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Like a river or a silver thread running through the vehement landscapes of reality – reflections on psychoanalysis and literary theory

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses contributions from literary research and how they imply psychoanalysis in their field of research. Close readings of Freud and Lacan serve as an opening to an overarching question: what can literary research teach us about psychoanalysis? A question that generates a paraphrase: how is psychoanalysis already involved in the practice of reading? The historical 'knowledge dependency' of psychoanalysis on the myth, the rhetorical potential and the resonance made possible by the figures of the literary dimension, and methods of contextualization in psychoanalytic literary criticism are emphasized. Psychoanalytic knowledge construction – from a literary speech acts perspective – can be understood as attempts to represent and deal with practice or reality and, more specifically, traumatic experiences. The article reflects on how the extent of clarity to which both theory and poetry can find words for the unconscious or 'the impossible' might manifest itself in a movement of return and departure in language. The article discusses how listening and translation can be enriching concepts in the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature.

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While working on a PhD project on how traumatic experiences are portrayed in literature, archives and psychoanalysis, I have had time to think about the fundamental though complicated interrelation between literature and psychoanalysis. In an earlier article (Sandbæk, 2022), I looked at how method and theory can be thought of within psychoanalytic literary criticism, and at how challenges linked to reductionist interpretations, and the difference between the literary and the clinical, can be articulated and met. In the wake of this work, I kept thinking of an aspect of the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis that had been omitted due to the space constraints of a single article. This text thus says what was left unsaid, which is also perhaps a movement back and forth – a recurring movement in language – that says something of value for our purposes. We will return to this, but first we will discuss what previously was left unsaid; that is, how the texts of psychoanalysis have been read by literary researchers.

From the literary researcher's point of view, writes Shoshana Felman (1977/2007), it seems self-evident that psychoanalytic texts can be understood and explored just as much as literary texts can, since it is not a matter of one text being applied to the other (subject-object relationship), but rather of a reciprocal relationship where the texts imply and involve each other (subject-subject relationship). It is not only psychoanalysis that seeks an understanding of the subtexts in other texts; literature can also be the unconscious of psychoanalysis:

> We would like to suggest that, in the same way that psychoanalysis points to the unconscious of literature, *literature, in its turn, is the unconscious of psychoanalysis;* that the unthought-out shadow in psychoanalytical *theory* is precisely its own involvement with literature; that literature *in* psychoanalysis functions precisely as its *'unthought'*: as the condition of possibility *and* the self-subversive blind spot of psychoanalytical *thought* (p. 217).

How might literature be the 'unthought-out shadow' in psychoanalysis, as Felman articulated above? How can literature and literary research methods – as is implied – further deepen psychoanalysis's knowledge about itself? To get closer to the complexities of this big question, I will reflect on close readings of Freud and Lacan and on how these contributions implicate psychoanalysis within their area of research. In her later work, Felman (1987) emphasises – as will be elaborated – the dependency of theory on the myth and how this relates to the extent to which the narrative offers a structure that resonates with basic human themes and, thus, with the unconscious. She describes psychoanalysis as a revolutionary lesson of

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reading, modifying both the interpretive stance and the very conception of the act of reading. Felman's question (cited above) could be paraphrased as follows: how can Freud's discoveries of the unconscious and sublimation – ideas that are also influential within literary research – be knowledge implied to understand and deepen our understanding of psychoanalysis's own texts?

Alternative words for *vehement* are *forceful* or *intense*. Etymologically, *vehement* derives from the Latin prefixes *vē-* ('lacking, too little') and *mēns* ('mind, reasoning, judgment'). In other words, *vehement* dialectically implies something as forceful as a lack of reasoning, and thereby suggests that psychoanalysis may have been constructed and can function as a linguistic remedy – like a river or a silver thread – running through the vehement and sometimes violent landscapes of reality, or what we often call trauma. A kind of working through of what to me seems to be a unifying thread – or perhaps also a silver thread – through the close readings of Lacan and Freud which will be reflected on here. The title and my play with its *signifier and signified*[1] might also illustrate the rhetorical potential and resonance made possible by the figures[2] of the literary dimension which this text attempts to address.

