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Towards a Psychoanalytic Aesthetics of Contemporary Literature

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Contents

1. An Introduction To Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism	1
I. Psychoanalysis and Literature	1
II. A Brief History of Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism	4
 2. The Unconscious	 38
I. Introduction	39
II. The Unconscious and Language	47
<i>The Language of the Unconscious</i>	57
III. Narration and the Split Subject	61
IV. The Unconscious as Translation	70
<i>The Unconscious of the Text</i>	77
<i>The Structure of Unconscious Discourse</i>	86
<i>The ICH and DIE ANDEREN</i>	93
 3. Desire	 99
I. Introduction	99
II. Jouissance	122
<i>Feminine Jouissance and Transgression</i>	135
III. Incest	143
IV. Desire and the Letter	160
 4. Time and Memory	 172
I. Introduction	172
II. Time	177
III. Memory	210
 5. Conclusion	 253
 Bibliography	 259

Abstract

Psychoanalysis has traditionally served literary criticism as a body of knowledge that aims to explain literature. This is unsatisfying from the point of view of literary criticism as it tends to ignore the literariness of the work. Some critics have suggested that the affinity between psychoanalysis and literature lies in a similarity between the structure of the psyche and the structure of literature. This is the fundamental point of departure for the present study.

There are no explicit methodologies for a psychoanalytic literary criticism based on this premise and so this present study is guided by others' attempts to put this into practice. Some of the ways in which psychoanalysis can gainfully contribute to literary criticism are demonstrated through an examination of four key aspects of psychoanalysis: the unconscious, desire, time and memory.

The psychoanalytic background to this study comes primarily from Freud, Lacan, Derrida and Laplanche. The theory underlying each aspect is examined in some detail, particularly concerning its potential contribution to literary criticism.

The unconscious is considered not only as a structure but also in terms of its relations and processes. Lacan's focus on the unconscious as structured like a language is considered in some detail as this is one of the main points where psychoanalysis and literary criticism overlap, in their attention not only to what is said (whether by analysand or text) but to how it is said. Atkinson's *Human Croquet* displays quite self-consciously two distinct levels of narration, which are quite clearly related to the conscious and unconscious. In Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin*, we are also faced with the presence of unconscious texts, although in this case they are difficult to discern and their presence disrupts the stability of the text and works against singular readings.

The concept of desire is one of the most fundamental for psychoanalysis, particularly Lacanian psychoanalysis. His notion of

desire as the desire for the other is examined through Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*. The related concept of jouissance is explored through its relation to transgression, particularly in the form of incest, which has profound effects on the structure of Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire*. The letter is examined as a metaphor for desire, as it appears in a variety of works where it is used to convey desire, but invariably expresses more than it intends.

The analysis of the role of time and memory in literature and psychoanalysis is undertaken concurrently as time is always implicated in memory. Psychoanalysis suggests that the time of the subject is not always identical to the time of the clock and the implications of this are seen through an examination of Strauß's *Der junge Mann*. Finally, Wolf's *Kassandra* brings together a number of the aspects of time and memory raised in this chapter.

Through the examination of these themes, this study indicates a number of ways in which psychoanalysis can contribute to literary criticism, precisely because it is able to bring out aspects of a work that are not otherwise immediately apparent.

I hereby declare that this thesis does not contain any material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. To the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made.



Richard Bell
Cologne, 8th August 2001

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An Introduction to Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

Psychoanalytic literary criticism has not had the most illustrious history, and it must be admitted that many of the crimes with which it is charged have in fact been committed. Yet despite the mistakes it has made, psychoanalytic literary criticism has continued to grow and prosper. The continuing popularity of Lacan and, more importantly, Derrida has contributed in no small part to this. While Lacan's influence is greater in the clinical sphere than in literary criticism, it is perhaps Derrida's readings of Freud that have kept him a part of literary criticism; bringing him to the attention of critics and students once more.

I would like to begin by examining the relations between psychoanalysis and literature, as well as some of the strategies that psychoanalytic literary criticism has used in the past, and some of the ways in which we might profitably use psychoanalysis in literary studies today.

1. Psychoanalysis and Literature

Psychoanalysis has, and has always had, a close affinity with literature. Freud was a voracious reader, wrote a number of pieces on

literature (some of which will be considered in due course), and even regarded writers as

valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us ordinary people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science.¹

Writers possess insights into human nature which psychoanalysis aims to systematise. In his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud draws on several examples of parapraxes from literature, precisely in order to show that even before psychoanalysis, the motivation behind them was evident.² Here, literature does not merely serve psychoanalysis by providing examples, but by showing that what psychoanalysis has to say about parapraxes is already known. Freud even goes so far as to draw a parallel between the dramatic structure of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (one of the most important works of literature for psychoanalysis) and the clinical work of psychoanalysis, "the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever mounting excitement."³ While the process of uncovering lies at the heart of

¹ Sigmund Freud. "Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens *Gravida*." *Gesammelte Werke* (GW). Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1952. V.VII. 1941. p.33. Translated as "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gravida*." Trans. James Strachey. *Penguin Freud Library* (PFL). Ed. Albert Dickson. V.14. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. p.34. All of Freud's works will be cited in full on their first appearance. Subsequent references will be indicated by the English title, followed by its location in the Penguin Freud Library (or Standard Edition where indicated) and then the *Gesammelte Werke*.

² E.g. Sigmund Freud. *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*. GW V.IV. 1941. pp.107-111. Translated as *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Trans. Alan Tyson. PFL. Ed. James Strachey. V.5. 1975. pp.142-146. Freud added two more examples of slips of the tongue in 1912 "in view of the interest that is lent to our theory. . . by support of this nature from great writers." (p.109/p.144)

³ Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*. GW. V.II/III. 1942. p.268. Translated as *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. PFL. V.4. 1976. p.363.

psychoanalysis, the delays and excitement are more evident in his case histories, which he freely admitted "read like novellas."⁴

Psychoanalysis and literature intersect most prominently in their emphasis on language, not just what is said, but how it is said. However, in order to cite language as the central concern of psychoanalysis, a rather broad definition of "language" must be taken, for after all, the "talking cure" began with the interpretation of hysterical symptoms, of the body "saying" that which could not be expressed aloud.⁵ The emphasis on language becomes even more pronounced in the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan:

Psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by the subject. From the Freudian point of view man is the subject captured and tortured by language.⁶

Yet although psychoanalysis may be considered to be primarily a verbal psychology, nevertheless much of its work is also concerned with the subject's presymbolic (that is, pre-linguistic) origin, and "linguistic representation always keeps its relation to bodily experience."⁷ This poses a number of interesting challenges to psychoanalytic literary criticism, where the only body that speaks is the body of the text. Nevertheless, we should not shy away from problems of representation, but instead look to psychoanalysis to help us at

⁴ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud. *Studien über Hysterie*. GW.V.1. p.227. Translated as *Studies on Hysteria*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey and Alix Strachey. PFL. V.3. 1974. p.231. Translation modified.

⁵ Murray M. Schwartz, "Critic, Define Thyself," *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. p.3.

⁶ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book III 1955-1956. The Psychoses*. Trans Russell Grigg. London: Routledge, 1993. p.243.

⁷ Schwartz p.3.

those points at which the language of the text tries (whether successfully or not) to let the body speak. There may be points in the text, particularly those points which deal with the experience of the body, where we find it trying to speak, to render its experience into language.

II. A Brief History of Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

It is in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that Freud inaugurates the tradition that was to plague psychoanalytic literary criticism throughout its early years, by providing the unconscious motivations for Hamlet's behaviour.⁸ Yet even after this, and attempting to fathom the depths of the author's mind, he nevertheless admits that

just as all neurotic symptoms, and, for that matter, dreams, are capable of being 'over-interpreted' and indeed need to be, if they are to be fully understood, so all genuinely creative writings are the product of more than a single motive and more than a single impulse in the poet's mind, and are open to more than a single interpretation.⁹

Freud is, in principle at least, far less reductive than early psychoanalytic critics. Although Freud wrote a number of pieces explicitly concerned with literature, with the exception of his article on the uncanny, none of these pieces constitute his lasting contribution to literary criticism.¹⁰ Nevertheless, these pieces exerted a tremendous

⁸ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.367; GW p.272.

⁹ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.368; GW p.272.

¹⁰ These include most notably "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's 'Gradiva'" (1907), "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), and "Dostoevsky and Parricide" (1928).

influence of the development of psychoanalytic literary criticism, and if only for this reason, it is worth considering some of Freud's strategies and arguments in more detail.

Freud's first major work primarily concerned with literature is "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*" (1907). He begins his reading with the intention of examining the dreams in the novel, justifying his interest on the grounds that "when an author makes the characters constructed by his imagination dream, he follows the everyday experience that people's thoughts and feelings are continued in sleep and he aims at nothing else than to depict his heroes' states of mind by their dreams."¹¹ In essence, Freud's interest lies in discovering if writers perhaps construct Freudian dreams for their characters, in much the same way that he had previously shown a consciousness of the meanings of parapraxes, which predated the development of psychoanalysis. Freud is not, however, interested solely in literature as a validation of psychoanalysis, but also in literature from the point of view of psychoanalysis, "even if this inquiry should teach us nothing new about the nature of dreams, it may perhaps enable us from this angle to gain some small insight into the nature of creative writing."¹² Initially, Freud contents himself with a recounting of the story and providing some preliminary interpretation. Here I will focus on those points of Freud's reading which are most pertinent for psychoanalytic literary criticism. However, before

¹¹ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.34; *GW* p.32-33.

progressing to Freud's analysis, a short summary of *Gradiva* is in order.

Norbert Hanold, an archaeologist, becomes smitten with an engraving of a young girl walking, in particular her curious gait. He names her *Gradiva*, and invents a history for her, imagining her to be from a Pompeian family. He travels to Pompeii, and one day in the ruins comes across *Gradiva*, who turns out not to be a delusion or a ghost, but a young German girl, Zoe Bertgang, a forgotten childhood friend of Norbert's (although she does not reveal this immediately).

At first Freud finds the revelation that this mysterious character of *Gradiva/Zoe* is a neighbour of Norbert's somewhat unsatisfying.¹³ However, when it is disclosed that there had been a friendship between them in childhood, "perhaps a childhood love," a variety of new interpretive possibilities become available to Freud.¹⁴ He is able to read Norbert's delusions as the product of "forgotten" childhood memories, and shows a number of ways in which this knowledge enables a re-reading and a re-interpretation of the story.¹⁵ Up to this point, Freud's reading has remained quite close to the text, but a number of problems arise when he suggests that "it should be possible for us to show the origin of the phantasies [that is, Norbert's of *Gradiva*] in detail, even though we can only guess at them."¹⁶ It is precisely this sort of speculation, whether at the level of the character

¹² Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.35; *GW* p.33.

¹³ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.55; *GW* p.55.

¹⁴ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.56; *GW* p.56.

¹⁵ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.56; *GW* p.56.

or of the author that gives psychoanalytic literary criticism a bad name. While it is possible to attribute repressed memories and phantasies to fictional characters, it is only through an attention to the letter of the text that we can deduce their existence, and, possibly, comment on their nature and contents.

The fact that Norbert had forgotten Zoe is not the sort of thing which is likely to escape any psychoanalytically minded critic — forgetting is almost invariably a sign of repression. It is at this point that significant problems arise in Freud's reading, for he suggests that "a return like this of what has been repressed is to be expected with particular regularity when a person's erotic feelings are attached to the repressed impressions — when his erotic life has been attacked by repression."¹⁷ Here, Freud is simply taking a number of psychoanalytic assumptions about the subject and applying them to Norbert, regardless of whether the text supports these assumptions. He assumes that the most likely psychoanalytic explanation for this sort of forgetting must be true, and neglects the fact that there is no evidence in the text from which to draw this inference.

Freud also confronts the question of the artist's intention, how to account for a work which seems to be constructed along psychoanalytic lines, but whose author may not have any knowledge of such matters:

¹⁶ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.56; *GW* p.56.

¹⁷ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.60; *GW* p.60.

It is so easy to draw analogies and read meanings into things. Is it not rather we who have slipped into this charming poetic story a secret meaning very far from its author's intentions? Possibly.¹⁸

Nowadays concerns such as the author's intentions, or the inherent meaning of the work seem rather quaint. Freud is right to be concerned about the possibility of reading into the work, but he fails to realise that the problem is not that of reading something into the text that isn't there, but rather of making an interpretation that isn't supported by the text. Yet for Freud, even if the writer is not conscious of the theories of psychoanalysis, s/he is still qualified to give us an accurate depiction of the mental life of the subject, "the description of the human mind is indeed the domain which is most his own; he has from time immemorial been the precursor of science, and so too of scientific psychology."¹⁹ In his conclusion, Freud puts forward his theory as to how the author was able to construct a perfect psychoanalytic case, without knowing anything of psychoanalysis:

He directs his attention to the unconscious in his own mind, he listens to its possible developments and lends them artistic impression instead of suppressing them by conscious criticism. Thus he experiences from himself what we learn from others – the laws which the activities of this unconscious must obey. But he need not state these laws, nor even be clearly aware of them; as a result of the tolerance of his intelligence, they are incorporated within his creations. We discover these laws by analysing his writings just as we find them from cases of real illness; but the conclusion seems inescapable that either both of us, the writer and the doctor, have

¹⁸ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.68; *GW* p.69.

¹⁹ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.68; *GW* p.70.

misunderstood the unconscious in the same way, or we have both understood it correctly.²⁰

Freud now introduces an idea which was to prove very influential on the first generation of psychoanalytic literary criticism, namely literature as a product of the author's relation to his/her unconscious. Freud seems to be suggesting that creative writers are somehow not subject to the same psychic processes as everyone else, that they are able to incorporate the products of their unconscious into their writing. Freud elaborates this theory of the relation of the author's unconscious to the work in more detail in his "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908).

Freud begins this piece by suggesting that it may be possible to better understand creative-writers, and how they get their ideas, by examining an analogous activity – phantasying.²¹ Phantasying is, in this case, a conscious process, as the English title suggests, more commonly known as day-dreaming. After a cursory examination of phantasying, Freud ventures to suggest that dreams (as wish-fulfilments) are not terribly far from phantasies, differing most importantly in that in the dream, the phantasy, by virtue of its more direct contact with the unconscious, is more likely to be distorted.²² This series of equivalencies (creative writing is similar to child's play, which is similar to phantasying, which is similar to dreaming) leads Freud to a point where he is able to suggest that the hero of fiction is

²⁰ Freud, "Gravida." *PFL* p.115; *GW* pp.120-121.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, "Das Dichter und das Phantasieren." *GW*. Vol VII. 1941. pp.213-214.
Translated as "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming." Trans. James Strachey. In *PFL*. Ed. Albert Dickson. V.14. 1985. pp.131-132.

²² Freud, "Creative Writers." *PFL* pp.136-137; *GW* pp.218-219.

none other than "His Majesty the Ego."²³ Freud's confidence in this assertion is such that he suggests that even where this might not be the case, nevertheless this is in accordance with the findings of psychoanalysis:

It has struck me that in many of what are known as 'psychological' novels only one person – once again the hero – is described from within. The author sits inside his mind, as it were, and looks at the other characters from outside. The psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes. Certain novels, which might be described as 'eccentric', seem to stand in quite special contrast to the type of the day-dream. In these, the person who is introduced as the hero plays only a very small active part; he sees the actions and sufferings of other people pass before him like a spectator. Many of Zola's later works belong to this category. But I must point out that the psychological analysis of individuals who are not creative writers, and who diverge in some respects from the so-called norm, has shown us analogous variations of the day-dream, in which the ego contents itself with the role of spectator.²⁴

It also has its equivalent in dreams, where the dreamer's ego may be split between two (or more) "characters," yet in dreams Freud recognises that it is similar to the same process in psychosis.²⁵ The concept of a conscious non-pathological splitting of the ego seems particularly hard to defend in light of his comments elsewhere on this phenomenon outside the dream.²⁶ It is never made entirely clear by

²³ Freud, "Creative Writers." *PFL* pp.137-138; *GW* p.220.

²⁴ Freud, "Creative Writers." *PFL* p.138; *GW* pp.220-221.

²⁵ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, *PFL* p.164; *GW* p.96.

²⁶ See, for example: Sigmund Freud, "Die Ichspaltung im Abwehrvorgang." *GW*. V.XVII. 1941. pp.59-62. Translated as "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. pp.461-464.

Freud just how creative writers come to have this privileged relation to their psyches – how they are able to consciously control its processes.

The source of literary inspiration then becomes identical to the inspiration for phantasies: an experience in the present awakens a childhood memory from which a wish finds its fulfilment in the literary work.²⁷ The art of the writer then lies in transforming his/her phantasies into a form acceptable to all.²⁸ Although this brings us no closer to understanding the means by which writers move us, it does suggest that it may be possible to discover the writers inspiration. This concept of Freud's spawned an entire generation of psychoanalytic literary criticism whose goal was to discover the writer's hidden childhood phantasies. They reasoned that if we can discover the analysand's repressed phantasies through his/her parapraxes, dreams, and so on, then it should be possible to do just the same by examining what the writer gives us – literature. Early psychoanalytic literary criticism tended to focus on one of the two possibilities Freud raised, attempting through the work to uncover the unconscious of either the author or the character.

In his work "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), Freud interprets the scenes from *The Merchant of Venice* in which Portia's suitors are required to choose between three caskets, made of gold, silver and lead, to find the one with Portia's portrait and win her hand:

²⁷ Freud, "Creative Writers." PFL p.139; GW p.221.

²⁸ Freud, "Creative Writers." PFL pp.140-141; GW p.223.

If what we were concerned with were a dream, it would occur to us at once that caskets are also women, symbols of what is essential in a woman, and therefore of a woman herself – like coffers, boxes, cases, baskets and so on. If we boldly assume that there are symbolic substitutions of the same kind in myths as well, then the casket scene in *The Merchant of Venice* really becomes the inversion we suspected. With a wave of the wand, as though we were in a fairy tale, we have stripped the astral garment from our theme; and now we see that the theme is a human one, a *man's choice between three women*.²⁹

Interpretations like this have since come to be known, not unfairly, as "vulgar Freudianism." There are a number of problems with this approach, not only from a literary, but also from a psychoanalytic perspective. Firstly, there is the question: what justifies treating this scene as if it were a dream? And secondly, what justifies this type of dream interpretation? It is perhaps best to approach the first question through the second. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud refers to this approach as the 'decoding' method, whereby every symbol in the dream has a fixed meaning.³⁰ Such an approach is not possible in the scientific interpretation of dreams as "everything depends on the trustworthiness of the 'key' – the dream-book, and of this we have no guarantee."³¹ Freud's method relies instead on a free-associative process, on deciphering what meaning a symbol has for the dreamer, rather than imposing a pre-determined meaning on it.³² Freud's position on this is remarkable for its inconsistency, for in the second

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl." *GW*. V.X. 1946. pp.236-237. Translated as "The Theme of the Three Caskets." Trans. James Strachey. In *PFL*. Ed. Albert Dickson. V.14. 1985. p.26.

³⁰ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, *PFL* p.171; *GW* p.102.

³¹ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, *PFL* p.173; *GW* p.104.

and third editions of *The Interpretation of Dreams* he added a considerable amount on the question of symbolism in dreams, and by the fourth edition he devoted an entire section to it, VI (E): "Representation by Symbols in Dreams – Some Further Typical Dreams."³² Freud justifies his catalogue of symbols on the basis that "this symbolism is not peculiar to dreams, but is characteristic of ideation, in particular among the people, and it is to be found in folklore, and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes, to a much more complete extent than in dreams."³³ The symbolism that is used in dreams is therefore representative of the more general use of symbolism in language, and it is this aspect which justifies its use in "The Theme of The Three Caskets." To cite but one objection to this universal system of symbols, it must be to a certain extent language-specific.

Nicholas Rand and Maria Torok note that this tendency towards a universal catalogue of symbols grows more pronounced in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, particularly between 1909-15, but that although it directly contradicts the rights Freud accords to the individual dreamer, it does not revoke them.³⁴ The idea of a universal catalogue of symbols is a seductive one, and it probably is possible to draw up a number of symbols with commonly accepted meanings, but if the use

³² Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.178; GW p.108.

³³ For a fuller examination of Freud's positions on the use of symbolism in dream interpretation see: Nicholas Rand and Maria Torok. *Questions for Freud: The Secret History of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1997.

³⁴ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL pp.467-468; GW 356.

³⁵ Rand and Torok, *Questions* p.15.

of these symbols is as much a part and parcel of any given culture as Freud suggests, then why would the dream-work choose forms which are so simple to interpret? Moreover, given the prevalence of vulgar Freudianism generally, is it not possible that this sort of symbolism in fact becomes an ally of the censorship in the dream, creating a screen interpretation? As Geoffrey Hartman notes, "after Freud, we all have Freudian dreams; that is, we report them that way — except for those chosen few who are Jungians."³⁶

Elizabeth Wright notes the similarity between dream interpretation and literary criticism, and suggests that the process of secondary revision, by which the dreamer reworks the dream through retelling it,

[s]hows that it is a danger for all systematic thinking to ignore elements that do not fit into a desired pattern. Reading shares this danger with the reporting of a dream. Boundaries shift with the contextual placings of the visual material of the dream or of any symbolic medium, including what we call art: the rivalry of interpretations both within subjects (conscious versus unconscious) and between subjects (teller versus hearer) remains a common characteristic of dream and art, in whatever other respects they may differ.³⁷

The tendency to recognise only what is already known is poor practice in both psychoanalysis and reading. It ignores the specificity of the text/analysand and is more than likely to overlook a great deal by reaching "standard" conclusions.

³⁶ Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Interpreter's Freud." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988.p. 415.

³⁷ Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*. London: Routledge, 1989. p.26.

Without a doubt, Freud's greatest work on literature is his piece, "The Uncanny" (1919). Through a series of etymological investigations, Freud shows that the very nature of the *unheimlich* [uncanny] lies in what is *heimlich* [homely], that among the many meanings of the word is that which is exactly the opposite.³⁸ Freud also presents a fairly comprehensive list of things which bring about an uncanny feeling in literature:

These themes are all concerned with the phenomenon of the 'double', which appears in every shape and in every degree of development. Thus we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another – by what we should call telepathy – so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing – the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations.³⁹

Although this present study is not explicitly concerned with the uncanny, many of these characteristic themes nevertheless can be found in the works under consideration here. These works have not been chosen as representative of the uncanny, but simply as they offer interesting perspectives on psychoanalysis.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche." *GW*. V.XII. 1947. p.237. Translated as "The 'Uncanny'" Trans. James Strachey. In *PFL*. Ed. Albert Dickson. V.14. p.347.

³⁹ Freud, "The Uncanny." *PFL* p.356; *GW* p.246.

In Lacan's works, the double finds its significance in the specular image which is implicated in the development of the ego in the mirror stage. The infant, seeing its whole image reflected, constructs its ego around the phantasy of this unity it does not yet have.⁴⁰ The very construction of the subject can be considered an uncanny process, and indeed Lacan recognises in the appearance of doubles (for example, in dreams or hallucinations) a remnant of this formative process.⁴¹ It is also important to note that Freud considers the mere fact of repetition (regardless of what is being repeated) provokes a feeling of the uncanny. He suggests that it may be that repetition arouses a feeling of the uncanny as it recalls the sensation of helplessness that sometimes occurs in dreams, but also that repetition reminds the subject of the compulsion to repeat.⁴² It is the return of the repressed present in the compulsion to repeat that constitutes the *heimlich* element of the *Unheimliche*, "for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."⁴³ This is the most interesting facet of Freud's investigation of the uncanny, the suggestion that what provokes a feeling of the uncanny is not what is strange, but that which lies too close to home. Repetition, and its relevance to literary

⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage." *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Sheridan, Alan. London: Routledge, 1977. p.2.

⁴¹ Lacan, "Mirror Stage" *Écrits: A Selection* p.3. Freud suggests that "the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted" ("The Uncanny." *PFL* p.358; *GW* p.248.)

⁴² Freud, "The Uncanny." *PFL* pp.359-361; *GW* pp.249-251.

criticism, will be covered in more detail in the chapter "Time and Memory."

Freud's works on literature show us both the best and the worst of psychoanalytic criticism, although the best tends to be in the theory rather than the execution. As the influential Yale critic Geoffrey Hartman, whose contributions to psychoanalytic literary criticism will be considered in more detail shortly, has noted:

Today we read these older kinds of interpretation (Freud's excepted) only to know the worst. It is to get them over with, to face the vigour of certain reductionist moves, to admire the artist for the odds he overcame, or ourselves for staying relatively sane though born *inter faeces et urinas*.⁴⁴

The challenge for contemporary psychoanalytic literary criticism is to find a mode of criticism which avoids these pitfalls and gainfully contributes to our understanding of literature. Before considering some of the ways in which Hartman and others have suggested a psychoanalytic mode of criticism might profitably orient itself, a brief examination of the contribution of Jacques Lacan to the debate is in order.

Jacques Lacan may well be the most influential psychoanalyst since Freud, certainly within the realm of literary studies. There are a number of obstacles to an easy understanding of Lacan, not the least of which is his style, with its frequent untranslatable puns and obscure

⁴³ Freud, "The Uncanny." *PFL* p.363-364; *GW* p.254.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* p.xv.

allusions.⁴⁵ His major works include one substantial collection of essays, the *Écrits* (1966), only some of which have appeared in translation. The remainder of his theory is elaborated in the published transcriptions of the seminars he held over more than twenty years at a variety of institutions in Paris. Of these, barely a third have appeared in French (specifically Seminars 1-4, 7-8, 11, 17, and 20), and fewer still in translation. The scattered nature of these publications means that it is difficult to trace the evolution of his thought with any precision. The pace with which new seminars are released is also a cause of not a little frustration, and samizdat transcriptions of his seminars circulate through Lacanian schools across the world.

As with Freud, it is not Lacan's work on literature which has always provoked the most interest among literary critics. Most Lacanian psychoanalytic literary criticism tends to work from the basis of his insights into the complex relations between the psyche and language, as well as his insights into the nature of desire and the subject. According to Lacan, Freud's genius in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is not just in showing that dreams mean something, but more importantly that dreams communicate in the same way people communicate.⁴⁶ In stressing this, he minimises the distinction between

⁴⁵ Lacan's writings, perhaps not altogether surprisingly, provoke rather extreme reactions. As the distinguished literary critic Malcolm Bowie notes, "[h]is difference from Freud, and especially the high buffoonery that marks much of his writing, is dwelt on with glee in the many hostile responses to which his thought gives rise. Most published responses of this kind are trivial and written by self-righteous bystanders who have tried and failed, or simply failed, to read what Lacan writes." Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 pp.128-129.

⁴⁶ Lacan, *Seminar III* p.10.

the language of the psyche and everyday language. His most famous work on literature is his seminar on Edgar Allen Poe's "The Purloined Letter" with which he opens the French version of the *Écrits*.

Lacan reads Poe's work as being composed of two scenes, the primal scene in which the Minister steals the letter from the Queen before the King and the repetition of that scene where Dupin steals the letter back from the Minister.⁴⁷ Each scene is structured by three glances, each of which is marked in relation to a different moment:

The first is a glance that sees nothing: the King and the police.

The second, a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides: the Queen, then the Minister.

The third sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whoever would seize it: the Minister, and finally Dupin.⁴⁸

Fundamentally Lacan's reading shows the ways in which the structures of the novel are (almost compulsively) repeated. The positions in these intersubjective triangles are determined by the subject's relation to a pure signifier, the purloined letter.⁴⁹ The letter comes to function as a signifier of unconscious desire, as such it insistently returns throughout the text.⁵⁰ The repetition in the second scene serves to create meaning by allowing a reinterpretation of the first.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'" Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*. Ed. John Muller and William Richardson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. pp.30-31.

⁴⁸ Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" p.32.

⁴⁹ Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" p.32.

⁵⁰ Shoshana Felman, "On Reading Poetry: Reflections on the Limits and Possibilities of Psychoanalytic Approaches." Muller and Richardson, *The Purloined Poe* p.146.

⁵¹ Felman, "On Reading Poetry." p.148.

One of Derrida's charges against Lacan's reading of Poe is precisely that it uses literature simply in order to illustrate a truth of psychoanalytic theory.⁵² This is typically referred to as 'applied psychoanalysis' – the simple application of psychoanalytic structures or processes, without due regard for the specificity of the work of literature. Derrida's second objection is that Lacan operates only at the level of the content of the text, treating the story only in its narrations, rather than its narrating.⁵³

Lacan's other prominent contribution to psychoanalytic literary criticism is his reading of a favourite text of psychoanalysis, *Hamlet* ("Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*"). As the title suggests, he reads *Hamlet* through his theories of desire, the complexity of which preclude an easy summary of this piece, and what follows is only intended as a broad outline of Lacan's approach. The theory of desire provides a way for Lacan to interpret the actions of Hamlet.⁵⁴ The advantage of Lacan's reading is that he does not seek to provide Hamlet's unconscious motivations, but instead places the character within structures of desire, which elaborate his (in)actions.⁵⁵ Lacan is not unaware of the pitfalls of psychoanalytic criticism, and seems determined to head off the creation of a vulgar Lacanianism

⁵² Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 426. Translation of *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà*. Paris: Flammarion, 1980.

⁵³ Derrida, *The Post Card*, pp.427-428.

⁵⁴ Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*." Trans. James Hulbert. *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading — Otherwise*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. p.12.

⁵⁵ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*." p.17.

when he asserts that "I wouldn't want to encourage you to produce the sort of hogwash that psychoanalytic texts are full of. I'm just surprised that nobody's pointed out that Ophelia is *O phallus*, because you find other things equally gross, flagrant, extravagant."⁵⁶ Strangely, this is exactly the point that he comes to a few pages later, "Ophelia is at this point the phallus," but he is quick to assert that such a conclusion is not based on etymology, but on Ophelia's role for Hamlet.⁵⁷ The great strength of Lacan's reading over many psychoanalytic critiques of *Hamlet*, is that it remains stubbornly at the level of the text, never degenerating into a psychoanalysis of the character.

The year 1977 marks a watershed in psychoanalytic literary criticism. It sees the appearance of an issue of *Yale French Studies* entitled *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis*, which contained such influential articles as Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'," Derrida's "Freud and the Scene of Writing," and Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire's "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study." It is no coincidence that the rebirth of psychoanalytic literary criticism comes alongside the rising popularity of post-structuralism. As Elizabeth Wright suggests, deconstruction would scarcely have been possible without Freud's theory of the unconscious.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," p.20.

⁵⁷ Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," p.23.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Wright, *Speaking Desires can be Dangerous: The Poetics of the Unconscious*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999. p.13.

The following year saw the appearance of a volume entitled *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, edited by Geoffrey Hartman. This selection included a number of important texts such as Derrida's reading of Freud's *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* ("Coming into One's Own"), a project which would eventually result in his work *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1980); as well as Barbara Johnson's influential reading of Derrida's reading of Lacan's reading of Poe, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida." In his preface, Hartman notes that within psychoanalytic literary criticism,

[t]he emphasis has shifted from producing another interpretation, yet another exercise in casuistry, to understanding from within the institutional development of psychoanalysis, and from the inner development of Freud's writings, what kind of an event in the history of interpretation psychoanalysis is proving to be.⁵⁹

This is a form of psychoanalytic literary criticism which is not concerned with literature, but rather with psychoanalysis. While such studies are interesting, they nevertheless tend to tell us more about the psychoanalysis than literature. This present work is concerned with examining how psychoanalytic literary criticism has progressed in the twenty-odd years since these publications, and how we might return to a psychoanalytic literary criticism which focuses on literature. Hartman suggests that the experience of reading might become the focus of criticism:

The question that moves to the centre is that of the character of the written character: its ambiguous origin and uncertain effect, its

⁵⁹ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* p.vii.

metaphorical energy however restrained or purified, its residual bodily or hieroglyphic aspect, its irreducible "sounddance" (Joyce).⁶⁰

It is precisely these aspects of literature that will be confronted throughout this study. The unique aspect of every work of literature must not be subordinated to psychoanalytic, or any other, theory. Psychoanalysis itself teaches us this: beyond the temptation towards a universal symbolism there lies the knowledge that every analysand's language is different. Hartman stresses that psychoanalysis should provide "a closer mode of close reading," one which takes place through particular attention to language, both of the text and the critic.⁶¹

The principal complaint of Brooks, Hartman and Felman is that psychoanalytic literary criticism typically uses literature simply in order to elaborate psychoanalytic concepts, subordinating the specific literariness of the work to its theoretical discourse. While the mastery of the theory over the text may be pleasing for psychoanalytic theory, Felman finds it dissatisfying from the point of view of literary criticism, as it

*misrecognizes (overlooks, leaves out) their literary specificity; that literature could perhaps even be defined as that which remains in a text precisely unaccounted for by the traditional psychoanalytical approach to literature.*⁶²

⁶⁰ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* p.ix. Indeed, Lacan suggests that reading Joyce (in particular *Finnegans Wake*) is close to reading the data of psychoanalysis: the word-plays of the unconscious. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore, 1972-1973*. Trans. Bruce Fink. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998. p.37.

⁶¹ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* p.xiv.

⁶² Felman "To Open the Question," in Felman (ed.) *Literature and Psychoanalysis — The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, (1982), p.6.

Such an accusation is true of not only traditional psychoanalytic literary criticism, but also post-Freudian criticism – this is the charge Derrida levels at Lacan's reading of Poe.⁶³ Yet surely psychoanalytic literary criticism should seek out precisely that which remains unaccounted for. Those aspects of the work which strike us as incongruous, whether textual or formal, may be the points at which psychoanalysis is most helpful. The challenge for psychoanalytic literary criticism is to focus on precisely those aspects of the work which resist a simple assimilation to the cause of psychoanalysis.

Felman calls for a deconstruction of the power relations between psychoanalysis and literature, for the replacement of the notion of *application* [of psychoanalysis to literature] with one of *implication*,

bringing analytical questions to bear upon literary questions, *involving* psychoanalysis in the scene of literary analysis, the interpreter's role would here be, not to *apply* to the text an acquired science, a preconceived knowledge, but to act as a go-between, to *generate implications* between literature and psychoanalysis — to explore, bring to light and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed *implicate each other*, each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other.⁶⁴

It is important to note that she does not call for a simple reversal of the power relation between literature and psychoanalysis, which would then privilege literature over psychoanalysis. The reverse move has manifested itself primarily in literary readings of psychoanalysis, showing the ways in which the texts of psychoanalysis, particularly

⁶³ Derrida, *The Post Card*, pp.431-432.

Freud's, function as literature. However, if this opposition is deconstructed, then the goal is to produce readings which show the ways in which literature informs psychoanalysis (not merely representing, but extending its theories) and vice versa. A good example of a place where literature and psychoanalysis intersect, is, as we have seen, in the phenomenon of the uncanny. Not only does psychoanalysis have something to add to our understanding of the uncanny, but literature offers insights into the inherently uncanny nature of the ego.

The notion of implication implies an interiority, whereas the notion of application is based on the notion of exteriority, that psychoanalysis is outside literature.⁶⁵ The concept of application overlooks the fact that psychoanalysis bases its key concepts on literary proper names, and those of historical authors:

Literature, in other words, is the language which psychoanalysis uses in order to *speak of itself*, in order to *name itself*. Literature is therefore not simply *outside* psychoanalysis, since it motivates and *inhabits* the very names of its concepts, since it is the *inherent reference* by which psychoanalysis names its findings.⁶⁶

Perhaps there are no natural boundaries between psychoanalysis and literature, each is traversed by the other.⁶⁷ If psychoanalysis always finds itself implicated in literature, then it is impossible for it to step outside literature and claim ultimate validity as an explanatory tool.

⁶⁴ Shoshana Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. pp.8-9.

⁶⁵ Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. p.9.

⁶⁶ Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. p.9.

⁶⁷ Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. pp.9-10.

Hartman suggests that the critic can no longer stand outside the object of his study, that "the language of interpretation realises that it must share bed and board with the object language."⁶⁸ Hartman contends that the language of psychoanalysis is not more certain and less figurative than the language of art.⁶⁹ Such a position undermines the privilege of the critical discourse, laying it open to the same strategies it would use on the literary text.

This problem has led critics such as Felman and Brooks to call for a psychoanalytic literary criticism based on transference.⁷⁰ Within the clinical setting, transference is the process by which the analysand transfers feelings or affects from his/her repressed past onto both the analyst, and his/her present situation.⁷¹ Transference does not necessarily constitute a hindrance to the analysis, as by remaining alert to the transference, the analyst is able to recognise the return of the repressed in this repetition by the analysand.⁷²

A transferential mode of literary criticism would be a close reading which pays particular attention to how the text works and how it speaks:

In the transferential situation of reading, as in the psychoanalytic transference, the reader must grasp not only what is said, but always what the discourse intends, its implications, how it would work on him.

⁶⁸ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. p.xvii.

⁶⁹ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. p.viii.

⁷⁰ Peter Brooks, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." *Critical Inquiry* V.13(2), Winter 1987. 334-348. p.341. & Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. p.7.

⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*. GW V.XI. 1940. p.459. Translated as *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Trans. James Strachey. PFL. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.1. 1976. p.494.

⁷² Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, PFL p.496; GW p.461.

He must — in Lacanian terms — refuse the text's demand in order to listen to its desire. In narrative, for instance, the reader must reconstruct and understand not only events but also the relation of this story to the narrative discourse that conveys it in a certain manner, discourse that itself constitutes an interpretation which demands further interpretation.⁷³

Its principal advantage would be that it avoids the trap of working at the level of the character or author, but functions almost exclusively at the level of the reader and the text. It also manifests a healthy skepticism about the text, realising that the text is not always honest with the reader:

The text conceived as transference should allow us to illuminate and work through that which is at issue in the situation of the speaker, or the story of the narrator, that is, what must be rethought, reordered, interpreted from his discourse.⁷⁴

While Hartman does not explicitly call for a methodology based on transference, he does note that as an effect of psychoanalysis sharing its language with literature, the critic must continually pay attention to "ever subtler notions of transference and countertransference, of hermeneutical complexity when it comes to discerning what is literal and what is figural, as well as a better knowledge of "transitional objects."⁷⁵

An opening towards a preliminary methodology seems to exist in Felman's suggestion that the reason psychoanalysis and literature perceive each other as threats, is that each "is contained in the other

⁷³ Brooks, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." p.344.

⁷⁴ Brooks, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." p.345.

⁷⁵ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. p.xvii.

as its *otherness-to-itself*, its *unconscious*.⁷⁶ This offers the possibility of a psychoanalytic reading which takes place in the text without the text being aware of it, and perhaps even works to subvert the text. Such an approach could also be applied to psychoanalytic theory, and as Felman notes:

as the unconscious traverses consciousness, a theoretical body of thought is always traversed by its own unconscious, its own "unthought," of which it is not aware, but which contains itself as the very conditions of its disruption, as the possibility of its own self-subversion.⁷⁷

In order to adopt this approach, it would be necessary to seek the unconscious of the text, which, like the unconscious of the psyche, becomes apparent at points where the text breaks down or betrays itself. The unconscious of the text is an assumption, a construction even, which rewrites the text. This is how a transference mode of criticism might well work, for as Brooks notes, transference results in "new impressions or reprints," and "revised editions" of old texts.⁷⁸ This is akin to the question of the re-presentation of the unconscious to consciousness: is there a change of state, or is it another inscription. These questions will be considered in more detail in the following chapter.

⁷⁶ Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. p.10.

⁷⁷ Felman, "To Open the Question." Felman, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. p.10.

⁷⁸ Brooks, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." p.342, an idea he takes from Freud's "Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse." *GW*. Vol.V. 1942. p.279. Translated as "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria." Trans. Alix Strachey and James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.8. 1977. p.157.

There may be other, more profound reasons behind contemporary psychoanalytic literary criticism's preference for Freud's metapsychology over his literary analyses. Peter Brooks, in his "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism," suggests that the validity of a psychoanalytic approach to literature may lie in the fact that the "object" of the analyst and the critic are, in some basic way, the same:

[T]he structure of literature is in some sense the structure of the mind — not a specific mind, but what the translators of the *Standard Edition* call "the mental apparatus," which is more accurately the dynamic organization of the psyche, a process of structuration. We continue to dream of a convergence of psychoanalysis and literary criticism because we sense that there ought to be, that there must be, some correspondence between literary and psychic process, that aesthetic structure and form, including literary tropes, must somehow coincide with the psychic structures they both evoke and appeal to.⁷⁹

It is difficult to speak of a single structure of literature, and although many psychoanalytically inclined critics work on drama or poetry, Brooks's own preference seems to be for narrative. If there is a reason for a closer affinity between psychoanalysis and narrative than with other literary forms, it may stem from the fact that psychoanalysis is not simply concerned with language, but also with language in the form of narratives. Why should the same techniques which are applicable to the narratives of the analysand not be appropriate for an understanding of narrative in general? The critic must then listen to the text as the analyst listens to the analysand — hearing not only what is said, but how it is said, and what is unsaid. Hartman draws a similar

⁷⁹ Brooks, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." p.337.

conclusion, but through a quite different argument. While he, too, sees the link between literature and the structure of the psyche, he sees it as taking place at the level of language:

The unconscious ego is identified with language, or the priority of language to meaning. Literary language (the "lack" or "gap" in meaning that leads to figurative supplementation or over-determination and ambiguous usage) is not treated as specifically literary: it is said to characterize the very structure of the psyche.⁸⁰

It is not merely language that brings together psychoanalysis and literature, but specifically the figurative language of literature. It contains within it all the same mechanisms by which the psyche, in particular the dream work, is able to exploit the use of language.

While I share the concern that psychoanalysis privileges itself over literature and purports to provide an ultimate interpretation, nevertheless this is not a flaw in psychoanalysis itself, but in its practitioners. Psychoanalytic literary theory should be capable of providing not an explanation or interpretation, but many interpretations which may serve as explanations. This is precisely the way in which psychoanalysis may work, by providing constructions which lead to greater (that is, 'more,' not 'better') understanding.⁸¹

Brooks examines the fruitful construction of hypothetical narratives within the clinical framework, and sees this process as

⁸⁰ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. p.x-xi.

⁸¹ Perhaps the most famous example of this is Freud's (re)construction of the primal scene in his analysis of the wolf-man. Sigmund Freud, "Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose." *GW*. V.XII. 1947. pp.63-69. Translated as "From the History of an Infantile

analogous to (or even the same as) the processes of the reader or literary critic.⁸² Just as the analyst must be willing to enter the analysand's delusional framework, so Brooks suggests that the reader or critic must display the same willingness with the text.⁸³

As with any critical approach, psychoanalytic literary criticism aims to add something to our understanding of literature, to bring out facets of the work with other approaches may not reveal. Equally the literary part of psychoanalytic literary criticism contributes to our understanding of psychoanalysis. Brooks concludes that:

Psychoanalysis matters to us as literary critics because it stands as a constant reminder that the attention to form, properly conceived, is not a sterile formalism, but rather one more attempt to draw the symbolic and fictional map of our place in existence.⁸⁴

But it is not only literary critics who are troubled by the methods and findings of psychoanalytic literary criticism – psychoanalysts are also quick to point out its shortcomings. Jean Laplanche, for example, rejects the notion of “applied psychoanalysis” as merely derivative, preferring to encourage ‘extra-mural psychoanalysis’:

[P]sychoanalysis ‘outside the walls’ or outside the cure, should have the ambition to have findings of its own: that is, to find other methods, for as I have said, the main method you don’t have, because you don’t have a person to give you free associations. But you have other ways: for instance, trying to define the effect of the work.⁸⁵

Neurosis.” Trans. Alix Strachey and James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. Vol.9. 1979. pp.267-274.

⁸² Brooks, “The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism.” p.346.

⁸³ Brooks, “The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism.” p.347.

⁸⁴ Brooks, “The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism.” p.348.

⁸⁵ Jean Laplanche, “The Kent Seminar. 1 May 1990.” *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation and the Drives*. Ed. John Fletcher and Stanton, Martin. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992. p.35.

Laplanche is stating here one of the most fundamental problems of psychoanalytic literary criticism: a stubbornly silent subject. This silence should not be interpreted as resistance, although silence within in the text might be. Given this (not insubstantial) handicap, how might we proceed to analyse texts from a psychoanalytic perspective? Elizabeth Wright proposes a three-fold schema of psychoanalytic literary criticism:

[F]irst, I see psychoanalytic criticism as investigating the text of the workings of a rhetoric seen as analogous to the mechanisms of the psyche; second, I argue that any such criticism must be grounded in a theory which takes into account the relationships between author and text, and between reader and text; and third, I argue that these relationships be seen as part of a more general problem to do with the constitution of the self in social systems at given moments in history.⁸⁶

In this present study, the focus will for the most part be on the first of these questions. I concur with Wright and Brooks that there is a similarity between the structure of literature and the structure of the psyche, and that this similarity justifies the use of psychoanalytic strategies in the understanding of literature, and that by this undertaking literature may also teach us about psychoanalysis.

Six novels are under consideration in this study, all written within the last twenty years, and range from those with an almost experimental structure (Botho Strauss's *Der junge Mann* (1984), Mark Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire* (1988), and Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* (1997)) to those whose structure at least appears

⁸⁶ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.6.

more straightforward (Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983), Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* (1983), and Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet* (1997)). These works have not necessarily been chosen because they lend themselves to a psychoanalytic reading, but in some cases precisely because they resist one.

