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# Psychoanalysis and Storytelling

Peter Brooks

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## Changes in the Margins: Construction, Transference, and Narrative

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Stanley Fish has repeatedly mounted a strong argument that there are no grounds for interpretation that are not themselves the product of other acts of interpretation. Since there are no independent grounds of interpretation, there is no escape from rhetoric, meaning the discourse of persuasion, whose norms and constraints are set by the given community of interpreters. In an essay of his *Doing What Comes Naturally* entitled "Withholding the Missing Portion: Psychoanalysis and Rhetoric," Fish takes on that most interpreted and reinterpreted of Freud's texts, the case history of the "Wolf Man," arguing that Freud is simply engaged in a rhetorical power play, beating his patient, and his reader, into submission. Fish claims that Freud's elaborate construction of the Wolf Man's "primal scene" – the witnessing of his parents' copulation – is really "about" the "discursive power of which and by which it has been constructed."<sup>1</sup> That is, the unfolding of the Wolf Man's story really mimics Freud's own persuasive rhetoric. Freud finds what he needs, and orders it in dramatic fashion, in a narrative that has no basis other than its need to persuade.

In the course of the essay, Fish attacks my own reading of "The Wolf Man," in *Reading for the Plot* – where I found a kind of heroic honesty in Freud's exposure of his

doubts about the reality of the primal scene – as a mistaken attempt to make Freud's text more "open," more "modernist," whereas he insists that it is a closed and totalitarian rhetorical performance. I don't want to defend my reading of "The Wolf Man" here. But Fish's essay does provide an opportunity to rethink Freud's narrative rhetoric. Essentially, Fish renews a traditional line of attack on psychoanalysis that claims that what the analyst finds is what he creates, that analytic interpretation is really "suggestion," and that the unfolding of the solution to the Wolf Man's case merely mirrors Freud's persuasive manipulation of the reader. I want to address these questions, not by way of the Wolf Man, and not so much directly, as by an argument concerning the grounds of narrative as a form of explanation and understanding, and Freud's specific contribution to our conception of narrative.

There appears at present to be increasing agreement, even among psychoanalysts themselves, that psychoanalysis is a narrative discipline.<sup>2</sup> As such, it at least implicitly displays the principles of its own "narratology." First of all, the psychoanalyst is ever concerned with the stories told by his patients, who are patients precisely because of the weakness of the narrative discourses that they present: the incoherence, inconsistency, and lack of explanatory force in the way they tell their lives. The narrative account given by the patient is riddled with gaps, with memory lapses, with inexplicable contradictions in chronology, with screen memories concealing repressed material. Its narrative syntax is faulty and its rhetoric unconvincing. It follows that the work of the analyst must in large measure be a recomposition of the narrative discourse to give a better representation of the patient's story, to reorder its events, to foreground its dominant themes, to understand the force of desire that speaks in and through it. Finally, the kind of explanation in which psychoanalysis deals is inherently narrative,

claiming an enhanced understanding of the present – and even a change in it – through histories of the past that have been blocked from consciousness. As the historian Carlo Ginzburg has elegantly demonstrated, psychoanalytic explanation belongs to a long tradition of narrative understanding that may reach back to the lore of the huntsman, who deciphers and follows traces left by his quarry – hoofprints, droppings, bent twigs and the like – along a path that should lead to his goal: a form of narrative explanation given its most obvious modern realization in the classic detective story.<sup>3</sup>

Freud gives the psychoanalytic problem of narrative an extended discussion in his first book-length case history, the “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905), better known by the name of its subject, “Dora.” He begins a treatment, Freud notes, by asking the patient for “the whole story of his life and illness,” but that is never what he receives. On the contrary: “This first account may be compared to an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost among shallows and sandbanks.” Freud continues in description of the patient’s narrative: “The connections – even the ostensible ones – are for the most part incoherent, and the sequence of different events is uncertain. . . . The patients’ inability to give an ordered history of their life in so far as it coincides with the history of their illness is not merely characteristic of the neurosis. It also possesses great theoretical significance.” After explaining that amnesias and paramnesias in the narrative serve the needs of repression, Freud concludes his preliminary discussion: “In the further course of the treatment the patient supplies the facts which, though he had known them all along, had been kept back by him or had not occurred to his mind. The paramnesias prove untenable, and the gaps in his memory are filled in. It is only toward the end of the

treatment that we have before us an intelligible, consistent, and unbroken case history.”<sup>4</sup>

*Mens sana in fabula sana*: mental health is a coherent life story, neurosis is a faulty narrative. Such a premise closely resembles that of the detective story, which equates the incomplete, incoherent, baffling story with crime, whereas detection is the making of an intelligible, consistent, and unbroken narrative. “Thus have you reasoned it all out beautifully in one long chain!” Watson exclaims to Sherlock Holmes, quite typically, at the end of one of their cases. The narrative chain, with each event connected to the next by reasoned causal links, marks the victory of reason over chaos, of society over the aberrancy of crime, and restitutes a world in which aetiological histories offer the best solution to the apparently unexplainable. We know that Freud was a student of Sherlock Holmes who perceived the close analogies between psychoanalysis and detective work.<sup>5</sup> It is not surprising that his earliest case histories, those of the *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), closely resemble the adventures of the London detective. In these early versions of “the talking cure,” Freud at least implicitly claims that moving back from present symptoms, and the incoherent narrative offered in explanation of them, to the traumatic events and their subsequent revival in the patient’s life, then the linking of events in an uninterrupted causal series, provides a narrative that is itself curative.

