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*Fiction*

Albertine

## ON NOT BEING ABLE TO SLEEP

Psychoanalysis and the Modern World

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Chatto & Windus

LONDON

2003

- 71 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (1962; Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 7.
- 72 Citing R. Linton, *ibid.*, p. 7.
- 73 Edward Glover, *Freud or Jung* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950). Glover was at the heart of the controversies about the future of psychoanalysis after Freud. Originally a supporter of Melanie Klein in the dispute with Anna Freud, he went on to become one of her strongest critics.
- 74 Part of this quotation appears in Andrew Samuels's discussion of Jung and anti-Semitism, *The Political Psyche*, Chapter 12: 'Jung, Anti-Semitism and the Nazis' (London: Routledge, 1993).

## Of Knowledge and Mothers: On the Work of Christopher Bollas

*No English-speaking psychoanalyst captures as vividly as Christopher Bollas the dilemma of psychoanalysis in relation to unconscious processes which cannot be known. In his sometimes hallucinatory evocation of mental states beyond our grasp, he therefore takes up his place in the company of other writers in this collection, literary and psychoanalytic, for whom the project of writing is to seize something too evanescent or painful for the conscious mind. Freud famously could not talk about mothers, but the mother is central to Bollas's thought. The question here, which links back to the essay on Sylvia Plath, is: does the woman, do mothers, only enter the frame as culpable; or does the mother, when she makes her appearance, usher in something unspeakable, exposing the limits of what any language can know about itself? The essay was first delivered as a paper at a conference to celebrate Christopher Bollas's work, organised by the Independent Group of Psychoanalysts and held at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in June 1995. It was subsequently published in the new US psychoanalytic journal, *Gender and Psychoanalysis*, in 1996.*

About ten years ago a student who had been taking a course on Freud and feminism with me at the University of Sussex, came to me in a state of some anxiety. It seemed to her, from her reading of the late papers on femininity, that psychically speaking there were only mothers in the world. If the boy desires the mother, and if the girl's main psychological task is to detach herself from a maternal presence whose traces are never fully dispersed, then all love objects are in a sense mothers. (In first marriages, Freud argues, it is the relationship to the mother that surfaces and most often as not wrecks the home.) Or to put it more crudely, there is no getting away from mothers. They are there where you least expect them, most troublingly when you thought you had left them behind.

I must admit that I did not have a way of alleviating this student's

anxiety, since it seemed to me she had touched on something important. No amount of trying to stress the infinite plasticity of the unconscious, the fluidity, transferability, mobility of its objects quite worked – which should suggest the opposite, that there is no stopping point, that whoever you think you are dealing with, it is always also somebody else. It was as if everything we had discussed, with equal emphasis, about unconscious process was in a sense powerless in the face of this mother, her capacity to draw back everything to herself. Freud famously ignored the mother, but as many commentators have pointed out, her figure haunts the work.<sup>1</sup> The somewhat triumphant, absolute, nature of her arrival on the scene of those late papers bears all the marks, one might say, of the return of the repressed.

I start with this anecdote because what the student experienced is, I think, not wholly dissimilar to the feeling I find myself experiencing whenever I read the work of Christopher Bollas. There is, I think, no psychoanalytic writer in English – and this becomes more and more the case in the most recent writing – who conveys such a strong sense of the ungraspable unconsciousness of the unconscious, and the endless, unstoppable, play of its work. But equally, there is no psychoanalytic writer who gives me such a strong, and at moments sinking, sense of the utter unmovability of the mother. This essay will address what I see as the dynamic tension between these two components of the writing: between on the one hand the unconscious as a limit to knowledge, as a break on what it is possible for any subject of the unconscious to know of either the other or herself; and on the other hand, the mother as a figure there to be uncovered, the one you always somehow knew would be there.

Freud himself provides a precedent for the relationship between mothers and the question of knowledge in his (1925) paper on 'Negation'. At the start of the essay, in what might appear as an exemplary moment of self-analysis, he uses the example of denial of the mother to usher in the discussion of the origins of thought: "You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother." We emend this to: "So it *is* his mother."<sup>2</sup> (In Freud's paper, the mother stands twice over in the place of knowledge. First in this example, for analytic certainty, the moment when the analyst can be most unswervingly sure. But as the paper unfolds, she appears again, this time as the founding condition of judgement since it is in relation to

her body that the function of acceptance and rejection of what constitutes a world comes to be. 'To affirm or negate the content of thoughts is the task of the function of intellectual judgement [. . .] Expressed in the language of the oldest – the oral – instinctual impulses, the judgement is "I should like to eat this", or "I should like to spit this out."<sup>3</sup> In this famously dense paper, Freud manages, not for the first time, to set the mother up as blindness and insight. No one is so inept, so embarrassingly giveaway as the mother-denying patient, but without a capacity for denial, grounded in that primordial connection to her body, there would be no such thing as thought.

