CHAPTER 20

‘Freudian Fiction’ or ‘Wild Psycho-Analysis’?

Modernism, Psychoanalysis, and Popular Fiction, 1900-1920

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3. 3. Elucidate, on the basis of Dr. Freud’s teaching,
 - a. (a) The Conversion of St. Paul.
 - b. (b) The Channel Tunnel project.
 - c. (c) The European War.
 - d. (d) The growing popularity of tooth-picks in the United States.

[...]

5. 5. What evidence of inversion can you point to in the works of
either (a) Sophocles
or (b) Rupert Brooke?

5. 6. Subjects for an essay. (One only to be chosen.)—

Anus v. Vagina. The Influence of the Stool upon Social Institutions. The Pleasures of a Single Life. Dr. Freud, analysed by himself.¹

By 1920, according to the poet Bryher, ‘all literary London’ had ‘discovered Freud’: ‘To me,’ she wrote, ‘Freud is literary England [...] after the first war. People did not always

¹ *Lytton Strachey By Himself*, ed. Michael Holroyd (Heinemann, 1971), 112, quoted in John Forrester and Laura Cameron, *Freud in Cambridge* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 120-21. Forrester and Cameron suggest a date of 1914-15.

agree but he was always taken in the utmost seriousness.’² Despite Bryher’s enthusiasm, not all of ‘literary England’ were fans of Sigmund Freud, and neither, as Lytton Strachey’s spoof examination script testifies, was psychoanalysis always treated with such ‘seriousness’. Strachey’s jocular approach to psychoanalysis indicates, as John Forrester and Laura Cameron suggest, ‘what a very well informed undergraduate [at Cambridge] just might have been expected knowingly to laugh at, if not actually to know about’ around the years 1914-15.³ As Dean Rapp’s survey of periodicals published in the 1910s testifies, the ‘popularization of Freud’ began in the British general press in 1912, continuing apace throughout the decade.⁴ ‘By 1914, Freud was’ – in Cambridge at least – ‘an author “everybody knows”.’⁵ The mock exam script is permeated by the fascinated ambivalence that characterises Strachey’s own relationship to Freud, simultaneously performing a knowledge of Freudian concepts – Oedipus, sexuality, dream interpretation – while also holding these new ideas at a distance. Freud himself would admire Strachey’s irreverent approach to biography: in 1928, following the publication of *Elizabeth and Essex*, Freud wrote to Strachey that he was ‘steeped in the spirit of psychoanalysis’.⁶ But Strachey seems, in this earlier encounter, tickled by the pathologising propensities of the psychoanalyst, instructing his imagined undergraduate to ‘Write a short biography of Oedipus’, ‘a short essay on [...] Shakespeare’s Sonnets, psycho-pathologically considered’, or to tease out ‘evidence of inversion’ in the work of Sophocles or Rupert Brooke.⁷

² Quoted in Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Indiana University Press, 1981), 18.

³ Forrester and Cameron, *Freud in Cambridge*, 120-1, 137.

⁴ Dean Rapp, ‘The Early Discovery of Freud by the British General Educated Public, 1912-1919’, *Social History of Medicine*, 3.2 (1990), 218.

⁵ Forrester and Cameron, *Freud in Cambridge*, 122.

⁶ Quoted in Perry Meisel and Walter Kendrick (eds.), *Bloomsbury/Freud: The Letters of James and Alix Strachey 1924-1925* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), 332.

⁷ *Lytton Strachey By Himself*, 111-12.

If Lytton Strachey chuckled in his early response to Freudian ideas, then his friend Virginia Woolf – who would become, in 1924, the chief publisher of Freud’s writings in English – was altogether more severe. In a 1920 review of ‘Freudian Fiction’, Woolf complained of the tendency to turn ‘characters’ into ‘cases’.⁸ ‘Judged as an essay in morbid psychology,’ Woolf wrote of J. D. Beresford’s *An Imperfect Mother*, it ‘is an interesting document; judged as a novel, it is a failure.’⁹ Responding to a psychoanalytic review of *Sons and Lovers* in 1913, D. H. Lawrence was outraged by the ‘vicious half-statements of the Freudians’.¹⁰ In 1920, Katherine Mansfield lamented ‘the sudden “mushroom growth” of cheap psycho analysis [*sic*]’, while, writing in 1922, T. S. Eliot complained similarly of the reductive vision of a new ‘psychoanalytic type’ of novel that claimed to lay bare ‘the soul of man under psychoanalysis’.¹¹ In *Finnegans Wake* (1939), James Joyce would mock the ‘yung and easily freudened’, issuing a ‘word of warning’ to his readers to be wary of making ‘freudful mistake[s]’.¹²

Despite this litany of complaints, the relationship between British modernism and psychoanalysis is neither as simple, nor as straightforward, as, at first glance, it might seem. The links are both direct and oblique. In the early decades of the twentieth century, an emergent interest in what the novelist May Sinclair described as ‘the haunted world below our waking consciousness’ took diverse, and, as scholars have emphasised, eclectic forms, including: the widespread fascination with the occult and the uncanny which led to the founding of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882; the first translations of Freud’s

⁸ Virginia Woolf, ‘Freudian Fiction’ (1920) in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie and Stuart N. Clarke (London: Hogarth Press, 1986-2011), vol. 3, 197.