But Freud’s understanding and practice of narrative would soon become much less straightforward, much more difficult and complex. The constitution of a present narrative in relation to the story of the past in Freud’s practice becomes more complex and uncertain, the notion of causality more problematic; chronology itself is put into question by the workings of deferred action and retroaction; the part played by event and by phantasm becomes more difficult to unravel. What in particular makes the relation of narrative to the story of the past

more problematic – hence more interesting for the nar-  
ratologist – is Freud’s progressive discovery of the trans-  
ference, which brings into play the dynamic interaction  
of the teller and listener of and to stories, the dialogic  
relation of narrative production and interpretation.

“Dora” is in fact the key text of transition in Freud’s  
understanding of narrative. “Dora” is the case history of  
an aborted analysis, and it reads as a kind of failed  
Edwardian novel, one that can never reach a satisfactory  
dénouement, and that can never quite decide what the  
relations among its cast of characters truly are: as if  
Freud were one of Henry James’s baffled yet inventive  
narrators (as, for instance, in *The Sacred Fount*), but one  
who must finally give it all up as a bad business. What  
comes to complicate Freud’s relation with his patient  
Dora, and thus also the case history he writes, is the  
workings of the transference, and Freud’s discovery in  
the course of the analysis – but too late – that the relation  
of teller to listener is as important as the content and  
structure of the tale itself. Or rather: that the relation of  
teller to listener inherently is part of the structure and the  
meaning of any narrative text, since such a text (like any  
text) exists only insofar as it is transmitted, insofar as it  
becomes part of a process of exchange. Following the  
failure in the case of Dora, any narrative account will  
have to give a place to the transference, factor it in as part  
of the narrative situation.

As the discovery of the transference would complicate  
Freud’s conception of narrative, so should it help us  
complicate, and refine, versions of narrative analysis that  
do not take account of the relations of tellers and lis-  
teners. It is my premise that most narratives speak of  
their transference condition – of their anxiety concern-  
ing their transmissibility, of their need to be heard, of  
their desire to become the story of the listener as much  
as of the teller, something that is most evident in “framed  
tales” (such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) which embed

another tale within them, and thus dramatize the rela-  
tions of tellers and listeners. Narrative is always implicit-  
ly and often explicitly concerned with its channels of  
communication, with what Roman Jakobson calls the  
“phatic” function of language, its use to verify that the  
circuits are open, as when we say on the telephone, “Can  
you hear me?” Roland Barthes stresses that narrative is  
always contractual, based upon an implicit or explicit  
promise of exchange between teller and listener.<sup>6</sup> But the  
model of contract is not entirely adequate. For what is at  
stake is not only a relation of contract and obligation, but  
as well the movement of something through the com-  
municative chain, an act of transmission and reception.  
Something is being transmitted or transferred from the  
teller and is told to the listener, and to listening: it has  
entered into the realm of interpretation. And if the story  
told has been effective, if it has “taken hold,” the act of  
transmission resembles the psychoanalytic transference,  
where the listener enters the story as an active participant  
in the creation of design and meaning, and the reader is  
then called upon himself to enter this transference space.  
It is here, I want to argue, that attention to Freud’s discus-  
sions of the transference can help us to understand what  
is at stake in narrative telling.

#### “Constructions in Analysis”

The most interesting text for our discussion is the late  
essay of Freud’s called “Constructions in Analysis”  
(1937), an essay in which Freud rethinks the practice of  
psychoanalytic narrative explanation. The essay displays  
to a high degree Freud’s awareness of the rhetoric of  
psychoanalytic explanation. Indeed, in his opening para-  
graph, he notes that psychoanalysis has been accused of  
operating on “the famous principle of ‘Heads I win, tails  
you lose’ ” (*SE* 23: 257) – the accusation renewed by

Fish, apparently without any awareness of Freud's explicit awareness of the problem. Freud concedes the apparent pertinence of the accusation, since "yes" and "no" are treated by psychoanalysis in a peculiar manner – often as equivalent – in relation to the confirmation or disconfirmation of interpretations. Freud thus sets out to "give a detailed account of how we are accustomed to arrive at an assessment of the 'Yes' or 'No' of our patients during analytic treatment – of their expression of agreement or of denial." The essay, then, concerns interpretation, persuasion, and re-formation of the patient's life story in the transference space between analysand and analyst. In looking at it, I hope to gain some insight into the nature of psychoanalytic narrative explanation, and also to suggest how such explanation may offer a useful analogue to the critic concerned with literary narratives.

Like the contemporary essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), "Constructions in Analysis" represents a culmination of Freud's developing ideas on the transference. Many of the key concepts are expressed in two earlier pieces, "The Dynamics of the Transference" (1912) and "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" (1914). Here, Freud presents a view of the transference as a special space created between the analysand and the analyst, one where the analysand's past affective life is reinvested in the dynamics of the interaction with the analyst. Freud in the latter essay writes:

The transference thus creates an intermediate region [*Zwischenreich*] between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made. The new condition has taken over all the features of the illness; but it represents an artificial illness which is at every point accessible to our intervention. It is a piece of real experience, but one that has been made possible by especially favourable conditions, and it is of a provisional nature. (*SE*, 12: 154)

In other words, the transference is the realm of the "as-if," one in which the history of the past, its *dramatis personae* and emotional conflicts, becomes invested in a special kind of present, one that favors representation and symbolic replay of the past, and that should lend itself to its eventual revision through the listener's "interventions." Within the transference, recall of the past most often takes the form of its unconscious repetition, acting it out as if it were present: repetition is a way of remembering brought into play when recollection in the intellectual sense is blocked by repression and resistance. Repetition is both an obstacle to analysis – since the analysand must eventually be led to renunciation of the attempt to reproduce the past – and the principal dynamic of the cure, since only by way of its symbolic enactment in the present can the history of past desire, its objects and scenarios of fulfillment, be made known, become manifest in the present discourse. The analyst must treat the analysand's words and symbolic acts as an actual force, active in the present, while attempting to translate them back into the terms of the past. He must help the analysand construct a more coherent, connected, and forceful narrative discourse, one whose syntax and rhetoric are more convincing, more adequate to give an interpretive account of the story of the past than those that are originally presented, in symptomatic form, by the analysand.