When reflecting on close readings by Caruth and Felman, we are situated within an interdisciplinary research tradition where literature, testimonies and non-fiction – like psychoanalytic and philosophical texts – are studied together to illuminate and enrich our understanding of human conditions such as trauma (Caruth, 1995; Caruth, 2013; Caruth, 2016; Felman & Laub, 1992), law (Felman, 2002) and sexual difference (Felman, 2007 in Sun, Peretz & Baer, 2007). The ambition is not a systematic review of this field of research,[3] but rather a selection based on our line of inquiry; i.e., texts that show in various ways how literary research is both inspired by and can contribute to psychoanalysis and its central concerns.

Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth are both literary scholars, psychoanalytically oriented, and write within a deconstructive frame of reference. Both studied under and collaborated with Paul de Man.[4] Both were inspired by Lacan and have written influential books within the interdisciplinary trauma field. The texts focused on here are Caruth's (2016) readings of Freud (1939/2015), and Lacan's writings (Lacan, 1998) about Freud's (1900) narration of the dream of the burning child. As for Felman, we will look closer at her reading of Lacan's (2006, 1991) cross-reading of Freudian theory and *Oedipus at Colonus* (Felman, 1987), one of her many contributions emphasising the mutual implication between psychoanalysis and literature. Through these examples of close readings, reflections on the concepts of listening and translation – in psychoanalysis and literature – are elaborated. This will serve as another opening to our overarching question: what can literary research teach us about psychoanalysis?

Caruth about departure and awakening in trauma

In Caruth's reading (Caruth, 2016) of Freud's last published work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939/2015), she highlights how the text – despite the complex questions and criticism of its possible fictionalisation and psychologising of Jewish history[5] – tries to address – confront even – trauma that is 'deeply tied to our historical realities' (p. 12). She shows how Freud's writing is persistent in its efforts to witness what she calls 'the crying wound',[6] a voice that it cannot fully know but persistently tries to listen to and articulate. Caruth explores Freud's correspondence and writing while working on the book (between 1934 and 1938), and finds that he was preoccupied by the question which confronted the cruellest of realities: why did the Nazis persecute the Jews? Caruth reflects that Freud's questioning of history is not an attempt to deny its facts, as other critics have claimed, but more precisely a rephrasing of how history creates and dissolves itself around traumatic realities. The figure she finds keeps recurring in Freud's writing is that of departure: the departure and return in traumatic neurosis, in Jewish history, Freud's departure to London and, not least, the departure and potential return of his life project: psychoanalysis:

> It is this *unconsciousness of leaving* that bears the impact of history. And it is likewise first of all in the unconsciousness of Freud's reference to his departure in his own text that, I would suggest, we first have access to its historical truth (p. 24).

The story of *Moses and Monotheism* is by Caruth read as a double telling; an oscillation between a crisis of death and a crisis of life, manifested in an attempt to understand the intricate relation between the story of the Jews and the story of the Christians:

> The captivity and return, while the beginning of the history of the Jews, is precisely available to them only through the experience of a trauma. It is the trauma, the forgetting (and return) of the deeds of Moses, that constitutes the link uniting the old with the new god, the people that leave Egypt with the people that ultimately make up the nation of the Jews. Centering his story in the nature of the leaving, and returning, constituted by trauma, Freud resituates the very possibility of history in the nature of a traumatic departure. We

> might say, then, that the central question, by which Freud finally inquires into the relation between history and its political outcome, is, What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma? (p. 16).

By focusing on Freud's example – the story of the train accident[7] – Caruth elaborates on the temporality of traumatic experience and thus on the indirect referentiality of history[8]; for history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs, and that history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence. Departure and return are thus central figures in the temporal structure of traumatic experience, as Caruth reads Freud.

In Caruth's (2016) reading of Lacan's reinterpretation (Lacan, 1998) of Freud's account of the dream of the burning child, the crying wound is once again a figure: the demand, the imperative from the other who addresses us in his silenced abandonment: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' Let us first listen to the story as Freud (1900) once narrativised it at the beginning of chapter seven in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

> A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them (p. 509).