⁹ Woolf, ‘Freudian Fiction’, 196.

¹⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. James T. Boulton, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979-2000), vol. 3, 1913-1916, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, 2nd edition, (2002), 655.

¹¹ Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984-2008), vol. 4 (1996), 69; T. S. Eliot, ‘London Letter: August 1922’, *Dial*, 73 (September 1922), 330.

¹² James Joyce, *The Restored Finnegans Wake* (1923-39), ed. Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon (London: Penguin, 2010), 91-2, 320.

writings into English, starting with A. A. Brill's *Studies in Hysteria* in 1909; the founding, in 1913, of Britain's first psychotherapy unit, the Medico-Psychological Clinic (May Sinclair was a founding board member); and the founding, also in 1913, of the London Psycho-Analytical Society (re-formed in 1919 as the British Psycho-Analytical Society).¹³ For many of the central figures in Bloomsbury modernism – Lytton Strachey, James Strachey, Alix Strachey (née Sargant-Florence), Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, and Adrian and Karin Stephen (née Costelloe) – their first encounters with the Freudian unconscious took place at Cambridge in the 1900s and 1910s. Reviewing *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in 1914, Leonard Woolf wrote of Freud's 'great subtlety of mind,' admiring a 'broad and sweeping imagination more characteristic of the poet than the scientist or the medical practitioner.'¹⁴

In 1924, the Woolfs' Hogarth Press became the primary publisher of psychoanalytic literature in Britain, publishing Freud and Melanie Klein in translations by (amongst others) James Strachey, Alix Strachey, and Joan Riviere, alongside the work of British analysts including Ernest Jones and Ella Freeman Sharpe.¹⁵ '[A]ll the psycho-analyst books have been dumped in a fortress the size of Windsor castle in ruins upon the floor,' wrote Virginia Woolf:

¹³ May Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 8, cited by Suzanne Raitt, *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 135. See: Lyndsey Stonebridge, 'Psychoanalysis and Literature', in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 269-85; Stephen Frosh, 'Psychoanalysis in Britain: "The Rituals of Destruction"', in *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 116-136; Matt Ffytche, 'The Modernist Road to the Unconscious', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford University Press, 2010), 410-428; Theophilus E. M. Boll, 'May Sinclair and the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 106 (1962), 310-26; Suzanne Raitt, 'Early British Psycho-Analysis and the Medico-Psychological Clinic', *History Workshop Journal*, 58.1 (2004), 63-85; Philippa Martindale, "'Against all hushing up and stamping down": The Medico-Psychological Clinic of London and the Novelist May Sinclair', *Psychoanalysis and History*, 6.2 (2004), 177-200.

¹⁴ Leonard Woolf, 'Leonard Woolf: Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*' (1914), in *A Bloomsbury Group Reader*, ed. S. Rosenbaum (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 189-190.

¹⁵ J. H. Willis, Jr., *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917-41* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 297-328.

we are publishing all Dr Freud, and I glance at the proof and read how Mr A. B. threw a bottle of red ink on to the sheets of his marriage bed to excuse his impotence to the housemaid, but threw it in the wrong place, which unhinged his wife's mind,—and to this day she pours claret on the dinner table. We could all go on like that for hours; and yet these Germans think it proves something—besides their own gull-like imbecility.¹⁶

In January 1939, following his arrival in London as a refugee from Nazi Europe, the Woolfs met Freud. Famously, suggestively, he gave Virginia a narcissus; they discussed Hitler, guilt, fame, and the war.¹⁷ Besides that one – highly suspicious – ‘glance at the proof’ in 1924, however, Woolf appears to have refused to read Freud directly, until, after his death, she finally ‘Began reading Freud’ at the end of 1939.¹⁸

As Elizabeth Abel has argued, Woolf's antipathy to psychoanalysis was connected to a distinctively English and ‘singularly literary version of psychoanalytic discourse’ that was constructed by ‘Bloomsbury’ writers and psychoanalysts, and ‘which intensified both its appeal and its potential threat to writers of imaginative texts’.¹⁹ The affinities between psychoanalysis and literature, as has often been remarked, were already present, albeit in a sometimes-anxious form, in Freud's own writing.²⁰ In *Studies on Hysteria* (1893), Freud found it ‘strange’ that ‘the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science’.²¹ Freud returned frequently to literary examples: he ‘turn[ed] to the poets’ when he reached an impasse or difficulty in his own

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, 20th July 1924, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975-1980), vol. 3, 119, 134-5.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977-1984), vol. 5, 202.

¹⁸ Woolf, *Diary*, vol. 5, 248.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 15.

