

Psychoanalysis and literature: an introduction

Susan van Zyl

In a country where Freud is seldom seriously taught in psychology departments and the urgent demands of the political often marginalise all theoretical enquiry but that which is most explicitly committed, it may be ironic but it is hardly surprising that *JLS* should be one of the few, perhaps the first, local journal to devote a special edition to psychoanalysis.

After all, the history of the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis is as long as that of psychoanalysis itself and probably longer than that of literary theory, at least in its present form. Freud himself devoted some of his most interesting work to literature and post-Freudian psychoanalysis is central to the European intellectual tradition which continues to provide literary theory with some of its most important material and concepts.

1

Until very recently, the relationship between the two fields has been of the traditional kind, one best described in a more or less productive exchange primarily on the level of contents. Recent accounts (Kaplan, 1990) point out that the early history of this exchange displayed two identifiable stages determined by whether psychoanalysis or literature was seen to have priority.

The first, initiated by Freud and continued by his immediate followers, many of whom were practising analysts, was predominantly psychoanalytic in character and emphasis. It looked to literature for material in which concepts of its own could be most vividly explained or displayed. This approach, because it unashamedly used literature, its themes, effects, characters and even authors pragmatically, in the interests of a new and controversial knowledge, soon fell foul of the literary critical establishment. The New Criticism in particular, its most rigorous form being incompatible with psychoanalysis, argued that the interests of what is literary in the text could not be represented by way of so external, so reductionist an approach, one in addition tainted by its association with pathology.

Thereafter traditional literary criticism where it did so at all, turned to psychoanalysis only as an aid to character or thematic study and only where issues essential and internal to the text were concerned. Certainly while the analysis of specific characters or effects might be acceptable, that of the author was undoubtedly tabooed.

This approach was seen to redress earlier positions and to return the balance of emphasis to literature itself. Psychoanalysis thereafter played a subsidiary role and was often used almost defensively only on those occasions where it seemed especially appropriate – in the face of Hamlet's delay or Norbet's delusion – or where an effect or motive seemed intractable without it.

While neither of these positions has or need be superseded, a third of a

different kind gradually evolved primarily in Europe. This position, probably inaugurated, and certainly facilitated by Lacan's emphasis on the role of language in psychoanalysis put an end to the period in which the relation between psychoanalysis and literature was necessarily one of dominance, and replaced it with a real exchange between two bodies of language, one at last, to use Shoshana Felman's well-known formulation, outside the relation of master to slave.

Here, parallels between the language of literature, the modernist text in particular, and that of the unconscious, as well as those between the interpretive activity of the literary critic and that of the psychoanalyst are often drawn. In addition, literary criticism itself severs its supposedly constraining ties with the neutral language of commentary and comes to mimic what is aesthetic in the unconscious, often coupled with a liberal, and not always judicious, sprinkling of psychoanalytic concerns and vocabulary.

While no premise which founds what is essential in Lacan, Barthes or Kristeva should be set aside, in the hands of many of their less talented followers, this position inaugurates much that is detrimental. Firstly, and ironically in the light of the essential Freudianism of his project, Lacan's influence moves literary theory away from Freud and the style and spirit of his enquiry. Secondly, the stylistic parallels between the literary text and the symptom come to justify the introduction of a confused and heterologous discourse in literary theory which obscures what is important in the connection between literature and psychoanalysis. In practice, it leaves the task of clarifying Foucault's point at the end of *The order of things* (1973) to analytic philosophers Arthur Danto (1978) and Donald Davidson (1982) who, in establishing a formal parallel between the symptom and the text, also allow psychoanalysis and literature to occupy a similar privileged position in the modern episteme.

Any general account of the privileged relation between literature and psychoanalysis which returns to Freud might be tempted to do so by way of the theory of sublimation. At first glance, despite its relatively undeveloped status, sublimation provides a useful starting point, one which is, moreover, apparently less vulnerable to a superstitious theory of contagion suggesting that the most proud of cultural products will inevitably be tainted by any association with pathology.

In Freud's own work, however, the connection between sublimation and neurosis is clearly established, and severing them too early is detrimental to what is crucial to the argument. Both neurosis and sublimation have a common origin in the libido and a common status as vicissitudes, possible destinies for the instinct or more accurately, the drive. This connection has in turn as its precondition, the Freudian account of the psychic apparatus as the necessarily divided product of a divided field, that is, as the product of its existence between nature and culture, the body and language, a structural instability which is neither temporally nor "geographically" dissolved.

