

# The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

**Peter Brooks**

Psychoanalytic literary criticism has always been something of an embarrassment. One resists labeling as a “psychoanalytic critic” because the kind of criticism evoked by the term mostly deserves the bad name it largely has made for itself. Thus I have been worrying about the status of some of my own uses of psychoanalysis in the study of narrative, in my attempt to find dynamic models that might move us beyond the static formalism of structuralist and semiotic narratology. And in general, I think we need to worry about the legitimacy and force that psychoanalysis may claim when imported into the study of literary texts. If versions of psychoanalytic criticism have been with us at least since 1908, when Freud published his essay on “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” and if the enterprise has recently been renewed in subtle ways by post-structuralist versions of reading, a malaise persists, a sense that whatever the promises of their union, literature and psychoanalysis remain mismatched bedfellows—or perhaps I should say playmates.

The first problem, and the most basic, may be that psychoanalysis in literary study has over and over again mistaken the *object* of analysis, with the result that whatever insights it has produced tell us precious little about the structure and rhetoric of literary texts. Traditional psychoanalytic criticism tends to fall into three general categories, depending on the object of analysis: the author, the reader, or the fictive persons of the text. The first of these constituted the classical locus of psychoanalytic interest. It is now apparently the most discredited, though also perhaps the most difficult to extirpate, since if the disappearance of the author

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has been repeatedly announced, authorial mutants ceaselessly reappear, as, for instance, in Harold Bloom's *psychomachia* of literary history. Like the author, the fictive character has been deconstructed into an effect of textual codes, a kind of thematic mirage, and the psychoanalytic study of the putative unconscious of characters in fiction has also fallen into disrepute. Here again, however, the impulse resurfaces, for instance in some of the moves of a feminist criticism that needs to show how the represented female psyche (particularly of course as created by women authors) refuses and problematizes the dominant concepts of male psychological doctrine. Feminist criticism has in fact largely contributed to a new variant of the psychoanalytic study of fictive characters, a variant one might label the "situational-thematic": studies of Oedipal triangles in fiction, their permutations and evolution, of the roles of mothers and daughters, of situations of nurture and bonding, and so forth. It is work often full of interest, but nonetheless methodologically disquieting in its use of Freudian analytic tools in a wholly thematic way, as if the identification and labeling of human relations in a psychoanalytic vocabulary were the task of criticism. The third traditional field of psychoanalytic literary study, the reader, continues to flourish in ever-renewed versions, since the role of the reader in the creation of textual meaning is very much on our minds at present, and since the psychoanalytic study of readers' responses willingly brackets the impossible notion of author in favor of the acceptable and also verifiable notion of reader. The psychoanalytic study of the reader may concern real readers (as in Norman Holland's *Five Readers Reading*) or the reader as psychological everyman (as in Simon O. Lesser's *Fiction and the Unconscious*). But like the other traditional psychoanalytic approaches, it displaces the object of analysis from the text to some person, some other psychodynamic structure—a displacement I wish to avoid since, as I hope to make clear as I go along, I think psychoanalytic criticism can and should be textual and rhetorical.

If the displacement of the object of analysis has been a major failing of psychoanalytic literary criticism, it has erred also in its inability to rid itself of the underlying conviction that it is inherently explanatory. The problem with "literature and psychoanalysis," as Shoshana Felman has pointed out more effectively than any other critic, lies in that "and."<sup>1</sup>

1. See Shoshana Felman, "To Open the Question," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 5–10.

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The conjunction has almost always implied a relation of privilege of one term to the other, a use of psychoanalysis as a conceptual system in terms of which to analyze and explain literature, rather than an encounter and confrontation between the two. The reference to psychoanalysis has traditionally been used to close rather than open the argument, and the text. This is not surprising, since the recourse to psychoanalysis usually claims as its very *raison d'être* the capacity to explain and justify in the terms of a system and a discourse more penetrating and productive of insight than literary critical psychology as usual, which of course harbors its own, largely unanalyzed, assumptions. As Lesser states the case, “no ‘common-sense’ psychology yet employed in criticism has been helpful”; whereas psychoanalysis provides a way to explore “the deepest levels of meaning of the greatest fiction.”<sup>2</sup>