²⁰ Lionel Trilling, *Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 15-16; Adam Phillips, *In Writing: Essays on Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 2016).

²¹ Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-95), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey et al., 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74), vol. 2, 160.

thought, and, of course, that major concept of psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex, is itself drawn from Greek tragedy.²² As Adam Phillips has noted, poets, ‘whether pathologized or idealized or both’, are repeatedly invoked by psychoanalysts ‘as exemplary and inspiring figures in the way that Freud and his followers were not and are not by poets’.²³ Despite significant exceptions, Freud and his followers were not simply ignored by modernist writers, they were frequently roundly rebuffed.

More than viewing psychoanalysis as a competitive imaginative discourse, I want to suggest that one of the primary issues at stake for modernist writers in their often-spiky engagements with psychoanalysis was a debate about reading. These modernist writers were anxious about what Paul Ricoeur, writing forty years later, would refer to as a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’.²⁴ Modernist writers were troubled by what they perceived as a symptomatic theory of reading at the heart of psychoanalysis – a theory in which literature, treated like a patient, is subordinated to the interpretative sovereignty of the psychoanalytic reader, who sets about exposing the unconscious life of fictional characters, or, worse, diagnosing their author.²⁵ Not only, however, was this critique of psychoanalytic interpretation driven by a sense of the hermeneutic violence of the Freudian reader, it was also, I want to suggest, driven by a modernist distaste for one of the most important vehicles of so-called ‘Freudian’ ideas in early twentieth-century culture: popular novels. In what follows, I want to highlight the fact that the conflict between modernist writers and psychoanalysis often flares up most vividly in relationship to the representation of psychoanalysis in popular fiction. This modernist critique of psychoanalytic reading is, therefore, more frequently than not a critique

²² Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933 [1932]), *Standard Edition*, vol. 22, 135; and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Standard Edition*, vols. 4-5, 263. See Rachel Bowlby, *Freudian Mythologies: Greek Tragedy and Modern Identities* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

²³ Phillips, *In Writing*, 5.

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. D. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 33-4.

²⁵ See also Allon. White, *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 45, 167: n.52.

of what Freud referred to as “‘wild” psycho-analysis’, or what Shoshana Felman, borrowing from Henry James, described as ‘vulgar’ psychoanalysis – it is a critique of its most reductive version, derived, for the most part from popular (‘vulgar’, or in Mansfield’s equally loaded terms ‘cheap’) novels rather than any sustained engagement with psychoanalytic writing.²⁶ In the encounter between modernism and psychoanalysis there is, in these early years, a kind of ‘confusion of tongues’ (to borrow a phrase from Sándor Ferenczi), in which psychoanalysis is identified with the supposedly crude desires of the popular novel and cast onto the rubbish heap of mass culture.²⁷ As Felman pointed out, however, in this ‘vulgar’ version of psychoanalytic reading, it is not just literature that is travestied, but psychoanalysis too.

Both Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield registered their disapproval of psychoanalysis in response to popular fiction – most notably, both published their most direct criticisms in reviews of J. D. Beresford’s 1920 novel, *An Imperfect Mother*. Beresford’s book begins by describing the conflict that arises when Stephen Kirkwood’s beloved mother falls in love with the local organist. Stephen is devastated at the prospect of his mother leaving, but a girl named Margaret Weatherby has smiled at him and his affections begin to turn in a new direction. Jealously intuiting Stephen’s love for another woman, his mother, Cecilia, runs away from home; Stephen follows Cecilia to her lover’s house and begs her to return, but, hysterical, she laughs. To Stephen, ‘his mother’s laugh was a complete and desolating catastrophe’, leading to a seven-year estrangement.²⁸ After seven years, overwhelmed by loneliness, Stephen seeks out his mother in London. ‘But,’ as Mansfield summarises in her review, ‘at the very moment of their meeting Margaret Weatherby reappears and again smiles’:

²⁶ Shoshana Felman, ‘Turning the Screw of Interpretation’, *Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1977), 106-8.

²⁷ Sándor Ferenczi, ‘Confusion of the Tongues Between the Adults and the Child’ (The Language of Tenderness and of Passion), *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 30 (1949), 225-230.

²⁸ J. D. Beresford, *An Imperfect Mother* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 108.

