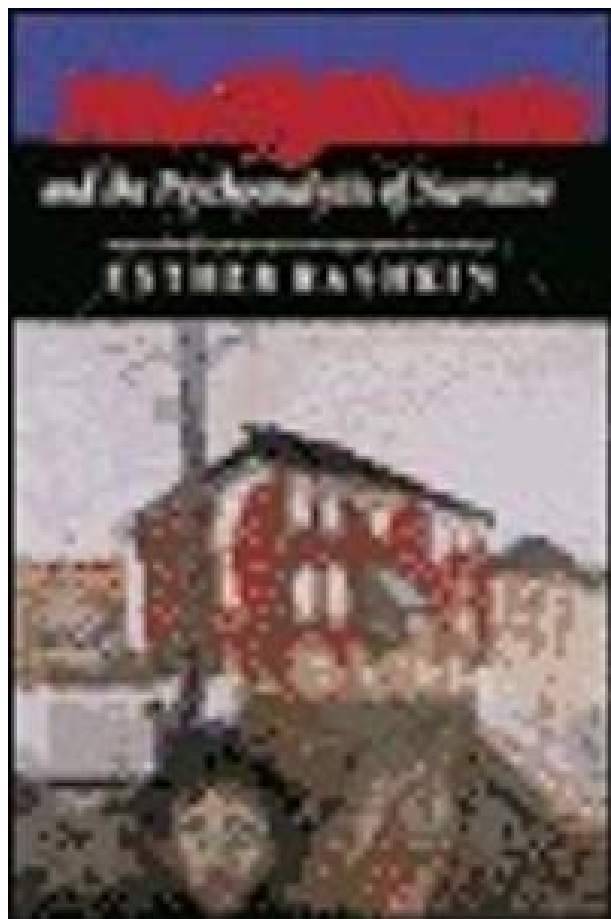


Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative



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ISBN10:	0691069514
Goodreads Rating:	4.00
Published:	November 8th 1992 by Princeton University Press
Genre:	Uncategorized
ISBN13:	9780691069517
Language	English
Pages:	228

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Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative is the first book to explore the implications of the psychoanalytic theory of the phantom for the study of narrative literature. A phantom is formed when a shameful, unspeakable secret is unwittingly transmitted, through cryptic language and behavior, transgenerationally from one family member to another. The "haunted" individual to whom the "encrypted" secret is communicated becomes the unwitting medium for someone else's voice - and the result is speech and conduct that appear incongruous or obsessive in a variety of ways. Through close readings of texts by Conrad, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Balzac, James, and Poe, Esther Rashkin reveals how shameful secrets, concealed within the unspoken family histories of fictive characters, can be reconstructed from their linguistic traces and can be shown not only to drive the characters' speech and behavior but also to generate their narratives. First articulated by the French psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, the theory of the phantom here represents a radical departure from Freudian, Lacanian, and other psychoanalytic approaches to literary interpretation. In Rashkin's hands, it also provides a response to structuralist and poststructuralist critiques of character analysis, an alternative to deconstructive strategies of reading, and a new vantage point from which to consider problems of intertextuality, "authorship," and the formation and origins of narrative.