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**Jeremy Tambling, ed. (2023). *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Literature and Psychoanalysis*.**

**New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 540 pages,  
ISBN 9781350184152.**

(Tadeusz Rachwał, SWPS University, Warsaw,  
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On the cover of the book we can see Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses. This paratextual presence hints at the complexity of the possible relationships between psychoanalysis, art and literature made even more complex inside the book. As we learn from Jeremy Tambling's "Introduction," Freud wrote about this sculpture in *The Moses of Michelangelo*, but also about the biblical Moses in *Moses and Monotheism* about which he wrote to Arnold Zweig in 1934, before the publication of the final version of the text in 1939, that he was writing *ein historical Roman*, a historical novel (5). Freud's Moses was "actually two people," one of whom was not a Jew, but the Egyptian monotheist who led the Jews out from captivity. The other was "the figure of the Jews after Moses was murdered by them, in a primal slaying of the father" (5). Judaism thus cannot claim any single originary identity, a split which may also be standing as a vague beginning of psychoanalysis as a response to "a sense of splitting which is imposed upon the subject" (5).

Though the figures of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan have been given a lot of attention in this handbook, and their undeniable role of founders of two schools of psychoanalysis in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is fully admitted in it, what the 37 texts included in the volume reveal is that by the 21<sup>st</sup> century those schools have generated numerous new ways of thinking about literature and culture, as well as approaches to their readings and theorizations in various places of the world from which the authors of the texts included in the book speak to us. The relationship between psychoanalysis and literature has been always mutual and has lasted for enough time to make it possible to speak of their inseparability. In the "Introduction" to the book Jeremy Tambling hints at literature as the Other of psychoanalysis, thus signalling that literary languages inevitably bring in much more than stories or histories told in them in different styles and forms. One might say that it is through a psychoanalytic dimension that otherness is brought to human discourses. The book is divided into five sections whose thematic content, however, frequently overlaps. What helps the reader find particular problems and issues in the text is the exhaustive and comprehensive index, to which the editor

sends the reader with the exclamation mark: “the reader ultimately must have recourse to the Index!” (15).

The first section of the book (“Forms of Psychoanalysis”) investigates various forms and modes of addressing psychoanalysis through which it may itself be seen as a literary creation, a language construct which seemingly offers a kind of scientific discipline, but in fact is a reflection on language’s weakness in expressing things to which it frequently points through word plays and ambiguities. This is the case of the irreducibly split idea of the “uncanny” (*unheimlich*), perhaps Freud’s most poetic term, which brings in possibilities of re-reading the broadly understood homeliness or domesticity as crucial themes for literature. Home is also a word which puts in motion economy (*oikos*) and desire, possession and being possessed which may take the form of dreams as well as the form of their analysis which, strongly linked with the name of Freud, is a literary theme archetypally informing not only literature, but also philosophy. Linguistic playfulness of psychoanalysis is discussed and illustrated with examples juxtaposing it with literary texts in the chapter opening this section (e.g. Freud/Heine, Lacan/Poe, Deleuze/Carroll) and titled “When Psychoanalysis Plays with Words.” The already mentioned “uncanny” is not only a matter of a wordplay, and in the chapter on Frankenstein and the uncanny various psychoanalytic attitudes to uncanniness are linked with the idea of the Other and its potential in literary interpretation. Dream interpretation, so strongly associated with the name of Freud, is addressed in one of the articles included in this part of the volume through Arthemidorus’s divination of dreams from quite a long time ago as a psychoanalytic trait which then became befitted in Freud, also feeding some ways of thinking in Foucault and Derrida. If dreams are appearances, then the question of “what it *means* that appearances have meaning” (57) is the fundamental question not only of psychoanalysis, but also of philosophy and literature.

Another question raised is the next chapter of this section goes away from Freud toward Lacan, and concentrates on fragmenting and divisibility of reality and the construction of wholeness which is also a crucial trait of Lacan’s attempts at showing himself as an avant-garde writer, which he revealed in his dispute with Derrida on the idea of atomistique (a kind of desire to infinitely divide) in the context of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*. There are four more chapters in this section, illustrating different forms of approaching psychoanalysis. One of them recalls the figure of Charles Mauron, who is read as “a polymath and pioneer” of the critical turn which “made psychoanalytic reading a staple feature of literary studies in France” (73). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are brought in to the book through projecting their complex writings on desire and the idea of body without organs on Mary Shelley’s novel *The Last Man*. The theme of sublimation in Freud and Laplanche is discussed in the next chapter, while the last chapter of this section takes up the theme of the uses of Chinese culture and script in Freud and Lacan.

