

Feminist
ENGAGEMENTS

Reading, Resisting,
and
Revising
Male Theorists in Education
and Cultural Studies

EDITED BY
KATHLEEN WEILER

LC/197/F474/2001
9/10/14

ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK LONDON

The Dreamwork of Autobiography:
Felman, Freud, and Lacan

ALICE PITT

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY ORIENTS THE QUESTION OF WOMEN READING MALE THEORY toward a question of desire: what do women want from male theory?¹ I approach this question as traumatic by tracing the historicity of psychoanalytic reading practices through autobiography, a genre that offers epistemological force to feminist theory, though not in predictable ways. The outline of my argument takes place neither fully anchored in the time of theory, nor in the time of feminist politics, but rather in a time that is other to both: dream time. Through the problem of dream interpretation, I consider debates on the nature of accepting psychoanalytic knowledge, a joke used by Freud, and theories of the subject derived through the writings of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud but reconceptualized and renewed through feminist psychoanalysis. In the confrontation between psychoanalytic and feminist reading practices, Shoshana Felman is exemplary in holding the two in productive and creative tension, thus providing what I consider to be a valuable method for reconsidering feminist education even as feminist education also reconsiders the constraints and possibilities of education for women and girls. In order to take feminist and psychoanalytic reading practices together, we must take a detour through Freud and Lacan where, in a dream, we first encounter the unconscious. The singularity of dreams may be that these two incompatible kinds of readings, feminist and psychoanalytic, can get tangled in each other rather than canceling each other out.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A READING PRACTICE

Of him all I have left is the fountain pen. I took it one day from my mother's purse, where she kept it along with some other souvenirs of my father. It is a kind of pen no longer made, the kind you have to fill with ink. I used it all through school. It "failed" me before I could bring myself to give it up. I still have it, patched with Scotch tape; it is right in front of me on my desk and makes me write, write.

Maybe all my books have been the detours required to bring me to write about "that."

—Sarah Kofman: *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*

So begins Sarah Kofman's (1996) slim autobiographical volume. The translator describes the narrative as "an account of [Kofman's] childhood between the ages of eight and about eighteen: it begins on the last day she ever saw her father, July 16, 1942—the day the Vichy police picked up Rabbi Bereck Kofman in the family apartment on the Rue Ordener—and ends when she enrolled at the Sorbonne in the midfifties" (vii). The translator, it seems, would like readers to know that Kofman's autobiography is about trauma, but Kofman's writing points to something more—the marking of the mark of trauma.

Kofman's "account" begins with the description of the fountain pen, and the significance of this beginning is not peripheral to her autobiography. The pen may no longer write, but its presence on the desk and the absence it marks "makes" Kofman write. And yet writing itself is posed as an extended detour away from her autobiographical writing. Her final sentence, ending with "that," points toward a quality of traumatic experience: it is unspeakable, "unclaimed" (Caruth 1996), an opaque kind of experience. Something happens, but the significance of the event arrives, if at all, belatedly. Traumatic experience creates a tear in our very capacity to make sense of the event, indeed, to fully experience the event. At the same time, we are drawn to the hole, compelled by some force to worry at it.

Kofman's writing about "that" has been deferred, but this deferral exceeds a simple putting off, just as its content also exceeds the painful event of the abduction and murder of her father. In Freud's view, traumatic events can only be approached by means of deferred revision, what he calls *Nachträglichkeit*. The knitting up of the tear is a reconstructive project rather than, as much feminist work prefers, one of recovery and expression of unspeakable truth. The opening of Kofman's next-to-last work and one of several brief publications that focus on her personal history of loss and love during the Nazi occupation of France asks us to consider two dynamics of this strange time of deferred action: the press onward (to write, to write) and the press of avoidance (the detours).

The interminable undulating force of *Nachträglichkeit* lies at the center of this chapter. I consider its movements in three overlapping contexts, each of which invites speculation for feminist educational theory. First, I discuss the centrality of the concept to psychoanalytic life-history making as a project of noticing how we find and lose sight of our capacity to apprehend what matters most to us: the surprise of intersection between our movements onward and our detours back. This first context suggests a method for reading feminist edu-

cation and our own biographies as women and feminists in ways that do not settle what shall count as success and what as failure. My second context explores how Freud's own constant self-revision is read by Lacan in ways that allow psychoanalysis to be considered in radically new ways. Here the emphasis is on Lacan's observations about *Nachträglichkeit*, and the central place this term occupies in Lacan's reading of the psychoanalytic subject (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973; Laplanche 1999). This context serves as a reminder that feminist psychoanalysis that takes its cue from Lacan must consider his ties to Freud. Lacan "discovers" a psychoanalysis capable of holding in abeyance the satisfaction of mastery, whether mastery takes the form of application or critical opposition. Somewhat obliquely, this context is also animated by my growing worry that we feminists are in danger of forgetting how to use the rich legacy of feminist thought in favor of more contemporary contributions. A third context brings the project of *nachträglich* reading practices into conversation with the specificity of feminist readings of psychoanalysis. I turn to Felman's (1993) recent essay that revisits Freud's famous question, What does a woman want? as well as some "canonical" feminist texts. Each context allows for a different articulation of the question that informs this edited volume. Following Adam Phillips's (1998) suggestion that psychoanalytic interpretations work best as hints to think with rather than orders to accept or reject, this chapter invites speculation on what might be useful here for the autobiographical project of feminist education.²

Felman (1993), like Kofman, grapples with what it means to read and write autobiographically from a place marked by traumatic experience—in this case, the traumatic experience of being a woman living in a patriarchal culture. Her beginning premise, "that *none of us, as women, has as yet, precisely, an autobiography*" (14; emphasis in the original) seems counterintuitive given the rich bounty of women's autobiographies, the extensive feminist scholarship on the genre, and the tremendous pleasure many of us experience when we read women's autobiographies.

