

*The Literary Use of
the Psychoanalytic Process*

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details that we would otherwise take too much for granted or else think too trivial to examine. Even if these exchanges do not constitute the main interplay in a text—as they do in the work of a self-conscious writer like James—they are still present as part of the body of alternative meanings out of which we carve our final, acceptable readings. We are likely to be better readers of novels, as well as dreams, if we are aware of them—if only to put them aside.

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*Literature as Transference:
Rhetorical Function*

An actor making a gesture is both creating for himself out of his deepest need and yet for the other person. . . . The actor's work is never for an audience, yet is always for one. The onlooker is a partner who must be forgotten and still constantly kept in mind: a gesture is statement, expression, communication and a private manifestation of loneliness—it is always what Artaud calls a signal through the flames—yet this implies a sharing of experience.

—Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*

The question the analyst has to ask himself constantly is: "Why is the patient now doing what to whom?"

—Paula Heimann, "Dynamics of Transference Interpretation"

The scope of psychoanalytic inquiry has widened since Freud's first explorations of hysteria in the 1890s. At that time he was interested in only one part of a person—a repressed part—which he treated as a surgeon treats a ruptured appendix, removing it as quickly and painlessly as possible, hypnotizing the patient if necessary. Freud later became interested in more of the person when he studied repressing as well as repressed forces, and today psychoanalysis has become established as a phenomenology of the whole person as well as a study of motives. It has moved away from a study of wishes only, as we saw in the chapter on fantasy, to a study of wishes to do something with somebody in a particular kind of

world—a study of a person's whole way of seeing the world and of his relationship to it. Most recently, the scope of psychoanalysis has been widened still further to include a study of the process of study itself. Not only does the patient's fantasy concern relationships with others, but the process of telling his fantasies to the analyst is itself a part of his relationship with the analyst: it is part of a social and rhetorical exchange, not just a transfer of information. This exchange includes both the rational relationship required logically by the treatment situation, and the irrational "transference" relationship generated not so much by present circumstances as by the patient's expectations and biased perceptions. The relationship, in other words, is shaped by the fantasy that is part of the patient's problem in the first place. And this rich exchange, analysts have increasingly realized, matters as much as what the patient actually says.

An increasing number of literary critics in the last few years have used this exchange, which provides the context for the patient's words, as a model for literary texts, just as the patient's words themselves (his dreams and fantasies) were earlier taken as models for texts. Or, to be more precise, the exchanges in the psychoanalytic process were taken as a model for the process of reading, which is seen now as an implied exchange between author and reader through the medium of the text. In this chapter, after elaborating on what I mean by a social and rhetorical exchange, I will examine the psychoanalytic theory of this process. First I will consider the original version of the theory, which Freud formulated partly in discussions of the patient's relation to the analyst, in neurotic transference, and partly in discussions of the joke teller's interaction with his audience; then the more recent extensions of Freud's work, in theories about the nature of transference and in the developmental research inseparable from these theories, will be examined. This research deals with the child's "object relations" and is best represented by Winnicott's theory and later theories about "transitional" objects and spaces, or play spaces. I will also examine some of the suggested ways of applying these theories to literary texts.

Although these theories have been enthusiastically adopted by literary critics as more promising approaches to literature than the old-style fantasy model, they present more problems than the other methods examined in this book. It is still not clear whether these theories can be usefully applied to specific texts, as opposed to the creative process in general. The rhetorical dimension of discourse is much harder to locate in a text than in the psychoanalytic process, and therefore more problematic. It is also difficult to distinguish strictly rhetorical elements from the other dimensions of the text that we have examined in the other psychoanalytic models, especially the revised fantasy model described in chapter 3.

SOCIAL AND RHETORICAL EXCHANGE:
TELLING AND MOVING

The need for a listener is especially obvious in the therapeutic situation and in the ritual confessions to which it has often been likened. But we do not have to turn to the psychoanalytic process to find a social and rhetorical exchange. Any effort to shape thought into formal or at least public forms of expression implies a listener, if only an imagined one. The consciousness of having something to say or show implies the existence of someone to say or show it to. Consciousness of being a self with something to express comes about through the ministrations of others recognized as separate from the self. Thus the private experience of self-consciousness is not possible without the public social contexts, structures, and responses that define the individual. These social factors are now being studied from many points of view; the new psychoanalytic awareness of this social dimension is part of a much larger movement which is changing the way we conceive of the individual.

The need for an audience is partly the need to have someone understand and respond to what we are saying. Even if we are merely spouting our desires, as early psychoanalytic theory had it, we want others to know about them and do something about them. Even "pure" desire is desire *for* something; it does not exist without an implied object. But we need

an audience in an even more fundamental and less direct way as well. Not only do we need someone to get the message, but we need someone just to hear it, bear witness to it, give it substance and reality.

Freud was primarily interested in the hidden wishes or conflicts in the content of what his patients said; but analysts are now interested also in the more fundamental wishes which seem to be both the ground and the end of communication—the wish for “recognition,” as Paul Ricoeur called it,¹ or the wish for “presence,”² for relationship. Freud did talk occasionally about the importance of sheer communication, apart from any message—for example, when he described how an idea is changed merely by saying it aloud or by having the analyst say it back.³ But only recently have the implications of this process been developed. Freud was talking about the meaning of particular symbols when he interpreted a patient's words, but not about the social and dialectical aspects of the symbol or the implications of using a symbolic medium at all.⁴ A symbol is a thing that requires interpretation; Ricoeur has even suggested that this is the most appropriate definition of symbol. It may be used to ward off interpreters, but it also acknowledges that interpretation is possible. (To cry, “The listener is baffled!” is no more destructive than to cry “God is dead!”)

