

A Concise Companion to
**PSYCHOANALYSIS
LITERATURE,
AND CULTURE**

Edited by Laura Marcus and Ankhi Mukherjee



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Psychoanalysis,
Literature, and Culture

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Editorial Offices

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The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Notes on Contributors

Isobel Armstrong is a fellow of the British Academy, Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of English Studies, and Professor Emeritus of what is now the Geoffrey Tillotson Chair. During her time at Birkbeck, continuing the powerful tradition of nineteenth-century studies established by Geoffrey Tillotson, Barbara Hardy, and Michael Slater, she founded the London Seminar for Nineteenth-Century Studies and the Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies (of whose committee she is still a member). She has published widely on nineteenth-century studies (in particular *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, 1996) and theory (see *The Radical Aesthetic*, 2000). Her latest book, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination* (2008), won the Modern Language Association's James Russell Lowell Prize in 2009. She gave the British Academy Warton Lecture on Poetry in 2011. She is working on a study of the nineteenth-century novel and the democratic imagination. During retirement she has taught at Harvard and Johns Hopkins universities and spoken at international conferences. She is a published poet.

Carolyn Burdett is Senior Lecturer in English and Victorian Studies in the Department of English at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research interests have focused on the literature, culture, and politics of the period 1880–1920. She has written a monograph titled *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (2001). She co-edited a special issue on 'Eugenics Old and New' for the journal *New Formations* in 2007 and has also co-edited a collection of essays on

The Victorian Supernatural (2004). She is currently researching a book about the emergence of the term “empathy” at the beginning of the twentieth century, with particular focus on how cultural forms in the nineteenth century helped to shape the ways emotional life was conceived and discussed.

Tim Dean is Professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is the author of *Gary Snyder and the American Unconscious* (1991), *Beyond Sexuality* (2000), *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (2009), and *What Is Psychoanalytic Thinking?* (forthcoming).

Maud Ellmann is Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Professor of the Development of the Novel in English in the Department of English at the University of Chicago. Her research and teaching interests focus on British and European modernism and critical theory, particularly psychoanalysis and feminism. Her monographs include *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound*; *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*; and *The Nets of Modernism*. Her recent journal articles have been on Irish fiction in English, the British psychoanalyst Marion Milner, the author of several luminous and idiosyncratic works on creativity, and the burgeoning new field of animal studies. Currently she is working on several projects, including World War II writing in Britain, the British novelist and poet Sylvia Townsend Warner, and fantasies of bodily disintegration in modernism, ranging from Melanie Klein to Samuel Beckett.

Stephen Frosh is Pro-Vice-Master and Professor in the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of many books and papers on psychosocial studies and on psychoanalysis, including *Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic* (2010), *Hate and the Jewish Science: Anti-Semitism, Nazism and Psychoanalysis* (2005), *For and Against Psychoanalysis* (2006), *After Words* (2002), and *The Politics of Psychoanalysis* (1999). His most recent books are *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* (2013), *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (2012), and *Feelings* (2011).

Patricia Gherovici PhD is a licensed psychoanalyst and analytic supervisor practicing in Philadelphia and New York. She is an award-winning author, who has published nationally and internationally. Most recently she wrote the foreword to *Erotic Anger: A User's Manual* (2001) and contributed to *The Dreams of Interpretation: A Century Down*

the Royal Road (2007). Her book *The Puerto Rican Syndrome* (2003) won the Gradiva Award and the Boyer Prize of the American Anthropological Association. Her latest book is *Please Select Your Gender: From the Invention of Hysteria to the Democratizing of Transgenderism* (2010).

Martin Hägglund is Professor of Comparative Literature and Humanities at Yale University. He is the author of *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (2012); *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (2008); and *Kronofobi: Essäer om tid och ändlighet* (2002).

Ranjana Khanna is Margaret Taylor Smith Director of Women's Studies and Professor of English, Women's Studies, and the Literature Program at Duke University. She works on anglophone and francophone postcolonial theory and literature, art, and film, psychoanalysis, and feminist theory. She is the author of *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (2003) and *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation 1830 to the Present* (2008). She has published in journals including *Differences*, *Signs*, *Third Text*, *Diacritics*, *Screen*, *Art History*, *positions*, *SAQ*, *Feminist Theory*, and *Public Culture*. Her current books in progress are titled *Asylum: The Concept and the Practice* and *Technologies of Unbelonging*.

Anna Kornbluh is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Illinois, Chicago, where her research centers on Victorian literature, critical theory, and cinema. She is the author of *Realizing Capital*, and is currently at work on *The Order of Forms* (a prehistory of structuralism), and *Marxism* (for the Bloomsbury Film Theory in Practice series).