It is customary to read the development of object-relations theory in Britain, with its focus on the mother, as remedying a glaring deficiency in Freud. My question, however, is not whether we should be talking about mothers – I assume that on the whole to be a very good thing – but what happens to our relationship to knowledge when mothers are around. When the traces of the mother are uncovered in analysis, is it the end of the line? Can we think about mothers and keep an open mind? Can we think ironically about mothers? (This is not the same as Winnicott's question as to whether a mother can relate playfully, ironically, tongue-in-cheek or, in Christopher Bollas's most recent work, comically with her child.) What does thinking about mothers do to thinking? If you make the mother *the* unconscious object, what hermeneutic arrest have you stumbled into, what violence have you committed to the unconscious as process, or to use one of Bollas's most famous formulas, to the category of the 'unthought'?

In fact that's only half his formula, only half the story, since his concept is more exactly the 'unthought known'. To put the question in terms closer to the language or spirit of his work: is the 'unthought known' the place where knowledge unravels from its own self-possession, from its pretension *as* knowledge; or is it the place where the mother, the imprint of her care on the being of the subject, is once and for all to be found? Are we dealing, to use his own words from an essay in *Being A Character*, with 'a force of dissemination that moves us to places beyond thinking';<sup>4</sup> or, by analogy with the mother in one of her most famous incarnations of stereotypes, with a type of first and last resting place? And if the second, does the mother acquire the status of only truth or rather the only place – given that psychoanalysis could be said to have made the idea of one truth its first casualty –

where truth is still allowed to be? It is probably already clear what I would like the answer to that question to be, but of course nothing is ever that simple.

It has often been pointed out that the mother has a lot to answer for in the writings of the Independent School. These quotes are almost all taken from *The Shadow of the Object*, Bollas's first collection of essays; 'his mother's absence'; 'his disappearing and dismissive mother'; 'the refusing mother'; 'the contagious confusion of the mad mother'; 'strange and absent mother'; 'cumulatively dis-incarnated by maternal failure'; and perhaps most devastating of all, 'she hired a nanny'.<sup>5</sup> It is, one could fairly say, and especially in the early work, something of a refrain. But it seems to me to be a trap, too easy – although that is exactly what I have just done – to just list these instances, to see them only as marking a blindspot in the writing, where one feminism, the feminism that sees psychoanalysis as a pure emanation of patriarchy, would read the ideological prejudice of a whole tradition, and one form of psychoanalysis (the Lacanian) would see a failure to acknowledge the absence at the heart of being, a way of laying at the door of the mother what is irredeemable about human desire.

One of the problems of those kinds of objection, even though they may each have a crucial point, is that they blind themselves to the institutional histories out of which theories are made and unmade. It therefore seems important to recognise the argument to which this appeal to the mother belongs. What worse fates is this dreadfully failing mother being called on to save us from? Paradoxically, it seems as if this hopeless mother, in relation to whom no doubts are entertained, is intended to ward off another form of certainty, knowledge, omniscience. In a strange twist, which I see as central to Bollas's project, the dulling sameness of her invocation is designed to protect the patient from the potential tyranny of psychoanalysis itself. Better her neglect than its coercion. Better to have been overlooked in the beginning than to find yourself bound, in the analytic setting, to an interpretive presence that won't let go. More explicitly, this emphasis on the mother's powers, in the reality of a patient's past, to move and stall a life – a power I would not wish to dispute – has two targets. On the one hand it is aimed at Kleinian hermeneutic confidence about deep phantasy, on the other at the version of object-relations interpretation which reads everything in the analytic setting

in terms of that setting alone, as having as its sole referent, with a no less oppressive sameness, the analytic here-and-now. As Bollas puts it, not without a trace of irony, in the final paper of *Forces of Destiny*, his second collection of essays: 'the British analysts of the 1940s freed the boring patient from the analyst's narcoleptic countertransference [. . .] by understanding the patient's narrative as a metaphor of the patient's ego experience of the analytic object, the clinician was suddenly alive in a field of meaningful plenty'.<sup>6</sup> Ignoring the mother, the analyst makes himself significant.

