Chapter VIII

Conclusion

The greatest insight imparted by psychoanalysis is the realization that man has to search for his reality in language. Language constitutes man in its own image and in language lies man's ultimate destiny. Language mediates reality. Reality itself is epistemological and not ontological. Freud perfected the "talking cure" realizing that man has to look for his own past (history) in the world of language. The analysand makes his history a linguistic act by recounting the events. Reality itself is constituted by the fact that the events in his life get spoken. They are converted into language. In psychoanalysis the materiality of the facts is of no account, but it is the structuring in the world of language that is considered important. As Robert Con Davis puts it, "psychoanalytic critique offers a language whose force is as 'performative' as it is 'constative', as much a theatricalization as a statement of truth." Even the Lacanian unconscious is structured as language.

This is why all the studies in this collection are linguistic ones. Language has a dual role to play here. If the symptom takes the form of the word it is through the word that the knots of symptoms have to be untied.

In this symptomatic study, psychoanalysis is used in the explication of literature because both literature and psychoanalysis have a common material—i.e. language. Literature and psychoanalysis
are attempts to read the signification behind the text of experience metaphorically. The present study attempts to make critical use of six psychoanalytic insights for elucidating select plays of John Osborne. Let us have a bird's eye-view of these analytic insights.

Psychoanalysis encodes a theory of history. It gives a new reading of history because in psychoanalysis a person's history is couched in the form of language. Here history becomes a verbal act. Psychoanalysis shows the textuality of history. This new perception of the relation between history and text has been made use of in the study of Luther.

A knowledge of hysterical as well neurotic symptoms is of great relevance to the student of literature, because literature also is structured like a symptom. In hysteria as well as neurosis word becomes symptom while symptom becomes word is literature. In hysteria as well as in neurosis flesh (body) becomes the signifying material while the body of language is the signifying material in literature. An insight into the semantic element (meaning) in bodily symptoms is very much helpful for a study of literature. A symptom is as ambivalent as the word, since it is an ensemble of contradictory significations. To quote Freud, "in this way, the symptom then comes into being, as a derivative, distorted in manifold ways, of the libidinal wish fulfilment, as a cleverly chosen ambiguity with two contradictory significations." Symptom signifies something other than what it says because the signifier is not tied to the signified. This post-structuralist
insight into the symptoms has been immensely helpful in the analysis of select plays.

The concept of trauma is the greatest contribution of psychoanalysis to critical theory. The theory of trauma which was formulated by Freud in the course of his case studies had been changed into a linguistic metaphor by Jacques Lacan. The concept of trauma anticipates Derrida, concerned as it is with the belated arrival of meaning. It is only in the future that the subject realizes its own history. To quote Lacan, "analysis can have for its goal only the advent of a true speech and the realization by the subject of his history in his relation to a future." Every text is an open-ended entity with no final closure of meaning. Every text leaves a potential space for a future reader, so that its meaning is re-activated. This knowledge has been fruitfully employed in the study of Luther and Inadmissible Evidence.

Freud's Interpretation of Dreams resembles a literary treatise, affording a key for the analysis of literature. Dream is a figurative form of writing through which the unconscious writes its desires: "The unconscious speaks but it does so indirectly using figures of speech and tropes, and in silences." Dream like literature is a piece of language. The text of dream has the structure of language comprising signifiers organized into a network of multiple relations by displacement. The knowledge that the dreamer becomes a linguistic metaphor when he becomes the subject of a dream has been immensely helpful in tracking down the subject of Inadmissible Evidence.
Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is a re-interpretation and a critique of classical Freudianism in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist theories. The instinctual unconscious that precedes language does not interest Lacan. Lacan explains the genesis of the human subject in terms of language. The subject comes into being when it acquires consciousness and this happens in a mythic moment which Lacan calls the mirror stage. Lacan maintains that the child forms the 'ego' concept by identification with an image that is reflected back to it from something outside itself. This alienating relation between the self and its image is applied in the symptomatic study of *Entertainer*, where the stage figure is split between the person and the character.

It is the primacy given to language that makes Lacan highly relevant for students of literature. "He maintains not only that the unconscious is structured like a language but that it is the product of language." Lacan traces the highly intricate relation between language and the subject. The subject gets written in language—it becomes a mere representation. This results in a persistent conflict between the representation and the represented, i.e. the subject and the innermost self. This analytic insight has been used in tracking down the subject in *Look Back in Anger* and *Entertainer*.

The present study is designed to be an act of reading based on the insight that the text is given shape or meaning in the act of reading. Every reading is a framing process through which a new text is created.
Every play under study is taken as fundamentally incomplete. The explication of select plays using psychoanalysis as a critical tool is one such reading. Every reading of the play encloses an alterity—being amenable to an alternate reading.

Osborne’s plays merit such a psychological probe for obvious reasons. His characters are mostly lonely beings and “the theme of isolation has been very important in Osborne’s work.” Abnormal or aberrant behaviour always fascinates Osborne. All the characters in the plays taken for study—Luther, Jimmy Porter, Bill Maitland and Archie Rice—exhibit deviant behaviour. Only a psychoanalytic probe helps in exploring the mindscape of these characters.