What is distinctive to Freud's position is not so much the understanding that the instincts are, in this, necessarily subject to vicissitudes nor even the more controversial assertion that what results is the drive which, no matter what its

destiny might be, is in essential respects always sexual in form, but stems from the recognition that despite the drive's apparently limitless plasticity, certain important parallels between its two most differently valued products, the symptom and the artwork, remain.

In the terminology of *The three essays on sexuality* (1905) this capacity for transformation is expressed by way of the formula that that which nevertheless remains sexual on the level of source is capable of taking a non-sexual aim and a non-sexual object. What distinguishes the symptom and the artwork is that the symptom (which is the neurotic's sexual life) is the product of a substitution on the level of the object only, while the artwork involves a substitution on the level of both object and aim.

Symptom and artwork, therefore, have a common status as permutations of the drive, which share in this the same preconditions in cultural (or superego) constraints upon the body, and have the same source in the libido.

But while the aesthetic and the pathological may have the same origins and preconditions and share an ontological status it is clear that, for Freud, the products of sublimation and the neuroses are significantly different in both value and effect.

The symptom, which operates as a constraint on action, condemns the sufferer to misery, while art is valued and makes its capacity to satisfy both the artist and those who experience it quite clear. Unlike the neurotic, the artist is not perceived as a reminder of cultural failure but is valorised as one who produces amongst its highest and most pleasurable products. This is why Freud speaks of art (but clearly not neurosis) as in the end providing the artist all that the world may offer, that is fame, riches and the love of women.

The admiration and the material rewards which culture gives to its artists stem from the fact that they have found a way in which to divert or exceed, even perhaps to cheat it, in ways which culture itself values and, unlike the neurotic, who is condemned to taking pleasure in secret, those who sublimate do so in full view of their admirers.

Art is therefore essentially constructive and progressive in ways which the common reading of these terms does not wholly capture. It is progressive (in contrast to the regressive direction of the symptom) and constructive in the sense that it binds and implements the drive in forms characteristic of the ego rather than the unconscious. Unlike the symptom which expresses and satisfies propositions which would have been consigned to the unconscious (that is, repressed) indirectly, the artwork sublimates these materials in ways which are still intelligible.

Freud's commentators (e.g. Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973) regularly draw attention to the fact that the theory of sublimation is relatively underdeveloped and neither the nature of the sublimatory process itself nor the limits of sublimation are fully described. Nor does Freud, except perhaps by way of his personal predilections, suggest directly any formal way in which to distinguish between the aesthetic and the other two fields which he characterises as sublimations, that is intellectual work and religion. There are, however, metapsychological grounds on which to suggest that art (particularly literature) is a sublimation of a distinctive and perhaps privileged kind.

Even at first glance, one of the noticeable features of the aesthetic is the universal delight it elicits, and the regularity with which it produces pleasure of an especially vivid kind for both those who make it and those who receive it. And unlike the pleasure associated with intellectual work and religious experience, that encountered in the aesthetic seems somehow closer to its origins in the sexual.

Freud sees all those activities he describes as sublimations as productive precisely because, unlike the symptom, they yield pleasure, the experience of mastery in the face of loss or frustration. The aesthetic, however, can be distinguished from other kinds of sublimation by way of the archaeological priority of the means by which this mastery is achieved.

2

The foundations of this account are to be found in the famous passage in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920: 283–286), in which Freud describes the *Fort Da* game.

What is important here is not merely the fact that the child, at so early an age, is able to master the experience of loss in the fact of the mother's departure, but the form which his activity takes. This preliminary and effective response is made possible by the child's capacity to model an event which causes unpleasure and in so doing diminishes that unpleasure. In playing the *Fort Da* game, Freud's infant grandson engages in an initially willing submission to loss, gaining mastery of it by virtue of re-enactment accompanied by prototypical linguistic events.