Our sense that the transference, as a special "artificial" space for the reworking of the past in symbolic form, may speak to the nature of a narrative text between narrator and narratee – and eventually between authorship and readership – receives confirmation when Freud, in his discussion of what he failed to notice in time in the case of "Dora," calls transferences "new impressions or reprints" and "revised editions" of earlier texts (*SE* 7: 116). The transference is textual because it presents the past in symbolic form, in signs, thus as something that is "really"

absent but textually present, and which, furthermore, must be shaped by the work of interpretation carried on by both teller and listener. As Jacques Lacan has insisted, the analyst by his mere presence – prior to any interpretive intervention he may make – brings to the analysand's discourse “the dimension of dialogue.”<sup>7</sup> That is, if the transference necessarily elicits interpretation, it is equally true that the potential and the promise of interpretation, on the part of “the subject supposed to know” – the analyst – triggers the transference relation: the analysand's entry into the special semiotic and interpretive space of transference (which, I should add, very much includes the countertransference).

It is in “Constructions in Analysis” that Freud most explicitly addresses the distinct yet interactive roles played by analysand and analyst in the recovery of the story of the past in a present narrative. He makes clear early in the essay that his narrative ideal remains faithful to his earlier premises: “What we are in search of,” he writes, “is a picture of the patient's forgotten years that shall be alike trustworthy and in all essential respects complete” (*SE* 23: 258). But he at once complicates the nature of this search by noting that the work of analysis “involves two people, to each of whom a distinct task is assigned” – the analyst and the analysand. Since the analyst has neither experienced nor repressed any of the story under consideration, his task cannot be to remember anything. “What then is his task?” asks Freud, to answer: “His task is to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind or, more correctly, to *construct* it” (258–9). At this point, “construction” is glossed as “reconstruction,” but the latter term will quietly disappear from the essay. Construction/reconstruction is likened to the work of the archeologist – in one of Freud's favorite and recurring analogies – since both archeologist and psychoanalyst “have an indisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combin-

ing the surviving remains”: a remark we may already find suggestive of the relation between interpretive narrative discourse and the story it attempts to reconstitute. But there are differences, since in the case of psychoanalysis one can claim that every essential of the past has been preserved, “even things that seem completely forgotten are present somehow and somewhere, and have merely been buried and made inaccessible to the subject” (260). Indeed, what the psychoanalyst is dealing with “is not something destroyed but something that is still alive,” since, as we know, his material consists in large part in “the repetitions of reactions dating from infancy and all that is indicated by the transference in connection with these repetitions” (259). That is, the “text” presented by the analysand contains in raw form everything that will be needed for its interpretive construction, a premise familiar to the literary interpreter as well.

As Freud's essay proceeds, “construction” becomes a radical activity. Consider his comment that “the time and manner in which [the analyst] conveys his constructions to the person being analyzed, as well as the explanations with which he accompanies them, constitute the link [*Verbindung*] between the two portions of the work of analysis, between his own part and that of the patient” (259). If this “link” still bears some resemblance to the Sherlock Holmesian chain of events, emphasis now has shifted from the chain itself – the coherent, ordered chronological story – to the way in which narrative discourse orders story – that is, the link between telling (including listening) and told. Narrative discourse takes shape between story (that which it claims to retrieve and to represent) and narrating (the telling that is productive of narrative discourse). The coherently shaped narrative places us, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, “at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, for Ricoeur as for Freud, the narrative is not simply “there,” waiting to be uncovered or disclosed. On the contrary,

narrative comes into being only through the work of interpretive discourse on story, seen as the raw material – what Freud in this essay calls *Rohstoff* – which becomes coherent and explanatory only as the narrating orders it in discourse. If we wanted to pursue the Sherlock Holmes analogy, we would have to look to those moments where the detective conveys to the criminal a hypothetic construction of events, to receive confirmation in the form of confession or self-betrayal. Yet we shall see in a moment that the confirmation of constructions in analysis entails a more complex narrative model.

The “link” of narrative discourse to story events in analysis is itself far from simple, since it does not take place at once, in a single uninterrupted operation. It works intermittently, interruptedly, in a dialogic manner. “The analyst,” writes Freud, “finishes a piece of construction and communicates it to the subject of analysis so that it may work on him; he then constructs a further piece out of the fresh material pouring in on him, deals with it in the same way and proceeds in this alternating fashion until the end” (260–1). In such alternating, reciprocal work – *Abwechslung* – the analyst is always in the process of constructing narrative, forming hypotheses of interpretation and meaning, in the manner, indeed, of any listener to a story, or any reader with a text. Such an active, “constructivist” role for the analyst of course raises the possibility of “suggestion,” of the imposition of false constructions on the analysand. What confirms that the analyst’s constructions are correct? It is a well-known psychoanalytic dictum that the patient’s “no” is unacceptable at face value, since it may likely be the denegation of “yes,” the product of resistance. But “yes” itself has no value, says Freud, “unless it is followed by indirect confirmations, unless the patient, immediately after his ‘Yes,’ produces new memories which complete and extend the construction” (262). Evidently the only confirmation one can have that the narrative has been cor-