Bollas's constant reference to the mother is, if I have understood correctly, part of an appeal to history. Hence his repeated stress on her actuality. Again, despite my own caveat, I found myself listing the number of times, also in the early work, that the insistence on a concrete retrievable reality appeared, a reality almost invariably given the status of single determinant or cause: 'This is *objective fact*'; 'a belief that was a *fact* in his infantile life'; not meaning, as it might appear, that his phantasy was a psychic reality to the child, but that his belief accurately reflected his world: 'It *was a fact* that neither parent, for different reasons, could identify with their child's needs' (this is both parents, but it is the mother's disappearance early in the child's life that precipitates the problem); 'an *actual family setting* with which [the ego] cannot cope'. 'It is a source of puzzlement,' writes Bollas in disagreement with Bion who, as he sees it, attributes the source of the child's attacks on alpha functioning to the child alone:

why madness within the mother or the father, or between the parents, or in that atmosphere that is created by all participants in the child-parent interaction, should be eliminated as one of the potential sources of disturbance in the child's development of alpha function.<sup>8</sup>

If we place the work in this tradition, it seems clear that, after Winnicott, Bollas wants to reassert early environment against fantasy, what is done to the infant against what the infant or patient projects on to her world. But in Bollas's case, the argument about reality avoids the obvious critique – that this move is a positivist reduction, that psychoanalysis must be about phantasy before anything else – because of the way it is constantly run into the question of knowledge. (How much can we ever know? How sure can or should the analyst

over be?) It is almost as if the irreducible nature of phantasy, partially or momentarily lost to the objective facts of the case, resurfaces in the form of a radical uncertainty which gives back to the unconscious its greatest unsettling force. And in so far as it was in relation to the mother that Bollas seemed originally so sure, it is appropriately her figure who stands to lose (or rather gain) most from such any such loss of conviction. By linking the Winnicottian stress on environment to the question of knowledge, Bollas therefore opens up a rift in his own work which allows us fruitfully to track the implications of this centring of the mother for the category of the unconscious. For the rest of this essay, I want to trace the ways in which his writing incrementally unravels that early hermeneutic certainty about the mother and in the process provides some dramatic and at moments disturbing insights into what a mother can carry, for theory, for analysis, for being a subject in the world.

There is a moment in H. D.'s *Tribute to Freud*, the poet's account of her analysis with Freud in Vienna, when she describes the symptom – writing on the wall – which of all her symptoms, he confessed to finding most disturbing: 'of a series of strange experiences, the Professor picked out only one as being dangerous, or hinting of a danger or a dangerous tendency or symptom'.<sup>9</sup> Freud analyses this hallucinated writing as desire for union with the mother, but later he comments: 'I must tell you (you were frank with me and I will be frank with you), I do *not* like to be the mother in the transference – it always surprises and shocks me a little. I feel so very masculine.'<sup>10</sup> On the wall, or off the wall ('Off the Wall' is the title of one of Bollas's papers from his second book), what flashes up as a moment of danger in H. D.'s symptom, and the moment of analytic frankness it precipitates, is the point where the boundaries of consciousness are transgressed, where the limits between inside and outside, between a subject and the world of objects that surround her, breaks down. As with the 'oceanic feeling', which in his famous exchange with Romain Rolland he declared himself immune to, Freud responds by an intimate confession which in fact involves a rigid redemarcation of lines.<sup>11</sup>

If object-relations theory, in its Winnicottian form, has taken upon itself to enter the space where Freud did not dare to tread, this particular form of danger – that there might be a world without

boundaries where all founding distinctions are lost – seems, for the most part, to have been ignored (rerepressed one might say). Indeed, you could argue that the emphasis on the adequacy and inadequacy of the mother – what she can and should do – has served to make safe or occlude this space: not the space of a necessary lack-in-being in Lacanian terms, but the opposite, a space too full, a space that will become our dream of the mother, but which is in fact a space with no single origin, and for which no one is accountable, where the divisions inside my own mind, and between me and the other, are unclear. One of Bollas's strongest early points – and a great deal follows from here – is that if Freud refused the mother as referent, he more than embraced her into the setting of analysis (Freud's blindness as the insight of analytic work). It would then be possible to read Bollas's writing as going back over this ground, unearthing its latent implications, shadowing forth its hidden shape.

More and more in the essays, analysis is a dream setting, 'a kind of *countertransference dreaming*', a meeting of one unconscious with another, the analyst as 'medium', processing in his body the unintegrated instincts and affects of a hysteric with nowhere else to go.<sup>12</sup> If at first this feels like an extraordinary maternal idealisation of the analytic encounter, in which feminism would see simply the inverse image of the mother who fails, it is only for a moment. And that is because the very movement which makes of this analyst all-receiver, reparative mnemonic trace for what failed before, also dissolves all identity, wrests from us any certainty of being, turns us into shadows, spirits, ghosts.