What the child does, as Freud points out, is in all respects characteristic of play and also of art, particularly of drama. What is essential here, is that this activity turns upon two forms of modelling. The first is that which allows the child, on the basis of perceptual parallels, to mimic the mother in the cotton reel and her departure in its movement and thus, in bringing it back, to return her to him. The second form is the naming associated with that activity, the linguistic accompaniment to the action which in instantiating the parallels (in marking the going, *fort*, and the coming *da*) transforms her departure, like her return, into pleasure.

It is clear that the child can produce over time an increasing refinement and elaboration of both modelling procedures, those that represent and refer to the world in action and those in language. While a child, he is confined to a cotton reel, a single gesture and a two word vocabulary. As an adult he has at his disposal, in theory at least, all of language and all of man's capacity to manipulate the world in action. But this capacity alone does not guarantee him the status of poet.

What remains is to distinguish the adult forms of signification from those of the religious man, intellectual or artist (the class of sublimators) and then to separate literary from other forms of sublimation. In this, Freud's account of the origins of the ego and the now familiar semiotic insights into the logic of natural languages may usefully be combined.

The Freudian account of the ego emphasises its status as the agency closest

to the perceptual apparatus which is the product of the operation of delay upon the drive. The ego's efficacy is proportional to the extent to which this delay is grounded in an appropriately organised set of increasingly refined perceptual discriminations. And this discriminatory capacity is in turn grounded in a logic in which the form or shape of things (their perceptual values) is a valid and necessary determinant of their capacity to satisfy or dissatisfy the drive.

By contrast, the acquisition of language involves a procedure of another kind. Meanings are not the properties of the elements in a signifying system but their associations established by convention. In other words, the signifier is not regularly related iconically to the signified; the *form* of words as percepts is not relevant in determining their function as concepts or as referents.

The way in which the world of objects as objects alone (which satisfy the drive) is learned is not relevant to the learning of a language. The logic of the body is not equivalent to that of words.

Because of the developmental priority of this logic of the body and its relevance to the pleasure principle, conventional forms are not enthusiastically embraced, and are regularly abandoned in favour of those motivated systems which preceded it. That children prefer at first a motivated language is clear from the way in which they implement a phonetic rationality in baby talk (calling a dog "woof-woof") and from the difficulty they have in accepting that the size of the parcel in no way relates to the value of the gift or that of the coin to its buying power. In fact, part of the difficulty of resolving Oedipus and the agony of unrequited love stems from the fact that it is by no means obvious that this person who shares nothing but her gender is an adequate substitute for the mother, and it is not consoling to recognise that nothing but the shape of the body or a gesture may stand between affection or even admiration and passionate love.

The knowledge that what differentiates the infant and the adult, the rational man and the madman, is the capacity to tell the difference between the structures which govern the elements in the signifying system and the logic of perception is expressed in some of the world's greatest literature.

The extraordinary ceremony which opens *King Lear* takes the form of a trial of love which Cordelia refuses to enter because of its flawed form. Called upon to speak more eloquently than her sisters of the love she bears her father in order to gain a portion richer than theirs, she refuses to enter into an exchange in which love may be measured in land. In response to Lear's rage at her refusal, Kent significantly speaks not only of his old man's dotage but of his madness. What marks King Lear as mad, as the rest of the play makes clear, is not just his vanity, his rage, nor his poor judgement of character but the error which unites the child and the madman, the belief that relative amounts of love may be exchanged proportionally for amounts of land.

For psychoanalysis two things in Lear are distinctive. The first is that what is pathological in his actions stems not from something intrinsic to pathology and separate from normality but from the re-emergence of ingredients which would be normal at a prior stage or on another occasion. If Lear were a child

or a property dealer, Kent would not have questioned his sanity. It is not that land can never be sold nor that it can never be given away, but Lear confuses a sale and a gift and in so doing tries to institute a currency where currency is neither possible nor called for.

What is Freudian in Kent's insight lies in the recognition that just such a slippage is at the heart of all madness, its pre-condition. The neurotic may satisfy the repressed wish in secret because a word is a thing which, while it cannot *be* itself and something else, it can *mean* both one thing and another. The psychotic may be deluded, may inhabit a fictional world in which words are substituted for things (Freud, 1915: 201–210) precisely because a signified is not necessarily a referent. Fiction is possible because words may signify without referring and poetry is possible because the words which signify are also things. What unites literature and psychoanalysis is that madness too is possible for just these reasons.