There is a repetition of the old conflict under a new guise. [...] [T]his time he is in love, and this time when he shows his heart to Margaret, she it is who laughs hysterically, cruelly. This is not to be borne, and in Stephen's despair he flings the problem at his mother. Why does he mind so much? Now we have the explanation. She remembers how when he was 'a little bit of a toddling thing' he had got into one of his rages with her, and she had laughed, wildly, hysterically, cruelly, until he banged his head against the wall to stop her and 'had a kind of fit.' This has left a dark place in his mind, and it is this that accounts for his extreme susceptibility to callous laughter.²⁹

In Beresford's novel, the mother's 'analysis' is presented as a 'revelation' – by revealing the repressed traumatic incident from childhood (his mother laughing at him before he banged his head), Stephen's mother Cecilia 'explains everything' to him, so that 'the tangle of his thought' is 'straightened out', curing him of an intolerable unconscious conflict that has pushed him close to suicide.³⁰ The novel concludes with a 'Retrospect', in which Beresford recounts Stephen's 'history' in the language of a psychoanalytic case study, describing 'his slight departure from the normal' as 'due to a severe nervous shock in his early childhood'.³¹

For Mansfield (who was friends with Beresford) the 'explanation, which is intended, evidently, to warm and light up the whole pale book', does little more 'than reveal its essential emptiness'.³² These 'brand-new exposed houses', located in the 'Garden City of literature', 'seem to breath white enamel and cork linoleum and the works of Freud and Jung,' and 'seem to defy you to find in them a dark corner or a shadowy stair'; but the house, Mansfield concludes, 'is not furnished at all: nobody lives there'.³³ Mansfield's repudiation

²⁹ Katherine Mansfield, 'Two Modern Novels', *Athenaeum*, 9 April 1920, 479.

³⁰ Beresford, *An Imperfect Mother*, 292, 282, 285.

³¹ Beresford, *An Imperfect Mother*, 307.

³² Mansfield, 'Two Modern Novels', 479.

³³ Mansfield, 'Two Modern Novels', 479.

of Beresford is coloured by a snobbish distaste for middle-class suburbia and its fiction, but both Mansfield and Woolf criticise Beresford for encouraging a reductively symptomatic approach to reading. For Woolf, Beresford's novel offered up psychoanalysis as a 'new key' to the unconscious, but this 'new key' was 'a patent key that opens every door': 'It simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches.'³⁴ The characters in this novel, Woolf claimed, are 'some of the very numerous progeny of Dr Freud' – 'all the characters have become cases,' and we, the readers, are obliged to adopt 'the professional manner of a doctor intent upon his diagnosis'.³⁵

In another review from 1920 – of May Sinclair's *The Romantic*, Mary Agnes Hamilton's *The Last Fortnight*, C. A. Dawson-Scott's *The Headland*, and Jane Burr's *The Passionate Spectator* – Mansfield wrote of her 'disgust' at these novelists' reliance on 'psycho-analytical explanation'.³⁶ 'What we deplore,' Mansfield wrote of Sinclair, 'is that she has allowed her love of writing to suffer the eclipse of psycho-analysis.'³⁷ In *The Romantic*, Charlotte Redhead, who (as Mansfield puts it) 'has already experienced physical love' in her affair with a married man, falls in love with the enigmatic 'romantic' John Conway, who tells her from the outset – rather unsettlingly – that 'if I know a woman wants me, it makes me loathe her'.³⁸ Charlotte consents to live a life with John 'without *that*'.³⁹ And yet, as Mansfield puts it, 'even before the war breaks out her suspicions are being awakened by his curious behaviour'.⁴⁰ Mansfield flags the none-too-subtle language in John's description of the sadistic pleasures of farming: 'Wounding the earth to sow in it and make it feed you [...] Seeing the steel blade shine, and the long wounds coming in rows;

³⁴ Woolf, 'Freudian Fiction', 197.

³⁵ Woolf, 'Freudian Fiction', 196.

³⁶ Katherine Mansfield, 'Ask No Questions', *Athenaeum*, 22 October 1920, 552.

³⁷ Mansfield, 'Ask No Questions', 552.

³⁸ Mansfield, 'Ask No Questions', 552; May Sinclair, *The Romantic* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co., 1920), 54, 55.

³⁹ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 54.

⁴⁰ Mansfield, 'Ask No Questions', 552.

hundreds of wounds, wet and shining.’⁴¹ On the outbreak of war, driven by their mutual ‘war-romancing’, the celibate couple rush to experience the exhilaration of the war at first hand as ambulance drivers (as Sinclair herself did), but John is gradually revealed to be a ‘coward’, experiencing strange episodes of revulsion at the sight of the wounded, which lead him to abandon dying men on the battlefields, while treating Charlotte with increasing brutality.⁴² Charlotte is perplexed: she can see that John’s ‘cowardice’ and his ‘cruelty’ are ‘somehow linked’; ‘but she couldn’t for the life of her imagine the secret of the bond. She only felt that it would be something secret and horrible; something she would rather not know about’.⁴³

After John’s death (he is shot by the servant of a wounded soldier that he has abandoned), the commandant, Dr McClane, a ‘great psychologist’, comes forward with an explanation.⁴⁴ ‘Conway’, he tells Charlotte after analysing *her* dreams, ‘was an out and out degenerate. [...] He suffered from some physical disability. It went through everything. It made him so that he couldn’t live a man’s life. [...] He was afraid of women’.⁴⁵ The psychotherapist insists upon the determining force of the unconscious, telling Charlotte that she ‘mustn’t imagine that he [John] did anything on purpose’, but rather that ‘he was driven’ by ‘something bigger than he was’ – ‘It was always urging him.’⁴⁶ As Suzanne Raitt comments, McClane interprets both John’s ‘repudiation of women and his excitement at the idea of war’ as ‘reaction-formations’, producing a curious side-lining of the war as John’s ‘cowardice and his gender dysfunction are explained away’ not as forms of war trauma, but ‘as congenital conditions’.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 32, cited by Mansfield, ‘Ask No Questions’, 552; Mansfield’s ellipses.

