Between literature and science: Freud and the demon of interpretation

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Summary

This essay examines a number of diverse responses, in recent exchanges between psychoanalytic theory, literary theory and the practices of textual analysis, to the ambiguous textual status of Freud's writing – its uneasy position on the borders between literature and science. In Section I a distinction is drawn between Patrick Mahony's reading of Freud in *Freud as a writer,* and those readings of Freud's texts associated with what has popularly come to be known as "French Freud", in particular Derrida's reading of the second chapter of *Beyond the pleasure principle.* While the underlying objective of both these readings might be said to be the constitution of Freud's scientific project as itself an example of figurative writing, the outcome of each is crucially different. Section II is directed at the critical tradition for whom Freud's genius was "poetic" rather than scientific; his ideas more valuable as "metaphors" than as literal truths. In Section III an alternative approach is put forward, exemplified in Arnold Davidson's reading of Freud's *Three essays on sexuality,* which presents a version of Freud's "genius" as neither an imaginative nor a rhetorical one so much as a *conceptual* one. In Section IV it is suggested that Freud's transcendence of the usual boundaries of science was the enabling dynamic of his thought.

Opsomming

In hierdie essay word daar ondersoekend gekyk na 'n aantal uiteenlopende reaksies in onlangse gedagtewisselings tussen psigoanalitiese teorie, literêre teorie en tekstueel analitiese praktyke op die dubbelsinnige tekstuele status van Freud se skryfwerk – die prekêre posisie daarvan op die grens tussen letterkunde en wetenskap. In afdeling I word 'n onderskeid getref tussen enersyds Patrick Mahony se lesing van Freud in *Freud as a writer* en andersyds lesings van Freudiaanse tekste wat geassosieer word met wat populêr bekend staan as "French Freud", in die besonder Derrida se lesing van die tweede hoofstuk van *Beyond the pleasure principle.* Alhoewel die onderliggende doelwit van albei hierdie lesings moontlik gesien sou kon word as 'n konstituering van Freud se wetenskap-like projek as op sigself genome 'n voorbeeld van figuurlike skryf, is daar ingrypende verskille in die uitkoms van hierdie lesings. In afdeling II word aandag geskenk aan die kritiese tradisie waarbinne Freud se genialiteit getipeer is as "poëties" in teenstelling tot "wetenskaplik" – sy idees het derhalwe groter status gehad as "metafore" as wanneer hulle gelees sou word as letterlike waarhede. In afdeling III word 'n alternatiewe benadering bekend gestel met verwysing na Arnold Davidson se lesing van Freud se *Three essays on sexuality,* waarin Freud se genialiteit voorgestel word as konseptueel eerder as òf verbeeldingryk òf retories. In afdeling IV word geredeneer dat Freud se transendensie van die gewone grense van wetenskap ten grondslag lê aan die besondere dinamika van sy denke.

> Mediocre spirits demand of science a kind of certainty which it cannot give, a sort of religious satisfaction. Only the real, rare, true scientific minds, can endure doubt, which is attached to all knowledge. I always envy the physicists and mathematicians who can stand on firm ground. I hover, so to speak, in the air. Mental events seem to be immeasurable and probably always will be so.
>
> Sigmund Freud

It is the peculiar focus of literary criticism on questions of language and interpretation which enables its practitioners to direct their attention not only

to literary texts but to scientific ones as well. Since both science and literature are constituted in language – both are discursive – both may become objects for the practice of literary criticism. Yet if their common constitution in language is one of the features which unites science and literature, it is also the one (as Roland Barthes has long since recognized) which divides them more surely than any of their differences. The reason for this, as Barthes points out, is that science and literature do not assume or, if one prefers, profess the language which constitutes them in the same way. As far as science is concerned,

> language is simply an instrument, which it profits it to make as transparent and neutral as possible; it is subordinate to the matter of science (workings, hypotheses, results) which, so it is said, exists outside language and precedes it. On the one hand and *first* there is the content of the scientific message, which is everything, on the other hand and *next,* the verbal form responsible for expressing that content, which is nothing.

In the case of literature, however – or at any rate, that literature which has "freed itself" from classicism and humanism –

> language can no longer be the convenient instrument or the superfluous backcloth of a social, emotional or poetic "reality" which pre-exists it, and which it is language's subsidiary responsibility to express, by means of submitting itself to a number of stylistic rules. Language is literature's Being, its very world; the whole of literature is contained in the act of writing, and no longer in those of "thinking", "portraying", "telling" or "feeling". (Barthes, 1967: 897)

By professing the language which constitutes them in these two conflicting ways, science and literature stand essentially in opposition one to the other. Of the two, it is science which assumes a privileged position. In assigning itself a purely instrumental status, in which language is simply the transparent medium through which the "truth" of its content is conveyed, scientific discourse believes itself to be a superior code, suggests Barthes – a mere "instrument of thought", a form of "neutral" language from which a certain number of specialized languages (the literary or poetic languages for example) have derived, as so many "deviants" or "embellishments". This neutral language is then held to be the referential code for all the "ex-centric" languages, which themselves are merely its subcodes. By identifying itself with this referential code, as the basis of all normality, Barthes goes on to say, scientific discourse arrogates to itself a right grounded essentially in a misconception of the nature of language, which it is the role of literature – or "writing" – precisely to contest.

One writer whose texts have consistently refused to uphold the boundaries between science and literature is Sigmund Freud. Symptomatic of the ambiguous textual status of his writing is the fact that though Freud was essentially a scientist, founder and father of the new science of psychoanalysis, and though, in his writings, he regularly and conscientiously defended the scientific status of his discoveries, the only public recognition he received from Germany in his lifetime was the Goethe Prize for literature. Some years

after this award, Albert Einstein is reported to have told Freud that he particularly admired his work not from a scientific but from a literary point of view: "I do not know any contemporary who has presented his subject in the German language in such a masterly fashion," Einstein wrote in a letter to Freud in 1939. Later, in Stuttgart in 1968, a book-length study focused exclusively on Freud's achievement not as a scientist but as a literary artist appeared,[1] and since then, Freud's name has become commonplace in literary studies throughout the West.

Yet Freud's transcendence of the traditional boundaries between the discourses of science and literature has seldom been positively acclaimed by his critics, who have tended either to elide the distinctive place of language in his work, or to use it against him as evidence of his implausibility as a scientist. Invariably, what begins in tribute to Freud's "literary genius" ends as an assault on his integrity as a scientist – an assault in which, as I shall demonstrate in Section II of this paper, the "demon of interpretation" is the principal target.

In this essay, I wish to examine a number of diverse responses, in recent exchanges between psychoanalytic theory, literary theory and the practices of textual analysis, to the ambiguous textual status of Freud's writing – its uneasy position on the borders between literature and science. To what extent do these exchanges either endorse or undermine the privileged position appropriated for itself by the scientific establishment; its consistent – and in Barthes's view, scandalous – denial of the fact "that language is a vast system, none of whose codes is privileged or, if one prefers, central, and whose various departments are related in a fluctuating hierarchy"? If, as Barthes suggests, what is called for today is a "mutation" in the consciousness, the structure and the objectives of scientific discourse, what part can the debate between literature, psychoanalysis and literary criticism play in bringing this about?

