of the subject" (1213), which would seem to indicate that the truth about these two subjects is not available.

Is there any conceivable criticism of psychoanalytic theory that cannot be explained, and thus explained away, in this same manner by blaming it on the unconscious motives of the criticizer?

Does she herself have an unconscious motive for invoking the critics' unconscious motives? I am sure that she must have worried about this, since she says later in the essay that "psychoanalysis urges a habit of self-scrutiny that is advantageous in negotiating the difficulty (or impossibility) of critical objectivity" (1213), which also bears directly on my second question.

Finally, do I have an unconscious motive for raising these questions? If I do, I would not be aware of it, of course, and so I must depend on her to enlighten me.

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Reply:

According to Frederick Crews, literary scholars should use methods and terminology that have been scientifically validated. He favors empirical analysis in order to reach what he considers accurate conclusions about literature. Crews's argument against psychoanalytic theory is familiar from his many published works on the subject, and since debate on the matter is rather well worn I will refrain from rehearsing it. I will simply point out that my essay observes common ground and cross-fertilization between historicism and psychoanalytic theory in the work of some recent scholars, instead of claiming the total dominance of the latter approach as Crews suggests.

The second half of Crews's letter, in which he writes of "calumny," concerns me more, because here the larger issues seem particularly timely. He uses the term to describe my observation that "the symptomatic language of individual historicists indicates an unconscious prohibition of certain ideas." For Crews, this amounts to calling these authors "mentally disturbed." Richard Levin's inquisitorial letter makes a similar point. But to suggest that texts contain traces of attitudes and ideas beyond the deliberate intentions of their authors is an altogether different matter from calling anyone mentally disturbed. The irreducible texture of language—its complex forms, the links between texts, the structures of figuration, image, and allusion—overwhelms the strict control of individual speakers or writers. Unlike scientific instruments, which we trust to function objectively and reliably, language both does our bidding and escapes our grasp. As I suggest in my essay, Lacan's work has been important for students of literature because of the attention it directs to the surfaces and structures of language. If the study of literature is imperiled, as Crews fears, it is not because botched tools have limited our ability "to reach real-world discoveries" but because we sometimes stray from the responsibility of listening to what Roland Barthes called "the rustle of language." Accordingly, when literature departments defer to colleagues in the sciences or social sciences for methodology and even for purpose, we lose what makes our discipline valuable. This is not to say that rationality has fallen by the wayside or to discount the genuine advances of historical research in literary study or to deny the excitement of an expanding canon.

Psychoanalytic criticism is not to everyone's taste, yet its current manifestations contribute to the burgeoning interest in questions of aesthetics and literary form, as we collectively consolidate the gains of historicism with the insights of postmodern theory. In my view, the state of literary and language study is nothing so dire as Crews describes. Readers will note the irony of his bemoaning a loss of "collegial civility" while accusing a disputant of tactics used by "official Soviet psychiatry" and characterizing a debate about theories of literary interpretation as "total war."

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