Why should we reject such a claim? Even if psychoanalysis is far from being a “science” with the formal power of linguistics, for instance, surely some of its hypotheses are so well established and so universally illustrated that we can use them with as much impunity as such linguistic concepts as “shifters” or “the double articulation.” Yet the recourse to linguistic and to psychoanalytic concepts implies a false symmetry: linguistics may be universalistic, but its tools and concepts are “cool” and their overextension easily recognized as trivial, whereas psychoanalysis is imperialistic, almost of necessity. Freud works from the premise that all that appears is a sign, that all signs are subject to interpretation, and that they ultimately tell stories that contain the same *dramatis personae* and the same narrative functions for all of us. It is no wonder that Freud called himself a “conquistador”: he extends remarkably the empire of signs and their significant decipherment, encompassing all of human behavior and symbolic action. Thus any “psychoanalytic explanation” in another discipline always runs the risk of appearing to claim the last word, the final hermeneutical power. If there is one thing that post-structuralist criticism has most usefully taught us, it is the suspicion of this last word in the interpretive process and history, the refusal of any privileged position in analysis.

But if we refuse to grant psychoanalysis any position of privilege in criticism, if we refuse to consider it to be explanatory, what do we have left? What is the status of a de-authorized psychoanalytic discourse within literary-critical discourse, and what is its object? If we don't accord explanatory force to psychoanalysis, what is the point of using it at all? Why do we continue to read so many critical essays laced with the conceptual vocabulary of psychoanalysis? What is *at stake* in the current uses of psychoanalysis?

I want to begin this inquiry with the flat-footed (and unfashionable) assertion that I believe that the persistence, against all the odds, of psy-

2. Simon O. Lesser, *Fiction and the Unconscious* (Boston, 1957), pp. 297, 15.

choanalytic perspectives in literary study must ultimately derive from our conviction that the materials on which psychoanalysts and literary critics exercise their powers of analysis are in some basic sense the same: that the structure of literature *is* in some sense the structure of mind—not a specific mind, but what the translators of the *Standard Edition* call “the mental apparatus,” which is more accurately the dynamic organization of the psyche, a process of structuration. We continue to dream of a convergence of psychoanalysis and literary criticism because we sense that there ought to be, that there must be, some correspondence between literary and psychic process, that aesthetic structure and form, including literary tropes, must somehow coincide with the psychic structures and operations they both evoke and appeal to. Yet here we encounter the truth of the comment made by Jack Spector in his book, *The Aesthetics of Freud*: “Neither Freud nor his followers . . . have ever shown concretely how specific formal techniques correspond to the processes of the unconscious.”<sup>3</sup>

Part of the attraction of psychoanalytic criticism has always been its promise of a movement *beyond* formalism, to that desired place where literature and life converge, and where literary criticism becomes the discourse of something anthropologically important. I very much subscribe to this urge, but I think that it is fair to say that in the case of psychoanalysis, paradoxically, we can go beyond formalism only by becoming more formalistic. Geoffrey Hartman wrote a number of years ago—in *Beyond Formalism*, in fact—that the trouble with Anglo-American formalism was that it wasn’t formalist enough.<sup>4</sup> One can in general indict Anglo-American New Criticism for being too quick to leap from the level of formal explication to that of moral and psychological interpretation, neglecting the trajectory through linguistics and poetics that needs to stand between. This has certainly been true in traditional psychoanalytic criticism, which has regularly short-circuited the difficult and necessary issues in poetics. The more recent—rhetorical and deconstructive—kind understands the formalist imperative, but I fear that it may too often remain content with formal operations, simply bracketing the human realm from which psychoanalysis derives. Given its project and its strategies, such rhetorical/deconstructive criticism usually stays within the linguistic realm. It is not willing to make the crossover between rhetoric and reference that interests me—and that ought to be the *raison d’être* for the recourse to psychoanalysis in the first place.