In Caruth's listening to Freud's initial interpretation of the dream, she emphasises how he, later in the same chapter, returns to the dream because he was not completely satisfied with his first explanation, seeing it as a wish-fulfilment:

> For the father, Freud seems to imply, the knowledge of the death of his child can perhaps appear only in the form of a fiction or a dream. The dream thus tells the story of a father's grief as the very relation of the psyche to reality: the dream, as a delay, reveals the ineradicable gap between the reality of a death and the desire that cannot overcome it except in the fiction of a dream (…).
>
> It is not primarily the wish to keep the child alive that motivates the father's sleep but rather the wish for consciousness to sleep that – even at the expense of a burning reality – motivates the dream (pp. 98–100).

Where Freud's narration in *Moses and Monotheism* was read as a (…) double telling – the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life* (…) (p. 7) – Lacan's turning to the dream of the burning child is likewise read as a double telling that constitutes a historical witness, only in this case as a confrontation with death and with life through the death of a loved child and the ongoing life of the surviving father: the true reception of the trauma's address can be to listen as the one who receives the gap between the other's death and his own life, in an awakening that, in the attempt to see, does not see, but re-enacts the difference between life and death:

> The awakening, in its very inability to see, is thus the true *reception of an address* that, precisely in its crossing from the burning within to the burning without, changes and reforms the nature of the addressee around the blindness of the imperative itself. For in awakening, in responding to the address of the dead child, 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?', the father is no longer the father of a living child, but precisely now the father as *the one who can say* what the death of a child is. The father's response to the address is not a knowing, that is, but an awakening, an awakening that, like the performance of a speaking, carries with it and transmits the child's otherness, the father's encounter with the otherness of the dead child (Caruth, 2016, pp. 109–110).

Waking up involves an experience of one's own survival which also involves the traumatic separation from the other, the impossibility of perceiving the other's death other than by being awakened from the dream, and then again being in the utmost uncertainty – an impending annihilation in the presence of otherness. At the core of traumatic awakening lies the ethical imperative to see the other, to see the other also in that which is impossible to perceive and which remains uncertain, like the other's death. And it is because we cannot perceive the traumatic moment of our survival that we will return to try to grasp and seek recognition of what we do not yet understand. We return to find out and understand an experience which, by its very nature, Caruth writes, can never be fully acknowledged.

Felman on Lacan's lesson of reading

In *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* (Felman, 1987), we gain an insight into Felman's own adventure in exploring Lacan and his reading of both literary and theoretical texts, among others, and – as I will review

here – in her re-reading of Lacan's cross-reading of Freudian theory and Oedipus at Colonus from Lacan's seminar II (1991). Felman argues for the 'endless psychoanalytic "narrativity" of understanding'. Within this double task 'both to understand psychoanalytic narrative and to narrate psychoanalytic understanding' (p. 14), she finds Lacan's writing and her own ambition. She elaborates on how reading Lacan has developed her way of reading literary texts, thus, offering further insight into our subject about how literary research methods might both be inspired by and enrich psychoanalysis – and into the methodology of the readings presented above by Caruth (2016). A unique attribute of Lacan's work is – according to Felman – his commitment to a triple reference: searching for knowledge through the dimensions of practice (clinical event), concept (theory) and metaphor (literature); by irreducibly committing to the complex of all three together: the practical teachings of the clinical experience, their relation to the theoretical teachings of Freud's work, and their relation to their fictional resonances, the figural teachings of a literary text. In reading Lacan, Felman finds that his reading of Freud implies a reconceptualisation of Freud's discovery – not as a revelation of meaning (the unconscious) but as a practical discovery of a new way of reading:

> The unconscious is not, in effect, 'discovered'; it is *constructed*: it is not a given to be observed, a substance out there that has finally come under the microscope; it is a theoretical construction. [. . .] There is a constitutive belatedness of theory over the practice, the theory always trying to catch up with what it was that the practice, or the reading, was really doing (pp. 23–24).