rectly constructed and construed lies in the *production of more story*. As readers, for instance, we know that our hypotheses of construal are strong and valuable when they produce in the text previously unperceived networks of relation and significance, finding confirmation in the extension of the narrative web. The process of listening to a story or reading a text is essentially constructive, a filling-in of gaps, a building of fragments into a coherent whole: a conquest of the non-narrative by the narrative, of non-sense by the semantic. And the measure of success in the constructive process is not so much in any assent that the text may give: a simple “yes” is of limited value unless it leads to a further opening up of the text, unless our constructions create further patterns of interconnectedness and meaning. And conversely, the “no” – Freud goes on to argue – may sometimes be read as an indication of incompleteness, a refusal to assent to a narrative construction that has not yet taken account of all the necessary story elements.

The view of narrative construction that appears to emerge from the model of psychoanalytic construction gives a large part to the role of the listener or narratee as dialogist in the creation of narrative and its meaning. As in most dialogues, the relation of teller and listener is simultaneously one of collaboration and struggle: collaboration toward the creation of the coherent and explanatory text, yet struggle over its interpretation and indeed over its very constitution, the elements of which it is made, their ordering, their shape. All of Freud’s writings on the transference portray it as a realm and process of contest, over the lifting of repression and the mastery of resistances. In the case of “Dora,” the analyst appears to gain his costly “victory” by too much imposing his construction of the text; while Dora makes the ultimate riposte available to the storyteller, that of refusing to tell further, breaking off before the end. “Constructions in Analysis,” along with “Analysis Terminable and

Interminable," suggests that the analyst must learn to eschew such imposed solutions, that the collaboration and competition of the transference ultimately must put into question the privilege of the analyst. As with reader and text, there is no clear mastery, no position of privilege, no assurance, indeed, that the analyst and the analysand won't trade places, at least provisionally, and perhaps frequently.

The model of the transference indeed complicates any conception of interpretation as working from outside the text – as not implicated in its production. Shoshana Felman notes the peculiar place of the analytic reader when she argues that the profession of literary criticism allows one "not to choose" between the roles of analyst and analysand, because of the "paradox" that: "1) the work of literary analysis resembles the work of the psychoanalyst; 2) the status of what is analyzed – the text – is, however, not that of a patient, but rather that of a master . . . the text has for us authority – the very type of authority by which Jacques Lacan indeed defines the role of the psychoanalyst in the structure of transference." For to the analytic reader, the text is "a subject supposed to know" – it is, says Felman, "the very place where meaning, and *knowledge* of meaning, reside. With respect to the text, the literary critic occupies thus at once the place of the psychoanalyst (in the relation of interpretation) *and* the place of the patient (in the relation of transference)."<sup>9</sup> In fact, I would add, the reader shuttles between these places, in an unstable dynamic.

Even Freud's – and our own – common-sensical assumption that the analysand/storyteller, rather than the analyst, must in some ultimate sense "possess" the true story, which needs to be construed and put into proper form, will be complicated if we follow the implications of Freud's argument. For Freud notes that while "the path that leads from the analyst's construction ought to end in

the patient's recollection," this is not always the case. "Quite often we do not succeed in bringing the patient to recollect what has been repressed. Instead of that, if the analysis is carried out correctly, we produce in him an assured conviction [*sichere Überzeugung*] of the truth of the construction which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory" (265–6). Thus we learn that parts of the story of the past may not ever be recalled by the person whose story it is, or was, but may nonetheless be *figured* in a construction of them by the analyst-narratee – a construction which is unsubstantiated, unverifiable, yet carries conviction. Such "conviction" is no doubt the aim of any storyteller, as of any reader who tries to retransmit the experience of a text – when, in particular, as critic the reader tries to convince other readers that the construction of a given text *must be* right.

Narrative truth, then, seems to be a matter of conviction, derived from the plausibility and well-formedness of the narrative discourse, and also from what we might call its force, its power to create further patterns of connectedness, its power to persuade us that things must have happened this way, since here lies the only explanatory narrative, the only one that will make sense of things. Calling upon Lacan as a gloss to Freud, one could say that narrative truth depends as much on the discourse of desire as on the claims of past event. The narrative discourse – like the discourse of analysis – must restage the past history of desire as it exercises its pressure toward meaning in the present. The past never will be recollected at all except insofar as it insists on continuing to mean, to repeat its charge of affect in the present. And if the analyst – like the reader – must translate this insistence back into a coherent story of the past, he can do so only by working with the present remains of that story, reconstructing in such a way that the *re-*quietly drops out – as it does from Freud's essay –



to become simply, and more radically, construction, working toward the goal, not of verifiability, but of conviction: toward "what makes sense."

In the last pages of his essay, Freud moves to a discussion of delusions, similar to hallucinations, produced in the analysand by the analyst's constructions: delusions that evoke a "fragment of historical truth" that is out of its rightful place in the story, to which the analyst must bring a kind of syntactic correction.<sup>10</sup> Freud writes at this point, in quite an astonishing sentence: "The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment – attempts at explanation and cure" (268). It appears that the interpretive analytic construction and the patient's delusional construction are "equivalent," two sides of one dialogic process, two versions of narrative that test themselves against one another, together working toward the construction of the "complete" and satisfying narrative text. Not only does the patient, in any successful analysis, become his own analyst, the analyst also becomes the patient, espousing his delusional system, working toward the construction of fictions that can never be verified other than by the force of the conviction that they convey. That Freud goes on in the very last paragraph of the essay to broaden his subject to the delusions of mankind as a whole, delusions which "owe their power to the element of historical truth which they have brought up from the repression of the forgotten and primeval past," merely confirms that we must consider all narrative truth to be "true" insofar as it carries conviction, while at the same time asserting that if it carries conviction it must in some sense be true – true to the experience of the past, which can of course be the experience of fantasy (as with the primal scene or scenarios of the primal horde) just as well as what we usually call fact.

