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Chapter 21

Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy: Narratives of Teaching

Isobel Armstrong

I am sick and tired of hearing psycho-analytic theories – if they don't remind me of real life they are of no use to me. An application of a theory ... is no good to me unless it reminds me of something which I can see at any time in the world in which I live.

(Bion 1978, 44)

I can still remember my exhilaration when I first learned some of the basic principles of Freudian and Lacanian thought concerned with gender and sexuality. They lifted a troubled feminism, beset with blame, anger, and puzzlement, into another world of thought. An ongoing inquiry into the construction of sexual difference seemed to be the project of both feminism and psychoanalysis, and there were times when I probably identified one with the other. The beauty of psychoanalytical models of, for example, phallic loss, or the symbolic order, was that they described deep, organizing structures in the self and in society that constituted not so much a totalizing explanation as an account of formative forces at work in culture. They provided complex reasons for women's oppression and its history. They released one from a politics of anger into a politics of analysis. I wanted to pass on this excitement to my students. But I'm not at all sure that I did. I begin by explaining why.

A Concise Companion to Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Culture, First Edition.

Edited by Laura Marcus and Ankhi Mukherjee.

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I sometimes wonder how our students on our Masters program at Birkbeck, "Gender, Society and Culture," survived on the grim psychoanalytical fare we presented them with in the 1990s. We may have taught the pleasure principle, but we certainly did not practice it. The concentration of psychoanalysis came in an intensively taught optional half-unit of about six weeks, and consisted of six texts by six authors, then considered to be canonical, presented to the students raw, in roughly historical order, without the help of adjacent literary or cultural texts. This was partly because we were suspicious of any attempt to "apply" psychoanalysis to texts, and partly that the project of the course was theoretical. We did not want to use texts as mere illustrations of psychoanalysis, a process that actually makes both texts reductive, and sets up a pattern of master discourse and subsidiary discourse. We wanted to inquire into the constitutive power relations of gender construction. We were discussing the way sexual difference was conceptualized through different phases of psychoanalysis, historicizing these discourses, and seeing them as historical documents. But we were certainly searching for answers.

All our students encountered Freud's work, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in an introductory course that included a number of historical, sociological, literary, and political texts. In the optional unit I taught we returned to Freud with "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" together with "Female Sexuality," but only after we read a founding document of feminist thought, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* of 1949. (Nowadays a more likely choice would be her lover Sartre's 1939 book, *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*.) We followed these with essays by Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler. They constituted together an incessant attempt to define sexual difference, as if psychoanalysis were concerned with nothing else.

From de Beauvoir's great work we set the first part of Book One, "Destiny." This section in particular prepares us for the famous statement at the start of Book Two, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." De Beauvoir's massive intellectual ambition, the comprehensiveness of her research, and her grasp of and inwardness with a range of disciplines, particularly psychoanalysis, are still stunning today, and for this reason alone I am glad that we started out with her. Some of her research has dated, some has not. (De Beauvoir must be among the earliest feminists to pick up on the importance of Lacan's mirror stage.) What is striking is her compulsive need to critique psychoanalysis and an equally compulsive need to use it in the service of an account of woman's indoctrination into her "vocation" as second sex. For her it is

the patriarchal mode of Freudian psychoanalysis itself that is instrumental in creating the western woman as other even when it constitutes an explanation of that otherness. It is indispensable to her. She resents it and relies on it. Psychoanalysis confirms her narrative of the culturally made nature of women's oppression because it is itself a product of patriarchal culture but she uses it for some of her foundational arguments. She agrees that "the whole sexual drama is more complex for the girl than for her brothers" (1997, 72) but denies the validity of the central premise, the punitive castration theory that gives women the status of second sex: in speaking of phallic power and phallic loss, Freud based female sexuality on a masculine model of male libido that persuades the girl that she has been mutilated, she argues. Freud's determinism ("All psychoanalysts systematically reject the idea of *choice* and the correlated concept of value" [1997, 76]), and his literalizing of the penis ("this weak little rod of flesh" [1997, 73]), preoccupy her. Yet she enters into dispute with Freud precisely in these terms. The penis, the vagina, the clitoris, and later in Book Two, penile urination, female micturation (women like watering with hoses as compensation for the projectile power they lack), a welter of sexual body parts, overwhelm her discussion.

Through de Beauvoir we discussed the issue of determinism and literalism in psychoanalysis. But what I see now in de Beauvoir is an irritability, an anger, an impatience with her own dilemma. She at once asserts the coercive power of empirical gender discrimination – this with a painful, accusatory asperity – and denies the explanatory force of Freudian models of gender formation while flying to them as a moth to a candle. The result is that she begins to hate women – and herself – for being what they are. She is the first post-World War II feminist, the first female misogynist. But what it is important to note now is that she set up in us exactly the same pattern of accusatory irritability and compulsive admiration that Freud evoked in her. And, I think, exactly the same pattern of resentment and reliance on the Freudian model of gender formation. This pattern seems endemic to the teaching of psychoanalysis – at least in this kind of course. The result is that the teacher becomes an apologist (and the master) instead of a collaborative explicator, constantly justifying the text in order to put a stay on the students' foreclosure of judgment. One solution, of course, is to tell them what is happening. But that cannot be the end of the matter. It is important for students to know you take seriously what is for many of them a first-time reader response, while trying to make reading a speculative and exploratory collective enterprise instead of a rush to judgment. Students will be

angry through sheer interpretive frustration: they will joke to deal with the bewilderment of unfamiliar thinking. I hesitate to describe this response as a “resistance” that can be smoothly overcome and incorporated into psychoanalytic discourse (saying no when yes is intended), because this procedure ignores the felt urgency of students’ responses.