Wherever possible, I have used official translations of both theoretical and literary works, indicating any changes I have made. Although Strachey's translation of Freud's works is not without its shortcomings, it is so broadly used that I have, for the most part, used it without modifications. In the case of the novels, however, where an attention to the letter of the text is much more important, occasionally I have made modifications, and included the original in parentheses or a footnote.

This study is divided into three chapters which represent some of the substantial concerns of both psychoanalysis and literature: The Unconscious, Desire, and Time and Memory. No division of psychoanalytic concepts is ever simple and each of these chapters overlaps with the others in a number of locations. Each chapter focuses on two novels, although some novels are also briefly considered in other locations.

The first of these three chapters is an investigation into how the concept of the unconscious can be utilised in psychoanalytic literary criticism. The focus is on the unconscious of Freud's original topography of the psyche, and its subsequent elaboration through the

work of Lacan, Derrida, Laplanche and Leclaire. The fundamental questions in this chapter are: how can the unconscious be represented to consciousness, what distortions or transformations are involved in this transition, and where can we find evidence of this in literature? Atkinson's *Human Croquet* and Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* provide us with, respectively, an overt and a covert representation of the unconscious in literature.

The next chapter focuses on one of the central concerns of psychoanalysis, particularly post-Freudian psychoanalysis: desire. Firstly a thorough investigation of the complex relations of desire, pleasure, and jouissance in Lacanian psychoanalysis will be undertaken. The ways in which desire and jouissance function in literature, both at the level of form as well as that of content, will then be considered through Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* and Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire*. The role of the letter as a metaphor for desire and its role in these texts and *Die Klavierspielerin* will also be considered.

The final chapter examines two aspects of psychoanalytic theory which are particularly relevant to literary criticism, time and memory. Psychoanalysis offers an understanding of the possibilities of time which do not always coincide with that of everyday life – within the psyche, time does not flow in one direction only. As memory displays this relation to time in its nature and processes, its role in the structure and content of narrative will also be considered. Strauss's *Der junge*

Mann and Wolf's *Kassandra* show two very different ways in which these concepts are vital for the construction of their narratives.

This thesis is an attempt to examine the ways in which psychoanalysis can be fruitfully used in literary criticism. This will be done through a detailed examination of some of the central concepts of psychoanalysis (desire, the unconscious, and time and memory). The thesis will then show how these concepts can also be useful in reading literature, taking examples from Australian, English, German and Austrian literature.

Although many of the works under consideration here are the subject of considerable literary and cultural discussion, this will not be covered in depth in this present study. This is not primarily a work of literary history or hermeneutics. The focus of the thesis is rather on what psychoanalysis might reveal about these particular works, and what they, in turn, might reveal about psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism. For this reason, I am not necessarily aiming to provide an interpretation of the texts as a whole. Nor do I mean to suggest that psychoanalytic literary criticism is the only possible means of interpreting a work of literature; the aim of this thesis is to return to the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis and to see how they may be useful in reading and understanding literature. More specifically it is an elaboration of theoretical concepts for psychoanalytic literary criticism. It is in the analogies or interfaces between psychoanalytic theory and literature that I hope to find and

show how psychoanalytic literary criticism can be a productive tool for literary studies. The thesis does not provide a 'total' model of psychoanalytic literary criticism, but aims to elaborate and demonstrate some possible strategies and methods. Nor should this be considered a thesis about psychoanalysis per se, it is clearly outside the providence of this thesis to make a case for psychoanalysis as either a psychology or a therapy. The focus of this thesis is always on psychoanalysis from the point of view of literature.

Although there is already an enormous number of works of psychoanalytic literary criticism, it is important to 'return to Freud' and look once more at psychoanalysis from the point of view of literary studies – specifically the similarity of the structure of the psyche and the structure of literature. Because of this approach, much of the work in the thesis is an attempt to bring together Freud and Lacan in such a way that they provide some meaningful basis for a psychoanalytic literary criticism.

The similarities between the work of the psychoanalyst and that of the literary critic have been sufficiently commented on elsewhere, but it seems worth recalling Malcolm Bowie's pertinent remarks:

The psychoanalyst and the literary scholar each offer the other a flattering mirror in which a quality of their performances that might otherwise seem shallow technical address emits a halo of moral worth. Both are campaigners against inaccuracy and lies, and a strong sense of professional uprightness unites them. Their moral

horizon is unclouded by low motives, just as their hermeneutic activities are unhindered by ignorance or partial sight.⁸⁷

While some might object that such a perspective is almost dangerously naïve – to suggest that either psychoanalysts or literary critics are, by definition, morally upright – nevertheless, I believe this serves as a good reminder of the *ideals* which these professions should serve to uphold.

In closing I would like to refer back to the words of Maria Torok and Nicholas Rand in their *Questions for Freud* (1997):

We envision literature as a resource for psychoanalytic inquiry, as an enhancement of our growing comprehension of people and their imaginative riches. Like human beings themselves, literary works are forever unforeseeable, and in their uniqueness they offer myriad avenues for expanding our ways and means to understand them. In the exchange between literature and psychoanalytic theory, all privilege must accrue to the text. Encounters between the creative work and the psychoanalyst should lead to theoretical recasting, expansion, or refinement—never to compliance. Instead of rigidly applying its tenets, psychoanalysis must continually adapt to literature. If psychoanalysis is incapable of this openness and flexibility, it may lose its reason for being. Because turning a deaf ear to literature is the same as refusing to embrace the singular essence of each and every human being.⁸⁸

In this study, we will not only attempt to listen to literature for what it has to tell us about psychoanalysis, but also remain aware of what psychoanalysis has to contribute to literary criticism.

⁸⁷ Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* p.154.

⁸⁸ Rand and Torok, *Questions For Freud* p.94.

The Unconscious

Perhaps the most fundamental concept in psychoanalysis is the unconscious, and it is just as important in psychoanalytic literary criticism, even though it is not always present as explicitly. In this chapter the unconscious is not simply a state or a location, but is also present in processes and relations. Nevertheless, the question of the unconscious is rather vexed for literary criticism. After all, the analyst has two real unconsciouses to deal with, whereas the critic only has one, his/her own. How can the notion of the unconscious be of use to literary criticism? To be more precise, just whose (or even what) unconscious are we interested in? The search for the unconscious of the author through their work has long since been discredited. Yet there are still a number of possibilities open, such as: examining the presence of unconscious structures or processes within the text; or the possibility that there may exist an 'unconscious' of the text, a narrative which does not exist at the same level as most of the text, and which functions as its unconscious.

While the text's effect on the unconscious of the critic could also be investigated, such a move would have to be approached in such a way as to stress those points of generality rather than specificity, lest it degenerate into a series of personal reflections on the text. The main focus of this chapter, however, is on representations of the

unconscious, and its presence in literature, specifically, the ways in which the processes and structures of the unconscious are reflected in the literary work. This raises interesting questions about the nature of representation not only within literature, but also within the psyche, as well as about how we might approach a psychoanalytic literary criticism which foregrounds the unconscious. This project is not without its challenges, as the unmediated representation of the unconscious to consciousness is, strictly speaking, an impossibility.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, this chapter will demonstrate that the unconscious is a crucial for literary criticism, and examine how these problems might be approached, if not overcome.

The two novels under consideration here, Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* and Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet*, contribute in quite different ways to our understanding of the unconscious. Both contain a number of characteristics which provoke a psychoanalytic reading, and while the presence of unconscious structures and processes is much clearer in the latter, the ramifications are just as complex.

1. Introduction

Discussing representations of the unconscious in literature (for example, dreams) is fairly straightforward, yet, as we have seen in

⁸⁹ Although in an interesting aside in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, PFL p.82; GW pp.49-50, Freud cites an example from Reik which suggests that the unconscious is quite able to interpret the actions of others' unconscious.

Freud's reading of Jensen's *Gradiva*, this strategy is prone to dissolving into the psychoanalysis of the character, wherein dreams simply become a tool for discovering repressed conflicts within the psyche of the character. Although it is undoubtedly more difficult, it may be more productive to consider the possibility of literature attempting to represent an unconscious divorced from character. Apart from the problem of its origin, there is also the immediate problem of the representation of something which is fundamentally anti-mimetic.⁹⁰ The unconscious, as Lacan notes, is not expressed coherently, but by "deformation, *Entstellung* [perversion], distortion, transportation."⁹¹ The direct, unmediated representation of the unconscious to consciousness is an impossibility. Where the unconscious is represented in language, such representations are frequently marked by a use of language which borders on the schizophrenic. However, it may not be possible to avoid this as

[t]he apparent irrationality of the dream is not only traceable to the resistance to censorship of the unconscious material. That material is already in a form to which the word 'rational' cannot be applied. It is subject to the flow of the primary process, that activity of unconscious desire, whereby an impulse seeks the repetition of achieved satisfaction by finding again the perception that accompanied it: more is included in the perception than the conscious mind can recognize. . . Linkages made in the (unconscious) primary process are already absurd from the point of view of the conscious mind, and these have

⁹⁰ Lacan notes that there are three, seemingly contradictory, aspects of the unconscious which are important; on the one hand it is "something negative, something ideally inaccessible," yet it is also "something quasi real," and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, it is "something which will be realised in the symbolic." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I 1953-1954. Freud's Papers on Technique*. Trans. John Forrester. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991. p.158.

⁹¹ Lacan, *Seminar I* pp.48-49.

a profound effect upon the dream. It is therefore difficult to understand precisely the distinction, if it is indeed viable, between the irrational connections pre-existing in the primary process and the 'distortions' insisted on by the censorship.⁹²

This is one of the places where psychoanalysis and literature intersect most prominently: in their attempts to render an originary (alinguistic, alogical) text into language. It is not only repression which disrupts the coherence of the dream narrative, but the very content itself is antithetical to conscious modes of representation. This is perhaps the greatest single problem in examining the unconscious in literature – how can unconscious material (whether it be implicit or explicit) be (re)presented in the text? This will be examined in more detail a little later, in the section on The Unconscious as Translation, where some of the ways in which the mechanisms of the primary process shape the production, and reproduction, of the text will be considered. For Lacan, these mechanisms of the primary process

correspond exactly to the functions that this school believes determine the most radical aspects of the effects of language, namely metaphor and metonymy – in other words, the signifier's effects of substitution and combination on the retrospectively synchronic and diachronic dimensions in which they appear in discourse.⁹³

Wright, however, rejects the absolute distinction between primary process (that is, wish-fulfilment) and secondary process (prevention of the fulfilment of wishes), and suggests that the two processes may in fact interact simultaneously.⁹⁴ Similarly, it is not always obvious as to

⁹² Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* pp.19-20.

⁹³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.298.

⁹⁴ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.20.

whether a word (or image) is functioning metaphorically or metonymically. Lacan even goes so far as to suggest that the metaphoric dimension is always present in language, as each word contains not only its own meaning, but all of its possible meanings, both alone and in other compound words.⁹⁵

Lacan suggests that the unconscious since Freud is "a chain of signifiers that somewhere (on another stage, in another scene, he wrote) is repeated, and insists on interfering in the breaks offered it by the effective discourse and the cogitation that it informs."⁹⁶ This notion of the insistent reappearance of the unconscious into conscious discourse will be seen in the examination of both *Die Klavierspielerin* and *Human Croquet*, although in quite different ways. Lacan also claims that it is this sense of an impediment, or of a discontinuity, which attracts Freud to the phenomena of the unconscious:

Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious. There, something other demands to be realized – which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.238.

⁹⁶ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.297.

⁹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI 1964: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994. p.25. It is one of Freud's most significant discoveries that there is meaning contained in the very things which are used to downplay the importance of manifestations of the unconscious; for example in dreams it is precisely its distortion (the dream-work) and its forgetting (a sign of resistance) that contain significance, even doubt in the reporting of the dream may be considered a form of emphasis (Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II 1954-1955: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. pp.125-126).

Similarly, in psychoanalytic literary criticism we may find ourselves drawn to precisely those aspects of the work which are incongruous, even though they may not necessarily be indications of the presence of the unconscious. This discovery that is produced in the gap is also a solution, which, although not a complete one, nonetheless has the quality of surprise, "that by which the subject feels himself overcome, by which he finds both more and less than he expected – but in any case, it is, in relation to what he expected, of exceptional value."⁹⁸ The meaning here is not unlike the meaning of Laplanche's enigmatic signifier – both unconscious and in excess of the intended meaning.⁹⁹ Once this discovery has been made, it automatically becomes a rediscovery, and is also open to being lost.¹⁰⁰ Every revelation contains within it the possibility of its repression.

For Lacan, the unconscious is "not an ambiguity of acts, future knowledge that is already known not to be known, but lacuna, cut, rupture inscribed in a certain lack."¹⁰¹ This lack is that of the gaps that interrupt the subject's discourse.

In this gap, something happens. Once the gap has been filled, is the neurosis cured? After all, the question remains open. But the neurosis becomes something else, sometimes a mere illness, a scar, as Freud said – the scar, not of the neurosis, but of the

⁹⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.25.

⁹⁹ The enigmatic signifier is a communication from the adult to the infant, which contains an additional unconscious meaning which is repressed by the infant, thus giving rise to the unconscious. Laplanche acknowledges that this term was first used by Lacan in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud," in his *Écrits: A Selection*, p.166. Jean Laplanche, "The Freud Museum Seminar. 3 May 1990." Fletcher and Stanton *Jean Laplanche*. p.58 & p.63 n.5. This concept will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.25.

¹⁰¹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.153.

unconscious... and what does he [Freud] find in the hole, in the split, in the gap so characteristic of cause? Something of the order of the non-realized.¹⁰²

Reintegrating the repressed into consciousness does not necessarily cure the neurosis – the scar represents that aspect of the unconscious which cannot be reintegrated as it is incapable of expression in the symbolic. Lacan sees this gap as analogous to that which Freud designated “the navel of the dream.”¹⁰³ The navel of the dream, an uninterpretable absence at the core of every dream, could be considered to be the point at which the dream makes contact with the primal signifier or the real.¹⁰⁴ As it lies at the heart of the unconscious, it permeates every aspect of psychic life, even syntax:

But what eludes the subject is the fact that his syntax is in relation with the unconscious reserve. When the subject tells his story, something acts, in a latent way, that governs this syntax and makes it more and more condensed. Condensed in relation to what? In relation to what Freud, at the beginning of his description of psychical resistance, calls a nucleus.¹⁰⁵

“Story” must be read here in a number of ways: not only is it the life-story that the analysand presents to the analyst, but it is also all the forms this story takes within the analytic setting – dream, events, actions. The same is also true for psychoanalytic literary criticism, the subject of which is the text. Literature's use of ambiguity, omissions, and screens (in the sense of screen memories) can all be seen as ways in which the text condenses around its nucleus. The nucleus of

¹⁰² Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.22.

¹⁰³ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.23. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.186 n.2; GW p.116 n1.

¹⁰⁴ Lacan, *Seminar II* pp.176-177.

¹⁰⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.68. Lacan uses ‘reserve’ here in the sense of an Indian reserve.

the text may not be quite as indecipherable as that of the dream, but such a possibility should not be dismissed.

Unlike Ego Psychology, which stresses the importance of a strong ego to control the id, Lacan begins from the fundamental premise that "there is something that establishes a fracture, a bipartition, a splitting of the being to which the being accommodates itself, even in the natural world."¹⁰⁶ It is against this fundamental discontinuity or impediment that Lacan poses the 'one' [*un*], which is not anterior to discontinuity, but comes into being through the formation of the unconscious, and is thus "the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of the rupture."¹⁰⁷ This 'one' does not, however, function as a transcendental signifier, fixing or guaranteeing meaning; rather it is the essence of the unconscious. It can also be found in the unconscious [*Unbewußte*], at its limit where one finds the *Unbegriff*, "not the non-concept, but the concept of lack," and it is in this rupture that absence emerges.¹⁰⁸ The unconscious is, for Lacan, characterised by its 'pulsative function,' that is, the need to disappear which seems to be inherent in the unconscious – "everything that, for a moment, appears in its slit seems to be destined, by a sort of pre-emption, to close up again upon itself, as Freud himself used this metaphor, to vanish, to disappear."¹⁰⁹ Although the unconscious permeates almost every aspect of psychic life, it only makes its presence felt fleetingly. In this

¹⁰⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.106.

¹⁰⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XI* pp.25-26.

¹⁰⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.26.

¹⁰⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.43.

pulsative movement of the unconscious, Lacan finds what he terms the *fading* of the subject.¹¹⁰ Although the subject only passes through this fading after he is already split, and the effects of this fading

lead us to the frontiers at which slips of the tongue and witticisms, in their collusion, become confused, even where elision is so much the more allusive in tracking down presence to its lair.¹¹¹

This pulsative movement of the unconscious indicates the way in which it opens up at the very points at which it reveals itself. Only where it shows itself (by absence or error) may we begin the process of elucidating it. This is why Lacan stresses that the analyst can only deal with the unconscious on the basis of what is said, that is, the discourse of the analysand.¹¹² Lacan is careful to remind his audience that he is interested in consciousness only in its relation to what he calls "the fiction of the incomplete text," that is, the question of recentering the subject into the lacunae which initially presents *itself* as speaking.¹¹³ For Lacan, the unconscious must be located at the level of a being,

in the sense that it can spread over everything, that is to say at the level of the subject of enunciation, in so far as, according to the sentences, according to the modes, it loses itself as much as an imperative, in an invocation, even in a hesitation, it is always the unconscious that presents you with its enigma, and speaks — in short, at the level at which everything that blossoms in the

¹¹⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.208.

¹¹¹ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.299.

¹¹² Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.100.

¹¹³ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.83. He refers to this formulation as nothing more than the relation of the preconscious to the unconscious.

unconscious spreads, like mycelium, as Freud says about the dream, around a central point.¹¹⁴

This is one of the reasons why we are justified in seeking the unconscious at the level of the text without necessarily having to equate it with a character. The unconscious is where the subject, as excluded from the system of the ego, speaks.¹¹⁵ The unconscious not only speaks, but even makes itself present in language. Because the unconscious speaks, because it desires to communicate, albeit in its own "language," it cannot be kept out of psychoanalytic literary criticism any more than it can be removed from psychoanalysis.

We cannot apprehend the unconscious directly (or consciously), only through its manifestations, which can be recognised by their peculiar logic and special characteristics. The complex relations between the unconscious and language will now be examined in more detail.

II. The Unconscious and Language

The most fundamental aspect of Lacan's conception of the unconscious is that it is "*structured like a language*."¹¹⁶ In his postscript to "The Unconscious: a Psychoanalytic Study", Jean Laplanche stresses that the unconscious is not structured by, with, or for, but *like*

¹¹⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.26.

¹¹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar II* p.58.

¹¹⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.20.

a language.¹¹⁷ Although this may seem an obvious point to make, nevertheless Laplanche makes it because the trap of simply stating that the unconscious is language is all too easy too fall in to (as indeed even Lacan does).¹¹⁸

Yet, psychoanalysis' interest in the structure of language is not a new development. Freud's theories contain many of the themes and ideas that find later expression in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, and ultimately in the structural psychoanalysis of Lacan. Although Freud did not have an adequate linguistic theory to examine the relationship between the body and language thoroughly, he did examine the relationship between word-representations [*Wortvorstellungen*] and thing-representations [*Sachvorstellungen*] – a distinction which parallels quite closely Saussure's between the signifier and signified.¹¹⁹ As early as 1891, Freud had noted that

[t]he object-presentation is . . . one which is not closed and almost one which cannot be closed, while the word-presentation is seen to be something closed, even though capable of extension.¹²⁰

The "thing" of the *Sachvorstellung* is not a simple object, such as a book, but a complex series of associations which are linked to sensory associations, and evoked by the word (or sensation) to which they

¹¹⁷ Jean Laplanche & Serge Leclaire, "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study." Trans. Peter Kussell and Jeffrey Mehlman. *Yale French Studies*, V.48, 1972. p.177.

¹¹⁸ cf. Lacan, *Seminar III* p.11

¹¹⁹ Schwartz p.3.

¹²⁰ The Penguin Freud Library and the Studienausgabe reproduce part of Freud's monograph *On Aphasia* as an appendix to "The Unconscious". Sigmund Freud, "Das Unbewusste." GW. V.X. 1946. (without appendices). *Studienausgabe III*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1975. p.173. Translated as "The Unconscious." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. p.222.

have become attached.¹²¹ For Lacan, the essence of the Freudian unconscious lies in the concept of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, which he translates as that which takes the place of the representation [*le tenant-lieu de la représentation*].¹²² This translation indicates the possibility of repression that is inherent in signification.

Lacan approaches the question of language in psychoanalysis through the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. From Saussure, he adopts the most fundamental tool of structural linguistics: the division of the sign into the signifier (the mental image of a sign, whether visual, aural or otherwise) and signified (the mental image of the object denoted by a sign).¹²³ Roman Jakobson provides Lacan with an important analysis of the division of metaphor and metonymy. Jakobson begins his analysis via a particular type of neurological impairment: aphasia. He contends that in aphasia an impairment can be seen in either the linguistic processes of similarity (metaphor) or contiguity (metonymy).¹²⁴ These two poles of language also correspond to the dominant modes of two forms of literature, poetry and narrative respectively. Jakobson recognises these two poles in Freud's work: metonymy can be seen in the process of displacement, condensation relies on synecdoche, while

¹²¹ Schwartz pp.3-4.

¹²² Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.60.

¹²³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Riedlinger. Trans. Roy Harris. La Salle, ILL: Open Court, 1986. p.67. Although Lacan departs from Saussure's work by privileging the signifier to such an extent that the signified, indeed even the sign, disappears. David Macey, "Introduction." *Lacan Seminar XI* pp.xxiv-xxv.

identification and symbolism work by similarity and therefore metaphor.¹²⁵ It is from this position that Lacan is able to align the structure of the unconscious with that of language:

Already at the level of the unconscious there exists an organisation that, as Freud says, is not necessarily that of contradiction or of grammar, but the laws of condensation and misplacement, those that I call the laws of metaphor and metonymy.¹²⁶

For Lacan, a large part of Freud's genius is in his recognising the concept of the signifier, and its vicissitudes (that is, the primary process mechanisms which parallel metaphor and metonymy), before structural linguistics systematized these concepts.¹²⁷

Lacan's reading of these two processes differs fairly significantly from Jakobson's – he aligns condensation with metaphor and displacement with metonymy, going on to argue that as displacement is logically prior to condensation, therefore metonymy must be the condition for metaphor.¹²⁸ In her summary of Freud's theories Elizabeth Wright comes to a similar conclusion:

A number of displacements onto one element of itself produces condensation and facilitates overdetermination. Displacement and condensation are thus not exclusive and there is no limit to the modes of their occurrence.¹²⁹

However, she notes that in his explanations of condensation and displacement, Freud makes no distinction between those associations

¹²⁴ Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle. *Fundamentals of Language*. 2nd Ed. The Hague: Mouton, 1971. p.90.

¹²⁵ Jakobson & Halle p.95.

¹²⁶ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.61.

¹²⁷ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.298.

¹²⁸ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1996. pp.112-113. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.157.

which operate via contiguity and those which operate by similarity.¹²⁹

Wright argues against a rigorous application of the distinction between condensation and displacement as

[a]ll these tropes are based on one thing being a reminder of another, on one's memories. No limits can be laid down beforehand to dictate to the memory whether it should provide similarities of congruities or both: that two entities are found together is no bar to their being in some way significantly alike and that two are alike is no bar to their being significant in their proximity.¹³¹

Indeed, Lacan is careful to stress that condensation works in two directions, "each signifying element of the dream, each image, includes a reference to a whole set of things to be signified, and inversely, each thing to be signified is represented in several signifiers."¹³² The same could, of course, also be said of literature. The recurrence of a scene, phrase or even word, is usually recognised by the reader as a motif. Even if it has a slightly different meaning, or occurs in a slightly different context, each time it brings to mind the other instances and the other meanings.

Lacan puts metaphor to use in a variety of contexts, the most important of which are elaborated here. Within his structuralist view of language, he recognises metaphor as

the implantation, into a chain of signifiers, of another signifier, by dint of which the one it replaces falls to the rank of signified, and, as latent signifier, perpetuates the interval onto which another chain of

¹²⁹ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.23.

¹³⁰ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.23.

¹³¹ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* pp.23-24.

¹³² Lacan, *Seminar I* p.266.

signifiers can be grafted.¹³³ Repression (*Nachverdrängung* or secondary repression) is also founded in the structure of metaphor, in the forceful substitution of one signifier for another.¹³⁴ Metaphor also plays a crucial role in Lacan's analysis of the Oedipus complex, which he sees as revolving around a substitution (that of the Name-of-the-Father for the desire of the mother) – a metaphor which makes signification (and therefore metaphor itself) possible.¹³⁵ This is one of the ways in which literature inhabits psychoanalysis – a metaphor, a repression, is the very thing which makes the subject's entry into language possible.

Metaphor as repression even finds its way into Lacan's reading of the sign, where he suggests that the bar separating the signifier from signified is none other than that of repression; although here it is the usurped signifier which takes its place beneath the bar.¹³⁶ He suggests that it is this bar that makes writing possible, but "what is written is not to be understood."¹³⁷

Metonymy is slightly less versatile in Lacan. He sees it in both displacement and in the diachronic relations between signifiers in the signifying chain.¹³⁸ Yet metonymy is also one of the fundamental properties of language:

Technically, metonymy is precisely the figure that emphasises the connection between one signifier and another, thus sustaining the

¹³³ Jacques Lacan, *La Psychanalyse* V.5. p.12, cited in Laplanche & Leclaire p.156.

¹³⁴ Evans p.112. cf. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.200. Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.62.

¹³⁵ Evans p.137. cf. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.200.

¹³⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.249.

¹³⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.34.

whole elementary mechanism of language, which dreams exploit without limit.¹³⁹

Language cannot escape metonymy, and although ordinary speech may not exploit this mechanism as the dream does, nevertheless it is always present. Lacan suggests that each signifier in the dream work can be taken to refer not to a signified, but rather to another signifier, which in turn refers to yet another in the chain of signification, which he describes as "rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings."¹⁴⁰ To describe it as a chain is a little misleading, however, for it does not progress in one direction only. It might be more appropriate to term it a web of signification, as each signifier is linked in a number of directions to other signifiers. It is in the interval intersecting the signifiers that the locus of metonymy exists.¹⁴¹ As a result of these metonymic associations, meaning cannot be found in a single particular association, but must instead be located in the sequence of associations.¹⁴² Each element must be considered in its context, not only with regard to other signifiers, but for the subject him/herself:

We can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning 'insists' but that none of its elements 'consists' in the signification of which it is at the moment capable.

¹³⁸ Evans p.113.

¹³⁹ Laplanche and Leclaire p.150.

¹⁴⁰ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.153.

¹⁴¹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.214.

¹⁴² John Muller and William Richardson, *Lacan and Language: A Readers Guide to Écrits*. New York: International Universities Press, 1982. p.15. This is precisely the point which Freud emphasises in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that it is impossible to produce a dream-book, a complete catalogue of symbols and their interpretations. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL pp.171-172; GW pp.102-103.

We are forced, then, to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier.¹⁴³

It is through this understanding of the unconscious, along this metonymic axis, that Lacan sees the functioning of the nodal points of the dream, that is, those points of the dream which attract overdetermination, taking place.¹⁴⁴ The discourse of consciousness cannot escape the interference of the unconscious breaking through from this other scene. In the course of this chapter a number of theories about the location and attributes of this other scene will be put forward.

Metonymy finds its most significant application in Lacan's theory of desire, in the continual metonymic deferral of one desire for another, for as soon as the object of desire is attained it is no longer desired and the subject looks for a new object.¹⁴⁵ Although, as we will see in the next chapter, the matter is a little more complicated than this.

Laplanche proposes that, rather than seeing the unconscious as determined by language, the unconscious is in fact the condition of language.¹⁴⁶ If the unconscious not only inhabits language, but is a precondition of it, then potentially the unconscious could be present in any manifestation of language, perhaps especially literature. Wright suggests that psychoanalysis is able to provide an explanation for "why language is literary all the time. . . the irrepressible figurality of

¹⁴³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* pp.153-154.

¹⁴⁴ Muller & Richardson, *Lacan and Language* p.17.

¹⁴⁵ Evans p.114.

¹⁴⁶ Laplanche and Leclaire p.178.

language as it betrays the operations of desire and fantasy."¹⁴⁷ At one level, it is simply because the tropes of literature (metaphor and metonymy) are also the processes of the psyche (displacement and condensation).

Language comes into being through the creation of the unconscious, through the fact of primal repression, which engenders a primal signifier, upon which the scaffolding of signifiers which constitute the symptom is built.¹⁴⁸ It is this signifier that constitutes the central point of primal repression, the point of *Anziehung*, "the point of attraction through which all other repressions will be possible, all other similar passages in the locus of the *Unterdrückt*, of what has passed underneath as signifier."¹⁴⁹ The primary signifier is pure non-sense, and thus has the effect on signification that a zero would on the denominator of a mathematical fraction, that is, it abolishes all meanings.¹⁵⁰ This is why the closer the narrative (whether literary or analytic) comes to this point, the more it struggles for coherence. But this does not mean that the signifier is open to all meanings in the unconscious:

¹⁴⁷ Wright, *Speaking Desires* p.3.

¹⁴⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.176. Wright suggests that for Freud "primal repression marks a prelinguistic entry into a symbolic world." A sentiment which Laplanche shares and develops in more detail in his theory of the enigmatic signifier. Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.12.

¹⁴⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.218. cf. Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.43. Serge Leclaire suggests that this central point is that of jouissance (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), which comes into being through the inscription of the letter on the body. Serge Leclaire. *Psychoanalyzing: On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practice of the Letter*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. p.97.

¹⁵⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.252.

It constitutes the subject in his freedom in relation to all meanings, but this does not mean that he is not determined in it. For, in the numerator, in the place of the zero, the things that are inscribed are significations, dialectized significations in the relation of the desire of the Other, and they give a particular value to the relation of the subject to the unconscious.¹⁵¹

Lacan stresses that to isolate in the subject a kernel which is *non-sense*, does not mean that interpretation is non-sense.¹⁵² Similarly just because we may reach a similar conclusion in our interpretation of a work does not mean that it is pointless. If anything, the reverse is true. Discovering a point at which interpretation fails may be the most interesting, even if the most frustrating, part of psychoanalytic literary criticism. Lacan notes that his desire for examining "the places where logic is disconcerted by the disjunction that breaks through from the imaginary to the symbolic" is motivated not by the paradoxes that are produced, "nor to point out some 'crisis' in thought, but, on the contrary, to bring their false brilliance back to the gap that they designate."¹⁵³ These problems cannot be resolved, as they are part of the breaking-down of translation, but they can be examined in their movement from one state to another.

In language, resistance manifests itself as "everything which brakes, alters, slows up the blarney, or else completely interrupts it."¹⁵⁴

Language frequently functions in this way in literature, not merely at

¹⁵¹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.252.

¹⁵² Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.250.

¹⁵³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.318.

¹⁵⁴ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.226. He later suggests that interruption in particular is repression (p.268).

the level of the characters' discourse, but at the level of the narrative itself.

The Language of The Unconscious

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud notes that the unconscious uses words as if they were things.¹⁵⁵ This notion is refined in his "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams," where he draws an important distinction: while in schizophrenia it is the words themselves which are subjected to the primary processes, in dreams it is not the words, "but the thing-presentations to which the words led back."¹⁵⁶ According to Freud, the unconscious representation is that of the thing alone [*Sachvorstellung*], the conscious representation that of the word [*Wortvorstellungen*] and the thing together.¹⁵⁷

Lacan sees language itself as a network which is superimposed on the totality of the real.¹⁵⁸ It does not have any contact with the real, but nevertheless attempts to envelope it, an attempt which must always fail. The structure of psychosis takes place in a "symbolic unreal," by which Lacan attempts to describe the relation of the subject

¹⁵⁵ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL pp.401-402; GW pp.301-302.

¹⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Metapsychologische Ergänzung zur Traumlehre." GW. V.X. 1946. p.419. Translated as "A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams." Trans. James Strachey. PFL. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. pp.236-237. Translation modified.

¹⁵⁷ Freud, "The Unconscious." PFL p.207; GW p.300.

¹⁵⁸ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.262.

of the real to the symbolic in psychoses.¹⁵⁹ The inherent contradiction between the real and the symbolic results not in an absence of communication, but a communication whose "sense" is for the most part opaque to all but the subject. The language of psychosis corresponds to the language of the primary process in that

what differentiates this language from others is what makes it less of a language than they, for it treats words not as words, but as things, or as images in a dream.¹⁶⁰

Nevertheless it is constructed according to its own rules, just as are the unconscious texts. It is not a language which is entirely that of the unconscious, but which shares much of its characteristic grammar.

Laplanche considers the following types of "languages" aberrant and primary: "the language of the Unconscious, schizophrenic language, poetic language, and . . . 'language in a reduced state'."¹⁶¹

For Laplanche, the "language" of the unconscious,

if it does indeed possess the essential characteristic of being a circulation of *Vorstellungen* [representations], is comparable only to that vertiginous layer of language which certain poets occasionally allow us to glimpse.¹⁶²

The fact that literary language provides us with the possibility of beholding language in an unconscious form is interesting, as it suggests that there may be a privileged relation between psychoanalysis and literature. What exactly would a language of the

¹⁵⁹ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.117.

¹⁶⁰ Laplanche and Leclaire p.151.

¹⁶¹ Laplanche and Leclaire p.178.

¹⁶² Laplanche and Leclaire p.177.

unconscious look like, and how might it resemble the language we encounter in literature? Laplanche and Leclaire suggest that the language of the unconscious is composed of "words" that are elements drawn from the imaginary (that is, the order of images), and which are able to function as signifiers.

At the level of unconscious language, there are only images, serving simultaneously and inseparably as signifier and signified. In a sense, it may be said that the unconscious chain is pure meaning, but one can say as well that it is pure signifier, pure non-meaning, or open to all meanings.¹⁶³

The words of this language remain images in which there is no distinction between the signifier and the signified; where the signifying image refers to nothing but itself as signified, and as such these images are simultaneously open, as well as closed, to every attempt at signification.¹⁶⁴ While the language of poetry is perhaps not quite as versatile as this, nevertheless, one of its most prominent characteristics is that it uses words in unusual ways in order to facilitate a multitude of possible readings.

Although we may find echoes of this unconscious language in literary texts, they are nevertheless always presented verbally, even though they do not take place in such a language. The language in which they take place is primarily *imaginal*. Freud notes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that dreams typically take place in images, since such a form is most favourable for the processes of condensation

¹⁶³ Laplanche and Leclaire pp.161-162.

¹⁶⁴ Laplanche and Leclaire pp.162-163.

and for avoiding censorship.¹⁶⁵ However, he also realises that dreams have a 'language' which is not identical to that of everyday speech:

If we reflect that the means of representation in dreams are principally visual images and not words, we shall see that it is even more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with a language. In fact, the interpretation of dreams is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictographic script such as Egyptian hieroglyphs. In both cases there are certain elements which are not intended to be interpreted (or read, as the case may be) but are only designed to serve as 'determinatives', that is to establish the meaning of some other element. The ambiguity of various elements of dreams finds a parallel in these ancient systems of writing; and so too does the omission of various relations, which have in both cases to be supplied from the context. If this conception of the method of representation in dreams has not yet been followed up, this, as will be readily understood, must be ascribed to the fact that psychoanalysts are entirely ignorant of the attitude and knowledge with which a philologist would approach such a problem as that presented by dreams.¹⁶⁶

This language is thus primarily non-phonetic, and as such is a system of representation which depends on writing. However the dream-work also makes use of words, as their inherent ambiguity of words makes them ideal for dreams in escaping censorship:

If one ambiguous word is used instead of two ambiguous words the result is misleading; and if our everyday, sober method of expression is replaced by a pictorial one, our understanding is brought to a halt, particularly since a dream never tells us whether its elements are to be interpreted literally or in a figurative sense or whether they are to be connected with the material of the dream-thoughts directly or through the intermediary of some interpolated phraseology.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.455; GW p.345.

¹⁶⁶ Freud, "Das Interesse an der Psychoanalyse." GW. V.VIII. 1943. pp.404-405. Translated as "The Claims of Psychoanalysis to Scientific Interest." Trans. James Strachey. In PFL. Ed. Albert Dickson. V.15. 1986. p.42.

¹⁶⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL, p.456; GW, p.346.

These are some of the problems we will face when we examine Elfriede Jelinek's novel, *Die Klavierspielerin*. At four points in this work we are confronted by 'unconscious texts,' that is, parts of the text which are not contiguous with the rest of the novel, and which contain many of the characteristics of the unconscious and its manifestations. These unconscious texts take place not only in images, but also in this language of ambiguity. The unconscious texts in *Die Klavierspielerin* are also already rendered into language in the novel, making them in effect tertiary manifestations, which are forced to conform to linguistic structures. As a consequence, they do not conform to the conventions of narrative, but to the laws of the unconscious. The complex relations between literal and figurative language can be seen in the unconscious texts of *Die Klavierspielerin*; where metaphors frequently adopt a literal rather than figurative meaning. While many see the novel as playing on two levels, a literal and a metaphorical, I believe that metaphors work in both these ways in the unconscious texts, and there is no way of deciding how they are to be read.

III. Narration and the Split Subject

A slightly more straightforward example of unconscious texts can be found in Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet*. This novel begins (after a somewhat enigmatic preface) in material reality. At one distinct point

(which can only be discerned retrospectively), the novel crosses from material to psychic reality.¹⁶⁸ What perhaps separates this novel from other flights of fantasy is that there is nothing to tell us that the level of reality has shifted. This shift remains unknown even to Isobel, the first-person narrator – and thus the distinction between these levels of reality does not exist for the text. Thus, when Isobel shortly thereafter finds herself back in 1918 (the novel takes place in 1960), we are faced with the dilemma of the fantastic: either she is hallucinating, or she has travelled back in time.¹⁶⁹ Since the novel seems to take place in a realistic world governed by the laws of physics (where time-travel is impossible), we must assume that she is having a hallucination. Isobel is also aware of this paradox, concluding “I am mad, I think. I am mad therefore I think. I am mad therefore I think I am” (p.48); and later, after another trip: “let’s face it, if it comes right down to it, which is more likely – a disruption in the space-time continuum or some form of madness?” (p.72). This provocation to the reader also serves as a red-herring, for ultimately it is apparent that it is neither of these possibilities which is responsible for the fantastic nature of her narrative. Although we do not discover the nature of the shift until near the end of the novel (p.280), there are a number of clues that could have led us to this conclusion beforehand.

¹⁶⁸ Kate Atkinson, *Human Croquet*. London: Doubleday, 1997. p.46. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶⁹ Freud faces a similar dilemma in his reading of Jensen’s *Gradiva*, noting that should the author construct a world in which ghosts and spirits exist “we know from the examples of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, we are prepared to follow him there without hesitation.” *PFL* p.43; *GW* p.42. cf. “The Uncanny.” *PFL* p.351; *GW* p.242.

In attempting to answer to the question "Who is speaking?" for the subject of the unconscious, Lacan suggests that the answer cannot come from the subject, as he does not know what he is saying, or even if he is speaking.¹⁷⁰ The same question could also be asked of literature and a similar answer given. Some works display a consciousness of their status as, if not works of literature, at least as narratives. Others subscribe to the fiction of transparency, the narration of things as they actually happened. In this instance, we are interested in a work which is conscious of its status as a narrative, but where the question of exactly who is narrating is quite complex. In this case, it should be born in mind that the subject of narration may be no different to the split subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan, the split in the subject is not only manifested in dreams, but persists upon awakening between the return to the real and consciousness re-weaving itself.¹⁷¹ This split only serves to represent the more profound split, situated between that which refers to the subject in the dream and the kernel of the dream.¹⁷²

Something akin to this can be seen in *Human Croquet*, both within the text, and also at a structural level. The sixteen year-old protagonist, Isobel, has an accident and falls into a coma, during which most of the action takes place. While her intrapsychic narrative could almost have been writing according to *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

¹⁷⁰ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.299.

¹⁷¹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.70.

¹⁷² Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.70.

the sensibility is distinctly Lacanian. The novel is, apart from the beginning and the end, structured according to two time frames, the Present and the Past. The Present sections take place almost entirely within Isobel's psyche while she is comatose. The Past sections involve Isobel's prehistory, including events which she cannot know, or appears not to know. Yet at the very beginning of the novel, Isobel claims to be

the alpha and the omega of narrators (I am omniscient) and I know the beginning and the end. The beginning is the word and the end is silence. And in between are all the stories. This is one of mine.
(p.20)

The biblical allusions are not without significance for a psychoanalytic reading of the text. Isobel plays on a similarity between the role of God in the creation of the world, and her role in the creation of the narrative world. Her world only exist through the word, and when it ceases to speak, it ceases to exist. The origin of her claim to be "the alpha and the omega of narrators," comes from the Book of Revelations (1:8), which, as will be seen, is an accurate description of her narrative. In making these claims, she immediately sets up a split between the omniscient narratorial Isobel and the protagonist Isobel, who does not have access to the narrator's knowledge. Isobel (as narrator) plays on this distinction, making the reader aware of this dual role through comments on her narrative:

This is ridiculous. There should be some rule about time warps (no more than one per chapter, for instance) and surely you should at least be able to tell what bit of the space-time continuum you're in.
(p.208)

This provocation (among others) serves to distract both the protagonist and the reader from questioning the precise nature of the narrative by attempting to place it within a fictional/historical distinction. It also makes the process of reconciling the Past and Present narratives more problematic.

In the Present, both within and outside her coma, Isobel believes that her mother [Eliza] left them when she was quite young, describing her as "an unreal woman, gone and almost forgotten, slipping the bonds of reality the day she walked off into a wood and never came back" (p.25). This comment prefigures much of the text both in terms of structure and content: questions of reality (or realities), the importance of the wood, and perhaps most importantly, memory and forgetting.¹⁷³ This last question will be covered in more detail in the chapter on Time and Memory, but I will focus on its role within *Human Croquet* here as its relevance is primarily connected to the idea of unconscious texts.

In the Past, we learn of the death of her mother at the hands of an unknown assailant (p.115). We later learn that her next door neighbour, Mr. Baxter, is the culprit, although in order to come to this conclusion the reader must connect the single instance where we learn his first name (p.27) with Eliza's use of it shortly before her demise (p.309). In the Present, we see this information struggling to get

¹⁷³ Isobel later describes her memories of her mother as being "like the shadows of a dream, tantalizing and out of reach" (p.28). As Freud notes, "dreaming is another kind of remembering, though one that is subject to the conditions that rule at night and to the laws of dream-formation" "From the History of an Infantile Neuroses." *PFL* p.285; *GW* p.80.

through, a process that is not unlike the attempts of the unconscious to make itself understood in dreams. The evidence comes in strange forms, the sudden appearance of artefacts that belonged (or have some connection) to her mother, the first of which is a compact which appears while Isobel is still in material reality (p.33) and is the only one that remains after Isobel comes out of her coma. This small remnant of their mother brings up a number of other images from the Past, some of which result in similar items making their way into the present. Firstly a shoe shows up, the significance of which is sensed by the children: "We know, in our bones and our blood, that the shoe has travelled through time and space to tell us something. But what?" (p.57) and a little later:

Perhaps she's coming back in bits – a drift of perfume, a powder-compact, a shoe. Perhaps soon there'll be fingernails and hair, and then whole limbs will start to appear and we can piece our jigsaw-mother together again. (p.58)

Although this is not what actually takes place in the text, something of the sort does occur at the level of the narrative. As far as the unconscious (or intra-psychic) texts are concerned, this is precisely what happens. Fragments of memory come back, filling in the gaps within the text. When Eliza's handkerchief appears, it stirs in Isobel "a faint trace of memory, a barely decipherable twitch along the neurons (a faint *click*) reminds me of something" (p.127). However the significance of these items is never apparent in the Present, only in the Past, yet nevertheless the children realise that although these signifiers remain enigmatic, they are not without meaning:

'It's like finding clues, isn't it?'

'Clues to what exactly?'

'Her,' he whispers as if we might be overheard. 'Where she is.' A lock of hair, a powder-compact, a twice-lost shoe and a strange smell – not much of a map. In court this evidence wouldn't add up to a mother. It would add up to madness. I refuse to even touch the lock of hair. I don't want a black curl, I want the whole Eliza, quick and breathing, an entire person inside her skin, the hair growing from roots on her head, the veins throbbing with robin-red blood. Why can't I go back and find *her*? (p.202)

The search for Eliza within the intra-psychic narratives is akin to dream interpretation's fruitless search for the ultimate meaning of the dream. Lacan contends that the subject can only recall towards a certain limit, the real.¹⁷⁴ However, the real cannot be located within the dream, it "has to be sought beyond the dream – in what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us, behind the lack of representation of which there is only one representative."¹⁷⁵ Although the repressed kernel of information in *Human Croquet* – the knowledge of Eliza's death – lies at the heart of the narrative, it is difficult to see it as the real of the text owing to the confusion of narrative levels. Ultimately we cannot locate the real in anything which is depicted in the novel as technically the real "resists symbolisation absolutely. In the end, doesn't the feeling of the real reach its high point in the pressing manifestation of an unreal, hallucinatory reality?"¹⁷⁶ Should we feel inclined to look for a real of the text, we would have to satisfy ourselves with merely asserting its possible existence, pointing to its effects; speculation as to its contents

¹⁷⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.49.