Focusing on Felman's (1987) work on Lacan's reading (Lacan, 1991) of Freud across *Oedipus at Colonus* both serves as an illustration of the principle of triple reference[9] and explores the relation between myth and theory a little further. My outline will not go into detail about the content of the complex theoretical discussions within and related to this material. Instead, I will focus on the 'hows' of Lacan's reading and involvement with the literary aspects of psychoanalysis, as seen from Felman's perspective and with emphasis on those reflections that can bring us closer to our line of inquiry. Felman emphasises how Lacan utilises the relation between *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* (the relation of the later literary work to the key narrative in psychoanalysis) to make a claim for the importance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920) in a continuous expansion of psychoanalytic insight. Lacan suggests an affinity of subjects between Freud and Sophocles' later texts, for example in the constitutive structural relation between life and death and repetition compulsion. But Lacan does much more; in exploring the narration of Freud's theory, Lacan is telling us – retells Felman – about Freud's strategies as a narrator; not just what the storyteller means to say, but what the storyteller is doing with and through his story.

> But if Freud is like Oedipus, Oedipus is, paradoxically enough, not buried – not yet buried – since the mystery (the riddle) of his mythic disparition is precisely such that Oedipus does die (or disappears), but without leaving a corpse. And it is Lacan who tells us, in the words of Sophocles' messenger, this essential thing, that Freud is not yet buried[10]:
>
> *Citizens, the briefest way to tell you*
>
> *Would be to say that Oedipus is no more;*
>
> *But what has happened cannot be told so simply –*
>
> *It was no simple thing* (Felman, 1987, pp. 142–143).

Felman finds that, through Lacan's involvement with the literary dimension of psychoanalytic theory, he implies an unavoidable breach of knowledge and understanding and that this breach consists of the myth (psychoanalysis' involvement with literature):

> The myth is thus at once the Other of the theory and that which *gives* the theory to itself, that which founds the theory from within the literary gift of speech. While there is no possible cognition of the myth – no constative exhaustion of the myth by theory – there should be a *performative* acknowledgement ('recognition' and 'assumption') by the theory of its relation to the myth, and of the irreducibility of the myth, as something in the theory that, paradoxically enough, both expropriates it from its truth and at the same time founds it as a 'fictitious truthful structure'. The myth is structurally truthful, and psychoanalytically effective, not just in function of but in proportion to its capacity for narrative expropriation (p. 153).

The act of expropriating most often refers to the surrender of a claim to private property. In Felman's writing here it is also used as a figure of the recognition between myth and theory, and in Oedipus, as read by Lacan, as an ongoing story or an ongoing structure. For Lacan, it seems like something resembling a rule in clinical practice, to make structure visible rather than to look for underlying meaning. Meaning is known to the subject himself (symbolized), while 'he is not master of the signified from which his being derived its shape' (Lacan, 2006, p. 242).

I will now take a closer look at how this listening for structure rather than for meaning has been thought about within literary science, and at how literature might, as Felman says, both expropriate theory from

the truth and found theory's truthful structure. Actually, if we look at it from this perspective, we have already witnessed several examples, not only in Sophocles' work and its relation to Freud's text, but also in Freud's story of the train accident and the temporality of trauma and in the dream of the burning child and Caruth's concept of traumatic awakening.

The performative ways of language

Talking about an interrelation between literary research and psychoanalysis inevitably becomes – as we have seen – a dialogue about the discipline's relationship to literature. Within literary research, the ways of doing things with language, for example in terms of trying to affect others or complying with social conventions – are referred to as literary speech acts (e.g., Felman, 2007 in Sun, Peretz & Baer, 2007). This is what Felman has in mind above when referring to the performative aspects of psychoanalysis, acknowledging its relation to the recognition offered in the structure of myth. This is also what Caruth reflects on when reading Lacan's interpretation of the dream of the burning child, where she emphasises the father's response to the address of the silenced utterance between life and death: 'Father don't you see I am burning?'; 'an awakening that, like the performance of a speaking, carries with it and transmits the child's otherness, the father's encounter with the otherness of the dead child' (Caruth, 2016, p. 110). Psychoanalysis and literary research have been said to meet here in an interest in language as communication aimed at the inner or outer other and at finding words for the silenced or for that which is not easily represented, creating an address for experiences not easily depicted (e.g., Felman & Laub, 1992).

A major tendency within literary research is the way in which the literary researcher has moved from listening to the text as an expressive whole, an expression of the author's intentions, to listening also to how the form elements are constructed and with what effect and strength they convey human experiences. Not primarily searching for the meaning behind a story, but for what Felman (1987) calls the narrative's practical effectiveness, what the text does to move us and how we are engaged. Texts are read not only from the narrator's reflective mode or as it necessarily presents itself, but as a performative act, where the text is woven into our attempts and those of the writer to understand the world.