One way to try to move out from the impasse I discern—or have perhaps myself constructed—might be through a return to what Freud

3. Jack J. Spector, *The Aesthetics of Freud: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York, 1973), p. 118.

4. Geoffrey Hartman, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958–1970* (New Haven, Conn., 1970), p. 42.

has to say about literary form, most notoriously in the brief essay, "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming." We would probably all agree that Freud speaks most pertinently to literary critics when he is not explicitly addressing art: the most impressive essays in psychoanalytic criticism have drawn more on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the metapsychological essays, and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, for example, than on *Delusions and Dreams*, "The Moses of Michelangelo," or the essays on Leonardo and Dostoyevski. "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming" in fact gives an excessively simplistic view of art, of the kind that allows Ernst Kris, in his well-known *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, to describe artistic activity as regression in the service of the ego.<sup>5</sup> Yet the essay may be suggestive in other ways.

Freud sets out to look for some common human activity that is "akin to creative writing," and finds it in daydreaming, or the creation of fantasies. Freud then stresses the active, temporal structure of fantasy, which

hovers, as it were, between three times—the three moments of time which our ideation involves. Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to the memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory. Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them.<sup>6</sup>

Freud will promptly commit the error of making the past evoked in the construction of fantasy that of the author, in order to study "the connections that exist between the life of the writer and his works" ("CW," p. 151)—an error in which most critics have followed his lead. For instance, it is this fantasy model, reworked in terms of D. W. Winnicott and object relations psychoanalysis, that essentially shapes the thesis of one of the most interesting recent studies in literature and psychoanalysis, Meredith Skura's *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process*; Skura, too, ultimately makes the past referred to in fantasy a personal past, that of author or reader, or both.<sup>7</sup> Yet the fantasy model could instead be suggestive for

5. See Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York, 1952).

6. Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953–74), 9:147–48; all further references to this essay, abbreviated "CW," will be included in the text.

7. See Meredith Anne Skura, *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* (New Haven, Conn., 1981).

talking about the relations of textual past, present, and projected future in the plot of a novel, for example, or in the rhyme scheme of a sonnet, or simply in the play of verb tenses in any text. I would want to extrapolate from this passage an understanding of how fantasy provides a dynamic model of intratextual temporal relations and of their organization according to the plot of wish, or desire. We might thus gain a certain understanding of the interplay of *form* and *desire*.

Freud is again of great interest in the final paragraph of the essay—one could make a fruitful study of Freud's final paragraphs, which so often produce a flood of new insights that can't quite be dealt with—where he asks how the writer creates pleasure through the communication of his fantasies, whereas those of most people would repel or bore us. Herein, says Freud, lies the poet's "innermost secret," his "essential *ars poetica*" ("CW," p. 153). Freud sees two components of the artistic achievement here: "The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies. We give the name of an *incentive bonus*, or a *fore-pleasure*, to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a fore-pleasure of this kind" ("CW," p. 153). I am deliberately leaving aside the end of this paragraph, where Freud suggests that the writer in this manner enables us "thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame," since this hypothesis brings us back to the *person* of the reader, whereas I wish to remain on the plane of form associated with "forepleasure."

The equation of the effects of literary form with forepleasure in this well-known passage is perhaps less trivial than it at first appears. If *Lust* and *Unlust* don't take us very far in the analysis of literary texture, *Vorlust*—forepleasure—tropes on pleasure and thus seems more promising. Forepleasure is indeed a curious concept, suggesting a whole rhetoric of advance toward and retreat from the goal or the end, a formal zone of play (I take it that forepleasure somehow implicates foreplay) that is both harnessed to the end and yet autonomous, capable of deviations and recursive movements. When we begin to unpack the components of forepleasure, we may find a whole erotics of form, which is perhaps what we most need if we are to make formalism serve an understanding of the human functions of literature. Forepleasure would include the notion of both delay and advance in the textual dynamic, the creation of that "dilatatory space" which Roland Barthes, in *S/Z*, claimed to be the essence of the textual middle. We seek to advance through this space toward the discharge of the end, yet all the while we are perversely delaying, returning backward in order to put off the promised end and perhaps to assure its greater significance.