'I seem to be saying,' writes Bollas in 'Off the Wall', 'that analysts are mediums for the psycho-somatic processing of the patient's psyche-soma'; or again, from *Cracking Up*, the analyst bears 'the analysand's psychic state in his own body'.<sup>13</sup> This quote from the title article of *Being a Character* could, I think, be taken as a type of manifesto of the later work, certainly for the last two books:

Being a character means that one is a spirit, that one conveys something in one's being which is barely identifiable as it moves through objects to create personal effects, but which is more deeply graspable when one's spirit moves through the mental life of the other, to leave its trace.<sup>14</sup>

The opening essay of *Cracking Up*, 'Communications of the Unconscious', draws out even further the extent to which, if you go down this path, what you begin to lose is the possibility of any conviction that there are, conventionally speaking, two separate consciousnesses in a room. 'Unconscious Communication' takes off from this remark from Freud's paper on 'The Unconscious': 'It is a very remarkable thing that the *Ucs* of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the *Cs*.'<sup>15</sup> We are close here to telepathy which, as other recent commentators have pointed out, is, no less than femininity, an undercurrent to Freud's work (not in either case its wild fringe, but something whose links with the discoveries of psychoanalysis are unavoidable but difficult because in each case they push it over its own theoretical edge).<sup>16</sup> First dismissed by Freud, telepathy then *returns* in the 1932 essay 'Dreams and Occultism', rather like mothers we might say (everything clearly returns to the 1930s). 'The phenomenon of thought-transference,' Freud writes, 'which is so close to telepathy and can indeed without much violence be regarded as the same thing'; 'by inserting the unconscious between what is physical and what was previously called "psychical" [psychoanalysis], has paved the way for the assumption of such processes as telepathy'.<sup>17</sup>

It seems to me therefore that there are two very different mothers, or fantasies of the mother, at work in Christopher Bollas's writing. Mother as fact, the one safe haven of interpretation; but then mother, or her space, as the vanishing point of all identities, where no form of knowing could ever reach. For if it is the case that in this second space subjects pass through each other like spirits in the night, more intimate, closer than any other form of contact could hope to be, the one thing that Bollas insists on is that this insight spells the end of the fantasy that subjects could ever know each other, or be known. 'It is interesting,' he continues in 'Communications of the Unconscious', 'that psycho-analysis, which would have us look truth in the eye, also makes use of the most powerful illusion we generate: that we convey ourselves to other people'.<sup>18</sup>

Compare that comment with this one from 'The Analyst's Multiple Function': 'Is not one pleasure of loving and being loved the realisation that one is truly known . . . In other words, to love and to be loved is an act of deep appreciative knowing'.<sup>19</sup>

And here is the mother: 'Maternal care, then, is a knowing that is an act of love, and whether we have our right to a destiny or whether we are to have a fate will, in my view, depend on whether a mother can love her infant in a knowing way.'<sup>20</sup> Which I would simply wish to qualify, to save the child from such maternal omniscience, with this remark by Bollas from 'Off the Wall': 'Each analyst who comes to know his patient [. . .] must unknow him.'<sup>21</sup>

Paradoxically, then, it is by invoking the maternal space as powerfully as he does, pushing the metaphor as one might say to its furthest limits, that Bollas himself 'unknows' the mother, undoes her as referent, placing the whole scenario – what it is to be an analyst, a patient, a human subject – beyond knowing's reach. Hence my sense that the most immediate feminist response to this tradition, crucial as it is, is too limiting. For if you simply demand that the Winnicottian image of the mother be modified – saved from her total accountability, recognised even more fully than he did in its radical ambivalence – or more simply demand that she be given her own voice (when does a mother get to speak, where are the case studies of women as mothers in the work?), you none the less remain essentially in the same referential frame.<sup>22</sup> As long as the question remains: what would be a truer representation of the mother, the limits of knowledge as knowledge remain untouched. Which is not to dismiss that question but to suggest that things become even more complex when we throw the unconscious back into the frame. Speaking on behalf of unconscious ambivalence is not the same thing as trying to address what the unconscious does to any position from which we might speak. These quotations are from 'The Psychoanalyst's Use of Free Association':

Regardless of how well analysed we may be, we shall always be a subject who only ever partly knows. Partly knows the other. Partly knows the self. Partly knows life. Most of our life is lived unconsciously, in dialogue with the other's unconscious, within the field of unconscious social processes.