¹⁷⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.60.

¹⁷⁶ Lacan, *Seminar I* pp.66-67.

would be pointless. Here Eliza's death functions as the real of the narrative of the Present – opaque to its protagonist, yet by virtue of the intrusion of the Past, transparent to the reader.

At the end of the novel, in three consecutive chapters ("The Art of Successful Entertaining," "Killing Time," and "There is Another World but It Is This One," Isobel relives Christmas Day, which ends each time in the death of the boy she loves, Malcolm Lovat (who, we learn in the Past, is her half-brother). Each time she awakes she is confronted with a slightly different reality with the result that when she finally returns to material reality (after twenty-two days drifting in and out of consciousness), she is not quite able to distinguish between the psychic reality of the text and the material reality she now inhabits. Indeed, on the last Christmas Day she muses on just this question:

Is this real? Or am I imagining it? And what is the difference? If I imagine a Christmas table groaning under fatted goose and flaming pudding, why isn't it as real as on that really happened? How is an imagined Christmas different from a remembered one? (p.275)

When she returns to material reality, she discovers that Mr. Baxter is dead, just as he was in the Present, but here he has killed himself (p.315). While in the Present, Isobel had experienced temporal distortions as well as reality shifts, and while she now acknowledges that everything that happened is a product of her comatose brain playing tricks on her, nonetheless "it's as if reality is the same, and yet ... not the same" (p.315). Rather than deciding in favour of any version of reality, Isobel concludes that perhaps:

reality is a relative kind of thing, like time. Maybe there can be more than one version of reality -- what you see depends on where you're standing. Take Mr. Baxter's death, for example, perhaps there are other versions. Imagine— (p.316)

And she proceeds to present another version of Mr. Baxter's death. This is clearly a story from the conscious Isobel and it is informed by both the things she has imagined, the things her unconscious has attempted to present to her, as well as the facts she knows from material reality. The point of her digression is that this could very well be the way it happened; that although it is clearly the product of her imagination, there are no facts that actually contradict this version of events. At the level of the text it doesn't matter whether it is real or not, and certainly not at the level of the unconscious text. The reader is given little option but to treat each of these possibilities equally (at least while they are being narrated), and, ultimately, is not required to decide in favour of one or the other. Isobel likens her experience to that of Alice waking up from the world through the looking glass:

It is difficult to believe that all those things that seemed so real have not happened. They felt real then, they feel real now. Appearances can be very deceptive. (p.319)

Indeed she may well say this, for at the level of psychic reality, the level on which they had their effect and on which the texts took place, they *are* real. This is more or less the same question that Freud is faced with in his rejection of the seduction theory for the formation of neurosis. In the final analysis, it does not matter to the unconscious

whether it happened or not, for it is treated as if it had, and everything else follows from that.¹⁷⁷

Before considering the unconscious texts of *Die Klavierspielerin*, we must first examine in more detail the question of how the unconscious may be represented to consciousness.

IV. The Unconscious as Translation

In Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, Stella gazes over the edge of the yacht into the still ocean, speculating on the existence of another world below, where all is reversed:

Under there, where what I am sure of is back to front, inside out, reversed, I feel in the way that I presently think, that is constantly, lucidly, testing all experience against feeling, clear and powerful as the water it suspends in.

Here, what I know by sensation, there, I know by intuition.

My empirical finger-tips numb and I can't open my eyes. What I see, what I touch is interior, either I am inside it or it is inside me. It is only vague when I subject it to the laws of the upper air. It is as though there is an entirely other way of being that makes no sense to my world, any more than my world makes sense to it. I cannot connect the two; the watery world won't move up into the dry bright light that I live in and when I take the dry bright light down there it immediately de-charges, leaving me to fumble my way in the dark.

This has been happening for years and I used to conceive of it as a poet's place or a place of inspiration; a place I imagined but where I could never actually visit. It comes closer to me than I am able to

¹⁷⁷ Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neuroses." *PFL* p.283; *GW* p.78.

come to it. Dreams do dream us, don't they? We are not the ones in control.¹⁷⁸

Although it is couched in the terms of personal experience, nevertheless this extract expresses one of the major difficulties that psychoanalysis is faced with: how can the data of the unconscious be expressed in terms of consciousness, how can we apply the rules, logic and language of consciousness to something which is so fundamentally alien to them? These are questions of translation. The concept of translation, rendering one language into another, plays a substantial part in the interpretative work of psychoanalysis. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud suggests that

the dream content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learned them. The dream content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts.¹⁷⁹

In dealing with the data of the unconscious, we must always remain aware that we are dealing with a translation. Freud's choice of metaphor here is perhaps more precise than he realises, for just as no translation from one language to another can ever be considered 'perfect,' neither can we assume that any given rendering of the 'dream-thoughts' is completely accurate. In the case of dream interpretation it may be more complicated than it seems, for the analyst

¹⁷⁸ Jeanette Winterson, *Gut Symmetries*. London: Granta, 1997. pp.47-48. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

is faced with the task of rendering one language (that of the dream-thoughts) which is, to a certain extent, unique to the speaker; with another language, which although it is common to both analyst and analysand does not mean that both are using the words and grammar in the same way.¹⁸⁰ Another problem is that the dream-thoughts are (directly or indirectly) the representatives of unconscious desires; desires whose representation may in fact be an impossibility.¹⁸¹ This aspect of representation will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

Yet this is not merely a problem within the analytic session, or even of dream interpretation, but is a question which lies at the heart of psychoanalysis – the problem of the double transcription. Stated briefly, the problem is this: when something moves from the unconscious to the conscious, is there a change of state, or is there a new inscription in consciousness? This is something which Freud himself never definitively solved, and which has continued to provoke psychoanalytically inclined thinkers from a variety of fields.

Laplanche and Leclaire argue that psychoanalytic theory errs in suggesting that there is a move from a manifest content to a latent one, when more precisely there is only one content (the latent one),

¹⁷⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.381; GW pp.283-284.

¹⁸⁰ Indeed in some cases the analyst and the analysand do not even share the same language. For example, although Freud's analysis of the Wolf-Man (a Russian) took place in German, the Wolf-Man's discourse is marked by his knowledge of English. Freud "Fetishism" PFL V.7, p.351; GW V. XIV, p.311. This fact forms the basis of a fascinating rereading of the Wolf-Man case by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. *The Wolf-Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

and only one narrative (the manifest one), "the text of the dream only expresses in an unconventional language meanings [*intentions significatives*] which have not found an adequate sign."¹⁸² It is not possible for these meanings to find an adequate sign, as the very nature of the sign, of representation, is incompatible with the unconscious. While I agree with their sentiments, I feel that the existence of just a single latent content is difficult to justify in psychoanalytic literary criticism. If there is latent content, or meaning, in the work, it must necessarily be multiple. Even in the dream, the process of overdetermination means that, apart from perhaps the kernel of the dream, there can never be said to be a single latent content. Dream interpretation is a translation of these contents, and the mistake of what they term "Freudian Realism," is the assumption that

the actual independent existence of this translation, at the moment when the dream is elaborated, in the form of unconscious thoughts. Under the pretext that the "significant intentions" of the dream can be expressed in the language of waking life, it is assumed that they are already embodied, at the time of the dream, in a text distinct from the manifest content.¹⁸³

This is precisely the point that Derrida approaches, although from a slightly different point of view, in his piece "Freud and the Scene of Writing," where he asserts that

[t]he conscious text is thus not a transcription, because there is no text *present elsewhere* as an unconscious one to be transposed or

¹⁸¹ Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing* p.19.

¹⁸² Laplanche & Leclaire p.120.

¹⁸³ Laplanche & Leclaire p.120.

transported. There is then no unconscious truth to be rediscovered by virtue of having been written elsewhere. There is no text written and present elsewhere which would then be subjected, without being changed in the process, to an operation and a temporalisation (the latter belonging to consciousness if we follow Freud literally) which would be external to it, floating on its surface. There is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present. The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united – a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions. Originary reprints. Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, *nachträglich*, belatedly, *supplementarily*: for the *nachträglich* also means *supplementary*.¹⁸⁴

The translation of the 'unconscious' into the 'conscious' is not a derivative or repetitive writing, that is, a transcription of an unconscious writing; it occurs in a manner which in its very secondariness is originary and irreducible.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the 'movement' of traces into consciousness produces new texts, which are not identical with the unconscious, but are the products of the translation into consciousness.

Derrida approaches the question of the double transcription through a reading of Freud's "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad' [*Wunderblock*]" (1925), a short piece in which Freud elaborates a model of perception and memory through the analogy of a popular children's toy, the *Wunderblock* – a reusable writing pad composed of

¹⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." Trans. Alan Bass. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. p.211

¹⁸⁵ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.212.

a plastic upper sheet and a receptive base. Writing is effected through the use of a stylus (or even a fingernail) and erased by separating the upper sheet from the base. The composition of the *Wunderblock* joins the two 'empirical certainties' by which we are constituted:

[I]nfinite depth in the implication of meaning, in the unlimited envelopment of the present, and, simultaneously, the pellicular essence of being, the absolute absence of any foundation.¹⁸⁶

The subject's entrapment within the symbolic cannot be escaped, but neither can it be relied on to guarantee meaning. The depth of the *Wunderblock* is "simultaneously a depth without bottom, an infinite allusion, and a purely superficial exteriority: a stratification of surfaces each of whose relation to itself, each of whose interior, is but the implication of another similarly exposed surface."¹⁸⁷ This is analogous to the structure of the unconscious of primal repression, which is pre-Oedipal, and thus pre-symbolic. It is ordered neither temporally, nor, in the usual sense, spatially – it is a hyperdimensional space where each point is simultaneously orthogonal to each other point. This space is the other scene [*andere Schauplatz*] where the unconscious texts of *Die Klavierspielerin* come into being. For Derrida it is in this space that writing becomes possible, the production

of meanings which irreversible, linear consecution, moving from present point to present point, could only tend to repress, and (to a certain extent) could only fail to repress.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.224.

¹⁸⁷ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.224.

¹⁸⁸ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.217.

Here, 'writing' is not identical with the writing of literature, but is closer to the system of writing which Freud sees in the dream work. The attempt to transcribe this writing into that of consciousness cannot but repress it, if only by its inability to re-produce it. Writing cannot occur without repression: "The condition for writing is that there be neither a permanent contact nor an absolute break between the strata: the vigilance and failure of censorship."¹⁸⁹

Concerning the protective celluloid layer of the *Wunderblock*, Derrida states that there is no writing which does not have its own defensive device, in order to protect against itself, that is, "against the writing by which the 'subject' is himself threatened as he lets himself be written: as *he exposes himself*."¹⁹⁰ At the level of the text, this can be seen in the ways in which *Die Klavierspielerin* both provokes and resists a psychoanalytic interpretation. Derrida also attempts to account for writing as a trace which survives the scratch's "present, punctuality and stigmē," concluding that writing supplements perception even before perception appears to itself, that is, before it is conscious of itself.¹⁹¹ Writing is also that which remains after perception has faded. This is how afterwardsness [*Nachträglichkeit*], as deferred effect, is possible: a trace may be written into memory before it is consciously perceived, only to emerge later with its full

¹⁸⁹ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.226.

¹⁹⁰ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.224.

¹⁹¹ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.224.

quota of affect.¹⁹² A memory-trace never made conscious may continue to have an effect through the mechanisms whereby a repressed trace may enter into consciousness – through the primary processes. Memory will be considered in more detail in the final chapter. I will now turn to a more detailed examination of these questions of translation in *Die Klavierspielerin*.

The Unconscious of the Text

Elfriede Jelinek's novel *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983) contains many themes and motifs which seem almost designed to provoke a psychoanalytic reading, yet surprisingly few critics have chosen to examine it in this light. Such a reading is prompted not only by the presence of themes such as sexuality, desire, the body, and the uncertain status of the subject; but also by the form of the novel. The novel has some peculiar structural aspects, which have seemingly gone hitherto unnoticed. In the first part of the novel there are four clearly separated texts, which are stylistically quite unlike those of the rest of the novel, although the themes are, to a certain extent, similar. These parts of the novel I have designated unconscious texts, for they seem to conform to the characteristics of the unconscious, and the rules governing constructions of the unconscious.

¹⁹² 'Afterwardsness' is Jean Laplanche's suggested translation of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*, "in all cases in Freud, it's possible to use either 'afterwards' or 'afterwardsness.'" "Notes on Afterwardsness." *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation and the Drives*. Ed. John Fletcher & Martin Stanton. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992. p.220.

Let me begin by noting that some critics have discerned these characteristics, without seeing the need to attribute them to the unconscious. Marian-Regina Kecht is certainly correct in describing Jelinek's writing as a "stark, colourful, at times vulgar language full of eccentric and bright metaphors," but, despite working within the framework of a psychoanalytic reading, she shies away from relating such a use of language to the unconscious.¹⁹³ One of the stylistic characteristics which has been discerned, without being related to psychoanalytic theories about language, is Jelinek's use of metaphor and unrealistic allegories to make the organic inorganic (and, I would suggest, vice versa).¹⁹⁴ As this is characteristic of the language of the unconscious, particular attention will be paid to those points in the text where this occurs most prominently. Despite the connection between poetic language and that of the unconscious, few have chosen to examine the novel from this point of view. Yasmin Hoffmann comes close, refraining from designating the language in Jelinek's texts as schizophrenic only on the grounds that the word has pathological connotations.¹⁹⁵ However, although Hoffmann discerns this characteristic, she does not analyse its role in the novel, or its subsequent implications.

¹⁹³ Maria Regina Kecht, "'In the name of obedience, reason and fear': Mother and daughter relations in W. A. Mitgutsch and E. Jelinek," *The German Quarterly*, V.62(3), 1989. pp.361-362.

¹⁹⁴ Janet Blanken, "Elfriede Jelinek's *Lust* als Beispiel eines postmodernen, feministischen Romans," *Neophilologus*, V.78(4), 1994. p.615.

¹⁹⁵ Yasmin Hoffmann, "'Hier lacht sich die Sprache selbst aus'," *Elfriede Jelinek*. Ed. Kurt Bartsch & Günther Höfler Graz: Droschl, 1991, p.51.

To deem these texts 'unconscious' is to imply that they are manifestations of the unconscious, thus raising the questions: what sort of manifestations, and whose unconscious? This is not a question which can be answered immediately, if at all. Kecht claims that the novel confronts us with Erika's neuroses, and I believe that here she is closer to a more fundamental truth than perhaps she realises.¹⁹⁶ For although there is no question that this takes place at the level of the content of the novel, I believe it can even be seen at the level of its form.

Elizabeth Wright presents one of the strongest readings of *Die Klavierspielerin*, in which she notes that the text appears to invite a psychoanalytic reading, but subsequently proves resistant.¹⁹⁷ She is aware that while the manifest level of the text not only invites, but indeed provokes a psychoanalytic reaction, it resists attempts at closure. Marlies Janz, on the other hand, believes that the novel takes elements of the theory of psychoanalysis (such as the phallus and castration) and makes them concrete.¹⁹⁸ The novel takes on a psychotic relationship to the language of psychoanalysis – importing its concepts and metaphors and placing them on a literal level.

Wright proposes that a psychoanalytic reading of the novel should draw on theories which stress that at the level of lived experience there is something unrepresentable which remains, "and

¹⁹⁶ Kecht p.361.

¹⁹⁷ Elizabeth Wright, "An aesthetics of disgust: Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin*," *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, V.14(2), 1991. p.184.

¹⁹⁸ Marlies Janz, *Elfriede Jelinek*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1995. p.86.

which does not necessarily appear solely in pathological symptoms."¹⁹⁹

The question of representability is of central concern in this analysis, for this unrepresentable is 'represented' in the novel, and not only within the unconscious texts. While the unconscious responsible for the production of the unconscious texts could be sought in one of the characters, Wright suggests that:

The unconscious of the text might then be sought at the level of the textual body rather than at the level of its individual figures. For just as physical bodies exhibit symptoms of civilisation's discontents, so do textual bodies. A reading of the textual body can work at a greater level of generality than a case-history reading, for it can show that the unconscious is irrepressible even in a text which plots the capture of the subject in the symbolic — the 'music teacher.'²⁰⁰

I can only concur with Wright, and my objective here is to reveal the presence of this unconscious of the text (the manifest text) and to elucidate its relation to the rest of the narrative.

In these unconscious texts, we find attempts by Jelinek to represent the language of the unconscious. It is not the 'language' in which the unconscious texts originally take place, although that is occasionally represented within the unconscious texts. This language cannot be apprehended directly, because the unconscious texts must always be considered as already being secondary manifestations of the unconscious. The exact nature of the origin of these manifestations will become clearer in due course.

¹⁹⁹ Wright, "An aesthetics of disgust." p.187.

²⁰⁰ Wright, "An aesthetics of disgust." p.187.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the unconscious texts is that of the concrete metaphor, that is, the use of metaphor not figuratively, but literally: "The gigantic tail of culture-refuse moves forward, softly rustling as it curls around, closing into a tight circle, millimetre by millimetre."²⁰¹ This characteristic is one of the most consistent across the four unconscious texts in Jelinek's novel. It varies in strength according to the tone and subject of the text, but in each of them many examples could be found. Each unconscious text is quite different from the rest, but nonetheless remains recognisable as an unconscious text by the presence (in varying degrees) of this and other characteristics.

We can also see the operation of metaphor as condensation at work within the unconscious texts. Freud discusses this phenomenon with regard to the use of words in schizophrenia in his work "The Unconscious," where he states that they

are subjected to the same processes as that which makes the dream-images out of latent dream-thoughts — to what we have called the *primary psychical process*. They undergo condensation, and by means of displacement transfer their cathexis to one another in their entirety. The process may go so far that a single word, if it is specially suitable on account of its numerous connections, takes over the representation of a whole train of thought.²⁰²

²⁰¹ "Der gigantische Schweif von Kulturschutt schiebt sich leise raschelnd von allen Seiten her vorwärts, millimeterweise schließt sich die Umzingelung." Elfriede Jelinek. *Die Klavierspielerin*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986. p.59. Translated as *The Piano Teacher*. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. London: Serpent's Tail, 1988. p. 57. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically, German page numbers followed by English.

²⁰² Freud, "The Unconscious." *PFL* p.204; *GW* pp.297-298.

This process of condensation can be seen at various points in the texts. For example, in the third unconscious text, "A telephone rings. Someone picks up. Someone laughs. Someone says something."²⁰³ There is far more taking place at the latent level of the unconscious text, that is, in the unconscious to which this text belongs, than is contained in these phrases. We are only presented with an indistinct reflection of the ur-text; we can say no more than that we are not presented with the entirety of the text. Here we come up against the problem of the unconscious text as a tertiary manifestation. By including it in a narrative, the restrictions of ordinary language are forced upon the text and result in structures like these. As Derrida says, this process of translation is also a one of repression, whether deliberate or not.²⁰⁴ We can proceed no further with our analysis of condensation as the massive overdeterminations belong to the originating unconscious, which we are unable to access.

Another characteristic of the unconscious is that it is timeless, that its contents have no relation to time, nor are they ordered temporally.²⁰⁵ Although time will be covered in more detail in the final chapter, it cannot be avoided here. Again we must remain aware that we are dealing with a secondary (or perhaps tertiary) manifestation. In narrative things are, by necessity, ordered sequentially, and it is almost impossible to represent simultaneity. However, we can see just such a

²⁰³ "Ein Telefon klingelt. Einer hebt ab. Einer lacht. Einer sagt etwas." (59/58).

²⁰⁴ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.217.

²⁰⁵ Freud, "The Unconscious." *PFL* p.191; *GW* p.286.

thing occurring in the first unconscious text in exactly the way that Freud suggests it would in dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he suggests that a simultaneity in time represents a logical connection, while a causal connection may be related by a dependent clause in a dream.²⁰⁶ However,

[I]n the great majority of cases, it must be confessed, the causal relation is not represented at all but is lost in the confusion of elements which inevitably occurs in the process of dreaming.²⁰⁷

In the first unconscious text we can see these relations, although it seems difficult to determine what the causal connection might be. It takes place primarily on a tram, and veers wildly from the general to the specific, and from the tram out (or across) to other events, following seemingly random chains of association, and returning without time having past:

A whole batch of ratty workers, on the verge of retirement, with tool bags on their shoulders, shove and kick their way out of the carriage. They're deliberately walking to the next stop! When a ram disturbs the peace and quiet among all the sheep in the car, then you desperately need fresh air, and you find it outside. If you're going to chew out your wife at home, you have to have oxygen; otherwise you may not be up to chewing her out. Something with a vague colour and shape starts swaying, slips along; someone screams as if stabbed. A thick, steamy mist of Viennese venom rolls across this public meadow. Someone even calls for an executioner because his evening has been ruined prematurely. My, but they're furious. Their evening relaxation, which should have begun twenty minutes ago, has not set in. Or else it has been abruptly cut off, like the colourfully printed package of the victim's life (with instructions), which he cannot put back on the shelf. (He cannot simply reach inconspicuously for a new, intact package; otherwise the salesgirl would have him arrested

²⁰⁶ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL pp.424-425; GW p.319.

for shoplifting. Follow me quietly! But the door that leads, or seems to lead into the manager's office is a phoney door, and there are no announcements of weekly specials on the windows of the brand-new supermarket. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, only darkness. And the customer plunges into a bottomless pit.) Someone says in the officialese that is customary in public vehicles here: You are to vacate this trolley car without further delay. A tuft of chamois hair grows rankly from a cranium; the man is disguised as a hunter.²⁰⁸

As well as dealing with questions of translation from the unconscious to the conscious, we are also faced here with the question of translations from German to English. A number of the issues of psychic translation are also present here. I am certainly not suggesting that we attempt to analyse the translator, Joachim Neugroschel, through his work, but that we look at the ways in which the English text functions as a translation. For this reason, I have not altered the translation at all, and I will now draw attention to a number of significant differences in the translation. The translation consistently reduces ambiguities in the text and makes

²⁰⁷ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL, p.427; GW p.321

²⁰⁸ "Ein ganzer Schub rattenartiger Handwerker dicht vor der Pensionierung, mit Werkzeugtaschen über den Schultern, drängt sich unter Schubsen und Treten aus dem Wagen. Jetzt gehen diese Leute zu Fleiß eine ganze Station zu Fuß! Wenn ein Widder unter all den Schafen im Wagen die Ruhe stört, benötigt man dringend frische Luft, und draußen findet man sie. Das Gebläse des Zorns, mit dem man dann zu Hause die Gattin traktieren wird, benötigt frischen Sauerstoff, sonst funktioniert es vielleicht nicht. Etwas von unbestimmter Farbe und Form gerät ins Schwanken, rutscht, etwas anderes schreit wie abgestochen auf. Ein dichter Sprühnebel von Wienerischem Gift dunstet über diese Volksweise hin. Einer ruft gar nach einem Henker, weil sein Feierabend vorzeitig verdorben worden ist. So sehr ärgern sie sich. Ihre abendliche Ruhe, die schon vor zwanzig Minuten hätte beginnen sollen, ist heute nicht eingetreten. Oder die Ruhe ist jäh abgebrochen worden, abgebrochen wie die bunt bedruckte Lebenspackung des Opfers — mit Gebrauchsanweisung —, die es jetzt nicht mehr ins Regal zurückstellen kann. Das Opfer kann sich jetzt nicht einfach unauffällig eine neue und versehrte Packung greifen, es würde von der Verkäuferin als Ladendieb arretiert. Folgen Sie mir unauffällig! Doch die Tür, welche ins Büro des Filialleiters führt, zu führen schien, ist eine Scheintür, und außerhalb des nagelneuen Supermarkts gibt es keine Sonderangebote der Woche mehr, sondern dort ist nichts, absolut gar nichts, nur Dunkel, und ein Kunde, der nie geizig war, stürzt ins Bodenlose ab. Jemand sagt in der hier üblichen Schriftsprache: Verlassen Sie auf der Stelle den Wagen! Aus seiner Schädeldecke wuchert ein Gamsbart heraus, denn der Mann ist als Jäger verkleidet." (19-20/17-18).

it more coherent, for example by placing the entire shoplifting scene within parentheses. Doing so alters the tone of the text quite substantially; by creating a clearly marked aside the translation places it on a different level. But it does not exist as a parenthesis, it exists with equal validity, and at the same level as the rest of the text. Even within the supermarket scene, the translations adds elements, for example "on the windows," which are not only simply not present in the German, but which also serve to create a more concrete image and to inhibit possible metaphoric readings. Similarly, a slightly more normal image is created through the change from "something else screams as if stabbed" to "someone screams as if stabbed." The return to the scene on the tram is not marked in the German, so that the reader has difficulty reorienting themselves after the transition, an effect which is probably clearer in a closer translation: "and a customer, who was never stingy, plunges into an abyss. Someone says in the written language which is normal here: Vacate the car at once!" The translation is overdetermined at this point, not only by placing the supermarket scene within parentheses, but also by changing "here" to "in public vehicles here" a series of discrete and clearly defined scenes has been created. While the distinction between "written language" and "officialese" may seem pedantic here, it will be shown shortly that this is not without significance for the novel.

The sum of these changes in the translation is to create clarity rather than confusion, through a stronger sense of linearity. But it is

not as though the supermarket scene is simply a simultaneous excursion in thought – time does not pass while this is happening precisely because time does not pass at all (or even exist).²⁰⁹ It is as if it exists within events in the unconscious texts, but not between them.

This is also how the unconscious texts relate to the manifest text. While time may exist (in its problematic forms) within them, it does not in their relations to the manifest text. They do not relate to the specific time-frame of the novel in general, they exist outside of the narrative, or, perhaps more in line with a Lacanian mode of psychoanalytic literary criticism, they could be described as existing between the narrative.

The Structure of Unconscious Discourse

Before going further into *Die Klavierspielerin*, Laplanche and Leclaire's conception of the structure of unconscious language must be considered in a little more detail. By learning a little more about the internal structure of the unconscious texts, we may also learn about their origin and their role within the novel.

The "sentences" which exist in the discourse of unconscious language are "short sequences, most often fragmentary, circular and repetitive."²¹⁰ If we briefly sketch the course of this first unconscious

²⁰⁹ Another distinguishing characteristic of the novel as a whole is that it takes place entirely in the present tense. Not only is this unusual in literature, but it corresponds precisely to the tense of dreams. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.683; GW pp.539-540.

²¹⁰ Laplanche and Leclaire p.163.

narrative, it will be shown to follow a trajectory which could be described as unconscious. Within these texts the location or scene changes frequently and, at first glance, randomly. The changes often hinge on a single word or association, a phenomenon that Freud had observed in dreams and termed "switch words."²¹¹ For example, the first unconscious text begins on a tram, then departs to a depiction of an encounter with a music student. This change appears to be provoked by the use of the word "viola," and although it, too, takes place on the tram, nevertheless it takes place at a different time, and indeed in a different tram (17-18/15-17). The narrative then returns to the original tram for the sequence quoted above, with its shoplifting scene, and subsequent return to the tram. From there, the text goes briefly through a music lesson to a night at the philharmonic, before returning to the scene of the tram to finish the unconscious text.

The tram is what we might call the frame of this particular text. It provides the backdrop for the narrative. The entire text conforms to the pattern laid out by Laplanche and Leclaire above: short flashes of stories, an absence of clear relations between them, and a circular and repetitive structure. Seldom are more than two or three paragraphs spent at the same point. However, the text does display a certain compulsion to return to the tram. The other texts conform to this model in varying degrees. The second is more consistent, and takes place within the frame of Erika's childhood experiences at her family's

²¹¹ Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria." *PFL* p.100 n.1; *GW* p.226 n.2.

country-house (35-45/33-44). The third is massively fragmentary, and the frame is much looser (58-61/56-60). It might be more appropriate to describe it as a motif, for it is far less concrete, and does not exert nearly the same pull on the narrative as the other frames. The fourth takes place within Erika's experiences at the conservatory and resembles the second in its relative stability (82-90/80-88)

The fact that we can discern different themes, frames, motifs and so on in each of these texts would seem to indicate that they occur discretely. That is, nothing is carried over from one to the next, although they are each recognisable as products of the same unconscious. Erika is quite clearly the focus of these, just as she is the focus of the novel, but I do not wish to suggest that she is the progenitor of the unconscious texts, in the sense that they transparently represent her unconscious. The unconscious texts are not part of a single, alternate text, but are other texts which stand in radical opposition to the narrative stability of the manifest text. This conclusion itself stands in radical opposition to previous criticism, which has attempted to read *Die Klavierspielerin* as a single homogenous text.²¹²

This form of fragmentary structure is common in contemporary novels, although clearly a mistrust of simple linear narration is much older. Even in novels where the presence of a distinct 'unconscious' level of narration is not under consideration, it seems as if such an idea

is almost a precondition of narrative. In Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, one of the narrators, Alice, displays a mistrust of the illusion of coherence, while nevertheless feeling compelled to tell her story:

I know I am a fool, trying to make connections out of scraps but how else is there to proceed? The fragmentariness of life makes coherence suspect but to babble is a different kind of treachery. Perhaps it is a vanity. Am I vain enough to assume you will understand me? No. So I go on puzzling over new joints for words, hoping that this time, one piece will slide smooth against the next.

Walk with me. Hand in hand through the nightmare of narrative, the neat sentences secret-nailed over meaning. Meaning mewed up like an anchorite, its vision in broken pieces behind the wall. And if we pull away the panelling, then what? Without the surface, what hope of contact, of conversation? How will I come to read the rawness inside?

The story of my day, the story of my life, the story of how we met, of what happened before we met. And every story I begin to tell talks across a story I cannot tell. And if I were not telling this story to you, but to someone else, would it be the same story? (p.24)

Alice suggests that every narrative is a manifest narrative which is not a distorted representation of a latent narrative, as in the dream, but rather the inescapable product of the secondary revision of reality. The slightly enigmatic conclusion is an allusion to the discovery of quantum physics that the fact of being observed can alter the behaviour of a sub-atomic particle. In this case, the conclusion is that the act of being read alters the text.

²¹² E.g. Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality: An Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek*. Oxford: Berg, 1994. p.25.

What then, is the place of the unconscious texts within the structure of the novel as a whole? For Laplanche and Leclaire, the unconscious is not coextensive with the manifest as its meaning, but must be interpreted in the gaps of the manifest text, and this is how these texts take place within *Die Klavierspielerin*.²¹³ The unconscious texts are preceded by a spatial gap which serves to separate them from the manifest text. This is why these texts cannot be read as part of a single unified narrative — they do not occur at the same level, they are not even written in the same type of language.

However, themes from the unconscious texts do occasionally break through into the manifest text. For example, the description of Erika as being bound up like an Egyptian mummy in the fourth unconscious text is later echoed in the phantasies of domination she expresses in her letter to Klemmer. The fact that we are able to find these events echoed in the manifest text suggests that they may originate from the same unique source.

The next question is: why do the unconscious texts appear in the gaps of the manifest text? Their appearance could well signal the return of the repressed breaking through the (relative) narrative stability of the manifest text and undermining the subject of the narration. If they are the return of the repressed, then they must already be

²¹³ Laplanche and Leclaire p.126.

manifestations of the unconscious, rather than the presence of the unconscious itself.²¹⁴

Lacan reads Freud as suggesting that the moment when the transference intervenes is in that closing up of the unconscious, "a temporal pulsation that makes it disappear at a certain point of its statement (*énoncé*)."²¹⁵ Transference thus functions as a form of repression – preventing the unconscious from speaking. It is for this reason that Lacan refers to the unconscious as the "intersaid" (*entre-dit*), alluding homophonically to the unconscious as that which is *interdit* [forbidden].²¹⁶ The rhythm of the appearance of the unconscious texts is not unlike the pulsation by which Lacan characterises the appearance of the unconscious.

The appearance/disappearance takes place between two points, the initial and the terminal of this logical time – between the instant of seeing, when something of the intuition itself is always elided, not to say lost, and that elusive moment when the apprehension of the unconscious is not, in fact, concluded, when it is always a question of an 'absorption' fraught with false trails.

Optically, then, the unconscious is the elusive – but we are beginning to circumscribe it in a structure, a temporal structure, which, it can be said, has never yet been articulated as such.²¹⁷

Lacan seems to suggest that it is in the interval between *Wahrnehmung* (perception) and *Bewußtsein* (consciousness) that the

²¹⁴ cf. Freud, "Die Verdrängung." GW. V.X. 1946. pp.256-257. Translated as "Repression." Trans. James Strachey. PFL. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. p.154.

²¹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.130.

²¹⁶ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.65.

²¹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XI* pp.31-32.

other is situated, and it is here that the subject is constituted.²¹⁸ The subject is thus constituted precisely in that space in which repression is possible. What takes place in this interval can only be communicated to consciousness through the intermediary of language (*Wortvorstellungen*).²¹⁹ I believe that this rupture is precisely the possibility of the unconscious, this interval suggests a place where the unconscious might access the data of perception (or perhaps more accurately, sensation) before the conscious receives it.²²⁰

Laplanche and Leclaire propose that the data of consciousness are "defective and 'lacunary,'" and that the unconscious is that which enables us to "reestablish a coherent sequence."²²¹ For the purposes of this study of *Die Klavierspielerin*, this would mean that there is a coherent text which exists to be discovered, and that by integrating the unconscious texts we might hope to arrive at it. Nevertheless, this notion, which seems to hark back to Freud's notion of *wo Es war soll Ich werden*, seems ultimately unproductive for psychoanalytic literary criticism. Rather than attempting to force coherence upon the text, it would seem more useful to work with what we have. Indeed, such an integration is strictly an impossibility. To cite just one obstacle, the data of the unconscious lack time. Even within the unconscious texts,

²¹⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.45.

²¹⁹ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.61

²²⁰ cf. Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.56, where he suggests that it is in this interval that the primary process takes place. It is because the signifying structure interposes itself between perception and consciousness that this is also where the pleasure principle and the unconscious intervene (*Seminar VII*, p.51).

²²¹ Laplanche and Leclaire pp.125-126. Emphasis is mine.

time does not run normally, thus rendering their integration into a series or sequence a logical impossibility.

The ICH and DIE ANDEREN

There is another remarkable characteristic of the unconscious texts which, although it may not appear immediately relevant, is also typical of manifestations of the unconscious. In these texts, there are occasions when certain pronouns (ICH, SIE, IHR; that is I, SHE, HER) are presented in capital letters.

Most have chosen to consider that the capitalisation of SIE indicates (and satirises) the protagonist's overvaluation of herself.²²² Even once we take the existence of the unconscious texts into account, this conclusion makes a certain amount of intuitive sense. It is also consistent with Freud's analysis of the appearance of the formula for trimethylamin in his dream of Irma's injection:

I saw the chemical formula of this substance in my dream, which bears witness to a great effort on the part of my memory. Moreover, the formula was printed in heavy type, as though there had been a desire to lay emphasis on some part of the context as being of quite special importance.²²³

²²² E.g. Andrea Lobb, *'Die endlose Unschuldigkeit': Unmasking Mythologies through Satire and the Grotesque in Elfriede Jelinek's Die Liebhaberinnen, Die Ausgesperrten and Die Klavierspielerin*. Unpublished Honours Thesis, Monash University, Melbourne, 1991. p.53. cf. also Wright, "Aesthetics of Disgust." p.185.

²²³ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL pp.193-194 & 754; GW pp.121-122 & 601. Freud also reports another dream to Fliess in which he witnesses the name of one of the characters before him "printed in heavy type." Jeffrey Masson(ed. and trans.) *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887 - 1904*. Cambridge, MS: Belknap Press, 1985. 31/5/1897, p.249.

Unfortunately, Freud does not go further with his analysis of this aspect of his dream, that is, the form in which the formula appears. However, to simply follow his lead and suggest that the capitalisation in the unconscious texts of *Die Klavierspielerin* conveys nothing more than emphasis, seems to ignore other implications of this phenomenon. While it is mostly SIE and IHR which are capitalised, this does not occur in every instance within the unconscious texts.²²⁴ Capitalisations do occur outside of the unconscious texts, and, as with the reappearance of themes and motifs from the unconscious texts, should be read as the return of the repressed in the form of echoes.

It must be emphasised that this effect of the intermittent capitalisation can only be conveyed graphically. Simply laying stress on such a word in speech could be conveyed in writing in any number of ways: *by italics*, **in bold**, underlined, a larger font, a different font, or any combination of the above. The effect within a written text is quite different, precisely because it does not correspond to normal modes of laying stress. What does it then mean if this can only occur in writing? One would have to suppose that this means that the texts are primarily not visual nor auditory, but graphic. It seems almost tautological to suggest that the text is graphic, but in this instance, the type of writing is not the same as that of the novel. What is its effect in

²²⁴ It should be noted that the translator has inserted a capitalisation (p.62) when there isn't one in the original (p.64) placing it outside of the unconscious texts. In her reading, Annegret Mahler-Bungers erroneously states that every instance of *sie* and *ihr* is capitalised. "Die Trauer auf der Spur: Zu Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin*." *Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche*, V.7, 1988. p.84.

these unconscious texts? It presupposes that the text will be perceived graphically, suggesting that the unconscious (or perhaps the psyche) is either graphic in nature, or can best be represented graphically. As Freud himself uses such an analogy (in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad"), we should not be too alarmed by this suggestion. Derrida takes this concept and extends it, and by looking at certain aspects of this in greater detail, we may be able to see other ways in which this notion can add to our understanding of *Die Klavierspielerin*.

It is significant for Derrida that Freud chooses to represent the structure of the psychological apparatus as a writing machine, and the content as irreducibly graphic:

It is no accident that Freud, at the decisive moments of his itinerary has recourse to metaphorical models which are borrowed not from spoken language or from verbal forms, nor even from phonetic writing, but from a script which is never subject to, never exterior and posterior to, the spoken word... Freud *does not simply use* the metaphor of nonphonetic writing; he does not deem it expedient to manipulate scriptural metaphors for didactic ends. If such metaphors are indispensable, it is perhaps because the illuminate, inversely, the meaning of a trace in general, and eventually, in articulation with this meaning, may illuminate the meaning of writing in the popular sense.²²⁵

Psychoanalysis has, therefore, an intimate link with writing, one which goes beyond a simple choice of metaphor. Most importantly, this is not a phonetic writing, but a writing which would have to be retranscribed into one. Psychoanalysis intersects with literature not merely through

²²⁵ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," p.199.

the common medium of language, but through writing as well. Given that Freud chose to represent the psyche by a writing machine, Derrida asks what psychical writing might mean, and what is the psyche if it can be represented by a text?²²⁶ If the psyche were to be represented by a text, then it would mean a much stronger link between psychoanalysis and literary criticism. In particular, it would mean that the various strategies of literary criticism are also valid tools for psychoanalysis.

According to Derrida, Freud asserts that psychic writing does not lend itself to transcription, as it is a single energetic system which covers the whole of the psychic apparatus.²²⁷ That is, psychic writing is not open to any of the psychical processes which operate in the psyche as it is a model of the entire psyche. We must consider then, where within the psyche this writing might take place. And perhaps also ask: What happens before anything is written? The answer is both simple and complex: the scene of writing.

The scene of writing is an originary locus anterior to meaning. If the scene of writing exists in *Die Klavierspielerin*, I would suggest that it takes place in the gap which precedes the unconscious texts. The unconscious texts break through into the manifest narrative through these gaps. If not anterior to meaning, these gaps certainly pose a number of challenges to interpretation. They also cannot be represented verbally; if these gaps were to be read aloud, silence, and

²²⁶ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.199.

only an indefinite silence, would be the result. Unlike music, there is no indication of how long the silence continues, a motif we find reflected in the confrontation between Erica and Klemmer, "Klemmer's silence has no musical termination or suspension" [*Klemmer schweigt ohne Nachschlag und Vorhalt*] (229/229). Without these characteristics, how are we supposed to attribute a length to these silences, if they indeed even have a length of time?

The scene of writing is intra-psychical, and therefore *imaginary*, that is, of the order of the imaginary, and thus pre-symbolic. The scene of writing is the ultimate absence, a space characterised only by lack. The absence is apparent in *Die Klavierspielerin* in a very literal way — in these gaps which separate the unconscious texts from the manifest text. Yet it is not only apparent in the gaps in the novel, but it is also alluded to within the third unconscious text, where there is a reference to a scene from Luis Buñuel's *An Andalusian Dog*:

you see two concert grand pianos. Then the two donkeys, half-rotten,
bloody heads suspended over the keyboards. Dead. Putrescent.
Outside of everything. In a totally airless room.²²⁸

The scene of writing is contained within the single simple sentence "outside of everything." That is, something which is outside of language, outside of time, perhaps even outside of space. The silence of the gaps is contained in the totally airless room: sound cannot travel through a vacuum. It is a space where the signifier cannot enter as

²²⁷ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," p.213.

sound-presentation, but only as image-presentation, only graphically, as occurs in the unconscious texts.

The unconscious poses a number of challenges to literary criticism. We have seen how the unconscious is indispensable for the understanding of a work such as *Human Croquet*, which is clearly influenced by a knowledge of psychoanalysis. In the case of *Die Klavierspielerin*, the implications of the presence of the unconscious in the novel are more far reaching. Through the existence of a manifest and an unconscious level of the text, the novel resists being read at a unified level. This alterity to manifest text is even more profound, as the unconscious texts must be considered translations into the language of narrative from an originary, non-phonetic, language that can never be wholly represented in the symbolic.

²²⁸ "In Buñue's Andalusischem Hund stehen da zwei Konzertflügel. Dann diese beiden Esel, halbverweste, blut-schwere Häupter, auf die Tasten niederhängend. Tot. Verrottet. Außerhalb von allem. In einer streng luftentzogenen Raum." (76/58-59).

Desire

*"Pure pleasure and pure reality are ideal limits,
which is as much as to say fictions."²²⁹*

1. Introduction

In his work "Freud's Masterplot," Peter Brooks suggests that desire engenders narrative, that there is always something which arouses the narrative from its state of quiescence, where the beginning can be seen as "an awakening, an arousal, the birth of an appetency, ambition, desire or intention."²³⁰ This chapter will focus on three texts which in some way feature desire as their 'spark': *Die Klavierspielerin*, *Out of the Line of Fire*, and *Gut Symmetries*. In this chapter we will not only ask whose desire might be involved, but also consider the play of desires both within the novel, in particular how this bears on the structure of the work; and also without – how the desire of the novel affects the reader. The role of jouissance within literature, and the particular challenges this presents to psychoanalytic literary criticism will also be examined.

Desire has always had a central role in psychoanalysis (after all, what is the Oedipus complex if not desire?), but in contemporary psychoanalytic theory, especially Lacanian, it takes on a much broader

²²⁹ Derrida, *The Post Card* p.284.

²³⁰ Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*. Ed. Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. "Freud's Masterplot," p.291.

significance. In his work *Theories of Desire* (1995), Patrick Fuery suggests that desire underwrites the body of Lacan's thought in the same way the drive does Freud's.²³¹

Désir is the term the French translators of Freud chose to render *Wunsch*, and although 'wish' would be the normal English equivalent of the German (and indeed is in the *Standard Edition*), English translators of Lacan have chose 'desire' as it corresponds more closely to the French *désir*.²³² This is also appropriate as Lacan's *désir* has philosophical resonances with Hegel, and is also a broader and more abstract category than any of Freud's, corresponding exactly to neither 'wish' nor 'drive'.²³³

Although desire receives its most thorough elaboration in Lacan, nonetheless like many of his concepts he attributes it to Freud, suggesting that Freud begins by postulating a world of desire which is

prior to any kind of experience, prior to any consideration concerning the world of appearances and the world of essences. Desire is instituted within the Freudian world in which our experience unfolds, it constitutes it, and at no point in time, not even in the most insignificant of our manoeuvres in this experience of ours, can it be erased.

The Freudian world isn't a world of things, it isn't a world of being, it is a world of desire as such.²³⁴

Desire is thus for Lacan a concept more fundamental, and more far reaching, than any other. It takes place on two levels: firstly, as the

²³¹ Patrick Fuery. *Theories of Desire*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995. p.20.

²³² Evans p.35.

²³³ Evans pp.35-36. cf. David Macey "On the Subject of Lacan." *Psychoanalysis in Contexts: Paths between Theory and Modern Culture*. Ed. Anthony Elliot and Stephen Frosh London: Routledge, 1995. p.80.