Catherine Liu is Professor of Film and Media Studies and Visual Studies at the University of California Irvine. She is the author of *American Idyll: Anti-Elitism as Cultural Critique* (2011) and *Copying Machines: Taking Notes for the Automaton*. Kaya Press recently reissued her 1997 novel *Oriental Girls Desire Romance*. She has published on higher education theory and policy, the Frankfurt School, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. She is at work on a book titled *Higher Education and Austerity: A Look at MOOCs*.

Laura Marcus is Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of the British Academy. She was previously Regius Professor of Rhetoric and Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Her research and teaching interests are in nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century literature and culture, with a particular focus on modernism, Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury culture, life writing, literature and film, the history of psychoanalysis, and contemporary fiction. She is the author of several books, including *The*

Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period (2007) (winner of the James Russell Lowell prize of the Modern Languages Association) and the forthcoming books *Dreams of Modernity: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Cinema* (2014) and *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (2014).

Todd McGowan teaches theory and film at the University of Vermont. He is the author of *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis* (2013), *Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political* (with Paul Eisenstein; 2012), *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (2011), and other works.

Ankhi Mukherjee is CUF Lecturer (Associate Professor) in the Faculty of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Wadham College. Her key areas of specialism are Victorian literature and culture, modern British and anglophone literature, postcolonial studies, critical theory, and intellectual history. She has published widely in international peer-reviewed journals such as *PMLA*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Paragraph*, *Parallax*, and *Contemporary Literature*. Her first book, *Aesthetic Hysteria: The Great Neurosis in Victorian Melodrama and Contemporary Fiction*, was published in 2007. Her second monograph, *What Is a Classic? Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon*, was published in 2013 by Stanford University Press in its prestigious Cultural Memory in the Present series.

Jean-Michel Rabaté is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, a curator of the Slought Foundation, an editor of the *Journal of Modern Literature*, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has authored or edited more than thirty books and collections on modernism, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. His forthcoming books are *An Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis*, *A Companion to 1922*, and *Crimes of the Future*.

Frances L. Restuccia is an English Professor at Boston College, where she teaches contemporary theory, modernism, the world novel, and film theory. Her publications include *James Joyce and the Law of the Father* (1989); *Melancholics in Love: Representing Women's Depression and Domestic Abuse* (2000); *Amorous Acts: Lacanian Ethics in Modernism, Film, and Queer Theory* (2006); and *The Blue Box: Kristevan/Lacanian Readings of Contemporary Film* (2012). She has published numerous articles in journals such as *Raritan*, *Contemporary Literature*, *Novel*, *Genre*, *Genders*, *American Imago*, *Lacanian Ink*, *Film-Philosophy*, and *Semplokē*. A chapter titled "Sebastian's Skull: Establishing 'the Society of the Icon'" is part of the recently published volume *Kristeva's Fiction* (2013), and an essay on

Don Quixote, love, and messianism in Agamben appeared in *Philosophy Today* (2012). She is co-chair of the Psychoanalytic Practices seminar at Harvard's Humanities Center.

Laurence A. Rickels is Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe (Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Karlsruhe). He is also the Sigmund Freud Chair at the European Graduate School. Since 1990 he has been teaching at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He teaches in the Comparative Literature Department as well as the Germanic, Slavic, and Semitic Studies Department, and has also been affiliated to Art, Film and Media Studies departments. He divides his time his time between California and Europe, notably Germany and Switzerland. His interests are in the intersections between psychoanalysis, technology, and Nazis. Strongly influenced by psychoanalytic theory, Professor Rickels' work is formed in the interrelationships of psychoanalysis, the Frankfurt School of critical theory, and deconstruction. His numerous works include *Aberrations of Mourning: Writing on German Crypts* (1988); *Der unbetrauerbare Tod* (1990); *The Case of California* (1991); *The Vampire Lectures* (1999); *Nazi Psychoanalysis* (2002); *Ulrike Ottinger: The Autobiography of Art Cinema* (2008); *The Devil Notebooks* (2008); and *I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick* (2010).

Nicholas Royle is Professor of English at the University of Sussex. He has published many essays and is the author of numerous books, including *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (2011); *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (2009); *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (with Andrew Bennett; 4th edn. 2009); *How to Read Shakespeare* (2005); *The Uncanny* (2003); *After Derrida* (1995); and *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (1990). He is also an editor of the *Oxford Literary Review*. Besides critical and theoretical writings, Professor Royle has also published numerous works of short fiction and a novel, *Quilt* (2010).

Naomi Segal is Professorial Fellow at Birkbeck, University of London. She has published twelve books, most recently *Consensuality* (2009), *Indeterminate Bodies* (2003), *Le Désir à l'œuvre* (2000), and *André Gide: Pederasty & Pedagogy* (1998).

Daniel Steuer worked at various British and Irish universities between 1989 and 2013. His research interests include literature and philosophy, and social and political theory, and he has published on figures including Goethe, Büchner, Musil, Bernhard, Wittgenstein, Sebald, and Adorno. He is co-editor of *Wittgenstein Reading* (2013), a volume of essays investigating the influence of literary authors on Wittgenstein.