In Caruth's (2016) close readings of Freud, her focus was, as we discovered, on the enigma of trauma as a delayed experience and how history then is no longer available as actual knowledge. Felman's (1987) attempts at articulating and deepening Lacanian insight also seem epistemologically oriented; towards articulating a way of searching for knowledge through what she calls a triple reference: theory, metaphor and clinical practice. They are both concerned with the imperative behind theoretical writing and with the articulation of experiences not easily depicted, sometimes not even registered. Both, in their idiosyncratic ways, imply and are examples of the same shift in the literary researcher's attention described above. A shift in attention that is also related to the material they are reading; to Freud's and later Lacan's history-making attempts to articulate not only the known but also the unknown forces of humanity and history and – especially in Lacan's case – how these are interrelated with language. Their intention is not to follow each author's argument, but rather to trace a different story within the text by, for example, as we saw with Caruth, listening to the recurring figure of departure in Freud's writing. In this way, new stories are created that are not reduced to dealing with the thematic context of the text or to only representing what the theory itself means. New stories which, in their return to the old story, transcend it and thus create something new. Something new which, in its turning back – its movement and engagement with what is already there – both preserves and engages in something which – in the reality of how it also escapes our understanding – might represent what Felman termed above as 'truthful structures', to which we will return.

Literature and theory as openings into the silencing of trauma

The word trauma ranges from describing the almost unimaginable atrocities to which a human being can be exposed to serving as a rhetorical tool with diluted content. Langås (2016) says this situation is illustrative of the importance and actuality of literary science in studying language portraying trauma. From the clinician's perspective, the patient's words and silences teach us to listen to what can only be told indirectly, and perhaps in ambiguous language, sometimes in metaphors, but just as often in symptoms or behaviours. If we focus on literature, Caruth (1995) emphasizes its potential as opening a window to traumatic experiences, arguing that the temporality of trauma[11] is an element that makes literature and other esthetical efforts both attracted to and particularly suitable for conveying the complexity of such experiences. Through indirect and surprising depictions, fiction approaches the gap between experience and language (see also Caruth, 2016), or between pain and writing.

By working with and studying the language connected to traumatic experiences, we might find words for the not easily represented. We can take care of and highlight what we see as missing or find words for how something cannot be represented. This applies both in poetry and in theory, but in poetry there is freedom or distance from reality and concrete experience in that the word is not tied to the concrete meaning to the same extent as in academic texts. This means that the word not only refers to something out there but also carries within it a certainty – or a nascent possibility of certainty – that the word can mean something else, for example – as we saw in the readings by Caruth – as a result of figures. A word, the words, and what eventually becomes the text can also offer a base – or perhaps what we can call a potential space[12] – for new meanings. Encounters and differentiations between literal, cultural and personal meanings enable possibilities both to recognise experience (and oneself) and to represent something new, such as thoughts and feelings that have not yet been realised.[13] In this way, fiction might also have a mediating force between theory and the field of practice. As Felman (1987) states regarding the relationship between myth and psychoanalytic theory:

> a narrative negotiation of difference and self-difference in the very practice of a discourse that purports to be cognitive and theoretical (p. 155).

Listening and translating in literature and psychoanalysis

Under the concepts of listening and translation, I will discuss some passages and possible meeting points between literary research and psychoanalysis. Reflecting upon these through the examples of the close readings of Caruth and Felman will serve as another opening of the overarching question: what can literary research teach us about psychoanalysis? And then, as already implied: how are Freud's discoveries of the unconscious and sublimation already involved in literary research and might – also in future efforts – be involved in a way that enriches both literature and psychoanalysis?

In his essay *Listening*, Roland Barthes (1991) writes:

> To listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred or mute, in order to make available to consciousness the 'underside' of meaning (what is experienced, postulated, intentionalized as hidden) (p. 249).