For the writer, the implicit audience has taken mythological form as the Muse, the one who inspires by being there to listen, who invokes by being invoked. And correspondingly, the fantasies of unproductive writers are haunted by angry

1. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 523.

2. Geoffrey Hartman, “I. A. Richards and the Dream of Communication,” in *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 37.

3. Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious” (1915), *SE* 14:202.

4. See Anthony Wilden's comment in Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 230.

muses—the pickers and harpers whose predicted scorn stops speech before it starts, as in the case of the stutterer, who imagines he will be interrupted—or by victimizable muses, who imagined fate scares the speaker into silence lest he destroy them. It is in the context of exchanges such as the one between writer and muse that literature comes into being. The transference model examined here promises to provide a way of showing how that context affects literature in general and how changes in context can influence the shape of particular works.

Still more is going on, however, in this exchange between speaker and listener, or between writer and reader. Not only does the speaker wish to convey a message, not only does he want to be heard and witnessed; he may also want to affect his listener in a way that has very little to do with what he is saying. If the speaker says he has a headache, he is perhaps not just giving us a specific piece of information and not just talking to be heard, without caring if there is a direct reaction to his specific message: he may also be trying to affect us in some other way. I have called this dimension of the psychoanalytic exchange *rhetorical*, because it is defined not only by what is being said but also by the way in which the speaker takes account of and tries to move or otherwise affect his audience. The study of rhetorical strategies belongs to many fields, but psychoanalysis is particularly sensitive to this dimension of discourse. Kenneth Burke once faulted Freud and psychoanalysis for not going beyond seeing the text as a dream to seeing that it is also a “prayer.”⁵ But Freud knew very well that his patient's words might be prayers—or curses, or invitations, or distractions, or in fact anything at all. Psychoanalysts begin with the assumption that words can mean more than they seem to mean and can do more than they seem to do; they can certainly do more than serve as the bear-

5. Kenneth Burke, “Freud—and the Analysis of Poetry” (1939), reprinted in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, rev. ed. (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1961), p. 229.

ers of obvious referential statements. Statements are performances.

For one thing, words can be false performances, intended as lies and designed to mislead, or intended as the only truth the listener can bear or can grasp. We are now familiar with the idea that our private personalities are inseparable from our public masks and are shaped by our public roles, that there is no self without the presentation of self, as Erving Goffman's studies argue.⁶ In a more extreme but lucidly persuasive argument, one woman, who has been through psychosis, compares the asylum's poses to the poses of everyday life:

Nobody ever tells the truth anyway, not even in bed. . . . At best we offer our pose and our costume for approval and kid ourselves that we have caught our partner naked. If we have, he fools us and becomes impotent. . . . We meet on a perfectly prescribed plain: "Give me a little of your lie and I'll return with mine." It is a bargain into infinity. We even take our lies to bed with us. Nobody makes love for the sake of sexual fulfillment. We make love to remind ourselves of our existence. . . . The lover is a false god who gives us for a moment a sense of self. . . . We give him a posture he never had, and lovingly, voraciously, steal it, clothe ourselves in his demeanor and claim it as our own. A love affair is a series of thefts, and we steal what never was. *So, too, the writer and the reader.*

[Emphasis added]⁷

Even if our performances are not always the designed lies Cameron describes, their truth or significance may not be totally contained in the literal message they convey: we may tell others we have a headache because we want sympathy or because we want to make them feel guilty. The significance of

6. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overbock Press, 1974).

7. Martha Cameron, "Why Psychosis?" *Michigan Quarterly Review* 4 (1965): 140.

words may even have nothing to do with what we are saying but only with the *way* we are saying it: an aggressive tone is used to pick a fight; a soft tone may be used to tease by giving information and at the same time making it hard to understand; or we can speak the same words tediously, to bore the listener. The significance of words may even lie in the simple fact that they are words—no matter what words and no matter how presented. Thus, for example, the patient determines to say something, anything, rather than tell the analyst how angry he is about an upcoming summer interruption. Or free association may be used to put on exhibitions for the analyst, who is seen as judgmental parent, as a way of competing with other "sibling" patients.

In recognition of all this, analysts (in France, especially) have shifted the emphasis of their study from the retold dream or fantasy to the process of retelling. Freud presented his "specimen dream" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a verbal icon; Jacques Lacan by contrast emphasizes another of the dreams that Freud reports, which is more like an insult than an icon, a patient's dream of "the abandoned supper-party," in which she wanted to give a supper party but could not, because there was nothing in the house but a little smoked salmon, and all the stores were closed. Though we might focus on the symbolic meaning of the dream's content (which does have its own import) in interpreting it, one of the dream's most significant wishes, as Freud shows, lies elsewhere. This is simply the woman's wish to prove Freud's wish fulfillment theory wrong by dreaming about an *unfulfilled* wish. In addition, Freud shows, by thwarting her own wish in the dream, the dreamer was identifying with an envied friend whose charms, she feared, were attracting her husband. The additional significances emerge only when we think about why the dream was dreamed and about the context in which it was told—not when the dream is considered in isolation.⁸

8. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), SE 4:147-51, 154, n. 2; 175; Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 621.

The single question that dominated early psychoanalytic inquiry was, "What infantile wishes does this material fulfill in the patient?" But analysts now ask a more awkward but more appropriate question: "What is the patient, as who, saying to the analyst, as whom, and from when—and why?"⁹ For a long time it was assumed that we knew the answer to the last part of the question: the patient was talking to give the doctor information. But we now know that even plain, "truthful" communication is a complicated process involving not only a referential message (in any of several modes of representation) but a speaker with his own eccentricities and his own attitudes toward what he is saying and the person he is talking to; a listener with his own requirements; and the implicit and explicit assumptions the speaker and listener make about their common language and the current occasion. What the analyst adds is the understanding that not only does communication have several aspects, but it is hard to separate plain, truthful communication from the transference, and that all aspects of an exchange may be influenced by unconscious processes which interact with conscious ones in unpredictable ways.