Forepleasure implies the possibility of fetishism, the interesting threat of being waylaid by some element along the way to the “proper” end, taking some displaced substitute or simulacrum for the thing itself—a mystification in which most literature deals, sometimes eventually to expose the displacement or substitution as a form of false consciousness, sometimes to expose the end itself as the false lure. It includes as well the possibilities of exhibitionism and voyeurism, which surely are central to literary texts and their reading. In the notion of forepleasure there lurks in fact all manner of perversity, and ultimately the possibility of the polymorphous perverse, the possibility of a text that would delay, displace, and deviate terminal discharge to an extent that it became nonexistent—as, perhaps, in the textual practice of the “writable text” (*texte scriptible*) prized by Barthes, in Samuel Beckett, for instance, or Philippe Sollers. But we find as good an illustration of effective perversity in the text of Henry James, and in the principle (well known to the New Critics) that the best poems accommodate a maximum of ironic texture within their frail structures, a postponement and ambiguation of overt statement. In fact, the work of textuality may insure that all literature is, by its very nature, essentially perverse.

What is most important to me is the sense that the notion of forepleasure as it is advanced by Freud implies the possibility of a formalist aesthetic—one that can be extended to the properly rhetorical field—that speaks to the erotic, which is to say the dynamic, dimensions of form: form as something that is not inert but part of a process that unfolds and develops as texts are activated through the reading process. A neo-formalist psychoanalytic criticism could do worse than undertake the study of the various forms of the “fore” in forepleasure, developing a tropology of the perversities through which we turn back, turn around, the simple consumption of texts, making their reading a worthy object of analysis. Such a study would be, as Freud suggests, about “bribing,” or perhaps about *teasing* in all its forms, from puns to metaphors, ultimately—given the basic temporal structure of fantasy and of the literary text—about what we might call “clock-teasing,” which is perhaps the way we create the illusion of creating a space of meaning within the process of ongoing temporality.

A more formalist psychoanalytic criticism, then, would be attuned to form as our situation, our siting, within the symbolic order, the order within which we constitute meaning and ourselves as endowed with meaning. This kind of psychoanalytic criticism would, of course, pay the greatest attention to the rhetorical aspect of psychic operations as presented by psychoanalysis and would call upon the rhetorical and semiotic re-interpretation of Freud advanced by Emile Benveniste, Jacques Lacan, and others. Yet it might be objected that this more obviously rhetorical version does not automatically solve the problem of how to use the crossover between psychic operations and tropes. The status of the *and*

linking psychoanalysis and literary text may still remain at issue: what does one want to *claim* in showing that the structure of a metaphor in Victor Hugo is equivalent to the structure of a symptom? What is alleged to be the place and the force of the occulted name of the father that may be written in metaphor as symptom, symptom as metaphor?<sup>8</sup> Is there, more subtly now, a claim of explanation advanced in the crossover? Or is an ingenious piece of intertextuality all that takes place?

Something, I think, that lies between the two. My views on these questions have been clarified by an acute and challenging review of my book, *Reading for the Plot*, that appeared in *TLS*. In it, Terence Cave asks what he calls “the embarrassing question . . . what is the Freudian model worth?” In his discussion of a possible answer to this question, Cave notes that “Brooks’s argument for a Freudian poetics doesn’t appear to depend on an imperialist move which would simply annex a would-be science of the psyche and release it from its claim to tell the truth. He talks repeatedly as if the value of the Freudian model is precisely that it does, in some sense, give access to the way human desires really operate.”<sup>9</sup> I think this is accurate, and I am happy to be exonerated from the charge of imperialism in the reverse—the imperialism that would come from the incursion of literary criticism into psychoanalysis in search of mere metaphors, which has sometimes been the case with post-structuralist annexations of psychoanalytic concepts. I certainly do want to grant at least a temporary privilege to psychoanalysis in literary study, in that the trajectory through psychoanalysis forces us to confront the human stakes of literary form, while I think also that these stakes need to be considered *in* the text, as activated in its reading. As I suggested earlier, I believe that we constitute ourselves as human subjects in part through our fictions and therefore that the study of human fiction-making and the study of psychic process are convergent activities and superimposable forms of analysis. To say more precisely in what sense psychoanalysis can lead us to models for literary study that generate new insight, we might best look toward a concept that lies at the very heart of Freudian analytic practice, the concept of the transference as it is constituted between analysand and analyst. Here we may find the most useful elaboration of the fantasy model of the text. Let me, then, briefly explore the transference, in order to indicate one possible way of conceiving the relations of psychoanalysis to literary discourse.