⁴² On Sinclair’s own excitement at the war, see Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 147-181; Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 237.

⁴³ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 177.

⁴⁴ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 107.

⁴⁵ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 107, 244.

⁴⁶ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 247-8.

⁴⁷ Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 180.

In her study of interwar women's writing, Nicola Beauman writes that 'by the 1930s Freudian ideas about memory and repression had become near-clichés of popular fiction and drama'.⁴⁸ The explanatory force of Freudian 'complexes' was 'a good way of rounding things off' and the 'explanations of the analyst' could be 'used to bring the novel to a calm, generally optimistic conclusion'.⁴⁹ As both Beresford's and Sinclair's novels testify, the use of Freudian psychoanalysis as a means of rounding up a plot was already a feature of popular fiction in the immediate post-World War One period.⁵⁰ It's certainly true that in both Beresford's and Sinclair's novels, the psychoanalytic 'explanation' appears at the close of the novel as a magical 'key' that appears to solve the complexities of psychic life with a neat conclusion.

Writing to John Middleton Murry as she worked on these reviews, Mansfield described her amazement 'at the sudden "mushroom growth" of cheap psycho analysis [*sic*] everywhere':

Five novels one after the other are based on it: its in everything. And I want to prove it wont do—its turning Life into a *case*. And yet, of course [...] ones novel if it's a good one will be capable of being *proved* scientifically to be correct. [...] With an artist—one has to allow—oh tremendously for the subconscious element in his work. [...] [W]hen hes *inspired* [...] there comes this subconscious... wisdom. Now these people who are nuts on analysis seem to me to have *no* subconscious at all. They write to *prove*—not to tell the truth.⁵¹

Mansfield doesn't object to what she agrees is a strong 'subconscious element' in art. What she objects to is that through the scientific urge 'to *prove*', the psychoanalytic novel delimits

⁴⁸ Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39*, 2nd edition (London: Persephone, 2008), 235.

⁴⁹ Beauman, *A Very Great Profession*, 224, 235-6.

⁵⁰ Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 180.

⁵¹ Mansfield, *Letters*, 4, 69.

unconscious processes that are not amenable to positivistic study, placing the reader, as Woolf put it, in the position of the doctor ‘intent upon his diagnosis’.⁵²

This modernist critique of psychoanalytic reading is, though, as I’ve already suggested, a critique of what Freud described as “‘wild” psycho-analysis’ – it is concerned with the most reductive version of psychoanalysis, derived, largely, from popular novels, rather than any meaningful engagement with psychoanalytic writing or clinical practice.⁵³ Both Woolf’s and Mansfield’s complaints about the constrictions of ‘Freudian Fiction’ are overshadowed by their often snobbish distaste for the popular novel, but they are also responding to a version of psychoanalysis that does not always do justice to the complexities of psychoanalytic thinking in this period.

In his 1910 essay on “‘Wild” Psycho-Analysis’, Freud recounts the case of a middle-aged lady who came to him complaining of anxiety. The recently-divorced lady had sought the advice of a young doctor, who ‘informed her that the cause of her anxiety was her lack of sexual satisfaction’ and that ‘she must either return to her husband, or take a lover, or obtain satisfaction from herself.’⁵⁴ The lady – who ‘would not return to her husband’ and found the doctor’s other suggestions ‘repugnant’ – had consulted Freud because the doctor had said that this was ‘a new discovery’ for which Freud was ‘responsible’.⁵⁵ The young doctor, Freud explains, was wrong on a number of levels: first, for his lack of ‘tact’, second, for his ignorance of the ‘*technical rules*’ of psychoanalysis, and third, for his neglect of its ‘*scientific theories*’. Starting with the latter, Freud notes that ‘The doctor’s advice to the lady shows clearly in what sense he understands the expression “sexual life” – in the popular sense, namely, in which by sexual needs nothing is meant but the need for coitus or analogous acts

⁵² Woolf, ‘Freudian Fiction’, 197.

⁵³ Felman, ‘Turning the Screw of Interpretation’, 106-8.

⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud, “‘Wild” Psycho-Analysis’ (1910), *Standard Edition*, vol. 11, 221. See also Shaul Bar-Haim, Elizabeth Coles and Helen Tyson, ‘Introduction’, *Wilding Analysis: From the Couch to Cultural and Political Life* (forthcoming, 2020).