Between literature and madness on the one hand and childhood on the other is quite literally a question of agency. Whereas neurosis speaks the unconscious (the language of the body), psychosis (the absence of agency) is all unconscious and body. Poetry is the business of the ego, the willing re-introduction of seeing in saying which made it possible in the first place.

There is nothing idle in the alliance between psychoanalysis and literary modernism. While it is true that all literature (because it has style and therefore re-organises the relation of form to content) is like the unconscious, only literary modernism makes of this alliance an epistemological, and especially a political, program.

Programmatic modernism sets literature above all other sublimations. Religion may envisage a whole new world, and in doing so reveal what is meagre, unsatisfying or unethical about the one in which we live. Intellectual work may be devoted to explaining the world, often in the interests of its transformation. Only literature can combine knowledge and pleasure, express not only that in the world which is to be explained or ought to be transformed but remind us of that which may not enter into it at all.

It is not for nothing that the theories associated with the practice of literary modernism correctly described as critiques of representation make this clear. Derrida, Barthes and Kristeva, in opposing logo- and phono-centrism, the regime of the Readerly and the dominance of the phenotext, combine to emphasise that the political program associated with modernism is based on their shared commitment to the strategic return of what is repressed.

In other words, psychoanalysis alone can tell us about the forms of experience which the culture enjoins and validates and those which it represses, and most particularly, allows us to understand how both artwork and symptom, because they are defined by form alone, act as active indicators within any culture of that which has been repressed. Each is, as it were, a continued reminder and exemplar of those operations which the cultural, in order to be itself, must sacrifice.

In the final analysis only psychoanalysis itself can explain why a knowledge of pathology should be so important to literature, and only literature can be its alternative practice.

3

In the introduction to an extraordinarily interesting collection of essays devoted to Freud's own texts, and a discussion of artworks in the light of psychoanalysis, Leo Besani (1988), casts new light upon the privileged relation between psychoanalysis and literature in ways perhaps more familiar in literary theory.

Besani's concern, especially in the first essay, is with what he describes as the unexpected textual density of Freud's work. Freud's singular achievement, he suggests, stems not so much from the content of his findings or even from the structure of his argumentation but from a revealing, perhaps strategic, textual collapse, one to be celebrated rather than bemoaned because it is a necessary function of both the content and the form of Freud's problematic.

While it is tempting, even commonsensical, to explain this apparent failure in epistemological terms or as the result of the novelty and complexity of Freud's propositions, Besani's claim for a particular textual status in psychoanalysis is of a stronger kind. This textuality stems, he suggests, from the basic tension in Freud between certain radical speculative moments emerging at the heart of the text and the necessity to practise, even to institutionalise, the results of this process itself.

What is interesting about this textual collapse, one which is distinctive in Freud's texts but need not be confined to them, is that what Besani describes as the emergence of a literary or aesthetic principle in language, usually excluded from the language of knowledge.

If Besani were simply joining a growing group of critics concentrating on Freud's scientific works as though they were aesthetic ones, his point would not be especially interesting, and might even be dubious. This project should not be confused with anything approximating a stylistic analysis, an appreciation of Freud as a writer, winner of the Goethe prize. Instead, Besani makes it clear that this textuality emerges within, and despite, the legitimate claims to the status of the knowledge which Freud's works make. Freud's work encompasses literary capacities or effects within its knowledge structures for reasons more substantial than the need to write well and persuasively.

Besani himself does not describe this textual collapse as essentially literary, but his analysis makes it possible to demonstrate that what he has identified is in all essential respects the emergence of an aesthetic principle at the heart of Freud's writing. Besani's textual density is to be found in Freud's marked ability to dwell in contradiction, his capacity to set aside the irritable searching after fact and reason, which Keats calls the poetic capacity, negative capability, one which is characteristic of the unconscious itself (Freud, 1915).

Secondly, Besani's account suggests that Freud's text is permeated with desires and wishes, with interest and self-interest which trouble the supposedly disinterested, notational systems demanded of the knowledge form. And finally that the Freudian text evinces the repressed affect associated with the alternative proposition which is to be found especially clearly in the divided discourse which he identifies in *The three essays on sexuality* (1905).