Through fictional, philosophical and psychoanalytic contributions, Barthes reflects on how aesthetic interpretation practices require a form of deep empathy and are in themselves a creational process. The best legend which accounts for the birth of language, writes Barthes, is Freud's story about the child who mimics his mother's absence and return through a game where he throws away and pulls back a spool attached to a thread. In the game, the child has gone from the first step of listening, that of indices (which here would be listening for the mother's footsteps) to creating meaning himself and thereby no longer listening to the possible alone, but also to that which Barthes terms the *secret*: 'that which, concealed in reality, can reach human consciousness only through a code, which serves simultaneously to encipher and to decipher that reality' (p. 249).

Barthes also reflects on Freud's method of free association and elaborates on its linguistic foundation and creational possibilities. He highlights the back-and-forth movement between neutrality and theory required to approach the unconscious; how listening relates to the intermediate space between body, speech and history:

> The psychoanalyst, attempting to grasp the signifiers, learns to 'speak' the language which is the patient's unconscious, just as the child, plunged into the bath of language, grasps the sounds, the syllables, the consonances, the words, and learns to speak (p. 256).

Listening involves empathy and a form of recognition which – as psychoanalysts know – involves trying to notice what appears incomprehensible or illegible just as much as seeking understanding. The task is not only to recognize something familiar, but also – and perhaps more challenging – to recognize the obscure. A symbol can, for example, also be a structural comparison, as in the child's game; a spool of thread that disappears and returns.[14]

In addition to listening for other stories within the text, it seems meaningful to listen to a form of recognition or identification (which then also means recognising differences), not only between readers and texts, but also between theoretical and literary texts, as Lacan (1991) did – and as Felman (1987) re-read to us through the writings of Freud and Sophocles. By recognising how something returns in language, we can read the unconscious as it is structured as language; not as hidden meaning, but as exposed in language through rhetorical tools. Freud's story about the child's game is an example; translated by Barthes (1991) as a legend about the birth of language as symbolised meaning. The patient-narrative as it appears in almost every psychoanalytic textbook can perhaps also be read as a legend. For example, the story of a breach in what a person says and what he does – and in that case the

persistent story about a persistent enigma, a history which literary and theoretical texts have produced in multiple variants countless times, and which, perhaps precisely for this reason, bear witness to the unknown and thus important. Or, for example, in the repeated narrative about what it might mean to really see and respond to trauma, which can mean acknowledging what it is in the other that remains unknown, as in the dream of the burning child: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'

If we turn back to the temporality of trauma (Freud, 1920; Freud, 1939/2015; Caruth, 2016), we also find an implicit point on the importance of listening to linguistic representations as they have arisen in the wake of traumatic experiences, a perspective where the experience is only available as something else, such as in the patient's words or in literature. Only a trace of the experience is left behind. The same applies to what we are attempting to do here: In all cases, writes Felman, the relationship between theory and text cannot be structured or defined in advance, but must be explored again and again within a specific textual encounter where the various texts implicate each other and, possibly, the field of practice they seek to illuminate. Within the individual and mutual meetings between text, theory and praxis, questions about the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis – their similarities and differences – can also be articulated in new ways.

Literary researchers are thought to listen to and articulate the diverse conditions of textual production, be they historical, economic or psychological mechanisms.[15]

> To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it. [. . .] It is a question, against all in-difference, of asserting the very existence of plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible (Barthes, 2002, pp. 5–6).

We saw how Caruth, when reading *Moses and Monotheism*, seemed consistent in her efforts to take in the contextual circumstances of Freud's writing, and how the figure of departure then appeared as an opening of the text and an expansion of theoretical thinking.

Staying focused on the conditions of the text's production also implies paying attention to how a text is connected to and can point toward other texts. When we write, we constantly work on what has already been written by others. This implies that those who seek to understand other people's texts also seek an understanding of what Kristeva (1984) called the text's intertextuality; how the text springs from and is bound together with other texts.[16] 'The awareness that writing was chained to writing; that every word had its tradition', as the author Elena Ferrante (2022, p. 97) puts it in her writing about Dante.