Felman's approach to women's autobiography also resonates with Kofman's observation that her philosophical and theoretical texts have served as the detours leading back to—making possible—autobiography. Felman generalizes this observation when she argues that women's autobiography must pass through the detours of literature and theory. Moreover, literature and theory must pass through the detours of autobiography. But Felman's essays are not autobiographical in any traditional sense: they do not narrate a life history. They narrate the autobiography of a reading practice.³ What distinguishes this from other reading practices is the reconstructive tracing of self-implication: the force, significance, and surprise of *Nachträglichkeit*. However, because it is the woman who reads, Felman ties reading practices

to sexual difference.

By bringing questions of sexual difference to the fore in relation to reading, writing, and autobiography, Felman extends her interest in the pedagogical lessons of psychoanalytic theory, bringing these into conversation with the pedagogical lessons of feminism. She offers us a new way to think about the historical tensions between psychoanalysis and feminism. Felman performs what we can learn from Lacan while also suggesting something about the limits of that lesson. She brings her psychoanalytic insights about learning to bear upon her own biography as a female reader of texts written by men and by women. Like Lacan, and, indeed, *after* Lacan, Felman returns to the texts of Freud.

In a crucial way, the lesson Felman asks us to consider concerns Freud's (1919) observation that learning *from* psychoanalysis is something quite different from learning *about* psychoanalysis. She sets this lesson in tension with what it means to learn *from* feminism in a way that is distinct from learning *about* feminism. In *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight*, Felman asks how "Lacan's unusual style and his unusual practice as a teacher . . . which makes a pedagogical imperative of its own refusal to take itself (its own authority) for granted, may suggest a revolutionary psychoanalytic lesson about lessons" (1987, 13). This lesson is revolutionary because it requires us to pay attention to qualities of pedagogical relations that interfere with (feminist) education's dream of progress and its corresponding reverence for linear, predictable development in terms of both the learner and knowledge. The dynamics of transference, the construction of and demands addressed to the illusory and idealized *subject-supposed-to-know*, and the persistence of our passion for ignorance (which often masquerades as a demand for knowledge) all point to the libidinal qualities of making and engaging knowledge that comprise the possibilities and constraints of education (Britzman 1998).

As we shall see, however, her rereading differs in important ways from Lacan's. We might say that it takes up an insistence, articulated by both Lacan and Freud in their theoretical arguments, that the desire for mastery or for a master of the truth necessarily obscures and defends against knowledge of one's unconscious desire. Her reading of Freud relies on Lacan for its method but not its substantive argument. Felman's argument is informed by the additional and deeply personal concern with how psychoanalysis *addresses* women. The lesson about reading across difference that Felman articulates performs a Lacanian lesson, but it can also be read as a lesson about reading Lacan. If, as Judith Feher Gurewich argues, "Lacan exists only when read in dialectical relation with the Freudian text" (1999, viii), we might add that Lacan exists for feminists only when read in dialectical relation with feminist interpretations of the Freudian text, interpretations to which Lacan paid little attention.

Juliet Mitchell's *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and*

Women (1974) is often cited as the cornerstone for this modern feminist consideration of psychoanalysis. No doubt her well-established feminist Marxist credentials piqued feminist curiosity in her reclamation of Freud for feminism. While Lacan does not figure centrally in this project of reclamation, Mitchell points to his influence on a group of French Marxist feminists working under the name of *Psychoanalyse et Politique* to rethink what psychoanalysis offers to theories of social and political life. This group explicitly, though critically, brought psychoanalytic concepts to bear on their attempts to understand how ideology functions at the level of the subject.⁴

Felman navigates between feminist rejections of psychoanalysis and Juliet Mitchell's (1975) insistence that Freud's work offers an important analysis of patriarchy, not an endorsement of it. Felman is sympathetic to and respectful of the intellectual rigor of Mitchell's pioneering efforts to intervene in a dominant tradition within contemporary feminist discourse to discount Freud and reject psychoanalytic theory *tout court*. Still, she worries that Mitchell's approach may be too hasty in its implicit assumption that, because Freud was a great genius, he is "thus by definition innocent of any feminist critique" (1993, 69). She suggests a third way: "I would like to propose an approach that would take into account both what we can learn . . . from psychoanalysis about femininity and what we can learn from the feminist critique about psychoanalysis, in a way that would transcend the reified polarization of these two (as yet unfinished) lessons" (72). Felman distinguishes her approach to reading from Judith Fetterly's well-known feminist insistence that women become "resisting readers" as a way "to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us" (Fetterly, cited in Felman 1993, 5). While Felman admits that the project of exorcizing the male mind with which we have learned to read is attractive and necessary, her apprenticeship in psychoanalytic theory has taught her to be leery of approaches to reading that privilege counterhegemonic consciousness. There is a danger, she argues, of failing to notice the difference between being a resisting reader and *resisting reading*. Slyly referring to the irksome conservatism of the ego, she notes that "resisting reading for the sake of holding on to our ideologies and preconceptions (*be they chauvinist or feminist*) is what we tend to do in any case" (6; emphasis added).