We looped back to Freud, Dora, and “Female Sexuality” after de Beauvoir, followed by Lacan’s “The Meaning of the Phallus” and Kristeva’s “Stabat Mater” (1986) – all well-worked but difficult texts. Irigaray’s (1985, 226–40) chapter, “Volume-Fluidity” from *Speculum of the Other Woman* followed, and we concluded with Judith Butler’s (1990, 43–72) critique of Lacan and Freud in *Gender Trouble*. It is a familiar genealogy. Re-reading these texts now, I am still struck by their supreme intellectual richness as well as by their exacting and sometimes charmless theoretical virtuosity. All these texts are concerned with the repercussions, the reverberations, of castration theory, the prohibitive intervention of the father, and the girl’s discovery, as Freud puts it, “of her own deficiency” and sense of “misfortune” in lacking a penis (1977, 380). They constitute an exhaustive poetics of the phallus even when they attempt to replace the Oedipal moment with something else. Looking back there was something obsessive, fixated, about this phallus-centered configuration of texts.

Here I will discuss responses to just two of these texts – Freud’s analysis of Dora and Lacan’s essay – and what we did to open them up.¹ I will ventriloquize the students’ voices, for often impulsive and seemingly basic critiques recall one in a raw way to essential problems, problems that a practiced and sophisticated reader of psychoanalytic texts might ignore.

What does Freud want?

I get this, the multiple signification of the symptom, this is neat. The way Dora’s cough transfers the pressure of Herr K’s erect member from the lower body to the upper body, the way the her Dad’s fellatio with Frau K. focuses on the throat, the connection between the parents’ catarrh of the lower body (gonorrhoea) and the catarrh in Dora’s throat.

“A symptom is the representation of a sexual phantasy ... a symptom has more than one meaning and serves to represent several unconscious mental processes simultaneously” [Freud 1963, 64].

But why always, always, always a sexual phantasy – why not other kinds of pain and fear?

This is a psychodrama – too many people in love with too many people, as if the unconscious levels out every relation and assigns an equal value to it. Bad luck for the unconscious I say.

This man is a bully, a patriarchal bully. Dora has been “handed over” to him. He forces her to accept she is in love with Herr K, forces her into the paradigm of the jealous hysterical woman, forces her into the guilt of masturbation and bed-wetting. He knows everything (what he won’t see is that Dora is trapped) and conducts everything in an authoritarian way. “Wait and see,” he says, when she wonders how her mother gets into the first dream, and then adds a note saying Dora has violated the “rules” of dream interpretation like a disobedient schoolgirl.

“I don’t in the least know how mother gets into the dream” ... “I will explain that to you later” ... Footnote 9: “This remark gave evidence of a complete misunderstanding of the rules of dream interpretation, though ... Dora was perfectly familiar with them” [1963, 86–87].

Man, this is abuse, not bullying.

There is a problem with the dream – Freud always footnotes or sidelines the mother. She is an obsessive housewife, Dora’s father “gets nothing” from her, no sex, Dora hates her, we are told, so she doesn’t matter. Yet she is *in the dream*. And we are specifically told that Dora tells *her mother* about Herr K’s proposition in the wood by the lake, though Freud elides this into “parents.”

Why should the mother’s castration matter?

Why does the dream have to be univocal, to represent an unfulfilled wish, when the symptom can be multivocal?

And if everything can be turned around to its opposite, why is Freud selective about the items he chooses to read inversely? The father could be saying, “I consent to let my [not our but maybe “your”] two children be burnt for the sake of your [the mother’s] jewel case.” If the mother is “really” Frau K, this is what he is doing. But Freud ignores this because every dream has to be an unfulfilled wish.

We decided to look afresh at the first dream, to see if there were other possibilities within the psychoanalytical paradigm.

“A house was on fire” [1963, 81]. Not “the” house but “a” house, a generalized house that seems to have been subjected to an act of arson.

It sure was on fire: even if we turn it around and say it was flooded, as Freud turns fire round to its opposite, both lead to sexual activity. A house in the conflagration of erotic feeling, in flagrante, or flooded with the wetness of sex. Her father, Frau K, Herr K, the governess (we learn later), and maybe Dora's own sexual feelings. They are all at it and all lying. Is she overwhelmed by this overdetermined sexual life? The "something" that might happen in the night is not an "accident," the bed wetting (Freud uses the word "accident," not Dora) – it's sex [Freud 1963, 88].

Freud substitutes Herr K for the father (with reason), but the fact remains that the father is the prime mover in this conflagration. It is he who wakes her to sexual life if we trust the Oedipal moment.

He wakes her to sexed life but the mother wakes her to sexual life earlier because she has the phallus.

OK. But the overwhelming wish of the dream is what Freud says, to get away.

But to get away with what? The mother *wants her jewel-case*, just as she wanted those pearl earrings, the droplets of sex, that her husband denied her (instead chaining her with a bracelet about which she was furious, we hear). Freud says that Dora wants to "give" her jewel case to the father, to Herr K. But what if the dream is speculating on the father's denial of genital/sexual life to the mother, the sacrifice? Might she be like the mother, living with loss, if she does not retrieve her jewel case and its promise of fulfillment? This looks like conflict, not an unfulfilled wish. The mother is much more important than Freud says, whatever we decide.

That's when Eros becomes death, when the jewel case is left to burn. The jewel case is the nexus of condensation, as Freud [1963, 96] says, but might it have additional and opposing significations? Sexual life and its negation.

The dream may want her mother to save her rather than the father – or maybe the dream is wondering how each parent might both save and let her down.