⁵⁵ Freud, “‘Wild” Psycho-Analysis’, 221.

producing orgasm.’ For psychoanalysis, Freud insists, ‘the concept of what is sexual comprises far more; it goes lower and also higher than its popular sense’.⁵⁶ Quarrelling with the young doctor’s acceptance of the ‘popular [*populären*],’ definition of sexuality as a purely physiological need (note the overlap between Freud’s and Mansfield’s modernist distaste for the ‘popular’), Freud introduces the term ‘*psychosexuality*’, emphasising that ‘the mental factor in sexual life should not be overlooked or underestimated’. ‘It is true,’ Freud acknowledges, ‘that psycho-analysis puts forward absence of sexual satisfaction as the cause of nervous disorders’:

But does it not say more than this? Is its teaching to be ignored as too complicated when it declares that nervous symptoms arise from a conflict between two forces—on the one hand the libido [...], and on the other, a rejection of sexuality, or a repression which is over-severe?

By focusing ‘exclusively’ on ‘the somatic factor in sexuality,’ the young doctor ‘simplifies the problem greatly,’ ignoring that crucial ‘second factor’ of repression, which, Freud states, ‘is by no means secondary in importance’.⁵⁷ Sexuality, in this account, and as Felman has argued, is constituted as a form of conflict or ambiguity that cannot be reduced to ‘literal’ or ‘vulgar’ bodily acts.⁵⁸

Alongside this critique of the ‘popular’ interpretation of sexuality, Freud also disparaged the quick fix approach of the wild analyst, the tendency to assume ‘that the patient suffers from a sort of ignorance, and that if one removes this ignorance by giving him information’ – about ‘his experiences in childhood’, for example – ‘he is bound to recover’.⁵⁹ The act of revealing a repressed truth to the patient may not in itself effect a cure, because the ‘pathological factor’, Freud insisted, ‘is not his ignorance in itself, but the root of his

⁵⁶ Ibid., 222.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁸ Felman, ‘Turning the Screw’, 108-11.

⁵⁹ Freud, “‘Wild’ Psycho-Analysis”, 225.

ignorance in his *inner resistances*'.⁶⁰ In *An Imperfect Mother*, Cecilia's explanation to Stephen works as an example of precisely this kind of wild psychoanalysis: the revelation of the childhood trauma is presented as in itself enough to effect a magical transformation in Stephen's life, ignoring the slow encounter with internal resistances experienced on the psychoanalyst's couch.

In *The Romantic*, too, although in many ways subtler than Freud's wild analyst, Dr McClane does risk overemphasising 'the somatic factor' underpinning John's behaviour. The psychotherapist explains John's 'romancing' of war as 'a gorgeous transformation of his funk', a 'desperate effort after completion', locating John's 'physical disability' as a source of both his cowardice and his cruelty: 'He jumped at everything that helped him to get compensation, to get power.'⁶¹ This insistence that John's physical sexual frustration lies at the root of his cruelty and 'cowardice' is also a deterministic explanation that precludes a more critical feminist or political analysis of this disturbing portrait of war-lusting masculinity – a political failing on Sinclair's part that may have contributed to Mansfield's negative review.⁶² Sinclair was fascinated by psychoanalysis, reading Freud and Jung in German, alongside the work of idealist philosophers and mystics, attempting her own distinctive synthesis of these different traditions.⁶³ And yet, her novels stand in an ambiguous relationship to Freudian psychoanalysis: in some cases, as Leslie de Bont has demonstrated, reworking psychoanalytic models of trauma and temporality in nuanced ways, and also, in other cases, as Suzanne Raitt notes, popularising 'a fairly crude version of Freudian thought'

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Sinclair, *The Romantic*, 245.

⁶² Suzanne Raitt writes that 'In Sinclair's work the war is divorced from wider contexts. [...] In order to think of war as she did, as an opportunity for intense, authentic *personal* experience, it was necessary that she should refuse to consider its significance as a political event.' Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 150. On Katherine Mansfield's more critical attitude to the war, see *Katherine Mansfield and World War One*, ed. Gerri Kimber, Delia da Sousa Correa, Todd Martin, Isobel Madison, and Alice Kelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁶³ R. Bowler and C. Drewery, 'Introduction: May Sinclair's Interdisciplinarity', in *May Sinclair: Re-Thinking Bodies and Minds*, ed. Rebecca Bowler and Claire Drewery (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 1-17.

akin to “wild” psycho-analysis’.⁶⁴ *The Romantic*, like the better-known *Mary Olivier* (1919), displays elements of modernist ‘stream of consciousness’ narrative style (the phrase that Sinclair herself so famously applied to the modernist novel), but this is a narrative that is as much driven by as it is about an erotic investment in war, and it also shares in that common tendency amongst bestselling novels in this period to turn to a ‘Freudian’ explanation as a means of tying up the plot.⁶⁵ And yet, although it does perpetuate a somewhat ‘wild’ psychoanalysis, I’d also like to suggest that *The Romantic*, situated as it is at the crossroads of modernism, popular fiction, and psychoanalysis, challenges both modernist writers and psychoanalytic writers (as well as scholars of both) in their – often futile – attempts to mark out their own territory, and to fend off that shared horror (which is also, frequently, a disavowed desire) for ‘the popular’.