I

I shall begin with a brief examination of Patrick Mahony's study, *Freud as a writer* which takes Freud's literary achievement as a starting point for an analysis of his "identity as a writer". In his capacity both as practising psychoanalyst and as professor of English literature at the University of Montreal, Mahony sets out to delimit this "identity" through a psychobiographical exploration of Freud's style in some of his major texts.

Mahony's project, in other words, stands at the intersection between the two fields of psychoanalysis and literature – an intersection to which the editors of *Critical Inquiry* devoted their winter 1987 issue. In her introduction to this issue, Françoise Meltzer suggests that . . . traditionally, when psychoanalysis and literature are brought together, psychoanalysis is assigned an active interpreting position, while literature plays the role of "slave to psychoanalysis' master", the object to be interpreted; traditionally, "it is psychoanalysis which 'knows' and will tell literature what it is 'really' about. From psychoanalysis literature is supposed to learn what it itself 'means'"

(1987: 219). In the usual exchange, suggests Meltzer, literature exists for the purpose of manifesting, almost in spite of itself, a psychoanalytic truth:

> Since fiction is made possible by the constitution of the subject, and since it is the role of psychoanalysis to demonstrate how that constitution occurs, then it follows, psychoanalysis would have it, that fiction becomes truth and thus useful only when decoded by psychoanalysis. Otherwise, it remains merely fable. Literature is then "recognized" by psychoanalysis only as the producer of *Stoff* for interpretation and consumption – precisely the position of the slave in the Hegelian model. In this position, literature cannot afford to recognize itself. Even if literature is mystified, as it often is in Freud or Lacan, it is so because it appears to have an arbitrary conception, which psychoanalysis will unravel as the ineluctable and incessant unfolding of the unconscious – nothing accidental, finally, at all. Except that literature does not know this. Its coherence, further, will be destroyed by the psychoanalytic reading, but it is only a surface coherence – the deeper one, the one of which literature itself is ignorant, will be revealed by psychoanalysis. (Meltzer, 1987: 218)

Furthermore, not only literature is "partitive" in this way in the perspective of psychoanalysis, maintains Meltzer. The same would apply to all other disciplines: "Linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, history, feminism, 'humanism' could all be said to remain incomplete and ultimately less than meaningful without the overarching vision offered by psychoanalysis" (1987: 219). It is precisely in their implicit opposition to this notion of the "overarching vision" of psychoanalysis that the essays in the collection introduced by Meltzer find their common ground – by turning psychoanalysis, in other words, from the interpreter into that which is to be interpreted; by making of it not the "all-consuming master subject" of inquiry, but, for once, its object.

Potentially at least, Mahony's promised "stylistic" project belongs in the same group as the above, for here too it is apparently not the established notions of psychoanalysis that Mahony proposes to bring to the practice of reading, but the texts of psychoanalysis themselves which are to be "put on trial", as it were. But in the end, the project only moderately fulfills its potential: first, because of the author's failure to ground his exploration of Freud's style in any linguistic tradition which might conceivably lend his version of "stylistics" a less than purely arbitrary status;[2] and second, because of the project's consequent inevitable degeneration, as the work proceeds, from the promised investigation of Freud's writing itself into a series of crude and speculative remarks more concerned with the assignment of psychical motivations to the author than what he had to say.

Evidently, Mahony is of the school which subscribes to the notion that creativity is some sort of disease which (as Meltzer puts it) "once the author is cured, disappears" – the same school which, at a recent seminar for analysts at a psychoanalytic institute in a major American city, came up with a reading of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* which argued that he wrote it because he struggled with a "negative maternal introject". When it was suggested to the analyst concerned that to see a great work of art purely as a psychoanalytic symptom might be to adopt an impoverished view of the creative act, he

responded to his critic (who happened to be a woman) that she too was in need of the cure:

> "From your reaction to my paper," he is reported to have said, "I am afraid that I must inform you that you too seem to have an unresolved conflict with your mother. Since you are a woman, this conflict has blocked your normal Oedipal development, and thus makes your relation to your father problematic. As I am the paternal figure here – male, older – I must conclude that you are resisting my interpretation of Baudelaire because you are personally defensive with me and what I represent."[3]

My own resistance in reading Mahony is to the multitude of such symptoms which he manages to uncover, in the course of his study, in Freud's creative output: the revelation, for example, that Freud's habit of addressing his lectures to a single member of the audience was (in Mahony's view) a manifestation of his "anxiety" about "exteriorizing his ultimately undefinable unconscious", a symptom of Freud's "personal insecurity" which "sought containment in a projected psychic space bounded and defined by good object relations" (1987: 58); or that Freud's "creativity was at its highest when he was in a bad mood"; that he found a "symbolic paternal value in writing"; or that writing was for Freud above all else a sort of masturbatory impulse – in Mahony's words, "a sublimating satisfaction for his drives", an attempt to "master them", or to give them "external realization".

In his preface to *Psychoanalysis and the question of the text,* Geoffrey Hartman remarks that ideally,

> psychoanalysis should provide a closer mode of close reading. Instead, it often blinds the "scientific" interpreter to the use of language, his own as well as that of the text at hand. The reductionist types of reading that result add nothing to theme, symbol, and archetype hunting. What does it matter that the drift of an interpretation is descendental rather than ascendental, that sex rather than a lofty ideal proves to be the key? Such concepts as sublimation or regression in the service of the ego or defensive mastery do not compensate for the crudeness and tactlessness of these ventures. That the patient – in this case the text – survives is something of a miracle. (1978: xv)

Mahony's study is an almost parodic embodiment of the kind of "reductionist moves" identified both by Meltzer and Hartman, and which Hartman associates particularly with certain "older" kinds of psychoanalytic interpretations (Freud's excepted) which we read "only to know the worst . . . to get them over with . . ." or, as he puts it, "to admire the artist for the odds he overcame, or ourselves for staying relatively sane though born *inter faeces et urinas".* (1978: xv)

It is crucial that Mahony's psycho-biographical project (representative as it is of what Jacques Derrida might have called a form of "empirico-biographical explanation" whose function, ultimately is to reduce the text to an excuse for the performance of an episode in the life of the author) be distinguished from that form of criticism concerned primarily with the relation between objectivity and subjectivity in discourse, one of whose functions is to foreground the place of the subject in his or her own work; to foreground, in other words,

the fact that "every utterance implies its own subject" (Barthes, 1967: 898). Only the latter form of psycho-biographical enterprise, in its capacity to demonstrate the necessity of the subject's constitution within discourse, is in a position to participate in the Barthesian project to "de-throne" scientific discourse from the privileged position in which it is held by society as a meta-language ... Only the latter form is appropriately positioned to demonstrate that, as Barthes writes,

> ... the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity or, if one prefers, the place of the subject in his own work, can no longer be thought of as in the halcyon days of positivist science. Objectivity and rigour, those attributes of the scientist which are still used as a stick to beat us with, are essentially preparatory qualities, necessary at the time of starting out on the work, and as such there is no cause to suspect or abandon them. But they are not qualities that can be transferred to the discourse itself, except by a sort of sleight-of-hand, a purely metonymical procedure which confuses *precaution* with its end product in discourse. Every utterance implies its own subject, whether this subject be expressed in an apparently direct fashion, by the use of "I", or indirectly, by being referred to as "he", or avoided altogether by means of impersonal constructions. (Barthes, 1967: 898)

What *is* excluded in the utterance is always only the "person", psychological, emotional, or biographical, certainly not the subject – a point amply demonstrated by many of those readings of Freud's texts associated with what has popularly come to be known as "French Freud".[4] One of the objectives of this recent French initiative is to constitute Freud's scientific project as itself an example of figurative writing, by focusing most insistently on the *textuality* of his work – an objective exemplified in, for instance, Derrida's reading of the second chapter of *Beyond the pleasure principle,* in which he analyses Freud's account of the episode of the grandchild's game with the wooden reel, the *fort/da* episode.