She is hurried downstairs. In other parts of Freud's writing, to go downstairs is to make a move to the lower body, whereas to go upstairs is to move beyond it. She is hurried into the arena of sex, not actually rescued

from it. It is a dream about fear of sex and desire for it, ambivalence about sex?

All dreams are messy, not neat like Freud says.

But he doesn't say they are neat: he says contrary impulses cohabit in the unconscious and contrary meanings run on different tracks in the dream.

Whatever we felt about these challenges and questions, the students learned to begin to read Freud. They learned the art of questioning, demystifying, and the close reading of images and statements. They learned to follow a chain of connections and began to see the complexity of gender identifications as Freud describes them.

What does Lacan want?

Turning to "The Meaning of the Phallus," Lacan evoked intense dislike in the students, not only because of the difficulty of the essay, but also because of its content and tone. There are five complex phases to this condensed and elliptical essay, to say nothing of Lacan's detachment – paring his fingernails – from the "comedy" of gender and sexuality, and the constant peripeteia of the argument.²

"It speaks in the Other." Why this mystification? Why this religiosity? Can't he *name* the Phallus? Why re-enact its "veiled" mystery for us? He is imitating the word of God. What's going on?

And why is castration and desire central to all relations? Why must we be in a state of privation? Why is the phallus the master signifier? What hubris.

This is theology.

"It speaks in the Other" (Lacan 1982, 79). Different questions emerged when we had unpacked this "theological" sentence (in fact a key sentence), which comes quite late in the discussion, worked back from it, and looked at the details of the five phases of this essay. "It," the phallus, the universal "it," is intelligible through difference and creates difference. The "Other" is not de Beauvoir's excluded object or "other" but the founding alterity entailed by the oppositional play of signification itself, which we find in the very structure

of language. The linguistics of Saussure, requiring the creation of meaning through diacritical marks, obviously speaks in Lacan's phallus. All language, and in parallel, all sexual relations, all subject-object relations, are organized through alterity. The fundamental "Other," the site of difference, is the unconscious. The phallus is the primordial signifier because it signifies the structure of signification itself, the possibility of meaning ...

OK. Stop there. Why the emphasis on language and the unconscious as a language? The realities of sexual difference are very remote from all this.

If the unconscious is structured like a language, what is the status of "real," conscious language? I don't get it.

Maybe it's like the dream? A manifest language and a latent language?

And why is there this "passion" [1982, 78] of the signifier?

The structure of signification is founded on the stable form of signifier/signified. It constitutes the law, the symbolic order that ordains meaning. But the order of signification is itself unstable, founded on the split between signifier and signified. It is this constitutive splitting and the unstable elements of language – metaphor, the pun, the homonymic clash, the ambiguity, "combination and substitution," as Lacan puts it (1982, 79), which makes possible the activity of repression (when one meaning has to disappear to make another function intelligibly), so that we are always subject to the conscious/unconscious split. The "passion" of the signifier comes in here. The "passion" means to be acted upon, to suffer. For the signifier is not only the omnipotent determinant of signification: it is *subject to splitting* by virtue of the signifier/signified duality. Splitting is the very form of castration. Thus the phallic fate of castration is built into language: it is the deep formative structure that the signifier signifies. We could say that castration creates language, and language creates castration. It is built into our communications. Underlying this system is not the threat of castration but its privation.

So this is determinism, a tragedy, not a psychodrama like Freud. So why does he call it all a comedy?

I don't feel that I suffer from castration – I refuse it.

What have need, demand, and desire to do with all this and with sexual difference?

What does it mean to have and to be the phallus?

Why is having assigned to the male, being to the female? Can't it switch?

We struggled through the two last phases of the essay embodied in these two questions to engage with the formative and inevitable asymmetry that constitutes gender relations. It was when we reached an account of this asymmetry, someone (there is always a joker in the class) burst out –

This is like a comic strip. He says that there's a no win situation because each side of the couple wants to incite desire in the other (first frame). No one wants to betray need or appetite, no one wants to be the passive object of love, no one wants to be the recipient of love (second frame, stalemate). So, we divide up forms of possession of the phallus, which is both real and not real (third frame, here, not here, I go, I come back). For the guy, who *has* the phallus, he keeps the unreality of the phallus going to protect its unreality and to cover its castration (fourth frame, the emperor's new clothes). For the woman she is in deep trouble – she signifies the desire of the Other (which isn't "really" there anyway), reflecting his phallic power. But that phallic power is in fact lack. She wants, anyhow, to abandon the masquerade of being the phallus and to be loved for not having it (fifth frame, three ways of being not there). Last frame, there's nothing there. But all the same, it takes two phalluses to fandango.

Given this theater of the absurd, we tried to get away from Beckettian drama by going back to need, demand, and desire. Lacan's neat formulation seemed to make need, the concrete appetites, disappear into repression by being re-described as absolute demand for unconditional love, the wanting in excess of need. Desire, the residue of longing left over from the subtraction of need from desire, and the position from which *both* sides of the couple start. That is to say, phallic lack takes up its residence in desire. This seemed a valuable addition to the lexicon of analysis, a way of thinking through the vagaries of the conscious and unconscious. Though these seemed hitched to the phallus as it were, rather arbitrarily, in effect desire is a form of phallic lack.

But we reached a stalemate with this text. Its abstraction, its coercive detachment, were real problems. We tried to solve this by going back to Freud and seeing how Lacanian positions could be mapped on to Freud's Dora narrative. Lacan (1990), of course, wrote about this text. But we were less interested in his specific interpretation than in the ways this particular essay might illuminate Freud's text, or the ways we might contest his thinking, or indeed the ways it might alter his Lacan's own thinking. So we re-described Freud, and here are some observations:

What does Dora want?