SOCIAL AND RHETORICAL EXCHANGE:
THE PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Psychoanalysis has always studied unconscious contributions to social and rhetorical exchange. Nonetheless, the way it conceptualizes these has changed. At first, Freud looked only for those unconscious exchanges that resembled the familiar conscious ones, just as when exploring fantasies he initially saw only the ones that resembled our familiar conscious daydreams. And since only relatively mature people engage in social exchanges, the social or rhetorical dimension of a clinical session—the unconscious transference exchanges as well as conscious ones—almost by definition followed the pattern of ordinary social exchanges. Freud contrasted behavior and

9. See Paula Heimann's similar questions in "Dynamics of Transference Interpretation," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 37 (1956):303-10.

texts that included this dimension to behavior and texts whose primitive quality made them so private that absolutely no exchange with the outside world was involved.

A literary critical model based on Freud's theories must draw primarily on two instances where Freud discusses such exchanges, in both of which he contrasts the material he is studying to asocial and nonrhetorical parallels where there is, he says, no exchange. The first source is Freud's discussion of neurotic transference in psychoanalysis, which he contrasts to the psychotic's total lack of relationship to the analyst (which thus makes the psychotic immune to psychoanalysis and the exchanges it demands). The second source is Freud's discussion of jokes, which require an audience to complete their effect; and he contrasts these to dreams, which are designed to resist an audience, although they make use of many of the same mechanisms jokes do. As we shall see, however, contemporary analysts would not make Freud's distinction between social and asocial processes, public and private symbolic acts. Instead, they see behind the seemingly asocial behavior of the psychotic or the asocial language of the dream a very primitive form of socialization—a socialization that may also underlie our more sophisticated exchanges, although it does not dominate them as it does in dreams and psychosis.

All psychoanalytic rhetorical theories of literary criticism originate, however, from Freud's first discoveries about this rhetorical dimension, in particular from the fact that this dimension is not necessarily explicit or even conscious. In the case of transference, what Freud did was primarily to identify that part of the patient's perception of, feelings about, and treatment of the analyst which is shaped largely by his own fantasies rather than by accurate perception of reality. The patient tries to force or coax the analyst to play out a scene he has in mind, though the patient is not aware of either the coaxing or the scene as such. All he sees is that the analyst is hostile, indifferent, loving, or whatever the scene dictates.¹⁰

10. See, e.g., Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference" (1912), *SE* 12:97-108.

Although Freud subsequently investigated specific examples of transference exchanges and how they were to be interpreted, in the case of the joke he described the more general conditions of exchange which make the joke possible in the first place.¹¹ But again, these general conditions are usually neither explicit nor conscious.

They are, however, more obviously related to literary texts than were the transference exchanges and have in fact been taken by both Freud and Ernst Kris as a model for the aesthetic exchange. They deserve closer scrutiny here. The joke, for Freud, is a displaced version of a sexual or aggressive wish, allowing the teller to express his forbidden wish in an acceptable way: instead of raping a woman he tells a dirty joke about raping her. But the joke cannot complete its work of displacement and yield the teller his substitute pleasure unless there is an audience to hear it. Paradoxically, it is often the very presence of a third party that makes the joke's displacement necessary. "There's somebody watching," the teller in effect says to himself, "so I can't have her. But I can get him to share the guilt with me vicariously, by acting out an attack through the joke's characters." This is a quick and clever accommodation to society's inhibitions; the joke teller bribes the observer to join him in a verbal enactment of the crime that civilization prevents him from carrying out. By this means the listener gets the unexpected pleasure of a substitute satisfaction that he has not had to exert any energy contriving, and the teller secures his own pleasure by being reassured that his displacement has worked—that his actions are acceptable and that his guilt is shared. The teller laughs, then, not because the joke produces pleasure in him directly but because he sees the listener laughing and thereby derives pleasure.

Whether or not Freud's account is accurate in detail, its terms are drawn from conscious, adult life, and we recognize

11. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), SE 8, especially section 5, "Jokes as a Social Process," pp. 140-58, and section 3, "The Purposes of Jokes."

its logic of complicity, sanction, and reassurance. It is, moreover, the kind of adult relationship epitomized in the oedipal triangle, which served so often as a model for Freud. This was the social exchange that interested him most, and it influenced all of his thinking about groups. In talking about the origins of religion, for example, Freud described the group complicity that makes possible the original archetypal patriicide: one brother can murder his father because all his brothers take part.¹²

According to Freud, it was out of such transference exchanges that the poet's role evolved.¹³ The poet made repetition of the original patricidal crime unnecessary by inventing slaughter on an epic scale and presenting it to the group. And as in the case of the joke teller, the poet who voices the displacement of murder for society then gets a double reward. Not only does he displace his own patricidal wishes, but he receives the secondary rewards of gifts and fame. For some time this theory was the main source for a psychoanalytic audience response theory, most importantly in the writings of Ernst Kris. For Kris, all art is communication, but the process of communication is determined by this secondary, facilitating function.¹⁴ The artist is modeled on the oedipal child, seeking reassurance as he tries to fulfill his displaced desires.

Since Freud, psychoanalytic theory about social and rhetorical exchanges within and outside of the clinical situation has come to include much more than the oedipal model, just as psychoanalytic theories of development have now come to encompass not only the oedipal stage but the entire range of stages from earliest infancy. Analysts have been studying the far more primitive kinds of relationship and the earliest undifferentiated states out of which both mature relation-

12. Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (1913), SE 13:125-26 and 141-46; "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), SE 18:122-28 and 135-37; "Moses and Monotheism" (1939), SE 23:81-90.