Freud’s own relationship to interpretation was fraught, caught between the desire to cure and the stubborn enigmas of the human psyche. But, despite his troubled allegiance to enlightenment scientific ideals, and his own sometimes ‘vulgar’ readings of literature, Freud was, nonetheless, alert to the tensions inherent in his commitment to unravelling unconscious aspects of the mind that, by definition, retreat from the analyst’s grasp. Mansfield’s complaint about the “mushroom growth” of cheap psycho analysis’ is strikingly reminiscent of one of the most famous moments in which Freud can be seen to hesitate before the limits of interpretation. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud observed:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled [...].

⁶⁴ Leslie De Bont, ‘Portrait of the Female Character as a Psychoanalytical Case: The Ambiguous Influence of Freud on May Sinclair’s Novels’, in Bowler and Drewery (eds), *May Sinclair*, 59-78; Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 142.

⁶⁵ May Sinclair, ‘The Novels of Dorothy Richardson’ (1918), repr. in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Indiana University Press, 1990), 444. On the apparent incompatibility of ‘heroic prose’ celebrating war with the ‘fragmented, sceptical style of the modernist novel’ see Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 177.

This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot [...] have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.⁶⁶

Mansfield's uncanny echo of Freud's description of the 'mushroom' growing up out of the obscure 'navel' of the dream, is a reminder that Freud's writings are as much a testament to the resistant, unknown and ineluctable aspects of the psyche as to the sovereign analyst's powers of interpretation.

Despite their animosity to the forms of symptomatic reading that appeared in 'Freudian Fiction', in fact, modernist writers in Britain shared more in common with Freud, and his followers, than many were prepared to admit. These writers, so anxious about the apparent sovereignty of psychoanalytic interpretation, were, at the same time, writing about the riddles of subjectivity in a way that shares a great deal with Freud's account of psychic life. Modernism and psychoanalysis both describe those enigmatic aspects of subjectivity that we struggle to know or to contain. 'The tendency of the moderns and part of their perplexity,' wrote Virginia Woolf in 1919, is 'that they find their interest more and more in [the] dark region of psychology.'⁶⁷

Between 1900 and 1920, then, modernism and psychoanalysis emerged alongside each other as competing imaginative discourses, claiming new forms of insight into 'the dark region of psychology'. Both modernist and psychoanalytic writers mapped out previously unspeakable terrains of the unconscious: dreams, memory, the uncanny, sexuality, repression, and – with heightened urgency in the wake of war – destructiveness, mourning, and

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Standard Edition*, vols. 4-5, 525.

⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Novels' (1919), *Essays*, vol. 3, 35.

reparation. In her account of post-World War One British modernism and psychoanalysis, Lyndsey Stonebridge shows how both writers and psychoanalysts in Britain were engaged in constructing a ‘mythology in which writers represent themselves as coming face to face with the potential violence – historical, epistemological and psychic – of modernity in order to transcend it’.⁶⁸ In the trio of essays written in the midst of the war, ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’ (1915), ‘On Transience’ (1916), and ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), Freud forged a theory of mourning that insisted upon the individual’s capacity to overcome their grief for what has been lost, and to replace the lost object – whether a loved person, or ‘some abstraction [...] such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on’ – with a new one.⁶⁹ Composed in response to a war that ‘shattered our pride in the achievements of our civilization’, Freud’s theory of mourning is also a theory about art’s capacity to rebuild a shattered ‘civilization’ – it is an attempt to find a form of psychic, artistic and political transcendence amidst the violence of modernity.⁷⁰ ‘When once the mourning is over,’ Freud writes, ‘it will be found that our high opinion of the riches of civilization has lost nothing from our discovery of their fragility. We shall build up again all that war has destroyed, and perhaps on firmer ground and more lastingly than before.’⁷¹ As critics including Jacqueline Rose and Judith Butler have explored, Freud’s theory of mourning is both politically and ethically troubling in its attempt (to quote T. S. Eliot) to shore up ‘ruins’ with the ‘fragments’ of European culture.⁷² It was not until the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920 that Freud would begin to theorise the presence of a destructive drive inhabiting the human psyche. As Europe crumbled, Melanie Klein began to piece together her own account

⁶⁸ Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (London: Routledge, 1998), ix.

⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917 [1915]), *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, 243.

⁷⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘On Transience’ (1916), *Standard Edition*, vol. 14, 307.

⁷¹ Freud, ‘On Transience’, 307.

