

**British Psychoanalytical Society and the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies,  
University of Essex**

**Psychoanalysis in the Academy  
Seminar Two: Psychoanalysis and Literature**

**Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup> 9.15 am to 1.30 pm**

The British Psychoanalytical Society, Byron House,  
112a Shirland Road, London W9 2BT

**Programme**

**8.30am** Coffee and Registration

**Session 1: 9.15-10.30**

**Josh Cohen: “‘Actual’ Neurotic Literature’**

This paper begins from the distinction Freud makes in his earliest psychoanalytic papers, between ‘actual’ and psycho-neuroses. Because they are the effect of immediate somatic pressures, ‘actual’ neuroses, says Freud, have no symbolic content and so are beyond the scope of psychoanalytic inquiry. Yet in the decades previous to and coinciding with these formulations on the ‘actual’ neuroses, various writers including Baudelaire and Huysmans were exploring the effects of an excess of somatic pain, especially in the form of neurasthenic illness and exhaustion, on literary form. This paper will argue that the ‘actual’ neuroses intrude into literature a kind of refusal or ruin of representation, and as such resonate very explicitly with the contemporary currents in both psychoanalysis and literature.

**Josh Cohen** is Professor of Modern Literary Theory at Goldsmiths University of London and an adult psychoanalyst in private practice. He is the author of numerous books and articles on psychoanalysis, modern literature and aesthetic theory, including *How to Read Freud* and, most recently, *The Private Life: Why We Remain in the Dark*.

**Coffee Break: 10.30-11.00**

**Session 2: 11.00–12.15**

**Diana Webster Thomas: ‘Trauma, Memory and Narcissism as Realised in Form in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro.’**

Ishiguro explores the aftermath of disturbed periods of 20thC history, especially the horrors of atomic war, socio-historic upheaval and the failures of dependency in childhood. His interests are the ‘emotional upheaval’ and that the trauma persists

into middle and older age for his central narrators. They begin their stories in the present, often bewildered, looking back to the past in memory to learn the truth as to why, despite their efforts, they are disappointed, have unfulfilled lives and a sense of time wasted. I outline the post-Kleinian concepts relevant to surviving catastrophic change, particularly types of projective identification, borderline narcissism and the costs of ego-depletion that these defences exact. I show how Ishiguro produces a failed and ironic form of the traditional humanist novel form which I have called the 'deficit' model, since it embodies the ego-depletion, demonstrated through his reconfigured conventions of the novel, as well as the behaviours of the narrators. He expands the territory a little further with intertextuality, detailed settings and the pleasures of word-play.

**Diane Webster Thomas** is a graduate in English Literature, and has taught it at secondary education level for many years. She then took up the MA in Psychoanalytic studies at the Tavistock Centre, writing a dissertation on narcissism in two novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby* (1926) and *Tender is the Night* (1934). This was followed by a PhD thesis on the six novels of Ishiguro: *Identity, Identification and Narcissistic Phantasy in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*.

### **Session 3 12.15-1.30**

#### **Matt ffytche: Poetry, Psychoanalysis and Negation**

Psychoanalysts have often reflected on the relations between poetry and creative development. Less often do they turn to themes of poetry and self-negation. This talk will concentrate on three writers – John Wilkinson, Denise Riley and John Welch – associated with a poetic scene which evolved in Cambridge from the late-60s. All of them have been close readers of psychoanalysis, or maintained some intellectual or practical relation to it. Each has also made violence, destructiveness or loss of self central to their evocations of everyday experience (at times mobilising ideas such as the false self, narcissism, or the damaged object). In examining their writing I will look at the way they consciously engage psychoanalytic ideas in their poetic practice and their reflections on the compositional process – but also how the poetry aims to resist psychoanalytic reflection. What is it that is thought to be withheld?

**Matt ffytche** is Deputy Director of the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, where he teaches on psychoanalytic history, concepts, and the application of psychoanalysis to sociology and literature. His work includes *The Foundation of the Unconscious: Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Liberal Psyche* (CUP, 2012) as well as essays on the uncanny, modernism and the unconscious, and Bion's *Memoir of the Future*.

**The seminar will take place at the British Psychoanalytical Society, Byron House, 112a Shirland Road, London W9 2 BT on Saturday March 21st.**

*This is the second in a Seminar Series jointly sponsored by the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Essex and the British Psychoanalytical Society. The aim of the series is to advance the understanding of psychoanalytic perspectives in a range of fields of academic knowledge, bringing together academics, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists in a dialogue between psychoanalysis and particular academic fields.*

*The organisers of the Seminar Series are Matt ffytche, Deputy Director of the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, and Michael Rustin. Nicola Abel-Hirsch (Visiting Professor, Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, and Institute of Psychoanalysis), David Bell (Institute of Psychoanalysis) and Daniel Pick (Birkbeck, University of London, and Institute of Psychoanalysis) are members of the Advisory Group to the Series.*