In Barthes's 'creational listening', there seems to be an implicit path from hearing or listening to saying or writing something about what we experience in the face of the other person's words. To represent another is to be able to express oneself through their words: 'To say something with the other person's words, but at the same time make the words one's own' (p. 194), write Skjerdingstad and Linhart (2020, my translation). Based on Benjamin (e.g., Benjamin, 2021) and Rancière (e.g., Rancière, 2007) among others, they show how translation in the broadest sense can refer to the linguistic transformation of something that is relatively unknown to the recipient into something that is known, understandable, and creational. Translation is about grasping an unknown experience or intention embodied in a text or utterance and articulating it anew, not as a mechanical repetition where nothing is added but rather as a repetition that also brings something new with it.[17] Above, Caruth translated Freud's writing about the temporality of trauma, and Felman translated the work of Lacan and his insights into the connections between literature, theory and praxis. Barthes translated Freud's free association method; his essay included psychoanalytic listening and at the same time created new thinking that reflects on the method's base in semiology and literary research. Lacan returned to Freud, as Freud had returned to a dream he had been told, and Caruth turned to both of these texts and their attempts to understand the dream of the burning child, and through this developed the thinking of traumatic awakening.

The story continues. By repeating and representing each other, we also add something new; thoughts and ideas are created which the individuals would not have come up with on their own. Perhaps it is the unknown and unconscious that we also then try to approach (and sometimes distance ourselves from) through this movement back and forth between listening and creating, not unlike the movement of Orpheus in another myth, that of Orpheus' returning gaze as he attempts to resurrect his beloved Eurydice from the underworld – the returning movement to the lost object of love as a prerequisite for the arising of the song. Blanchot's (1982) essay *The Gaze of Orpheus* ends with this paragraph:

> Writing begins with Orpheus's gaze and his gaze is the expression of a desire that changes the fate and purpose of his song and, through an inspired, careless decision

> discovers the origin of song and sanctifies it. However, to achieve such a gaze Orpheus had to be a singer in the first place. In other words, we can only write when we have reached that point which we can only reach in the space to which writing gives access. To write we must already be writing (p. 181).

As we remember the child's game where the spool of thread disappears and returns and the story of a father who wakes up from a dream that turns out to be the vehement reality of a burning child, the unconscious manifests itself as recurring movements to the same unresolved and unsolvable problems. Or as Lacan once said:

> The game is already played, the die already cast. It is already cast, with the following proviso, that we can pick it up again, and throw it anew. The game has been going on a long time. Everything I'm showing you is already part of a story concerning which one can pronounce every possible and imaginable oracle (Lacan, 1991, p. 219).

Listening to literature can put one in a situation that resembles the clinical, in the sense that the original text exists in neither one, only various attempts to translate a basic text whose existence we can only imagine. In its own way, the unconscious as it appears and disappears in language can point to a recurring lack (e.g., Lacan, 2006). Translation can mean turning feelings, thoughts and whims that one is left with into linguistic images, metaphors and comments that have their origin in the text and at the same time mark a departure from it. A movement beyond the text and at the same time a return to what seems essential, and where what seems essential can be what cannot be represented with ease, sometimes to turn to what is already there, other times to pass on and reproduce what is not there, not yet. Sometimes, through work and toil or by pure stroke of luck, literature is created, through all the translations, to which we feel compelled to listen, just like the myths that psychoanalytic theory has developed in close coexistence and dialogue with; like Blanchot's (1982) reading of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and like Freud and Lacan's writings – their metaphorical as well as their theoretical efforts. Texts that never stop telling us what they have to say.