So we don't need to see Freud as just the inexplicably all-powerful patriarchal father figure. He *has the phallus*. He is the signifier, the maker of meaning. It is he who understands the constitutive split of the unconscious when its language is betrayed. That means he is in charge of castration.

("He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. And thus the task of making conscious the most hidden recesses of the mind is one which it is quite possible to accomplish" [Freud 1953-74, 7:96].)

Dora's father thinks he has the phallus too, certain he knows that the encounter with Herr K was a fantasy. He wants Dora to desire him and to collude with him in his affair with Frau K. I guess his disavowal of the phallus – he lets it be known he is impotent – masks his libido, which again masks phallic absence?

Maybe the way to think about this is through the heavily populated scene of desire: everyone wants to be the cause of desire in others. They want to have the phallus while someone else *is* it, endorsing the person who has it and reflecting back their power. Or else they want to be the phallus while someone else has it. Freud wants Dora to accept his hysterical reading – she wants to kiss him, he suggests. Herr K wants Dora to want to kiss him. Dora's father wants her to want him (or at least his explanations and prevarications). Frau K wants Dora to want her. Frau K wants Dora's father to want her. Dora's father wants Frau K to want him. While Freud sees all desire as emanating from Dora, Lacanian theory would see Dora as the focus of the desire of the

Other. Trapped. She would be *in* a structure, not the center of a self-created network of relations.

Does this alter Freud? What does Dora want? Dora seems to opt out of the chain of desire. She displays an atavistic need for survival rather than the desire that is expected of her in Lacanian theory. A need for literalism – she confronts Herr K and Frau K with the truth of their betrayal of her as she sees it – and an archaic attachment to the mother, characterize her responses. Not allowed her phallic jewelry the mother is without, a person of lack. But, contra Lacan again, being without may grant a certain freedom even if it leads to privation.

And the dream?

Everything is on fire, yes, but the conflagration is the fire of desire, which has an equal importance with literal sexual activity.

The father's appearance is the appearance of the phallus, power, the man who has, but the man who is weak, impotent, he says.

Dora dresses herself hurriedly. Is she donning phallic being, the clothes of masquerade, under duress? Her being to his having? To prop him up?

The mother wants the phallus: she wants to go back for her jewel case, to preserve it.

But her preservation is the father's (and the children's) destruction. Hence the interdict. The mother must be in a state of desire in order to create the logic of lack that enables that essential having of the phallus.

("for each partner in the relation, the subject and the Other, it is not enough to be the subjects of need, nor objects of love, but they must stand as the cause of desire" [Lacan 1982, 81].)

Dora wants out from all of this, to regress to need, the mother. Forget about desire and demand.

But maybe she has lesbian desires?

But is she in mourning? Is she refusing masquerade for the death wish?

Must it all be lack, lack? Lack, Lacan, manqué.

What does a teacher want?

Some students become fascinated by the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. There is no need to argue with them, as happens sometimes, that it is important to teach psychoanalysis because it represents one of the new knowledges of the twentieth century, and that, along with Marxism, it is historically important as a mode of inquiry: that to explore this mode of inquiry in as much complexity as is possible is a pedagogical necessity. Such students become convinced of this without persuasion. But there will always be the student who cannot accept work on psychoanalysis: "To spend time reassessing the Oedipus complex may well be interesting but most women who are struggling, bored and dissatisfied with their lot could well see it as a debate doing nothing to help them ... there is a lot more practical work changing laws and conditions which may be more vital" (quoted in Armstrong 1989, 88).

I am not sure that there is anything to be said to such a student. If the course fails to engage curiosity and excitement one can only respect that, with disappointment. "What psychoanalysis can teach us is to substitute the art of listening for the seizure of meaning," Maud Ellmann (1984, 11) wrote in her *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*. With its attention to the subtleties of chains of signification, to condensation, to ambiguity and linguistic composites, to the functioning of metaphor and metonymy in the dream and in discourse, psychoanalysis is hyperconscious of those very elements of language that structure both speech and writing. This attention runs parallel to the attention of the literary critic. Indeed, on some occasions, as Ella Freeman Sharpe's (1950) systematic grammar of psychoanalysis suggests, textual analysis and psychoanalysis go hand in hand (see also Armstrong 2001). Freud was a brilliant textual critic, and thus his work can donate to the literary critic invaluable methodological practices. These generate meaning and material from a text's language. Attention to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) will elicit a range of interpretive practices, from parapraxes to the taxonomy of dreams, which invite the literary critic to develop them through linguistic and formal analysis. When students ask how they might "use" psychoanalysis, it is often apposite to appeal to these practices as hermeneutic tools that the student can employ, hermeneutic tools that are imaginatively liberating and productive. They are equally illuminating for readings of prose fiction and poetry.

But it is not quite enough to stop there. For to plunder a methodology from psychoanalysis without attending to its content speaks a formalism that circumvents the demands of psychoanalysis itself. For Freud as for Lacan, the unconscious speaks in language, and to proceed without recognizing this is to leave psychoanalysis behind.

What psychoanalytical material, then, would we seek to put before the student now? Ellmann's collection of essays amply demonstrates the richness and depth of psychoanalytic literary criticism. This is a collection of classic essays. The first group of essays remains with the Oedipal problem; others, such as Žižek's account of desire in film noir, revise Lacanian principles of masquerade and the negation of "the woman." Jacqueline Rose's virtuosic account of Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," feminine fantasy, fascism, mourning, and metaphoric language, is an exemplary discussion of identification and its complexity.