I do not agree [that it is possible to comprehend our patients]. I think we fail to 'grasp' them, because anyone – including oneself – is substantially beyond knowing. [. . .] the unconscious never ceases its

work and the psychic material in which it plies its trade is profoundly beyond our knowing.<sup>23</sup>

It is, as Bollas states in his Introduction to *Cracking Up*, the founding paradox of analytic work that the analyst aims to 'understand unconscious communication in terms of a theory of the unconscious which *theoretically* makes such communication impossible'.<sup>24</sup> I would suggest that one of the roles of the mother, in theory, has been to carry the burden of that paradox.

I will now therefore turn things around a little and make my question not what the mother does to the category of knowledge, but, as a way of extending that question, what she is being asked to bear. In what has become one of her most famous essays, 'Stabat Mater' (1983), written shortly after the birth of her son, psychoanalyst and writer Julia Kristeva comments:

Belief in the mother is rooted in our fascinated fear with the impoverishment of language. If language is powerless to situate me for, or speak me to, the other, then I presume – I yearn to believe – that someone somewhere will make up for that impoverishment. Someone, or rather someone female, *before* there was speech, *before* it – before the unconscious – spoke, before language pummelled me, via frontiers, separations, vertigos, into being.<sup>25</sup>

'Let us call "maternal",' she says near the start of her essay, 'that ambivalent principle that is bound to the species on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the proper Name to topple over into the unnameable. It is that catastrophe which we imagine as femininity, non-language or the body.'<sup>26</sup> I read Kristeva as saying that language fails us, both because of what it cannot speak and because the entry into language is a type of forced passage in itself. To recognise that, or to be in touch with the points where language brushes against its limits, is a type of catastrophe for those subjects (pre-Freudian we might say) who have vested their all in the accomplishment of identities and their poise. This felt catastrophe is simply the fact that there is an unconscious, that we cannot fully know, as Bollas puts it in those quotations, either the other or ourselves. We try to limit the damage, we protect ourselves from the felt danger, by fleshing out our anxiety, giving that zone of anguish a

name: femininity, non-language, body. But the name we give it before all others, the one we really hold answerable for it, is the mother.

One could then say that, if mothers know anything – to give them back their subjectivity in the matter for a moment – it is the travesty of that projection. Maternal love, Kristeva writes, is 'a surge of anguish at the very point where the identity of thought and the living body falls apart'.<sup>27</sup> Do not idealise the early union of mother and child. Not just because things are more complex than that, but because that vision of union has so often served in Western thought to veil over the disunity of being to which motherhood, if anything, owes its most fundamental allegiance. 'I am breaking apart like the world' (I take that line from Sylvia Plath's extraordinary voice poem, 'Three Women', in which three women's voices speak across and through each other in a maternity ward).<sup>28</sup> Once again this goes beyond the question of the complexity, agency of the mother. It is more what this figure of the mother forces us to confront about the limits of our being. What passes through the mother, writes Kristeva, 'gnaws away at the all-mightiness of the Symbolic'.<sup>29</sup>

Even more perhaps, that vision or fantasy of primary union hides the extent to which the mother and child, in their negotiations with each other, however playful and loving, are, among other things, up against a radical confusion of tongues. This is Jean Laplanche, in his book *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, glossing Ferenczi's famous formula.<sup>30</sup> He is discussing what he sees as the incommensurable dialogue between the mother and her infant: the mother a sexual being, the infant thrown into a world of words and desires to which it is quite impossible that she or he could be equal:

[We are dealing with] an encounter between an individual whose psychosomatic structures are situated predominantly at the level of need, and signifiers emanating from an adult. Those signifiers pertain to the satisfaction of those needs, but they also convey the purely interrogative potential of other messages – and those other messages are sexual. These enigmatic messages set the child a difficult, or even impossible, task of mastery and symbolisation and the attempt to perform it inevitably leaves behind unconscious residues. . . . We are not, then, dealing with some vague confusion of tongues, as Ferenczi would have it, but with a highly specific inadequacy of languages.<sup>31</sup>

And again:

The primal relationship is therefore established on a twofold register: we have both a vital, open and reciprocal relationship, which can truly be said to be interactive, and a relationship which is implicitly sexual, where there is no interaction because the partners are not equal . . . Someone is moving from the straight and narrow; we have here a 'Traviata', someone who has been led astray and seduced.<sup>32</sup>

Or, to use terms that will be more familiar – the last but not least of the eighteen reasons Winnicott offers as to why the mother hates her child: 'He excites her but frustrates – she mustn't eat him or trade in sex with him.'<sup>33</sup> If the mother feels hate for her infant, it is because she loves the infant – the form her love takes at moments *is* – too much.