Nor does Felman rely on that other well-known and increasingly contentious notion that we bring our embodied femininity to our reading (and writing) practices. Reading, for Felman, as for Lacan, is a psychical event. In this feminist story of reading, neither ideological consciousness nor biological femaleness can account for what happens when we read—or when our resistance to reading drops its guard—because neither coincides with the entirety of our reading selves. What cannot be accounted for in these approaches is the force of unconscious knowledge, what was earlier called *Nachträglichkeit*. This

is, of course, one of Freud's most important discoveries. It is inconceivable, Felman observes, that Freud himself could be immune to the force of his discovery. Indeed, his discovery introduces a new and persistent epistemological problem; Felman notes that "psychoanalysis precisely teaches us that every human knowledge has its own unconscious, and that every human search is blinded by some systematic oversights of which it is not aware. This is true of psychoanalysis itself, which cannot exempt itself from its own teaching. And, of course, it is also true of feminism" (1993, 71). Felman reminds us that Freud considered his own theories of femininity to be provisional and that psychoanalysis itself represents a struggle to open up new questions or familiar questions in new ways. Freud's famous question "What does a woman want?" comes on the heels of his claim to have spent thirty years investigating "the feminine soul." This question has been a flash point for many feminist critiques of Freud. Felman, however, reminds us that even posing this question is unprecedented in the history of ideas. It acknowledges perhaps for the first time that masculinity and femininity cannot be known by appealing to anatomy. More than this, Felman suggests that Freud "puts in question . . . woman's *want* as the unresolved problem of psychoanalysis and, by implication, as the unresolved problem of patriarchy, telling us, again, that we *do not know* what a woman really wants" (73).

Felman is less interested in the answers Freud tentatively formulates and revises over those thirty years than she is in the crisis of the question itself and how it forced itself on Freud. This orientation is the hallmark of the autobiography of reading practices. How, she wonders, did Freud live the question and live out its crisis? How Freud's autobiography passes through theory and how his theory passes through his autobiography form the intersecting storylines that Felman explores when she turns her attention to the dream that launched Freud's theory of dream interpretation. In a preamble to what has become known as "the dream of Irma's injection," Freud admits to his mixed feelings about his treatment, early on in his own development, of a family friend, Irma, whose hysterical symptoms had only been partially alleviated by his efforts. Prior to Irma's departure for the family's summer home, Freud had proposed a solution to the young woman that she seemed unwilling to accept. His dream is sparked by an encounter between Freud and a junior colleague who had been staying with the family. Freud heard a reproach in this doctor's news that the patient was "better, but not quite well" (1900/1901, IV: 106).

The dream features a party hosted by the Freuds. Irma was in attendance and complained to Freud about pains in her throat, stomach, and abdomen. At first, Irma was reluctant to let Freud examine her, but he succeeded in looking into her throat to discover "extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures" (107). Three other doctors joined in the examination, which

pointed to an infection that Freud blamed upon the use of a dirty syringe by the friend whom Freud thought was reproaching his methods of treatment. After recounting the events leading up to the dream and the dream itself, Freud provides a detailed analysis of his associations with the images as a demonstration of his method of dream interpretation.

Felman describes the significance of the dream in slightly different terms as she accounts for her interest in it. "I turn to this dream," she writes, "which in yielding thus a key to dreams, in triggering Freud's greatest insight into dream interpretation, can be said to be the very dream from which psychoanalysis proceeds, because it is also a dream about femininity, and about Freud's relationship—professional and personal—to femininity. It is thus the singular confession of a singular male dream of singular theoretical and pragmatic consequences. *Perhaps it is significant that the relationship of Freud to women is precisely questioned in, and is the focus of, the very crisis dream from which psychoanalysis proceeds*" (1993, 74; emphasis added).

Autobiographical (dreamed by Freud), theoretical (interpreted by Freud), and literary (written by Freud) modes of giving expression to lived experience intersect here, but none fully exhausts nor fully accounts for the others. Indeed, these three modes of experience resist each other, and each embodies the resistance of the other. The time of *Nachträglichkeit*, then, is the time of self-difference and self-resistance.

As Felman charts her course through the details of the text of the dream and the text of Freud's interpretation of it, she also explores other interpretations of Freud's dream of Irma's injection, including several by feminist readers whom she reproaches for missing the insight of Freud's text in their rush to reveal its blindnesses. Lacan's reading of the same dream plays a minor role among the interpretations Felman examines. While it is impossible to explore either of these rich interpretations in detail, a close look at the *differences* between what each claims the significance of the dream to be for psychoanalytic theory contributes to a contemporary consideration of creative, perhaps procreative, dialogue between psychoanalysis and feminism.

DREAMWORK AS A JOKE

Lacan's (1991) discussion of the dream appears in book 2 of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*.⁵ Like Felman, Lacan is interested in the crisis the dream provokes for Freud. His introductory comments refer to how his approach differs from those who argue that the dream of Irma's injection be interpreted as representing "a stage in the development of Freud's ego" (1991, 148). Lacan's notion of the significance of the dream is integral to the theory of

the subject he develops over his career, a theory that rejects the developmentalism of ego psychology. For Lacan, the dream and its interpretation represent a stage in Freud's theory, not his ego. The pressures of onward movement and its detours are very much in evidence in Lacan's formulation of Freud's discoveries.