This collection terminates in the early 1990s, the era that accepted Lacan's dismissal of an "appeal to the concrete, which is so pathetically conveyed by the term 'affect'" (1982, 79) and did not challenge his contempt for what he termed "nurse-analysts" (1982, 81), the psychoanalysis of object relations that deals with children (though he had a great respect for Melanie Klein). But it is this material, the work derived from object relations, which has begun to emerge in accounts of literature and psychoanalysis. The scene of reading and teaching has changed. The syllabus I described had an almost theological aspect to it. The overwhelming move towards affect and the study of the history of the emotions has surged over the last decade, altering the axis of teaching and writing.

An example of this new direction is Nancy Yousef's prize-winning essay of 2010, "Romanticism, Psychoanalysis and the Interpretation of Silence." The phallus-centered work I once taught does not make an appearance here. Christopher Bollas, D.W. Winnicott, Michael Balint, and Masud M. Khan are the interlocutors in this essay. The emphasis is less on psychoanalytical explanation than on the total analytic relationship and its intersubjective complexity. In a note, Yousef quotes Jeanne Wolff Bernstein's recognition of a revisionary shift in psychoanalytic thinking as a "new royal road to the unconscious": "Attention to the analyst's affective responses is indicative of the radical transvaluation of countertransference in recent decades. The concept once used to name a failure of analytic technique and a breach of neutrality is now commonly viewed as a vital source of insight, a 'new royal road to the unconscious'" (2010, 671). Yousef builds this revaluation of the analyst's status from a figure of impersonality to an intersubjective

presence into her revaluation of a number of central Romantic poems, Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," and the narrative of the "Discharged Soldier" in Book IV of *The Prelude*. Such poems, frequently read as examples of Romantic solipsism, and carrying with this reading a political criticism of the isolated Romantic artist, are now explored in and through processes of intersubjective attunement. The subtle and constant rebalancing of the existential priorities and needs of the subject and its other (and here the other is the other side of the pair) enacted in these poems becomes the field of critical investigation. The phenomenology of meditation, generative silence, the solitude that takes place against a relational background, the necessary presence of the other as a container of the subject's reverie, the possibilities of a nurturing "spiritual idleness" (Yousef 2010, 658), all these belong to relational states for Yousef. She considers the ebb and flow of psychic responsiveness in "Frost at Midnight," as the poet researches into his own interiority to understand the figures of his past, the guardian presences he lacks, his own child and its intersubjective future: "The sense that self-involvement precludes, or seeks to evade engagement with communal or civic life only duplicates the rigid opposition between solitude and sociality that a poem such as 'Frost at Midnight' interrogates" (2010, 657). Encounters with the self, she argues, are the ground of politics. She stresses that Romantic poems are not concerned with an easy response to what Christopher Bollas (1987, 13–29) has called the "transformational object" (that which transforms selfhood), and traces the psychic hesitations, disturbances, and failures of intersubjective exchanges, such as she finds in the "Discharged Soldier" narrative in *The Prelude*.

This essay offers a wholly new way of thinking about psychoanalysis and the text. It is over-simplifying to say that this form of criticism represents a move from the phallus to the breast, from the father to the mother, from structure to nurture, but certainly Winnicott's "good enough mother," Christopher Bollas' aesthetic of mothering, and, more distantly, Wilfred Bion's account of the breast as the ground of knowledge, as well as the work of Melanie Klein on the mother's body, constitute a tradition that stands behind this essay.

What would a psychoanalytical syllabus for literary students look like today? There are two ways of looking at this. One way is to compile a course that responds to these newly introduced texts. I don't think it is necessary to set up a conflict between earlier "phallic" texts and this new material. It does suggest, however, a reconfiguring of the content of our teaching. The second way is not to create a distinctively

psychoanalytical syllabus at all, but to study literary texts alongside a range of critical and historical materials that includes a psychoanalytic perspective.

What does the student want? A syllabus?

Here is a possible revisionary syllabus that attends to the new directions that Yousef's essay signals.

One would surely begin with Freud's foundational *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* of 1905. Jean Laplanche's gloss on this text, the first chapter in his 1970 *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, "The Order of Life and the Genesis of Sexuality," which attends to "the extraordinary broadening of the notion of sexuality occasioned by psychoanalysis" (1985, 25), could be read side by side with Freud. Laplanche's emphasis on "*maternal fantasies*" (1985, 24) that are tied to sexual excitation associated with a new internal entity would be a good way of modifying father-related texts. It would be a bridge to Lacan's work, which I would decisively want to retain. He is a canonical figure. "The Meaning of the Phallus" is so central to his work and to the linguistic turn of psychoanalysis that it is still crucially important reading. However, it is important to include work by the "nurse analysts" he speaks of. Melanie Klein is the analyst he most respects here, and chapters from *Love, Guilt and Reparation* would be an appropriate transition, possibly "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict" (1988, 186–98). The essay challenges Freud's dating of the Oedipus complex and locates it at an early stage in the child's development, but it is less a quibble about dates than an exploration of the importance of "*not knowing*" (1988, 188), or epistemophilia, to the child, adding a whole new category to the Freudian model. A move to Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, and the chapter "Something To Be Scared Of" also reveals connections between knowing and language, but in the context of the phobic object and "the instability of object relation" (1982, 32–55). Kristeva moves into the sphere of object relations here, but sees them as inevitably pathologized, a "horror of being" that is the other side of the religious, moral, and ideological codes that ordain the social order.