²³⁴ Lacan, *Seminar II* p.222.

above quote suggests, it underwrites all human experience, even the nature of the psyche as such; secondly, and much more tangibly, it constitutes the human subject through the symbolic: "Desire . . . is prior to any kind of conceptualisation – every conceptualisation stems from it."²³⁵

Desire possesses a dual and paradoxical temporality, which is marked by nothing so much as the time of *Nachträglichkeit*, of an understanding which takes place on two temporal levels. It both comes into being with the Oedipus complex, and it already exists before the Oedipus complex and makes it possible. Geoffrey Hartman sees this complicated temporality in both the Oedipus complex, and in desire's implication in language:

The snare of words or network of symbols, Lacan insists, is so total that it shapes our destiny more than flesh-and-blood generation. It is a second birth that precedes the first. The problematic of desire is this radical mediation of the word. It is not I (the subject) who desires; it is the object language of desire that alienates the subject from himself in the very movement of desire and brings him to the point where this desire of the other (the "of" denoting ambiguously that the desire which flows towards the other belongs to the other rather than to me; it is his desire I am expressing) drives him to wish for a cessation of all desire. Why should I speak at all if speech merely expresses the desire of someone else, if it is not "mine" but "yours" or "theirs"? To live in truth is to live in that temptation towards silence, toward aphasia, yet to maintain the "imperative of the word." For the word that is given up is not given up: it must inscribe itself somewhere else, as a psychosomatic or mental symptom.²³⁶

²³⁵ Lacan, *Seminar II* p.225.

²³⁶ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* p.xviii.

As the subject is always the subject of desire, there are only a limited number of ways in which desire can be stopped. As Hartman suggests, it is through not speaking, through avoiding the desire in language, that it can be negated. While this sheds an interesting light on the concept of a vow of silence, Hartman uses this idea to interpret Iago's muteness at the end of *Othello* as a revolt "against subjectivity: being subject, that is, to the desire of another, living in or toward his desire."²³⁷ Although this is a very specific example of silence within a text, it does open up another possibility for the interpretation of silence, or gaps. Rather than being indications of repression they may instead represent the text's (or subject's) refusal to be subject to the desire of the other. The question which must be asked is: who is the other of the text? The reader always desires something of the text (entertainment, catharsis, enlightenment, and so on) and the text which refuses to speak, also refuses to abet the reader in his/her desire. The critic is no different to the reader in this regard, and we have already seen how *Die Klavierspielerin* resists a psychoanalytic interpretation, and its silences may also be read as its resistance to the reader's desire for coherence: it envelopes the unconscious texts in silence and refuses to divulge their nature or origin.

The symbolic order (that is, language) exists prior to the subject, and the subject must gain access to this order if s/he is to be able to

²³⁷ Hartman, "Preface." *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* p.xviii.

speak and desire.²³⁸ Muller and Richardson assert that "desire erupts in the rupture of the primitive union with the mother," and that thereafter it must always be channelled through the symbolic, which "makes it possible that things be present in their absence in some way though words."²³⁹ Thus we encounter desire through the symbolic, but also in that which is beyond the symbolic, that which cannot be expressed.

The entry into the symbolic order is based on the child's recognition that it is not in possession of the object of the mother's desire, the phallus.²⁴⁰ The importance of the phallus to desire can be seen in Serge Leclaire's suggestion that it is "*a letter*, which may be called the alpha and the omega of desire's alphabet."²⁴¹ For Lacan, the phallus is the supreme signifier of desire, as a symbol of the union between the infant and the real.²⁴² It is this primal unity that desire in all its forms metonymically strives towards, and this is why all desire is impossible.

At the very beginning of Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, something similar is suggested, although it is couched in terms more at home in the discourse of theoretical physics than that of psychoanalysis:

In the beginning was a perfect ten-dimensional universe that cleaved into two. While ours, of three spatial dimensions and the oddity of time, expanded to fit our grossness, hers, of six dimensions wrapped itself away in tiny solitude.

This sister universe, contemplative, concealed, waits in our future as it has refused our past. It may be the symbol behind all our

²³⁸ Macey, Introduction to Lacan's *Seminar XI* p.xxv.

²³⁹ Muller & Richardson, *Lacan and Language* pp.22-23.

²⁴⁰ Macey, Introduction to Lacan's *Seminar XI* p.xxv.

²⁴¹ Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing* p.122

symbols. It may be the mandala of the East and the Grail of the West. The clouded mirror of lost beauty that human beings have stared into since we learned to become conscious of our own face.

Can anyone deny that we are haunted? What is it that crouches under the myths we have made? Always the physical presence of something split off.

Paradise: The Eden from which we have been forcibly removed.

The Twins: Missing self, other half, completeness again.

Male and Female: The uniting mystery of one flesh.

The Christ Motif. The Divine infills the human form and makes it whole. (p.4)

Read as an allegory, Winterson presents an interesting commentary on the phenomenon of desire in human mythology. Many of the other themes raised here (for example, the feminine nature of this alternate universe and the completeness offered by the other twin) are also significant, not only for the novel, but also for our understanding of desire. Although this novel is without a doubt profoundly concerned with desire and jouissance, it frequently makes use of the language of two of its principle characters (Jove and Alice), that of quantum physics. Later, when considering the love triangle in which she finds herself, Alice remarks that the reason that such a relationship is doomed to fail is that the points only hold each other in an equal tension in Euclidian geometry (pp.16-17); Jove on the other hand sees in it the shortcomings of the Standard Model of physics, which is able to describe three forces, but not what happens when they interact

²⁴² Muller & Richardson, *Lacan and Language* p.22.

(p.97). Though such analogies, a link between the concerns of theoretical physics (the nature of the universe) and the concrete concerns of the human subject (in this case quite specifically desire) becomes apparent. Max Planck is quoted to this effect in the novel, "science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature because we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery we are trying to solve" (p.82). A similar problem pervades the clinical practice of psychoanalysis – analysts are not immune to their own unconscious desires, nor from having them intervene in the analytic session in the form of counter-transference. The same could also be said of literary critics: desire cannot be kept out of their readings.

For Lacan, the human subject is "the subject of the desire that is the essence of man," a subject not only composed of desire, but also 'subject' to desire.²⁴³ Desire both splits the subject, as well as arising from it:

The unconscious is always manifested as that which vacillates in a split in the subject, from which emerges a discovery that Freud compares with desire – a desire that we will temporarily situate in the denuded metonymy of the discourse in question, where the subject surprises himself in some unexpected way.²⁴⁴

Unconscious desire gives rise to parapraxes and it is at these points that the subject is confronted, indeed ambushed, by the unconscious. This confrontation may not necessarily be understood, but is always recognised as such, even if this recognition is only manifested in denial.

Desire, together with the related concepts of need and demand, forms part of Lacan's theory of development.²⁴⁵ The genesis of desire raises a number of important issues for literary criticism, in particular the relation of the subject to language. The subject is initially only concerned with its needs – simple biological instincts, which are directed towards an object and are satisfied by it.²⁴⁶ However, as the subject is initially helpless, it requires others to help it satisfy these needs and the articulations the subject makes are those of demand, which is directed to the Other (whose place is initially filled by the mother).²⁴⁷ Although the articulations of demand are not expressed in language per se, nonetheless the must have already ("in some sense") passed through the defiles of the signifier.²⁴⁸ The infant thus stands in a curious relation to the symbolic, for although it is not yet capable of language, nonetheless it is capable of communication and is moving towards the symbolic. This notion forms the basis of Jean Laplanche's theory of development, in particular the concept of the enigmatic signifier, whereby the pre-symbolic infant is nonetheless able to interpret the unconscious communication of adults.²⁴⁹ Yet, regardless of the ability of the Other to satisfy the needs of the infant, it can never

²⁴³ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.107.

²⁴⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.28.

²⁴⁵ Evans p.37. cf. also Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1973. p.483.

²⁴⁶ Evans p.37. cf. also Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* p.483.

²⁴⁷ Evans p.37 & p.133. cf. also Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* p.483.

²⁴⁸ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p.309. F. p.811.

²⁴⁹ Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.22.

provide the total love demanded, and it is in this surplus of need in demand that desire is found:

Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*).²⁵⁰

The subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis is always a split (or barred) subject (\$). This bar represents not only the split between the conscious and unconscious, but also the subject as split from his desire by the drive. The splitting is a result of an incompatibility between the real and symbolic, and this deficit,

by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued [*méconnu*], an element that is called desire. It is this that makes the junction with the field defined by Freud as that of the sexual agency at the level of the primary process.

The function of desire is the last residuum of the effect of the signifier in the subject... It is necessarily there that the essential of the primary process is established.²⁵¹

As the surplus of desire exists outside of the symbolic, indeed exists precisely because in some way it exceeds the symbolic, it falls outside the possibility of representation: "desire... is the desire for nothing nameable."²⁵² In literature, desire may be found in both absence and exuberance. This absence may even exist outside the narrative, in its frame, a desire that pre-exists the work and gives rise to it. As such it

²⁵⁰ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.287. cf. Evans p.37.

²⁵¹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.154. cf. Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.294.

²⁵² Lacan, *Seminar II* p.223.

also permeates the work, and we will be looking at the ways in which it becomes apparent and is expressed.

We cannot escape desire in any analysis of narrative, as not only is metonymy is the discursive mode of narrative, but, for Lacan, "man's desire is a metonymy."²⁵³ In Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire cannot be satisfied – its realisation consists in its reproduction.²⁵⁴ Desire can only be sustained as long as it doesn't realise that it can never be satisfied, which is precisely why it is always the desire for a metonymic (possible) object and why its essential phantasy is that it can be realised. No matter how desire strives to attain its object, it will never be satisfied by it, for the object is only ever a metonymy of the real object: the lost primal unity.

A crucial distinction must be maintained between the drives and desire. While the subject is not separated from his drives, he is split from (and by) his desire.²⁵⁵ While the drive is an activity which is successful, "desire leads to a sure unconscious formation, namely a bungled action or slip."²⁵⁶ While the drive has an object which can be attained and is able to satisfy it, the object of desire functions in a distinctly different manner – a manner which speaks volumes about the nature of desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis:

You see, the object of desire is the cause of desire, and this object that is the cause of desire is the object of the drive – that is to say the

²⁵³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.175. cf. Jakobson and Halle p.96.

²⁵⁴ Evans p.37.

²⁵⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." Ed. Catherine Bonniq. Feldstein et al. *Reading Seminars I and II*. p.426.

²⁵⁶ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.426.

Desire, together with the related concepts of need and demand, forms part of Lacan's theory of development.²⁴⁵ The genesis of desire raises a number of important issues for literary criticism, in particular the relation of the subject to language. The subject is initially only concerned with its needs – simple biological instincts, which are directed towards an object and are satisfied by it.²⁴⁶ However, as the subject is initially helpless, it requires others to help it satisfy these needs and the articulations the subject makes are those of demand, which is directed to the Other (whose place is initially filled by the mother).²⁴⁷ Although the articulations of demand are not expressed in language per se, nonetheless the must have already ("in some sense") passed through the defiles of the signifier.²⁴⁸ The infant thus stands in a curious relation to the symbolic, for although it is not yet capable of language, nonetheless it is capable of communication and is moving towards the symbolic. This notion forms the basis of Jean Laplanche's theory of development, in particular the concept of the enigmatic signifier, whereby the pre-symbolic infant is nonetheless able to interpret the unconscious communication of adults.²⁴⁹ Yet, regardless of the ability of the Other to satisfy the needs of the infant, it can never

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²⁴⁷ Evans p.37 & p.133. cf. also Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* p.483.

²⁴⁸ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p.309. F. p.811.

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²⁵⁶ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.426.

object around which the drive turns. ... It is not that desire clings to the object of the drive – desire moves around it in so far as it is agitated in the drive. But all desire is not necessarily agitated in the drive. There are empty desires or mad desires that are based on nothing more than the fact that the thing in question has been forbidden you. By virtue of the fact that the thing in question has been forbidden you, you cannot do otherwise, for a time, than think about it. That too is desire.²⁵⁷

Desire is not only provoked by its object, but, as in the garden of Eden, even solely by its prohibition. The fundamental *méconnaissance* of desire is that it presents itself to the subject as that which s/he does not want.²⁵⁸ The attainment of the object of desire would therefore inevitably involve transgression, and it may be that transgression itself is the aim of desire. The object of desire in Lacan is either a phantasy (which in reality is the support of desire), or a lure.²⁵⁹ The fundamental phantasy which serves to support desire is that of its attainability. Without this simple delusion of the possibility of fulfilment, desire would vanish. We can see the lure at work in the form of inappropriate objects of desire which appear in a number of works: Wolfi's mother (and sister) in *Out of the Line of Fire*; the brother-in-law's wife from *Der junge Mann*, Malcolm Lovat in *Human Croquet*, and Stella in *Gut Symmetries*. Yet it is not merely at this level that the text functions as a lure, but also the next level up: the text functions as a lure for the reader. All narratives are implicated in this process insofar as they are constructed in order to keep the reader reading. The hold narratives

²⁵⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.243.

²⁵⁸ Lacan, *Écrits; A Selection* pp.312-313.

²⁵⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.186.

exert on their readers will be seen in the embedded narratives in *Out of the Line of Fire*, and in *Der junge Mann* in Leon's tale "The Woman on the Ferry." The lure may also function in another way as the impetus for the narrative, as that which draws the narrative into being. In *Out of the Line of Fire*, the lure is re-presented by the author to the reader, and with a similar effect – just as the author is drawn in by Wolfi's narratives, so too is the reader.

For Lacan, there is only one object of desire: the *objet petit a*, and the ambiguity of the genitive (a term whose very etymology suggests a relation to desire) suggests that the *objet petit a* is not the object to which desire tends, but the cause of desire: "desire is not a relation to an object, but a relation to a lack."²⁶⁰ Lack, or the lack of a lack, also characterizes the real "and the little we know about the real shows its antinomy to all verisimilitude."²⁶¹ Lacan stresses that there is no way to apprehend the real apart from through the "go-between" of the symbolic.²⁶² Thus, any apprehension of the real must also be considered a translation. The anti-representational quality of the real will also be seen later in this chapter with regard to *jouissance*. The desire of the subject is constituted at the point of lack where it falls short of the discourse of the Other, the point at which her/his desire is unknown, where it is "beyond, or falls short of what she [the mother]

²⁶⁰ p.37.

²⁶¹ Lacan, "Preface to the English-Language Edition," *Seminar XI* p.xli. cf also *Seminar II* p.3.

²⁶² Lacan, *Seminar II* p.97.

Other.²⁶⁹ I would like to note at this point that if we were to follow Laplanche, then this fundamental desire could be designated (pace Lacan) as the desire of the mother. This would indicate the complicity of the mother's desire in creating the desire for the mother.²⁷⁰ For Lacan, the desire for the mother cannot be satisfied as "it is the end, the terminal point, the abolition of the whole world of demand, which is the one that at its deepest level structures man's unconscious."²⁷¹

Fourthly, desire is the desire for something else, since it is impossible to desire that which one already has.²⁷² It is in this sense that desire is a metonymy, because the object of desire is continually deferred, the very activity of desire is that of desiring something else.²⁷³

Part of the reason why desire cannot be satisfied is that

the subject exhausts himself in pursuing the desire of the other, which he will never be able grasp as his own desire, because his own desire is the desire of the other.²⁷⁴

It is because the subject misrecognises the very nature of his desire as the desire of the Other that he is unable to satisfy it. Lacan even goes so far as to suggest that desire is always desire in the second degree: the desire of desire.²⁷⁵ Finally, Evans suggests that this phrase may reveal that desire emerges in the field of the Other, in the

²⁶⁸ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p.312. Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* V.34, 1953. p.12.

²⁶⁹ Evans p.38.

²⁷⁰ Although it should be born in mind that for Laplanche the mother is merely the prototype, it can be any adult. Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.26.

²⁷¹ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.68.

²⁷² Evans p.38. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.167.

²⁷³ Evans p.38. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.167 & p.175.

²⁷⁴ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.221.

²⁷⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.14.

unconscious.²⁷⁶ Desire is not only the basis of the unconscious, but thereafter permeates its every expression, in- and outside language. The subject's introduction into the dimension of language offers him/her the various aspects of his/her desire in the other; only when named in the presence of the other can desire be recognised as such.²⁷⁷ It is through speech that the desire of the subject is mediated and re-enters the system of language.²⁷⁸

The subject apprehends the desire of the Other in that which does not work, "in the lacks of the discourse of the Other."²⁷⁹ Like many of Lacan's phrases, this one seems to open to more than one possible interpretation. He could be suggesting that desire can be found in the parapraxes of the Other's discourse – in its linguistic mistakes (*Versprecher*); or perhaps more radically that desire is in the deficiencies of language itself. Furey offers a fairly straightforward way of explaining these possible relations:

Desire is located in the split subject's unconscious, which is part of the discourse of the Other. This, in turn, renders desire itself part of the Other.²⁸⁰

Laplanche's work, on the other hand, suggests that the unconscious is formed by the desire of the other (person) as expressed unconsciously in their discourse. In his work, the other takes on a much more concrete importance. In his theory it is the transmission of

²⁷⁶ Evans p.38.

²⁷⁷ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.157 & p.183. cf. also p. 177.

²⁷⁸ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.179. Note that for Lacan, speech, as the transmission of desire, can be recognised in any communication which is organised within a symbolic system (pp.244-245).

²⁷⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.214.

unconscious sexual messages, which he terms 'enigmatic signifiers,'
 by adults (typically the parents) that creates the unconscious.²⁸¹ Serge
 Leclaire takes a similar view, referring to the inscription of a letter on
 the body, which makes jouissance possible, creating a lack which all
 other objects of desire will strive to fill.²⁸² An echo of this can be found
 in Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, where the dying Stella composes a
 farewell note to Alice in which she implores her to "letter me" (p.173).
 It is thus the desire of the other, which is not necessarily directed
 towards the subject, and of which the other remains unaware, which
 forms the desire of the subject.

In Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, desire is almost
 inevitably related to the presence of an other. The novel concerns the
 complicated relations between three characters: Jove, his wife Stella,
 and their lover Alice. Alice is originally Jove's lover, however, when
 Stella finds out about them and meets Alice, the two women fall in
 love. Desire is almost always connected with the presence of a
 reflection, which is frequently both disturbing and attractive. It first
 appears in a scene where Alice and Jove stand before a mirror,
 admiring each other, and themselves:

The mirror offered us a snapshot of our own desirability. He was
 gazing past me with some satisfaction.

I looked too, but what disturbed me was another face in the mirror
 and another room behind. (p.18)

p.23.

che, "The Kent Seminar." p.25.
 fe, *Psychoanalyzing* pp.49-51.

fixing her desire through a label: "this kiss, tentative, ambivalent, would become a lock and key" (p.118). Although this confrontation with her desire is unexpected, nevertheless, Alice welcomes it:

At the same time I realised that I would like to do much more kissing if it were not so complicated.

So complicated. My first serious emotion was for a married man. My first experience of authentic desire was with a married woman.

You see, I did want to kiss her. That was what surprised me most of all.

'I see why he likes you,' said Stella, examining my neck with her fingers.

'Is that why you're doing it?'

'I don't know what I'm doing.'

I would argue with that.

She took me home, didn't put on any lights, took off her clothes and had me lie down beside her on what seemed to be a very narrow bed.

I wanted to touch her. The reflecting image of a woman with a woman is seductive. I enjoyed looking at her in a way that was forbidden to me, this self on self, self as desirer and desired, had a frankness to it I had not been invited to discover. Desiring her I felt my own desirability. It was an act of power but not power over her. I was my own conquest.

Her breasts as my breasts, her mouth as my mouth, were more than Narcissus hypnotised by his own likeness. Everybody knows how the story changes when he disturbs the water. I did disturb the water and the perfect picture broke. You see, I could have rested there beside her, perhaps forever, it felt like forever, a mirror confusion of bodies and sighs, undifferentiated, she in me, me in she and no longer exhausted by someone else's shape over mine. And I had not expected such intense physical pleasure.

Why then did I trouble the surface?

It was not myself I fell in love with it was her. (pp.118-119)

The motif of reflections here and elsewhere in the novel suggests that the desires expressed in the novel are, for the characters, slightly uncanny – at once *heimlich* (secret, close to home) and *unheimlich*

(foreign). The realm of the unconscious is represented here, and throughout the novel, as a place underwater, both visible and opaque. The reflection of the other woman also alludes back to the motif of the twins mentioned at the start, each completing the other's desire. The trouble is not in the physical expression of their desire for each other, but in the excess of their desire. This excessiveness is a fundamental aspect of unconscious desire.

For Lacan, desire is always unconscious desire, which, in so far as it is sexual desire, is the kernel of psychoanalysis, a position he readily attributes to Freud: "the motives of the unconscious are limited – a point on which Freud was quite clear from the outset and never altered his view – to sexual desire."²⁸³ In Laplanche's work, it is the excess in meaning, sexual meaning, of the enigmatic signifier, which gives rise to the unconscious.²⁸⁴

Fuery suggests that the notion of desire which lies at the heart of so much post-structuralist theory is one of a desire which is without resolution, and which continually challenges meanings and systems of discourse, and which is also by its very nature unrepresentable.²⁸⁵ This question of representation, or the lack thereof (also the representation of a lack) is similar to the question already discussed of the translation of the unconscious into consciousness, and as desire is unconscious (at the very least in Lacan where all desire is unconscious sexual

²⁸³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.142. Evans p.36.

²⁸⁴ Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.25.

²⁸⁵ Fuery p.2.

desire), we shall see that many of the same issues are at stake. If desire is strictly unrepresentable, then perhaps only its absence may be described, or at best it may be approached metonymically. Although desire itself may be unrepresentable, its effects are not, and in many ways we may only know desire through its effects.

One of Freud's most pertinent insights for an examination of literature is that desire exists in language, but that the language of desire does not show itself openly.²⁸⁶ In considering the role of desire in literature then we must consider its role beneath the surface of the text, in its structures and mechanisms. Lacan suggests that it is in the interval intersecting the signifiers, in the locus of metonymy, that desire "crawls, slips, escapes, like the ferret."²⁸⁷ The fundamental structures of signification and narrative enable the covert expression of desire. The relation between language and desire is of primary interest for psychoanalytic literary criticism, for

through language, desire becomes subject to rules, and yet this language cannot define the body's experience accurately. What is of peculiar interest to psychoanalysis – some would say peculiar in the sense of both special and bizarre – is that aspect of experience which has been ignored or prohibited by the rules of language. Words fail to match it but it is actual none the less. The energies of this desire become directed outside conscious awareness, attaching themselves to particular ideas and images which represent unconscious wishes.²⁸⁸

This aspect of language also holds true for literature, and although this experience cannot be apprehended through language, nevertheless it

²⁸⁶ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.1.

²⁸⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.214.

attempts to represent it. These attempts are often fragmentary, incoherent, or only perceptible in their absence. In his seventh seminar, Lacan suggests that, whereas psychoanalysis offers a methodology for understanding the ways in which desire and its vicissitudes operate, the arts attempt to represent this.²⁸⁹

For Lacan interpretation has the same temporal structure as metonymy, and as it approaches the end (that is, the final interpretation), it becomes directed towards desire: "desire, in fact, is interpretation itself."²⁹⁰ This point, more than any other, means that it is impossible for the critic to escape the desire of the text, and their own desire in interpreting the text. The subject is structured around desire, in so far as it points towards a void or real around which interpretation (through the orders of the imaginary and the symbolic) creates the subject.²⁹¹ For Lacan, understanding is only an ideal relation, and as soon as it is approached it becomes ungraspable.²⁹² The identity of desire and interpretation means that it is impossible to provide any sort of definitive reading of a literary work.

A contemporary psychoanalytic literary criticism based on the fundamental impossibility of arriving at a final understanding is similar to the interpretation of dreams, where Freud asserts that "it is never

²⁸⁸ Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism* p.1.

²⁸⁹ Fuery p.29.

²⁹⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.176.

²⁹¹ Henry Sullivan, "*Homo sapiens* or *Homo desiderans*: The Role of Desire in Human Evolution." Ed. Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher. p.40.

²⁹² Lacan, *Seminar III* p.7.

possible to be sure that a dream has been completely interpreted."²⁹³

Dream interpretation is not the quest for a final or ultimate knowledge, but merely a technique for attaining as much useful information as possible. The process of dream interpretation follows a similar path to that of the drive (see Figure 1 below), whereby not only is the goal not essential, but indeed, it is unobtainable:

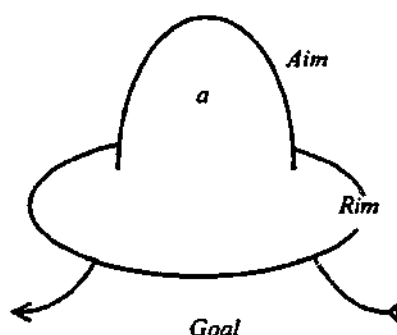


Figure 1. The Path of the Drive²⁹⁴

This diagram also explains how the drive may attain satisfaction without reaching its goal, as its aim is a return into the circuit.²⁹⁵ If, as Lacan suggests, the dream thoughts are nothing other than desires, and desire is interpretation, then we are faced with the interpretation of interpretation (or the desire of desire).²⁹⁶ The unconscious desire of the dream is never seen clearly, but only silhouetted in the background.²⁹⁷ This central desire can also be seen in Freud's comments on the navel of the dream, even if it is not named as such:

There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable –
a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown...

²⁹³ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.383; GW p.285.

²⁹⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.178.

²⁹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.179.

²⁹⁶ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.45.

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown.²⁹⁸

This is more or less the conclusion which we were forced into in our assumption of the existence of unconscious texts in Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin*, as well as in the concept of a real of the narrative in *Human Croquet*. We might be led to ask if, given the similarities in their presentation, the navel is desire in its most primal incarnation, or in Brooks's terminology, the impetus for narrative.

At all these points, in both literature and psychoanalysis, we can only speak about desire through language. Yet language only serves to interfere and distort, and the essential incompatibility between desire and speech

explains the irreducibility of the unconscious (i.e. the fact that the unconscious is not that which *is not known*, but that which *cannot be known*). Although the truth about desire is present to some degree in all speech, speech can never articulate the *whole* truth about desire; whenever speech attempts to articulate desire, there is always a leftover, a surplus, which exceeds speech.²⁹⁹

This is what Laplanche might term the enigma of the signifier. If we apply the notion that there is always a surplus in language to the study of literature, we are left with a theory which states that not only is the 'truth' of the text never present in the text, but that it can never be

²⁹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar I* p.155.

²⁹⁸ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL p.186 n.2 & p.671; GW p.116 n.1 & pp.529-530.

known at all. In attempting to articulate desire, the text creates it, but never expresses it totally. We will now turn to this surplus and examine *jouissance*, its relation to desire and to pleasure, and the difficulties involved in its representation.

II. Jouissance

While the French word *jouissance* essentially means 'enjoyment', it also has a sexual connotation ('orgasm') which has led to it being left untranslated in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.³⁰⁰ Yet the word does in fact appear in the Oxford English Dictionary, where it contains the meanings that it has in Lacan initially, and for this reason I have chosen to leave it unitalicised throughout.³⁰¹

While *jouissance* is not identical with desire, it forms a part of what Lacan terms "the dialectic of desire," which, according to David Macey, "defines the subject in terms of the other and of the desire of and for that other."³⁰² In "The Subversion of the Subject and the

²⁹⁹ Evans p.36.

³⁰⁰ Evans p.91. According to David Macey, the verb form *jouir* "can antiphrastically come to refer to the experience of exquisite pain which occasions a momentary loss of consciousness" Macey, *Lacan in Contexts*. London: Verso, 1988. p.202.

³⁰¹ Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* p.288 n.129. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *jouissance* as: "1. The possession and use of something affording advantage; 2. Pleasure, delight; merriment, mirth, festivity." (V.XIII, p.278).

³⁰² Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.319. Macey, *Lacan in Contexts* p.203.

Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" (1960), Lacan suggests that it is pleasure that sets limits on *jouissance*, but four years later in "On Freud's '*Trieb*' and the Psychoanalyst's Desire" he states that pleasure sets limits on desire.³⁰³ It is this latter formation that will be adopted here. The pleasure principle (*Lustprinzip*) is initially developed as the expression of the infantile subject's attempts to satisfy the id, yet at the same time Freud attempts to reconcile this with Fechner's theory of constancy – the impulse to minimise sensation.³⁰⁴ Pleasure is conceived of here as not merely the production of agreeable sensations, but also as the absence of disagreeable ones.³⁰⁵ Freud later modifies this view and suggests that unpleasure may be produced by the rate of change of tension.³⁰⁶ The obvious problem with this is, as Freud later realised, that it fails to take into account the possibility of a pleasurable tension (Lacan uses the example of foreplay).³⁰⁷ Freud suggests that this qualitative difference in excitation may be the result of a particular rhythm in the change in tension.³⁰⁸

The pleasure principle is, however, subordinate to the reality principle,

³⁰³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.319. Lacan, "On Freud's '*Trieb*' and the Psychoanalyst's Desire." Trans. Bruce Fink. Feldstein et al. *Reading Seminars I and II*. p.417.

³⁰⁴ See for example, Sigmund Freud, "Jenseits des Lustprinzips." *GW*. V.XIII. 1940. pp.3-6. Translated as "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. pp.276-278. The translation of *Lustprinzip* is not without its difficulties, and as Derrida points out "*Lust* also designates erotic enjoyment [*jouissance*] and desire." *The Post Card*, p.275.

³⁰⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Formulierungen über die zwei Prinzipien des psychischen Geschehens." *GW*. V.VIII. 1943. p.231. Translated as "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. p.36.

³⁰⁶ Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." *PFL* p.276; *GW* p.4.

³⁰⁷ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.152.

³⁰⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Das ökonomische Problem des Masochismus." *GW*. V.XIII. 1940. p.372. Translated as "The Economic Problem of Masochism." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. p.414.

an agency of the ego which serves to ensure the safety of the subject by denying or delaying inappropriate impulses.³⁰⁹

Lacan does not develop the concept of jouissance in opposition to pleasure until as late as 1960.³¹⁰ He works more or less exclusively with the early concept of the pleasure principle as simply a homeostatic device, and it must always be kept in mind that jouissance only functions in opposition to this homeostatic pleasure principle.³¹¹ The obvious questions about this form of the pleasure principle are: why should the subject strive to create excitation if it only produces unpleasure? And why should tension necessarily be felt as unpleasure, surely sexual excitement is a pleasurable tension? Freud was never able to formulate an adequate solution to this problem, but recognised its existence (in such diverse examples as war neuroses and masochism), which led him to his tentative suggestion about the degree (or rhythm) of change.

Lacan, however, chooses to focus on the question of the subject's aim in transgressing the limits of the pleasure principle: desire is not the same as pleasure. Desire must always have a limit, and this distinguishes it from pleasure, which is merely the drive towards homeostasis:

³⁰⁹ Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning." *PFL* p.41; *GW* pp.235-236.

³¹⁰ Evans p.91. See for example, Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, p.319. For an account of the previous uses of jouissance in Lacan, see Evans, p.91, and also Macey, *Lacan in Context* pp.202-203.

³¹¹ E.g. Lacan, *Seminar II* pp.79-80.

Desire, on the other hand, finds its boundary, its strict relation, its limit, and it is in the relation to this limit that it is sustained as such, crossing the threshold imposed by the pleasure principle.³¹²

That is, whereas pleasure is defined in terms of homeostasis, desire represents the opposite, seeking as it does to transgress these limits. In effect, desire seeks to produce unpleasure. The result of this transgression is not greater pleasure, but rather pain, and it is this 'painful pleasure' that Lacan terms *jouissance*.³¹³ The subject thus seeks a greater pleasure, a pleasure which, by exceeding the pleasure principle, is experienced as pain. Pain, too, often exceeds the possibilities of expression offered by the symbolic, connecting with the body in a way that cannot always be communicated in language. In *Gut Symmetries*, Stella recognises the ways in which pain, physical or psychic, goes beyond expression:

I understand that pain leapfrogs over language and lands in dumb
grows beyond time. A place where there is no speech and no clock,
no means of separating either the moment or its misery. Nobody
comes and nobody goes. It is a place unvisited by civilization.
Civilization has not happened. (p.41)

Here Stella stresses a number of aspects which are common to the unconscious and/or the real. Civilization, in this case, can be read as the Oedipus complex, the event which marks the entry into civilization through the subject's accession to language. The real has no relation whatsoever to language or time, but it is not coterminous with the unconscious of repression.

³¹² Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.31.

³¹³ Evans p.92. cf. Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.184.

The subject's entry into the symbolic order is contingent upon a renunciation of the possibility of jouissance in the castration complex, and it is this accession to the law which makes jouissance impossible.³¹⁴ Although to be more precise, Lacan specifies that it is not the law that bars the subject from jouissance, but rather that it creates the barred subject.³¹⁵ The barred subject is not only the split-subject, but also the subject as prohibited from attaining the object of his desire. It is the prohibition of incest which is the "sine qua non" of speech.³¹⁶ The entry into the symbolic which is effected through the resolution of the Oedipus complex via castration thus closes off the possibility not only of the realisation of jouissance, but even of its expression.

Jouissance presents itself as buried at the centre of a field and has the characteristics of inaccessibility, obscurity and opacity; moreover, the field is surrounded by a barrier which makes access to it difficult for the subject to the point of inaccessibility.³¹⁷

However difficult it may be, it is not necessarily impossible. The problem lies in the fact that the ideal object of jouissance is incest, and all other attempts to gain jouissance must fall short of this. The motif of incest appears in the works under consideration here in a variety of forms, a more detailed examination of which will be undertaken shortly. The pleasure principle imposes a limit upon desire, and at this limit there is a gap which is designated $-\phi$, specifying a lack in the

³¹⁴ Evans p.92. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.319. Muller & Richardson, *Lacan and Language* p.411.

³¹⁵ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.319.

³¹⁶ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.69.

signifying order, in the Other.³¹⁸ The lack in the signifying order is a rift which is opened up not by a vacuum, but precisely by the excess or supplemental nature of jouissance. Lacan suggests that for psychoanalysis, this gap which precedes jouissance is "the place where the battlefield of our experience is situated."³¹⁹ These gaps are the places where desire is strongest and where it produces the fundamental data of psychoanalysis: dreams, parapraxes, and so on.

Lacan further stresses the qualitative difference between the pleasure principle and jouissance by stressing that the former takes place on the level of the symbolic, and the latter on the level of the real:

The function of the pleasure principle is, in effect, to lead the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as required to maintain at as low level as possible the tension that regulates the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus.³²⁰

Not only is jouissance forbidden to the subject by the pleasure principle, but is prevented by the metonymic processes of desire. The transgression of the pleasure principle is the attempt of the subject's desire to capture the jouissance of the other, the jouissance beyond the pleasure principle.³²¹

³¹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.209.

³¹⁸ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.425.

³¹⁹ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.203.

³²⁰ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.119.

³²¹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* pp.183-184.

In so far as the drives attempt to transgress the pleasure principle towards *jouissance*, every drive is a death drive.³²² Perhaps there is more to the French *la petite mort* [orgasm] than meets the eye, a point Alphonso Lingis makes in his article "Lust," where he suggests that the pleasure of orgasm "consists in a passage into the contentment and quiescence of death."³²³

For Brooks, the desire of the narrative is "the wish for the end, for fulfilment, but fulfilment delayed so that we can understand it in relation to origin, and to desire itself."³²⁴ The relation between death and narrative will be considered in more detail in the next chapter, here we are concerned with desire not only in its relation to death or to the death drive. Brooks suggests that it is not that the narrative avoids death, it simply wishes to avoid a premature death.³²⁵

In Botho Strauß's *Der junge Mann*, it is the character of Almut (in the section "The Terrace") who best demonstrates the relations of pleasure, desire, and *jouissance*. She is, according to the narrator, possessed with the ability "to adapt to almost anything, even things that didn't really appeal to her, or were indeed unpleasant."³²⁶ She has

³²² Evans p.92. In his second seminar Lacan suggests that it is also possible to read the concept of minimum tension within pleasure principle as the striving for death (Seminar II, p.80).

³²³ Alphonso Lingis. "Lust." *Speculations After Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture*. Ed. Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow. London: Routledge, 1994. p.143.

³²⁴ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot" p.299.

³²⁵ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot" p.299.

³²⁶ "[S]ich beinahe alles passend zu machen, selbst das noch, was ihr eigentlich gar nichts besagte oder sogar unangenehm war." Botho Strauß, *Der junge Mann*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987. p.219. Translation modified. Translated as *The Young Man*. Trans. Roslyn Theobald. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995. p. 151-152. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically, German page numbers followed by English.

taken the homeostatic impulse of the pleasure principle to an extreme point where "she diffracted every mania and sensual stimulus in her vicinity through her nature, and what she received was only the very palest of reflections."³²⁷ By this complete (and it should be stressed, fictional) subservience to the pleasure principle, Almut avoids not only jouissance, but even desire. Although Leon, a recurring figure in the novel who is also the narrator of this chapter, finds her both beautiful and attractive, he is completely unable to desire her as her appearance deflects "every lustful gaze" [*jeden lüsternen Blick*] (219/152).

Lacan suggests that desire may be tempered or extinguished through beauty: "the beam of desire is both reflected and refracted till it ends up giving us that most strange and most profound of effects, which is the effect of beauty on desire."³²⁸ This is one of the somewhat counter-intuitive properties of desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis, sometimes: "beauty intimidates and stops desire."³²⁹ This is precisely what happens to Leon, who remains caught before the paradox of attraction without desire:

At the same time, however, I believed I was hearing a faint request, a secret plea to come closer. But how do you find your way to a body whose every turn reveals that you will never be able to move it even one millimetre closer to arousal.³³⁰

³²⁷ "[S]ie haugte ja durch ihr Wesen jede Manie und sinnliche Erregung in ihrer Nähe, empfing nur eine schwache Reflexion davon." (219/152) Translation modified.

³²⁸ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.248.

³²⁹ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.238.

³³⁰ "Gleichzeitig glaubte ich aber die leise Bitte, das heimliche Ersuchen zu vernehmen, ihr näher zu kommen. Doch wie findet man zu einem Körper hin, von dem jede Wendung verrät, daß man ihn niemals auch nur für einen Millimeter würde in Erregung versetzen können." (220/152) Translation modified.

Is this simply wishful thinking on his part, a projection of his desire? Or could it be the failure of the pleasure principle on Almut's part? Desire making its presence felt, communicating unconsciously (could we perhaps even say enigmatically?) and attempting to go beyond the pleasure principle. It is at this point that Leon relates his story "The Woman on the Ferry" to Almut and his companions. While this will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, here our main concern is what its relation is to desire. This story is not only concerned with desire and its consequences, but is also motivated by it:

I warned everyone around me, and requested that they interrupt me immediately if my remarks began to disturb or offend. Of course I was addressing myself primarily to Almut, whose dark yearning [*wünschendes*] face, petrified in yearning [*im Wunsch versteinertes*], was providing the actual impetus [*Antrieb*] for me to tell my story. I would all too dearly have loved to know how much narrated depravity she could tolerate. If I might not finally be able to unsettle her prim and proper gloom, maybe even tearing it wide open. One final attempt to make myself appear desirable [*begehrtenswert*] to her, this was probably the more profound motive for everything I was to bring forth, and now that I was delivering my narration before her eyes I allowed myself confessions that had never before passed my lips.³³¹

Leon clearly demonstrates the role of desire, his desire for her desire, in providing the impetus for the story, not only his desire for her. This

³³¹ "Ich warnte daher die Umstehenden im voraus und bat sie, mich unverzüglich zu unterbrechen, sobald meine Auslassungen sie zu belästigen oder zu verletzen begannen. Dabei wandte ich mich vor allem an Almut, deren dunkel wünschendes, im Wunsch versteinertes Gesicht mir den eigentlichen Antrieb zu meiner Erzählung bot. Ich wollte doch gar zu gerne wissen, wieviel an geschilderter Verworfenheit ihr zuzumuten wäre. Ob es mir nicht endlich gelänge, ihr schickliches Betrübteise zu stören, wenn nicht gar aufzureißen. Vielleicht ein letzter Versuch, sie mir begehrtenswert erscheinen zu lassen, dies war wohl der tiefe Beweggrund für alles, was ich im folgenden vorbrachte, und unter

is also the way in which Lacan suggests beauty can join desire, through "the crossing of some invisible line, i.e., outrage."³³² If he can provoke her indignation, then perhaps this single emotion will free the others, and finally make her desirable to him. Leon's description of the story he is about to tell has much in common with the stories Wolfi (in Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire*) tells of spying on his sister masturbating, which are both confessional and which are also told with the hope of provoking a response. The exact question of what response and from whom will be considered in more detail shortly.

In "The Woman on the Ferry," Leon travels to Istanbul for a friend's funeral and is seduced by a woman named Mero. She makes love to him, and in doing so takes him captive within her memory. Mero strikes once "a man was sufficiently distanced from his normal and median disposition, whether it was tending higher or lower."³³³ In telling this story to Almut, Leon seems to be promoting the advantages of her disposition, rather than providing an incentive to break free of it. Mero strikes not only when desire is aroused, but also despair, and although Leon is initially attracted in despair, it is clear that Leon is drawn into her memory at the point of her orgasm:

Our actions became more and more intense, ever more masculine, ever more unyielding, and emanating from some deep source, a victory neared for us both. A trembling from her innermost forces overcame this vital woman, an almost brusque shudder, as if she had

ihren Augen erzählend, erlaubte ich mir Geständnisse, die nie zuvor über meine Lippen gekommen waren." (221/153) Translation modified.

³³² Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.238.

³³³ "[W]enn der Mensch von seiner mittleren und mäßigen Gestimmtheit genügend weit entfernt war, sei es nach oben, sei es nach unten hin." (234/163)

suddenly lost all sense of me, and I, kissing her and dropping away like a ripe fruit, I sank over the edge into unconscious depths and saw her above, far, very far above, bending over the rim of the fountain, and finally, in falling, saw her face.³³⁴

This excess traps him in her memory, yet he is eventually able to escape when he comes across the young Mero, who is separated from memory by a wall (237/165). The wall is a fairly obvious representation of repression, of the barrier between preconscious memories and the unconscious, but it could also represent the border between the pleasure principle (or maybe desire) and *jouissance*. According to Lacan, Freud was the first to express the idea that

the only moment of *jouissance* that man knows occurs at the site where fantasms are produced, fantasms that represent for us the same barrier as far as access to *jouissance* is concerned, the barrier where everything is forgotten.³³⁵

This is a particularly appropriate means of viewing this border, for it is precisely here that (according to Mero) Leon becomes a memory, and it is his *jouissance* which has transported him there. Yet it is also within Mero's memory that we find the young Mero on the other side of the wall. According to Leon, the young Mero has been placed on that side of the wall out of fear that she might be a robber or rival (237/165). A fear that proves well-founded when Leon engages in a complicated sexual relation with the young Mero, their positions constantly shifting

³³⁴ "Immer härter, immer männlicher, immer unbeugsamer wurde unsere Handlung und aus einer tiefen Anbahnung näherte sich für uns beide der Sieg. Ein Beben aus ihrer ureigenen Gewalt kam über die starke Frau, ein beinahe rücksichtsloser Schüttel, als hätte sie jede Fühlung mit mir verloren, und ich, der küssend abfiel wie eine reife Frucht, ich sank über den Rand in eine bewußtlose Tiefe und sah sie, hoch droben, weit, sehr weit, über die Brunnenmauer gebeugt, sah im Fallen endlich ihr Gesicht." (226-227/157)
Translation modified.

in accordance with the fluctuations of desire – her position half-on half-off the wall ensures that Leon cannot both have sex with her and enjoy her expression at the same time (238-239/166-167). It is not simply his pleasure that is important, but that he is able to enjoy hers. Leon is led to the brink of orgasm again, when the older Mero suddenly appears and drags him away. He begs Mero for satisfaction, which she is only too happy to provide until he inadvertently reveals that he has just been with the young Mero, at which point Mero becomes lost in thought and eventually leaves Leon on the edge of his *jouissance*:

And I would have remained trapped on this craggy peak of desire [*des Lustwehs*] for all time, a petrified priapic column, if it had not been for an entirely unexpected turn of events, wonderfully soothing, releasing me from the rawest and most foolish elements of my desire, and cleansing me forever.³³⁶

Mero calls her younger self and achieves a reconciliation with her, through which Leon is freed from her memory and his story ends. He puts forward a defence of his story before any of his audience have a chance to speak, claiming that it could not be told in any other way:

I am very well aware of the fact that it doesn't completely connect with masculine cognition any more than it does with feminine instinct. It eludes one while conflicting with the other. It is simply another confirmation of the detachment and the errancy of erotic thinking, which knows no certainty, but is affected only by the fluctuation of attraction and repulsion felt towards a person, a topic, or a thing. It is

³³⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.298.