Stories are told for purposes, to establish a claim on the listener's attention, an appeal to hearing, which is also an appeal to complicity, perhaps to judgment, and inevitably to interpretation and construction. In the transference situation of hearing or reading, as in the analytic transference, the work of the reader is not only to grasp the story as much as possible, but to judge its relation to the narrative discourse that conveys it, seeking to understand not only what the narrative appears to say but also what it appears to intend. As Freud says in "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," it happens that the analysand "does not listen to the precise wording of his obsessional ideas" (*SE* 12: 152). As we know most explicitly from modernist and postmodernist narratives – but it is no doubt true of all narrative – a certain suspicion inhabits the relation of narrative discourse to its story, and our role as readers involves a finely tuned and skeptical hearing, a rewriting of the narrative text in collaboration and agonistic dialogue with the words proffered by the narrator. Texts, like analysands, offer resistances, which must be progressively semanticized. And in fact, interpretation discovers that resistance is incorporated with its task, a factor in that struggle for mastery which, like repetition, both conceals and reveals.

#### *Transference Stories*

It is clear that our, and Freud's, original model of narrative, in the detection narratives of Sherlock Holmes, has by now undergone considerable complication: complication by the interpretive presence of the listener, by the situation of transference which represents an uneasy dialogue between narrator and narratee, a struggle to construct and to control the text, and to master the past through its telling and interpretation in the present. It

may be significant that the Sherlock Holmes canon contains at least one tale that in itself represents such a complication, and that it is a complication that it was in the logic of the canon eventually to produce. What I have in mind is "The Final Problem" – which at the time it was written (1893) was indeed intended to be the final Holmes story – where we find that the detective's work on London crime has both uncovered and produced Holmes's equal opposite, the "Napoleon of Crime," Professor James Moriarty, with whom Holmes becomes locked in "the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-parry work in the history of detection."<sup>11</sup> Holmes goes on, in words that anticipate Freud's talking about his particularly intelligent patient, Dora: "Never have I risen to such a height, and never have I been so hard pressed by an opponent." The essential point about Professor Moriarty is that his intelligence matches Holmes's: "he is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web. . . . You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet at the end of three months I was forced to confess that I had at last met an antagonist who was my intellectual equal. My horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill" (172).

Moriarty's identity as Holmes's other, the necessary other of the transference relation, is all the more strongly suggested in that Moriarty comes into being, as it were, through Holmes's own deductive powers, as a kind of structural necessity of the interpretive work of detection. It is as if Holmes's constant quest for crime to be detected had led to the establishment of a transference situation in which finally he has his other, another "subject supposed to know" whose presence, even while invisible, will "dialogize" Holmes's words and actions in that they will always have to incorporate the reactions of the other. There is in fact a brief dialogue between Moriarty and Holmes, when the Professor visits Baker

Street to warn Holmes against continuing his pursuit, which follows an inevitable script since, as Moriarty says, "All that I have to say has already crossed your mind" (174). The more interesting dialogue takes place in the absence of the other, as Holmes and Moriarty deduce, tit for tat, what the other will do next, and act in response, in a manner of reasoning given its classic statement by Edgar Allan Poe's Inspector Dupin.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when Watson concludes that he and Holmes must have escaped Moriarty's clutches by catching the express boat train from Victoria Station, Holmes replies:

"My dear Watson, you evidently did not realize my meaning when I said that this man may be taken as being quite on the same intellectual plane as myself. You do not imagine that if I were the pursuer I should allow myself to be baffled by so slight an obstacle. Why, then, should you think so meanly of him?"

"What will he do?"

"What I should do."

"What should you do, then?"

"Engage a special." (pp. 178–9)

Moriarty's "special" indeed roars by, shortly after Holmes and Watson have slipped off their train at Canterbury. And so it goes on. The tale unfolds as move and counter-move of detective and detected, with each in turn occupying each role, with each both pursuer and pursued, as in the unstable dynamics of the transference. The inevitable outcome is mutual extinction at the Falls of Reichenbach, where the "personal contest between the two men ended, as it could hardly fail to end in such a situation, in their reeling over, locked in each other's arms" (185).

In "The Final Problem," then, the logic of the detective narrative in its classic guise results in the creation of a new and putatively ultimate narrative which stages fully the dynamics of the transference. Here, as in "Constructions

in Analysis," it is not only a matter of combining archeological fragments, or clues, into a narrative chain that links past and present and "solves" the problem of their interrelation. Now the present itself is shown to be the place of struggle and dialogue in the construction of a narrative that gives meaning to the past by writing its retrospective interpretation through the creation of its form. What we thought at first to be a relatively straightforward – albeit mentally and emotionally taxing – recapture of the past turns out to be something quite different: the effort, variously collaborative and agonistic, to construct, interpret, and control the past in the present. At issue, for both Freud and Sherlock Holmes in the revised models of their methods, is not so much the history of the past, or at least not the history of the past directly, as its present narrative discourse. This is the space of dialogue, struggle, construction. In the discipline and mastery of the transference lies the significant work of interpretation and understanding.