13. Freud, "Group Psychology," SE 18:135-37.

14. Ernst Kris, "Approaches to Art," in *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 16.

ships and individuality develop.¹⁵ Instead of seeing psychosis or dreams as autistic withdrawals from reality and relationship, they see such behavior as a return to primitive narcissistic relationships of infancy. These relationships begin with an original undifferentiated experience in which the mother is not separated from the self, fantasy from reality, or wish from action. The child discovers with surprised delight that the thumb which randomly appears within sucking range actually belongs to him and that he can move it about at will, just as he discovers with rage that the breast (which seemed part of him, inside him, while he was nursing) is not within his control.

There are many stages in the gradual process of differentiation that has received so much attention since Freud first described the child's development. At first, the child separates what is inside him from that which is outside, if they can be called that, largely by what feels good and what feels bad, but the process becomes more complex as he begins to coordinate feelings with increased perception of what *inside* and *outside* really mean. There are stages in which he perceives another person as separate, but only as a mirror of himself, or a projection of his own feelings, or a substitute for his frustrated ideal grandiose self. There are stages of magical relationships governed by the child's unrealistic impulses and perceptions—telepathic and sympathetic unions. There are also stages in which the child perceives others as separate, but only as separate objects to be manipulated or as need-fulfillers for him.

Having explored these stages, modern psychoanalysis avoids the dichotomy of Freud's original all-or-nothing approach, in which behavior either manifested transference or did not, and a text either demanded an audience or did not. Thus the modern analyst would say that the neurotic differs from the psychotic not in forming a transference relationship with the analyst but in forming a transference relationship of a certain, relatively mature kind. The psychotic has retreated

15. See chapter 3, pp. 77-80 and note 53.

not into total isolation but into a stage in which the other is part of himself, or a projection of his own hostile wishes. So, too, the joke and the text are defined not by the fact that they require an audience and are designed for public consumption but rather by the particular kind of adult public for whom they are shaped. While exploring the different forms of public, psychoanalysis simultaneously provides the critic with a new scale of possible discriminations.

In fact, unless we do distinguish between all the possible kinds of implied relations between teller and hearer, studying this dimension of experience tells us much less—if anything—about individual texts than about the general conditions for producing texts. Once we do distinguish between the varieties of teller-listener relations in the analytic situation, identifying the quality of transference relationship can tell us a great deal, apart from the content of the communication. The paraphrasable content may be "I hate you," but the analyst then must ask whether this hate is an adult's scorn or an infant's world-shattering rage. And what does the patient mean by *you*? Is he seeing a real person? An ogre? A magic influencing machine? No matter what the patient happens to be saying, it is significant when he starts talking like a toddler, not bothering to finish sentences or elaborate beyond Tarzan-like exclamations. These attempts at expression suggest the implicit assumption that the analyst, like mother, will understand.

So, too, texts presume a variety of relationships. They may invite complicity or ward off understanding simply by the way the author shapes his communication. The author leaves out too much, perhaps, or trusts the listener to understand his jokes, or uses primitive forms of expression. Consider the very primitive dream text which, according to Freud, allowed for no audience. Despite Freud's claim, the dreamer often chooses to tell his dream to an audience—usually to the person for whom it is intended as a communication, albeit a coded one: for example, it means something to tell someone "I dreamed that you died last night." This telling may be

seen as a continuation of a tendency, already at work in the sleeping dreamer, to establish contact with reality.¹⁶ For the dreamer uses recent memories (the day's residue, in Freud's words) to make his dream images, and even the wishes expressed by the dream, though they may be oblique, are often addressed to an audience. The wish in Freud's own specimen dream of "Irma's injection"¹⁷ was a wish to prove to others that he was a worthy doctor, and the wish in his dream of the botanical monograph was a wish to prove his right to take time off for hobbies; surely Freud is not the only one talking in his sleep.

Establishing contact with reality, however, usually takes a more primitive form in dreams, especially the form of looking and fantasy-drenched seeing. To dream is to make the external world into a receptive, bland "dream screen,"¹⁸ that first environment in which the infant dreamed, as he fell asleep staring at the mother whose ministrations blended with his own fantasies and were hardly separate from the feeding he had just had and the dreams he was about to have. This primitive exchange with a "holding environment" is not what we would recognize as an adult relationship of mutuality, but it is a relationship nonetheless.

Even later, after these experiences of falling asleep at the breast, the child does not sleep alone but sleeps with what the analyst would call his fantasied "good object," if not with his transitional blanket or his teddy bear. Later, the adult takes his partner to bed with him, or he substitutes bedtime reading, drinking, or rituals implying company. People often welcome or fear sleep as they welcome or fear the intimate relationships which draw on early experiences of intense union; insomnia often accompanies a distrust of intimacy. Of course, sleep is also related to other forms of fantasy retreats, like un-

16. Mark Kanzer, "The Communicative Function of the Dream," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 36 (1955): 260.

17. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE 4:118-21.

18. Bertram D. Lewin, "Sleep, the Mouth, and the Dream Screen," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 15 (1946): 419-34.

dergoing the sleepy hypnosis of staring up into the big flat face of a movie screen (secure with a tub of buttered popcorn) or curling up with a seductively mindless mystery or adventure story.

TRANSITIONAL PHENOMENA AND LITERARY CRITICISM

One of the most important aspects of the psychoanalytic theories that take account of these exchanges, or "object relations," is their conceptualization of consciousness as inseparable not only from relationship but also from symbolic behavior. The newly popular Winnicottian theories of "transitional objects" and "transitional spaces"—states when the child merges with the outside world, which were described in the preceding section—imply that infants have relationships as well as impulses, and that these are primitive relationships in which the distinction between subject and object is unclear. But perhaps the most striking implication of these theories between the infant's relationship itself and the rest of the infant's perceptions, feelings, speech, and mental representations is unclear.