Here we need to loop back to earlier work on object relations, that of Wilfred Bion, D.W. Winnicott, and their contemporary follower, Christopher Bollas. All psychoanalytical readings involve a two-sided relationship, but for this group the relational element in identity formation and the maternal holding capacity is paramount. Bion has

described the principal addition to psychoanalytic theory on which this work is founded: describing “projective identification” he says:

I don't think there is much to be said beyond Melanie Klein's version – what she called an omnipotent phantasy; a phantasy that a person can split off feelings, thoughts and ideas he does not want and evacuate them into another person, more particularly into the mother, and more particularly still at a primitive state of existence, namely, at the breast itself. Of course the infant doesn't *do* anything; nothing happens. But the infant *feels* as if he could do that, and *feels* that it gets rid of some characteristic which it doesn't like and then becomes afraid that that same characteristic is directed towards it by the other person – originally by the mother, or by the breast into which it projects it. The theory was not intended as a substitute for already existing psycho-analytic theories, but as an addition to them.

(Bion 1978, 1)

Bion describes an addition to psychoanalytical thinking – the mother for the father, the breast for the phallus, and, instead of *desire*, the paramount emotion is *fear*: fear of the avenging other, fear of not knowing, fear of the void. The corollary of this is that there is an intense emphasis on what will assuage fear. Consequently, the potency of the earliest mothering, and the arousal and satisfaction of epistemophilia, receive an attention not present in the earliest psychoanalytical thought. Here I would offer the student chapters of Winnicott's *Playing and Reality*, concerned as it is with both nurturing and the “transitional object,” that protean entity of early life that is neither subject nor object, a piece of blanket or a toy, for instance, that for the child negotiates the space between itself and the world, the relationship with the mother and externality (Winnicott 1971, 118). Several of Bion's essays in *Second Thoughts*, notably “A Theory of Thinking” (1984, 93–109) and “Attacks on Linking” (1984, 110–19), explore fear and thought, and the importance of the breast in precipitating thought. Finally, the opening chapters of Christopher Bollas' *The Shadow of the Object*, with their emphasis on the mother's aesthetic of care and the search for a “transformational object,” that which will alter the imagination, would bring this syllabus up to the present.

It would be appropriate to include some case histories: Klein's “The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego” (1988, 219–32), largely a case history of a child analysis, and parts of Marion Milner's account of an analysis of a schizophrenic woman, *The Hands of the Living God: An Account of Psycho-Analytic Treatment* (1988 [1969]). These could be set against Freud's Dora.

There are two problems with this syllabus. Though it traces the contours of object relations, it is in some ways even more abstract than the course I began by describing. Bion's sense, in the epigraph to this essay, that no theory will attract him unless it reminds him of the real life he lives, might well be shared by student readers of this syllabus. The way these theories might enter into literary analysis is not immediately evident. Yousef's originality in seizing on the possibilities of the dyad of analyst and analysand is one way of responding to this work. But the texts I mention cannot be explored in the same way as the earlier syllabus allowed, as in Ellmann's volume, which is in many ways the culminating example of the phallic tradition of literary criticism. Thus in the last part of this essay I move to an alternative way of teaching psychoanalysis.

What do students want? Unsystematic perspectives?

This second method intersperses the students' core texts and the works of criticism associated with them with any psychoanalytic text that seems relevant to these texts. It does not presuppose previous knowledge of psychoanalytic texts and methodologies but assumes that the single text enables a grasp of structure and method that is sufficiently powerful. I give three examples of this practice. Two are autobiographical, one is a wish.

The first was a supervision of an MA essay on a one-to-one basis. The student was writing an essay on dolls and toys in the nineteenth century. She was beginning with Jane's doll in *Jane Eyre*, and continuing with the Doll's Dressmaker in *Our Mutual Friend*, but she found it difficult to generate material and was falling into a simple descriptive account of what was going on. She had discovered historical material on dolls, but nothing was emerging for her. I was puzzled for a bit, but then remembered Luce Irigaray's (1989) essay, “The Gesture in Psychoanalysis.” This girl had never read any psychoanalytic text. She would not have grasped many of the references, particularly to Dora and to Schreber at the end of the discussion. But she did learn some of the essentials of analysis through the essay itself. I pointed her specifically to the passage on the doll (1989, 132–35). There Irigaray offers a non phallic alternative to the representation of loss in the little boy, Ernst's, fort-da game. She argues that “In the absence of her mother, a girl's gestures are not the same. She does not play with a string and a reel symbolizing her mother, for her mother's sex is the same as hers

and the mother cannot have the objective status of a reel. The mother's identity as a subject is the same as hers" (1989, 132). The mother cannot be externalized in a symbol whose very function as a symbol represents separation because mother and girl are in identity with one another: instead the girl child's response to maternal deprivation is, firstly, utter loss, and loss of the will to live – "she neither speaks nor eats." Then she invents through the doll not a fully objectified entity, not a split-off symbol, but a form of "quasi-subject" (1989, 132; my emphasis). The doll is a form of herself and the mother fused, because they occupy the same subject position. The negotiation of absence is created through *space* rather than through the object. In order to organize a "symbolic space" (1989, 132), the girl uses her own body as the symbol of absence, dancing, opening herself to "cosmic space," creating relational "territory" that organizes the gap between herself and the lost mother. Indeed space is crucial to Irigaray's reading. The girl thinks through her loss territorially, inscribing herself within a circle, setting spatial boundaries and limits to her identity.