Turning from the detective story to other narrative modes, one could find the same principles at work in a number of narratives, especially those that dramatize the relations of tellers and listeners, and render the interpretation of the story told somehow difficult or problematic. I want to evoke briefly a tale of Balzac's that represents in notable ways the issue of construction. The tale I have in mind is *Adieu*, which recounts how Philippe de Sucey, out hunting near a friend's country estate, comes upon a deserted house lived in by a mad woman under the care of her uncle, a doctor. In the crazed young woman, Philippe recognizes with horror his long-lost love, the Comtesse Stéphanie de Vandières, whom he accompanied and protected during the retreat of Napoleon's army from Moscow, whose life he repeatedly saved, but from whom he became separated at the crossing of the infamous Berezina River, where he heroically commanded the building of a raft to bear her to safety, while he re-

mained behind, to suffer years of enslavement in Siberia. The doctor takes over the narrative at this point, to inform Philippe's friend the Marquis d'Albon about the story of the past. He describes the banks of the Berezina on the eve of the final disaster of the French armies, when thousands of stragglers arrive at nightfall, exhausted and almost indifferent to their fate, and improvise bivouacs instead of crossing immediately on the pontoon bridge, which the commander of the rear guard then sets on fire at dawn, as the Cossacks descend. At the first passage of the Berezina, much of the Grand Army was destroyed; this second passage is a repetition in the mode of utter catastrophe, as thousands fall from the wrecked bridge into the water, thousands are crushed and killed by the melec, and the rest are made prisoner. The overloaded raft is launched, Stéphanie herself upon her arrival at the other side has lost her sanity. Following this traumatic moment, she wanders barefoot for two years in the wake of the army, and when the doctor finds her she can utter only the single word of her farewell to Philippe, *Adieu!* The doctor keeps her with another mad girl, working to "domesticate" her, as if she were a feral child, treating her with kindness but without any apparent progress toward a cure.

Once the doctor has finished his narrative of this horrific past moment shared, with such different results, by Stéphanie and Philippe, there begins a period of competition between Philippe and himself in therapy for Stéphanie. When the doctor dismisses Philippe as a meddler in his care of Stéphanie, Philippe conceives the project of a more radical kind of therapy, which will take the form of an attempted reconstruction of the scene of suffering and trauma, and then its repetition: one more crossing of the Berezina, a repetition of a repetition, another passage, an "artificial" one that will be the space of Philippe's "intervention," and is supposed to work his patient's cure. Reconstruction and repetition will in fact be literally

based on a construction: the construction by Philippe of a representation of the Berezina River at the moment of its passage, eight years earlier.

Philippe retreats to an estate he owns in Saint-Germain, and spends the autumn in large-scale engineering projects. Working from a stream running through his grounds, he has workers dig a canal which will "represent the devouring river," builds and burns bridge trestles and bivouacs, and ravages his park "in order to complete the illusion on which he staked his last hope."<sup>13</sup> Then he orders ragged uniforms to clothe hundreds of peasants whom he engages to figure the French legions and the Cossacks. No detail is neglected in his search to "reproduce the most horrible of all scenes." Finally, "In the first days of the month of December, when snow had covered the ground with a thick white blanket, he *recognized the Berezina*" [my italics]. Philippe's "recognition" of the place of past trauma follows a series of terms that speak of reproduction and representation – "*représenter,*" "*copier,*" "*figurer,*" "*compléter l'illusion,*" "*reproduire,*" – which culminates in the description of his constructed scene as a "*représentation tragique.*" Notions of theatrical representation and psychic reproduction and repetition are very closely allied here: as in the "artificial illness" of the transference, we have a place of representation and reproduction where the past will be replayed in symbolic form, and in which the analyst will attempt to intervene in order to correct the sequel of the past, to rewrite its present consequences.

With the "recognition" of the scene of suffering by Philippe, the would-be analyst who is responsible for the construction, the stage is set for communicating the construction to the analysand, to see how it will work upon her. Early in January, 1820, Philippe dresses himself in the rags he wore on November 29, 1812, and has Stéphanie (temporarily drugged with opium) put back into her old clothes, then bundles her into a carriage

similar to that which brought her to the banks of the Berezina. She now traverses "the fictive plain of the Berezina" (1011), and the staged drama begins: cannon thunders, a thousand costumed peasants howl in horror as the Cossacks descend upon them. Stéphanie jumps from the carriage and runs to the raft at the river's edge. As she stands before Philippe, her intelligence appears to come back to her: "she passed her hand over her forehead with the lively expression of someone who meditates, she contemplated this living memory, this past life translated before her, she turned her head quickly toward Philippe and *saw him*" (1012). The coloring and the freshness of a young woman spread across her face, her mind quickens. She speaks Philippe's name, and throws herself in his arms. But as he holds her, her body grows rigid. "Adieu, Philippe. Je t'aime, adieu!" she speaks in a weakening voice, and dies. The coda of Balzac's tale reports how Philippe, haunted by the memory of this tragic moment reproduced, doubled, eventually will commit suicide. "Construction" in *Adieu* is perfectly realized, literalized. It is forceful, persuasive, therapeutic, and also mortal. It is too good a fiction, in that its representational qualities take a fearsome toll in reality.