The game is played by Freud's grandchild who, at the age of one and a half, is observed by his grandfather playing with a wooden reel with a piece of string tied around it. "It never occurred to [the child] to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage," writes Freud. "What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his little curtained bed, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his meaningful 'o-o-o-o'[signifying "gone"]. He then pulled the reel out of the bed again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful *'da'* [signifying "there"]. This, then, was the complete game – disappearance and return. As a rule one witnessed only its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act." (Freud, 1920g: 15)

Derrida's reading is based on the hypothesis that the process of repetition identified in the *fort/da* game is "re-enacted" in the account itself in a way which can be shown to "re-inscribe" the writer (Freud) in his own text:

> If we consider the argumentative framework of the chapter, we notice that something repeats itself, and this process of repetition must be identified not only

> in the content (the examples, the materials described and analyzed) but also in Freud's very writing, in the "steps" taken by his text, in what it does as well as in what it says, in its "acts" as much as in its "objects". What obviously repeats itself in this chapter is the movement of the speculator to reject, set aside, make disappear *(fort),* defer everything that seems to call the PP[5] into question. He notes that it is not enough, that he must postpone the question. Then he summons back the hypothesis of something beyond the pleasure principle only to dismiss it again. The hypothesis returns only like something that has not really returned but has merely passed into the ghost of its presence. (1978: 144–115)

According to Derrida, the description of Ernst's game – of the "earnest game of Ernst, the elder grandson of the grandfather of psychoanalysis" – should no longer be read *only* as a theoretical argument, "a strictly theoretical speculation that tends to conclude that what we have here is the repetition compulsion *or* the death drive *or* simply an inner limit to the PP", but rather that the description of Ernst's game can also be read as an "autobiography" of Freud – "not merely an autobiography entrusting his life to his own more or less testamentary writing but a more or less living description of his own writing, of his way of writing *Beyond the pleasure principle*" (1978: 119):

> [J]ust as Ernst, in recalling the object (mother, plaything, or whatever), comes also to recall *himself* in an immediately supplementary operation, in the same way the speculating grandfather, describing or recalling this or that, recalls *himself,* and produces what is called his text, making a contract with himself so as to be left holding all the strings of his line, descendants and ascendants, in an incontestable *ascendancy.* (1978: 134)

By proffering both a multiple subject for the text (Freud as writer, father, grandfather, "father" of a discipline) and a multiple object (the *fort/da* game; the relation of the pleasure principle to a "beyond"; filiation; dissemination, or the projection of psychoanalysis into the future while at the same time attempting to master that future by repetition) Derrida's reading demonstrates how Freud's text both accounts for and at the same time "acts out" the psychoanalytic processes – such as those of the dream-work – that Freud examined.[6] At the same time, he demonstrates how the subject is constituted within his own discourse. But what survives in the Derridean reading, even as it sets out to "re-inscribe" the writer (Freud) in his text, is a comment not on the man, nor on his life, but on the nature and texture of writing itself, on the fact that the "institutional character of the science of psychoanalysis stands in relation to the institutional character of writing itself" (Hartman, 1978: xii), and on the fact of the impossibility, at significant moments, of the writer's achieving any discursive distance from or perspective on what is written:

> This text is auto-biographical, but in a completely different way from what was believed before . . . *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is . . . not an *example* of what we believe we already know under the name of autobiography. It writes the autobiographical, and, from the fact that an "author" recounts something of his life in it, we can no longer conclude that the document is without truth value, without value as science or philosophy. A "domain" opens up in which the "inscription" of a subject in his text is also the necessary condition for the

> pertinence and performance of a text, for its "worth" beyond what is called empirical subjectivity (if, indeed, there is such a thing, since subjectivity speaks, writes, and substitutes one object for another). (1978: 135)

Ironically, Mahony's psychobiographical project can only be described as "pre-Freudian" by comparison. In its commitment precisely to delimiting Freud's "identity as a writer", to identifying a single unitary self which would be the source and locus of Freud's entire oeuvre, Mahony implicity rejects the very Freudian scenario which would have revealed to him the impossibility of his project – a scenario in which the notion of a unitary identity which waits to be revealed to all who take the trouble to uncover it is replaced by that of a subject inevitably partial and divided, consisting not in a single self but instead, to borrow Richard Rorty's term, in a number of "quasi selves" (1986: 7) which lurk beneath the threshold of consciousness, irrecoverable *in toto* even to the mind they inhabit.

If Mahony's project displays any sensitivity at all to the notion of an unconscious, it is to the reductive notion of the unconscious as a "seething mass of inarticulate instinctual energies" – a "reservoir of libido" – which, as Rorty has pointed out, is just another name for "the passions", the lower part of the soul, the "bad, false self" (1986: 7). To view the conscious/unconscious distinction in this way is to see it essentially in terms of the Platonic reason-passion distinction; but had this indeed been the only sense Freud gave to the term his work would have left our self-image largely unchanged: "What is novel in Freud's view of the unconscious is his claim that our unconscious selves are not dumb, sullen, lurching brutes, but rather the intellectual peers of our conscious selves, possible conversational partners for those selves" (Rorty, 1986: 7). In the new, Freudian picture, complex and sophisticated sets of transactions between two or more "intellects" in a single body take the place of the older, traditional picture – apparently endorsed by Mahony – of one "intellect" (which is constituted in consciousness) struggling with a mob of "irrational" brutes (constituted in the unconscious). Mahony's psychobiographical investigation – representative as it is of at least one major interpretive tradition which has arisen at the intersection between psychoanalytic and literary theory – reveals a model of the unconscious which, ironically, denies to Freud's theory both its novelty and its complexity.

II

Supplementing Mahony's fond but ultimately unhelpful psycho-biographical investigation of Freud's writing is a gushing tribute to his "literary genius". This places Mahony's reading amongst many recent essays in which Freud has been acclaimed as proto-novelist – in which his texts (in particular the case histories) have been compared to great works of fiction. Representative of this initiative is Steven Marcus's influential reading of one of the most famous of the case histories, "Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria", better known as the case of Dora.