Lacan puzzles over Freud's claim to have discovered that the dream is always the fulfillment of a wish. In this dream, Freud identifies the wish to be absolved from responsibility for Irma's ongoing suffering. He absolves himself in several ways: Irma refuses his interpretation and thus has only herself to blame; Irma's pains were, after all, organic in nature, thus beyond his purview; Irma's suffering was directly related to her widowhood, something for which Freud was not responsible; Irma's pains were the result of an injection with a contaminated syringe administered by someone else. This rush of alternative explanations, each on its own exculpating Freud, reminds the dreamer of a joke: "The whole plea—for the dream was nothing else—reminded one vividly of the defence put forward by the man charged by one of his neighbours with having given him back a borrowed kettle in a damaged condition. The defendant asserted first, that he had given it back undamaged; secondly, that the kettle had a hole in it when he borrowed it; and thirdly, that he had never borrowed a kettle from his neighbour at all. So much the better: if only a single one of these three lines of defence were to be accepted as valid, the man would have to be acquitted" (Freud 1900/1901, IV: 119). Freud's ironic observations point directly to the problem in structuring a defense on such conflicting claims: they cancel each other out, leaving the hapless accused once again without defense. In Felman's interpretation, this effect is a crucial performance of the unconscious, where "there is no such thing as an 'either-or,' only a simultaneous juxtaposition" (1993, 93). On this point we can begin to tease out the differences between her reading and Lacan's. Lacan, in his retelling, poses the following question: "[H]ow is it that Freud, who later on will develop the function of unconscious desire, is here content, for the first step in his demonstration, to present a dream which is entirely explained by the satisfaction of a desire which one cannot but call preconscious, and even entirely conscious?" (1991, 151).

Lacan's response points to a problem that will preoccupy his theory of the subject. In that seminar, he insists that what is important to know is "where the subject of the analytic relation is to be found" (1991, 134). This puzzling assertion is, in turn, anticipated by Freud in a footnote that was added in 1919, nearly twenty years after *The Interpretation of Dreams* made its first appearance. This footnote is key, not only in relation to the development of Freud's second typology, but also to Lacan's rereading of Freud. It signals a correspondence between Freud's own return to the text and the question Lacan poses.

The crux of the footnote reads, "No doubt a wish-fulfilment must bring pleasure; but the question then arises 'To whom?' To the person who has the wish, of course. But as we know, a dreamer's relation to his wishes is a quite peculiar one. He repudiates them and censors them—he has no liking for them, in short. So that their fulfilment will give him no pleasure, but just the opposite; and experience shows that this opposite appears in the form of anxiety, a fact that still has to be explained. Thus a dreamer in his relation to his dream-wishes can only be compared to an amalgamation of two separate people who are linked by some common element. Instead of enlarging on this, I will remind you of a familiar fairy tale . . ." (1900/1901, V: 581). The appearance of two separate people and the bond of anxiety that connects them is what interests Lacan. The footnote, insists Lacan, "expresses clearly the idea of a decentering of the subject" (1991, 135). He will go on to show us how the dream performs this decentered subject, the discovery of which, in theoretical terms, is alluded to in the footnote. The decentered subject is bound up with what Lacan calls "the sexual foundation" (137) which, he argues, in this dream is double. Its doubleness concerns the force of the collision between the dream's two primary qualities: it is a dream that Freud dreams as he tries to make sense of dreams; and it is a dream that concerns Freud's relations with the women in his life—notably his wife, pregnant at the time with Anna Freud, and a friend of Irma's who strikes Freud as potentially less resistant to his help—who emerge in Freud's associations as he interprets the dream. This notion of the sexual foundation as double, then, refers to self-difference as well as difference between men and women.

There is something more at stake, and Lacan gives us a hint when he suggests that what Freud is trying to express in this complex dream is the idea that "[w]hat there is in the unconscious can only be reconstructed" (137). Not only did Freud 'reconstruct' the significance of the dream with the addition of the footnote, but, in Lacan's view, the unconscious speaks indirectly, forcing its thinker to *interpret* its meaning. Three difficult and interconnected ideas are thus introduced in Lacan's interpretation. First, there is the idea of the (anxious) decentered subject found in the footnote that radically alters Freud's understanding of where wish fulfillment and pleasure occur in dreams. Second, we learn that this is a subject that is somehow bound up with sexual relations. In Lacan's view this signals the limits of possibility for relation rather than the grounds for closing the gap between or within individuals. Third, this subject reconstructs rather than discovers or recovers its otherness to itself. This last idea runs counter to the notion that the unconscious serves as container for repressed memories and represents the qualities of *Nachträglichkeit*, thereby distinguishing Lacan's reading of Freud.

Lacan proposes that this dream teaches Freud about the unconscious, a les-

son that will eventually take on sharper meaning in Freud's postulation of the death drive and his second formulation of the psyche in terms of id, ego, and super-ego. Lacan finds the expression of the dream's lesson in the gap between Freud's speech in the dream and Freud's speech about his dream or, for that matter, about the emerging theories that will become psychoanalysis: "So this dream teaches us the following—what is at stake in the function of the dream is beyond the *ego*, what in the subject is of the subject and not of the subject, that is the unconscious" (1991, 159). How do we get a glimpse of this "beyond" that Freud cannot quite articulate? Lacan does not leave the "three feminine characters" (157) represented by Irma. These characters and the meanings associated with them are knotted together in the dream and form what Freud calls the "navel" of the dream, the knot of the unknown that resists interpretation. In the dream, Freud attempts to examine Irma and is surprised when she is, at first, reluctant to let him peer into her mouth. When she does open her mouth, he sees "on the right a large white spot and somewhere else . . . some remarkable curled structures which evidently are patterned on the nasal turbinal bones, extensive white-grey scabs." Lacan considers what this "horrendous discovery" (1991, 155) signifies, noting, "The phenomenology of the dream of Irma's injection led us to distinguish two parts. The first part leads to the apparition of the terrifying anxiety-provoking image, to this real Medusa's head, to the revelation of this something which properly speaking is unnameable, the back of the throat, the complex, unlocatable form . . . the abyss of the feminine organ from which all life emerges, this gulf of the mouth, in which everything is swallowed up, and no less the image of death in which everything comes to its end" (163–64).