The second part of the *Handbook* is titled “Reading Texts,” and what it

concentrates on are ways of reading of amalgam of literature and psychoanalysis with their mutual inspirations and textual cooperations. This section of the book introduces psychoanalysis and literature as interrelated kinds of writing which are crucial for understanding various roles of contemporary literary criticism in which specialization is giving way to a more imaginary ways of interpreting texts, the ways which also demand new methodologies of reading and writing where literature is not exposed as a form endowed with unique and typical characteristics. Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield*, one of Freud's favourite books, is shown in the article opening this section as a text whose numerous elements became patterns mimed in his life and which were also projected on his theoretical ideas. The replacement of the figure of Oedipus with that of Antigone is analysed in the next article as a change in psychoanalytical ethics and in the writings of Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler. Jacques Lacan returns in another article in this section as the interpreter of Lewis Carroll's *Alice Books*, reading them in terms of a clash between the mathematical and the real where "the mathematization of language" ends up in the subversion "the logician's conservative ideals" thus demonstrating "the real as impossible" (158–159). The next chapter suggests that Dennis Potter's TV series *The Singing Detective* is a near-encyclopaedic work "engaging with different traditions of crime fiction and psychoanalytic thought" (161). Jungian, Freudian and Kleinian analytical categories turn out to be useful tools for an insightful reading of the film. William Shakespeare's plays are the subject of two subsequent chapters which introduce Freud as a careful reader of the Swan of Avon and discuss Jacques Lacan's reading of *Hamlet* as a way of "manoeuvring [...] between literary analysis and clinical practice" (189). The last article in this section addresses poetry and poeticity in psychoanalysis through Lacan's claim that Freud's frequent use of philological references and linguistic analysis augments the involvement of the unconscious in his writings.

The third part of the book is titled "Psychoanalysis and Modernism" and gathers readings of Modernist texts of Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and Samuel Beckett as significant commentaries on psychoanalysis with whose "great wave" they are contemporary. The near simultaneous birth of modernism and psychoanalysis seems to be indicating their inseparability – the prevailing theme of the book. The concerns of writers and artists can be treated as literary symptoms of psychoanalysis – the phrase used in one of the chapters of this section with reference to James Joyce. This part of the book consists of five chapters on literary works and one on surrealist art, with Max Ernst and *Salvador Dalí* providing inspiration to an elaborate analysis of image and visuality in psychoanalysis. This central part of the book brings in literature and psychoanalysis as an amalgam of forms of expression of the modernist concern with language and expression of the intuitive, of what is beyond the surface of things, of ways of overcoming the narcissistic increment of the ego. The nuanced

readings of literary texts and contexts offered in this section demand a lot of concentration and attention on the part of the reader but, especially for students of literature, they may be rewarding.

Part four of the book (“Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Gender”) considers the role of psychoanalysis in feminist and gender studies, and in women’s writing. The first chapter in the section discusses hysteria in the light of Freud’s case study of it (“Dora Case”) which stimulated feminist critique and deployment of concepts brought by psychoanalysis “as a way to challenge the oppression of sexual difference in life and in thought” (306). Julia Kristeva’s reading of George Bataille is discussed in the next chapter as an incitement to thinking of the relationship between art and abjection and their power of exposing to radical otherness and of expressing radical negativity. An analysis of Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* proposed in the next chapter concentrates on the possibilities of reworking psychoanalysis towards theorizing the queer sexualities and genders which were emerging in Barnes’s time. What follows then is a reading of Elizabeth Abel’s reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* in which Melanie Klein’s criticism of Freud and the replacement of the Oedipal father with pre-Oedipal mother plays the central role. The near absence of the mother in Woolf’s novel (she is mentioned only once in it) is read in the chapter as expressing “a desire for a masculine woman” (343). The chapter “Lacan, the Feminine, and Feminisms” is devoted to Jacques Lacan’s fascination with the female sexuality which became explicitly the focal point of his investigation long after its implicit presence in his early writings. What this fascination is linked with are the ideas of vanishing, absence, incompleteness, linguistic inexpressibility and undecidability, which dislocate the ego and give to a different from phallic kind of pleasure. The last chapter of the book concentrates on the ways in which “cinema’s reliance upon the disparities of sexual difference” (367) has been critiqued from the perspective of feminist and lesbian film theories and theorists. One of the questions raised in the text is how to create what is called “counter-cinema” addressing female viewers who might engage in “cross-identification, same-sex desire, negotiation, self-conscious appreciation of cinematic address, and fantasy” (368).

The final part of the book goes beyond literary studies toward other forms of art and, more generally, toward the cultural significance of psychoanalysis in artistic expression and in its role in the world of new technologies. It also, and importantly so, goes beyond the European cultural hegemony toward other culture addressing the (post) colonial transfer of psychoanalysis to other than Europe places of the world. The initial two chapters of this section (“Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory”) take up the theme of music which “has remained curiously resistant to psychoanalytic inquiry” (381). This may be an effect of Freud’s declared unmusicality which the first chapter of this section (“The Battle for the Voice”) confronts with Theodor Reik’s, Freud’s colleague’s, embracement of music as a vocalization of language which may broaden the scope of psychoanalytical insight. What Freud saw as a limitless oceanic feeling carried by music, one’s submersion

in this ocean may be seen as sound bath which “connects music to the presymbolic” (387), a perspective opened in psychoanalysis by Lacan. The other chapter related to music (“Sibling-Incest in Wagner”) reads Wagner’s mythic heroes as immersed in a “perpetual fantasy of rivalry with the father” (395), which Oedipal theme is elaborated on the example of the complex relationship between Sigmund and Sieglinde in the *Valkyrie*. The next chapter (“The Creature... Was... a Man!”) sends us to animal studies and concentrates on Freud’s two kinds of approach to animals in his writings. One of them is a hermeneutic suspicion in which the animals appearing in his patients’ thoughts are treated as encrypted anxieties. Animals in this case stand for something else. The other approach is based on speculation, and it concerns the possibility that humanness begins with bipedality which is associated with significant psychic consequences, one of them being the shift of libidinal excitements from the nose to the eyes.

