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An Alphabet Without Freud: Desire and Absence in the Analytic Spaces of Literature

In his epic 2005 novel *Human Traces*, Sebastian Faulks follows the birth of modern psychology through the lives of two fictional psychiatrists. Bordering on historiographic metafiction, the novel presents characters reading and discussing important philosophies and texts from the period, studying at recognized institutions and encountering authentic historical figures including Jean-Martin Charcot, Joseph Babinski, Alois Alzheimer and Wilhelm Fliess. Concepts familiar to psychoanalytic thought abound: dream analysis, unconscious desire and repressed memories all play important parts in the narrative. Yet the term "psychoanalysis" is mentioned only once and the name of Freud is never referenced in the course of the novel's 609 pages. Drawing upon Henk de Berg's notion that literature "is a battle between drives and repressions, between the desire for expression and the need for censorship," my paper will question this absence. In discarding Freud from a quasi-fictional account of psychology, what exactly is being abdicated? What does this omission, and our reactions to it, tell us about modern assumptions concerning the place of Freud and psychoanalysis in literature, culture and modern history? What does it tell us about our own investments and desires? Drawing upon the notion that there are strong ties between the analytic setting and the site of literature, my paper engages theorists including Adam Phillips, Mary Jacobus and Shoshana Felman to interrogate how we might read what wishes and repressions are present in the kind of disruption found in Faulks' novel. How can we "read beyond what the subject has been incited to say" and what is dangerous about the desire to do this reading? Using this novel as a *mise-en-scene* between theory and practice, my paper will question the idea that if "literature is the language psychoanalysis uses to speak of itself" as Peter Vine notes, what is being said when literature leaves psychoanalysis out? What traces of the human can be found there?

Currently finishing a PhD in Education at York University in Toronto, Canada. My master's degree is in English literature. Prior to graduate school, I worked as an elementary teacher and a journalist. Current interests include the intersections between psychoanalysis and aesthetics --how we are changed by the objects we encounter and notions of beauty. My thesis, "The Opposite of Reading", is a psychoanalytic examination of how the private space of reading is taken up in the public spaces of literature curriculum and classroom.