In his analysis, Marcus compares the narrative course of Freud's history of Dora's illness and treatment to the general form of the modern experimental

novel. Like a modernist writer, he suggests, Freud begins the case history with an elaborate introduction concerning the problematical status of his undertaking and the dubious character of his final achievement. In addition, like the familiar "unreliable narrator" of modernist fiction, Freud pauses at regular intervals to remind the reader that his insight into the complex of events composing the case history has remained "fragmentary", that his understanding of it remains in some essential sense permanently occluded (1985: 66). The set of "Prefatory Remarks" to the history are regarded by Marcus as a kind of "novelistic framing action", in which Freud "rehearses his motives, reasons, and intentions and begins at the same time to work his insidious devices upon the reader":

> First, exactly like a novelist, he remarks that what he is about to let us in on is positively scandalous, for "the complete elucidation of a case of hysteria is bound to involve the revelation of intimacies and the betrayal of . . . secrets". Second, again like a writer of fiction, he has deliberately chosen persons, places and circumstances that will remain obscure; the scene is laid not in metropolitan Vienna but "in a remote provincial town". He has from the beginning kept the circumstances that Dora was his patient such a close secret that only one other physician – "in whose discretion I have complete confidence" – knows about it. He has "postponed publication" of this essay for "four whole years", also in the cause of discretion . . . Finally he has buried the case even deeper by publishing it "in a purely scientific and technical periodical" in order to secure yet another "guarantee against unauthorized readers". He has, in short, made his own mystery within a mystery, and one of the effects of such obscure preliminary goings-on is to create a kind of Nabokovian frame – what we have here is a history framed by an explanation which is itself slightly out of focus. (1985: 68)

During the course of his essay, Marcus will compare the content of Freud's text to a play by Ibsen (1985: 64); its "forbidding" and "disconcerting" quality, in which the writer "succumbs to no impulse to make it easy for the reader", will be said to be reminiscent of both Borges and Nabokov (1985: 69–70); and the elaborate "interweaving" of the various strands of time in the account or, as Marcus puts it, Freud's "geological fusing of various time strata – strata that are themselves at the same time fluid and shifting" will be described as virtually "Proustian" in their complexity (1985: 73). Finally, as Marcus reminds us, the actual events of the case (quite apart from Freud's narration of them) are themselves "full of such literary and novelistic devices or conventions as thematic analogies, double plots, reversals, inversions, variations, and betrayals – full of what the "sharp-sighted" Dora as well as the sharp-sighted Freud thought of as "hidden connections" . . . "(1985: 79–80)

There is no doubt a certain intellectual satisfaction to be had in seeking out the traces of modernist fiction in Freud's prose. But is this all that there is at stake in the exercise? One of the effects of Marcus's reading is to contribute to the popular perception – so close to the heart of Mahony's project – of Freud as a "literary genius". Yet despite Freud's own well-documented enthusiasm for the novelists' art, it is not certain he would have cared much for Marcus's efforts, nor even the embedded tribute to his literary skill. Indeed, historically, the public's recognition of his success as an artist had,

more often than not, been synonymous with a refusal to acknowledge his validity as a scientist – a bitter reminder to Freud of its scepticism with regard to the existence of any *theoretical* value in his writing.

Such was the case on the occasion of the publication of the *Studies on hysteria* (1895) for which the most substantial recognition came not from the scientific community but from the poet, literary historian, and dramatic critic, Alfred von Bergner, then professor of the History of Literature in the university and director of the imperial theatre in Vienna: "We dimly conceive the idea that it may one day become possible to approach the innermost secret of human personality ... " wrote von Bergner. "The theory itself is in fact nothing but the kind of psychology used by poets" (Jones, 1961: 224). In medical circles however, and in the scientific community as a whole, the book was not well received. (Jones, 1961: 223 ff)

Four years later, *The interpretation of dreams* was given a similar reception. Some eighteen months after publication, no scientific periodical, and only a few others, had so much as mentioned the book. According to Jones, it was simply ignored. Although the book was not entirely neglected by the psychological periodicals, its reviews here were almost as destructive as complete silence would have been: one proclaiming the danger that "uncritical minds would be delighted to join in this play with ideas and would end up in complete mysticism and chaotic arbitrariness"; another settling for the conclusion that "the imaginative thoughts of an artist had triumphed over the scientific investigator". (Jones, 1961: 307)

In the case of Marcus's reading of the Dora narrative, his response pivots on the allegation that the "central moment" of the "central scene" of Dora's life (and Freud's text)[7] – a scene which Freud orchestrates with "inimitable richness", according to Marcus, and with the "tact" and "sense of form" that one associates with a classical composer of music, or with Proust, Mann, or Joyce ... – this central moment, which becomes thereafter the central "reality" of the case, is a *"reconstruction"* that Freud has "formed in his own mind":

> This pivotal construction becomes henceforth the principal "reality" of the case, and we must also observe that this reality remains Freud's more than Dora's, since he was never quite able to convince her of the plausibility of the construction, or, to regard it from the other pole of the dyad, she was never quite able to accept this version of reality, of what "really" happened. (1985: 79)

Marcus is quick to proclaim the "unquestionable genius" of this "pivotal construction", but it is clearly a "literary" rather than "scientific" genius he has in mind. By suggesting that the "central character" in the action in this history is not Dora but Freud himself, that it is "his story that is being written and not hers that is being retold", Marcus simultaneously repeats the claim, which is also his central thesis, that the history of Dora's case, as constructed in Freud's text, is essentially a fictional one. It must be emphasized, Marcus writes, that the "reality" Freud insists upon is very different from the "reality" that Dora is claiming and to which she is clinging. And he goes on to suggest that not only does Freud overlook for the most part this critical difference, he

also adopts no measures for dealing with it: "The demon of interpretation has taken hold of him, and it is this power that presides over the case of Dora" (1985: 85).

In this way, what begins as a tribute to Freud's power as an artist ends as an attack on his integrity as a scientist – an attack in which the "demon of interpretation" is the principal target. What begins, in other words, as a potentially liberating gesture, promising in its inter-disciplinary nature to go beyond the opposition between science and art, ends by surreptitiously reinforcing it. Like other masterpieces of literature or the arts, Marcus claims, Freud's case histories seem to possess certain "transhistorical qualities" which, if they are by no means easy to specify, are nevertheless clearly discernible. The implacable "march of science", he writes, has not – or has not yet – consigned them to "mere history": "Their singular and mysterious complexity, density and richness have thus far prevented such a transformation and demotion" (1985: 56). In effect, this is to place art and science on either side of an unbridgeable divide – one in which science is ephemeral, subject to the relentless passage of history, while art is "timeless" and lives forever; it is simultaneously to suggest, in effect, that if Freud's case histories are still in circulation, it is to their "transhistorical qualities", that is, to their "complexity, density and richness" as works of art and not science that they owe their life.

In a more recent confrontation between literary criticism and another of Freud's best known case histories, Stanley Fish has made a parallel (while singularly more direct) attack on Freud's scientific integrity (Fish, 1987). The target this time is the so-called "Wolf-Man" case history (1918 [1914]), and the force of Fish's attack is invested primarily in the (by now) familiar allegation that the greater part of the final interpretation of the dream which is the centre-piece of the Wolf-Man's analysis, is the product of "persuasion and force" on the part of Freud, the analyst, rather than the result of independent work on the part of the patient. Even where the patient does apparently speak for himself in the interpretation of the dream, claims Fish, the independence of his words is compromised by the method by which they have been "induced" by Freud.