Freud associates what he sees with the idea of death, linking it with both the grave illness of one of his daughters and a patient's death for which he felt professionally responsible. But Lacan takes this much further in his own remarkable set of associations. In a manner reminiscent of Melanie Klein's descriptions of the early fantasmatic and terrifying images the infant attributes to the mother, Lacan links the confrontation with the back of the throat to female genitalia and to death. What happens next, in the "second part" of the dream? In Lacan's words, "Freud appeals to the consensus of his fellow-beings, of his equals, of his colleagues, of his superiors" (1991, 164).

The two parts of the dream, then, are populated by two distinct casts of characters, the feminine characters who force Freud to the abyss of the unknown and unknowable, for which death is the ultimate representative, and a trio of male characters. If Freud confronts the knot of feminine resistance (and meets up with death or lack of being), he does so from the position of one whose *identifications* are bound up in a different knot—a cluster of male authority figures who play a key role in the dream and behind whom lurk sig-

nificant characters from Freud's present and his childhood. It is the male characters who "play a ridiculous game of passing the buck with regard to these fundamental questions for Freud—*What is the meaning of the neurosis? What is the meaning of the cure? How well-founded is my therapy for neurosis?*" (Lacan 1991, 157; emphasis in the original).

The male characters do not provide Freud with the solution he wants. In the face of the contradictory answers produced by these characters who represent the sum of identifications of Freud's ego, Lacan argues that "the subject decomposes, fades away, dissociates into its various egos" (176). It is this failure of the ego to maintain its coherence that Lacan links to the subject's quest for signification set into motion by a terrifying encounter with the real. In the dream of Irma's injection, Freud confronts the lack of being, the other side of symbolization. A *different* Freud comes through this loss—this is the Freud who, in order to create psychoanalysis, hears his own questions and pursues them, in spite of uncertainty and disapproval. Lacan concludes by arguing that what is at stake in the dream is the very nature of the symbolic. "What gives this dream its veritable unconscious value, whatever its primordial and infantile echoes, is the quest for the word, the direct confrontation with the secret reality of the dream." He continues, "In the midst of all his colleagues . . . of those who know—for if no one is right, everyone is right, a law which is simultaneously paradoxical and reassuring—in the midst of all this chaos, in this original moment when his doctrine is born into the world, the meaning of the dream is revealed to Freud—that there is no other word of the dream than the very nature of the symbolic" (1991, 160).

Colette Soler (1996) helps us to situate Lacan's discovery of Freud's discovery at the beginning of Lacan's efforts to distinguish between the ego—that is, the sum of identifications—and the subject that comes into being and indeed must be made to appear through speech. *Speech* becomes a problematic term because it functions as mediation in the field of the ego and as revelation in the field of the subject. The mediating function of speech orients the ego in an address to another who can understand, maybe love, the one who speaks. For Lacan, Freud's dream performs such an address to his male colleagues and to the male authority figures behind them.

For speech to function as revelation, something happens that is completely new and unforeseen; revelation transforms the ego. In an encounter between two subjects, it is the singularity of the one who speaks that is made to appear. Again, to return to the dream, the singularity of Freud's desire—to conceive the answer to his questions—emerges in the rather strange space between Freud who dreams and Freud who returns to the dream in the footnote. When that which appears can be symbolized, it no longer resides "beyond the ego."

Lacan's project was to provoke, within the analytic setting, the paradox of assuming the position of a subject of desire. The subject comes into being when he or she can "become his or her own cause, . . . come to be as subject in the place of cause. The foreign cause—that Other desire that brought him or her into the world—is internalized, in a sense, taken responsibility for, assumed . . . , subjectified, made one's own" (Fink 1996, 89). In order for analysis to succeed—to be analysis—one must come to tolerate "the disjunction between being and identification" (Soler 1996, 41), to learn how to put oneself in the place of the cause of one's own desire, and to partake in the interminable struggle to symbolize the cause of desire. Not only is this project interminable, it takes place in the strange time of *Nachträglichkeit*. The productivity of this version of subjectivity and its implications for theorizing all manner of relations within teaching and learning have yet to be fully realized. When considering the geography of such an undertaking, however, the differences between Lacan's reading and Felman's reading permit another way of conceptualizing the sexual foundation of Freud's discovery.

WHAT DOES FREUD WANT? RESISTANCE AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Felman also stresses the difference between Freud's dream speech and his speech about the dream, and she wonders about the function of the analogy between Freud's dream exculpations and the joke of the kettle. However, Felman, unlike Lacan, does not assume to be addressed by the joke. On this she agrees with other feminist readings of the dream. Why, she asks, have feminists been unable to detect Freud's insight that his wish fulfillment has the status of joke? She argues that this oversight has to do with the ways in which the joke, which connects Irma's resistance to the examination to her plea that Freud relieve her pain, comprises an exchange among men that refers, awkwardly and anxiously, to their relations to women. To women, Felman argues, the ridiculous game of passing the buck is just not funny.