³³⁶ "Ich wäre wohl für alle Zeiten auf diesem Gipfel des Lustwehs zur priapischen Säule erstarrt, wenn nicht in diesem Augenblick eine unerwartete Wendung eingetreten wäre, die mich wunderbar besänftigt, die mich von den rohsten und törichsten Elementen meine Begierde erlöst und für immer gereinigt hätte." (240/167-168) Translation modified. It is difficult to do justice to the specificity of Strauß's German compound *Lustweh*, which combines the sense of both pleasure and pain. In this context, *jouissance* is also an acceptable, if obscure, translation.

truly the crass antithesis of a masculine possession of knowledge. Much more like a mirror, it envelops everything but retains nothing. It allows for tumultuous inconsequence, the abrupt succession of mutually exclusive evidence and feeling; it is born by the feminine need to touch someone, in order to avoid having to be *logical*. But it also encompasses respect for the continual occurrence, the repetitions of lust, for events that are torn out of history and cannot be told, that make us sigh and then sigh to God, because each time we touch a person in our misunderstanding way, we try to go far beyond that and make ourselves part of a divine delight, but in the end what we are seeking is nothing more than syncope, the interruption of existence in a cry, in a sensual whimper, in a rearing of hips, and not another *person*.³³⁷

His narrative is not only imbued with desire, but more particularly an all encompassing non-phallic desire. Leon thus seems to be striving towards a more feminine mode of narrative, perhaps one in which *jouissance* may be expressed. This mode would defy not only the conventions of narrative, but also those of logic. As a result it would not be transparent to consciousness, but instead accord more with the unconscious. This is a result not only of the content of the story, which is overflowing with desire, but also of his desire in telling it. And how is

³³⁷ "Ich weiß daher wohl, daß sie weder der männlichen Erkenntnis je recht eingehen wird noch auch dem weiblichen Gespür. Der einen entzieht sich, dem anderen widersetzt sie sich. Denn darin zeigt sich doch immer wieder die eigentliche Verlassenheit und das Dahinirren des erotischen Denkens, das nichts sicher weiß, sondern immer nur in wechselnder Anziehung oder Abstoßung zu irgendeiner Person, einem Thema, einem Gegenstand bewegt wird. Es ist wahrhaftig das krasse Gegenteil zum männlichen Besitzstand des Wissens. Es gleicht wohl vielmehr dem Spiegel, der alles auffaßt und nichts bei sich behält. Es leistet sich die stürmische Inkonsequenz, die schroffe Folge sich ausschließender Beweise und Gefühle; es wird getragen von dem weiblichen Verlangen, den anderen anzufassen, um nicht *logisch* sein zu müssen. Aber es gehört zu ihm auch die Achtung vor der unendlichen Begebenheit, den Wiederholungen der Wollust, jenen aus der Geschichte gerissenen Ereignissen, die nicht zu erzählen sind, die uns seufzen lassen und zu Gott seufzen lassen, denn jedesmal, wenn wir einen Menschen berühren auf unsere mißverständliche Weise, dann suchen wir uns weit darüber hinaus an ein heiliges Entzücken anzuschließen, und es ist zuletzt nur noch die Synkope, die Unterbrechung des Daseins im Geschrei, im sinnlichen Winseln, im Aufbäumen der Hüfte, die wir suchen, und nicht den anderen *Menschen*." (244-245/170-171) Translation modified.

this story received by its intended audience? If Leon's aim was to provoke a reaction in Almut, he has clearly succeeded, for she advises him to:

free yourself from your inconsolable desires!... otherwise you won't be able to hear or see anything wonderful, you will be unmoved by anything that is truly sublime. And all you'll be left with is a twitch, in your soul as well as your sex, your own little closed system of stimulus and arousal. You'll end up behaving like an amphibian on heat who indiscriminately clings to every curve until he finally meets a little woman.³³⁸

This is of course the advice we would expect from the pleasure principle incarnate, and Leon's tale even seems to support her argument. He does not appear to have made himself more desirable to her, and her reaction is dismissive rather than outraged. As with many of the tales in *Der junge Mann*, this one lacks a conclusion, Almut merely responds with a tale of her own. Leon's tale has, however, done us a great service in indicating the possibility of a narrative form which would correspond more closely to feminine jouissance.

Feminine Jouissance and Transgression

Just as Freud suggested that there is only masculine libido, jouissance is, for Lacan, essentially phallic: "analytic experience attests precisely

³³⁸ "Befreien Sie sich endlich von Ihren untröstlichen Begierden!... sonst werden Sie bald nichts Wunderbares mehr hören und sehen können, das wirklich Erhabene wird Sie nicht mehr berühren. Sie werden dann nur noch zucken, im Geist wie im Geschlecht, ein abgeschlossenes System von Reiz und Überschwang. Sie werden sich am ende gar noch

to the fact that everything revolves around phallic jouissance, in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as "not whole" (*pas tout*) with respect to phallic jouissance."³³⁹ This position is rather problematic, particularly from the point of view of feminist readings of psychoanalysis. This section will consider the ways in which critics have challenged or revised these concepts. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that women are able to experience a jouissance beyond the phallus:

But if this enigmatic jouissance is attributed to woman as her mark of resistance to the Other, at the same time, this jouissance is, by that fact, strictly outside of articulation and is thus *unknowable*.³⁴⁰

Lacan does not, however, see phallic jouissance as necessarily positive, indeed "it is the obstacle owing to which man does not come (*n'arrive pas*), I would say, to enjoy woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the jouissance of the organ."³⁴¹ Although men have access to their jouissance, it only serves to limit their pleasure, to channel it along a phallic path. Thus feminine jouissance would seem to be more transgressive, and closer to a 'pure' jouissance. For Grosz, the drawback to Lacan's theory of feminine sexuality lies in the fact that, although women are accorded the possibility of refusing a desire which is not theirs, they are not permitted to claim that which is theirs:

In attributing a non-phallic sexual pleasure to women, Lacan exceeds the narrow constraints of Freud's understanding of female sexuality as necessarily bound to male sexuality. Yet in claiming that this

wie der Lurch zur Brunst benehmen, der wahllos jede Rundung klammert, bis er endlich auf ein Weibchen tritt." (249/174) Translation modified.

³³⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.7. cf. p.9. "Jouissance, insofar as it is sexual, is phallic, which means that it does not relate to the Other as such."

³⁴⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990. p.139.

jouissance is also beyond discourse and knowledge, ineffable, he back-handedly repositions women in a dependent position. This is a pleasure, a series of sensations and experiences about which nothing more can be said than that they are *non-phallic*.³⁴²

In all its forms jouissance challenges the possibility of representation, but as a non-phallic jouissance, feminine jouissance lacks even that link to the symbolic. Grosz remains unsure as to whether jouissance is in itself unknowable, or whether it is simply that women cannot know their non-phallic jouissance.³⁴³ Lacan suggests that in relation to the phallic function of jouissance, women have a supplementary jouissance.³⁴⁴ He is careful to stress, however, that this is a supplement, not a complement – it does not make the woman (or jouissance itself) whole.³⁴⁵ This supplementary jouissance may in fact be closer to a 'pure' jouissance in that it is "beyond the phallus" and outside the laws of the symbolic.³⁴⁶ Lacan describes this jouissance, the jouissance of the Other, as

a jouissance that is hers, that belongs to that "she" that doesn't exist and doesn't signify anything. There is a jouissance that is hers about which she perhaps knows nothing if not that she experiences it – that much she knows.³⁴⁷

It cannot be known, for, as it is beyond the laws of the symbolic, it cannot represent itself to consciousness, let alone through the medium of language. Yet according to Lacan, although there is something in

³⁴¹ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.7.

³⁴² Grosz, *Jacques Lacan* p.139.

³⁴³ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan* p.139.

³⁴⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.73.

³⁴⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.73.

³⁴⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.74.

³⁴⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.74.

women that escapes discourse, man is nevertheless driven to seek her out as that which can only be situated through discourse.³⁴⁸ This essential misunderstanding means that (heterosexual) men seek out women not as supplements, but as equal partners in phallic jouissance. But jouissance does not have anything to do with the sexual relationship, indeed, Lacan suggests that all jouissances are "but rivals of the finality that would be constituted if jouissance has the slightest relationship with the sexual relationship."³⁴⁹

Given the difficulties in representing phallic jouissance, it is even more difficult to conceive how this supplementary jouissance of the feminine might be represented. For Lacan, it is the pleasure principle that keeps the search for the object of desire on the proper path and "imposes the detours which maintain the distance in relation to its end."³⁵⁰ To follow Brooks's reading, it must be the pleasure principle of the narrative which prevent it from ending too soon.³⁵¹

Fuery sees feminine jouissance as supplementary in the sense of Derrida's 'dangerous supplement' in *Of Grammatology*, which is "properly *seductive*; it leads desire away from the good path, makes it err far from natural ways, guides it towards loss or fall and there for it is a sort of lapse or scandal."³⁵² *Die Klavierspielerin* is a good example of a text where this transgressive feminine jouissance operates not only

³⁴⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.33.

³⁴⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.112.

³⁵⁰ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.58.

³⁵¹ cf. Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.292.

³⁵² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. p.151. Fuery pp.43-44.

at the level of the content, but also at the level of the structure. The excessiveness of this supplement can be seen in the eruptions of the unconscious texts into the novel. Not only do they disrupt the narrative flow of the novel, but they even destabilise the manifest text through their very different forms, sometimes even impersonating its language. The unconscious texts certainly do not function as a complement to the manifest text, and indeed cannot be integrated into it.

Prior to his article "On Freud's '*Trieb*' and the Psychoanalyst's Desire," Lacan had portrayed desire as transgressive, "always in violation, always rebellious and diabolical," but thereafter it is jouissance that is transgressive, for even in the fantasy of transgression, desire never exceeds the boundaries of the law.³⁵³ Whenever desire tries to head towards jouissance it "drops off" at the point at which it encounters its borders (or prohibition).³⁵⁴ It is here that the pleasure principle usually intervenes, changing the object of desire to another. Only if the subject violates this prohibition may s/he approach her/his jouissance:

We are, in fact, led to the point where we accept the formula that without a transgression there is no access to jouissance, ... that that is precisely the function of the Law. Transgression in the direction of jouissance only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law. If the paths to jouissance have something in them that dies out, that tends to make them impassable, prohibition, if I may say so, becomes its all-terrain vehicle, its half-track truck, that gets it out of the circuitous routes that lead man back

³⁵³ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.423.

³⁵⁴ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.424.

in a roundabout way toward the rut of a short and well-trodden satisfaction.³⁵⁵

In other words, it is the bond between desire and the law that introduces a prohibition on desire, a prohibition which, perversely, makes jouissance possible. Indeed, Lacan seems to suggest that jouissance is not to be found in the normal modes of satisfaction, but, to follow his metaphor, off the beaten track.³⁵⁶ In many of the novels under consideration here we find forms of satisfaction which are not quite pathological, but which might be generally considered marginal. These forms can be seen in *Die Klavierspielerin*, *Out of the Line of Fire*, and, to a lesser degree, *Gut Symmetries*.

In *Die Klavierspielerin*, Erika seeks satisfaction first and foremost in voyeurism and sado-masochistic acts. She finds soft-core pornography unsatisfying, as there is an absence of pain and "[p]ain itself is merely a consequence of the will to pleasure, to destroy, to annihilate; in its supreme form, pain is a variety of pleasure. Erika would gladly cross the border to her own murder."³⁵⁷ Through her forms of desire, Erika is seeking precisely the painful pleasure of jouissance. Yet what she is looking for is, in a sense, something which cannot be found:

What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain... What he is looking for is not, as one says, the phallus – but precisely its absence, hence the pre-eminence

³⁵⁵ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.177.

³⁵⁶ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.177.

³⁵⁷ "Der Schmerz ist selbst nur die Folge des Willens zur Lust, zum Zerstören, zum Zugrunderichten, und, in seiner höchsten Form, eine Art von Lust. Erika würde die Grenze zu ihrer eigene Ermordung gern überschreiten." Translation modified (108/107).

of certain forms as objects of his search.

What one looks at is what cannot be seen.³⁵⁸

Yet for Erika, it is not possible to speak of a universal desire in voyeurism, "small lamps glow tranquilly over boobs and cunts, chiselling out bushy triangles, for that's the first thing a man looks at it, it's the law. A man looks at nothing, he looks at pure lack. After looking at this nothing, he looks at everything else."³⁵⁹ Her experience at the peep-show is quite different: "Here, in this booth, she becomes nothing" [*Hier, in dieser Kabine, wird sie zu gar nichts*] (53/51). Through voyeurism she is, in a sense, transformed into the object of desire, and this transformation threatens to consume and destroy her: "The hole that she despised and neglected has now taken full possession of her. She is nothing."³⁶⁰ Just after she returns home from this experience into the "safety" of her mother's arms, the second unconscious text breaks through and interrupts the manifest text.

We are supposed to assume that Erika has turned to these transgressive forms of pleasure as a result of her experiences with both men ("the memories aren't good" [*die Erinnerung tut nicht gut*]), and the influence of her mother ("after each of these experiences, Erika wanted to get back to her mother as fast as possible" [*Erika wünschte jedes dieser Male nur, so rasch wie möglich zu ihrer Mutter*]).

³⁵⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.182.

³⁵⁹ "[B]eschaulich die Lämpchen über Brüste und Fotzen hinweg glühen. Haarbuschige Dreiecke erglimmend herausmeißen, denn das ist das allererste, worauf der Mann schaut, da gibt es ein Gesetz dafür. Der Mann schaut auf das Nichts, er schaut auf den reinen Mangel. Zuerst schaut er auf dieses Nichts, dann kommt die restliche Mutti auch noch dazu." 53-54/52

zurückzugelangen") (76/74). I believe, however, that it is probably a mistake to place too much emphasis on Erika's sexual experiences with men, as it seems clear that this is a symptom, not a cause:

Sex [*Lust*] started those young men rolling with Erika, and then they stopped sex [*Lust*]. They turned off the gas, leaving only a whiff. Erika tried to hold them with passion and pleasure [*Lust*]. She pounded her fists on the swaying dead weight on top of her, she was so excited she couldn't help shrieking. Her nails pointedly scratched the back of each opponent. She felt nothing. She simulated overwhelming pleasure [*Lust*] so that the man would finally stop. Although the man stops, he comes again another time. Erika feels nothing, she has always felt nothing. She is as unfeeling as a piece of tar paper in the rain.³⁶¹

In turning to these perverse forms of satisfaction, it seems as if she is resorting to these extremes simply in order to provoke feeling. Here we see the way in which transgression serves to provoke *jouissance*, regardless of the transgressive form of desire chosen. Yet the most transgressive form of desire, the form which produces the greatest *jouissance*, is also that which is metonymically closest to the fantasy of primal unity – incest. However, this is only the case where the desire is directed from the child to an adult or sibling. We will now consider the presence of this supreme form of *jouissance* in *Out of the Line of Fire and Gut Symmetries*.

³⁶⁰ "[D]as Loch, das sie verachtete, vernachlässigte, hat nun ganz Besitz von ihr ergriffen. Sie ist Nichts." 199/198.

³⁶¹ "Die Lust brachten die jungen Herren bei Erika ins Rollen, dann stoppten sie die Lust wieder. Sie drehten Erika den Hahn zu. Gerade nur ein bißchen Gas durfte sie riechen. Erika versuchte, sie mit Leidenschaft und Lust an sich zu fesseln. Heftig mit Fäusten schlug sie auf das wippende tote Gewicht über ihr ein, vor Begeisterung konnte sie ein Schreien nicht zurückhalten. Mit Nägeln gezielt kratzte sie den Rücken des jeweiligen Gegenspielers. Sie hat nicht verspürt. Sie hat überwältigende Lust angedeutet, damit der Mann endlich wieder aufhört. Der Herr hört zwar auf, doch ein anderes Mal kommt er

III. Incest

For Lacan, it is obvious that just as the prohibition of incest underwrites the law, so too is incest the fundamental desire of man.³⁶² Lacan's piece "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" ends with the enigmatic statement that "castration means that jouissance must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder (*l'échelle renversée*) of the Law of desire."³⁶³ At first glance, this seems to be a particularly obscure statement, even by Lacan's standards, for while the first part of the sentence is reasonably clear, the second is equally opaque. Evans offers a lucid and attractive interpretation of this sentence:

the symbolic prohibition of enjoyment in the Oedipus complex (the incest taboo) is thus, paradoxically, the prohibition of something which is already impossible; its function is therefore to sustain the neurotic illusion that enjoyment would be attainable if it were not forbidden.³⁶⁴

The enjoyment prohibited by the Oedipus complex is impossible only because the very object of desire (that is, incest) is already a metonymy. The desire for sex with the mother is only a symbolic act, an attempt to regain a lost unity, and the Oedipus complex leads the subject to believe this to be the case. This law, this interdiction, only serves to create the desire in order to transgress it; only through this

wieder. Erika spürt nichts und hat nie etwas gespürt. Sie ist empfindungslos wie ein Stück Dachpappe im Regen." (77/75) Translation modified.

³⁶² Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.6.

³⁶³ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.324.

³⁶⁴ Evans p.92.

transgression can jouissance be attained, and it must therefore be considered as fundamentally transgressive.³⁶⁵

Miller suggests that the incest prohibition is a prohibition against satisfying the desire of the mother (*désir de la mère*).³⁶⁶ Here we can see the same ambiguous genitive that Lacan uses in his formulation "desire is the desire of the other," for the Oedipus complex is not just about the desire for the mother, but reciprocating the desire of the other, in this case, the mother's desire.

The incest prohibition means: Thou shalt not have access to that which is your supreme jouissance. What reverberates in this story is the prohibition expressed in signifiers which bears on jouissance itself. What Lacan emphasises here is that, in this respect, desire is always tied to the prohibition of jouissance, and that is why desire's major signifier is $-\phi$. Desire is always instituted by a lack and hence desire is on the same side as the law.³⁶⁷

The incest prohibition is not just a myth, but as is stressed here, also a story, a tale told to young children. As such it is expressed in language, a language that is already permeated by desire. To say the desire is on the same side as the law does not necessarily mean that it is not in favour of jouissance, simply that because it is outside of the realm of the real it cannot even attain it.

Peter Brooks suggests that throughout the romantic tradition the image of fraternal-sororal incest "hovers as the sign of a passion interdicted because its fulfilment would be too perfect, a discharge

³⁶⁵ Evans p.92.

³⁶⁶ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.423. At this point in his analysis of Lacan's text, Miller actually seems to be approaching Laplanche's conception of the Oedipus complex.

³⁶⁷ Miller, "Commentary on Lacan's Text." p.423.

indistinguishable from death, the very cessation of narrative movement.³⁶⁸ This particular form of incest appears repeatedly in both Henshaw's *Out of the Line of Fire* and Atkinson's *Human Croquet*, although in each case only under certain circumstances. Interestingly, it also appears in Jensen's *Gradiva*, but Freud does not interpret it in this manner, although within his reading such an interpretation is not only possible, but even provoked by the fact that this same motif appears in other works by Jensen.³⁶⁹ Its appearance in *Human Croquet* will be examined in the following chapter, but here I would like to focus on the development of the incest motif in *Out of the Line of Fire* in more detail.

Out of the Line of Fire is a complex postmodern novel, one which becomes steadily more unsettling (both in content and form) as it progresses. The impetus for the novel comes from a package the author receives from a friend he made in Germany (Wolfi) while on student exchange there.³⁷⁰ This package is accompanied by a simple note: "Vielleicht kannst Du etwas damit anfangen [perhaps you can make something of this]," although the German could also mean 'perhaps you can begin something with this.'³⁷¹ The ambiguity here can be seen to indicate the role of this package in providing the spark of desire which brings the novel into being. The first and final parts of

³⁶⁸ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.297.

³⁶⁹ Freud, "Gradiva." *PFL* p.111 & 118 (cf. also pp.50-51); *GW* p.116 & 124 (pp.49-51).

³⁷⁰ The narrator and implied author remains nameless throughout this work. To simplify matters I will refer to him as "the author" and will endeavour to make it clear when I am speaking of Henshaw.

the novel are inspired by the contents of this package (which are never described in depth) and the middle part of it appears to be a text which was included in the package. The author never provides an explanation for the inclusion of this middle narrative, and indeed the work is primarily a work which remains trapped between the desire for a completed work, and the writing of the work.

Incest first appears in the form of Wolfi's retelling of the Besserman trial, in which a beautiful woman is kidnapped and forced to bear a child (p.28). She is then released and does not see her daughter or the father for some twenty-odd years. Besserman (the father) claimed that he merely wanted a beautiful child, and having seen the daughter 'in person' Wolfi admits that he can sympathise with Besserman; even the author admits that she was "very striking," when confronted with her photograph (p.34). Wolfi then bemoans the moral righteousness of the indignation in the media, punning that "it's all relative, isn't it," (p.34). The incredible denouement of the Besserman trial is also revealed to the author by Wolfi:

Wolfi bursts into my room. He runs to the radio, turns it on. Nothing happens.

What's the matter with this bloody thing?

It's not plugged in.

Es ist nicht eingesteckt, he repeats.

He fumbles for the cord, plugs it in and switches it on. He searches frantically for the station.

Wait until you hear this.

Also, sensationelle Ereignisse hier in München. Ich bin Dieter

³⁷¹ Mark Henshaw, *Out of the Line of Fire*. Melbourne, Australia: Penguin, 1988. p.49. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text.

Winter, Bayern Drei und Sie hören Nachrichten. Nach einer kurzen Pause – der Papst vergibt seinem Attentäter [After a short break – the Pope forgives his assassins].

Verdammte Scheisse ... Idioten!

Forget it, I heard it earlier. They say it's just a flesh wound. He'll live.

No, no, no. Not the Pope. They had a newsflash on the Besserman trial.

I thought that had finished weeks ago.

No, the committal proceedings had to be held over. His daughter tried to commit suicide. It's just been revealed that she and her father were lovers. (p.38)

Nothing else appears upon the theme of incest for the rest of the chapter, and it is only later that the author discovers that there never was any Besserman case. It is eventually revealed to us that the only 'actual' occurrence of incest in the novel takes place in Wolfi's family.

It seems as if a narrative process is at work here which is not dissimilar to negation (*Verneinung*). Through negation, the subject is able to bring the repressed contents of the unconscious into consciousness, simply by presenting them in a negative form (for example: "You ask who this person in my dream can be. It's *not* my mother").³⁷² Lacan even goes so far as to suggest that negation is the main form in which the repressed re-presents itself to consciousness and forms the most solid beachhead of the unconscious.³⁷³ Through the story of the Besserman case, Wolfi partially presents his own, simply in a disguised form. In hindsight, Wolfi's description of the

³⁷² Sigmund Freud, "Die Verneinung." *GW*. V.XIV. 1948. p.11. Translated as "Negation." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.11. 1984. p.437.

³⁷³ Lacan, *Seminar VII* pp.64-65.

Besserman family ("even the most idyllic family appearances sometimes conceal *hidden* passions") now seems loaded with significance, as he could just as easily be speaking of his own family.³⁷⁴ The next chapter is written from the perspective of Wolfi, although it is not immediately clear whether this is part of the contents of the box, or a narrative written by the author of the first part. If it is written by Wolfi, then it has already been subjected to secondary revision in the form of the author's translation into English. The novel draws our attention to its composition in two languages not only by occasionally providing the German in parentheses, but even by the presence in two different places of the same text, once in German (p.89 ff.) and once in English (p.101 ff.). Wolfi's story concerns certain events which take place during a family holiday to Yugoslavia. Wolfi awakes one morning and watches his half-dressed sister sleeping:

As I watched I realised I had never really considered Elena as a separate being before. She had always been someone who was just there, who simply was my sister. But now, in the half-light, I suddenly caught a glimpse of the image of the young woman she was on the verge of becoming. For the first time I registered how beautiful she really was. It was as though I had never even seen her before, as if for years I had been anaesthetised, insensitive to what had grown up around me. I could not take my eyes off her, off her perfect face, her lips, her slender arms and hands, off the contours of her body beneath her night-dress. (p.59)

Wolfi's narrative is filled with a sense of yearning beyond mere juvenile sexual curiosity. His description is infused not with tenderness, but

³⁷⁴ "Sogar Familien die ganz idyllisch scheinen, haben manchmal ihre eigenen *heimlichen* Leidenschaften" [my emphasis] (p.28). His description also provides an excellent example of the role of the heimlich in the uncanny nature of his desire.

with lust. Only by negating their consanguinity, can he register her as a separate, and sexual, being. Wolfi is both overwhelmed and confused by his experience:

Everything I had ever read about love, or desire, or beauty expressed itself in such abstract terms, so abstract in fact that, in reality, it had meant nothing to me at all. Why had no one mentioned this physical tearing, this sick rending I felt in my soul? It was as though, unable to raise my hands quickly enough, I had suddenly been blinded by the glare from some accidentally perceived truth, the exact nature of which remained undisclosed to me. For the first time in my life I felt absolutely isolated. I became aware that between whatever it was that Elena seemed to incarnate and my own being there existed some mysterious and unbridgeable gap. (p.60)

Here we come closest to an explicit consideration of jouissance within the novel, both in Wolfi's blinding glimpse of the real nature of his feelings towards Elena, as well as in her supplementary jouissance, which is incompatible with the sexual relation. Elena's 'incarnation' is threefold: she embodies jouissance, but is also metonymically linked to both Wolfi's mother and the jouissance associated with her. Wolfi's description of realising his desire could just as easily be applied to his narrative – it is at this point that the reader sees a part of the truth, albeit somewhat distorted. The motif of emergent juvenile sexuality appears again a little later in the narrative, but in this case it is attributed to Elena:

It was as though she were well on the way to becoming fully aware of her erotic potential and of the devastating effect that this would have on the men around her, but was still a little unsure about how this effect could be achieved. I seemed to have become the guinea-pig for her experiments. She appeared to delight in teasing me and to enjoy my obvious confusion. (p.78)

Whether consciously or unconsciously, it appears as if Elena recognises Wolfi's desire, and reciprocates it by flirting. By responding in this form, she allows herself the luxury of a certain form of negation, to be able to say "that is not what I meant at all." The incestuous desire between Wolfi and his sister becomes more overt not long after he loses his virginity to a prostitute, whose services were arranged and paid for by his grandmother. The prostitute (Andrea) is described by Wolfi as "a slightly older, but no less beautiful version of my sister Elena" (p.95). This woman occupies a position midway between the flirtatious innocence of his sister, and the worldly pragmatism of his grandmother. The absent middle term in this equation is clearly none other than the mother, Wolfi admits that there is a strong resemblance between her and his sister:

Yes. At sixteen my sister was a beautiful woman and at thirty-five my mother was, paradoxically, an equally beautiful young girl. People often mistook them for sisters. The three of us used to go out walking together and my mother's friends would always tease me about having two such attractive girlfriends. I never really knew how to react. (p.19)

The author attributes no special significance to this resemblance and its importance only becomes apparent afterwards. Andrea's is a name with several resonances in the text, one could describe it as overdetermined: the girl the author beds in Heidelberg is also named Andrea (p.22), a fact which we are reminded of as it occurs to him for no reason in Berlin (p.184). Certainly this is a coincidence no more uncanny in literature than in real life, but nevertheless we are led to

wonder if perhaps Wolfi gave the prostitute the name of the first girl the author sleeps with in Germany in order to seduce him into his text. In order to provoke not only his curiosity, but perhaps also his desire. Elena also contributes to this uncanniness: after she has read the author's manuscript (including Wolfi's stories), she dresses like Andrea when she comes to pick the author up to take him to see Wolfi's father, leading both the author and the reader to wonder if she had done so deliberately (p.199). There is also a not insignificant homophonic echo between Andrea and Wolfi's sisters, Elena and Anya.

All of Wolfi's narratives have a dual significance for the reader. Initially their worth is only that of the events they present, a manifest value. Their latent, or perhaps surplus, value is only appreciated later on when the reader reads them not as accurate depictions of events, but as fictions within the novel. The reader then reads them not for what they say, but merely for how they bear on the actual events of the novel. Wolfi's story ends with his sister quizzing him on losing his virginity:

I told her more or less what had happened, leaving aside the role my grandmother had played and how much Andrea had looked like her. She just sat there, occasionally smiling and drawing her shoulders up and pressing her hands together as she imagined some minor detail to herself. (p.108)

His desire is apparent not only in what he tells Elena, but is also that which motivates it, and it is perceived as such by her:

Oh Wolfi, that was so romantic. Wunderschön war es.

As I walked her to the door she turned suddenly and embraced me, kissing me on the mouth.

You're a hero Wolfi, she said. A real hero.

After that night things were never to be the same. (p.108)

Wolfi's stories have conveyed, both implicitly and explicitly, so much desire towards his sister, that his final line is quite unambiguous – it clearly means they had sex. The next chapter begins with the author stating that even before this point he had begun to suspect that something was definitely wrong in Wolfi's family (p.109). But even here the author is deceiving the reader, for he does not talk about these events from the point of view of the end of the novel, but as if he had only just come across them. The author engages in a fiction of ignorance, and as such he replicates Wolfi's desire not only through his re-presentation of Wolfi's stories, but also through his own text, even as he begins to reveal the truth of Wolfi's:

[I]t is Anya's eyes that immediately strike me. They are almost unnaturally blue, unnaturally intense. In my mind I can see an image of Wolfi as I saw him for the first time, standing nervously outside the door to my room in Heidelberg. I see his intense blue eyes and then through them, I see Elena on the beach. I see the wisp of pubic hair poking out from beneath her swimming costume. I feel Wolfi registering her as a separate being for the first time. (p.109)

At this point the reader has no reason to mistrust the reliability of the author, and until the end is inclined, despite the obvious transference between Wolfi's stories and those of the author, to believe in the truth of his words. But there is also a desire to go back, to reread the early part of the novel to search for clues, a desire which even infects the author as a reader of Wolfi's narrative:

For a long time I sat trying to formulate conversations I had had with Wolfi, trying to piece together chance remarks that might have

confirmed or denied what I had begun to think. I tried to recall when Anya had first come up in our conversation, what exactly had been said. I felt as if you would feel if, as a reader, you were now forbidden to go back to the conversation that took place the day she was first mentioned. And yet I cannot be sure that this was the first time. I simply cannot remember. (p.109)

At a superficial level then the reader is suddenly caught. Is the author trying to incite us to go back and check? Is he daring us to continue without doing so? The author is attempting to convince us of both the link between fiction and reality, as well as his own good faith in writing the text.

When Wolfi finally faces his father, he does no more than reveal that his sister Anya is also his daughter (pp.170-171). All the other events in Wolfi's narrative, and that of the author lead us to believe that Elena is the mother, but we have been seduced into this position. The novel is so tightly constructed, and the author is so up-front and honest about the existence of his story as a narrative, that the reader is compelled to believe this version of events. The reader's suspicions are only raised along with the author's, as piece by piece things stop adding up.

When the author returns to Berlin, he discovers that Wolfi's story of the Besseman case is in fact nothing more than a recently unearthed fragment of a story by Kleist from 1810 (p.176).³⁷⁵ For the reader, this immediately raises a number of questions, for example, if

³⁷⁵ On page 45, it is revealed that Elena also stars in a ballet production of Kleist's *The Marquise of O*, another coincidence which, while plausible, has a slightly uncanny effect on the reader, especially given the implication of an incestuous desire between the Marquise and her father.

this fragment is being unveiled at the conference, then how could Wolfi have known of its existence, particularly given he knows not just the story but the actual words? The author does not even consider this, but instead rushes to confirm that the Besserman case never existed, after which he discovers other aspects of Wolfi's story do not appear to have taken place. Only after discovering that the police have no record of Wolfi's arrest does the author concede that "perhaps the world which Wolfi had created in his correspondence really didn't exist, and had never existed" (p.182). Elena later confirms that Wolfi was arrested, but the charges were dropped which is why there was no record of Wolfi's arrest (p.192).

The author travels to Wolfi's home town of Klagenfurt in an attempt to discover the truth, and discovers that Wolfi shot himself (as indeed did Kleist), and his father refused to allow him to be buried with his mother (p.186). The author then re-evaluates Wolfi's narratives, wondering if he had

been blind to some hidden message in what Wolfi had written? Had he foreshadowed his death in some subtle way that I had not perceived? And if I now went back over what he had written would I be able to read a single sentence of it without his death staring me in the face? (p.189)

But of course as the author and editor of the text he has done so, and he admits that sentiments like these are really a fiction:

Of course I knew of Wolfi's death before I began writing his tale, indeed long before I decided to put my recollections of him down on paper or to edit and assemble the material he sent me. It seemed to me that in the essentially three episodes of his life that he himself

related he had created a self which was both separate from and an augmentation of the person I had known in Heidelberg. (p.195)

In other words, Wolfi had created a fictional translation of his life, which the author retransmits to us. We cannot know which parts Wolfi altered, or which the author has (deliberately or not) changed. The 'truth' about Wolfi's life is only a fiction. Although the author admits to his part as writer and editor, nonetheless, he continues in his fiction of limited narrative omniscience, writing as if these events were taking place in the present. He claims that to have made a more rigorous attempt to portray the real Wolfi would have been futile, for he had

become displaced by a collection of memories, papers and photographs. I had become caught up in the 'fiction' of what he had written. Yet I could not help feeling that this was what was so cruel about his death – the sense of being left with a feeling of absolute loss, of irrevocable absence without appeal. (p.195)

The author realises that he had been seduced by Wolfi's narrative, but does not realise that in re-presenting Wolfi's story in this way he deceives the reader and places him/her in an analogous position. The very nature of the story is not in its denouement, but in its telling.

Lacan suggests that *jouissance* implies the acceptance of death.³⁷⁶ The presence of *jouissance* in the works of literature under consideration in this study results in death in *Out of the Line of Fire* and *Human Croquet*, and is only narrowly avoided in *Gut Symmetries*. Yet at the level of the narrative, each of them also attempts to avoid this premature end to the story – both Wolfi's and Isobel's are embedded narratives, and *Gut Symmetries* does not keep to a straight-

forward linear structure in any case. The author in *Out of the Line of Fire* is conscious of this facet of his narrative:

As a 'story' it seems to have been wound up too quickly. The narrative momentum seemed to promise more. Too many questions remain unanswered . . . So be it. In some ways this mirrors the abruptness of my own discovery of the death of my friend. (p.196)

After the discovery of Wolfi's death, the author admits that the Wolfi that he knew has become indissolubly merged with the self-generated fictional Wolfi (p.189). He also realises that by choosing to meet Elena he is also choosing to provoke a confrontation between the world as it is and the world of Wolfi's fiction (p.189). This is of course the same confrontation the reader faces throughout, as the novel provokes us to check real world details with those of the novel, for example, the Kleist story, or the fragment of an interview reputedly from *Die Zeit*. But it does not matter if we do or not, for like the author, we are victims of a fiction.

Yet the author does not really appreciate this until Elena asks him if he knows any reason why her father might have wanted Wolfi dead. He tells her that he knows her father found out "about you and Wolfi," and when she pushes him to explain himself he tells her that "Wolfi told him. He told him that he was Anya's father" (p.194). He reveals that he knows about the child's lineage, but neither of them realise at the time is that he is only half-right.

Unlike the author, Elena realises that Wolfi's stories are not entirely factual, yet when she reveals that the holiday in Yugoslavia

³⁷⁶ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.189.

never took place, the author merely responds: "How do I know you're not doing to me what you claim Wolfi did to us both? Why would he have invented having a holiday in Yugoslavia? What's the point?" (p.204). She suggests that

he saw us meeting here one day, that he knew you would find out about Anya, that he wanted you to know. This was all part of the hidden content of what he wrote. (p.207)

Elena recognises that there is more to Wolfi's narratives than lies on the surface, but she suggests that it is consciously included by Wolfi, knowing that she was the only one who could decipher it. The author protests that the truth about Anya was obvious from the start, to which Elena can only reply:

But that's just it. That's what Wolfi wanted you to think, at least initially. But what he wanted you to know, eventually, I'm sure was that Anya is not my child. She's not my daughter. (p.207)

Even if Wolfi had wanted to communicate this deliberately, nevertheless the desire present in language has produced an excess of meaning which in turn suffuses the author's text. The author is curiously nonplussed when Elena reveals the truth about Wolfi's relationship with his mother (p.207). With Wolfi dead, and the truth out, the novel ends with one last lingering image of desire:

I looked up to the balcony and Elena's room. I could swear I could hear music drifting down through the open door. In my mind I could see an image of Wolfi's face floating before me and through it, the image of the room in the Hotel Belvedere and Elena lying in bed. Her nightgown had fallen open and one breast lay exposed. (p.207)

Only at the end of the novel are we finally presented with an honest acknowledgement by the author of his desire and in doing so he

reveals what we had already begun to suspect: that he absorbed and retransmitted the desire of Wolfi's text.

The incest motif is also present at a number of points in *Gut Symmetries*, and, as in *Out of the Line of Fire*, in more than one relationship. Alice's attachment to her father, although fairly extreme, does not seem extraordinary. However, there are a number of points where her consciousness of it is disconcerting. She is clearly aware of psychoanalysis and its findings, and her evaluation of it does not coincide with that of her father

He did not believe in the unconscious, except as a soup of fantasy and half-memories that entertained his sleep. To suggest, as I did, that the mind is a self-regulating system, where consciousness and unconsciousness work as load-balancing pulleys, roused anger enough to make me think I had touched something relevant. (p.120)

While we might feel inclined to quibble with her reading of intra-psychic relations, her interpretation of her father's reaction does not seem unreasonable. This impression is reinforced, when a few lines later, she reveals to us that her father used to tell her she had an "octopus complex" (p.120). In order to make it absolutely clear that the (barely) latent meaning of this phrase is not wasted on her, a little later on she says quite bluntly,

I loved my father incestuously. I would have coupled with him in a different morality. He wanted my love but, except in small children, demonstrations of affection embarrassed him. (p.126)

As in both *Out of the Line of Fire* and *Human Croquet*, a certain amount of detective work is required on the part of the reader in order

to recognise the disguised presence of incest. Alice and Stella are half-sisters (by their father), but each of them (as well as Jove) only reveals details that enable this conclusion to be drawn under the guise of family history. This knowledge causes a strange shift in the omniscience of the narrator. When Alice presents us with the details of her father's relationship with his secretary, she is actually presenting us with information that would seem to properly belong to Stella, yet her voice is still quite clearly apparent: "he had given her presents, clothes, perfume. And there was a night when. . ." (p.150). Alice's discourse again ends in an ellipsis that does not serve to disguise its meaning. At the same time there is no weight attached to this fact, even though it has quite significant consequences for the text. Stella conveys this fact (in relation to her father's death) a few pages later (p.166) and it is left to Jove to connect the two (although only for the reader, not for himself) (p.190). Yet in this instance the conclusion seems almost too easy – the narrators mention these facts as if they had no inkling of their significance when in fact they form one of the key themes of the novel. The structure here is quite clearly a literary one of revelation: the pieces add up fairly easily, and Jove's contribution feels forced. This 'artificiality' draws our attention to the fact that not only is this a narrative, but it is also a fiction.

There are a number of similarities between *Gut Symmetries* and *Out of the Line of Fire*. Not only do they both focus on the revelation of an incestuous relationship, and are both infused with the desire of their

'authors,' but the events of both novels are provoked by the receipt of a letter.

IV. Desire and the Letter

The letter (that is, correspondence) functions as an important psychoanalytic metaphor for desire, both in literature and in theory. The opening piece in the French edition of Lacan's *Écrits* is "*Le séminaire sur 'La Lettre volée'*," and part of Derrida's major work on desire, the letter, and psychoanalytic literary criticism (*The Post Card*) is in the form of letters ('Envois'). Our interest in the letter from the point of view of psychoanalysis is as a metaphor for desire, yet Derrida suggests that it has a far more fundamental significance for literature, as it is not a genre, but all genres, it is "literature itself."³⁷⁷

We have already considered the role which desire plays in bringing these texts into being, for example, in *Out of the Line of Fire*. The manifestation of this generative desire in a letter will now be considered in more detail. What does the use of the letter as a metaphor for desire actually have to tell us about the nature of desire? What additional aspects of desire are revealed by the use of the letter? How does it affect the production of the narrative?

In the texts under consideration in this chapter, letters play a crucial role in the transmission of desire (and perhaps an even more important role for the text). In *Out of the Line of Fire*, the package Wolfi sends the author provides the material for the construction of at least part of the narrative; while in *Die Klavierspielerin* it is the letter from Erika to Klemmer that, according to Jelinek herself, is the critical

³⁷⁷ Derrida, *The Post Card* p.48

event of the text.³⁷⁸ In *Gut Symmetries*, the letter Stella receives informing her of Jove's infidelity sets the events of the novel in motion.

Fuery suggests that the letter also provides the perfect metaphor for the deconstruction of meaning, and that in Derrida's texts (in particular *The Post Card, Margins of Philosophy*, and "Sending: On Representation") we find:

the questioning of what it is to send 'letters' in ways that might 'mean', so that they might arrive at their intended destination. And part of this very process is desire. For desire, especially post-structuralist desire, is always marked by a non-arrival; it always has its intentions questioned, and always positions the sender and receiver within a certain relationship.³⁷⁹

If letters never arrive at their intended destination, then perhaps it is because as agents of desire they are subject to the same problems of transmission and reception, that is, failures which result in parapraxes. Perhaps desire is fated not to arrive at its destination precisely because its destination is that of jouissance (or alternately, and this is rather more in line with Brooks' argument, its destination is death). Both these destinations are impossible, and they are the 'actual' destinations of desire, as opposed to the metonymic objects towards which desire aims. It is the fact that letters are supposed to be delivered, but do not invariably reach their destinations, that make them an excellent metaphor for desire.

Letters are sent and there is always the possibility of them going astray (and we may note in passing that it always involves being

³⁷⁸ Donna Hoffmeister, "Access Routes into Postmodernism: Interviews with Innerhofer,

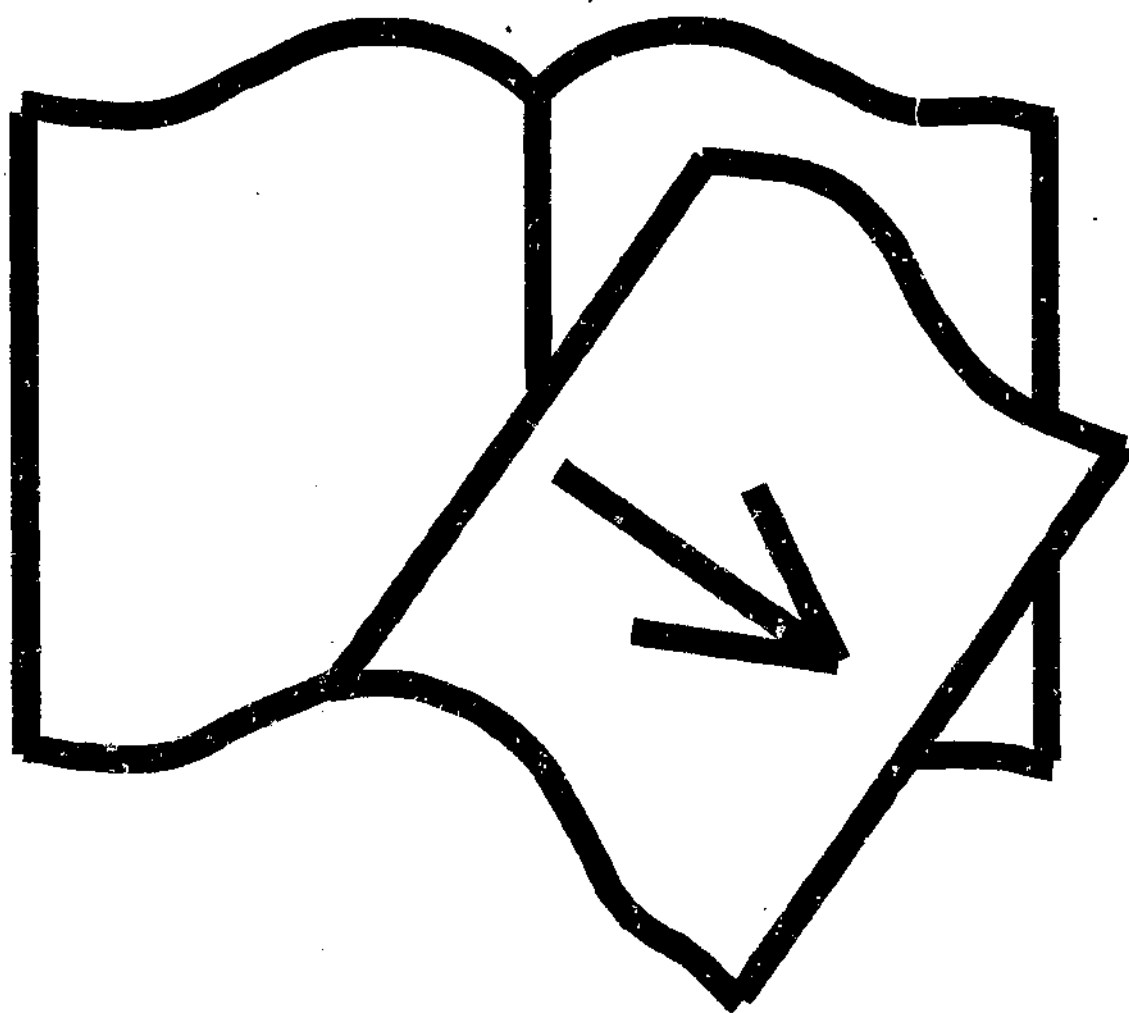
properly addressed, stamped, etc.), but even if successfully delivered, the delivery itself always involves a delay. The letter never arrives immediately, and it is its existence in this deferred state which distinguishes it from other contemporary forms of communication (telephone, fax, email). A delay, or a deferral, of communication (or meaning) is also characteristic of an important psychic phenomenon: afterwardsness [*Nachträglichkeit*]. The nature of afterwardsness is similar to that of desire, in so far as the delayed recognition is the recognition of a surplus meaning which was unconsciously perceived and immediately repressed.