A discussion of the development of object relations¹⁹ then becomes inseparable from a discussion of the development of symbolic behavior, because the child's first relationships take place in a total "sharing situation" which includes symbolic exchanges.²⁰ The child who sees his mother offer him a cookie and calls out "ma" (his word for good-things-to-eat) at first does not separate the giver, the cookie, his word for it, his

19. D. W. Winnicott's term, applied to phenomena he discussed in his essay "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 89-97, has recently been taken up by literary critics. Similar phenomena had been discussed under other names by analysts like Melanie Klein and Marion Milner and other analysts, in what has been called the "object relations school"; see chapter 3. See also Phyllis Greenacre's studies of creativity.

20. Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan, *Symbol Formation: An Organismic-Developmental Approach to Language and the Expression of Thought* (New York: John Wiley, 1963) pp. 42-44.

feelings about it, and his identification of it. For all he knows, cookies are part of mother's arms, as milk is part of the breast. This is a cookie-experience; there is no clear distinction between self and object; between self and symbol (the exclamation "ma!" is as much a part of the child as hunger is); between self and others; or between the appearance of the cookie and the word for it, which always appears at the same time. Translation of the child's cry would require several sentences: "It's a cookie!" "I want the cookie!" "Give me the cookie, Mommy!" "Mommy is giving me the cookie!" "This sweet thing is called a cookie!"

Object relations theories, then, explore the nature of symbolic action, as they trace the child's evolution from an infant in a presymbolic state into a being who is simultaneously and in closely connected ways becoming a separate self, a member of society, and a user of symbols. It is no wonder that these theories have been so enthusiastically taken up by literary critics. Unlike earlier versions of psychoanalysis, they allow symbolism a space of its own and recognize it as a category of experience rather than as a mere distortion of, or escape from, something else. Freud's map of the mind left no place for symbolic reality; there was only the jungle of the id and the steadily expanding ego, which built its civilization where the id had been. Freud saw fantasy only as a "preserve," a remnant of the old territory left in its natural state. Only once, in talking about the nature of transference, did he discuss anything resembling a space *between* jungle and city, self and society, fantasy and reality.²¹

This, however, is the space that the newer theories begin with; it is taken to be the matrix out of which fantasy and reality later develop. Freud always separated inner phenomena from the outer world in which they manifested themselves. The inner battles over wish and defense were "primary"; what happened at the interface between inner and outer

21. Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" (1914), *SE* 12:154.

worlds was "secondary" and incidental—a mere envelope for the joke, facade for the dream.²² But new theories recognize that symbols are not created in a vacuum; the so-called primary activities are inseparable from the secondary ones, and symbolic action is inseparable from the facade, envelope, or bridge leading outward to reality.

The newer theories show that fantasy is not a retreat into a private world of unreality but a new relationship to the realities of a public world. While the old psychoanalytic theories reinforced misleading and question-begging dichotomies of "art and nature," "fantasy and reality," "self and other," and "word and thing," the newer approach recognizes that the defining quality of human creativity is the suspension of such categories. In the infant's early experience, and later when that undifferentiated state is self-consciously recreated in the transference or the work of art, new relations between the categories are explored, and neither category disappears altogether in favor of the other.

Promising as these developmental theories are, however, their application to literature presents problems, though these have not always been acknowledged. Applications of Winnicott's idea about transitional or play spaces has been somewhat confusing. The term *transitional space* is often loosely used to counter the old dichotomies with new insights about playful, experimental relationships between opposites, such as self and other, fantasy and reality, and symbol and reality. But the very different kinds of "play" implied here are not always distinguished, and the term *transitional* threatens to become a somewhat indefinite mark of approval rather

22. See for example Freud's distinction between primary and secondary gain in neurotic symptoms ("Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks" [1909] *SE* 9:231-32); and between primal and secondary repression ("The Unconscious," *SE* 14:202); and between the more primitive aspects of dream work and the dream's less primitive "secondary revision" (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *SE* 4:178-83). Freud refers to the joke's envelope in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, *SE* 8:92, and to the dream's facade in the *Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis* (1916-17), *SE* 15:181.

than a precise description. Just what are the things transitions are being made between? And what does this tell us about the literary text? In its general form, this is more a theory of creativity than it is a description of the way any given text works. Art is neither reality itself nor an escape from reality; but what does this tell us about a particular text?

One thing that adds to the looseness of the application of the term *transitional* is the fact that the infant's transitional object, from which all the theorizing begins, is only the first of several developments in which several different dichotomies become apparent to the child. In the earliest stages nothing is separate. The transitional object is both part of the child and a separate entity; the play space is felt to be both made up *and* real, defined by his fantasy *and* his mother's reality. Later, however, the child begins to see his transitional object from a different point of view and starts to venture from his "play space," which is a space in which he merges with his mother. As he begins to leave her and return to her, not only does he begin to experience "separation and individuation"²³ but the union to which he returns becomes more complex: now he sees the physical distinction between him and his mother, though "merging" in other ways. I have suggested in talking about different kinds of object relations implied by, for example, jokes as opposed to dreams, that there are different sorts of transitional accommodations. Only by seeing the different stages and how they affect different texts will critics be able to use Winnicottian theory in practical criticism as well as in general theories of creativity.