If, as I have been describing so far, I read a progress or move in Bollas's writing towards the vanishing point of all knowing, I equally read an increasing and symmetrical stress on what is excessive or unmanageably baffling about the nature of the world for the child. Though in relation to sexuality, would it be fair to say that, although there is an erotics of the patient's idiom and frequent discussions of object choice, there is not much sex in the good, or bad, old perverse Freudian sense, in this writing? (There are the essays on the trisexual in *The Shadow of the Object* and on homosexual cruising in *Being a Character*, but these are, I think, cases apart.)<sup>34</sup> I also remember that when Laplanche, in a talk to the Institute of Psychoanalysis ten years ago, said something similar to what I have quoted here, his suggestion that the mother's message to the child might be bafflingly sexual, might indeed be sexual at all, caused something of an outrage (in the discussion Juliet Mitchell suggested that what was going on was in itself a 'confusion of tongues').

But it does seem to be the case that in the later writing, notably in the wonderful essay, 'Why Oedipus?' there is a new emphasis on the madness, not of the mother, but of the options open to the child as he negotiates his way through a set of essentially unresolvable predicaments – that madness as Bollas puts it in one of my favourite of his formulas, 'that ego psychology terms reality'.<sup>35</sup> We are dealing, as he puts it in the later essay, 'Cracking Up', with 'a world of the real that is deeply thoughtless'.<sup>36</sup> 'For this is the age, is it not,' he asks in 'Why

Oedipus?', 'when the child comes to understand something about the oddity of possessing one's own mind?'.<sup>37</sup> The Oedipal child's 'moment of truth', he continues, is a discovery 'that in some ways matches the search that Oedipus inaugurates when he aims to get to the origin of a curse that dooms his civilisation':

That curse is the bittersweet fact one suffers in having a mind, one that is only ever partly known and therefore forever getting one into trouble, and one that in the extreme can be rather lost (as in the losing of a mind); and one whose discovery by the child is a most arresting moment.<sup>38</sup>

It is not possible to get justice in relation to the conflicts of the family scene, and the realm where we are meant to seek it, that of the group, is, as Freud himself pointed out, the bearer of its own insanity. 'We are,' Bollas states, 'amidst two quite profound unconscious orders – our own mind and that of the group – which break the symbiotic and Oedipal cohesions.'<sup>39</sup> Crucially, none of this can be laid at the door of the mother. These dilemmas, which will check our dreams of safe haven for ever after, no one is accountable for: 'Our own subjectivity,' he exclaims, 'will abuse us all!'<sup>40</sup>

So why do we lay so much on the mother? What is it, finally, ultimately, that we are asking her to protect us from? In 'What Is This Thing Called Self?', one of the essays from the latest collection, Bollas writes: 'The mother who gives birth to us also brings us in touch with death.'<sup>41</sup> (Likewise Kristeva describes motherhood as a 'veiling over of death in death's very place'.)<sup>42</sup> In Freud's essay on 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', silent Cordelia, dumb in the face of her father's demand for love, bearing a love in excess of speech, is also, going back over an old mythological equivalence, the representative of a death to which she finally brings him (cradled in Lear's arms in the last scene, her latent identity as mother surfaces inside out at the end of the play). Again, a line from Plath's poem 'Three Women', this time the second voice: 'the world conceives / Its end and runs towards it, arms held out in love'.

I don't think it would be going too far to suggest that this is also a strand which runs through Bollas's writing. In this, as with everything else I have described, he could be seen as bringing to the surface of a



whole tradition in relation to the mother what she is being asked to carry. He could be showing us what psychoanalysis – writing of her and returning to her in what so often feels like a punishing scrutiny – no less than any other discourse, repeats. (Why do we expect psychoanalysis to be free of all this?)

In the first essay in *The Shadow of the Object*, in a sense the flagpiece for what's to come, there is an extraordinary line: 'the search for the perfect crime or the perfect woman is not only a quest for an idealised object'.<sup>43</sup> That sentence, with its brazen equation, brought me up short and sent me looking for other signs in the writing of this link between woman and crime. For that early paper, these fantasised figures are seen as making good a deficiency of early experience, which at this stage of the writing can lead only to the mother. But, as I have been arguing, Bollas also has, to my thinking, some far better ideas. Perfection (I reread his sentence) is criminal, women must be perfect, because it is the woman who, by wresting us from a world of certainty, committed the first crime.