A letter, as Lacan points out, is something that is read.³⁹⁰ That is, it is addressed to someone and intended to be read. Although this sounds obvious, it is important to bear in mind for the analysis of desire that although it is meant to be read doesn't mean it will be. The necessary delay in sending a letter increases the possibility that the circumstances surrounding the message will have changed – the message that was sent will not be the one that is received, and this characteristic is what sets the letter apart as a model for desire: the very form of its transmission creates the potential for misunderstandings. For Derrida, the possibility of the letter's non-arrival reveals something quite unusual about the letter as,

Jelinek, Rosei, and Wolfgruber." *Modern Austrian Literature*. V.20(2) 1987. p.114.

³⁹⁰ Fuery p.48.

³⁹¹ Lacan, *Seminar XX* p.26. As Bruce Fink notes in the translation, the French ("*La lettre, ça se lit*") contains an ambiguity that is difficult to render into English, it could also mean "A letter is something that can be read" or "A letter is something you read."



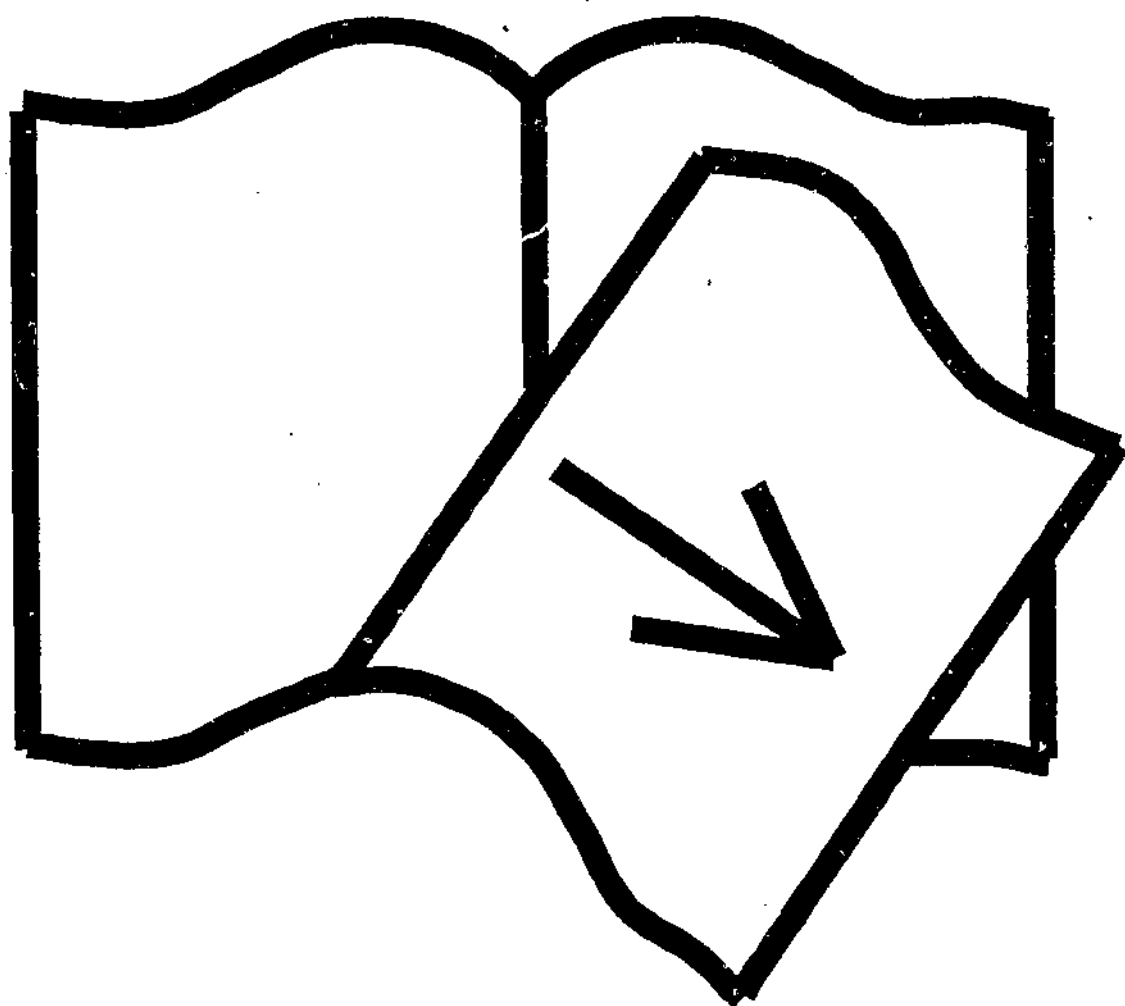
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Die Klavierspielerin, for example, the desire expressed in the letter Erika writes to Klemmer, is one which does not meet its end. For Erika the letter "indicates the progress a certain kind of desire has taken. Erika has written down everything she does not wish to say aloud."³⁸⁴ Writing lends itself to the expression of desire, and Erika even suggests that: "What cannot be said above all else must be silenced, but written."³⁸⁵ While the letter expresses a fantasy of submission and domination, its purpose is, according to Jelinek, to control and subjugate Klemmer.³⁸⁶ Even if the letter can be successfully written down, the letter still has to reach its intended recipient. Although Erika hand-delivers the letter, thus removing the possibility of it going astray, nevertheless she does not guarantee that its contents will be received properly. Erika recognises this possibility, but revels in it: "I am so much afraid of reading and understanding your letter of 4/24, dear Klemmer, that if I deliberately misunderstand your letter—something I am bound to do—then we'll kiss and make up again after the fashion of the angels, this misunderstanding he imagines is a deliberate misunderstanding. It implies not only that there is something in the letter that can be misunderstood but that it must be able to be understood, in order not to be misunderstood. But as the letter is intended to convey

³⁸⁴ "Welchen Fortgang eine gewisse Liebe nehmen soll. Erika hat alles geschrieben, was sie nicht sagen will." (191/190) *ibid.* p.194.

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contents of the letter once he has read it."³⁸⁹ However Klemmer is, as Erika had suspected, repelled by her desires, "however hard he now tries he can no longer see this woman as a human being; you've got to wear gloves to touch something like that."³⁹¹ The misunderstanding, that failure of the intended message, is not, however, absolute. Despite, or perhaps because of, his repulsion, Klemmer goes some way towards fulfilling Erika's desires. Violent impulses being to stir and he does begin to insult her (albeit only in his head (219-220/218-219)) and at the same time he begins to respond to Erika's desire:

Klemmer regards himself as standing outside desire and objectively considering the perspective of this female body. But he is moved imperceptibly. The glue of lust smears up his diverse ways of thinking, and the bureaucratic solutions that Erika prescribes offer him the guidelines to act in accordance with his pleasures.

Klemmer, willing or not, is affected by the woman's wishes. He is still an outsider, only reading her wishes. But soon he will be won over by pleasure!

Erika desires one thing: that desire make her body desirable."³⁹²

Desire is communicated by the letter, but not directly. It seems as if the desire explicitly expressed by the letter is not the one to which

³⁸⁹ "Es kann nur dann noch schiefgehen, wenn Klemmer den Brief liest und ihn mißbilligt. Aus Ekel, Scham oder Furcht, je nachdem, welches Gefühl in ihm die Oberhand erhält." (208/207)

³⁹⁰ "Erika zwingt Klemmer zum Lesen eines Briefes und fleht innerlich dabei, daß er sich über den Inhalt des Briefs, kennt er ihn erst, hinwegsetzen möge bitte." (214/213)

³⁹¹ "Sosehr er sich bemüht, als Mensch kann er sie jetzt nicht mehr recht sehen, nur mit Handschuhen kann man so etwas eingreifen." (216/215)

³⁹² "Klemmer hält sich für außerhalb der Begierde stehend und objektiv den Aussichtspunkt dieses weiblichen Körpers betrachtend. Doch unmerklich wird er schon ergriffen. Der Leim der Gier verklebt seine diversen Denkart, und die bürokratischen Lösungen, die Erika ihm vorschreibt, geben ihm die Richtlinien für ein Handeln im Sinne seine Lust.

Klemmer wird von den Wünschen der Frau sacht in Mitleidenschaft gezogen, ob er will oder nicht. Noch liest er die Wünsche als Außenstehender vom Papier ab. Doch bald wird er vom Genuß verändert werden.

Erika erwünscht sich eines, daß ihr Körper kraft Begierde erwünscht ist." (227/225)
Translation modified.

Klemmer responds, he responds precisely to the desire not expressed by Erika in the letter. Here Klemmer's desire is quite clearly the desire of the other – he is not expressing his desires, but, unconsciously and unwillingly, Erika's.

Erika suggests that they exchange letters rather than expressing their desires to one another in person, begging him to allow her to send another letter, but reacting against her desire, he turns on her: "lovers don't need to write letters. A written pretext is necessary only if lovers have to deceive each other."³⁹³ When Erika attempts to make love to Klemmer in a janitor's room at the conservatory, his resistance to her desire manifests itself in his inability to maintain an erection: "It's because of her letter that he can't perform love, but can only think about love."³⁹⁴

Klemmer's rejection of the desires in her letter leads Erika to turn her affection/aggression towards her mother, kissing her and holding her down: "She kisses Mother in a way in which she has not even thought of kissing her for years."³⁹⁵ This attack is described from the Mother's point of view as "parasexual" [*parasexuelle*] (236/234), which suggests that although there is undoubtedly a sexual element to it, it is not the main factor: "It's like a lover's struggle, and the goal isn't

³⁹³ "Unter Liebenden bedarf es des Briefs als Medium nicht... Nur bei Liebesbetrug benötigt man die schriftliche Ausflucht." (232/230)

³⁹⁴ "Sie ist mittels Briefs schuld daran, daß er Liebe nicht ausführen kann, sondern immer nur an Liebe denken." (246/244)

³⁹⁵ "Sie küßt die Mutter, wie sie es seit Jahren nicht mehr in Erwägung gezogen hat." (234/232)

orgasm, but Mother per se, the person known as Mother."³⁹⁶ Erika's motivation is described as "cryptosexual" [*kryptosexuelle*] and this hidden element is precisely the supplement of feminine jouissance, which lies in Erika's intention, but which is not apparent to her. It is difficult to conceive of a more overt example of incest as an attempt to regain the primal unity with the mother than the one presented here: "Erika sucks and gnaws on this big body as if she wanted to crawl back in and hide inside."³⁹⁷

The novel closes with Klemmer returning to beat and rape Erika, all the while taunting her about her letter: "Well, where's your letter now? This is all you get."³⁹⁸ When she protests that this is not what she wanted, not the desire expressed in her letter, he responds "Well then you'll have to express yourself more carefully next time."³⁹⁹ The desire to which Klemmer is responding is that expressed by the letter: Erika's longing to be able to find jouissance in pain. It should, however, be stressed that this does not occur, although she

regards various things as passionate desire; his behaviour would be half-way appropriate to passion alone. That's something Erika Kohut once heard. But that's enough darling! Let's start with something better.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ "[E]s ist wie bei einem Liebeskampf, und nicht Orgasmus ist das Ziel, sondern die Mutter an sich, die Person Mutter." (235/233)

³⁹⁷ "Erika augt und nagt an diesem großen Leib herum, als wollte sie gleich noch einmal hineinkriechen, sich darin zu verbergen." Translation modified (235/233)

³⁹⁸ "[N]a wo ist er jetzt, dein Brief. Das hast du nun davon." (273/270)

³⁹⁹ "Dann mußt du dich das nächste Mal eben präziser ausdrücken." (273/270)

⁴⁰⁰ "[H]ält verschiedenes für leidenschaftliches Sehnen, und nur der Leidenschaft wäre sein Verhalten halbwegs angemessen." (269/266) Curiously, in the German language a link can be seen between suffering [*Leiden*] and passion [*Leidenschaft*].

The confrontation with Klemmer reveals her phantasy of jouissance through pain, a phantasy whose origins lie in the transgressive nature of jouissance, to be nothing more than a lure, a screen for unrepresentable nature of her desire.

A letter also sets the main events of the novel in motion in Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* (p.36). Similarly, as in *Die Klavierspielerin*, even though the letter (albeit a counterfeit) arrives, the intended letter, the intended meaning, never arrives. Indeed, Jove's desire in writing the letter remains opaque, even to him; he claims he wrote the letter in order to reveal his affair with Alice to Stella:

I wanted to bring her to her senses.

When she took up the game, though I suppose it wasn't a game to her, I was surprised, excited. I wanted to find out what would happen next.

A threesome? I suppose so. I wanted to see them together, myself as the invisible other. I watched them in the bar, walked behind them to the Battery, saw them in my own apartment. Imagined what they would do. Oddly, I never thought that they would really do anything, the sex was a surprise. I made the mistake of thinking I could control the experiment. (p.193)

Again, the desire expressed through the letter is more than is intended, not only much more than he wants to say, but much more even than can be expressed, by him or anyone else. Jove's desire creates a surfeit of meaning which coincides with Alice and Stella's desire. He intervenes in both his relationships through this letter in order to create a new position for himself within these relationships, however, he becomes a much more invisible other than he had intended. In the

process of bringing his relationship with Alice to the attention of Stella, as well as bringing Stella and Alice together, he removes himself from both relationships. As Alice notes in a different context (again, that of physics) "there is no discovery without risk and what you risk reveals what you value" (p.103), and Jove's risk, the wager he consciously makes for his desire, inadvertently reveals and provokes unconscious desire. His attempt to control Stella and Alice's desire is doomed to fail, as he attempts to limit their jouissance to the narrow constraints of phallic jouissance, not realising that it is precisely the supplemental nature of their jouissance which cannot be contained.

An understanding of the nature of desire enables a closer reading of the role of the letter in engendering desire and thereby giving rise to the novel. In every case the sending of the letter is motivated by a conscious desire and pervaded by an unconscious one, which is either retransmitted (*Out of the Line of Fire*), transformed (*Gut Symmetries*) or (mis)recognised (*Die Klavierspielerin*).

Desire can never be ignored, in either psychoanalysis or literature. As readers or analysts, we must constantly pay attention to both our desire and that of our other, whether it is a text or an analysand. We must also remain aware that, owing to the processes of transference and counter-transference, one always affects the other. This is not

simply the case in the analytic setting, but also in reading, whether as a critic or 'just for pleasure.' This is not merely the case with literature, but is also true of literary criticism: reading an analysis of desire is also experiencing a type of desire.⁴⁰¹

The novels under consideration in this chapter vividly demonstrate the importance of desire, not only for the subject, but for narrative. The re-presentation of Wolff's stories in *Out of the Line of Fire* displays the risks of ignoring the dimension of desire, while at the same time wilfully seducing the reader into the very same desire. As we have seen, desire is frequently expressed through letters. In *Gut Symmetries* and *Out of the Line of Fire*, it is letters invested with desire that bring the novel into being. The letter as a metaphor for desire reveals that desire can never be communicated. In every letter there is something in the nature of the desire that escapes representation, a surplus or an excess which affects the reader.

⁴⁰¹ Fuery p.2.

Time and Memory

*"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing
would appear to man as it is, infinite." - William Blake*

I. Introduction

The importance of memory to psychoanalysis is not in question: the data of psychoanalysis are frequently memories, and psychoanalysis never stops questioning the nature of memory and of remembering. As early as the *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud had noted that "*hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences*."⁴⁰² Yet, even then this was not precisely true, because they actually tended to suffer not from what they could recall, but precisely from what they couldn't: repressed memories. In his later technical work, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914), Freud suggested that the task of psychoanalysis was "to fill in gaps in memory."⁴⁰³

How important, then, is memory to psychoanalytic literary criticism? An understanding of memory would seem crucial to any psychoanalytic theory of literary criticism if only for the simple reason that many works are constructed around memories – whether

⁴⁰² Breuer and Freud *PFL* p.58; *GW* p.86.

⁴⁰³ Sigmund Freud, "Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten." *GW*. V.X. 1946. pp.127-128. Translated as "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis, II)" Trans. and ed. James Strachey. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works. (SE)* V.XII. p.148.

remembered or forgotten, real or imagined. Needless to say, it is not possible in literary criticism to fill in the gaps in memories, but it is these structures of memory which are particularly interesting in literature, for it does not accept them uncritically, but often provides alternative ideas about the structures and functions of memory.

Time is also under consider here, as it is always implicated in memory; memories are, by definition, past events (although some of the novels in this chapter question this point of view). In Lacan's view, the memory in which psychoanalysis is interested is the symbolic history of the subject, a signifying articulation.⁴⁰⁴ That is, memories are events which are inscribed into the signifying chain (or narrative) of the subject's history. On the other hand, for Derrida memory is of paramount importance to psychoanalysis, as it "is not a psychical property among others; it is the very essence of the psyche: resistance."⁴⁰⁵

One of the advantages of psychoanalysis for literary criticism is that it does not assume that the time of the subject is the same straightforward linear time of the clock. Indeed, Freud even displays a dissatisfaction with the limits narration places on the presentation of the processes of the psyche: "Linear presentation is not a very adequate means of describing complicated mental processes going on in different layers of the mind."⁴⁰⁶ Psychoanalysis is an attempt to find

⁴⁰⁴ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.223. Evans p.110.

⁴⁰⁵ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.201.

⁴⁰⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Über die psychogenese eines Falles von weiblicher Homosexualität." GW. V.XII. 1947. p.287. Translated as "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in

ways of describing psychic processes which accurately reflects their variety and resistance to representation.

Laplanche asserts that psychoanalysis shows history (especially its own) not as a continuous or as a cumulative process: "it does not evolve smoothly and ... its course is marked by repression, repetition and the return of the repressed."⁴⁰⁷ These three attributes are marked by an anti-linear attitude towards time, because "for psychoanalysis, the past is never entirely past — nothing is forgotten," in so far as memories can be repressed, they are not lost, only hidden.⁴⁰⁸ Repressed memories do not disappear from the psychic life of the subject, they continue to affect him/her, and invariably attempt to return. The past is not a time which can be consigned to history, it continues to live in the memory of the subject.

For Lacan, the linear conception of time is almost useless in psychoanalysis, for in the psyche time may just as well run in reverse through the twin processes of retroaction and anticipation.⁴⁰⁹ These processes, which will be examined in more detail shortly, demonstrate the ways in which the past, present and future affect each other. The psychoanalytic understanding of time, and particularly the time(s) of the subject, the unconscious, and afterwardsness, all have much to contribute to an understanding of the time of the novel (that is, the

a Woman." Trans. James Strachey. *PFL*. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. Vol.9. 1979. p.386.

⁴⁰⁷ Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*. Trans. David Macey. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. p.2.

⁴⁰⁸ Linda Ruth Williams, *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject*. London: Edward Arnold, 1995. p.129.

particular conception of time that the literary work presents, how it functions internally, and how this affects the reading of the novel), as well as the comprehension of its structure, and how this reflects on its content.

The forwards and backwards movement of time is inescapable in memory. Memories are not simply formed at one point in time, they continue to form part of the subject throughout his/her life; they are revised, reviewed, and sometimes repressed. They also play a central part in forming a narrative for the subject, and this leads Linda Ruth Williams, in her work *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject* (1995), to state that "if subjects come into being through their relationship to narratives, then narratives are formed in time."⁴¹⁰ Therefore an understanding of time is essential not only for psychoanalysis, and the understanding of the narratives of the subject (for these narratives will be dependent on the time of the subject); but also for the understanding of narrative outside the analytic setting. Time is inescapable in narrative, even if only for the simple reason that narratives are received linearly.⁴¹¹ Nevertheless, we must always remain aware is that "the form of narrative time. . . does not flow in only one direction."⁴¹² This aspect of narrative time is continually brought to our attention in literature and can be seen in the formalist distinction between the *fabula* and *sjuzet*, that is to say, the distinction between

⁴⁰⁹ Evans p.207.

⁴¹⁰ Williams *Critical Desire* p.126.

⁴¹¹ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.282.

⁴¹² Williams *Critical Desire* p.126.

the chronological order of events and the order in which they are presented in the narrative. The *sjuzet* does not always correspond with the *fabula*, but, with the exception of a few experimental narrative forms which deliberately disrupt the *sjuzet* (for example the 'shuffle novel' or works such as Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*), the *sjuzet* is inescapable from the point of view of the reader. While the *fabula* may coincide with the *sjuzet*, frequently it does not, often drawing our attention to this fact and provoking us to consider what might be responsible for this divergence. *Why* should they not coincide? What is achieved by this? How does this effect the reading of the novel?

This chapter will focus on the *sjuzet*, as this is the area psychoanalytic theories of time and memory. The relations between the *fabula* and the *sjuzet*, as well as between the narrator (or implied author) and the *sjuzet*, and perhaps finally between the novel itself and its *sjuzet* will be considered.

This is not a simple attempt to utilise psychoanalytic techniques and theories to explain the text, although they can be useful in supplementing our understanding of the text at a structural level, but to examine what literary narratives have to tell us about the theories and techniques of psychoanalysis. They do not simply reflect psychoanalytic theories of time and memory, but augment and challenge them. Williams suggests by combining the insights of psychoanalysis with those of literature, we are led to

the possibility that we can understand something more of the double movements of time and confused sequence in the texts themselves, which look back as much as they look forward in a pattern of traumatic cross-currents, by relating them to these thoughts on the 'afterwardsness' of the psychoanalytic subject, and the way in which psychoanalytic narratives move backwards and forwards in time.⁴¹³

This chapter will examine the ways in which time and memory are crucial to an understanding not only of narrative structures, but also of the structure(s) within the novel – the way narrative events, and the relations between them, conform to, and also confront, psychoanalysis' understanding of time and memory.

II. Time

*"The distinction between past, present and future
is only an illusion, even if a stubborn one."– Albert Einstein*

Time is not an easy concept to talk about in abstract, particularly given the discoveries and theories of quantum mechanics and relativity physics. Just as physics wrestles with the notion of time as relative, so too psychoanalysis is confronted by a subject whose relation to time is not fixed – within the psyche all manner of relations between past, present and future are possible. These two approaches are brought together in Jeanette Winterson's *Gut Symmetries*, in particular through the characters of Alice (a physicist) and Stella (a poet):

⁴¹³ Williams *Critical Desire* p.127.

Time.

Newton visualised time as an arrow flying towards its target. Einstein understood time as a river, moving forward, forceful, directed, but also bowed, curved, sometimes subterranean, not ending but pouring itself into a greater sea. A river cannot flow against its current, but it can flow in circles; its eddies and whirlpools regularly break up its strong press forward. The river is maverick, there is a high chance of cross-current, a snag of time that returns us without warning to a place we thought we had sailed through long since.

Anyone to whom this happens clings faithfully to the clock; the hour will pass, we will certainly move on. Then we find the clock is neither raft nor lifebelt. The horological illusion of progress sinks. The past comes with us, like a drag-net of fishes. We tow it down river, people and things, emotions, time's inhabitants, not left on shore way back, but still swimming close by.

A kick in the current twists us round, and suddenly we are caught in the net we made, the accumulations of a lifetime just under the surface. What were those stories about townships at the bottom of a river? Lost kingdoms tantalisingly visible when the water was calm? It is well-known that mermaids flash through the dark sea to swim like salmon against the river.

The unconscious, it seems, will not let go of its hoard. The past comes with us and occasionally kidnaps the present, so that the distinctions we depend on for safety, for sanity, disappear. Past. Present. Future. When this happens we are no longer sure who we are, or perhaps we can no longer pretend to be sure who we are.

If time is a river then we shall all meet death by water. (pp.104-105)

These are but some of the aspects of time with which we are frequently confronted in psychoanalytic literary criticism. The simple fact that the unconscious is 'timeless' has quite significant ramifications for literary criticism, particularly at the level of structure in the existence of unconscious texts or memories, which do not relate to the time of the rest of the work at all. The relation between the time of the unconscious and the time of modern physics is also made explicit in

Der junge Mann. In the preface, the narrator claims that "the time of madness will soon become the time of normalcy."⁴¹⁴ What we currently regard as the time of madness, an ultra-subjective relationship of the subject to time, becomes (at least in the world of *Der junge Mann*) the standard perception of time, as the realisation slowly dawns that the perception of the course of time is relative.

Evans considers Lacan's approach to time to be one of the most innovative features of his psychoanalysis, particularly in its focus on the concepts of logical time, retroaction and anticipation.⁴¹⁵ Lacan introduces the concept of logical time in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* via a reflection on the nature of desire:

If indestructible desire escapes from time, to what register does it belong in the order of things? For what is a thing, if not that which endures, in an identical state, for a certain time? Is not this the place to distinguish in addition to duration, the substance of things, another mode of time — a logical time?⁴¹⁶

John Forrester suggests that this other mode of time may have found its place in Lacan's waiting room, where, owing to the practice of the variable length session, objective time had no meaning.⁴¹⁷ Forrester suggests that the variable length session could have been invented to counter the obsessional neuroses, and I would like to pause for a moment to consider the obsessional's relation to time in more detail — repetition-compulsion [*Wiederholungszwang*] is, after all, the

⁴¹⁴ "[D]ie Wahnzeit wird nun bald zur Normalzeit werden." (9/3) Translation modified.

⁴¹⁵ Evans p.205.

⁴¹⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.32.

⁴¹⁷ John Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p.170.

obsessional's *modus operandi*.⁴¹⁸ The obsessional holds a very interesting relation to time, or rather, to non-time because of his *ungeschehenmachen*, his desire to make things unhappen:

The obsessional thus waits because he has entered time that is non-existent, predicated on the non-happening of an event that did happen: he has entered an impossible world, and, just as any number becomes infinite when divided by zero, any time becomes empty, becomes pure duration, when it is deprived of anything that has actually happened. This time of pure duration is the time of the pure object: the object defined by nothing more than its duration.⁴¹⁹

The obsessional does not so much evade time, as enter into an impossible relation with it. Here we see the importance of a theory of the time of the subject – this time simply cannot be comprehended from the 'normal' point of view. Psychoanalysis can only effectively deal with obsessional behaviour by locating it in a relation to time which is predicated on the (im)possibility of it running backwards.

Peter Brooks's article "Freud's Masterplot" (1982) proposes a model of narrative structure and reading, which is based upon the possibility of a back and forth movement of time. In this work, he utilises the notion of repetition as the essence of narrative. Brooks begins by considering narrative through the distinction between metaphor and metonymy proposed by Jakobson and extended by Lacan. He contends that narrative must inevitably operate as a metaphor, "in its affirmation of resemblance, in that it brings into relation different actions, combines them through perceived similarities

⁴¹⁸ Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis* p.170.

⁴¹⁹ Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis* p.171.

. . . appropriates them to a common plot, which implies the rejection of merely contingent (or unassimilable) incident or action."⁴²⁰ Yet equally, narrative cannot do without metonymy "as the figure of movement, of linkage in the signifying chain, of the slippage of the signified under the signifier."⁴²¹

Brooks begins with the fundamental premise that narratives have beginnings, middles and ends, and asserts that the beginning presupposes the end: "the very possibility of meaning plotted through time depends on the *anticipated* structuring force of the ending."⁴²² Regardless of the presentation of the *sjuzet*, the reader always anticipates an ending, without which the formation of meaning through the reading of the narrative becomes impossible:

We read the incidents of narration as "promises and annunciations" of final coherence: the metaphor reached through the chain of metonymies.⁴²³

Anticipation is not only a reading process, but also a psychological one. Lacan discusses it in his work on time, where it is his counterpoint to retroaction (*Nachträglichkeit*, *après coup*, afterwardsness), and is the way in which the future alters our understanding of the present.⁴²⁴ Anticipation can be seen in the mirror stage, where the ego is constructed on the basis of an anticipated future completeness which never actually arrives.⁴²⁵ It can also be seen in language, not only at

⁴²⁰ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.280.

⁴²¹ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.281.

⁴²² Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.283. My emphasis.

⁴²³ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.283.

⁴²⁴ Evans p.207.

⁴²⁵ Evans p.207. Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego." p.15.

the level of the sentence, where the initial words anticipate the words to come, but also at the level of narrative, where the progress of the text is governed by its ending.⁴²⁶

Lacan even goes so far as to assert that retroaction, where the present alters our understanding of the past, structures all discourse, for it is only with the final words of a sentence that the other words acquire their full meaning.⁴²⁷ For the purposes of psychoanalytic literary criticism, why should we not then take this up another level? For just as the final word determines the meaning of the sentence, does not the end of the novel determine our understanding of the rest of it? That is, at the very least, the end could be said to close the possibility of the text adding further information for our interpretation. Retroaction is inescapable in the reading process, for everything that is read is later re-read in the light of fresh knowledge. It is only the end of the *sjuzet* which enables any final understanding of the *fabula*, for even if the novel begins at the end of the story, our understanding of that beginning, of the final state of affairs, must remain incomplete without a knowledge of the path that was taken to reach it.

A number of the works of the works of literature under consideration in this study (for example, *Gut Symmetries* and *Kassandra*) attempt to lay open these processes by beginning at the end, that is the end of the *fabula*. Clearly this is not by any means an exclusively psychoanalytic device, nor is it restricted to contemporary

⁴²⁶ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.303. Evans p.207.

literature. This narrative use of anticipation demonstrates that meaning is formed through the reading process, and that a knowledge of the end provokes a reading which is anticipatorily retroactive. While the process of retroaction normally works throughout the narrative by causing the reader to rethink previous events in light of current ones, by placing the end at the beginning the reader reads in a process which is already structured by the knowledge of the end, and everything is revised in order to approach that ending, with the knowledge that it must lead to this end. The similarities between this structure of reading and that of psychoanalytic interpretation are so obvious as to be almost trite: the analyst, too, is presented with a current psychological state and then attempts to discover how the analysand came to this point – what started it, what altered it, in short, what happened. This alerts us to the fact that this process of reading has a privileged relationship to psychoanalysis. By placing the end at the beginning, the path of reading assumes a greater importance than the goal, a movement which is not dissimilar to Lacan's path of the drive, where satisfaction may be obtained without reaching the goal.⁴²⁸

Brooks contends that the end, as well as the initial desire, animates meaning: "the interrelationship of the two determines, shapes, necessitates the middle... and the kind of vacillation between illumination and blindness that we find there."⁴²⁹ That is, while reading

⁴²⁷ Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* p.303. Evans p.207..

⁴²⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* pp.178-179.

⁴²⁹ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.284.

we remain blind to the possible future significance of every narrative event, yet each event may also serve to illuminate previous ones.

I would like to begin my examination of time with a novel whose structure is very difficult to discern, Botho Strauß's *Der junge Mann*. Although *Der junge Mann* was the first prose work that Strauß explicitly called a novel (and, as is commonly the case in Germany, it is designated as such on the cover), it is not immediately apparent that it is one.⁴³⁰ Strauß's work in general exhibits many postmodernist traits, such as

the abandonment of humanist confidence in the Enlightenment and the self-determining subject, which leads to a fragmentation of linear plot and of character; the rehabilitation of the irrational and the mythic; the constantly shifting range of aesthetic, philosophical and metaphysical themes, out of which the fragmented form creates a mosaic of the poetic and the discursive which consciously subverts genre boundaries... deliberately ambiguous and often misunderstood relationships between author and narrator; extensive direct, periphrastic or ironically modified quotation.⁴³¹

In *Der junge Mann* we can find many, if not all, of these traits, however the focus of this chapter will be on the two aspects most relevant to a psychoanalytic reading of the novel: the fragmentary structure and the rehabilitation of the irrational, which McGowan explicitly links to the logic of dreams.⁴³² The novel is composed of five chapters and a preface, although the chapters are not numbered, and it may appear to the reader from the table of contents that it is a collection of short

⁴³⁰ Moray McGowan, "Botho Strauß," *The Modern German Novel*. Ed. Keith Bullivant. Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987. p.245.

⁴³¹ McGowan, "Botho Strauß," pp.244-245.

⁴³² McGowan, "Botho Strauß," p.253

stories. In a sense this is true, for within each chapter there are one or more embedded narratives, which vary in tone and content as each is the product of a different implied author.

The chapters take place in a variety of realities, from ones that seem largely concurrent with our own ("The Street," "The Tower," and to a lesser extent "The Forest") to a pair of similar but different futures ("The Settlement" and "The Terrace"). The fact that there are different narrators and realities in each chapter might give us good cause to question the work's claim to the title 'novel,' lacking as it does conventional forms of binding such as characters and plot.⁴³³ The key to deciphering this fragmentary structure lies in an examination of time in the novel. By doing this, it is also hoped that the novel will in turn shed some light on the concept of time itself.

Brooks suggests that although the end "retrospectively illuminates beginning and middle," nevertheless it is not the single truth of the text.⁴³⁴ This, he believes, must include the processes through which the narrative takes place, these processes of transformation within the narrative.⁴³⁵ Thus truth is not so much there to be read, but there in the reading. This is an important point, for it emphasises that not only is the end not the exclusive truth of the work, but in the end, a singular truth is impossible. For Brooks, it is the fact of repetition itself,

⁴³³ McGowan sees the five books of *Der junge Mann* as being connected by "recurrent motifs and a narrator common to four of them." ("Botho Strauß," p.252). Joseph Federico also sees in the figure of 'Leon' a single character (Federico, "German Identity and the Politics of Postmodernity: A Reading of Botho Strauß's *Der junge Mann*," *The German Quarterly* V. 66(3), 1993. p.357.)

⁴³⁴ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," p.284.

and its affect on the reading process, which opens up the possibility of multiple interpretations:

If repetition is mastery, movement from the passive to the active; and if mastery is an assertion of control over what man must in fact submit to – choice, we might say, of an imposed end – we have already a suggestive comment on the grammar of plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends.⁴³⁵

For Brooks, repetition is not simply one literary device among many, by enabling rereading and reinterpretation, it becomes a crucial device for opening up the literary work to multiple interpretations. While the repetitions of *Der junge Mann* enable multiple interpretations, the novel itself provokes a limitation of these interpretations. For example, in the preface, Leon (the implied author of the tales in the novel) proposes his poetics, in particular the events he hopes to bring to light: "Allegories. Tales of initiation. Romantic Novel of Reflection" ["Allegorien. Initiationsgeschichten. Romantischer Reflexionsroman"] (15/7). Many articles on *Der junge Mann* take this as their starting point and while these forms correspond to those of the novel, the work should not be limited to interpretations based on these forms.⁴³⁷ As McGowan rightly suggests, the novel subverts simple allegorical

⁴³⁵ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.284.

⁴³⁶ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.286.

⁴³⁷ For example, Marieke Krajenbrink's "'Romantiker der elektronischen Revolution'? Zur Verwendung romantischer Elemente in Botho Strauß' *Der junge Mann*." *Romantik – eine lebenskräftige Krankheit: Ihre literarische Nachwirkungen in der Moderne*. Ed. Erika Turner. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991. pp.159-185; Sigrd Berka "Vorsicht Lebensgefahr! Die Spätfolgen der Romantik bei Botho Strauß." *Romantik – Eine lebenskräftige Krankheit. Ihre literarischen Nachwirkung in der Moderne*. Ed. Erika Turner. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991. pp.187-208; and Heidi M. Müller, "Transformationen romantischer Inspirationsquellen im *Jungen Mann* von Botho Strauß." *Literarische Tradition heute*:

readings, it "cites and plays with major cultural themes of its time, but never seriously addresses them, decking them instead in a clogging gauze of fictionality and myth."⁴³⁸ Psychoanalytic literary criticism should always be suspicious of a work that provides its own interpretation, in the same way that psychoanalysis would be negligent if it unquestioningly accepted analysands' statements about themselves. It could even be argued that psychoanalysis is predicated on the belief that subjects never say everything about themselves, precisely because they are unable to. Psychoanalytic literary criticism should take into account not only what the novel says about itself, but also how it says it, and to what extent this actually tallies with the form and content of the novel.

While on the one hand the first chapter is a tale of initiation, that of the young Leon into the world of the theatre, it also serves as the reader's initiation into the poetics of the novel, in particular the question of time. For example, Leon discovers that the time of rehearsal ("these imploring repetitions that are nevertheless unearthing something piece by piece; giving rise to, or maybe only regaining something that 'was there' at the very beginning") itself requires a new kind of time-consciousness, that of a "spiralling time that knows no unintertwined progress."⁴³⁹ Thus we can see that even at this point, the earliest in

Deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur in ihrem Verhältnis zur Tradition, Ed. Gerd Labrousse and Gerhard P. Knapp. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988. pp.181-199.

⁴³⁸ McGowan, "Botho Strauß," p.254.

⁴³⁹ "Diese beschwörenden Wiederholungen, die gleichwohl Stück um Stück etwas zutage befördern, entstehen lassen oder nur etwas zurückgewinnen wollen, das vielleicht ganz zu Anfang, auf den ersten Proben bereits 'da war.'" (20-21/9) Translation modified. As will be

the *fabula* of the novel, the idea of an altered time-consciousness had already germinated in Leon's mind. At this point, however, it is still a time of the subject, and has not yet gained the theoretical backing of modern physics, as it will later (later in the *fabula*) in the preface (14/7). This tale presents us with Leon's point of departure, the point at which the ideas and tales in the novel begin to coalesce. It may well be argued that it is his experiences in the theatre which lead him to write the novel, for he sees "the stage as an entrance into the Great Remembering."⁴⁴⁰ A key moment for our understanding of time within the novel occurs towards the end of the chapter when Leon, on a walk through the city, begins to perceive reality in quite a different way, seeing

the accumulated present as an opulent painting in radiant exaggerated colours, a single tremendous motion of time and nontime, repeatedly entwined and always on the brink, about to freeze into a monstrous sculpture at any moment, into a skittish monument, to come to a whirring standstill.⁴⁴¹

Certain key elements of time are displayed here in conjunction with key characteristics of the unconscious. For example, there is more than one version of time, here it is seen as a dynamic structuring force, not one that can be pinned down to by empirical measurement. There is

seen, this bears a strong resemblance to Leon's comments in the Preface, which are, presumably, written after the completion of the tales which compose the novel, on the construction of the novel.

⁴⁴⁰ "Die spiralförmige [Zeit], die keinen unumwundenen Fortschritt kennt." Translation modified.

⁴⁴⁰ "Die Bühne als Eingangspforte zur Großen Erinnerung." (32/16) Translation modified.

⁴⁴¹ "Die anfallende Gegenwart als ein ausladendes Gemälde in übertrieben leuchtenden Farben, eine einzige gewaltige Bewegung aus Zeit und Unzeit, vielfach verschlungen und stets auf der Kippe, augenblicklich zu einer ungeheuren Plastik, zu einem schreckhaften Monument zu erstarren, zu schwirrendem Stillstand zu gelangen." (60-61/39) Translation modified.

also the use of one of the prominent characteristics of the unconscious in describing time here: that of the absence of mutual contradiction. How else can we account for such nonsensical collocations as a 'skittish monument' or 'whirring standstill'?

Strauß's *Der junge Mann* seems to me an attempt to go beyond a notion of time and of narrative which is linked to the 'arrow of time' (that is, only flows forward) and indeed much of the novel concerns the move towards a new consciousness that would be able to absorb such complex narrative structures. These new structures will require new efforts on the part of the writer:

Instead of narrating in a straight-line, or striving for an all-encompassing development, he will grant diversity in its zones, instead of history he will record the multi-layered moment, the synchronous event. He will lay out, or allow to take form, scenes and honeycombs of time rather than epics and novellas. Thus he will attempt to adapt ever more attentively to the situation at hand, instead of offering restrained opposition. He will improve his means within it, recognising that only successful adaptation will provide him with the necessary sovereignty and freedom to recognise the true wealth of forms, the diversity, the playful capacity of his reality.⁴⁴²

The narrator seems to be proposing that he is some sort of literary *bricoleur*, working not with predetermined ideas or forms, but with what he finds. At the same time, he suggests that the reality of his stories is not to be contrasted with any material reality, that they, like psychical

⁴⁴² "Statt in gerader Fortsetzung zu erzählen, umschlossene Entwicklung anzustreben, wird er dem Diversen seine Zonen schaffen, statt Geschichte wird er den geschichteten Augenblick erfassen, die gleichzeitige Begebenheit. Er wird Schauplätze und Zeitwaben anlegen oder entstehen lassen anstelle von Epen und Novellen. Er wird sich also im Gegenteil der vorgegebenen Lage stärker noch anpassen, anstatt sich ihr verhalten entgegenzustellen. Er wird seine Mittel an ihr verbessern, denn nur die geglückte Anpassung verleiht ihm die nötige Souveränität und Freiheit, um den wahren

realities, are each internally valid. This absence of a stable reality across chapters is one of the main obstacles to the easy recognition of the novel as such. This relative independence will be examined a little later, as there are many points of repetition and similarity between the texts. However, this independence is one of the factors that contributes to the subversion of the form of the novel: it also makes it exceedingly difficult to propose any sort of continuity among the characters. This style of narrative also requires a new time-consciousness:

As far as the element of time is concerned, we also require an extended perception, a many-faceted awareness, to protect us from the monotonous and compulsive regimes of progress, utopia, and every other so-called future. We need different clocks for this, it is true, feedback mechanisms that free us from the stubborn, old, forward-hand-mentality. We need circuits closed between Once Was and Now, and ultimately we need a living unity of day and dream, of eagle-eyed competence and pliant sleepwalking.⁴⁴³

The normal perception of time (or time-consciousness) – the arrow of time, is opposed by the text in much the same way that Leon opposes linear narratives. The new time-consciousness he proposes represents (like modern physics) an understanding of time that is closer to that of the unconscious than the conscious. Just as we are faced with the

Gestaltenreichtum, die Mannigfaltigkeit, das spielerische Vermögen seiner Realität zu erkennen." (10-11/3-4) Translation modified.

⁴⁴³ "Was nun das Element der Zeit betrifft, so muß uns auch hier eine weitere Wahrnehmung, ein mehrfaches Bewußtsein vor den einförmigen und zwanghaften Regimen des Fortschritts, der Utopie, vor jeder sogenannten 'Zukunft' schützen. Dazu brauchen wir andere Uhren, das ist wahr, Rückkoppelungswerke, welche uns befreien von dem alten sturen Vorwärts-Zeiger-Sinn. Wir brauchen Schaltkreise, die zwischen dem Einst und Jetzt geschlossen sind, wir brauchen schließlich die lebendige Eintracht von Tag und Traum, von adlergleichem Sachverstand und gefügigem Schlafwandel." (11/4) Translation modified.

question of how unconscious data (in particular memories) may represent themselves to consciousness, *Der junge Mann* also challenges us to consider what has transpired in the attempt to render this new time-consciousness into the old.

Not only does this notion of a different, or developing, time-consciousness underwrite much of the Leon's poetics, it is also given voice in a variety of locations and contexts throughout the novel. For example, in the chapter "The Terrace," Hans-Werner suggests that man is evolving towards an alteration in the perception of time, towards a truer sense of it:

It is just this straight, single-strand time, also known as progress, which has been drummed into us, a leftover from the era of revolutions, it alone is responsible for the vertigo of an ever stronger acceleration that we experience — because we only see things moving in *one* direction. If we were able to view all these developments from just a slightly more elevated time-point, things that now seem to be taking place in impossibly swift succession would appear orderly and controlled, and, furthermore, it would be easier to distinguish between their good and bad ends.⁴⁴⁴

Hans-Werner raises several interesting questions about time and its perception. Firstly, there is the suggestion that our conception of time is inherently limited precisely because it can only take place through

⁴⁴⁴ "Denn eben diese gerade, einlinige Zeit, auch Fortschritt genannt, die uns eingetrichterte, ein Überbleibsel aus der Epoche der Revolutionen, sie ist ja allein dafür verantwortlich, daß wir den Taumel immer stärkerer Beschleunigung erleben — weil wir alles nur in *eine* Richtung sich bewegen sehen. Von einem nur wenig erhöhten Zeit-Punkt aus würden uns aus alle Entwicklungen, die sich jetzt noch zu überstürzen scheinen, als wohlgestalt und gemäßigt darstellen und sie ließen sich im übrigen auch nach ihren guten und schlechten Zielen besser unterscheiden." (203/140) Translation modified. C.f. his later comment that "those things that strike us as random events and inexplicable phenomena might well appear orderly and comprehensible to a being in the next higher realm of sense and time" ["Was uns als Zufall und unerklärliches Geschehen begegnet, das könnte einem Wesen

the perception of the subject. This absence of an objective perspective is precisely the state of affairs that humanity finds itself in when faced with the findings of relativity physics: a world in which time is relative. This new conception of time-consciousness implies the ability of a sort of fourth-dimensional perception, an extra sense (or perhaps merely an extension of existing human senses) which would be able to see not only the here and now, but also the here and then (past), or even the there and then (future).⁴⁴⁵ But this proposed time-consciousness seems to go beyond this already tricky task and suggests that it is possible to see more than one reality – that it is possible to see all alternate realities, and to pick and chose a path among them. Not so much a perception of the universe, but of the universes, possible only in a (practically) infinite hyperdimensional space capable of allowing all these 4-D universes to be seen as occupying the same space. We can already see in psychoanalysis a suggestion as to the possible nature of such a perception. It possesses two of the key characteristics of the unconscious which would make this possible: the absence of a relation to time (seen here through a higher-order relation to time); and the freedom from mutual contradiction (the ability for these universes to occupy the same time and space). Something like this takes place in *Der junge Mann*, both on the level of the *fabula* and the *sjuzet*. As we will see shortly, the character of the businesswoman

aus einem nächsthöheren Zeit- und Sinngefüge leicht überschaubar und planmäßig erscheinen." Translation modified (191/131).