A second source of looseness in critics' use of the term *transitional* is the fact that the infant's transitional experiences are transitional only to us, since only we and not he can distinguish between the subjective and objective realities that form the context for his experience. By contrast, however, the work of art is not, as it would sometimes appear in these

23. Margaret Mahler, *On Human Symbiosis and the Vicissitudes of Individuation* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968).

discussions, equivalent to the transference in a psychoanalytic session or to the child's transitional object. The infant's and patient's play spaces are very different from the adult's aesthetic play space in a work of art. The child emerges from his transitional play space; the patient emerges from his unwitting transference relationships; and it is this emergence and its implied self-conscious perspective that provide the model for art. At first, the child's play is not play at all but often all too real (as frightening stories and movies are too real). So, too, with transference behavior in analysis; pop psychologists may refer to such rigid repetitions as "games people play," but these are not games for those involved—not even in child analysis, when a child acts out his fantasies through doll families and a well-stocked doll house. True play begins only when the child realizes the difference between killing a father doll and killing a father, or when the patient recognizes the difference between merely disagreeing with the analyst and having fantasies which turn disagreement into a crushing attack.

But once the child or patient can distance himself from his own behavior, once he can see that there may be a difference between his own version of reality and someone else's version, then "play" begins, and so does the symbolic behavior which is a first version of art. One analyst has even suggested that the mark of successful therapy is the ability to be playful about one's fantasies, rather than denying them altogether or taking them for the truth, and that as an analyst he knows the terminal phase of an analysis has begun when he feels that the patient is sharing a playful approach with him or even initiating one.²⁴ The subject's attitude toward transitional phenomena and games gives them their special quality and their special role in the whole personality, just as it is the reaction to and integration of fantasies, not the fantasies themselves, that makes a person the person he is and a text the text it is.

24. Harold Searles, "Transference Psychosis in Psychotherapy of Schizophrenia," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 44 (1963): 249-81.

This conjunction of transitional phenomena and fantasies brings us to one last source of laxity in the application of these theories. Although they may suggest a more appropriate model for literary texts than the old-style fantasy model, they nonetheless resemble the *newer* fantasy models. As long as we understand that a fantasy depicts action in an external world composed of other people (however primitively this is conceived), and as long as we understand that a fantasy is not a retreat from reality but an alternate version of it, we see that fantasies have always been "transitional spaces," "other stages" of reality. The theories about transitional space are really theories about fantasies, but fantasies now seen as the rich, many-dimensional phenomena they really are. Object relations theories and theories about transitional phenomena call attention to a new dimension of fantasy life, and they accord fantasy a newly important status in our total mental life; but they do not provide a category for experience or a model for literature that differs from fantasy as we defined it in chapter 3. These theories thus allow us to keep and expand upon all we have learned from long study of fantasy over the years.

RHETORICAL EXCHANGES IN A TEXT

I shall reconsider Dickens's *Old Curiosity Shop* to suggest first what the psychoanalytic theory of rhetorical exchanges can contribute to the understanding of a text and then to suggest how its use is related to the fantasy model. It has already been suggested that the novel's content and structure, as well as the narrator's relation to his material, are influenced by a fantasy about the Ambiguous Seducer and the Pure Maiden. Let us see now what we can find by thinking about the novel in the context of, or as the medium and occasion for, an exchange between the narrator and the reader.

Of course, since *The Old Curiosity Shop* was a serial novel which appeared in segments every week, it was literally just that. Any serial writer is involved in an exchange with his au-

dience, in which both sides give and receive. Dickens was responsive enough to his audience's reactions to make the famous revision of the ending of *Great Expectations*, later on, and had he not been listening to his audience in the case of Nell's story, there would have been no novel at all but only a few short sketches. Dickens had just completed *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) and had no intention of starting another long novel for a while. Instead, he began work on a long-cherished project, a journal on the model of *The Spectator*, *The Tatler*, and Goldsmith's *Bee*. *Master Humphrey's Clock* was to contain nonfiction, some whimsical fiction, and a variety of other pieces, including personal reminiscences; all selections were to be short.

Readers, however, did not go along with Dickens's plans, and after rushing to buy the first, much-advertised issue, they ignored its successors. Sales rose again only after the first segments of Nell's story appeared, and Dickens was pressured into extending the story beyond the few installments he had envisioned, into a full-length, unplanned-for novel, which came out in weekly segments, faster than he had ever produced a novel before. This seemed to be the only way to make a financial success of *The Clock*. The pressure Dickens complained about in his letters is echoed in the novel by Codlin, the puppet master, who cannot escape his charge, but has to carry him forever: "Whereas he had been last night accosted by Mr. Punch as 'master,' . . . here he was, now, painfully walking beneath the burden of that same Punch's temple, and bearing it bodily upon his shoulders" (p. 191).²⁵

More important than anything Dickens himself might have felt, however, are the details he included in the portrait of the narrator, Master Humphrey, and it is Humphrey we will focus on here, either as himself or as the more anonymous narrative voice that takes over and is only retrospectively identified as his. Actually, Humphrey's fictional presenta-

25. Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Angus Easson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972).

tion of his story is in some ways just as autobiographical as Dickens's famous autobiographical fragment about his humiliating service in the blacking factory as a child. Like Dickens, who only reluctantly showed the blacking factory description to his friend John Forster, Humphrey is a shy and defensive narrator, carefully selecting a sympathetic audience. Their differences are revealing too. In the "real" autobiography, Dickens effaced his adult self, except as a means for conveying facts about his childhood. In Humphrey's story, we see just the opposite: a writer tells us what it is like to be a man who tells stories partly as a means of effacing painful childhood memories. Humphrey shares several narrative traits with Dickens ("love of inanimate objects" as a stimulant for his imagination, for example), and his treatment of the quaint curiosity shop tells us much about a trait central to the man who invented the detective story: curiosity.