In Fish's analysis, Freud's account of the Wolf-Man's case history proceeds not according to principles of rationality and objectivity, but is characterized by a rhetorical pattern in which repeated claims of "independence" – for the analysis itself, for the "materials" upon which it is built, and for the patient's share in its work – can be shown to be powerfully subverted by the narrative in which they are submerged: "The real story of the case," writes Fish, "is the story of persuasion, and we will be able to read it only when we tear our eyes away from the supposedly deeper story of the boy who had a dream" (1987: 163).

Fish's arguments against the "independence" of the Wolf-Man's analysis, which he constructs in this way in the first section of his paper, and elaborates in those which follow, along with Marcus's claim that in the Dora case history, "it is [Freud's] story that is being written and not [Dora's] that is being retold", are situated at the edge of a much broader (and continuing) tradition

of criticism which attacks Freudian psychoanalysis on the grounds that it "acts by suggestion" – or, in Fish's terms, "that what the analyst claims to unover (in the archaeological sense of which Freud was so fond) he actually creates by verbal and rhetorical means" (1987: 158). Within this tradition, the principal objection to psychoanalysis follows Wittgenstein's observation that Freud is constantly claiming to be scientific, but what he gives is *speculation* – "something prior even to the formation of a hypothesis".[8] In Wittgenstein's view, the only reason these "speculations" have gained a certain popularity in the mind of the public is through their "appeal", or their "charm" as explanations: "The picture of people having unconscious thoughts has a charm. The idea of an underworld, a secret cellar. Something hidden, uncanny . . . A lot of things one is ready to believe because they are uncanny." (Cited in Cioffi, 1969: 186.)[9]

The same fundamental objection is embedded in Sebastiano Timpanaro's reference in *The Freudian slip* (1976) to the "captious and sophistical method, resistant to any verification, quick to force interpretations to secure preordained proofs, employed by Freud and Freudians in their explanation of slips, dreams and neurotic symptoms" (1976: 14). Timpanaro's aim in this study, which concentrates on *The psychopathology of everyday life,* is to "demystify a mode of reasoning which is also to be found in other of Freud's works – in particular, *The interpretation of dreams* and in general, all those writings which are dominated by the work of 'interpretation', which belongs to the anti-scientific aspect of psychoanalysis" (1976: 12). Timpanaro uses the word "anti-scientific" because he regards it as the most appropriate to designate the "ensemble of diverse objections" which can be made against psychoanalysis – objections which, as he points out, are interrelated, even if not identical. It is apparent that in both Fish's and Timpanaro's view, a method of investigation which admits the practice of interpretation cannot by nature be scientific.[10]

Traditionally, and prior to the work of the French women's liberation group *Psychoanalyse et politique,* feminists have rooted their objections in similar ground. Historically, for many feminists, Freud has been, and indeed still is a prime target as a "male chauvinist" whose so-called "scientific" propaganda has been responsible for damning a generation of emancipated women to the passivity of the second sex (cited in Mitchell, 1974: 303). In her survey of traditional feminist attacks on the Freudian notion of femininity (in *Psychoanalysis and feminism,* 1974), Juliet Mitchell elicits the common claim on which their diverse arguments rest – namely, that Freud's theories are not based on what may justifiably be called scientific evidence.[11] Particularly pertinent here is the work of Shulamith Firestone who, taking her cue from Havelock Ellis's remark, in 1917, that Freud was a great artist but not a scientist, finds "poetic" rather than "scientific" genius in Freud's work:

> But was there any value in [Freud's] ideas? Let us re-examine some of them once again, this time from a radical feminist view. I believe Freud was talking about something real, though perhaps his ideas, taken literally, lead to absurdity. In this regard, consider that Freud's genius was poetic rather than scientific; his ideas more valuable as metaphors than as literal truths (cited in Mitchell, 1974: 346).

In the same way, Marcus attributes the fascination of the Dora history (as well as its ultimate failure) to Freud's genius as a story-teller, while for Fish, the "appeal" of Freudian propositions in general (and in the Wolf-Man's case history specifically) is directly attributable to the peculiar "discursive power" of which and by which they have been constructed. The true content of Freudian explanations, according to Fish, is the story of their making, the story of "persuasion ... practised on a massive scale", in which the reader only believes what he is told because he has "fallen totally under the control of the teller".[12]

Underlying all these readings is the implicit requirement that, even if literature knows that language is never naive, never "transparent" – that is, that it can never convey any "truth" which is extraneous to writing, which is not a truth having to do with the art of writing itself – the language of science, on the other hand, must remain "innocent": a neutral utensil, an instrument merely, to convey a "meaning" or a "truth" or a "fact" which is beyond it, foreign to it.

III

It has been said that in the history of psychoanalysis, two competing myths about Freud have gradually developed. In a recently published reading of Freud's *Three essays on sexuality,* framed as a challenge to both, Arnold Davidson characterizes these myths as follows:

> The first myth, that of official psychoanalysis, depicts Freud as a lonely genius, isolated and ostracized by his colleagues, fashioning psychoanalysis single-handedly and in perpetual struggle with the world at large. The history of psychoanalysis under the sway of this myth has become the story of Freud as triumphant revolutionary. The second, opposing myth pictures Freud as getting all of his ideas from someone else – usually Wilhelm Fliess, although the names of Jean Martin Charcot, Havelock Ellis, and Albert Moll, among many others, are also mentioned frequently – and taking credit for what were in fact no more than minor modifications in previously developed theories. This is the myth of the career discontents, and the history of psychoanalysis dominated by it has become the story of Freud as demagogue, usurper, and megalomaniac. (1987: 256)

To these two myths we might now add a third, in which Freud emerges most strongly as a literary genius, whose imaginative and rhetorical powers occasionally enabled him to seduce his audience into mistakenly identifying his theoretical double-talk with scientific fact. This is the Wittgenstinian story of psychoanalysis as essentially duplicitous and dangerous, likely to do more harm than good: "Because although one may discover in the course of it various things about oneself, one must have a very strong and keen and persistent criticism in order to recognize and see through the mythology that is offered or imposed on one. There is an inducement to say, "Yes, of course, it must be like that ... " (1972: 52). Under the sway of this myth, the history of psychoanalysis is itself the history of a "powerful mythology", the story of Freud as at worst hypocrite and dissembler, at best master illusionist.

While the perpetrators of this myth should be given credit for their recognition of, and focus upon, what many of Freud's critics ignore, that is, the place of language in his work, it is their apparent underlying allegiance to the notion of science as a form of neutral language, an instrument of thought – which, if it has a certain need of language, is nevertheless not, like literature, *in* language – that leads them inevitably to the conclusion that the so-called literary qualities of Freud's writing must necessarily disqualify it as science. Consequently, and paradoxically, the very focus of these commentaries on the textuality of Freud's writing, far from encouraging the "mutation" in the consciousness of scientific discourse called for by Barthes, ends rather by confirming its present notion of itself as a superior referential code in relation to which all others are mere embellishments. How could this be avoided? What would it mean to read Freud so as neither to elide the place of language in his work nor to acknowledge it only as a threat to its credibility as science?