Such a toll is no doubt the negative or ironic version of the effect that any storyteller hopes to make on his listeners: stories ultimately seek to change the minds and the lives of those they touch. The analyst who makes constructions and communicates them to the analysand hopes to take a similar toll, to produce new confirming memories or else that "assured conviction" that allows a possible fiction to take the place of history, and to build a new narrative which ought to carry through to a new dénouement. The transference actualizes the past in symbolic forms so that it can be repeated, replayed, working though to another outcome, in a changed personal history. As I noted earlier, the transference represents that "intermediate region between illness and

real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made." The transferential space is that margin – the place of fictions, of reproductions, of reprints, of repetitions – in which change is effected, through interpretation and construction. Freud writes in the final sentence of "The Dynamics of Transference": "For when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone *in absentia* or *in effigie*" (SE 12: 108). This statement may appear paradoxical, in that it is precisely "in effigy" – in the symbolic mode – that the past and its ghosts may be destroyed, or laid to rest, in analysis. If the past returns in the present, its identity with the past is, as Moustapha Safouan writes in his book on transference, "manifestly a matter of the signifier."<sup>14</sup> Freud is arguing, I believe, that the transference succeeds in making the past and its scenarios of desire relive in signs with such vivid reality that the constructions it proposes achieve the effect of the real. They do not change past history, but they rewrite its present discourse, and prepare an altered future. Such is no doubt the intention of any constructed narrative, as the case of Stéphanie and Philippe demonstrates in so exacerbated a form.

The ending of *Adieu* may remind us of the final moment of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, where the "statue" of Hermione, long reported dead as a result of Leontes' insane suspicions concerning her chastity, comes alive for the love of a repentant and long-suffering Leontes. She quickens in his embrace, in the manner of Stéphanie and Philippe, but with a different result. "Oh, she's warm! If this be magic, let it be an art/Lawful as eating," exclaims Leontes. If it be magic in *The Winter's Tale*, it is white magic, with a happy outcome. Yet the play allows us to believe that it is not magic at all, but the happy end of a long process of working through that begins in Hermione's simulated death and ends in her fictive rebirth, in a scene constructed by Paulina when she feels Leontes has achieved the psychic and moral

readiness necessary to the completion of his "cure." To describe the whole of the intervening action of *The Winter's Tale* in terms of the transference would be labored, and yet possibly suggestive, in that it offers a working through of the original problem – Leontes' jealousy and resulting erotic, epistemological, and moral insanity – in terms of other fictions, especially those of another generation, in Perdita and Florizel, that speak symbolically of the solutions available to the original problem and its actors. For our purposes, Shakespeare's play provides a useful foil to Balzac's tale, and provokes us to inquire more closely as to why Philippe's construction, albeit successful, provokes disaster.

Like Freud with Dora, Philippe too much imposes his construction of story and meaning, arrogating the position of the "subject supposed to know" without allowing a sufficiently interactive role for his patient. The doctor who has cared for Stéphanie before Philippe's arrival on the scene accuses Philippe of egotism and a misunderstanding of the therapeutic relation. This should be, not the constant demand for recognition and reciprocation that Philippe displays, but rather a long, patient self-abnegation and unhesitating devotion. The doctor understands and indeed enters into the logic of her symptoms, which Philippe would simply efface, eradicate. Philippe cannot abide Stéphanie's degradation as a woman, her lack of modesty, her failure to behave as the object of male desire. To which the doctor "acidly" replies, "What you wanted was madness as it is portrayed at the opera" (1009). The accusation is not unfounded: Philippe would no doubt prefer a scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and his construction of the fictive crossing of the Berezina in his park indeed reminds us of the elaborate sets and machinery of grand opera. He puts too much faith in the capacity of representation and reproduction to carry the message of his drama. Stéphanie cannot but

respond to the fidelity of the reproduction, but she is also crushed by it. She is given no place in the scheme, no position from which to speak herself, to enter into the dialogue of the transference. She is denied the possibility of counter-move that so characterizes Professor Moriarty in "The Final Problem" and that seems indispensable for the true work of construction. In attempting to exercise total control over the construction, Philippe violates the principle of the "alternating fashion" in which construction-building should proceed. He finally fails as a therapist, for himself as much as for Stéphanie. He reveals himself to be an imperfect reader, a rigid interpreter who fails to enter the delusional system of the text under consideration, who never understands the dialogic imperative. One cannot read, as one cannot cure, from the outside. It is only through assuming the burden and the risks of the transference situation that one reaches the understanding of otherness.

What is at issue in psychoanalysis, Lacan says in his seminar on transference, "is nothing other than bringing to light the manifestation of the subject's desire." And what the subject desires, in the most general terms, is "the desirer in the other" (*"le désirant dans l'autre"*). The subject desires to "be called to as desirable."<sup>15</sup> For Lacan, the demand for love is always absolute, based on an unappeasable original lack, and desire is not desire for this or that, but desire *tout court*. So that the reciprocation of love becomes "giving what one does not have," a response produced from the "realm of non-knowledge." In this situation, the analyst must learn the "coordinates" needed to "occupy the place that is his, which defines itself as that which he should offer vacant to the desire of the patient in order for it to be realized as desire of the Other." The position of the analyst is thus one of renunciation, setting aside his own person to allow the analysand to listen to the echo of the desire he wants to

make heard. In entering the dynamics of the transference, the analyst renounces the totalitarian foreclosure of interpretation and meaning.