An appropriate starting point for an analysis of Humphrey and his relation to his material and his audience is the fact that he is remembering. The earliest psychoanalytic interpretations of *The Old Curiosity Shop* merely tried to find out what Dickens was remembering as he wrote the novel, particularly as he indulged himself in the sticky sentimentality of Nell's death. These were attempts to explain Dickens's artistic failure as a descent into the merely personal, usually in the form of a particular personal memory. It has been suggested that behind Nell's death is the death of Dickens's young cousin, Mary Hogarth, whom he had loved unreasonably: Dickens was so saddened, it is suggested, that he could not be objective when recreating her death. Going a bit deeper, it has been suggested that Dickens was in love with the seventeen-year-old girl, so that the sugarcoating of Nell's death conceals not only a sadness but a taboo sexual attraction.²⁶

Steven Marcus adds complexity to such interpretations by avoiding literal-minded assumptions about influence. He

26. See my discussion in chapter 3 of the early psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel.

suggests that through Nell's death Dickens may have been mourning his own spiritual death in childhood, during the blacking factory humiliations that he described in his autobiography. Both memories, then—Mary's death and Dickens's own—lay behind Nell's death, and Dickens was both remembering his own experience and identifying with another's. Simply evoking Mary's death is not enough to explain Nell.²⁷ Marcus's analysis begins to capture the complexity that the background of *The Old Curiosity Shop* must have—a complexity that would almost certainly include the emotional ambivalence which I described earlier. For Nell's death scene not only invites Dickens—or any reader—to take passive pleasure in identifying with Nell (or with Mary, or with one's childhood self who suffered in one of the equivalents to blacking factories, which all childhoods provide); it also seduces the reader into taking a more active pleasure in identifying with the aggressor, in killing Nell, in getting back at the world and replaying the childhood scene so that he can be on the winning side this time. The fluidity of identification contributes to the fantasy quality of the episode and the novel, and Dickens exploits it. At the beginning of the book, we identify with Nell; Grandfather Trent seems to be a selfish ogre, and though he becomes more pitiable during the first part of the story, he is still despicable. We can comfortably feel sorry for and admire ourselves as we sympathize with the dear child who puts up with him. Later on, however, we begin to detect echoes of *King Lear*, and Dickens takes advantage of another form of sentimentality latent in his material, as he gradually transforms Trent into a well-meaning but deluded old man nobly mourning his lost child.

27. Dickens coyly confessed to having been in love with Little Red Riding Hood as a child ("A Christmas Tree" [1850]). Insofar as the confession is true at all, it suggests that Dickens was attracted to victimized little girls long before Mary died in his arms; this early bias—and the fantasies associated with it—may even have helped bring about the overpowering effect her death had on him later. The "merely personal" cannot be explained by the merely biographical.

Searching for Dickens's specific memories, however, explains less about the meaning of the novel than the fact that the story is so intimately connected to the very process of remembering.²⁸ This process, like the individual memories themselves, is highly ambivalent, and it wavers between the two alternatives that characterize the fantasy about master and victim, which I described earlier and which characterize so many elements in the novel. These opposing versions of remembering charge the process of memory with the same danger that infects all the novel's relationships and activities. The process of remembering can be a leisurely activity in which the narrator has complete mastery and control of what and how much he remembers. But remembering can also turn into a process in which memories get out of control, come alive, and take over; it can even draw one into past experience again, just as the Single Gentleman was drawn into Nell's adventures and Humphrey was drawn into the gigantic clock in London.

For the most part, however, the threat of this kind of memory is never fully realized. It adds excitement to the story, but what we generally feel in the narrative is the triumph of a man subduing memories and taking pleasure in controlling them. For the "pleasures of memory," to quote the famous

28. If we were to consider these memories systematically, I would emphasize Dickens's memory of a brief pastoral period in his life just *before* the move to London and the blacking factory incident. These were his last weeks in Chatham with the beloved schoolmaster who introduced him not only to imaginative works but to the very journals Dickens set out specifically to recreate in *Humphrey's Clock*. Dickens refers lovingly and gratefully to this man, but the scenes in which the schoolboy dies while his schoolmaster sits helplessly by may not be far from Dickens's subjective version of that period. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the schoolboy's death marks a transition from Nell's stay with the lively Punch to her stay at the deadly waxworks. It was while Dickens was working on this section that he first hinted that Nell too might die. See his letter to Forster, 7 July 1839, reprinted in *Dickens' Letters*, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey, Pilgrim edition, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

poem to which Dickens alludes in dedicating the novel,²⁹ include not only the regressive joy of returning to past events but also the miser's joy of telling over his coins. The content of such memories is naturally important, but the process of recovering and remembering provides its own delight, even when the memories are painful and humiliating. Dickens said he cried over Nell's death, but his tears may have been similar to the tears of the Walrus and the Carpenter, who cried over the oysters they devoured.

The delight derived from remembering is strong and, like the Walrus's pleasure, appetitive: there is a devouring memory as well as a devouring curiosity. Whether dwelling on one fixed image, as Humphrey dwells on Nell's, or chasing after it, like the Single Gentleman in his carriage watching the countryside fly by, the process of remembering satisfies a visual hunger. The narrator watches with something like the "infant's omnivorous eye," as I believe some analyst has called it, and presents a search for the "pictorial past,"³⁰ like the search that took Alex Haley to Africa to look for his roots or the one that takes an analytic patient back to his old neighborhoods rather than to the mere memory of them. The process of narration often takes on this primitive quality of hunger. Some readers feel that Quilp's way of literally gobbling things up, shell and all, is a model for and expression of Dickens's own insatiable appetite for reality in his fiction.

Memory's appetite and its satisfaction also provide the occasion for a social and rhetorical exchange that involves not only the narrator's relation to his created characters and their world but also his relation to his audience. Quilp's appetite is related to the way he teases others by offering and then withdrawing refreshment, and Dickens—or the novel's narrator—is in a way like Quilp in this sense. In the guise of a host, in the

29. "The Pleasures of Memory" was written by Samuel Rogers, who affected the novel in other ways as well. See chapter 3, note 94.