On the explicit level *The three essays* are concerned to demonstrate the novel proposition, that sexuality cannot and should not be considered in the light of the traditional naturalistic or attendant developmental model. However, Besani points out that within the work we may identify an essentially narrative voice, one in which the sexual is conceived of in classical teleological terms, and the narrative pull, the demands of the genre itself, accounts for this tension. It is this generic demand, the teleological one suppressed by the surface content, but carried by the narrative demands of the writing, which is seen as the emergence of the symptom, the Writerly, at the heart of a true narrative.

What is interesting in Besani and especially apparent in the Introduction to his book is that what psychoanalysis has as **content** is identical to what the aesthetic itself *is*. That which Freud reveals to exceed the ego and the dominant regime of natural language or rationality in which it deals, is the presence of a poetic principle within the ordinary or rational. Literature, then, is the psychopathology of everyday life, the willed or intentional aspect, officially tractable but always excessive, which necessarily inhabits culture itself.

The textual collapse which Besani reveals to be operative in all Freud's works cannot therefore be seen simply as an error or failure within the house of reason but rather as an inevitable outcome of reason's relation to that which always and systematically escapes its first principles. If the ego is slave to three masters, then, in a way reminiscent once more of Barthes, the Readerly is always subject to the besieged principle that it wrests from the domain of the Writerly.

Interestingly, many of the papers in this collection spontaneously demonstrate the privileged relation of psychoanalysis to literature and for reasons outlined in the metapsychology and underlying analyses such as Besani's.

4

In the opening paper, Chesca Long-Innes suggests that Freud's texts are the source of a number of diverse responses amongst critics and commentators, precisely because of their ambiguous textual status. This textual ambiguity, she suggests, stems from the fact that Freud's writing cannot be clearly classified as either literature or science, primarily because in each instance we expect a particular relation between language and concepts (between style and content) which Freud's work resists. The first possible response to this uneasy position is to reconsider Freudian works as primarily instances of literary activity, as events having a style. This response, she argues, classically represented in Patric Mahony's *Freud as a writer*, is illegitimate in that it sidesteps the real issues and indulges in a form of biographical gossip and a limited assessment of stylistic features.

Derrida's reading of the second chapter of *The pleasure principle*, by contrast, while it too partakes in a reconstrual of Freud's essentially epistemological or scientific project which emphasises its essentially literary or rhetorical forms, has the advantage of revealing that which is constitutive of

the Freudian text on a more substantive level. This Derridian account similarly suggests that there is a surreptitious and a necessary poetic principle at the heart of Freud's texts.

Neither of these positions Long-Innes argues are, however, wholly satisfactory, for each stumbles when trying to formulate the peculiar merits or difficulties which the Freudian text presents. Certainly, Stanley Fish's classic attack on Freud's "Wolf-man" case, in which he accuses Freud of a variety of misdemeanours ranging from invalid interpretation to strategic, almost blatant, misconstrual, is no more satisfactory than Mahony's panegyric.

The final solution, the author suggests, is neither a reconstrual of psychoanalysis as a proper object of an essentially literary study by virtue of the stylistic sophistication, the genius of Freud's writing, nor is it appropriate to condemn Freud as a failed scientist exploiting apparently secure evidence and canons in order to indulge in barely disguised and largely whimsical interpretive activities.

Rather, in supporting a reading of *The three essays on sexuality* by Arnold Davidson, she suggests that the singular contribution Freud's work has made to the history of what should now simply be called "writing" is a conceptual advance predicated upon a capacity to transcend the traditional demand that texts belong either to aesthetic forms on the one hand or scientific ones on the other. It is precisely the capacity to transcend rather than awkwardly straddle this division which accounts for Freud's unique contribution, his practical critique of that very borderline.

In the second paper, John Noyes examines Freud's essay *The uncanny*, which focuses on Hoffmann's work *The sandman*. Here, a noticeably similar problematic is considered but a different conclusion is drawn.

Noyes points to the fact that Freud's reading of Hoffmann's tale, as the opening etymological investigation reveals, is an attempt to exemplify a basic psychoanalytic insight by way of a literary text. While Freud recognises that Hoffmann's tale is an especially vivid and appropriate instance on which to base a discussion of the uncanny, his reading, Noyes suggests, is interestingly flawed. At a number of key points a recurring error or distortion, at times of an almost explicit kind, is made. What, Noyes asks, accounts for this misreading?