To refuse or to fail to enter the transference is to condemn oneself to reading always the same text, to a solipsistic practice of interpretation. "It must change," as Wallace Stevens says of the supreme fiction. The change that is wrought by fiction, as by psychoanalysis, is a product of conviction: that a constructed narrative makes sense of things. But to argue this is not to say, in the manner of Stanley Fish, that the reader is hammered into submission by a rhetorical power play. Fish can write off "The Wolf Man" as an exercise in the rhetoric of persuasion only, I think, because for him not much appears to be at stake in psychoanalysis: the patient has disappeared, only the reader is left. Whereas I want to urge that the narrative constructed in psychoanalysis finds its power of persuasion in its capacity to illuminate the buried history of unconscious desire, to make sense of an otherwise muddled life story.

What Fish's rhetorical version of psychoanalysis seems to exclude is the possibility of change, of transformation, through the transference process. Fish appears to believe only in power, which has in fact become a central idol much worshipped in recent criticism. Psychoanalysis, more humble and at its best more humane, also believes in cure, by which it means the possibility of an enhanced listening to the discourse of otherness, a new reading of the history written by unconscious desire, resulting in a changed understanding of narrative entailments and consequences. The words of the analysand in the psychoanalytic session form themselves in relation to the listener. As Daniel Gunn says, in *Psychoanalysis and Fiction*, "The power of the transference, like the power of any love story, is rooted in the conjugating of these *two* pronouns: 'you' and 'I.'"<sup>16</sup> The "I" and the "you," as we know from Emile Benveniste's work on discourse, are

markers that change place according to who is speaking, in a relation that is necessarily dialogic. From this dialogue, even if it is asymmetrical – even if the analyst's commentary is largely marked by silence – arises the possibility for new understanding. In the transference relation, there is a difficult, agonistic, and productive encounter. The same is true of the reading of texts, where we interpret, construct, building hypotheses of meaning that are themselves productive of meaning, seeking to understand narrative as both a story and the discourse that conveys it, seeking both to work on the text and to have the text work on us. Transference and construction suggest a properly dynamic model of narrative understanding that allows us to recapture, beyond a formalist "narratology," a certain referential function for narrative, where reference is understood not as a naming of the world, and not as the sociolect of the text, but as the *movement of reference* that takes place in the transference of narrative from teller to listener, and back again. It is in this movement of reference that change is produced – that the textual reader, like the psychoanalytic patient, finds himself modified by the work of interpretation and construction, by the transference dynamics to which he has submitted himself. In the movement between text and reader, the tale told makes a difference.

## NOTES

- 1 Stanley Fish, "Withholding the Missing Portion: Psychoanalysis and Rhetoric," in *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 525–54.
- 2 See, in particular, Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

- 3 Carlo Ginzburg, "Spie: Radici di un paradigma indiziario," in *Miti, Emblemi, Spie* (Torino: Einaudi, 1986); English trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- 4 *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 7: 16–18. Subsequent references to Freud will use the abbreviation *SE*, and will appear in parentheses in the text. The critical literature on "Dora" is very rich: see, in particular, Philip Rieff's "Introduction" to the case history (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 7–20; and Steven Marcus, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," *Partisan Review* 41: 1 (1974), reprinted in *In Dora's Case*, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), a volume which contains a number of other interesting essays on the case.
- 5 We are told of Freud's interest in Sherlock Holmes by his celebrated patient known as the "Wolf Man." See *The Wolf-Man by the Wolf-Man*, ed. Muriel Gardiner (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 146. For a further discussion of Holmes and Freud, see my *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984; reprinted Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 269ff.
- 6 See Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350–77; Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), pp. 95–6; English trans. Richard Miller, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).
- 7 Jacques Lacan, "Intervention sur le transfert," *Ecrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 216.
- 8 Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 167. I use here the terms "story," "discourse," and "narrating" in the manner of Gérard Genette's "*histoire*," "*récit*," and "*narration*," referring, respectively, to the apparent order of events "as they happened" (the Russian Formalist *fabula*), the way they are presented in the narrative

(Russian Formalist *sjuzet*), and the productive act of telling. Though we tend to talk – as Freud does – of the “story” as primary, a moment’s reflection allows us to see that it is in fact a derivative of the “discourse,” the product of the reader’s interpretation of a normalized chronology from what the narrative discourse gives us. See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (trans. of “Discours du récit,” in *Figures III*) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

- 9 Shoshana Felman, “To Open the Question,” in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 7.
- 10 On the notion of “historical truth,” one must turn to *Moses and Monotheism* – which Freud was working on at the same time as the “Constructions” essay – to understand that it is contrasted to “material truth,” truth substantiated by observable events or verifiable facts. “Historical truth” appears to have the same status as what he elsewhere calls “psychic truth”: that which is true for the subject, whether its origins be real or phantasmatic, that which belongs to his understanding of his own story. Thus the opposition between “historical truth” and “narrative truth” argued by Donald Spence in *Historical Truth and Narrative Truth* seems to me fundamentally wrong: all of Freud’s discussions put them on the same side of the antithesis, in opposition to “material truth.”
- 11 Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Final Problem,” in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band and Other Stories of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: NAL/Signet, 1965), pp. 172 and 173.
- 12 See Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter”: “But this ascendancy . . . would depend upon the robber’s knowledge of the loser’s knowledge of the robber” (it is the narrator speaking, then the phrase is repeated by Dupin); and the commentary on this passage by Jacques Lacan in his “Séminaire sur la lettre volée,” *Ecrits*, p. 33ff.
- 13 Honoré de Balzac, *Adieu*, in *La Comédie humaine* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976–81), 10: 1010.
- 14 Moustapha Safouan, *Le Transfert et le désir de l’analyste* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988), p. 58.

- 15 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire: Livre VIII: Le transfert*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991), pp. 234 and 414.
- 16 Daniel Gunn, *Psychoanalysis and Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 217.