However justified missing the joke may be, this response also misses the humor of the gap that the dreamed joke produces for the dreamer. "What is funny," Felman suggests, "in the joke . . . is that it refuses to resolve the question of the difference in terms of the logic of identity" (1993, 97). The wish fulfillment may be a joke, but the joke also performs anxiety. Where Lacan's interpretation separates the dream into two parts, one representing Freud's anxiety about his relations with women and his relation with death and a second representing "the sum of identifications" that make his ego, Felman brings these two parts in tension with each other and argues that the wish fulfillment functions as "a *denial* of the (sexual) anxiety of difference and self-difference." The kettle story is "first and foremost a *defense* against the conflict (crisis, con-

tradiction, and self-contradiction) which provokes, and is embodied by, the dream" (97; emphasis in the original).

In order to trace the contours of the conflict that is embodied by the dream, Felman turns to the knot of female characters, focusing on Irma and Freud's wife. Where other interpreters of the dream focus on either the patient or the wife, Felman insists that it may be much more productive to consider the dreamwork in terms of "a *structural perception* of the symbolic *interaction* between the two" (103–4; emphasis in the original). In the dream Irma complains of pains in the abdomen but resists examination. In a footnote, Freud tells us that the pains remind him of his wife and his perception of her bashfulness toward him. Felman offers the observation that "[s]ince, out of the footnote, the wife emerges as a *secret sharer in the feminine complaint* of the hysteria, the feminine complaint as such unfolds as more complex than it first seemed, in that it now appears to be articulated from different vantage points, from different structural positions (105; emphasis in the original). Felman considers the similarities and differences between the two female figures. Both demonstrate resistance toward Freud. Both have been "'infiltrated' by a male intervention" (105): Irma has had an injection from a dirty syringe, and Freud's wife has been impregnated. However, where Irma's complaint is traced back to her lack of a husband, the wife's complaint leads directly to the presence of a husband who considers himself happily married. How then can Freud's wife's complaint be accounted for when she represents the embodiment of female fertility? Felman argues that Freud stumbled upon the paradox that both women are "*suffering from the womb*" (106; emphasis in the original).

What does it mean that both women, who represent opposite poles of the criteria for fulfillment under patriarchal law, are unhappy? Felman's response to this is reminiscent of Lacan's insistence that the dream's wish speaks from beyond the ego, but she specifies how this "beyond" speaks as well from beyond "conventional ideas of feminine fulfillment" (106): "Notwithstanding Freud's own consciousness and cultural beliefs, the dream suggests that the patriarchal myth of feminine fulfillment *could be* but a masculine wish fulfillment" (106; emphasis in the original). Where there should be a difference between the positions each woman occupies, the dream renders them equivalent in their unhappiness. What the dream teaches Freud, in Felman's view, is that "the woman in his bed is as unknown, perhaps, and as dissatisfied, as the untalkative patient in his office, hysterically, and painfully choking on a speech she cannot yield" (107). In coming up against the question, What does a woman want? another question appears: what does the dreaming Freud want? Most interpretations seem to agree that what he wanted was to *conceive* psychoanalysis by means of a homoerotic bond with his friend and colleague, Wilhelm Fliess.

Felman is not fully satisfied that the metaphor of conception is exhausted by these interpretations. She argues that it is significant that Freud does not simply wish to eliminate feminine resistance, but that “he wants to *understand* it, so that he can *answer* appropriately, relieve the suffering. Freud’s fundamental wish is to *satisfy* each of these women: to satisfy the female wish” (107; emphasis in the original). If the dream’s wish is to satisfy the female wish, how does the dream fulfill the wish? Two Freudian concepts, inversion and condensation, help Felman argue that the condensation of the two women into one and the inversion of what each gives Freud are the processes that permit Freud’s dream to function as a wish fulfillment. We have returned to the time of *Nachträglichkeit*, a time that is neither representation nor identity but difference and self-difference. Freud’s wife carries his child but refuses to address her husband with her desire. Irma, on the other hand, does address Freud with her complaint; she, however, refuses to make use of his therapeutic reply. Freud, Felman suggests, wants to conceive psychoanalysis with Irma who, unlike Fliess, offers Freud something that will prove key to psychoanalysis: Irma gives Freud her resistance. The significance of the dream for Felman concerns the radical alteration in the patient/doctor relationship. As Felman sees it, “What emerges in the Irma dream as absolutely crucial is the recognition that fecundity—psychoanalytic fecundity—is *not conceptual*: the patient has to “*accept* the solution,” that is, not just to integrate, but to participate in, the conception of the insight. The doctor is no longer *master*—of the cure or of the patient, of the illness or of the “solution” to the illness. The analytical fecundity proceeds, precisely, from the doctor’s destitution from his mastery . . . from the *destitution*, in effect, of mastery as such” (111; emphasis in the original).