Mother as criminal may seem an odd note with which to conclude, but it is in a sense where Bollas's own writing leads. The last collection, *Cracking Up*, ends with two papers – 'The Structure of Evil' and 'Cracking Up' which read like alternative versions, back to back, of each other. In the first, evil is described as the compulsive repetition of a death-in-being in which the infant was once the victim of a crime, the 'murder' of the true self.<sup>44</sup> Only this can explain, Bollas convincingly argues, the 'extraordinary balance struck by those we consider evil between benign and inhuman authority, the way that the serial killer, for example, lulls his victim into a false dependency which he is then so hideously able to turn inside out and exploit: 'Shocking harm erupting in the midst of a benign texture of the real ... the grandmother turns into a hungry wolf.'<sup>45</sup> Unknowable, unpredictable – 'we cannot see where he is coming from and ... whatever we know about him does not help us find him'<sup>46</sup> – the one we consider evil presents us with a grotesque, inflated, parody of our inability to control our own ends and the ends of the world.

In the next and final essay, 'Cracking Up', mother once again rushes in, only this time with a difference. This mother is a clown. Death-defying, she goes back in the opposite direction from the serial killer, turns 'disaster into pleasure', taking into herself, 'right before

the baby's eyes', the baby's own 'internal madness': 'Does she do,' he asks, 'what comic and humorists have been doing all these centuries, taking up into their bodies and souls these disturbing aspects of life?'<sup>47</sup> 'Is [the comic moment] death defying? ... For a brief moment, then, the funny man defies the forces of life and death. He does deliberately what most of us do by chance.'<sup>48</sup>

And if death is in the frame, then so, exceptionally I would say, is sexuality. The instincts, explicitly sidelined in the rest of the work, return when it is a question of really cracking up – control of the world, of bodies, of thought all falling apart: 'The force that the humorist grasps when he crosses the boundary is the constant unconscious movement of instinctuality ... The comic moment may be a descent into the underworld, where it dips into the force of instincts and returns with enough energy to split sides.'<sup>49</sup>

I like this mother as clown. I think it's the best version we've had so far. Not least of all, because the excessive, unmanageable nature of what she is being asked to carry has become the explicit theme. As if that tension, dialectic, balancing act between knowing the mother and the flight of knowledge, has finally toppled over, as if it had to come back to 'the mother where she is rediscovered as negotiating boundaries whose nature is to be unnegotiable. (As the *I Ching*, in fact one of the most patriarchal texts ever written, would put it: 'No blame'.) Once we are in a world of instincts and unconscious, there are some things, rather a lot in fact, that not even a mother can do.

I want to end by trying to convey a sense of how maddeningly hard I have found it to write about the work of Christopher Bollas. I decided in the end that it was not just that I was being difficult, but even more because of the type of demand that he places on his reader, a demand connected, I think and in the best sense, to what I have been trying to describe. It is not just the extraordinarily powerful way that Bollas evokes the analytic scene, the extent to which, because he is so often writing about the limits of its own capacities, he mimics in his writing the form of a theory which *should* be ungraspable if it is to remain faithful to its object – the unconscious as an ever-receding form of truth. It is more or as much, since the two are not unrelated, that he issues a very particular challenge to the reader. I would say that Bollas asks his reader to treat him like his ideal version of how a mother

would treat her child. He thereby undoes, by passing the position back to the reader and out into the world, the extent to which, if there is an ideal mother anywhere to be found, it is the analyst – or rather this analyst – himself (the strongest desire of this writing seeming to be at moments the desire to be one's own mother). Read me, hold me, but don't crush me, don't get too close. Above all, don't think you know, and I would want to add, don't expect to get it right.

Literary critics who have turned to Freud in the last decade have spent a lot of their time concentrating on footnotes and asides. It started with the case of 'Dora', the argument being that if you wanted to find an answer to everything that went wrong with that case, it was in the footnotes – indeed by Freud's own acknowledgement – that it could be found.<sup>50</sup> So I end with one aside and one footnote. First the aside, from the Introduction to *The Shadow of the Object*: 'I do not discuss how one might analyse the presence of the actual mother's mothering. I look forward to doing so in another work.'<sup>51</sup> Second, the footnote, from the essay 'Violent Innocence' in *Being a Character*.

As reconstructions decrease, and as the patient's character is increasingly understood within the transference, the question of what the mother actually did, or who she actually was, fades into its proper place: into the areas of speculation and hypothesis, profoundly tempered by a forgiveness intrinsic to the more important realisation of one's own generated disturbances. I intend to discuss this important question, of the invocation of the name of the mother in psychoanalytic reconstruction, in a future essay.<sup>52</sup>

In response to which, I would simply want to say (it is the message of this entire essay): I can't wait.