The mother can never be replaced by a symbol. "Human beings must love something," Jane, the narrator of the novel, says of her doll, a doll she nurses by the fire and takes to bed – "I could not sleep unless it was folded in my night-gown" (Brontë 2006, 35). This doll, "a faded graven image," lay "safe and warm" in the child's night clothes. There was enough in these brief paragraphs for my student to mine despite her lack of a context in psychoanalytical thinking. She experimented with seeing the doll as a "quasi-subject" rather than an object, an analogue of Jane herself, who comes into being here as a mother, belonging to the same subject position as the mother, and mothering herself, even giving birth to herself, a re-birth into warmth – "folded in my night-gown." This is neither an anthropomorphic projection nor a retreat to the womb, but a more powerful and troubled attempt to re-create the self from loss. Jane's subdued movements, certainly not dancing, from stair-head to nursery, a sort of ritual boundary-making, also came to be seen as part of a total situation of mourning, situating the doll in a ceremony of loss. That Jane lacks the vitality ascribed to the gestures of the mourning girl by Irigaray led to an understanding of the depths of psychic illness Jane is threatened with and indeed suffers. Her attempts at symbol-making through the doll are attempts to integrate herself, a strategy we see throughout the novel.

A grasp of one element of Irigaray's work led to further understanding of others. The lack of context did not seem to matter here. What my student did was to infer and make connections through close

reading of the psychoanalytical text and the novel. But to do this she had to understand phallic theories of gender and their contestation.

The second case of psychoanalytical reading took place as a class epiphany, in a graduate class in the United States, which was struggling to read Tennyson's *Maud* (1855). The course was on nineteenth-century poetry and the emotions, "Victorian Lyric Poetry and the Passions." We began by reading poems against nineteenth-century psychological and medical texts, followed by Stanley Cavell's (2005, 155–91) reading and critique of Austin's "perlocutionary" category of emotion. Thereafter each session was arranged round a cluster of poems constellated with a range of prose texts, nineteenth-century and modern – philosophical, psychological, historical, medical, psychoanalytical. The aim was to give the students multiple methodologies and languages for thinking about emotions. There were two consecutive sessions that included *Maud* and other poems. The first session included, as constellated prose texts among others, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), Benjamin Richardson's *Diseases of Modern Life* (1876), passages from the work of Maudsley, and Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" essay. The second session included, among other texts, Thomas J. Graham's *On the Diseases of Females* (1871) and Freud's "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896; 1953–74, 3:186–221).

In the second session, we were getting nowhere, puzzling over the violence of the disorganized, paratactic logic of the first poem in *Maud*, and speculating on the strange hallucinatory nature of Section VII, in which the hero thinks he remembers the two fathers, Maud's and his own, arranging a marriage between himself and the yet unborn child – "Well, if it prove a girl ..." (Tennyson 1988, l. 291). Then one of the students suddenly referred to two points in Freud's hysteria essay: "Whatever the case and whatever symptom we take as our point of departure, *in the end we infallibly come to the field of sexual experience*" (1953–74, 3:199); "children cannot find their way to acts of sexual aggression unless they have been seduced previously. The foundation for a neurosis would accordingly always be laid in childhood by adults, and the children themselves would transfer to one another the disposition to fall ill of hysteria later" (1953–74, 3:208). What would happen if we posited that the "hero" of *Maud* had been abused by his father? This essay was written before the literal seduction of the child was called into question (later by Freud himself), but I do not think this mattered for our subsequent discussion. We had agreed in a general way that the speaker was hysterical. But this prompt from Freud enabled us to read the poem, not as a desperate *expression* of hysteria,

but as a poem *about* a person driven to illness and suffering by an early trauma, with consequences for his whole way of experiencing the world and his language for it. I stress that this was not a narrative release so much as an analytical liberation. Reading the poem as an expressive text meant that we were locked into the violence of the speaker's mental life and could only re-describe it. Reading the poem through the analytical prompt meant that we could read it over and above the speaker's anguish through Freud's two metaphors of discovery, the archeological uncovering of buried remains, and the pursuit of chains of "associatively connected" memories (1953-74, 3:198).

Freud's prompt suggested an adult seducer: the father, or fathers, of the speaker and of Maud. We began to read the erotic implications of line 71 of the first poem – "Maud with her sweet purse-mouth when my father dangled the grapes." Maud's mouth took us back to the "lips" of the "dreadful hollow" in the very first stanza, where "blood" moves from metaphor – the "blood-red heath" (l. 2), to the literal – "a silent horror of blood" (l. 3). The lips recur in the final stanza – "Or an underlip, you may call it a little too ripe, too full" (l. 85). Perverse orifices or hollows recur: the "old man" who ruined the speaker's father "Dropt off gorged from a scheme that has left us flaccid and drained" (l. 20); "Pickpockets, each hand lusting for all that is not its own" (l. 22), endorse the erotics of illicit theft from a pocket, a longstanding sexual innuendo; "centre-bits," robbers' tools for making holes, "Grind on the wakeful ear in the hush of the moonless nights" (l. 42), another erotic allusion; "Must I too creep to the hollow ..." (l. 53). These are predominantly vaginal images, but in this analysis we did not make the obvious symbolic equations because these images are assigned both feminine and masculine significations: the speaker is hyperconscious of the blurring of gender markers when, dangerously, gender markers disappear – "When the poor are hovelled and hustled together, each sex, like swine" (l. 33). It's as if his reading of sexuality is polymorphous, as if abuse has rendered him feminine as well as masculine. And this hystericizing of sexuality has its repercussions in his account of class and class oppression.

Section VII, an enigmatic four-stanza poem where the two fathers speak of a possible marriage even before Maud's birth, overheard, or possibly fantasized by the speaker, is a magnificent evocation of uncertain traumatic memory, the tricks the unconscious can play. Did he just dream the episode a moment ago, or was it a long-ago occurrence? Did he confect the memory from the oriental fiction of the *Arabian Nights*? The boy child would be 6 or 7, the Oedipal moment, at this time.