This reading of what makes psychoanalysis an event that proceeds from transformed power relations between (male) doctors and their (female) patients resonates with Lacan’s own understanding of the psychoanalytic dialogue. However, Felman traces the origins of the idea that psychoanalytic dialogue describes an exchange between “doctor and patient [who] are both self-divided, and [who] communicate through their self-division” (Felman 1993, 111) to the specimen dream that inaugurates psychoanalysis as a theory and as a method of self-analysis. Unlike Lacan, who locates the surprise of self-division beyond the sum of the ego’s identifications with other male figures who represent the law, Felman locates the source of the discovery in Freud’s identification with his female patient who represents unspeakable suffering: “The doctor is creative (procreative) only insofar as he is himself a patient: Irma’s symptom in the shoulder is Freud’s own. The subject of the dream is saying: I am myself a patient, a hysteric; I am myself creative only insofar as I can find a locus of fecundity in my suffering. And I am procreative only insofar as I am

not the master of that which I conceive, to the extent that I do not control what I give birth to” (111).

Felman has noticed something that Lacan has not. She pinpoints the risk of identifying with the one who does not represent the law, the one whose status as a speaking subject of desire is not yet assured. Her observation brings her to the conclusion, about Freud’s creation, that “[T]he dreamer is predicting here . . . that femininity—the question of woman and the woman as a question—is bound to remain unsolved and unresolved in psychoanalytic theory to the extent, precisely, that it is the very navel of psychoanalysis: a nodal point of significant resistance in the text of the ongoing dream of psychoanalytic dream of understanding” (120).

The dreamer’s prediction is not of the same order as Freud’s waking struggles as he continues to ask and be dissatisfied with his own responses to his question, “What does a woman want?” Felman points out that where the dream performs the wish to eliminate the conflict, the rhetorical structure of the question is one that addresses men exclusively. It is curious about women but does not speak to women. The impasse of waking relations for both men and women is the desire to be understood by the other as if difference made no difference. Lacan has helped us to theorize this desire for understanding as a trap of the ego, but it is an alluring trap nonetheless, both for psychoanalytic theory and for the participants who play by its rules. Indeed, it is the wish to be understood, as a woman, by her male analyst that has prompted Felman to write this essay on Freud. However a caring and compassionate listener and astute observer Felman found this man to be, something was missing: “Yet I felt that he might well have failed to understand, or to take into account, something crucial about me as a woman, thus someone in a different position than himself. I also felt that he had no warning of this something he was missing, since neither psychoanalytic theory nor his clinical training had prepared him for it, even though they enabled him effectively to understand me in other ways” (123).

Felman’s wish to be understood as a woman by a man is structured like the plea of the hysteric who addresses her question about what it means to be a woman precisely to the one who cannot give her what she wants and then lets him know that she is not and will not be satisfied. The plea is addressed to an imagined master, who must, as Freud learned and forgot many times, refuse the position. Or, as Gurewich writes, “By breaking down the collusion between the hysteric and her master, psychoanalysis allows the subject to sever the tie with the one who is by definition important to provide and answer to an impossible question” (1999, vii). This formulation, which teaches us a great deal about the nature of desire, emerges from reading Lacan, who painstakingly traced Freud’s steps as he repeatedly stumbled and regained his footing in his

encounters with feminine resistance—that is, the resistance of his patients and his own self-resistance.

Eventually, using developments in Freud's theories as his base, Lacan would elaborate a theory of four discourses—those of the hysteric, the master, the university, and finally, the analyst—to describe the forms social bonds take in the interminable struggle toward acceptance of the human condition: "To lack the answer becomes the solution. Beyond the mysterious power of the master and the opacity of knowledge there is nothing to be found except the freedom of desire" (Gurewich 1999, viii). If Freud's famous question was, What does a woman want? Lacan's famous pronouncement would be, "La femme n'existe pas."

And perhaps she does not, at least not quite in the way much feminist writing has wished. Nor does the assertion exceed the structure of Freud's question to address women. Felman, even after writing her chapter on Freud, in an effort to give her analyst some clue about what he might be missing, still did not know how the chapter was also a testimony to her own autobiography as missing; missing because, she writes, "I still could not essentially address it to myself—truly address it, that is, to a woman" (1993, 124). She leaves the question, What does a woman want? and moves to another scene of stories. This is the scene of women's struggles to address our stories, not (only) to a male audience, but to ourselves, to each other, to our mothers, and, most surprisingly, to our self-difference. Felman seems to have arrived, belatedly and through many detours, at her own implication in men's stories and to theories about women's desire.

A different question, one whose provenance Felman traces to the poetry of Adrienne Rich, situates women in relation to this other scene of writing: "with whom," Felman asks, "do you believe your lot is cast?" (1993, 126–27). This question, which relies on interpretation rather than ontology, is inclusive in its structure of address and can account for that other time, the dream life of desire. Because claiming this question as one of and for women's autobiography can only be a destination arrived at via a confrontation with the tensions of desire and that which resists desire, in short, via the detours of *Nachträglichkeit*, it returns us to the problem of education, of how knowledge comes to matter in belated time. Psychoanalytic theory, it is clear from all the kettle jokes, does not know what women want. Can we say that feminist education repeats this defense? When feminist education forecloses the question of resistance and forgets the problems of interpretation and self-implication, it may also be left with only a kettle story as a defense. However, the press onward and detours backward that mark so creatively the autobiographies of Freud, Felman, and Kofman propose an alternative to kettle stories that resides in the question, How am I reading my life?

NOTES

This essay was supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant #410-98-1028 ("Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry").