## Notes

- 1 Melanie Klein was, of course, the first analyst to concentrate on the mother. For more recent analysis of the mother-child bond, see Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); and for an analysis of the absence-presence of the mother in Freud's work, see Madeleine Sprengnether, *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 2 Sigmund Freud, 'Negation', *Standard Edition*, 19 (1925; London:

- Hogarth Press, 1961); p. 235.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 236–7.
- 4 Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self-Experience* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), p. 17.
- 5 Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unknown Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1987).
- 6 Christopher Bollas, *Forces of Destiny: Psychoanalysis and Human Idiom* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), p. 194.
- 7 Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, p. 77.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 9 H. D., *Tribute to Freud* (1956; Boston: David R. Godine, 1974), p. 41.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 146–7.
- 11 Sigmund Freud, 'To Remain Rolland', *Standard Edition*, 20 (1926; London: Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 279.
- 12 Some of these ideas were already present in the earlier work, such as 'The Psychoanalyst and the Hysteric', in *The Shadow of the Object*, but the later paper goes further. Christopher Bollas, *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), p. 12.
- 13 Bollas, *Forces of Destiny*, p. 59; *Cracking Up*, p. 12.
- 14 Bollas, *Being a Character*, p. 63.
- 15 Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', *Standard Edition*, 14 (1915; London: Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 194.
- 16 Jacques Derrida, 'Telepathy', trans. N. Royle, *Oxford Literary Review*, 10 (1988), pp. 3–41.
- 17 Sigmund Freud, 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis', *Standard Edition*, 22 (1932; London: Hogarth Press, 1974).
- 18 Bollas, *Cracking Up*, p. 19.
- 19 Bollas, *Forces of Destiny*, pp. 112–13.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 22 Rozika Parker explores most fully the issue of maternal ambivalence, addressing Winnicott's work, notably his 1949 paper 'Hate in the Counter-Transference', in *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago, 1995).
- 23 Bollas, *Being a Character*, pp. 116–17, 131.
- 24 Bollas, *Cracking Up*, p. 6.
- 25 Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', in T. Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (1983; Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 175–6.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 161–2.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 175–6.

- 28 Sylvia Plath, 'Three Women', in *Winter Trees* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971).
- 29 Kristeva, p. 185.
- 30 Sandor Ferenczi, 'Confusion of tongues between adult and child', in *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933).
- 31 Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Macey (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 130.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.
- 33 D. W. Winnicott, 'Hate in the Counter-Transference', in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (1949; London: Hogarth Books, 1979), p. 201.
- 34 Bollas: 'The Trisexual', in *The Shadow of the Object*; 'Cruising in the Homosexual Arena', in *Being a Character*.
- 35 Bollas, *Being a Character*, p. 243.
- 36 Bollas, *Cracking Up*, p. 243.
- 37 Bollas, *Being a Character*, p. 239.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 240.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 240–1.
- 41 Bollas, *Cracking Up*, p. 174.
- 42 Kristeva, p. 177.
- 43 Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, p. 18.
- 44 Bollas, *Cracking Up*, p. 195.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 191–2.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 190.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 253.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 252–3.
- 50 This point is made by a number of the essays in Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds, *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- 51 Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, p. 7.
- 52 Bollas, *Being a Character*, p. 178.

## What Makes an Analyst?

*It is little known how Freud's perhaps most far-reaching border crossing resided in his vision of a psychoanalytic institution which would be open to the people and which, in its training procedures, would engage with other disciplines in the humanities – the history of civilisation, mythology, religion and literature – so as to stop psychoanalysis from entrenching itself either as official knowledge or as esoteric lore. In this essay, I describe the failure of that vision and the attempts, also unsuccessful, of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, to restore it, and ask what price psychoanalysis, as institution and practice, has paid as a result. We do not need the endless wrangles about the character of Freud (the famous 'Freud Wars'). If it is indeed time for psychoanalysis to critique its own history and performance, it should look to how it reproduces itself as an institution, at its most basic, to how analysts are trained. My exploration of this question, which returned me to an earlier engagement, from the 1980s with the writings of Lacan on feminine sexuality, was stimulated by the work of the Egyptian-born, Paris-based psychoanalyst, Moustapha Safouan, translator in the 1950s of *The Interpretation of Dreams and Hegel's Phenomenology into Arabic*, and one of the few analysts to situate psychoanalysis – both in its history and in its radical potential – at the interface between social institutions and the unconscious. A longer version of this essay formed the introduction to my translation of his 1986 book on the topic: Jacques Lacan and the Question of Psychoanalytic Training (Macmillan, 2000).*

'Institutional training is probably antithetical to analysis.'

Adam Limentani, 'The Training Analyst and the Difficulties in the Training Psychoanalytic Situation', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* (1974)

'I have never spoken of the formation of analysts; what I have spoken of are the formations of the unconscious. There is no analytic formation [training]. Out of analysis an experience evolves which it is a complete