The book then takes us from animals to technology and the technological production of pleasure (“Steve Jobs and the iGadget in the Economy of Jouissance”) through “gadgeting” the world with objects which become extensions of the body. Interestingly mixing Steve Jobs’s biography with Lacanian uses of the Name-of-the-Father and Jacques-Alain Miller’s notion of externalities in ordinary psychosis this chapter offers an insight into the complexity of shaping delusive objects of desire. The next chapter takes up possible affinities between psychoanalysis and posthumanism, claiming that psychoanalysis may also be seen as “posthumanism *avant lettre*” (453), which proto-posthumanism is rarely noticed in posthuman studies. Briefly having discussed various approaches to the ideas of the posthuman and transhuman and Donna Haraway’s idea of our becoming of cyborgs, the chapter offers an insightful analysis of Spike Jonze’s 2013 film *Her* from the perspective of transhuman fantasies of technological increment of pleasure and Lacan’s writings on love and jouissance.

The four final chapters of this section, and of the book, relate psychoanalysis to colonial and postcolonial discourses. The first of them reads Freud’s view on religion as illusion as the illusion’s extension to phantasm and hallucination in colonial contexts, finding in psychanalysis a possibility of going beyond the hallucinatory to something that “exceeds us ... but also makes us” (473). Making use of Slavoj Žižek’s version of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the author of the next chapter (“(Post)Colonialism and the Persistence of Psychoanalysis”) claims that psychoanalysis is “the *only* theory to effectively deal with the (post)colonial present and subvert colonialism’s shattering effects upon what is perceived as non-Western, subaltern, underrepresented” (476; original emphasis). Since postcolonial discourse ‘failed miserably’ in dealing with stereotyping and creating false universalities, psychoanalysis may reintroduce a different ethical dimension to our constructions of identity hinted at by Žižek’s idea of sabotaging one’s interests. The next article discusses Frantz Fanon’s and Octave Manoni’s visions of decolonizing the mind, showing that Fanon’s faulting of Manoni’s alleged seeing colonialism as a response



to “a need for dependency” (490) was open to challenge. Focusing on “the psychic scars of centuries of colonialism” both thinkers brought attention to “the structural organization of beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices imbibed across generations” (496). The chapter closing the book takes us to Martinique and its colonial history through an analysis of Suzanne Césaire’s writings in which she “psychoanalyses Martinicans, deciphering through their behaviour their thought-mechanisms” (506). Seen as living outside authenticity, Martinicans have replaced Freud’s dreams opting “for tales to project the depth of their inner self” (506). The article also discusses Edouard Glissant’s psychoanalytic theorization of the Caribbean and his linking of poetry with the unconscious and his “uses of psychoanalysis to stir a revolution magnifying independence” (515).

What follows then are 24 pages of the already mentioned Index. The index is detailed and well-constructed and can be of much help in orienting the reader within this wide-ranging book. The concerns, concepts, terms and proper names which the book addresses are plentiful, and the above outline of what I have found to be the main themes of the particular chapters is highly fragmentary. The variety of subjects and approaches of the particular papers is another feature of the book which carries the word “handbook” in its title. In some older sense of the word, this book is not handy, it is big, thick and heavy. However, I think it would be good to keep it ready-to-hand, as Heidegger would have it, and see in it a useful tool in academic studying and learning, both as a source of information about literature and psychoanalysis, and as a source broadening one’s understanding and vision of them. Though devoted to literature and psychoanalysis, the book does not offer a singular position towards them, and gives the reader the possibility of choosing from among quite numerous attitudes, styles and forms of academic writing, themes and topics to be thought about. Needless to say that it does not contain everything, there are no books which could not be supplemented, and it fact its diversified and cross-disciplinary dimension invites supplementation, be it in writing or in thinking. Rather than announcing a final truth of psychoanalysis and literature the book promises advancement not only of what Jeremy Tambling calls “newish readers” (1), but of any reader taking up studying literature and its place in the contemporary world.

TADEUSZ RACHWAŁ is Professor of English at the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland, where he teaches literary and critical theory and thematic courses addressing various issues of contemporary culture and its critiques from post-humanist perspectives and concerning anthropocentrism, environment politics, mastery of nature, violence. His fields of interest are British and American literature and culture, critical theory, and literary criticism. His publications address various concerns of contemporary literary and critical theories in social and political contexts.