1. In choosing to pursue this question, I do not comment upon what Lacan has to say about masculinity and femininity and the psychical conflicts specific to each construct (See Mitchell and Rose 1982; Verhaeghe 1997). Rather, I explore Felman's (Lacanian) method for what it offers contemporary feminism as a way to read Lacan. The question is indebted to Elizabeth Young-Bruhl (1998).
2. For my more explicit discussions of the implications of psychoanalysis for feminist education, see Pitt 1998, 1997, and 1996.
3. The phrase "autobiography of a reading practice," deliberately invokes Jane Miller's (1996) "autobiography of a question" while also recognizing her emphasis on material conditions that organize the possibility of intellectual work.
4. It is less clear that Lacan's rereading of Freud has had much influence in feminist educational studies. This is particularly so if we think of educational studies in traditional ways—that is, as being primarily focused on teaching and learning in compulsory education. In this context, a sustained feminist study of Lacan has yet to make an appearance. Yet the blossoming of an interest in pedagogy on the part of academics working in postsecondary humanities education (Berman 1994; Gallop 1995; Penley 1989) has been accompanied by a reopening of a space for thinking about the implications of psychoanalysis for educational research (Appel 1999, 1996; Briton 1997; Britzman 1998; Ellsworth 1997; Pitt 1998; Robertson 1997) that are "post-Lacanian." Felman has been central to both sites of this development.
5. Readers of the French Lacan gained access to this seminar in 1978, but readers of an English Lacan had to wait an additional decade. These delays, which are justified by the enormity of the task of transcribing oral text and compounded by the ordinary difficulties of translation and the specific difficulties of translating Lacan's notoriously complex and playful language, contribute to the peculiar experience many of have in attempting to read Lacan. Indeed, it is probably not usual to have read commentaries long before encountering the material upon which they are based. There is a temptation, then, of giving an overly high regard to interpretations that meet our unexamined expectations and to forget that Lacan's ideas, much like those of Freud, changed—often significantly so—over time. My own focus on a very early Lacan and my discussion of only one other feminist reading of Lacan represents my interest in doing something with Lacan that might arouse curiosity rather than explicating his teaching or failing in my own fashion to explicate his teaching.

REFERENCES

- Appel, Stephen, ed. 1999. *Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey Press.

- . 1996. *Positioning Subjects: Psychoanalysis and Critical Educational Studies*. Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey Press.
- Berman, Jeffrey. 1994. *Diaries to an English Professor: Pain and Growth in the Classroom*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Briton, Derek. 1997. "Learning the Subject of Desire." In *Learning Desire: Perspectives on Pedagogy, Culture, and the Unsaid*, edited by Sharon Todd, 45–72. New York: Routledge.
- Britzman, Deborah. 1998. *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ellsworth, Elizabeth. 1997. *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address*. New York & London: Teachers College Press.
- Felman, Shoshana. 1993. *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 1987. *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight: Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Fink, Bruce. 1996. "The Subject and the Other's Desire." In *Reading Seminars 1 & 2: Lacan's Return to Freud*, edited by Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Marie Jaanus, 76–97. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1919. "On the Teaching of Psychoanalysis in Universities." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (1917–1919), translated and edited by James Strachey with Anna Freud, 169–73. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- . 1900/1901. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, parts 1 and 2. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vols. 4 and 5 (1900–1901), translated and edited by James Strachey with Anna Freud, 169–73. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Gallop, Jane, ed. 1995. *Pedagogy and the Question of Impersonation*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Gurewich, Judith Feher. 1999. Preface. In Paul Verhaeghe, *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*. Translated by Marc du Ry, vii–ix. New York: Other Press.
- Kofman, Sarah. 1996. *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1991. "The Difficulties of Regression; The Dream of Irma's Injection; The Dream of Irma's Injection (Conclusion)." In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Sylvana Tomaselli, 134–71. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Laplanche, Jean. 1999. "Notes on Afterwardsness." In *Essays on Otherness*, 260–65. London: Routledge.
- Laplanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. 1973. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Miller, Jane. 1996. "Stories of Hope and Disappointment." In *School for Women*, 251–77. London: Virago Press.
- Mitchell, Juliet. 1975. *Psycho-Analysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Mitchell, Juliet, & Jacqueline Rose. 1982. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*. London: MacMillan.
- Penley, Constance. 1989. "Teaching in Your Sleep." In *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, 165–81. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Phillips, Adam. 1998. *The Beast in the Nursery: On Curiosity and Other Appetites*. New York: Pantheon.
- Pitt, Alice. 1998. "Qualifying Resistance: Some Comments on Methodological Dilemmas." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 11, no. 4: 535–53.
- . 1997. Reading Resistance Analytically: On Making the Self in Women's Studies. In *Dangerous Territories: Struggles for Difference and Equality in Education*, edited by Leslie G. Roman and Linda Eyre. New York: Routledge.
- . 1996. "Fantasizing Women in the Women's Studies Classroom: Toward a Symptomatic Reading of Negation." *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 12, no. 4: 32–40.
- Robertson, Judith. 1997. "Fantasy's Confines: Popular Culture and the Education of the Female Primary School Teacher." In *Learning Desire: Perspectives on Pedagogy, Culture, and the Unsaid*, edited by Sharon Todd, 75–95. New York: Routledge.
- Soler, Colette. 1996. "The Symbolic Order," parts 1 and 2. In *Reading Seminars 1 and 2: Lacan's Return to Freud*, edited by Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus, 39–55. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Young-Bruehl, Elizabeth. 1998. "On Psychoanalysis and Feminism." In *Subject to Biography: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Writing Women's Lives*, 174–94. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Verhaeghe, Paul. 1997. *Does the Woman Exist? From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*, translated by Marc du Ry. New York: Other Press.