⁷² Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 20-1; Jacqueline Rose, *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World* (London: Vintage, 2004), 73; T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922), in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 59-80.

of human destructiveness, a destructiveness that Klein located in the minds of children, who from earliest infancy were caught up in a vicious cycle of fantasised violence followed by the drive to make reparation, a drive that Klein herself located as the impulse behind artistic creation. Klein's theories would be widely embraced by the psychoanalytic community in Bloomsbury in the years following the First World War.⁷³

And yet, I want to suggest in conclusion that alongside this transition to a bleaker engagement with the violence of psychic life, there was also in this fraught post-war moment a shift in both modernist and psychoanalytic writing – a shift in which a conflict about reading and interpretation transforms into a debate about the psychic and socio-political function of art.

In *Paris: A Poem* (1920), Hope Mirrlees suggests an affinity between the work of the poet and that of the psychoanalyst. An unnamed *flâneuse* emerges from the Paris Metro to encounter strange fragments of modern urban life juxtaposed with ghosts from the past – advertisements rub up against fragmented references to the Greek underworld, the spoils of empire, the Peace Conference at Versailles, the May Day general strike, the war dead, grieving mothers, ancient rituals, the Virgin Mary, pornography, Algerian tobacco, the Koran, Absinthe, jazz, and President Wilson. The speaker 'wade[s] knee-deep in dreams', as though sifting through the collective unconscious of postwar Europe.⁷⁴ Towards the end of the poem, immersed in the seedy underworld of Paris nightclubs, she finds that 'The dreams have reached my waist' (l. 376), and the figure of Freud looms, threateningly:

[...] behind the ramparts of the Louvre

Freud has dredged the river and, grinning horribly,

waves his garbage in a glare of electricity. (ll. 413-415)

⁷³ See Frosh, 'Psychoanalysis in Britain'.

⁷⁴ Hope Mirrlees, *Paris: A Poem* (1920), *Collected Poems*, ed. Sandeep Parmar (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011), 1-18, l. 310.

This might at first appear as another disparaging glance at the patriarch of psychoanalysis, who dredges the river to expose the ‘garbage’ of the unconscious in the ‘glare’ of modernity. But it also reveals a more profound connection between modernist aesthetics and the Freudian unconscious.

Anticipating Eliot’s ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’ (l. 431), the first line of Mirlees’ poem states a longing for a form of wholeness: ‘I want a holophrase’ (l. 1). ‘A holophrase,’ Sandeep Parmar glosses, ‘is defined as a primitive linguistic structure that expresses a complex concept in a single word or short phrase.’⁷⁵ This desire for wholeness, haunted by the acknowledgement of its lack, animates the entire poem. As Peter Howarth observes, the fragmented modernist form offers new possibilities for connection:

Without syntax to restrict the fragments’ meaning to their immediate context, [...] they can now connect to each other in multiple and unexpected ways [...]. Although the poem is full of separate elements, its power to suggest connections is increased, because the usual distinctions between important and unimportant or centre and margin cease to matter [...]. Since the fragments are not absorbed as a subcomponent of any narrative masterplot, a detail at one point of the poem finds its counterpart with another far distant, and draws their different situations together.⁷⁶

Paris operates according to the dream-logic that Freud described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: it is ruled by subterranean and overdetermined associations that zig-zag across the text, demanding that the reader, like the psychoanalyst, pursue each set of associations into that web-like maze of the dream/poem where each fragment is connected.⁷⁷ There is also, therefore, a parallel here with Freud’s contemporaneous desire for a form of psychic wholeness or transcendence, which, in his wartime essays, he too located in art or

⁷⁵ Sandeep Parmar, ‘Introduction’, Mirlees, *Collected Poems*, xl.

⁷⁶ Peter Howarth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6-7

⁷⁷ Howarth, *Cambridge Introduction*, 20-21.

‘civilization’, flirting, as Klein would in the 1930s, with what Leo Bersani has described as a modernist ‘culture of redemption’.⁷⁸

And yet, unlike Freud’s amnesiac longing for a culture that will rebuild itself, Mirrlees’ poem also stages a question about the possibilities of artistic, psychic and political wholeness, at a time when ‘The unities are smashed’ and ‘The stage is thick with corpses’ (ll. 181-2). Surveying French soldiers encamped in the Tuileries, the speaker observes: ‘some day it will look beautiful: / Clio is a great French painter, / She walks upon the waters and they are still’ (ll. 286-7). Later in the poem, Mirrlees imagines a series of paintings that serve as commemorations of moments of historical resistance, revolution, and conflict:

Manet’s *Massacres des Jours de Juin*,

David’s *Prise de la Bastille*,

Poussin’s *Fronde*,

Hang in a quiet gallery. (ll. 290-93)

As Julia Briggs notes, the poem stages ‘an extended mediation on the nature of art and its capacity to transform the pain and violence of history into beauty and stillness’.⁷⁹ Unlike Freud’s war essays, Mirrlees’s poem stages the crucial modernist question not only of how, but if, it is psychically, socially, or politically viable to forge together ‘unities’ that have been – perhaps irredeemably – ‘smashed’. This is a question that both psychoanalysts and modernists will go on to ask themselves throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s.

⁷⁸ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁷⁹ Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 86.