It is in the response it offers to this question that Davidson's reading of the *Three essays* seems to me to be particularly significant. In it, Davidson suggests that despite the enormous number of pages that has been written on these essays, it is very easy to underestimate their density – "a density at once historical, rhetorical and conceptual" (Davidson, 1987: 252). This underestimation stems, Davidson suggests, from historiographical assumptions that quickly misdirect us away from the fundamental issues at stake in Freud's work. What distinguishes his own reading is his attachment, as he puts it, to a different epistemological and methodological orientation from that at work in previous material – "a different and particular way of doing the history of psychoanalysis". Central to this new epistemological and methodological orientation is the archaeological perspective of Michel Foucault. Indeed, Davidson classifies his reading of Freud's *Three essays* as following in the wake of some of his own earlier writings, in which he has tried to "adopt and adapt Foucault's archaeological perspective, using it to write a history of nineteenth-century psychiatric theories of sexuality" (1987: 254–255).

Davidson's debt to Foucault is particularly apparent in his utilisation of Foucault's notion of the "discursive practice" – a central constituent of which, in Davidson's interpretation, is "a set of concepts linked together by specifiable rules that determine what statements can and cannot be made with the concepts". To write a history of nineteenth-century psychiatry by way of this notion, according to Davidson, requires writing a history of the emergence of a new system of concepts and showing how these concepts are internally related by a set of rules to form what we might think of as a "determinate conceptual space" (1987: 255). How we characterise Freud's place in this history, Davidson goes on to say, will then depend not on who said what first, but on whether the structure of concepts associated with Freud's writings continues, extends, diverges from, or undermines the conceptual space of nineteenth-century psychiatry.

> What we need . . . is a history of the concepts used in psychoanalysis, an account of their historical origins and transformations, their rules of combination, and

> their employment in a mode of reasoning. This task presumes, first, that we can isolate the distinctive concepts of nineteenth-century psychiatry, articulate their rules of combination, and thereby discern their limits of the possible. We must then undertake the very same enterprise for Freud's work, which, with sufficient detail, should enable us to see more clearly whether Freud's conceptual space continues or breaks with that of his predecessors. (1987: 257)

It is this focus on the *conceptual* and *historical* dimensions of language – the conceptual as contingent on the historical – which distinguishes Davidson's reading of Freud from the tradition of textual analysis exemplified in the earlier mentioned essays by Marcus and Fish. What emerges in Davidson's reading is a version of Freud's "genius" as neither an imaginative nor a rhetorical one so much as a *conceptual* one, grounded not so much in his manipulatory powers when dealing with the language of nineteenth-century psychiatry as in his ability, at the level of *conceptual* articulation above all, fundamentally to alter it: "Many writers before Freud possessed bits and pieces of his terminology and exhibited an inchoate, unself-possessed grappling with the problems brought to light by the *Three essays,*" writes Davidson. "But it was Freud who ascended to the level of concepts, who systematically and lucidly thought what had previously remained in a kind of precognitive blockage . . . " (1987: 275). The true source of Freud's genius, in other words, lay not so much in his ability to work *with* language as in his power to proceed *in spite of it.*

The particular concept on which Davidson focuses his attention in this essay is that of "sexual perversion". His analysis thus concentrates primarily on the first of Freud's *Three essays,* "Sexual aberrations". He begins with the observation that in order even to approximate to a comprehensive reading of this essay, it will be necessary to begin before Freud, with the prevailing concept of sexual aberration (or perversion) in the literature of nineteenth-century psychiatry; it will be necessary to "demarcate the conceptual space of which perversion was an element that dominated European psychiatry at the time Freud was writing the *Three essays*". And he goes on to point out that the best way to begin to understand the nineteenth-century conceptual space encircling perversion will be to examine the notion of the "sexual instinct": "for the conception of perversion underlying clinical thought was that of a functional disease of this instinct. That is to say, the class of diseases that affected the sexual instinct was precisely the sexual perversions" (1987: 258).

To be able to determine precisely what phenomena are functional disturbances or diseases of the sexual instinct, Davidson proceeds, one must also specify in what the *normal,*or natural, function of this instinct consists: "Without knowing the normal function of the instinct, everything and nothing could count as a functional disturbance" (1987: 260). Indeed, by the time Freud inherits the concept of the sexual instinct, as Davidson goes on to demonstrate, there is virtually unargued unanimity not only on the fact that this instinct does have a natural function, but also on what that function is. The view of Krafft-Ebing (in his *Textbook of insanity*) is offered as representative:

> During the time of the maturation of physiological processes in the reproductive glands, desires arise in the consciousness of the individual, which have for their purpose the perpetuation of the species (sexual instinct) ...
> With opportunity for the natural satisfaction of the sexual instinct, every expression of it that does not correspond with the purpose of nature – i.e., propagation – must be regarded as perverse. (1987: 260)

The natural function of the sexual instinct then, is propagation, and the corresponding natural, psychological satisfaction of this instinct must then consist in the satisfaction derived from heterosexual, genital intercourse. Sadism, masochism, fetishism, and homosexuality must all then be classified together as perversions since, as Davidson points out, "all exhibit the same kind of perverse expression of the sexual instinct, the same basic kind of functional deviation, which manifests itself in the fact that psychological satisfaction is obtained primarily through activities disconnected from the natural function of the instinct" (1987: 262).

This then is the prevailing conception of the sexual instinct and its perversions which Freud inherits and with which he is obliged to work in his *Three essays.* To this popular conception of the sexual instinct Freud introduces two new technical terms: the *sexual object* is "the person from whom sexual attraction proceeds", while the *sexual aim* is "the act towards which the instinct tends" (1987: 263). As far as the "perversions" are concerned, these may now be classified in terms of (1) deviations with respect to the sexual object which, in relation to the prevalent conception of the natural function of the sexual instinct, must necessarily consist in deviations from the natural attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; and (2) deviations with respect to sexual aim, which must now necessarily consist in deviations from the natural goal of sexual union. These, as Davidson points out, are precisely the two conceptually basic kinds of deviations we should expect of those writers who subscribed to the popular conception of the sexual instinct (1987: 263).

It is important to recognize at this point that at the time Freud inherits it, shared opinion regarding this definition of the concept of the sexual instinct is *unquestioned:* in the nineteenth-century psychiatric theories that preceded Freud, both a specific object and a specific aim formed *part and parcel of the instinct itself.* The very nature of the sexual instinct manifested itself, according to these theories, in an attraction to members of the opposite sex and in a desire for genital intercourse with them.

