

P R E F A C E

This book is a study of the central role of trauma in Freud's thought. It argues that it is Freud's mapping of trauma *as a scene*, the elaboration of a *scenography* of trauma, that is central to both his clinical interpretation of his patients' symptoms and his construction of successive theoretical models and concepts to explain the power of such scenes in his patients' lives. This attention to the scenic *form* of trauma, and its power in the determination of neurotic symptoms, presides over Freud's break from the neurological model of trauma he inherited from Charcot. It also helps explain the affinity that Freud and many since him have felt between psychoanalysis and literature (and artistic production more generally) and the privileged role of literature at certain moments in the development of his thought.

A number of alternative theoretical models are to be found in Freud's work: traumatic seduction, screen memory, inherited primal fantasy (*Urphantasie*), the individually constructed originary fantasy (*ursprüngliche Phantasie*). All involve the analysis of sequences of scenes layered one upon the other in the manner of a textual palimpsest, with claims to either material or psychical reality. The notion of a 'primal scene,' a central term for this study (which argues that it has been misconstrued by later generations of psychoanalysts), designates the site of a trauma that deposits an alien and disturbing element in the suffering subject. These signifying traces of the seductive or traumatizing other person resist assimilation and binding into the ego's narcissistic structures and personal archives; they function as an internal foreign body and so give rise to deferred or belated aftereffects. Trauma, involving the breaching of psychical boundaries by an excessive excitation and leading to an unmasterable repetition, characterizes both Freud's first encounter with sexuality under the sign of

seduction and with the death drive under the various forms of the compulsion to repeat, from the negative clinical transference to shell shock and war trauma.

The book begins with the figure of Charcot and the role of key psychological elements in his predominantly neurological model of trauma and traumatic hysteria. It was Freud's encounter with Charcot and his treatment of hysteria, in Paris in 1885–86, that turned him from a career that had been based on laboratory dissection, the anatomy of the central nervous system in the lower animals (eels and crayfish) to a concern with hysteria as a psychological condition based on traumatic shock and the operation of unconscious ideas, although he continued throughout the 1890s to do highly regarded neurological work on infantile brain diseases. Freud was to break from Charcot to develop a properly psychological theory of hysteria (and, by extension, all psychopathology) based on the operation of traumatic memories and their affects. The problem, both clinical and theoretical, that confronted Freud was the status of the 'scenes' that his patients reproduced, either through recall and association or through acting out. His model of traumatic causality gains in complexity in the texts of 1895–97, especially through the elaboration of a traumatic temporality with the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action/afterwardsness). At the same time it is progressively narrowed to a sexual etiology of seduction/abuse in childhood, Freud's notorious 'seduction theory.' Along with the problems of his clinical practice, the development of a concept of fantasy internal to the model of traumatic seduction precipitates the crisis or turning point of September 1897, in which Freud privately rejects his seduction theory in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess. Freud falls silent in public, but in his correspondence with Fliess and his self-analysis he oscillates between the model of traumatic memory and its repudiation in a turn to an emergent model of infantile sexuality. Here he proposes as a 'universal event' an emotional configuration that is not until 1910 labeled the 'Oedipus complex,' but which in the crisis months of late 1897 is outlined through a brief commentary on Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This turn to tragedy as a model of male subjectivity is more fully elaborated in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). It crystallizes a shift in focus from symptom to subjectivity, from the narrower field of psychopathology to a concern

with psychical structure and a developmental model of sexuality as such in the *Three Essays* of 1905.

This book also examines a second crisis or turning point, that of 1919–20. Here the turn to literature (E. T. A. Hoffmann and the associated aesthetic question of the uncanny) accompanies the return of trauma under the rubric of the compulsion to repeat and the death drive. At both moments of theoretical crisis and change (1897 and 1919) Freud turns to literary texts that exemplify a repeated pattern of traumatic scenes and that dramatize precisely a traumatic scenography. He then submits his chosen texts to an ‘oedipal’ reading that marginalizes or excludes the ‘daemonic’ repetition that characterizes them. The book argues that Freud’s engagement with literature at key moments of theoretical impasse and crisis, as well as his long study of Leonardo da Vinci, constitutes thought experiments in the imaginary space of literature and painting. When the chosen works of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Hoffmann, and da Vinci are read in the light of the tension verging on conflict in Freud’s thought, between what Jean Laplanche has called a ‘Copernican’ or other-centered model of trauma and a ‘Ptolemaic’ or self-centered model of development, the insights of his rejected ‘traumatology’ return to challenge and disturb his dominant developmentalist framework. It will be argued that the texts to which Freud is drawn both invite and resist his oedipal readings, while themselves bearing imaginative witness to the foundational relation to the traumatic or seductive other, even as Freud’s readings refocus them on the impulses of the centered, single individual.

Where conventional accounts often see the repudiation of the theory of traumatic seduction as the maturing, if not the foundation, of psychoanalysis as such, this book develops the thesis of Jean Laplanche that in this shift from a traumatic to a developmental model, along with the undoubted gains embodied in the theory of infantile sexuality, there were crucial losses, specifically, the recognition of the role of the adult other and the traumatic encounter with adult sexuality that is entailed in the ordinary nurture and formation of the infantile subject. It also argues that Freud’s attention to the power of scenes—scenes of memory, scenes of fantasy—persists, both in his general psychology of dreaming and his major case studies. Along with this persistent Freudian ‘scenography’ is the recurrent

surfacing, at different moments of his thought, of key elements of the officially abandoned model of trauma.

The conceptual focus for the book arose out of an engagement with the work of Jean Laplanche, beginning with the classic essay coauthored with J.-B. Pontalis on fantasies of origin, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” around which an important Anglophone anthology was built, *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986). Its immediate context is my long-term project of translating and presenting Laplanche’s work to an Anglophone public: *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, coedited with Martin Stanton (London: ICA, 1992); Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, edited with an introduction by John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999); a special issue of *New Formations* 48, “Jean Laplanche and the Theory of Seduction,” which translates and presents the work of Laplanche and his co-thinkers, published in 2003; and, most recently, *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000–2006* (New York: IP Books, 2011). My overview of Laplanche’s revision of Freudian metapsychology that situates him in relation to Freud, “Seduction and the Vicissitudes of Translation: The Work of Jean Laplanche,” appeared in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2007): 1241–91.

Laplanche’s work, as will be obvious to any reader, is therefore a recurrent reference point, and its insights into the logic of trauma, its topography, temporal dimensions, and fundamental relation to the other are an incitement to the book’s tracing of the evolution, disappearances, and serial returns of the traumatic in Freud’s work. My enthusiasm for a Freudian scenography, however, is not something that the late Laplanche would probably have shared.

Freud and the Scene of Trauma

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