The transference, as I understand it, is a realm of the *as-if*, where affects from the past become invested in the present, notably in the

8. I allude here to an example used by Jacques Lacan in “L’Instance de la lettre,” *Ecrits* (Paris, 1966), pp. 506–9.

9. Terence Cave, “The Prime and Precious Thing,” review of *Reading for the Plot* by Peter Brooks, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 January 1985, p. 14; all further references to this review, abbreviated “PPT,” will be included in the text.



dynamics of the analysand-analyst relation, and the neurosis under treatment becomes a transference-neurosis, a present representation of the past. As Freud puts it in the Dora case history, the transference gives us “new impressions or reprints” and “revised editions” of old texts.<sup>10</sup> One can call the transference textual because it is a semiotic and fictional medium where the compulsions of unconscious desire and its scenarios of infantile fulfillment become symbolically present in the communicative situation of analysis. Within the transference, recall of the past most often takes place as its unconscious repetition, an acting out of past events as if they were present: repetition is a way of remembering brought into play when recollection in the intellectual sense is blocked by repression and resistance. Repetition is both an obstacle to analysis, since the analysand must eventually be led to renunciation of the attempt to reproduce the past, and the principal dynamic of the cure, since only by way of its symbolic enactment in the present can the history of past desire, its objects and scenarios of fulfillment, be made known, become manifest in the present discourse. The analyst (I paraphrase Freud here) must treat the analysand’s words and symbolic acts as an actual force, active in the present, while attempting to translate them back into the terms of the past.<sup>11</sup> That is, the analyst must work with the analysand to fit his emotional impulses into their proper place in his life history, to restore the links between ideas and events that have fallen away, to reconnect isolated memories, and to draw conclusions from interconnections and patterns. The analyst must help the analysand construct a narrative discourse whose syntax and rhetoric are more plausible, more convincing, more adequate to give an account of the story of the past than those that are originally presented, in symptomatic form, by the analysand.

Freud writes in one of his key essays on the transference, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through”:

The transference thus creates an intermediate region [*Zwischenreich*] between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made. The new condition has taken over all the features of the illness; but it represents an artificial illness which is at every point accessible to our intervention. It is a piece of real experience, but one which has been made possible by especially favourable conditions, and it is of a provisional nature.<sup>12</sup>

Freud’s description of this intermediate region—this *Zwischenreich*—that is both artificial and a piece of real experience makes it sound very much

10. Freud, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” *Standard Edition*, 7:116.

11. On these points, see Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912), *Standard Edition*, 12:97–108; and “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” (1914), *Standard Edition*, 12:145–56.

12. Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through,” *Standard Edition*, 12:154.

like the literary text. He who intervenes in it is the analyst or reader, first of all in the sense that the simple presence of this other brings to the analysand's discourse what Lacan calls "the dimension of dialogue."<sup>13</sup> Texts are always implicitly or even explicitly addressed to someone. The "I" that speaks in a lyric ever postulates a "thou." Indeed, as Benveniste has shown, "I" and "thou" are linguistically interdependent, both signifiers without signifieds, and with referents that constantly change as each speaker in turn assumes the "I" in relation to the interlocutor, who from "I" becomes "thou."<sup>14</sup> This situation is frequently dramatized in narrative texts, in what we call "framed tales," which stage the presence of a listener or narratee whose reactions to what is told are often what is most important in the narrative. Such is the case of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, which has become a classic point of reference since Roland Barthes in *S/Z* made it a model for the workings of the "narrative contract," and also Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where the narratee of each embedded narrative is supposed to act upon what he has been told. In other cases, the simple presence of the narratee, even when silent, "dialogizes" the speech of the narrator, as Mikhail Bakhtin has so thoroughly demonstrated in the case of the Dostoyevskian monologue. A good example of dialogized monologue is Albert Camus' *La Chute*, where Jean-Baptiste Clamence's abject confession includes within it the unnamed and silent narratee's responses, with the eventual result of implicating the narratee within a discourse he would no doubt rather not listen to. Even in texts which have no explicit narrator or narratee, where the narrative is apparently "impersonal," there is necessarily a discourse which solicits a response, be it only by the play of personal pronouns and the conjugation of verbs.