The basic failure, he demonstrates, stems from the fact that what is literary in the text exceeds its capacity to function as exemplary. Whereas Hoffmann, as writer, is content to dwell within the disparate voices which mediate the world of the text, to dwell that is, in contradiction, Freud's essay, under the constraints of a discursive piece, attempts to reconcile them.

This flawed attempt, Noyes argues, is explained by way of the difficulty which psychoanalysis has (on another level) with the relationship between narrative and historical operations. This difficulty stems from the illusions which it, perhaps any science, has that the will to truth naturally overrides any generic commitment which may not be in its own interests, particularly where the genre is history. Whereas Hoffmann proceeds in the belief that narrative itself is a means by which the truths or, for that matter the fictions, of the psychic mediate those of history, Freud cannot do so.

In a way reminiscent of Besani and Long-Innes, Noyes's essay is concerned with the relationship between literary or aesthetic discourses and scientific ones, suggesting that Freud is unable to maintain the clear distinction between the two forms to which his project commits him. Freud's reading of Hoffmann's tale is symptomatic in the strict sense because it displays, but is unable to acknowledge, the way in which the form of his enquiry (the genre or technique) necessarily troubles its content.

What distinguishes Besani's position from that of Noyes is that Noyes believes that Freud is either unaware of, or uneasy with, this contradiction and that it is one which is potentially vitiating precisely because psychoanalysis is committed to both a method and object of enquiry which themselves produce this contradiction.

John Higgins's paper dealing with Raymond Williams's response to psychoanalysis, entitled *A missed encounter*, outlines the form which Williams's opposition to the psychoanalytic project takes and provides some of the reasons for this opposition. He suggests that what is interesting about Williams's response to Freud are the questions which it raises about the possible relations between cultural materialism and psychoanalysis as a whole, particularly in relation to literature.

Williams's objections, Higgins suggests, can be isolated under a number of basic rubrics. Firstly, he sees psychoanalysis as fundamentally elitist or romantic which in this supports the notion that the unconscious and creative activity are both beyond the reach of all but the idealised figure of the poet.

Secondly, Williams, as one committed to a general democratisation and rationalisation of the aesthetic, believes that psychoanalysis is necessarily opposed to the basic model of communication which informs cultural materialism's theory of social reproduction. In separating man (as he believes Freud does) from the social and seeing his natural individual position as essentially in conflict with the social, Williams believes that Freud neither has, nor finally can, make a substantial contribution to any understanding of social relations. Beyond a gesture to the possible usefulness of Oedipus, Williams misses Freud at every turn. What is interesting about this failed encounter, Higgins's account implies, originates in cultural materialism's inability to think the level at which psychoanalysis makes a contribution to an understanding of the social.

Susan van Zyl and Joanne Stein describe and then assess the similarity between the artwork and the symptom on the basis of a common conception of a language of the unconscious which parallels poetic language in essential respects. By way of an examination of this linguistic reading, exemplified in the work of Paul Ricoeur, they suggest that the construal of a language of the unconscious is not faithful in essential respects to Freud's conception of the symptom. Furthermore, in re-describing the symptom and the artwork by means of a rhetorical model which can sustain a parallel of this kind, much that is both essential to, and epistemologically revealing about, literature and pathology is lost.

In delimiting the linguistic model and its appropriate application in this way, they suggest that when both the artwork and the symptom are

considered not so much as events within a language (albeit a language of a special variety or form) but rather as events at the edge of the linguistic itself, then the special role of literature and psychoanalysis is better understood.

What is at stake in this re-description is the extent to which literature and pathology can be understood not merely as indicating what is a special or elevated form of experience itself but that which marks the boundaries or limits of experience. In other words each continually reminds us not merely of the fact of cultural repression but also of the necessary form of that which is repressed.

If the first four papers have been broadly concerned with aspects of Freud's endeavour itself, with the textual status of his work and possible parallels between questions of aesthetics and those in psychoanalytic pathology, then Carol Steinberg and Nicola Galombik discuss the extent to which a Freudian explanation (of the operation of group psychology) can be brought to bear upon the question of the political function of the aesthetic.