⁴⁴⁵ For more on the concept of time as a fourth dimension see Paul Davies, *About Time: Einstein's Unfinished Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995: pp.72-73.

(in the chapter "The Forest") possesses a sort of ability to perceive the future, through her intra-psychic experiences within the forest. On the other hand the perception of multiple realities can perhaps be seen in the different forms that this forest takes within *Der junge Mann* as a whole, as well as the fact that the central character, Leon, appears in slightly different forms. All of these could be taken to represent possible realities, none of which stands as definitive, perhaps precisely because, from the point in time of writing, none of these can be ruled out. At the point in time of writing all of these are possible; indeed according to the principles of time proposed by the novel they have all already happened, will happen, and are happening. However I do not believe that the novel attempts to distinguish between good and bad ends, as in a sense there are no such ends to distinguish between. The stories show potential paths, which are neither judged, nor regarded as inevitable.

Hans-Werner further suggests that this cause and effect model of linear progress has long since been internalised by mankind, to the point at which it has created "a phantasm, an inner presence in us" ["ein Phantasma, ein inneres Anwesen"] (206/142). He favours the adoption of a model based more on the notions of mutations and metamorphoses (203-204/140-141). The presence of these fundamentals of conscious logic define the very limits of human thought. An understanding of time is thus vital not only for the structure of the work, but also for the way in which it interacts with its content. The first

three words of the novel are "Time time time," and thereafter it remains a constant concern (7/1). These words are presented to us in the preface, but this does not mean that time becomes a dominant theme thereafter – as this is only true at the level of the *sjuzet* – but that the dominant theme of the work is being given to us after it is written, but before we begin reading. From the very beginning, the novel works against linear (or chronological) readings.

Linearity is a concept which corresponds to our common (or as Derrida would term it, 'vulgar') conception of time.⁴⁴⁶ While our physical lives are lived linearly, the same cannot be said our psychic lives, something which can be seen most obviously in the phenomenon of afterwardsness. The novel is also an attempt to show the degree to which our world is shaped, or even hampered, by a 'vulgar' conception of time:

Mankind still has not come to terms with time in the least... So it has had to set up all kinds of makeshift clocks, the superstitious and the historical, the biographical and the ideological, and out of unfathomable time the most powerful of mankind's moods and delusions have emerged. Once it was the last days, once it was the modern era.⁴⁴⁷

Time is seen not as a universal constant, but as something with which mankind struggles to come to terms. Mankind must necessarily fail precisely because time cannot be classified simply: so much depends

⁴⁴⁶ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," p.215.

⁴⁴⁷ "Mit der Zeit kommen die Menschen immer noch am wenigsten zurecht... So mußten sie denn allerlei behelfsmäßige Uhren einrichten, die abergläubischen und die geschichtlichen, die biografischen und die ideologischen, so daß aus der unfäßlichen Zeit die mächtigsten Täuschungen und Stimmungen des Menschengeschlechts hervorgingen. Mal war es die Endzeit, mal die Neuzeit." (7/1) Translation modified.

on the subject that it becomes meaningless to attempt to consider time without mankind to measure it. The novel attempts to show us not a vulgar empirical conception of time, but rather a subjective one. It does this not only through the content of the novel, where chapters frequently take place in a time which is not that of material reality, a time which cannot be measured by clocks; but also in the form of the novel, in the uncertain time between chapters. The chapters do not follow a normal temporal succession, and because they each take place in different realities it is meaningless to speak of any temporal relation between them.

In his exploration of Freud's conception of the unconscious as timeless, Lacan suggests that it can, in fact, be characterised by a temporal pulsation, an opening and closing.⁴⁴⁸ This presents an interesting image of the time of the unconscious – an image we have already seen in the structure of *Die Klavierspielerin* and which is perhaps not all that far from the structure of *Der junge Mann*. Another aspect of time which assumes a greater significance in psychoanalysis is that of the 'time between,'

the pause for breath, the stopping and starting, hesitation and hastening, the precipitousness and dwelling upon — an entire phenomenology of time, of its vacillation and thickening, its pulsations and its quiescence, that has the utmost significance *within* the act of speaking.⁴⁴⁹

Forrester suggests that this attention to the internal spacing of speech is a point of contact with Derrida's work, "why should we not employ

the Derridean terms of spacing, of *différance*, to describe this function of the analyst's temporal intervention."⁴⁵⁰ Derrida raises a different objection to the conception of the unconscious as timeless, seeing in this concept a point at which Freud is thinking beyond the realm of concepts available to him:

The timelessness of the unconscious is no doubt determined only in opposition to a common concept of time, a traditional concept, the metaphysical concept: the time of mechanics or the time of consciousness. We ought perhaps to read Freud the way Heidegger read Kant: like the *cogito*, the unconscious is no doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar conception of time.⁴⁵¹

Perhaps the same criticism can also be made of the proposition that the unconscious is inherently illogical. It does not seem as if the unconscious is either exactly timeless, or completely illogical, but rather that it works according to concepts of time and logic which are difficult for us to grasp.

For Brooks, repetition within the text creates the plot, it illuminates a significant interconnection of events: an "event gains meaning by repeating (*with variation*) other events."⁴⁵² Repetition is fundamental to the literary experience, and not merely from a psychoanalytic perspective, in that

rhyme, alliteration, assonance, meter, refrain, all the mnemonic elements of fictions and indeed most of its tropes are in some manner

⁴⁴⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.143.

⁴⁴⁹ Forrester, *Seductions* p.173.

⁴⁵⁰ Forrester, *Seductions* p.174. Forrester sees Derrida's concept of *différance* ("the intermingling of space, of spacing, and time, of delay and deferral") as one of the main points at which Derrida's thought crosses that of psychoanalysis (p.354.).

⁴⁵¹ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.215. Similarly, Lacan responds to Freud's timelessness of the unconscious, "it is true, and it isn't," *Seminar I* p.243.

⁴⁵² Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.288. My emphasis.

repetitions which take us back in the text, which allow the ear, the eye, the mind to make connections between different textual moments, to see past and present as related and as establishing a future which will be noticeable as some variation in the pattern.⁴⁵³

Brooks sees repetition not so much as a technique of narrative, but as the very foundation of it. This is very true of Strauß's *Der junge Mann* and McGowan places repetition within the context of Strauß's works as a whole and suggests that "the need for meaningful connections remains; otherwise the subject, freed from the strait-jacket of linear logic, may disintegrate altogether."⁴⁵⁴ These meaningful connections take place through the repetition (with variation) of characters and situations. For example, in the first chapter we are introduced to Leon's efforts to stage Genet's *The Maids*. He sees this as taking place in "a cave in time," in the not too distant future "following the breakdown of all human communication. Humans have withdrawn back into their ceremonies, hidden away, encapsulated."⁴⁵⁵ This notion of a 'cave in time' can be used to describe the temporal structure of the chapters. While there is no doubt that there is time within these chapters, but much like the unconscious texts in *Die Klavierspielerin*, they have no relation to time outside of themselves. There are also a number of similarities between this fictional reality, and those portrayed in "The Settlement," "The Terrace," and to a lesser extent "The Forest." The motif of the apocalypse is most strongly felt in the realities of "The

⁴⁵³ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." pp.287-288.

⁴⁵⁴ McGowan, "Botho Strauß." p.248.

Settlement" and "The Terrace," where a combination of economic breakdown and environmental damage leads to the collapse of society (113-114/75). Rituals, particularly processions, also feature prominently in all three chapters, both as an adjunct to, and in some cases a substitute for, communication.

In the second chapter, "The Forest," we see the evolution of a new form of time-consciousness is portrayed through the processes of memory, which will be considered in greater detail shortly. In the businesswoman's meeting with Gründe, he outlines his plans for a resort to be built in a forest which both the businesswoman and the reader recognise as the place she has just visited in her mnemonic search for his name. Here, her memories can only really be described as memories of things to come; already *Der junge Mann* has confronted (and confounded) one of the most fundamental assumptions of time: that we all exist in the same time. In this chapter it has also already become problematic to speak of reality with any certainty, since the lines between psychic and material reality have begun to blur, a blurring which is perhaps symptomatic of this new form of thought.

Later we encounter a slightly different version of Gründe's resort in "The Settlement," where the inhabitants (the Syk) have developed a new sense of time, as well as language. The minor details of Leon's

⁴⁵⁵ "Eine Höhle in der Zeit." "Nach dem Zusammenbruch aller menschlichen Kommunikation. Die Menschen haben sich in ihre Zeremonien zurückgezogen, verkrochen, verkapselt." (32/17) Translation modified.

production of *The Maids* resonate throughout the novel, firstly in the businesswoman's future memories, then in Gründe's plans, which are realised in "The Settlement," and also in a different form in "The Terrace," where it is not explicitly named as Gründe's resort, but nevertheless the park through which Leon runs contains a number of echoes of the forest, such as a tower of voices, a gate to this area, and a path of terrifying illusions (306/215). On account of this, it may appear that these consecutive repetitions and elaborations are formed linearly through the reading of the novel, but there is one other important event which perhaps makes the origin of the middle three chapters clear. In the final chapter of the novel, "The Tower," Leon goes to meet his mentor from "The Street" (Alfred Weigert, also known as Ossia) at a hotel. The description of this building is such that it immediately brings to mind the centrepiece of Gründe's resort, the tower (339/237).

The presence of these competing realities, these possibilities of future development of society, are not simply random, or completely unrelated. I would suggest that just as Leon is the first-person narrator of the first and last chapters, he is also the third-person narrator of the middle chapters, that is, in these chapters he is the implied author. In this instance the end of the novel is also its origin, showing us the spark which brings the narratives of *Der junge Mann* into being: "plot starts (gives the illusion of starting) from that moment at which the story. . . is stimulated from quiescence into a state of narratability, into

a tension, a kind of irritation, which demands narration."⁴⁵⁶ In the final chapter there are numerous hints that the novel may result from Leon's work on a series of sketches that Ossia had sent him (374/264). To cite just one example, Ossia refers to "the story with the erotic house of horrors," a description which more than adequately suits the embedded story "My Brother's Wife".⁴⁵⁷ Thus the reader's re-construction of the novel as a novel is only achieved retrospectively [*nachträglich*].

Yet for Brooks, repetition is inherently ambiguous, and it is this ambiguity which causes a suspension of time, or rather subjects it to "an indeterminate shuttling or oscillation which binds different moments together as a middle which might turn forward or back."⁴⁵⁸ That is, repetition traps the reader between the reading processes of retroaction and anticipation, for the reader cannot know whether an event is to gain significance through a future event, or a past one. This is particularly the case in *Der junge Mann*, its complicated temporal structure, makes it difficult to place the stories within the concepts 'past' and 'future' at all. In a sense, every narrative event is a primary repetition, somewhat in the sense of Derrida's conception of the conscious transcriptions of memories as originary reprints.⁴⁵⁹ Linearity is imposed upon the *Der junge Mann* by the constraints of both the conventions of narrative and the limits of consciousness, with the result

⁴⁵⁶ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.291.

⁴⁵⁷ "[D]ie Geschichte mit der erotischen Geisterbahn." (382/269) Translation modified.

⁴⁵⁸ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.288.

⁴⁵⁹ Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." p.211.

that it is only the final chapter which lends coherence to the structure of the novel.

Brooks's approach to repetition is based on Freud's work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where it is seen as a mastery, and, in the case of the *Fort-Da* game, a movement from the passive to the active:

[I]f mastery is an assertion of control over what man must in fact submit to—choice, we might say, of an imposed end—we already have a suggestive comment on the grammar of plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends.⁴⁶⁰

But this is nothing more than the illusion of mastery, for the choice is nothing more than how to die; not dying is not an option. Similarly, in reading we have not so much a choice of ends, but rather a choice of how we choose to approach them, a choice which can be made retrospectively. By this, Brooks does not mean so much a choice of possible endings for the text, but a choice of interpretations, a choice of meanings.

Brooks attempts to align his model of reading with Freud's economic model of the psyche, where memories, affects, and so on are analysed in terms of the psychic energy (libido etc.) invested in them.⁴⁶¹ Brooks sees the text as being composed of energy (in much the same way that Freud uses the term), which is made available to the reader; the more effectively the energy is made available, the greater the effect the text will have on the reader:

Repetition in all its literary manifestations may in fact work as a "binding," a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form within the energetic economy of the narrative. Serviceable form must in this case mean perceptible form: repetition, repeat, recall, symmetry, all these journeys back in the text, returns to and returns of, that allow us to bind one textual moment to another in terms of similarity or substitution rather than mere contiguity.⁴⁶²

Repetition serves to create a depth of plot beyond and beneath simple linear narration. This binding of textual energies, which is similar to that of the pleasure principle, also enables the possibility of postponement.⁴⁶³ Indeed, postponement may even be considered an inevitable structural characteristic of narrative. In this model, the pleasure principle of reading is fulfilled by the end of the work. It is the function of repetition, as well as other structural devices (such as that of the sub-plot), to ensure that the energy is not discharged until the end.

Towards the end of his essay, Brooks begins to speak of repetition as subversive, speaking of a return which would undermine the ideas 'beginning' and 'end,' by intimating that beginnings presuppose endings, and that endings have always taken place before beginnings.⁴⁶⁴ In a sense, Brooks is subverting the idea of beginnings and endings altogether – repetitions within the text suspend the choice between beginnings and endings. Brooks highlights the ambiguity in

⁴⁶⁰ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.286.

⁴⁶¹ See for example, Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." *PFL* p.306; *GW* pp.35-36.

⁴⁶² Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." pp.289-290.

⁴⁶³ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.289.

⁴⁶⁴ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.297.

repetition, for while it is a doubling back in the text, it is not possible to say whether it is a return to something, or a return of something: "for instance, a return to origins or a return of the repressed."⁴⁶⁵ Indeed, we should be suspicious of this imposed choice, for the origin may in fact be in the repressed. If repetition is also the return of the repressed, then might there not also be an instance where repetition is symptomatic of a repressed of the text, an unsaid, perhaps unsayable, moment in the text? The problem for literary criticism is that if there is such a repressed moment in the text, we would not be able to see it directly, we would only be exposed to it asymptotically, as will be seen in *Human Croquet*.

The indeterminate oscillation of repetition between past and future also subverts normal (linear) time. It disrupts it by aligning itself with the conception of time where all events have already happened, "they are only waiting for us to happen to them" ["Sie warten nur darauf, daß wir ihnen zustoßen"] (14/6). All the stories of *Der junge Mann* have already occurred in the sense of already being possible, they are just waiting to be written in much the same way that the future exists already, it is just waiting for us to experience it.

In his preface to *Der junge Mann*, Leon suggests that the universe is striving back towards an eon where there was only "Same Time," ["Gleiche Zeit"] where "every look took its own word, and

⁴⁶⁵ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.288. On repetition as the return of the repressed in Freud, see "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" PFL p.288, GW p.16; and his lecture on "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," in his *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*.

everything found its own poet" ["Jeder Blick nahm sich ein Wort, jedes Ding fand seinen Dichter"] (14/6). It is this notion of not only time, but also stories, which can be seen in *Der junge Mann*. An understanding of all time as 'already there' gives us some insight into the nature of the time of Same Time which appears at many points in the text. There may also be a relation between Same Time and the timelessness of the unconscious, as has already been suggested in *Gut Symmetries*.

Leon also charges modern physics with having

removed the last bit of statics and symmetry from our dream of the world. Now we can only think of Becoming. From Alpha to Omega, through life and the inanimate, the world is bound to the irreversibility of all events, to non-equilibrium, and to the dynamic of disorder and extravagant structure.⁴⁶⁶

A little later, he will liken the process of his writing to that of time (the time proposed by modern physics), in which he will discover "those still and dormant events that must wait such a long time for someone to come across *them* and bring them to life."⁴⁶⁷ That is, the stories already exist (presumably somewhere within his psyche), and he is merely writing them down. As has already been suggested, the very fact of writing them down is a translation which alters them, in this case perhaps by bringing them into contact with the linear restrictions of the

GW. V.XV. 1940. p. 114. Translated as *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Trans. James Strachey. PFL. Ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards. V.2. 1973. p.140.

⁴⁶⁶ "[E]ntzog unserem Traum von der Welt den letzten Gehalt an Statik und Symmetrie. Nun können wir nur noch Werden denken. Diese Welt ist also von A bis Omega, durch Leben und durch Unbelebtes an die Unumkehrbarkeit allen Geschehens gefesselt, an das Nicht-Gleichgewicht, und die Dynamik von Unordnung und verschwenderischer Struktur." (14/6) Translation modified.

⁴⁶⁷ "[J]enen lautlosen und ruhenden Ereignissen zurückzufinden, die lange darauf warten müssen, ~~und~~ jemand zu *ihnen* stößt und sie zum Leben erweckt." (15/7) Translation modified.

narrative form. The narrator rails against the strict linear conception of time, and even suggests that poetry may be a good defence against it:

[H]e will continue to be in charge of lost and recurring time, and will not even consider throwing out this precious crystal of standstill. He will continue to defy the time-arrow to the very last, raising the shield of poetry against it even if it proves to be a lost cause.⁴⁵⁸

This raises the question of just what is meant by "lost and recurring time?" Could not this phrase be just as well used to describe repression: something which is both lost and recurs? That which has been repressed could well be regarded as lost, yet at the same time it is never really lost and it continually tries to make its way back into consciousness. Yet for the narrator the concept of lost and recurring time is broader than this. The lost time with which he tries to get in touch with is not only the time of the past, but also the time of a lost era, before the measurement of time, when mankind's relation to time was governed much more by subjective experience. Although it seems lost, it continually recurs in the unconscious, not only in repression, but also through the subjective experience of time's passing in dreams.

Just as for Freud the aim of all life is death, a death toward which the proper path must be taken, Brooks suggests that the death instinct also drives the narrative towards its end:

Beyond and under the domination of the pleasure principle is this baseline of plot, its basic "pulsation," sensible or audible through the repetitions which take us back in the text. Repetition can take us both

⁴⁵⁸ "[Er] wird weiterhin schalten und walten mit verlorener und wiederkehrender Zeit und auch die kostbaren Kristalle des Stillstands nicht in die Asche werfen. Er wird, wenn auch auf verlorenem Posten, bis zuletzt dem Zeit-Pfeil trotzen und den Schild der Poesie gegen ihn erheben." (15/7)

backwards and forwards because these terms have become reversible: the end is a time before the beginning.⁴⁶⁹

The plot is that which ensures that the correct path towards death is taken. While the narrative must follow the proper path in order to illuminate the end, the improper end lurks in narrative, often in the form of an incorrect choice.⁴⁷⁰ Brooks suggests that the sub-plot provides a defence against the wrong choice, by illustrating the potential pitfall of the short-circuit (frequently represented as the temptation to the mistaken erotic object choice) and ensuring that the narrative will continue towards its proper end.⁴⁷¹ We have already seen this short-circuit manifested in the form of fraternal-sororal incest in *Out of the Line of Fire*, where it is a sub-plot *par excellence*, as it is nothing more than Wolfi's fantasy. In *Der junge Mann*, this inappropriate erotic object choice appears in "The Settlement," in the form of this chapter's Leon figure's brother's wife. This unwieldy expression is unavoidable, for this Leon is not quite identical with the Leon figure from the preface, and the Syk, entirely in line with the asymmetrical logic of the unconscious, distinguish his brother's wife from his sister-in-law (156/106). After his erotic adventures with her, he awakes to find her horribly transfigured, and slays her for both their salvation. Yet it is difficult to consider this a sub-plot, for it is hardly anymore subordinate to the plot of *Der junge Mann* than any of the other stories in the novel.

⁴⁶⁹ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.291.

⁴⁷⁰ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.292.

⁴⁷¹ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.292 & pp.296-297.

In Kate Atkinson's *Human Croquet*, we again find the example of fraternal-sororal incest, a desire whose fulfilment would be so perfect, it would be indistinguishable from death.⁴⁷² Isobel attempts to seduce Malcolm Lovat, a boy who is in fact her half-brother (although neither of them know this). Every time she does so, three times in all, Malcolm is killed in a car crash (pp.248, 264, 278). Needless to say all three of these attempts take place within the intra-psychic narratives, where this relation to time (for Isobel remembers each death) is possible. In an epilogue to her story, (a section designated the 'Future,' for it concerns events that happen to the principal characters after the end of the main events of the novel), Isobel tells of sleeping with Malcolm, still unaware that he is her half-brother:

In bed, in his staggeringly untidy garden flat in Chelsea, his limbs were marble, his flesh was ice. Sex with Malcolm Lovat was like the dance of death. 'I always wanted you,' he whispered, 'I just never knew how to tell you.' Of course, it was too late then. 'We're so alike,' he sighed. But I don't think we were, not really.

He died six months later in circumstances so squalid that the inquest became a *cause célèbre*. (p.339)

Thus, even outside the restrictions imposed by the superego on the intra-psychic narratives, it would still seem as if this rule holds good. Not only does Isobel not know that Malcolm is her brother during her earlier attempts, but neither does the reader. Her actual success in attaining the object of her desire cannot really be regarded as a short-circuit. If anything it appears to the reader as nothing so much as the

⁴⁷² Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.297.

attempt to bring her endeavours during the inter-psychic narrative to a conclusion.

To conclude this analysis of Brooks's model of reading, I would like to cite his brief, but excellent, summary. He sees his model as one which

structures ends (death, quiescence, non-narratability) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the desire of the narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as *détour*, as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, as arabesque in the dilatory space of the text.⁴⁷³

Effectively he attempts to model the structure of the text on the life, or more accurately the psychic life, of the subject. Brooks contends that this type of psychoanalytic literary criticism avoids the pitfalls of previous criticism (which searches in the text for the unconscious of the author, reader, or character) by examining the functioning of the work.⁴⁷⁴ If one criticism could be made, it is that it is not radical enough. While he sees repetition as the essence of narrative, in his efforts to utilise this in the service of binding textual energies, he seems to minimize the notion of repetition as the return of the repressed. This may relate to his laudable endeavours to keep psychoanalytic literary criticism on the level of structure, but although the concept of a 'repressed' of a narrative text is problematic, nevertheless it is a useful one, as we have seen in *Die Klavierspielerin* and *Human Croquet*.

⁴⁷³ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.295.

⁴⁷⁴ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." pp.299-300.

Winterson's *Gut Symmetries* also plays with the conventions of narrative, presenting a structure which, although it is more straightforward than that of *Der junge Mann*, is nevertheless highly 'disordered' at the level of the *sjuzet*. This can be seen as a product of the novel having three narrators, each of whom possesses a different attitude towards time, of which Alice's tends most towards an understanding of time as unity, but not a unity which offers comfort:

Stabs of time torment me. What use is it to go back over those high rocks that resist erosion? My life seems to be made up of dark matter that pushes out of easy unconsciousness so that I stop and stumble, unable to pass smoothly as other people do. I should like to ramble over the past as though it were a favourite walk. Walk with me, memory to memory, the shared path, the mutual view.

Walk with me. The past lies in wait. It is not behind. It seems to be in front. How else could it trip me as I start to run?

Past. Present. Future. The rational divisions of the rational life. And always underneath, in dreams, in recollections, in the moment of hesitation on a busy street, the hunch that life is not rational, not divided. That the mirrored compartments could break. (pp.19-20)

The past torments her, even in her efforts to tell her story, she cannot pass through her memory without the danger of repression (dark matter) giving rise to parapraxes (tripping her up). She is aware of process of the unconscious not only in their common manifestations (dreams and memories) but also in everyday life (a moment's hesitation on a busy street). Stella on the other hand recognises that the principles of retroaction and anticipation mean that the past is not fixed in memory:

I can't go back into the past and change it, but I have noticed that the future changes the past. What I call the past is my memory of it and my memory is conditioned by who I am now. Who I will be. (p.45)

The processes by which memory operates, including their complex relation to time, will now be considered in more detail.

III. Memory

As early as 1896, Freud proposed a model of memory which was not static, where memory traces were "subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances — to a *retranscription*," memories are not, therefore, singly, but multiply present.⁴⁷⁵ Afterwardsness must not be considered simply as one mnemonic process among many, but perhaps as the essence of memory. It should be noted that here, and with afterwardsness generally, it is always an unconscious rereading, a reinterpretation of an earlier scene which has existed in the fully repressed unconscious, and thus in a temporal vacuum.⁴⁷⁶

This is one of the difficulties of psychoanalysis, that the object under scrutiny is constructed in two stages — the event and the psychic revision of its significance.⁴⁷⁷ Any analysis which deals with recollections must therefore consider that their reproduction always

⁴⁷⁵ Masson p.207.

⁴⁷⁶ cf. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis." *PFL* p.277; *GW* p.71.

⁴⁷⁷ Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* p.88.

involves an alteration.⁴⁷⁸ That is, even the process of recalling a memory alters it, we cannot ever really consider ourselves to be dealing with a memory in its pure state. The issues raised by this alteration are similar to those that we have already considered in "The Unconscious" in the question of the double transcription. Even when we are only concerned with preconscious memory traces – those that are fully transparent to consciousness – nonetheless there must invariably be something in the nature of those memories that escapes language, precisely because they are not constructed in language.

Lacan stresses that remembering always involves a limit, a limit which can be seen as the real.⁴⁷⁹ No remembering can be complete as the subject must invariably encounter resistance as s/he approaches repressed unconscious memories. This resistance is manifested as repetition and the greater the resistance to remembering, the more repetition comes to replace remembering.⁴⁸⁰ This can be seen towards the end of the intra-psychic narratives of *Human Croquet*. Gradually the Past begins to catch up with the present, eventually a point is reached where the memory of Eliza's very nearly breaks through into the Present, in Isobel's father's admission: "I killed your mother," which is immediately followed by a section in the Past which explains why he believes this to be true (p.214). When the present returns, her Father corrects himself: "What I mean is I killed her spirit." This (barely)

⁴⁷⁸ cf. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis." *PFL* p.235; *GW* pp.30-3.

⁴⁷⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI* pp.40 & 49.

⁴⁸⁰ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through." *SE* pp.150-151; *GW* p.132.

repressed knowledge then disrupts what follows. Although we have already seen the strange phenomenon of time-travel within the intrapsychic narrative, now we are treated to a nightmarish repetition (with variation) of the Present. Isobel's attempts to seduce her half-brother Malcolm Lovat are repeated three times, each time ending in death. It is because these repetitions carry meaning that Freud suggests that they, like dreams, are a type of remembering.⁴⁸¹

Another important aspect is that unconscious memories are never altered, because "the processes of the system *Ucs.* are *timeless*, i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all," all reference to time is bound up with the system *Cs* [Consciousness].⁴⁸² It is only when unconscious phenomena are manifested in consciousness, that they can be considered to encounter time at all. This is another point where we encounter the problem of the double transcription in literary criticism. What happens when something which is not subject to the 'normal' rules of time and logic enters a realm where they are unescapable? What is altered, what is kept, what is lost? In discussing Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Daniel Ferrer notes that

each segment of the narrative corresponds to two distinct events in the story, for the narrating of each perception refers both to the psychic event (the perception itself) and to an external event (what is perceived). In the same way the narrating of each memory refers to a

⁴⁸¹ Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through." *SE* pp.150-151; *GW* p.132.

"From the History of an Infantile Neurosis." *PFL* p.285; *GW* p.80.

⁴⁸² Freud, "The Unconscious." *PFL* p.191; *GW* p.286.

psychic event (remembering) and to an external event that took place in the time of the story.⁴⁸³

In other words, the narration of a memory always refers to both a material and a psychological reality. In a first person narrative, the reliability of the narrator's memories is no more certain than that of anyone else. The fiction of literature is that narrators remember things exactly as they happened. Ferrer also suggests that

[a] dream or fantasy is always a psychic event and opens up a story within the story, endowed in its turn with its own logic. The narrative of this dream will thus refer both to the psychic event of the dream within the main story and to the events of the interpolated story.⁴⁸⁴

But these 'events' are by no means the events as they actually happened. Indeed, Ferrer seems almost to be suggesting that as psychic events, memories do not necessarily conform to the logic of consciousness. This should not come as any great surprise, because although preconscious memories are not dynamically unconscious, they are nevertheless subject to unconscious alteration – particularly that of affect: there are happy memories, sad memories, and so on. Memories cannot be considered impartial representations any more than dreams or fantasies can. We will see this in more detail shortly in our consideration of Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*.

Memory features prominently at two points in *Der junge Mann*: in the embedded story "The Woman on the Ferry," which has already been

⁴⁸³ Daniel Ferrer, "To the Lighthouse." *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*. Ed. Maud Ellman. London: Longman, 1994. p.162.

⁴⁸⁴ Ferrer p.162.

discussed in view of its relevance to desire; and in the chapter "The Forest". The latter begins with an unnamed businesswoman driving to an appointment and suddenly forgetting where and with whom it is. Freud stresses that forgetting is not a parapraxis like any other, since it is the only one which can be considered purely psychical.⁴⁸⁵ The businesswoman's forgetting creates a vacuum into which other memories rush:

The absence itself opened up like a gate, soon resembling a majestic portal, through which streamed — with the exception of the one thing she needed — a myriad of colourful and distant memories, curiously distracting the driver. Only very few of these memories did she recognise as her own; most of them did not even seem to have emanated from her and her life up to now, but much more to be flowing over her from other people's destinies. Just as if her useless mind, now on top of everything, was now working as a thief of data and thoughts, and was tapping, through whatever higher mode of contact, into the lives of earlier and more distant people.⁴⁸⁶

This is not a collective memory, but rather the suggestion of a sort of telepathy; her unconscious attempting to rob (or at the very least observe) others'. The novel suggests that the boundaries between psyches might not be as strong as is frequently contended. This is something we will also see later in the novel in the story of "The Woman on the Ferry," where the notion of the personification of the

⁴⁸⁵ Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, PFL p.87; GW p.54.

⁴⁸⁶ "Das Fehlende selbst öffnete sich wie eine Pforte, bald schon wie ein erhabenes Tor, durch das — mit Ausnahme der einzig benötigten — eine Vielzahl bunter und ferner Erinnerungen hereinströmen und die Fahrerin merkwürdig zerstreuten. Dabei erkannte sie nur die wenigsten dieser Erinnerungen als ihre eigenen, die meisten hingegen scheinen gar nicht aus ihr selbst, aus ihrem bisherigen Leben hervorzugehen, sondern vielmehr aus den Schicksalen anderer Leute auf sie überzufliessen. Gerade so, als betätigte sich ihr undienlicher Geist nun obendrein als Dieb von Daten und Gedanken und zapfte, durch welche höhergeartete Berührung auch immer, die Lebenssphären fremder und früherer Menschen an." (67-68/43) Translation modified.

psyche, or the representation of psychic elements by avatars, is taken to an extreme point where they assume a life of their own and assert their independence from the psyche which spawned them. Alphonso Lingis sees the presence of multiple personalities within the psyche as one of the fundamental principles of psychoanalysis: "a division of one's psychic forces, each system dealing with its own preoccupations, non-communicating with the others," which is not necessarily psychotic, and indeed "may work quite well."⁴⁸⁷ This can also be seen within this chapter, when these avatars appear to follow the businesswoman out of her memory.

Before turning to these memories, I would like to consider the possibility of telepathy, which has a certain significance within psychoanalysis, and indeed psychoanalysis provides certain explanations for what might otherwise be considered paranormal phenomena. As early as *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud, although sceptical, refused to dismiss such ideas, preferring to hope that his discovery of the unconscious would explain some portion of them. Nevertheless,

[i]f the existence of still other phenomena — those, for example, claimed by spiritualists — were to be established, we should merely set about modifying our 'laws' in the way demanded by the new discovery, without being shaken in our belief in the coherence of things in the world.⁴⁸⁸

Telepathy can be seen not only in Freud's works, but also many years later in those of Jean Laplanche. I am not suggesting that either of

⁴⁸⁷ Lingis p.147.

them believe in the existence of the paranormal, but rather that they both provide explanations for phenomena which might otherwise be called telepathy, and do so within the framework of systematic theories of mental life. Freud cites an example from Reik where a young woman forgets the title of *Ben Hur* (on account of certain unpleasant homophonic associations with this phrase in German), and this amnesia is 'caught' by her male companions.⁴⁸⁹ In this case, the unconscious of the young men understood the significance of this forgetting on the part of the young woman, and chose to respond in kind.⁴⁹⁰ This form of unconscious communication finds itself at the heart of Laplanche's theory of development in the form of the enigmatic signifier. For Laplanche, the signifier always has two meanings, it has "an adaptive meaning and it has an implicit meaning which is impregnated by something sexual."⁴⁹¹ He takes the premise of manifest form and latent meaning and applies it to all human communication. In this way, every inter-subjective communication says more than either the sender or the receiver realises and as we have seen, this excess is that of desire. We also find unconscious communication in *Der junge Mann* in the Syk community's form of 'pure' communication, which can only be achieved amidst absolute serenity, by a 'Master':

⁴⁸⁸ Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, PFL p.324; GW p.290.

⁴⁸⁹ "Ben Hur" is very close to the German "bin Hure" [I'm a whore]. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, PFL pp.81-82; GW pp.49-50.

⁴⁹⁰ Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, PFL p.82; GW p.50.

⁴⁹¹ Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.22.

Only in that state would he be able to communicate purely; from one unconscious to another. And the resulting understanding would be the only one possible, all ambiguity, conditions and hidden meanings having been excluded from the outset.⁴⁹²

This pure communication of the unconscious is pure by virtue of lacking the interference of language. This might well be the form of communication which would correspond to the emergence of the new time-consciousness, as it would be free of the restraints of linearity and logic.

The business woman attempts to find her way to her forgotten destination by a sort of free-associative navigation. She picks up a hitchhiker, whom she recognises as a famous artist ("this master creator of making unhappen"), but whose name she is entirely unable to recall.⁴⁹³ Needless to say, we cannot help but feel that some significance lies in this forgetting as well, although the precise nature of this significance is unclear. He advises her to "follow the arrow" ["Fahren Sie nur immer in Pfeilrichtung"] to her destination and with these words she begins to see all the objects around her as signs pointing her in the right direction (69/44). She allows her unconscious to interpret the signs, and hopes to reach her destination by this method.⁴⁹⁴ The businesswoman's free-associative navigation is in fact

⁴⁹² "Dann erst unterhielt er sich pur: von Unbewußt zu Unbewußt. Und es erfolgte nur noch das eine, das einzig richtig Verstehen, bei dem alles Doppeldeutig, Vorbehaltliche und Hintersinnige von vorneherein ausgeschlossen blieb." (100/147) Translation modified.

⁴⁹³ "[D]iesen Meister des Ungeschehen-Machens." (68/44) Translation modified. Note that *ungeschehenmachen* is precisely the undertaking of the obsessional, as discussed by Forrester above. The identity of this artist remains unclear, but it could be Leon, Ossia, or perhaps even Strauß.

⁴⁹⁴ In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud asserts that the unconscious is adept at solving problems (in dreams) which the conscious cannot. *PFL* pp.131-132; *GW* p.68.

a navigation of the psyche, of memory; but undertaken through the same methods Freud uses to approach the unconscious.

She arrives at the forest and sees the past, existing simultaneously as both past and present (71/46). This is another manifestation of the perception of time through this new time-consciousness. She perceives the past in the present tense (that is, as it happens), but nonetheless recognises that it is also anterior to her position in time. She then approaches a gate, which we later discover is the border of the Syk community, a tribe whose very name suggests a link with what she will find beyond in the realm of Same Time – the psyche. Beyond this barrier she feels there is the potential threat of a collapse of the ego:

The cohesion of her person could no longer be guaranteed, and her legs, her eyes, and her heart might well head off in their separate ways; that even her precious and robust powers of reason might scatter like a flock of frightened chickens.⁴⁹⁵

At this point, a Freudian reading might be tempted to read this beyond as the id. This border could thus be read as the border of the unconscious; the gate as the barrier of censorship. Lacanians on the other hand would probably be provoked into reading this as the real, noting the similarity between her description of a fragmented body, and the phenomenon of the *corps morcéle*, although one must note that this phenomenon is only ever experienced retrospectively. The

⁴⁹⁵ "Daß dort womöglich der Zusammenhalt ihrer Person nicht länger gewährleistet bliebe und ihre Beine, ihre Augen und ihr Herz getrennte Wege einschlagen könnten, ja daß ihre kostbare und erfolgreiche Vernunft wie ein Haufen aufgeschuchter Hühner auseinanderstieben würde." (73/47) Translation modified. Note the key nature of these

questions that must be asked of both these interpretations are: where is she now, and where does she stand in relation to the other side? For the former interpretation she must be looking from the ego, while the Lacanian reading would see her as standing in the imaginary.

Once she crosses this barrier, she finds that the space there no longer looks anything like it did on the other side, that is, this realm cannot be adequately or truthfully perceived through any translation into the world of perceptual-consciousness (76/49). Here, we again come across the problem of representing to consciousness events which do not conform to the logic of consciousness. From within, this space conforms to its own logic and its own physics, and it 'makes sense' to its subjects. The link between the time of the unconscious and Same Time can be seen in the fact that because the unconscious has no relation to time, all events within the unconscious occur on the same temporal plane.

A little further into the forest, the businesswoman realises that she is standing next to a tower, nearly sixty meters high and entirely without windows, which "all this time had only been waiting for her gaze" ["[d]ie ganze Weile nur auf ihren Anblick gewartet hatte"] (77/50). Here we have another link, this time in Same Time, between the narrative, modern physics and Leon's earlier conception of the novel – the discovery, merely by attention (by turning the gaze), of that which has always been there. This tower contains "just about everything that has

organs as those which correspond to mobility, vision, reason, and, at least traditionally,

ever been given a name in our country and in our language," all of which exist in voices and are available for purchase.⁴⁹⁶ She wishes to climb this tower to look out over the expanse of Same Time, presumably to try and find her way out – to find the forgotten name. In accordance with the Lacanian reading suggested earlier, this tower can be seen as the Other – the locus of language within the unconscious; and it is clear to the businesswoman that if there is a means of finding her way out, then it must be through a linguistic connection.

After browsing through the enormous variety of voices and dialects available, she is accused by the store-detective of having appropriated another voice, of shoplifting. After a brief interrogation she is taken to meet the proprietor (known as 'the German' ['der Deutscher'] for short), who is a giant carp with the face of a man. He invites her to dinner at 'Jerry's Air Bubble,' and in order to get there she has to strip to pass through an oxygen shaft. Yet when she sits down opposite the German, he praises her clothes, leading her to wonder if "at present he doesn't see me at all," implying that the German does not have a traditional relation to space-time either.⁴⁹⁷ This emphasis on 'at present' seems odd, for surely in the realm of Same Time the present is all there is; or does she mean to imply that he does not fully exist in the realm of Same Time? If the German is the personification

emotion.

⁴⁹⁶ "Hier ist so ziemlich alles zu finden, was in unserem Land und in unserer Sprache je nur beim Namen genannt worden ist." (77/50)

of the Other, then this would make sense, as language does not exist within any single subject, but, as the Other, within all subjects.

Shortly before she leaves the German, she reflects that she has the feeling of always being on time (93/62). This raises an interesting question: for how can the concept "on time" have any meaning whatsoever in a realm where all time is equal? This simple statement serves to emphasise the reason [*Grund*] why she finds herself in the world of Same Time at all, she is only there because of a missed encounter. For Lacan, psychoanalysis is founded on a missed encounter – on *tuché* – a point of contact with the real which is never met.⁴⁹⁸ In this way, *tuché* can be seen as similar to primal repression, in that it is the inevitable failure to make contact with the real that engenders the unconscious. In "The Forest," the missed encounter leads the businesswoman towards the real, but she only approaches it asymptotically, as we will see shortly.

When she returns to the forest, she finds that she has is unable to recall the face of the German:

what came to mind was extremely vague. The brows an eel, the nose a giant, the eyes two fiery heads of lettuce: the true hermaphroditic image had been expunged from her memory and was entirely transformed into nothing more than an artificial emblem.⁴⁹⁹

The image she is able to remember strikes one as a bizarre construction, not unlike a surrealist painting, it is more like a dream

⁴⁹⁷ "Daß er mich *gegenwärtig* gar nicht sieht." (89/59) Emphasis in the original. Translation modified.

⁴⁹⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI* p.55.

image – an unconscious construction – than a preconscious memory. Once she returns to the surface of the realm of Same Time, her fantastic experiences continue. She has sex with a lifeguard and is instantly aware that she has fallen pregnant:

What wouldn't she have to suffer here in this forest? Here, where the laws of time changed course as arbitrarily as the pathways, which themselves were no more than signposts, the growth and development of the fruit in her womb might also proceed in entirely disproportionate ways. It was therefore her one and only wish to find her way out of this wilderness of Same Time as quickly as she possibly could, and to reach a place where she could count on more natural processes.⁵⁰⁰

Here she is caught between conflicting realities. Until now she has accepted this reality as it occurred, in much the same way that the subject never questions the inherent logic of the dream; now, already deep within it, she wants to find her way out. We should note here that in the realm of Same Time there is not a single experience of time. The subjective experience of Same Time is not the same for all people, or in all circumstances. The course of time ebbs and flows for the subject, not simply in the subjective experience of time, but the subject's subjective experience actually alters the course of time.

While trying to find her way out back into 'normal' time, she encounters a bush with strange regenerative powers which seems to

⁴⁹⁹ "Da gelang es ihr dies nur höchst ungenau. Die Braue ein Aal, die Nase ein Hüne, die Augen zwei feurige Salatköpfe: sein wahres Zwitterbildnis war in ihr ausgelöscht und restlos in ein künstliches Emblem übergegangen." (93/62) Translation modified.

⁵⁰⁰ "Was mußte sie in diesem Wald nicht alles gewärtigen? Hier wo die Gesetze der Zeit so willkürlich wechselten wie die Wege ziellos und selbst bloß Wegweiser waren, könnte wohl auch das Wachsen und Werden einer Leibesfrucht auf ganz unverhältnismäßige Weise vonstatten gehen. Daher war es nun ihr einziges Verlangen, so schnell wie möglich aus

accelerate the course of time in such a way that the embryo matures and is born. This child is also the businesswoman, and she experiences her childhood again. At this point, the adult businesswoman disappears from the narrative and is replaced by the child. We then witness a bizarre primal scene in which her mother is killed and raped by a creature which appears to be a wolfman. The wolfman chases her, and as she runs she passes through her life until she reaches her current age and a fork in the path – the point at which Same Time and what we might call Self Time intersect. At this intersection, she is attacked by a monster who may or may not be the monster from the primal scene and she is only saved by the intervention of the German. He offers her a single word twice: "Gründe!"

With a sigh of relief, she sank exhausted into the soft sand, and for now her memory, sutured by lightning, found well-earned peace.⁵⁰¹

This suggests that everything that has transpired since she forgot the name 'Gründe' has taken place within her memory. What we are presented with is a dramatisation of the processes of memory, the space and time within which they take place, and the paths they follow. Her recall of the name of Gründe seems to take place not through any sort of logical process, but through an unconscious navigation – following associations through her memory until she reaches a point

dieser Wildnis von Gleicher Zeit herauszufinden und einen Ort zu erreichen, wo sie sich natürlicher Vorgänge sicher sein konnte." (96/64)

⁵⁰¹ "Sie sank erschöpft, mit einem Seufzer der Erlösung, in den weichen Sand, und das vom Blitz genährte Gedächtnis fand einstweilen seine verdiente Ruhe." (101-102/68) Translation modified.

where the name is inescapable. The closer she gets to Gründe's name, the more frantic and disturbing her experiences become, and it is only when she is right next to the name (for Gründe's first name is Wolf-Dieter) that the Other intercedes and provides her with the answer she has been looking for. Lacan suggests that the Other is "the locus of speech and, potentially, the locus of truth."⁵⁰² This dimension of speech can be seen quite clearly in the character of the German, but he only presents the truth in the form of the solution to the businesswoman's mnemonic quest; a partial truth at best, for it does not give her the answer as to why it was forgotten in the first place.

With the recall of this name, this part of the story ends and we find her back in her car, and speeding back towards Cologne "in order to make up for a certain loss of time."⁵⁰³ She refers to Gründe as he "whose name had completely [*spurlos*] escaped her for some few agonising moments."⁵⁰⁴ Thus everything that has taken place between her forgetting and remembering is not only intra-psychic, but also massively condensed.

Time in "The Forest" is thus confused between the time of the subject (which may also be Same Time), and the time of material reality. She is able to recall events that only took moments (in real time), but which she experiences as having taken much longer. The time of her experience in the forest is much the same as the time of

⁵⁰² Lacan, 1977, *Seminar XI* p.129.

⁵⁰³ "Um einen gewissen Zeitverlust einzuholen." (102/68) Translation modified.

⁵⁰⁴ "Dessen Name ihr einige qualvolle Augenblicke lang spurlos entfallen war." (102/69) [my emphasis]

dreams – in both cases the time of the subject may pass more slowly relative to the time outside of the subject. The subject does not experience the time as passing at anything other than the 'normal' rate, but upon re-entering material reality becomes aware that nowhere near that much time has passed. The passing of time thus depends, both in psychoanalysis and modern physics, on where you stand. Her experiences in this chapter seem to suggest that this emerging new time consciousness makes it possible for the subject to move between events (in the conception of modern physics) through Same Time.