The narratee, the addressee, the "you" of these texts is always in some measure a surrogate for the reader, who must define his own interpretation in response to the implied judgment, and the discursive implication, of the explicit or implicit textual "you." Contemporary reader-response criticism has often made excessive claims for the role of the reader—to the point of abolishing the semiotic constraint that the text exercises upon reading—but it has usefully shown us that the reader necessarily collaborates and competes in the creation of textual meaning. To return to Freud's term, we "intervene" in a text by our very act of reading, in our (counter)transference desire to master the text, as also in the desire to be mastered by it. When we are what we call literary critics, our interventions—our efforts to rewrite and retransmit—may

13. Jacques Lacan, "Intervention sur le transfert," *Ecrits*, p. 216. I note that Murray Schwartz argues, briefly but evocatively, the relevance of the transference to literary interpretation. See Schwartz, "Critic, Define Thyself," in *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1976–77*, n.s. 2, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 1–17.

14. Emile Benveniste, "De la subjectivité dans le langage," *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1966), pp. 258–66.

closely resemble the psychoanalyst's, with all the attendant perils of transference and countertransference.

However self-absorbed and self-referential they may appear, lyric and narrative discourses are always proffered for a purpose: to establish a claim on the listener's attention, to make an appeal to complicity, perhaps to judgment, and inevitably to interpretation and retransmission. In the transferential situation of reading, as in the psychoanalytic transference, the reader must grasp not only what is said, but always what the discourse intends, its implications, how it would work on him. He must—in Lacanian terms—refuse the text's demand in order to listen to its desire. In narrative, for instance, the reader must reconstruct and understand not only story events but also the relation of this story to the narrative discourse that conveys it in a certain manner, discourse that itself constitutes an interpretation which demands further interpretation. As Freud writes in "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," it occurs that the analysand "does not listen to the precise wording of his obsessional ideas."<sup>15</sup> Narrators may be similar to the analysand in this respect, most obviously in such modernist and postmodernist narratives as those of Conrad, Gide, Faulkner, and Sarraute, but also in many more traditional novels, especially in the eighteenth century—in the work of Diderot and Sterne, for instance—and even at the very origins of the genre, in the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, a novel which both reveals and conceals its story. A certain suspicion inhabits the relation of narrative discourse to its story, and our role as readers calls for a suspicious hearing, a rewriting of the narrative text in a sort of agonistic dialogue with the words we are given to work with. Freud repeatedly describes the relations of analyst and analysand in the transference as one of struggle—struggle for the mastery of resistances and the lifting of repressions—which continually evokes a realm of the demonic. With reader and text, the struggle must eventually put into question any assumed position of mastery or privilege, which is why we must reread, speak again, retransmit.

The advantage of such a transferential model, it seems to me, is that it illuminates the difficult and productive encounter of the speaker and the listener, the text and the reader, and how their exchange takes place in an "artificial" space—a symbolic and semiotic medium—that is nonetheless the place of real investments of desire from both sides of the dialogue. The transference actualizes the past in symbolic form so that it can be repeated, replayed, worked through to another outcome. The result is, in the ideal case, to bring us back to actuality, that is, to a revised version of our stories. As Freud writes in the last sentence of another important essay, "The Dynamics of Transference": "For when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone *in absentia* or *in effigie*."<sup>16</sup>

15. Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," *Standard Edition*, 12:152.

16. Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," *Standard Edition*, 12:108.

The statement appears paradoxical, in that it is precisely “in effigy”—in the symbolic mode—that the past and its ghosts may be destroyed, or laid to rest, in analysis. What Freud means, I think, is that the transference succeeds in making the past and its scenarios of desire live again through signs with such vivid reality that the reconstructions proposed by analytic work achieve the *effect* of the real. They do not change past history—they are powerless to do that—but they rewrite its present discourse. Disciplined and mastered, the transference ushers us forth into a changed reality. And such is no doubt the intention of any literary text.