(The narrator is 25 to Maud's 17, eight years older than she, but we must remember the agreement is prior to her birth.) What is fascinating about this poem is the conjuring of mnemonic uncertainty. It may even be that the poem represents a screen memory overlaying a more disturbing episode of abuse. The two fathers agree to bind him, after all. Again, the literal occurrence of these events is not the objective here, but a structural understanding of the poem and its language. What emerges is first of all a series of deranged images whose logic is only available when their origin in traumatic memory is disclosed, and secondly, a disintegrated syntax that breaks rather than makes connections, as if the narrator's linguistic coherence has been radically impaired. The need to image social violence through the taking in of dangerous substances – vitriol, alum, poison, in stanzas X and XI – is an example of the first form of distortion, where these murderous stimulants suggest what Freud, in "The Aetiology of Hysteria," terms, in his eloquent criticism of abuse, a "premature" arousal, at the "mercy" of an "arbitrary will." Arbitrariness, indeed, characterizes the second form of incoherence. The narrator strings together chains of events and arguments through the dominant paratactic connective, "And," as if they are causal when in fact the connections are the result of a kind of persecutory associationism. To return to stanza X, the connection between the "vitriol" madness of domestic violence and the preceding stanza IX, is not logical, but based on the intoxicant affinities of adulterated wine and vitriol. "Peace in her vineyard – yes! – but a company forges the wine." Adulterated wine calls forth the verb, "forges." The narrator's world is predicated on being cheated, deprived, with a corresponding social critique that becomes a projection of his own fears and fantasy.

We did not read any of the work of Bion in this class, but had we done so we might have described this rhetoric as an attack on linking, that destructive process whereby there is nowhere to put hatred, no symbolic form in which it can be projected and investigated: "Feelings of hatred are thereupon directed against all emotions including hate itself, and against external reality which stimulates them" (1984, 107). The speaker of *Maud* uses words like missiles, split off parts of himself that attack a feared attacker.

It is with Bion that my final example is concerned, a single line of poetry drawn from the ending of Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855): "Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set / And blew. 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came'" (2007, l. 204). The metrical pattern of the final line is disrupted by the huge caesura following

"And blew." All that follows is simply the title of the poem itself. Everyone speculates about the ending of *Childe Roland* and its "meaning." Students rightly ponder the endless hermeneutic possibilities of this last line and what its phallic act of desperation signifies. Here psychoanalysis can help us not simply with content but with form. In a hypothetical teaching situation I would want to concentrate on the function of this massive pause. "There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth allows us to believe," Bion (1977, 37) wrote, in his paper *Caesura*, following Freud's image of the caesura of birth. Interestingly, psychoanalysis borrows from poetics with a technical term. Can poetics borrow from psychoanalysis? In other work – I would want students to read *Four Discussions with W.R. Bion* (1978) as a comparatively contained way of coming at the nature of his thinking – Bion saw the function of the pause or the gap as a kind of hole that resists meaning. It is a generative space or void but our impulse, so strong is our dislike of the gap, is to fill it with "bogus ideas, paramnesias" (1978, 39). The "itch of the patient to fill the gap" (1978, 22) is comparable to the "itch" for closing down critical interpretation.

How could we think of the caesura in Browning's poem? For Lacan the move would be to the "unconscious," "that chapter in my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood" (1977, 50). In an impressive recent reading, Cornelia Pearsall (2012) has interpreted the poem through trauma, noting the heavy ictus on "blew," with its resonance as a "blow." The verb has a double resonance as expiration, and a wound. One could read the caesura as a wound in the text, or a death, as the breath literally expires after the verb. This break or severance might have many possibilities. But here it seems like a break in the self's history of the self. It is a pause after which the poem re-inscribes its own title in italic, in a new form. This is a return to the point of no return, as John Ashbery wrote in "Wet Casements." The chasm in the text suggests that the "new" poem, *Childe Roland* in italics, begins again after the break, as in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, and concurrently interpretation begins again. The gap here is a seismic epistemophilic gap, the blank that both excites and destroys curiosity. Perhaps the gap here signifies that pause in which the poem's totality needs to "seep," as Bion put it, "from conscious rational levels to other levels of mind" (1978, 34), there to be creatively assimilated in the deepest ways. Alternatively, perhaps the pause after the blowing of the horn (which can enunciate nothing in language, can only make sound) registers psychic damage, what Bion describes as "a revival of thalamic fear – the fear which is so

powerful that it makes thinking impossible" (1978, 45). This is a fear that has been building throughout the poem. No caesura is alike. Each pause will create different possibilities in different poems – every pause is unique.

The deep structures explored in psychoanalysis become ways of opening up thinking. In this essay I have asked, in the context of teaching, what Freud, Lacan, and Freud's *Dora* want. I have asked what the teacher and what the student want of psychoanalysis. On balance I prefer the third way of teaching, the use of a constellation of theoretical texts round a core literary text. It is a method that relies on serendipity, but the insights are often dramatic. We know of course that the epiphanies and inspirations of teaching are always unpredictable. But they will never come about unless the students feel that psychoanalysis reminds them, in Bion's words, of "real life."

Notes

- 1 Of the large volume of criticism on *Dora*, the most useful were McCaffrey (1984), Bernheimer and Kehane (1990), and Lakoff and Coyne (1993).
- 2 These phases are: rehearsal of the determining structure of castration for male and female subjects and the problematic nature of the phallic phase for women (Lacan 1982, 75–77); the phallus as primordial signifier on analogy with language, and the signifier/signified split that entails the "passion" of division and the repression undergone in the conscious/ unconscious split (78–79); the consequent "speaking" of the signifier in the unconscious (the Other) and the formative structure of need, demand, and desire that ensures there is always a residue of desire and lack in both male and female (i.e. this follows the patterns of castration) (79–81); the need to veil lack (82–83); sexual difference organized round having (male) and being (female) the phallus (83–85).

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