There is also a difference between what we now see as having taken place in the narrative, and what she claims took place. That is, outside of the forest, in the world of material reality she had been trying to remember, "she had practically beaten her brains out, turned her mind [*Bewußtsein*] upside down and inside out, searching for this colourless yet telling name."⁵⁰⁵ That is, she has been searching her preconscious mind, the realm of memories, for this name. However, it is pointless for her to search for the reasons [*Gründe*] for forgetting in consciousness [*Bewußtsein*] as the reasons for her forgetting are fully unconscious.

She realises that his name does have something special about it, some connotation of which she is only aware in its results, "this isn't the kind of name you forget only once, she thought to herself, there's

⁵⁰⁵ "Sie hatte sich schier den Kopf zerbrochen, sie hatte ihr Bewußtsein von oben bis unten umgekrempelt, um nach diesem ebenso blassen wie sprechenden Namen zu suchen." (102/69) Translation modified.

something about it, some kind of protective barrier, it will block my circuits again in the future."⁵⁰⁶ This is not a name which is merely misplaced, but one that has been forgotten because of its associations. The reason for the repression (forgetting) no doubt lies within her inner search, and seems to have something to do with the primal scene and the Wolfman. Beyond that, however, it is impossible for us to say what the reason might be.

The question that must be asked is: what is the relation of this inner search to consciousness? Although it is tempting to consider the entire process to be unconscious, this cannot be the case as the businesswoman remembers everything that went on in her search for the name. While this intra-psychic journey has an explicit end, it is not possible to localise a point at which it begins – the narrative slides indeterminately from a material to a psychic reality. Even the return to material reality is not as simple as it first appears, for two of the avatars from her mnemonic journey (shortly before she crossed the border into Same Time) appear in the back of her car:

Of course the driver knew who they were and what they were about;
but she just couldn't understand how these darkly symbolic, time-shy
creatures had ever landed so explicitly in the back of her car.⁵⁰⁷

They claim that she hauled them out of the woods, and now she doesn't know what to do with them. McGowan notes that the

⁵⁰⁶ "Einen solchen Namen vergißt man vermutlich nicht bloß einmal, dachte sie jetzt, da klebt etwas dran, ein Sperrschutz, der wird auch künftig meine Elektronik blockieren." (102/69) Translation modified.

⁵⁰⁷ "Natürlich wußte die Fahrerin, um wen es sich handelte und was es mit den beiden auf sich hatte; doch konnte sie sich nicht erklären, wie diese symboltrübten und zeitscheuen

persistence of the dream after waking is a typical Romantic characteristic and describes the businesswoman's experiences in the forest as "a seamless sequence of nightmares defying spatial, chronological and biological logic."⁵⁰⁸ It is precisely this seamlessness that provokes a feeling of the uncanny in the reader. It seems as if, just as the border between material and psychic reality at the start of the chapter is uncertain, the move back is perhaps only the illusion of the differentiation of the two.

When she meets with Gründe, the businesswoman discovers that his plan is to build a "tower of silence" ["Turm der Stille"] in an as yet undetermined forest (105/71). As the conversation progresses it becomes obvious that this is the tower and forest which she has just visited. The tower of her experience is one of limitless voices, rather than one of silence; similarly he envisions a resort dedicated to "pure sociability and guileless human contact" ["reinen Unterhaltsamkeit und der entlasteten Menschenbegegnung"] (105/71), which is also quite different to the various confrontational and terrifying contacts she experiences in her memory:

How much of the known and half-known she was reencountering in his fantastic scheme! It was difficult for her to understand how it could have so much in common with her own experiences in the time of her forgetfulness, but a dark, inner association attracted her all the more impulsively to this congenial man.

Gestalten in aller Ausgesprochenheit in den Fond ihres Wagens gelangt waren." (103/69)
Translation modified.

⁵⁰⁸ McGowan, "Botho Strauß." p.254.

Absolutely! she thought, I dreamed what he is thinking! And, thank God, the things he is planning are already behind me.⁵⁰⁹

Her memories can only accurately be described as memories of the future: what will take place in the future in the real world, has already taken place in her memory. In Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*, Kassandra's gift of prophecy is also the ability to remember things that have not yet happened. She and the businesswoman are both faced with the knowledge of future events, but where the businesswoman lacks the desire to change them, Kassandra lacks the ability. Although future memories are not present in *Gut Symmetries*, Alice suggests that their possibility is related to the nature of time: "Memory past and memory future. If the universe is movement it will not be in one direction only" (p.218).

In "The Forest," not only do we have several relations of the subject to time, but also of the subject to memory, memory to time, and psychic reality to material reality. The text refuses to limit itself to any one conception of any of these things. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this chapter is that of the figures from her memory passing from psychic to material reality. This happens again, in a slightly different form, in the story "The Woman on the Ferry" in the chapter, "The Terrace."

⁵⁰⁹ "Wieviel Bekanntes und Halbbekanntes war ihr in seinem fantastischen Entwurf wiederbegegnet! Die Ähnlichkeit, die dieser mit ihren eigenen Erlebnissen aus der Zeit der Vergeßlichkeit aufwies, war ihr nur schwer erklärlich, aber eine dunkle, innere Verwandschaft verband sie umso impulsiver mit dem gutwilligen Mann.

Wahrhaftig! dachte sie, mir träumte, was er denkt! Und was er plant, das habe ich gottlob schon hinter mir." (106/72)

Leon is the narrator of "The Terrace," but he is not identical with the Leon of the preface or the Leon of "The Settlement." After attending a friend's funeral in Istanbul he finds himself gripped by depression and unable to raise his eyes. He is joined on a ferry by a woman (Mero) whom he walks alongside and finds himself unconsciously following her (in much the similar way to that by which the businesswoman arrives at the forest) eventually arriving at her apartment. They kiss, but Leon closes his eyes before he can see her. When she breaks from him, he feels he should be able to see her, but he isn't:

[T]he light in my eyes flickered and my pupils rolled rapidly back and forth, as if I were in the middle of a sleep phase full of dreams. An unsteady outline was all I could discern against the backdrop of the window, and that she had put a finger to her lips as if signalling me to keep silent; and still, up until this point, we had not exchanged a single word. So what she really meant was that I should remain in my enraptured state.⁵¹⁰

This mention of dreams immediately raises the concept of the unconscious, and also brings the concepts of psychic reality, of different relations to time, to the fore. Their lovemaking becomes more intense, and Leon loses consciousness. When he awakes, he goes searching for her, but comes across a group of men in a room who are apparently occupying a different time, a different time-space:

⁵¹⁰ "[D]enn mein Augenlicht flackerte, die Pupillen rollten so erregt hin und her, als befände ich mich mitten in einer traumreichen Schlafphase. Nur einen zitterigen Umriß erkannte ich gegen das Fenster und daß sie den Finger auf die Lippe legte, als wollte sie mir Schweigen gebieten; dabei hatten wir bis dahin nicht ein einziges Wort miteinander gesprochen. Es sollte aber wohl heißen, daß ich mich in meinem Überschwang anhalten möge." (226/157) Translation modified.

It had suddenly become difficult for me to move as I was used to moving. The crippling time-dimension that applied to this secret corner was beginning to have an effect on me.⁵¹¹

This time affects not only his physical being, but also his psyche, the speed at which he thinks. Just as with the businesswoman, Leon seems to have moved from a relatively stable material reality to a psychic one. The subjective experience of time here is different again – time has slowed not relative to the outside, but within. Unlike the businesswoman however, Leon has not moved into his own psychic reality, but rather Mero's. She explains it to him:

You are a blissful memory. The only thing you might still find unsettling: except for *that*, you are no longer anything. In the world outside, you no longer exist. For the fact that you currently exist as you do, you may give thanks to the industrious substances of my thought processes. You now belong in my corona. You have entered into *my* time, and from now on you no longer have to concern yourself with any other existence.⁵¹²

Here we see the reverse of the appearance of the Construction-King and his Queen in the back-seat of the businesswoman's car. Where there it was a matter of a semi-autonomous psychic entity crossing over into the world of material reality, here an autonomous material entity becomes a psychic one. Leon is by no means the only avatar of memory within Mero's memory. There are not only the other men he

⁵¹¹ "Es fiel mir auf einmal sehr schwer, mich wie gewohnt zu bewegen. Das lähmende Zeit-Maß, das in diesem geheimen Kabuff herrschte, schein nun auch auf mich überzugreifen." (228/158) Translation modified.

⁵¹² "Du *bist* eine glückselige Erinnerung. Das einzige, was dich herbei ein wenig bedrücken könnte: außer *dem* bist du nichts mehr. In der Welt sonst gibt es dich nicht länger. So wie du nun am Leben bist, dankst du es allein dem fließigen Geweb meines Gedenkens. Du gehörst nun in meine Korona. Du bist in *meine* Zeit eingetreten und brauchst dich fürderhin um kein anderes Dasein mehr zu kümmern." (231/161) Translation modified.

initially comes across, but even former aspects of Mero's memory (the younger Mero), and he comes to the realisation that

[e]very one of us was now nothing more than embodied thought; we consisted of the exuberance of a memory which *she* was keeping, and woe be! should it ever be erased or even blocked for any length of time — we would cease to exist. We were creatures of an everlasting hour. The time-dimension in which Mero had stored us was also our prison, this cell in which we would tirelessly persist from now on.⁵¹³

As memories, they are trapped in a timeless dimension, preserved in their original state. These avatars retain a certain amount of independence from the psyche they belong to, but remain nevertheless trapped within this realm of memory, and segregated from other psychic elements. Alphonso Lingis proposes the existence of a wall that serves to keep out that the libidinous eyes of desire, and that this wall

may function to maintain a non-confrontational coexistence of different sectors of oneself. One may value an affable relationship with the beast within oneself. One may not want to penetrate behind that wall, not out of horror and fear of what lies behind, but because one may choose to be astonished at the strange lusts contained within oneself. One may want the enigmas and want the discomfiture within oneself.⁵¹⁴

These avatars also represent those elements of the psyche which are not under the conscious control of the subject: repression, mechanisms of defence, and so on. Lacan suggests that the dream contains

⁵¹³ "Wir waren allesamt nur mehr verkörpertes Gedenken; wir bestanden aus dem Überschwang einer Erinnerung, die *sie* sich bewahrt hatte, und wehe!, wenn diese einmal erlöschen sollte oder nur für länger blockiert wäre — es würde uns dann nicht mehr geben. Wir waren die Kreaturen einer unvergänglichen Stunde. Der Zeit-Raum, in dem Mero sich uns eingeprägt hatte, war zugleich unser Gefängnis, diese Zelle, in der wir fortan unermüdlich hin und her lebten." (234-235/163) Translation modified.

elements which represent "the diversified images of his [the subject's] ego, and these are so many points of anchorage, of stabilization, of inertia."⁵¹⁵ Bearing in mind the Lacanian conception of the ego as something fundamentally split and unconscious, the avatars both here and in the businesswoman's memory can be seen as attempts to represent the processes and intra-psychic relations of the split subject. The relation of these avatars to memory is presented by Leon not as a facility which is particular to Mero, but rather as a fundamental property of the psyche:

In our innermost being all we ever collect are captivities, and from them we build our Lebensraum, from so many cast off cells, and every cramped passage, we know, is also a placenta, it bears us over and over again.⁵¹⁶

Memory as described here by Leon is thus vital for the constitution of the subject; the subject is determined by his/her memories. Lacan concurs, but in a slightly different frame, suggesting that "a subject originally represents nothing more than the following fact: he can forget. . . the subject is literally at his beginning the elision of a signifier as such, the missing signifier in the chain."⁵¹⁷ It is not merely memory that is the essence of the psyche, but in the form of forgetting, repression. The unconscious is the memory of those things which man forgets, specifically those he does not want to think about.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ Lingis p.149.

⁵¹⁵ Lacan, *Seminar II* p.167.

⁵¹⁶ "Im Innersten sammeln wir stets nur Gefangenschaften und bilden daraus unseren Lebensraum, aus vielen abgeschiedenen Zellen, und jede Enge, das wissen wir, ist auch eine Fruchthülle, sie gebiert uns wieder und wieder." (235/164) Translation modified.

⁵¹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar VII* p.224.

⁵¹⁸ Lacan, *Seminar VII* pp.231-232.

A good deal stranger than Leon's place in Mero's memory, which, after all, could quite easily be read metaphorically, is the fact that Leon returns to the world of material reality. This return is effected by his bringing the adult Mero into contact with herself as a girl – a part of the psyche which has been set aside (241/168). He will later name them expectation (the young Mero) and experience (the old Mero), presenting the younger as that part of the psyche which was that which Mero desired to become at that point in her life, but, unable to achieve this, this idea had to be partitioned off from the rest of the psyche – even from the memories she later adds (243/169).

Even after he and the other men are freed from Mero's memory, the old and the young Mero continue to coexist within the realm of material reality (242/169). This is, in a sense, the same process that we saw with the businesswoman pulling figures out of her memory, only seen from the point of view of one of the figures. Where as they were avatars whose relation to their original figure or memory has been distorted by the processes of the unconscious, the figures of Mero's memory have not suffered the same processes, most notably in the case of the young Mero, who, suspended in timelessness of the unconscious, has not changed at all.

Something like this mnemonic process can be seen in psychoanalysis in the works of Jean Laplanche. In his theory of development, human sexuality (sexuality with fantasy) is brought about

in the infant through a process of *implantation*.⁵¹⁹ In this process the adult implants in the child enigmatic signifiers (the unconscious messages that pervade all human communication), which in turn give rise to the unconscious.⁵²⁰ Unconscious messages from the adult find their place in the unconscious of the child. It does not seem to me too great a leap to take this primal process and consider its functioning beyond infancy and into adulthood. Indeed, Laplanche admits this, but suggests that in adulthood the mechanisms move from the active to the passive, and certainly this is the case with Mero's memory.⁵²¹ In this way it becomes possible to read the businesswoman's experience of memories other than her own as implantations of the other from childhood. Upon his return to his own life, Leon finds that it has changed:

I found myself back in a life that was somehow richer than I had actually lived it; in which there were admittedly many omissions, but many completed stories too, and innumerable encounters and affirmations, of which I had not always been aware. Now they were appearing again in the abundance of consciousness, and I found myself in the carefree company of all those missed and long-forgotten figures, all of the ones so well received, who had at one time or another crossed my path. A convalesced consciousness, that's what it was, more expansive and profound than it had ever been...⁵²²

⁵¹⁹ Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.24.

⁵²⁰ Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.25.

⁵²¹ Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar." p.67.

⁵²² "[I]ch fand mich zurück in einem fast noch reichlicheren Leben, als ich es wirklich gelebt hätte; in dem es zwar viele Versäumnisse gab, aber auch eine Menge erfüllter Geschichten, unzählige Begegnungen und Bejahungen, die mir nicht immer bewußt geblieben waren. Jetzt aber traten sie in die Fülle der Besinnung, und ich befand mich in sorgloser Gesellschaft mit all den vermißten, lange vergessenen Gestalten, den gut beleumundeten, die irgendwann einmal meinen Weg gekreuzt hatten. Eine gesündete Besinnung, das war es, weitläufig und tiefreichend wie nicht zuvor..." (241-242/168-169) Translation modified.

Seemingly having been a part of someone else's memory has made his own more alive. It has also altered it, perhaps by making him aware of the processes and structures of his own memory. Yet although Leon is now aware of the nature of memory, he does not possess Mero's abilities: not only to be able to draw others into memory, but also to interact with them (245/171). The avatars of Leon's memories are only figures of beginnings, not unlike the stories of *Der junge Mann*, none of the which are complete in themselves. The novel binds them into some sort of fragmentary wholeness in much the same way that Leon's psyche binds these figures of beginnings into the totality of his memory. They retain independence from each other, and even from the overarching narrative; but, like the avatars in Mero's memory, each of them contributes to the whole.

In closing, I would like to consider in a little more detail one final aspect of Brooks's – his theories regarding the desire of the narrative as a desire for death. Christa Wolf's novel *Kassandra* (1983) is a retelling of the story of the Trojan war, and the events leading up to it, from the point of view of the seer Kassandra. As this novel is set during a single day – the day on which Kassandra is led to her death by the Greeks, most of her narrative takes place through the recollection of memories. The work also brings time to the fore with Kassandra continually correcting her references to 'here,' 'now,' 'there,' and 'then,' reinforcing the awareness of the two different time-constructions in the

narrative.⁵²³ Her narrative takes place primarily in the past, for the simple reason that there is no longer a future for Cassandra:

Nothing left to describe the world but the language of the past. The language of the present has shrivelled to the words that describe this dismal fortress. The language of the future has only one sentence left for me: Today I will be killed.⁵²⁴

The past is all that remains to Cassandra and she has only a day to retell her story. The two levels of her narrative, the present and the past, leads to a slightly disjointed narrative. Memories are evoked by her present circumstances, but these circumstances also interrupt and interfere with her tale.

Similarly to Leon in *Der junge Mann*, Wolf opposes the 'Homeric' form of linear narration, with a beginning, middle, climax and end.⁵²⁵ She states that she originally conceived of the story as "a pattern, a tissue," and, as such it would have to be told without recourse to linear narration.⁵²⁶ Yet this proved impossible for Wolf because "narration takes place within time and time itself has a linear structure."⁵²⁷ Wolf's rather intractable view of time leads her to the conclusion that

⁵²³ Brown, "The Cassandra of Christa Wolf (1983)," *Classical and Modern Literature*, V.9(2), 1989, pp.116-117.

⁵²⁴ "Für alles auf der Welt nur noch die Vergangenheitssprache. Die Gegenwartssprache ist auf Wörter für diese düstre Festung eingeschrumpft. Die Zukunftssprache hat für mich nur diesen einen Satz: Ich werde heute noch erschlagen werden." Christa Wolf *Kassandra. Erzählung*. Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1983. p.18. Translated in *Cassandra*. Trans. Jan van Heurck. London: Virago, 1985. p.14. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically, German page numbers followed by English.

⁵²⁵ Wolf, "The Origins of Narration: A Conversation with Jacqueline Grenz." *The Fourth Dimension: Interviews with Christa Wolf*. Trans. H. Pilkington. London: Verso, 1988. p.117.

⁵²⁶ Wolf, "The Origins of Narration." p.117.

⁵²⁷ Wolf, "The Origins of Narration." p.117.

it is not possible to convey this tissue form, all these simultaneous threads that produce a single pattern, through narration, for we narrate things in a sequence, one after another.⁵²⁸

As we have already seen, although narrative usually works within the constraints being read from beginning to end, there is no necessity for the time of narration to follow the time of reading. Obviously she is correct in considering the impossibility of rendering this tissue form into narrative. But does not the very fact that she is able to conceive of such a structure suggest that this is a limitation perhaps of perception (or to follow Freud, of the system *Pcpt.-Cs*)?

Narrative techniques, which in their closedness or openness also transmit thought patterns. I experience the closed form of the Cassandra narrative as a contradiction to the fragmentary structure from which (for me) it is actually composed. The contradiction cannot be resolved, only named.⁵²⁹

This tissue form can only be thought of as an ideal form: it is not possible to represent it to consciousness. The development of a new mode of thought would transform the very nature of perception, perhaps enabling the reading of Wolf's dreamt-of tissue narrative by allowing the simultaneous perception of mutually exclusive possibilities. Thus when reading *Kassandra*, it may be useful to keep this original conception of the novel as a tissue narrative in mind in order to see how it approaches this, and to what extent its failure is

⁵²⁸ Wolf, "The Origins of Narration," p.117.

⁵²⁹ "Erzähltechniken, die ja in ihrer jeweiligen Geschlossenheit oder Offenheit auch Denkmuster transportieren. Empfinde die geschlossene Form der *Kassandra*-Erzählung als Widerspruch zu der fragmentarischen Struktur, aus der sie sich für mich eigentlich zusammensetzt. Der Widerspruch kann nicht gelöst, nur benannt werden." Christa Wolf, *Kassandra: Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung*. Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand,

simply a reflection of the limits of the human perceptual-conscious system.

As a seer, Cassandra has the ability to see time in a similar way to that proposed by the poetics of *Der junge Mann*. She can see the past, present and future, but lacks the ability to influence or change the future (91/78). Her experience of time is also highly subjective: when she is shocked, time stands still with shock (70/59) and when she is depressed it slows down (104/89).

Kassandra is a novel which takes place almost entirely within the narrator's memory, a fact of which Cassandra remains highly conscious. Cassandra likens her process of remembering to following a thread back in time (26/21). It is not quite as simple as that, for her narrative continually switches between the past and the present, following her stream of consciousness:

The sequence of images moves with frantic speed through my tired head; words cannot keep up with them. Strange, the similarity of the traces in my memory, no matter how varied the recollections that lead to them. These figures which light up over and over like signal fires. Priam, Aisakos, Aeneas, Paris.⁵³⁰

One name that is conspicuous by its absence here is that of Achilles, a name she wishes to, but is unable to, forget (12/9). It is also here the novel comes closest to representing the form of the tissue narrative. It does not, indeed cannot, represent it directly, but it represents an

1983. p.120. Translated in *Cassandra*. Trans. Jan van Heurck. London: Virago, 1985. p.266.

⁵³⁰ "Rasend schnell die Abfolge der Bilder in meinem müden Kopf, die Worte können sie nicht einholen. Merkwürdige Ähnlichkeit der Spuren, welche verschiedenste Erinnerungen in

approximation of it, as experienced by Cassandra, who is not just a character, but also the narrator. In itself, it is perhaps not so much a representation of a tissue narrative, as of the limits of perceptual-consciousness which prevent it. A number of aspects of memory as described by Cassandra are particularly amenable to psychoanalysis. For a start these memories are described as being not only too fast for words, that is, for narrative, but indeed of being outside the realm of language altogether, they are (in the Lacanian sense) imaginary. There also seems to be something in the nature of condensation at work here, for these rapid images are perceptible to consciousness, even if not expressible in narrative. This is similar to the condensation we saw at work in the businesswoman's memory, but in the case of Cassandra the images, although accessible to consciousness, are nonetheless kept outside the realm of language. Indeed, for Cassandra, the realm of the imaginary is considered to be more primary, more fundamental to human experience, than the symbolic: "The last thing in my life will be a picture, not a word. Words die before pictures."⁵³¹ Here, the death of her words precedes her death but brings about that of the narrative.

Cassandra is not an entirely willing narrator, nor is she entirely in control of the material which comes to mind.⁵³² Cassandra is, however, aware of this limitation, and makes no attempt to hide it

meinem Gedächtnis vorfinden. Immer leuchten diese Gestalten auf, wie Signale. Priamos, Aisakos, Aineias, Paris." Translation modified. (53/44)

⁵³¹ "Das Letzte wird ein Bild sein, kein Wort. Vor den Bildern sterben die Wörter." (26/21)

⁵³² Wolf, "The Origins of Narration." p.118. cf. *Cassandra* (13/10).

(41/34). She even admits to trying not to remember – to trying to keep things out of her narrative (84/71). We are forced not only to consider the reliability of the narrator in this case, but also the ways in which the narrative controls the narrator. The narrative is also driven by a compulsion to narrate, a compulsion seemingly linked with *Kassandra's* imminent death. This death is thus not only that of the author/*Kassandra*, but is also the death of the narrative, and with it, silence. The consciousness of the inevitability of this death drives the narrative to attempt to express everything that needs to be said before that point occurs.

Brooks asserts that the nature of the narrative ending inevitably concerns the human end, death: "all narration is obituary in that life acquires definable meaning only at, and through, death."⁵³³ He is not suggesting that all narratives end in a literal death, but at the very least they end in a figurative death. In a sense, it is the narrative itself which dies at the end of the work. The narrative is thus maintained in a tension caused by its arousal from the quiescence of the beyond-narration ("the unnarratable"), until it reaches its death, its return to the inorganic state of the non-narrative.⁵³⁴ For Brooks the desire which engenders the narrative is the desire for the end, "but desire for the end reached only through the at least minimally complicated *détour*,

⁵³³ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." pp.283-284.

⁵³⁴ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.291.

the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of the narrative."⁵³⁵

The approach of her death makes *Kassandra* more self-conscious of her narrative, which in turn leads her to search through her memory in order to fill the still existing gaps in her narrative.⁵³⁶ Fear keeps her narrative flowing in the right direction, preventing digressions: "when the fear ebbs away, as it is doing just now, remote thoughts come to mind."⁵³⁷ *Kassandra's* fear can be considered the fear of a premature death – a death before she has finished her story, rather than a fear of death itself.⁵³⁸ Thus for her narrative the desire for the end is precisely the desire to finish saying everything, to complete her tale.

Thus while the work is an approach of death, it is also, in some sense, a deferral of death.⁵³⁹ In *Kassandra* the narrator defers her death with her narrative, through her memories. While the memories that *Kassandra* narrates are painful, nonetheless this pain proves that she is still alive:

Perhaps pain dies before we die. That information, if true, must be passed on; but to whom? Of those here who speak my language,

⁵³⁵ Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot." p.292.

⁵³⁶ S. Risse, *Wahrnehmen und Erkennen in Christa Wolfs Erzählung 'Kassandra.'* Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986. p.101.

⁵³⁷ "wenn die Angst abhebt, wie eben jetzt, fällt mir Fernliegendes ein." (16/12)

⁵³⁸ She even goes so far as to describe her memory as a "fear-memory" ["Angst-Gedächtnis"] (123/105).

⁵³⁹ Bernhard Greiner, "Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod': Kontinuität und Wandel des Erzählens im Schaffen von Christa Wolf." *Erinnerte Zukunft: 11 Studien zum Werk Christa Wolfs.* Ed. Wolfram Mauser. Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1985. p.121.

there is none here who will not die with me. I make the pain test and think about the goodbyes. Each one was different.⁵⁴⁰

This reinforces her proposition that images (memories) are more fundamental to the constitution of the subject than words (or the symbolic expression of memory). Here Cassandra reveals the essentially fictional nature of her narrative: not only does it take place within her mind, but even if it could be expressed in words, her language would not be understood.

The closer she comes to death the easier she finds it to remember the things she has forgotten (42/35). While she had long avoided thinking of her past she finds that "the approach of death does make your whole life pass before you."⁵⁴¹ The more alive she feels, the more she fears death, which in turn stimulates her memory, and thus her narrative (26/21).

Finally, we must not ignore the frame of the narrative. Cassandra's story is preceded by a brief passage from an unnamed narrator standing in Greek ruins: "It was here. This is where she stood."⁵⁴² The text then switches narrators as Cassandra begins to tell her story:

Nearby, the giant fitted-stone walls which, today as in the past, point the way to the gate, where no trace of blood can be seen seeping out from beneath. Point the way into the darkness. Into the slaughter-house. And alone.

With this story I go to my death.

⁵⁴⁰ "Vielleicht daß der Schmerz stirbt, eh wir sterben. Das, wär es so, müßte man weitersagen, doch wem? Hier spricht keiner meiner Sprache, der nicht mit mir stirbt. Ich mach die Schmerzprobe und denk an die Abschiede, jede war anders." (8/6)

⁵⁴¹ "[D]er nahe Tod mobilisiert nochmal das ganze Leben" (77/65)

⁵⁴² "Hier war es. Da stand sie." (5/3)

Here I end my days, helpless, and nothing, nothing I could have done or not done, willed or thought, could have led me to a different goal.⁵⁴³

The link between Cassandra's life and that of the narrative is quite clear from the start. Her tales come into being through the silence of the narrator. The narrator only intervenes again at the end of the novel, after Cassandra's death:

Here is the place. These stone lions looked at her.
They seem to move in the shifting light.⁵⁴⁴

Kassandra's stories could have taken place not only in her memory, but in that of the narrator.⁵⁴⁵ In the end, we are left with the possibility that Kassandra's story has been nothing more than "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis."

The psychoanalytic approach to time has many advantages for literary criticism, the foremost of which is that it acknowledges that there is no time without the subject, and the subject does not have a singular relation to time. In Botho Strauß's *Der junge Mann*, the various forms of time are not only explicitly expressed in the preface, but function throughout the tales which make up the novel. Only through close

⁵⁴³ "Nah die zyklisch gefügten Mauern, heute wie gestern, die dem Weg die Richtung geben: zum Tor hin, unter dem kein Blut hervorquillt. Ins Finstere. Ins Schlachthaus. Und Allein.

Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod.

Hier ende ich, ohnmächtig, und nichts, nichts was ich hätte tun oder lassen, wollen oder denken können, hätte mich an ein anderes Ziel geführt." (5/3) Translation modified.

⁵⁴⁴ "Hier ist es. Diese steinernen Löwen haben sie angeblickt. Im Wechsel des Lichts scheinen sie sich zu rühren." (160/138)

⁵⁴⁵ cf Ortrud Gutjahr, "Erinnerte Zukunft: Gedächtnisrekonstruktion und Subjektkonstitution im Werk Christa Wolfs." *Erinnerte Zukunft: 11 Studien zum Werk Christa Wolfs*. Ed. Wolfram Mauser. Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1985. p.67.

attention to the repetition of scenes and characters in the novel is it possible to discern it as a novel.

Der junge Mann suggests that the link between psychic and material reality is flexible. Characters display the ability to move in and out of their own, and even others', memory. The conception of time as happening, having already happened, and going to happen, enables the possibility of memories of the future. This is also seen in Christa Wolf's *Kassandra*, although it is not Kassandra's memories of the future that are the focus of the novel, but those of the past. Her narrative is composed primarily of memories. Her remembering is motivated not only by the fear of her imminent death, but also by the fear that she might not be able to finish her story. Ultimately the frame of the narrative even suggests that the novel is not just Kassandra's memories, but those of the 'author'.

Ricoeur on Time and Narrative

The French philosopher and theorist, Paul Ricoeur, deals extensively with questions of time and narrative. However, despite Ricoeur's interest in psychoanalysis, his approach to questions of time and narrative is primarily from a hermeneutic point of view.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁶ For a fuller account of some of the difficulties in reconciling Ricoeur's philosophy with psychoanalysis, see Edith Kurzweil's excellent chapter on Ricoeur in her work *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980. See also, Thelma Z. Lavine's pointed criticism's in her piece "Paul Ricoeur and the Conflict of Interpretations," in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed) *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Chicago: Open Court, 1995, pp.169-192.

Nevertheless, he makes a number of points about time and narrative which deserve closer inspection for how we might perhaps be able to integrate them within psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Ricoeur starts from the fundamental premise that there is an essential relationship between narrative and time, taking "temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent."⁵⁴⁷ However, Ricoeur claims that literary criticism has overlooked this reciprocity, because it takes for granted the fact that "every narrative takes place within an uncriticized temporal framework, within a time that corresponds to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants."⁵⁴⁸ Certainly psychoanalysis promotes an understanding of time which is not the same as the time of the clock, yet this seems to be a generalisation which cannot hold in the face of, among many others, the work of the Russian Formalists. This seems all the more unusual given that only a short while later in the same article, Ricoeur falls back on the distinction between 'story' and 'plot'.⁵⁴⁹

Like Brooks, Ricoeur focuses on the reading process itself, noting that the plot provokes the reader:

[...] we are pushed ahead by this development and ... we reply to its impetus with expectations concerning the outcome and the completion of the entire process. In this sense, the story's conclusion

⁵⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," *Critical Inquiry*, V.7, 1980, p.169.

⁵⁴⁸ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," pp.169-170.

⁵⁴⁹ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.171. This is, of course, the distinction between the *fabula* and the *sjuzet*.

is the pole of attraction of the entire development. But a narrative conclusion can be neither deduced nor predicted. There is no story if our attention is not moved along by a thousand contingencies. This is why a story has to be followed to its conclusion. So rather than being predictable, a conclusion must be acceptable. Looking back from the conclusion to the episodes leading up to it, we have to be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions.⁵⁵⁰

As we have already seen, this forward and back shuttling of the reading process is present in psychoanalysis in the forms of anticipation and retroaction (Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*). Ricoeur understands plot to be that narrative form which gives structure to the episodes of narrative.⁵⁵¹ While the structure of the plot is always present, it may well be that its nature or significance is only realised 'afterwards.' In the case of *Der junge Mann*, for example, it is only once the reader has finished the work that s/he may begin to attempt to make sense of what is indeed a very episodic narrative. The retroactive process is one which takes place in memory, it "repeats—re-collects—the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end."⁵⁵² In reading, therefore, memory is always implicated in the reconstruction of plot, but this can never be a 'perfect' reconstruction any more than any memory can ever be considered perfect. Yet, the importance of the imperfections of memory and the subjective perception of time is barely touched upon in Ricoeur's work.

⁵⁵⁰ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.174.

⁵⁵¹ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.178.

⁵⁵² Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.183.

It is curious that, given this understanding of the reading process, Ricoeur not only ignores the analogy with the psyche, but even goes so far as to ignore the subjective dimension of time altogether, referring to "the irreversible order of time common to human and physical events."⁵⁵³ Yet Ricoeur is clearly not unaware of the role that narrative plays in drawing the reader's attention to the possibility of other temporal structures:

Finally, the recollection of the story governed as a whole by its way of ending constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as moving from the past forward into the future, according to the well-known metaphor of the arrow of time. It is as though recollection inverted the so-called natural order of time. By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn also to read time itself backward, as the recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. In this way, a plot establishes human action not only within time, as we said at the beginning of this section, but within memory. Memory, accordingly, repeats the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of time as "stretching-along" between a beginning and an end.⁵⁵⁴

A psychoanalytic perspective would suggest that memory, of all things, does not merely repeat the course of events. Indeed, we must bear in mind that the processes of the unconscious, as well as repressed memories, are "timeless, i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all."⁵⁵⁵

The question of repetition is central to both psychoanalysis and literature. Ricoeur, however, approaches the question of repetition and

⁵⁵³ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.179.

⁵⁵⁴ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.180.

⁵⁵⁵ Freud, "The Unconscious." PFL p.191; GW/p.286.

its role in the constitution of the plot from a Heideggerian perspective, which, while illuminating from the point of view of history and time, is nevertheless difficult to integrate within psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, like Brookes, Ricoeur sees repetition as a narrative means by which past, present and future are all linked.⁵⁵⁶

When Ricoeur does finally consider the implications of psychoanalysis for his project, it is only through a reading of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. Ricoeur is, however, not very forthcoming on precisely how fairytales "bring the hero or heroine back into a primordial space and time that is more akin to the realm of dreams than to the sphere of action."⁵⁵⁷ Unfortunately he does not devote more time to these considerations, but remains on a very general level. When he does go into more detail, it is at the level of content rather than form, and results in rather superficial psychoanalytic readings:

[T]he kind of repetition involved in this travel toward the origin is rather primitive, even regressive, in the psychoanalytic sense of the word. It has the character of an immersion and confinement in the midst of dark powers. This is why this repetition of the origin has to be superseded by an act of rupture (like, for example, the episode of the woodcutters [sic.] breaking open the belly of the wolf with an ax in "Little Red Riding Hood").⁵⁵⁸

One cannot help feeling that psychoanalysis might have more to contribute to a discussion of plot, particularly given Ricoeur's interest in the phenomenon of repetition.

⁵⁵⁶ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.182.

⁵⁵⁷ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.185.

⁵⁵⁸ Ricoeur, "Narrative Time," p.185.

A large part of Ricoeur's work, *Time and Narrative*, involves a reading of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and although an analysis of this reading, and indeed of Proust's work itself, falls outside the scope of this present work, it may be profitable to consider Malcolm Bowie's seminal work *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*.

Bowie suggests that one of the essential "Proustian preferences" of the novel is of "being outside time to being inside it."⁵⁵⁹ In terms of Ricoeur, this preference would make its presence felt in a desire for the plot rather than the story. It also brings to mind the atemporality of the unconscious, which is not, strictly speaking, the absence of time, but a different relation to it. In terms of reading, it is our awareness of the plot which takes us outside of time. The consciousness of the processes of retroaction and anticipation serves to break the reader free of the strictures of linear time.

Bowie is not merely concerned with the content of Proust's work, but also its structure, noting that "Proust's novel, as everyone knows, is magnificently plotted: it has a beginning, middle and end."⁵⁶⁰ Regrettably his analysis of the structure of Proust's work does not involve a more psychoanalytic view. Although Bowie's work is ostensibly concerned with time (a not inconsiderable subject in Proust's novel), much of it revolves around an analogy between the

⁵⁵⁹ Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*, p.46.

⁵⁶⁰ Malcolm Bowie, "Proust and Psychoanalysis," *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, V.68, 1999, p.26.

construction of *A la recherche du temps perdu* and the dialogue of the psychoanalytic session.⁵⁶¹ While his reading is certainly insightful, it is based quite specifically on Proust's work, and it is thus difficult to extrapolate from this any general use for psychoanalytic literary criticism. The present thesis is much more concerned with an attempt to work not from the clinical situation, but from Freud's metapsychology, to discover similarities between psychic and literary structures. Bowie, on the other hand, argues that:

The best hope to be had from Lacan for the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary studies seems to me this: that the resurgent science of rhetoric, as applied to literary texts, might eventually find a psychodynamic theory that is appropriate to it in complexity and explanatory range. Even this hope, which is of necessity a qualified one, has to be worked for, and extricated from the false promises and premature solutions that Lacan's literary manner has held out to criticism.⁵⁶²

This seems to me a rather narrow view of the possibilities of psychoanalytic literary criticism. Given this evaluation of the potential Lacan's psychoanalysis offers for literary criticism, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that while Bowie's work offers a number of important insights about Proust, it only contains a limited number of possibilities for the interpretation of other works of literature from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Bowie does, however, note that Proust's novel is "built from a multitude of repetitions, recapitulations, replications, coincidences,

⁵⁶¹ See, for example, Bowie, "Proust and Psychoanalysis," p.24.

⁵⁶² Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*, p.159.

uncanny resemblances and prophetic anticipations of the future."⁵⁶³ Here we have, at least potentially, a very interesting point at which the works of Ricoeur, Bowie and Brooks coincide. Yet although all of these things have clear psychoanalytic resonances (and Bowie is without doubt aware of this), he does not go into a more detailed examination, in either *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* or his article "Proust and Psychoanalysis," of how these structures work within the novel, and, more particularly, of just what psychoanalysis has to contribute to our understanding of them (or vice-versa).

Although Bowie is a skilful reader of Proust, his use of psychoanalysis does sometimes differ from that adopted in this thesis. Bowie, for example, believes that Freud's three models of the psyche (the dynamic, economic and topographical) are incompatible, but I tend to concur with Jean Laplanche's view that not only does Freud never really abandon the dynamic model, but that it continues to exist beneath the topographical model throughout Freud's writings.⁵⁶⁴ An argument that is more difficult to accommodate is his suggestion that the associations provoked by memories in Proust's work are "the special privilege of the introspective mind, operating alone and unaided, seeking and finding its own moments of *jouissance*."⁵⁶⁵ This notion is difficult to integrate with the concept of *jouissance* as

⁵⁶³ Bowie, "Proust and Psychoanalysis," p.26.

⁵⁶⁴ Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*, pp.15, 101-102. Cf Jean Laplanche's work *The Unconscious and the Id*, pp.122-140. It should be noted that Bowie considers Laplanche to be part of a "coherent and continuing tradition of psychoanalytic enquiry." p.131.

⁵⁶⁵ Bowie, "Proust and Psychoanalysis," p.25.

corporeal, transgressive and beyond representation (whether to the subject or the reader).

Conclusion

This study began by questioning the traditional relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, specifically the idea that psychoanalysis is a body of knowledge which can explain literature. As with psychoanalysis, literary criticism should always begin by listening to what the text has to say and how it says it. The attempt to impose predetermined meaning on the text (whether it be a dream or a work of literature) through a catalogue of symbols is not only vulgar, but is antithetical to the spirit of psychoanalysis, which should always be first and foremost a recognition of the individuality of the work or analysand. It is not possible for psychoanalysis to occupy a position outside literature as it has, from its very inception, been guided by literature.

This study has shown only some of the ways in which psychoanalysis can contribute to our understanding of literature. The aspects of psychoanalysis under consideration here, the unconscious, desire, time and memory, were chosen for their central importance to psychoanalysis. If, as Brooks, Hartman and Wright all suggest, there is a connection between the structure of literature and the structure of the psyche, then each of these aspects is also indispensable for psychoanalytic literary criticism. This also suggests that

psychoanalytic literary criticism must always be, at least to some extent, based on the examination of the structure(s) of literature.

The novels under consideration were not chosen simply because they lend themselves to psychoanalytic interpretations, but also because they contribute something to our understanding of psychoanalysis, and in particular to psychoanalytic criticism. We have seen that psychoanalysis is able to bring out aspects of these works that are not immediately apparent, such as the unconscious texts of *Die Klavierspielerin*.

None of these works was chosen with a view to a 'complete' psychoanalytic reading, each was only intended to shed some light on one particular aspect under investigation here. Yet nevertheless almost every one of them touched upon at least one other theme. While this is perhaps not so surprising in those works where there is a clear consciousness of psychoanalysis, for example, *Die Klavierspielerin* and *Gut Symmetries*, it is more striking in the case of *Der junge Mann*, which does not owe any obvious allegiance to psychoanalysis.

If the unconscious is structured like a language, that is, a non-phonetic written language, then we have an additional point of contact between psychoanalysis and literature. The unconscious texts of *Die Klavierspielerin* 'take place' in this language – we only see them in the work in translation, the revision of these texts into verbal language and made available to consciousness. This revision is not only into verbal

language, but also into time and logic, and with each of these alterations, something is lost. Echoes of this non-verbal language persist in the intermittent capitalisation of the pronoun SHE, an effect which is peculiar to writing. These echoes also break through into the manifest text, the repressed returns.

The presence of these texts undermines any attempt to read the novel as a coherent whole, and suggests that as literary critics we must always keep an eye out for the manifestations of the unconscious, as they cannot be read at the same level as the rest of the text – they must be read as secondary revisions. In *Die Klavierspielerin* these manifestations are not beneath the text, but between it, appearing in brief flashes, the same way unconscious makes itself felt outside of literature.

In *Human Croquet*, we see the presence of the unconscious through the intra-psychic narratives, which also take place on two unconnected levels: Past and Present. Some of the knowledge demonstrated to the reader from the Past is clearly present in Isobel's unconscious, and manifests itself in the reappearance in the Present of items metonymically connected with the lost mother.

As critics, readers or analysts, we ignore desire at our peril. As metonymy, it is the most basic structure of narrative. Desire is indispensable to a psychoanalytic understanding of literature, as it is desire that gives rise to the novel, that causes it to come into being. This is seen in both *Out of the Line of Fire* and *Gut Symmetries*, where

this desire is expressed through a letter. But desire can never be fully expressed, and in both cases there is an excess of desire: *jouissance*. In *Die Klavierspielerin*, Erika's transgressive desires, her attempts to attain *jouissance* through pain, are rejected by Klemmer. Yet in her missive there is an excess of meaning, which affects him, and results in him fulfilling her desires as expressed in the letter. It is not merely the particularly violent manner of their fulfilment that leaves Erika unsatisfied, but this is also the nature of desire, that once an object is attained, it is no longer desired.

The object that provokes the greatest *jouissance* is incest, and this is seen in *Gut Symmetries*, *Out of the Line of Fire* and *Human Croquet*. Incest, particularly fraternal-sororal incest, normally represents a short-circuit in the plot of the narrative – a too pure encounter with *jouissance* which ends in death. In both *Out of the Line of Fire* and *Human Croquet*, the incest motif does indeed end in death, but as it takes place in an embedded story and an intra-psychic narrative (respectively), the deaths that result do not end the narrative.

Desire makes its presence felt not only through the events of the text, but also through its structure. In *Out of the Line of Fire*, it pervades the text at two levels: Wolfi's texts are suffused with his desire and this desire affects the 'author,' who in turn forwards it (in the sense that the address on a letter may be replaced with another) to the reader. By representing these stories as he received them, the author

reinvests them with desire, passing on both his and Wolff's to the reader.

The idea that time only travels forward is of only limited use to both psychoanalysis and literary criticism. In the psyche, time may just as well run backwards or cease to exist altogether. In literature this can be seen in the presentation of events in an order other than the one in which they occurred. Botho Strauß's *Der junge Mann* is not a novel that is concerned with a single aspect of time, but with many possible times. Foremost among these is the concept of Same Time, where everything has already happened, is happening, and will happen. In this way, the timelessness of the unconscious finds its representation in material reality. A pure representation of Same Time would require different forms of literature, similar to Wolf's dreamt of 'tissue narrative,' where linear narration gives ways to the presentation of the story all at once. It is through an analysis of repetition in *Der junge Mann* that we are led to the recognition of the novel as a novel rather than a collection of short stories.

The "towards" of my title is intended to indicate that this is not an all-encompassing theory of psychoanalytic literary criticism, but merely an attempt to indicate and demonstrate possible strategies and methods. Psychoanalysis is not a fixed body of knowledge and as it develops, so too will psychoanalytic literary criticism. Each of the texts under consideration in this chapter could also be investigated from a

variety of other perspectives. Those chosen here are simply among the most fundamental to psychoanalysis and literature. This study has attempted to show that readings should be approached not merely at the level of the content of the text, but at the level of the structure(s) of the text and their effect on the reader. By doing so we may not only learn more about literature, but also more about psychoanalysis and its place in literary criticism.

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