In such a conception of the transference, we have a rhetorical elaboration of the fantasy model of the text adumbrated in “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming.” The text is conceived as a semiotic and fictive medium constituted as the place of affective investments that represent a situation and a story as both symbolic (given the absence of situation and story except “in effigy”) and “real” (given the making-present of situation and story through their repetition). The text conceived as transference should allow us to illuminate and work through that which is at issue in the situation of the speaker, or the story of the narrator, that is, what must be rethought, reordered, interpreted from his discourse. Transference and interpretation are in fact interdependent, and we cannot assign priority to one over the other. If it is evident that transference calls forth interpretation, it is equally true that it is the potential of interpretation on the part of “the subject supposed to know”—as Lacan characterizes the analyst—that sets the transference going.<sup>17</sup>

When, as analysand or as text, you call for interpretation from the analyst/reader, you put yourself into the transference. Through the re-thinkings, reorderings, reinterpretations of the reading process, the analyst/reader “intervenes” in the text, and these interventions must also be subject to his suspicious attention. A transferential model thus allows us to take as the object of analysis not author or reader, but reading, including, of course, the transferential-interpretive operations that belong to reading. Meaning in this view is not simply “in the text” nor wholly the fabrication of a reader (or a community of readers) but comes into being in the dialogic struggle and collaboration of the two, in the activation of textual possibilities in the process of reading. Such a view ultimately destabilizes the authority of reader/critic in relation to the text, since, caught up in the transference, he becomes analysand as well as analyst.

Yet here I once again encounter Cave, who finds my evocations of “transference” and “dialogue” in *Reading for the Plot* to be largely metaphorical. “It seems curious,” writes Cave, “to speak of a once-and-for-all written narrative as the medium for transference for a reader who

17. On this point, I am indebted to an exposition of the transference according to Lacan presented by Jacques-Alain Miller at the conference, “Lacan’s Legacy,” held at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 14–16 June 1985.

has not supplied its materials. . . . How can there be a transference where there is no means by which the reader's language may be rephrased in coherent and manageable form by the text-as-analyst?" ("PPT," p. 14). Cave has reversed the basic model, which would see text as analysand and reader as analyst; but that is a reversal that can, I have suggested, take place in the process of reading and interpretation. What is more to the point, there happens to be an essay of Freud's that indirectly responds to some of Cave's questions: "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), an essay from late in Freud's career in which he explicitly addresses the roles played by analysand and analyst in the creation of a life story and its discursive meaning.

Near the start of this essay, Freud notes that since the analyst has neither experienced nor repressed any of the story in question, he cannot be called upon to remember it. "His task," writes Freud, "is to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind or, more correctly, to *construct* it."<sup>18</sup> As Freud's essay proceeds, this construction becomes a radical activity. The analyst constructs a hypothetical piece of narrative and, writes Freud, "communicates it to the subject of analysis so that it may work on him; he then constructs a further piece out of the fresh material pouring in on him, deals with it in the same way and proceeds in this alternating fashion until the end." Confirmation that these constructions are correct does not take the form of a simple assent: a "yes" from the analysand has little value, says Freud, "unless it is followed by indirect confirmations, unless the patient . . . produces new memories which complete and extend the construction" ("CA," p. 262). As in reading, hypotheses of construal prove to be strong and valuable when they produce more text, when they create in the text previously unperceived networks of relation and significance, finding confirmation in the extension of the narrative and semantic web. The analytic work, the process of finding and making meaning, is necessarily a factor of listening and reading as well as telling. Freud indeed goes on to concede that there are moments when the analyst's construction does not lead to the analysand's recollection of repressed elements of his story but nonetheless produces in him "an assured conviction of the truth of the construction which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory" ("CA," p. 66). Parts of the story thus seem to belong to the interpreter rather than to the person whose story it is, or was.

"Constructions in Analysis" as a whole gives a view of psychoanalytic interpretation and construction that notably resembles the active role of the reader in making sense of a text, finding hypotheses of interpretation that open up ever wider and more forceful semantic patterns, attempting always to reach the totality of the supreme because necessary fiction.