In his discussion of those "perversions" which manifest themselves as deviations in respect of the sexual object, Freud gives his fullest attention to inversion (homosexuality) – the deviation to which most nineteenth-century psychiatrists had themselves devoted the most attention. And it is in the following passage, with which Freud concludes his discussion on deviations in respect of the sexual object, that, as Davidson will demonstrate, he deals his first "conceptually devastating blow to the entire structure of nineteenth-century theories of sexual psychopathology" (1987: 265). The passage is worth quoting in full:

> It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual instinct and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is. Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together – a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thought between instinct and object. It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions. (Freud, 1905d: 147–48)

In order to show that inversion was a real functional deviation and not merely a statistical abnormality without genuine pathological significance, Davidson reasons, one had to conceive of the "normal" object of the instinct as part of the very content of the instinct itself: "If the object is not internal to the instinct, then there can be no intrinsic clinico-pathological meaning to the fact that the instinct can become attached to an inverted object" (1987: 265). It is through claiming, in effect, in the above passage, that there is no natural object of the sexual instinct, that the sexual object and the sexual instinct are merely "soldered together", that Freud proves himself worthy of the name of genius, in Davidson's eyes. Freud's conclusion, he writes:

> is explicitly and directly opposed to any conclusion that could be drawn by using the [prevailing] concept of the sexual instinct. The relationship between the concepts of *sexual instinct* and *sexual object* found in nineteenth-century texts, a rule of combination partially constitutive of the concept of the sexual instinct, was completely undermined by Freud, and as a consequence of this cutting away of old foundations, inversion could not be thought of as an unnatural functional deviation of the sexual instinct. (1987: 265–266)

In much the same way, as Davidson demonstrates, Freud's argument, his "structure of concepts", leads to the parallel conclusion that the "normal" aim of the sexual instinct, genital intercourse, is not part of the content of the instinct; or, in other words, in the terms of Freud's earlier conclusions about the sexual object, the sexual instinct and sexual aim are merely "soldered together". If the resulting overall structure of Freud's argument is to show that neither a specific aim nor a specific object has any constitutive bond with the sexual instinct, and if the previously shared concept of the sexual instinct is thus effectively dismantled, then, remarks Davidson, it is difficult to see how any conceptual foothold could remain for the concept of unnatural functional deviations of this instinct:

> In the case of both sexual aim and sexual object, it is only the apparent uniformity of normal behaviour that directs us to think otherwise. But this apparently well-entrenched uniformity actually masks the operations of the sexual instinct, operations which, *when conceptualized by Freud,* show us that the idea of the natural function of the instinct has no basis whatsoever. We ought to conclude from what Freud says here that there are no true perversions. The conceptual space within which the concept of perversion functions and has a stable role has been thoroughly displaced – and displaced in a way that requires

> a new set of concepts for understanding sexuality and a new mode of reasoning about it. (1987: 270–71)

Crucial to the difference between Davidson's reading and the tradition of literary analysis exemplified by Marcus and Fish *et al,* and in Mahony's project as a whole, is Davidson's recognition, not only of the rhetorical, but especially of the historical and conceptual density of Freud's texts. By concentrating almost exclusively on the "literary" aspect of Freud's work, which is defined in this case primarily as a function of its rhetorical power, these critics are led to underestimate or ignore both its historical and conceptual dimensions. In Davidson's reading of the *Three essays,* Freud's name itself – along with those of his predecessors, such as Bloch, Moll and others – are treated as, so to speak, "placeholders for certain sets of concepts and the way these concepts fit together to constitute a conceptual space". Only from this perspective can Davidson appropriately be placed to determine the way in which these essays provided the resources to "overturn" the conceptual space which made it possible for psychiatrists to make the statements about perversion that so dominated the period – by fundamentally altering the rules of combination for concepts such as sexual instinct, sexual object, and sexual aim, with the consequence that these shared concepts, among others, were destroyed.

That Freud himself was not always able to grasp the import of his own work; that he continued to use the idea of perversion as if his own conceptual innovations were not wholly accessible to him; that he often reintroduced, "behind his own back", in the *Three essays* and elsewhere, identifications that he had shown to be untenable; that, in Davidson's terms, his "genius" was not always conscious of itself as such, is explained in Davidson's text by what he calls the "divergent temporality of the emergence of new concepts and the formation of new mentalities" (1987: 276). "Automatisms of attitude," writes Davidson, "have a durability, a slow temporality, which does not match the sometimes rapid change of conceptual mutation. Mental habits have a tendency towards inertia, and these habits resist change that, in retrospect seems conceptually required" (1987: 276). When this is taken into account, the hesitations and ambiguities of Freud's texts can no longer be seen as the result of some "deconstructive indeterminacy or undecidability of the text", but are rather, as Davidson remarks, the "consequence of the dynamics of fundamental change":

> Mentality and concept are two different aspects of systems of thought, and we should not expect them to be coherently connected all at once, as if forms of experience could be dissolved and reconstituted overnight. Sidney Morgenbesser (1987: 277) is said to have asked the following question on an exam at Columbia University: "Some people argue that Freud and Marx went too far. How far would you go?" Whether Freud went too far or not far enough, this is exactly the right range of question. How far can you go? How far will you go?

IV

Freud's critics have often suggested that his work would have been more successful had it embodied their notions of scientific discourse; but there is

evidence to suggest that the enabling dynamic of Freud's thought was the result of a constant transgression of the boundaries of these notions as instituted by the scientific community during his lifetime. For all his desire that psychoanalysis be accorded the resonance and prestige of a true science *along* with all the others – "Psychoanalysis is a method of research, an impartial instrument, like the infinitesimal calculus . . . " (Freud, 1930: 36) – Freud never failed to respond to his material with the full resources of a supremely creative imagination. Indeed, there are many examples of this creative tension scattered throughout his work. In the earliest case histories of the *Studies on hysteria* (1893–1895) he writes:

> I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuro-pathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science . . . (1895d: 160)

The problem, Freud believed – and in this he consoled himself – lay not in any preference of his own for the literary or fictional mode of writing so much as in the nature of his subject itself:

> The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection. (1895d: 160–161)

In the Dora case history, which appeared in 1905, Freud was prepared to acknowledge that his narrative was such that many would find it possible, and would take it upon themselves, to read it as a *roman à clef,* "designed for their private delectation", rather than a serious contribution to the psychopathology of the neuroses (1905e: 9). Indeed, as Steven Marcus has shown, Freud's prophecy was not to go unfulfilled. In his reading of the memoirs of dr. Daniel Paul Schreber, published in 1911, Freud made a further confession of his convictions regarding the thin line dividing fact from fiction, truth from delusion: "It remains for the future to decide whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit, or whether there is more truth in Schreber's delusion than other people are as yet prepared to believe," he wrote (1911c: 79). In a letter to Hermann Struck in 1914, Freud acknowledged his essay on da Vinci to be "partly fiction" (Freud, E., 1961: 312) and in the essay itself, he admitted that as a piece of writing it might easily be classified as a "psycho-analytic novel":

> In the preceding chapters I have shown what justification can be found for giving this picture of Leonardo's course of development – for proposing these subdivisions of his life and for explaining his vacillation between art and science in this way. If in making these statements I have provoked the criticism, even from friends of psycho-analysis and from those who are expert in it, that I have merely written a psycho-analytic novel, I shall reply that I am far from over-estimating the certainty of these results. Like others I have succumbed to the attraction of this great and mysterious man, in whose nature one seems to detect powerful

> instinctual passions which can nevertheless only express themselves in so remarkably subdued a manner. (1910c: 134)

It is only fitting that the scientific investigator who chose for his objects of research the stuff of dreams, desires and fantasies – those very fictions by which we constitute ourselves as human subjects – should have been one of the first to refuse, however tentatively, the margins between literature and the more important territory of "truth" traditionally set aside as the domain of science. It was Barthes who said that "what the human sciences are discovering today, in whatever field it may be, sociological, psychological, psychiatric, linguistic, etc., literature has always known . . . "; but it might just as well have been Freud: "Science has only a few apodeictic propositions in its catechism: the rest are assertions promoted by it to some particular degree of probability," he wrote. "It is actually a sign of a scientific mode of thought to find satisfaction in these approximations to certainty and to be able to pursue constructive work further in spite of the absence of final confirmation" (1916–17: 51).