They suggest via a detailed examination of the programmes of Artaud, Mzwakhe and Leni Riefenstahl that Freud's text *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego* allows a number of recurring operations to be identified. In pointing out that the mechanisms of the "spectacle", derived from Freud's work, are regular and recurring, they also suggest that the ingredients which make the persuasive or the political function of the aesthetic possible can be deployed successfully in the interests of a variety of programmes, regardless of their ethical or political status. They also suggest, therefore, that in understanding the ways in which the persuasive elements, the "de-individuation" associated with the operation of the group can be used in aesthetic formats, these procedures may equally easily be abused.

The second group of papers in this collection share a common format in that each takes a psychoanalytic concept or concepts and applies them to the analysis of a particular text. In each case, these analyses suggest not only that the concepts chosen are of particular value in illuminating the texts concerned, but also that these concepts make available, or enrich textual readings in ways which more standard accounts have not been able to do.

In his study of Coleridge's *The ancient mariner*, David Bunyan concentrates on its uncanny qualities, using Freud's renowned essay to explain how these effects are achieved. He suggests that the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom is useful in accounting for some of the features of the symbolic in literature and accounts for why it is that images and poems reveal "a truth ordinary only in dreams".

Both poetry and Freud, Bunyan suggests, as can be demonstrated in *The ancient mariner* in particular, keep alive the sense of the unconscious.

Opperman's enigmatic late collection entitled *Komas uit 'n bamboesstok* has often presented commentators with particular difficulties. Written after a long and potentially fatal illness, the poems emerge as inexplicably opaque. Martin Crous's analysis in the light of Freud and the subsequent work of Karen Horney and Juliet Mitchell, suggests that the poems are about a type of adult rebirth, an introspection in terms of the regressive passage through the infantile stages which his illness made possible. In willingly entering into

this regression, Crous suggests the poems convey a type of rediscovery of language, and a reliving of its acquisition.

Méira Cook's study, the first in the light of Lacan, focuses on Isaiah Bashevis Singer's work, particularly upon his short story "The black wedding". In this analysis, she demonstrates that "The black wedding" is particularly appropriate for a psychoanalytic approach for two reasons. Firstly, it is explicitly concerned with psychosis, is the record, that is, of its protagonist's vow to silence, and secondly, the tale itself has much in common with a psychoanalytic case history.

In addition, two closely interrelated themes, that of the position of women in the shletel community (particularly that of a rabbi's daughter) and the relation which the central character has to silence are explored. Using Lacan's Imaginary and symbolic and the Mirror stage, the author suggests that these concepts provide a unique understanding of the way in which a rigidly patriarchal society acts as a form of resistance to women's speech which in turn assigns its subjects to silence.

In the final paper of the collection, Hein Viljoen undertakes an analysis of D.J. Opperman's "Sondag van 'n kind" in the light of Lacan and then of Freud. Paying particular attention to Lacan's *lack* and using it to explain the broken (*die verminkte*) form of the text, he discovers the hidden intertext, the Bible. He supplements his analysis with Freud's "family romance", thus allowing the enigmatic lamb in the last line to express the young child's wish to return to the heart of the Oedipal structure with the power of the Son of Man.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the contributors, especially John Higgins, Chesca Long-Innes and Joanne Stein, for their interest and encouragement, and Peter John Delport for an extraordinary five-year seminar on Freud which made the form of this special issue possible.

References

- Besani, L. 1986. *The Freudian body: psychoanalysis and art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Danto, A.C. 1978. Freudian explanation and the language of the unconscious. In: Smith, J.H. (ed.). *Psychoanalysis and language, psychiatry and the humanities*. Vol. 3. London: Yale University Press, pp. 325–352.
- Davidson, D. 1982. Paradoxes of irrationality. In: Wollheim, R. (ed.). *Philosophical essays on Freud*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 189–305.
- Foucault, M. 1973. *The order of things*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Freud, S. 1905. Three essays on the theory of sexuality. *On sexuality*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, Vol. 7, pp. 45–169.
- Freud, S. 1909. From the history of an infantile neurosis. (The wolf man.) *Case Histories II*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, Vol. 9, 1979: pp. 233–366.
- Freud, S. 1915. The unconscious. *On metapsychology. The theory of the unconscious*. Harmondsworth: Pelican, Vol. 11, 1984: pp. 159–216.