18. Freud, "Constructions in Analysis," *Standard Edition*, 23:258–59; all further references to this essay, abbreviated "CA," will be included in the text.

The reader may not have written the text, yet it does change and evolve as he works on it—as he rewrites it, as those readers we call literary critics necessarily do. And as the reader works on the text, it does “rephrase” his perceptions. I think any of us could find confirmation of such a truly transferenceal and dialogic relation of text and analysis in our own experience. And there are of course literary texts that inscribe and dramatize acts of reading, interpretation, and construction: for instance, Balzac’s *Le Lys dans la vallée*, where Natalie de Manerville reads Félix de Vandenesse’s long confession and tells him that he has misinterpreted his own desires. Benjamin Constant’s *Adolphe* stages a similar case of retrospective reading that provokes an entire reconstruction of the story. The epistolary novel of course stages nothing else: *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is all about different models and levels of construction in the reading of messages, and the writing of messages with a view toward their interpretation. The novels of Conrad and Faulkner are similar to Laclos’ masterpiece in that they offer multiple constructions of events that never are verifiable, that can be tested only by the force of conviction they produce for listeners and readers.

Interpretation and construction are themselves most often dramas of desire and power, both within literature and in the reading of literary texts. Hence I would claim that the model of the transference is a far more literal model of reading than Cave would allow. I find it significant that toward the end of “Constructions in Analysis,” Freud turns to a discussion of delusions, similar to hallucinations, which are produced in the analysand by the analyst’s constructions: delusions that evoke a “fragment of historical truth” that is out of place in the story. Freud writes at this point, in an astonishing sentence, “The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment—attempts at explanation and cure” (“CA,” p. 268). That is, not only does the patient, in any successful analysis, become his own analyst; the analyst also becomes the patient, espouses his delusional system, and works toward the construction of fictions that can never be verified other than by the force of the conviction that they convey. And this seems to me a fair representation of good criticism, which involves a willingness, a desire, to enter into the delusional systems of texts, to espouse their hallucinated vision, in an attempt to master and be mastered by their power of conviction.

One final point needs to be made, again in reference to Cave—a resourceful critic whom one can never finally lay to rest. It can be argued—and I have myself argued—that much of Freud’s understanding of interpretation and the construction of meaning is grounded in literature, in those “poets and philosophers” he was the first to acknowledge as his precursors. “In which case” writes Cave, psychoanalysis “can’t itself provide a grounding, since it is part of the system it attempts to master.” Cave continues: “Its advantage (though a precious one) would only be that,

in its doubling of narrative and analysis, story and plot, it provides a poetics appropriate to the history of modern fiction" ("PPT," p. 14). Cave here reverses the more traditional charge that psychoanalysis imperialistically claims to explain literature in order to make the more subtle (and contemporary) charge that psychoanalysis may be nothing *but* literature, and the relations of the two nothing more than a play of intertextuality, or even a tautology.

I am unwilling to concede so much. One can resist the notion that psychoanalysis "explains" literature and yet insist that the kind of intertextual relation it holds to literature is quite different from the intertextuality that obtains between two poems or novels, and that it illuminates in quite other ways. For the psychoanalytic intertext obliges the critic to make a transit through a systematic discourse elaborated to describe the dynamics of psychic process. The similarities and differences, in object and in intention, of this discourse from literary analysis creates a tension which is productive of perspective, of stereoptical effect. Psychoanalysis is not an arbitrarily chosen intertext for literary analysis, but rather a particularly insistent and demanding intertext, in that crossing the boundaries from one territory to the other both confirms and complicates our understanding of how mind reformulates the real, how it constructs the necessary fictions by which we dream, desire, interpret, indeed by which we constitute ourselves as human subjects. The detour through psychoanalysis forces the critic to respond to the erotics of form, that is, to an engagement with the psychic investments of rhetoric, the dramas of desire played out in tropes. Psychoanalysis matters to us as literary critics because it stands as a constant reminder that the attention to form, properly conceived, is not a sterile formalism, but rather one more attempt to draw the symbolic and fictional map of our place in existence.