Pamela Thurschwell is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Sussex and the author of *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880–1920* (2001) and *Sigmund Freud* (2000; 2nd edition, 2009) and the co-editor, with Leah Price, of *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (2005), and with Nicola Bown and Carolyn Burdett of *The Victorian Supernatural* (2004). She is currently working on a study on modern adolescence and anachronism.

Andrew Webber is Professor of Modern German and Comparative Culture in the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Churchill College. He has published widely on relationships between psychoanalysis, literature, and other cultural forms. His works include *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (1996); a translation of the “Schreber case” for the new Penguin edition of the works of Freud; and *The European Avant-Garde 1900–1940* (2004). His most recent work has been concerned with urban space, and in particular Berlin. From 2004 to 2007 he held a Major Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust to work on the city, and the resulting book, *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2008.

Robert J.C. Young is a postcolonial theorist, cultural critic, and historian. He has taught at the universities of Southampton and Oxford and is currently the Silver Professor of English and Comparative Literature in the Department of English at New York University. His publications include *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (2008); *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003); *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001); *Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory* (1996); *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Culture, Theory and Race* (1995); and *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990). He is the general editor of *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*.

Nicolette Zeeman teaches at King’s College, Cambridge, and in the English Faculty of the University of Cambridge. She is the author of *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (2006), and has written on *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer, song, scholasticism, devotional literature, medieval literary theory, and ideas of image use and idolatry. An interest in psychoanalysis has shaped her work on *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer, and a forthcoming essay on the will in spiritual writing. She is currently finishing a study titled *Arts of Disruption: Conflict and Contradiction in Medieval Allegory*, and editing, with Jean Michel Massing, a volume on the chapel of King’s College.

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Laura Marcus
Ankhi Mukherjee

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Introduction: Psychoanalysis at the Margins

Laura Marcus

The essays in this volume represent the variety of new ways of taking up the legacy of psychoanalytic thought and theory, reaching forward to us from the close of the nineteenth century. The continuities between then and now are revealed in the focus on sexualities, on the form of the case history, on the place of vision and the specular, and on the role of language as manifestation of unconscious processes. There are also marked discontinuities, however, not only from the original texts of psychoanalysis but from many of their later twentieth-century reformulations. Most notable, perhaps, is the near-total absence of any direct discussion of the Oedipal, the “complex” which for Freud founded human identity, sexual organization, and his new science. The Oedipal and Oedipalization were central topics, to take one example, in Maud Ellmann’s excellent collection of essays, *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (1994). Two decades later, our contributors continue to be preoccupied with questions of sexuality and psychic life, but their frameworks are substantially those of queer and postcolonial theory, cultural criticism, translation in its many senses, models of time and temporality, and the human–animal interface.

In Part I of the volume, “Histories,” Stephen Frosh offers the fullest account of the place of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century – a

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long twentieth century, since the processes he describes seem to persist into the second decade of the current century. He mentions in passing the neglect of psychoanalytic theory by psychologists and stresses the conjunction of “the slow and rather dull work of clinicians” and “a more flamboyant and speculative use of psychoanalysis as a key to cultural knowledge.”

whatever one might think of the validity or efficacy of psychoanalysis, it has come to define a very widespread form of cultural experience and to be indispensable to ways of living in, as well as understanding, that cultural form. ... the human subject reflexively deploys psychoanalytic understanding in the construction of selfhood; psychoanalysis itself is reflexively embodied in the cultural processes to which it has partially given rise.

The other paradox Frosh identifies is the place of rationality in psychoanalytic theory: committed to scientific rationalism while “enacting the irrational otherness it is striving to theorize.” He mentions in particular the uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and telepathy, parapsychology, and so on – the topic which is at the center of Carolyn Burdett’s chapter discussed below – but his main focus is on a similarly tense relationship, with reflection on colonial and gender relations. In both cases, what initially looks like a disaster area, shaped by Freud’s analysis of the “primitive” on the one hand and the masculinist and heteronormative associations of the explanatory models he developed on the other, contributes to some of the most powerful and influential work in postcolonial and feminist theory.

Andrew Webber’s analysis of the “case study” – a term which he points out was not used by Freud – is one of several chapters which bring out the notorious difficulties of Freud translation. The case study is, however, “the foundational mode of representation for psychoanalysis ... a form of study that psychoanalysis adapts from established conventions of medical and other scientific or disciplinary writing, but also adapts to its own purposes.” Freud does use the term *Krankengeschichte* which, as Webber points out, “modulates between the historical account of the analysand’s illness and that of the treatment of the illness in question.” As Webber shows in detail in Freud’s discussion of Wilhelm Jensen’s novella “Gradiva,” the relations between *Fall* (case), and *Anfall*, *Unfall*, *Zufall*, and so forth inevitably get lost in translation.

Burdett, as noted above, addresses the question of the occult and paranormal which “were not the marginal interests of cranks but