30. Bertram D. Lewin, *The Image and the Past* (New York: International Universities Press, 1969), pp. 22–23.

preface to the first edition of the novel, Dickens invites his readers to a feast and promises them an array of dishes "smok[ing] on the board."

But after tantalizing and rousing his readers' curiosity in the novel, Dickens consistently holds back his promised delights stretching the story out, coyly withholding information and not letting us know what is happening to Little Nell or even whether she is still alive. Quilp made Sampson Brass drool by drinking liquor in front of him, and then he suddenly forced him to drink a cup boiling hot. At the end of the novel, Dickens offers his readers something more like ice cubes, with Nell's snowbound death, but he plays with Nell's death—and with them—in the same way Quilp taunted Brass. The death scene is a juicy morsel, and, having long kept it a secret (Dickens sent a copy of the last chapter to a friend before it was published, asking that he not give the secret away), he teases the reader with it until the very end. Without privileged narrative access, the reader must accompany the Single Gentleman and see only through his eyes, slowly coming closer to the room where Nell lies, approaching from the outside, seeing through the window, not knowing until the very last minute whether she is asleep or dead. As one contemporary reader put it, "Dickens gloats, touches, tastes, smells and handles [the death of Little Nell] as if it were some kind of savory."³¹

In all of these relationships we recognize the same alternatives that characterize the novel's main fantasy: either dominate or be dominated, eat or be eaten. Quilp threatens to devour everyone, but he is eventually swallowed up and drowned in a river; similarly, Samson had imagined "drinking" Quilp from the bottom of his cup, earlier in the novel. These occurrences resemble the narrator's relation both to the memories he draws on and to the audience to which he

31. Fitzjames Stephen, *Cambridge Essays* (1855); cited in Kathleen Tillotson's *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 48.

presents them; to the world he is creating and the people with whom he is sharing it. The narrator either totally subdues his world to his own fantasies, or his world gets out of control and subdues him.

This is why a general theory that equates every text with a transitional object or transitional space only serves here to destroy distinctions. It is true in one sense, of course, that *The Old Curiosity Shop*, like all other fiction, is a "transitional" world that is neither a part of ordinary reality nor a mere falsehood but which has its own provisional truth. Nonetheless, the narrator's limitations give this novel its own particular relation to the extremes of reality and falsehood. For the narrator, it could be said that there is no transitional space between his way and the world's way, between fantasy and reality. Instead of playfully suspending the boundaries between fantasy and reality, or between himself and the objective world, the narrator always feels compelled to choose between these alternatives, and he thereby forces readers to choose between them as well. The forced choice has several effects. Most immediately, perhaps, it affects the *things* in the world he creates. The narrator tells us, for example, that he likes inanimate objects better than people; yet he still fears them, because, though safely inanimate, these objects may begin to dominate him if his imagination depends too much on them for stimulation. He sees no third possibility, no relationship *between* imagination and objects in which neither would dominate.

Dickens's famous animated objects, in the world of this novel at least, are either practically alive without the help of imagination, as Humphrey's clock seems to be, or they are merely objects. The animation comes not from real movement but, as in animated cartoons, from rapidly switching back and forth between two possibilities. An example of this is Nell's flickering perceptions the night she spends among the waxworks: the waxworks are first statues and then become "really" alive, but they are never both at once—never alive in the special sense that art makes life come alive.

Humphrey's attitude also affects the fictional status of the whole novel, impelling it either toward pure fantasy or toward hard reality. Quilp and Nell each actually choose one of the two aforementioned alternatives as a description of the narrative in which they appear. For Quilp, his is a true history, and he thinks of himself as Robinson Crusoe, snug in his version of Crusoe's bachelor bower, served by an adolescent Friday. Quilp relives the story of one man's struggle with the everyday details of living, in all their variety and toughness. Nell, by contrast, thinks of her travels as a recreation of *Pilgrim's Progress*, an abstract and allegorical journey toward death that is, finally, a dream. Humphrey, as we have seen, tries to draw a firm line between the opposing stances he assumes. He is *either* a distanced, uninvolved narrator of what might be fiction, or—as he reveals at the end—he is an actor in a true story, drawn into his tale as reluctantly as Oedipus was drawn into his search.

There is only one place in *The Old Curiosity Shop* where anything resembling an imaginative play space is created. There is only one part of the novel in which fantasies meet the real world on a ground midway between them, and creations are known and accepted for what they are: neither real nor false but something different and better. All modern readers have appreciated the breathing space it provides in the novel, and its contrast with the rest of the book points up its difference in imaginative status. This creation appears in the latter part of Dick Swiveller's story. Swiveller begins as a villain and threatens by turn to take up each of the two roles in the fantasy scene of the persecuted child—the possessive parent and the masochistic child. Nell's wicked brother bribes Swiveller to take Nell for his child-wife, along with her supposed inheritance, and to reduce her to an expensive possession; later, Quilp offers to be Swiveller's parent and let him play the part of a persecuted child. But Swiveller refuses both roles and becomes increasingly attractive. He is the only one of the characters who lives in a fiction known and relished as a fiction. He, not the narrator, invents the fairy tale that silently shapes

the story: he transforms Sally Brass into a dragon, the small servant into a Marchioness, and his own recovery from fever into an Arabian night.

Only by recognizing the difference between the narrator's and Swiveller's way of telling stories—the difference between their relations to their creations and to their audiences, and the difference between their two kinds of symbolic expression—can we see how the novel works. And these differences are differences both in the nature of their fantasies and in the degree of self-consciousness with which they indulge them. Although it is useful to think about transitional spaces, the critic must distinguish between *kinds* of transitions, as they are elaborated in fantasies and as they are more or less self-consciously integrated into the texture of the story.