Pace his critics, Freud himself was well aware of the ambiguous textual status of much of his own writing, which hovered uneasily, he seemed to feel, on the borders between literature and science. Yet was it not precisely this uneasy position which enabled him to open up that "other place", that whole new dimension of intellectual inquiry, the unconscious? "Only the real, rare, true scientific minds can endure doubt, which is attached to all knowledge," he once said to Marie Bonaparte (cited in Mahony, 1987: 77). Freud's commitment finally was a commitment to scepticism – a scepticism which, in refusing the usual boundaries of science, made it possible to transcend them and explore a new continent of knowledge.

Notes

1. This was Walter Schonau's doctoral thesis, *Sigmund Freuds Prosa: Literarische Elemente seines Stils,* published by J.B. Metzlersche Verlag (cited in Mahony, 1987: 10).
2. For reference to a number of schools of thought in modern linguistics that have yielded significant results for the study of literary texts, see J.M. Coetzee: "Linguistics and literature", in Ryan, R. and Van Zyl, S. (eds.). *An introduction to contemporary literary theory* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1982). In this essay, Coetzee concentrates on two schools: that of generative-transformational grammar associated with the name of Noam Chomsky, and that of structuralism, particularly the kind of structuralism defined in the writings of Roman Jakobson.
3. For the full account, see Meltzer, 1987.
4. Exemplary of one application of the recent French initiative which I shall not discuss here, and in which Lacan is the seminal figure, are the essays introduced by Jeffrey Mehlman in *French Freud: structural studies in psychoanalysis* (*Yale French Studies,* 48. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972). In his editorial introductory essay, Mehlman notes that "to the extent that the truth of Freud's theory *is* the fact of repression, the very resistance to that truth, the structure of its escape, constitutes an essential dimension of the discovery itself. So that psychoanalytic theory after Freud, in this view, should not be (primarily) a "rectification" of

Freud's theory on the basis of new data. Nor should it be an effort to purge Freud's writings of the elements (e.g. the "death instinct") with no apparent empirical basis. Analytic theory, on the contrary, should be above all the theory of the contradictions in Freud's texts, of what we have referred to (all too succinctly) as the repression of the discovery of repression" (1972: 6).

5. "PP" is the initial for the French expression for "pleasure principle" – a concept developed early in *Beyond the pleasure principle* and in Derrida's text. At the same time, the French pronunciation of these initials sounds like the equivalent of "granddaddy" (pépé). This homonymy links the authority of the pleasure principle and that of the grandfather or grandfathers evoked in the text.
6. For a lucid summary of this aspect of Derrida's reading – of the way in which he not only "overdetermines the scene of writing" but actually "inserts the writer into it", see Geoffrey Hartman, 1978: xiii.
7. Marcus is here referring to the scene between Dora and Herr K. that took place when she was fourteen years old, and acted, Freud said, as a "sexual trauma". The scene is represented by Marcus as follows: "The reader will recall that on this occasion Herr K. contrived to get Dora alone 'at his place of business' in the town of B . . ., and then without warning or preparation 'suddenly clasped the girl to him and pressed a kiss upon her lips.' Freud then asserts that 'this was *surely* just the situation to call up a *distinct* feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of *fourteen* who had *never before* been approached. But Dora had at that moment a violent feeling of disgust, tore herself free from the man, and hurried past him to the staircase and from there to the street door'." (All italics are Marcus's.)
8. Cyril Barrett (ed.). *Wittgenstein: lectures and conversations* (University of California Press, 1972, p. 44). For further references to the "huge literature focusing on the issue of evidence and testability" see Fish's list in *The linguistics of writing – arguments between language and literature* footnote 5, pp. 171–172.
9. In the course of his essay, Cioffi will reveal repeatedly his own scepticism towards Freudian propositions – by likening the notion of the unconscious to the "invisible companion phantasies" of our childhood (188); by proffering physiological explanations to replace Freud's psychological ones (189); by attributing Freud's attempts to illustrate the operation of unconscious agencies (in *The psychopathology of everyday life* and elsewhere) to an unacknowledged and underhand "determination to describe familiar facts in a novel and congenial idiom" (191). Where Freud is most convincing, Cioffi will evoke not the probability of his assertions but his "grammatical genius", his "ingenuity in devising unconstruable idioms" (194), or his "ingenious exploitation . . . of confusion . . . in the interests of the theory" (195). He will suggest, alongside Wittgenstein, that psychoanalytic explanations in general are akin to aesthetic ones: " . . . aren't these [explanations] once again simply a matter of 'giving a good simile', of 'placing things side by side'?" Via the work of G.E. Moore (*Mind,* 1955), Cioffi will infer that "the world, conceived of psychoanalytically, is just the everyday world taken over again with an altered expression" (209). In the end, he will conclude that "there are good grounds for assimilating [Freud's] achievement to that of the anonymous geniuses to whom it first occurred that Tuesday is lean and Wednesday fat, the low notes of the piano dark and the high notes light. Except that instead of words, notes and shades, we have scenes from human life" (210).
10. Amongst those "diverse objections" put forward by Timpanaro are the Marxist claims that psychoanalysis is a "bourgeois doctrine" incapable of seeing beyond an ideological horizon delimited precisely by the class interests of the bourgeoisie; and that it is "anti-materialistic" in that it eternalizes situations which are

historically specific – for example, suggests Timpanaro, "it abstracts what truth there is in the notion of 'hatred of the father' from an authoritarian structure of the family, which remains transient even if it is slow to pass away, and transforms it into a sort of eternal destiny of mankind" (1976: 13).

11. While providing a comprehensive survey of, and response to this tradition, the work of Mitchell's text is to defend psychoanalysis against it, and to show that because those feminists in opposition to Freud try to discuss his concept of femininity *outside* the framework of psychoanalysis, their objections, and even their tributes, cannot be made to stand up. She also reveals that their rejection of the scientific status of psychoanalysis would be more accurately described as a rejection of its two most crucial discoveries: the unconscious, and infantile sexuality.

    Amongst those feminist writers discussed by Mitchell are Simone de Beauvoir (*The second sex,* 1949), Betty Friedan (*The feminine mystique,* 1963), Eva Figes (*Patriarchal attitudes,* 1970) and Germaine Greer (*The female eunuch,* 1971).

12. For a development of, and response to Fish's arguments, see my "Power, meaning and persuasion in Freud's 'The Wolf-Man': a response to Stanley Fish", in *The Minnesota Review,* forthcoming 1990.

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