psychoanalysis works collaboratively to plumb energy from the wells Freud struck long ago, guided as he was by the poets and philosophers who had gone before him.

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The essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Psychoanalysis* offer critical and personal perspectives on selected canonical authors, followed by analysis of contemporary literature of social, sexual, and political turmoil, as well as of newer forms such as film, graphic narrative, and autofiction. The volume divides into four sections, each offering the reader different entry points and subject areas to explore. Yet the collection requires no particular order of reading. Each chapter may fruitfully be read as a free-standing piece on various and timely topics. Taken a whole this volume can