Notes

1. Refers to the breakdown of the sign into different parts: signifier ('sound-image') and the signified ('concept'). For Saussure, the signified and signifier were form rather than substance while, for example, Barthes (1991, 2002) uses the concepts to differentiate between the literal and cultural meanings of the sign. Lacan translated these concepts from semiotics to psychoanalysis in regard to, for example, how a signifier also becomes signified through transference; see for example his text *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1968) (parts of this manuscript were republished in *Écrits* (2006).
2. In literary research, figures is a term for imagery language that indicates a shaping of the linguistic expression, for example the allegory and the apostrophe (see Andersen et al., 2020).
3. See, for example, Langås (2016) for an overview of literary research aims and contributions within the interdisciplinary trauma field. Whitehead (2004) and Sun et al. (2007) have reviewed parts of the works of Caruth and Felman, respectively.
4. In Felman's essay *Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence* (in Felman & Laub, 1992), she reflects on Paul de Man's work as an influential thinker and literary critic, and more specifically on how the discovery of his writing for *Le Soir*, a major Belgian newspaper that was seized by the Nazis in 1940 and that consequently functioned under Nazi supervision as a pro-German publication, created a discourse characterised by moral judgment. Felman also explores Paul de Man's *Fall to Silence* in connection with the matter.
5. See Haugsgjerd's (2015) afterword in the latest Norwegian translations of *Moses and Monotheism* for a thorough review of different themes and how the texts can be understood in relation to Freud's other writings.
6. A figure she found in reading Tasso's (1842) epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, a text Freud also turned to in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920).
7. Freud (1939/2015 writes: 'It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a "traumatic neurosis". This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. [...] As an afterthought, it must strike us that – in spite of the fundamental difference in the two cases, the problem of traumatic neurosis and that of Jewish monotheism – there is a correspondence in one point. It is the feature which one might term latency.' (pp. 67–68).
8. Trauma's temporality is further explored by Caruth in her essay on Paul de Man's notion of reference. Caruth reads de Man's theory of reference as a narrative inextricably linked to the connection between reference and impact, and in particular the impact of a fall, a reoccurring figure of the falling body which Caruth suggests as de Man's own translation of trauma (Caruth, 2016).
9. Felman shows us how the principle of triple reference seems to have its roots in what is considered the very first trace of a more systematic relation between theory and literature in psychoanalysis: Freud's letter to Wilhelm Fliess dated 15 October 1897.

   My dear Wilhelm

> My self-analysis is the most important thing I have in hand, and promises to be of the greatest value to me, when it is finished. [. . .] If analysis goes on as I expect, I shall write it all out systematically and lay the results before you. So far I have found nothing completely new, but all the complications which I am used to? [. . .] Only one idea of general value has occurred to me. I have found love of the mother and jealousy of the father in my own case too, and now believe it to be a general phenomenon of early childhood. [. . .] If that is the case, the gripping power of Oedipus Rex [. . .] becomes intelligible [. . .]. The Greek myth seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he has felt traces of it within himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy, and his dream fulfillment played out, in reality, causes everyone to recoil in horror, with the full measure of repression which separates his infantile from his present state. (Freud, 1897/1954, pp. 221–224)

10. Referring back to her earlier discussion on how Lacan argues for the importance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920).
11. The early ideas of temporality of trauma and the clinical experience that traumas often remain unintegrated and inaccessible to words and thoughts are elaborated by neurobiological research showing how trauma is not usually processed as part of our normal memory functions. Brain imaging studies, for example, show stress-related changes in brain regions that mediate integration between different functions. See for example Van der Kolk, 2020 for an overview.
12. Ogden (1985) reflects on the implication of Winnicott's concept of potential space for the development of subjectivity and symbolisation, and how symbolic function can be understood as involving the interrelationship of three distinct entities: the symbol (a thought), the symbolised (that which is being thought about) and the interpreting subject (the thinker generating his own thoughts and interpreting his own symbols). 'Potential space ceases to exist as any two of these three elements become dedifferentiated: the thinker and the symbol, the symbol and the symbolized, or the thinker and the object of thought (the symbolized).' (p. 137).
13. Through studies of testimonies from Holocaust survivors and literature, psychoanalyst Amir (2019) has identified various discourses that describe the extent to which the interpreting subject establishes contact with and marks distance from the traumatic material, which in turn affects the narrative's potential for change. Amir finds that when it comes to literature (compared to other experiential material) there is a built-in metaphorical space which in itself can promote narrative changes. Even when the text is declared autobiographical, the author in a fictional text is not the same as the protagonist.
14. See *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for Freud's original account of the game (Freud, 1920, pp. 15–16). In Caruth's readings her focus is on *Beyond the Pleasure Principle's* connection to *Moses and Monotheism*, to departure and return (Caruth, 2016). In the wake of the First World War, Caruth (2013) also reads Freud's depictions of the game as pointing towards not just a child's attempt to make sense of his mother's presence and absence but also towards the author Freud's attempt to create meaning out of the threat posed by the war and to incorporate this into psychoanalytic thinking.
15. See, for example, Kittang (1976).
16. For a presentation on how Kristeva builds this concept on her reading of the literary theorist Michail Bachtin, see Franzén (1995).
17. See Hillis Miller (1982) *Fiction and Repetition*.

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