*Luther* is an attempt to give a new reading of history—a search for history in language. It almost psychoanalyses history—history is made to yield its own language. Luther’s neurosis becomes the textual form of history. It is an error that speaks the truth. The truth of history blossoms out of the language of error spoken by Martin’s neurosis. We can decipher the present only in terms of the past because it is Martin’s past that writes his present. This is why an excavation of Martin’s past which lies buried in the world of language becomes all the more important. The conflict between father and son is of pivotal importance in the study of Martin’s neurosis. Hans Luther, with his brusque, abrasive manners, is a sinister father figure. It is only natural that Martin feels acute anxiety in the presence of such a father. The encounter with this formidable father figure depleted his mental
reserves and later erupts in the form of neurosis. Martin's neurosis is characterized by a repetitive structure. Martin's religion is only a repetition of his infantile neurosis. His God is only a magnified Hans and he displaces on to God the ambivalent emotions he feels towards his father.

Language takes centre stage in the study of Look Back in Anger also. The study gives a symptomatic reading of the text and character (Jimmy). Text and character are not mimetic representation of the life outside but only pieces of language. In this symptomatic study, the text is treated as a character while the character is treated as a text. The text is like a subject that is written by language. There are textual aporias where the text's own subjectivity evades the nets of the language. This repressed subjectivity of the text in the form of Desire erupts symptomatically. The text articulates its desire through various symptoms. Three such symptoms have been identified for closer scrutiny. They are (1) the animal imagery within the text (2) metaphoric crossings within the text (3) imaginary role play. The text is seen to display a kind of infantilism—a tendency to slip back from the symbolic world of language to a pre-symbolic world of symbiosis and fantasy. The text itself becomes a symptom of the character—Jimmy—as we find the same infantilism repeated in the case of the character also.

Traditional criticism has failed to explicate Jimmy satisfactorily. The attempts to trace the 'socio-genesis' of his anger have only made
him more ambiguous. The linguistic nature of Jimmy's reality has been lost sight of by traditional criticism. The present study has attempted to 'disambiguate' Jimmy by taking him as a textual construct—a linguistic artefact. As Banhan puts it, "Jimmy is real because he is written from within." 7 Lacan has put it across quite emphatically that it is language that writes the character. Society itself is structured like language. The subject becomes a mere signifier in the world of language. The inner core of Jimmy's subjectivity fails to be caught in the nets of language and remains unrepresented. This subjectivity comes to the fore in the form of symptoms. Jimmy's anger is a textual symptom—a metaphoric representation—through which his self or subjectivity erupts. All the symptoms—oral fixation, sadism, masochism etc. exhibited by Jimmy betray a tendency to regress to an antecedent stage. The character shows a proclivity to slip back from the symbolic to the pre-symbolic. The character thereby repeats the text.

The study of Inadmissible Evidence is an enquiry into the positioning of the subject in the world of language. The fact that the play is structured in the form of a dream makes such an enquiry convincing. The application of dream theory in the explication of the play is a symptomatic study because dream itself is structured like a symptom. Lacanian reading of Freud has enabled us to treat dream itself as a form of writing. The study has attempted to foreground the textual questions that arise due to the application of dream theory to the text of the play. Dream raises the question of the relation between the subject and the text. Dream does not represent a pre-existing
reality because the dreamer becomes a linguistic metaphor (a piece of language) inside the dream. The dreamer is not present as such in his dreams: Maitland in the dream is not Maitland the dreamer, but a character who is born with the text. As a character in the text he has no ontological existence anterior to the text. He is a linguistic reality valid only within the language of dreams. Maitland thus becomes contemporaneous with the dream itself.

Another textual problem that dream poses is the question of signification. The subject is not present as a full presence in the present. It becomes difficult to locate the subject in the dream temporally because by repeating the past in the present, the dream writes the future. The past and future join and unwrite the present.

The study of *Inadmissible Evidence* also shows the relation between the reader and the text. Dream always leaves a potential space for the reader because it is only during interpretation (reading) that the dream yields its meaning. Freud himself has stated in unambiguous terms that the dream is something to be interpreted. Meaning is precipitated only in a trans-individual situation. Meaning exists, not as a present fullness, but a future possibility. It is the advent of 'future reader' that retroactively gives meaning to whatever is embedded in the work. By reading it we are restoring *Inadmissible Evidence* to its meaning.

The study of *Entertainer* is a general enquiry into the complex nature of theatrical language, and the kind of reality involved in drama.
as stage performance. It is a metaphorical reading of the theatrical text of drama. Archie is seen as a stage metaphor in which the figural and the literal vie with each other for dominance. The actor's body on the stage is *flesh made word*. It is a signifying material that has two contradictory significations. The actor's body stands for itself (the Real of the body) at the same time it can signify a character who thus becomes an absent presence. The actor writes out a narrative on the stage with his own body and at times, the narrative may be subverted by the intrusion of the 'Real'. In other words, the actor's experiences as a man may conflict with that of the character. An actor succeeds on the stage when he makes his body an image so that the character can inhabit his body. But in the case of Archie he is a failure because his experiences as a man conflicts with his experiences as an actor. There is a conflict between body and language—the Real and the symbolic. As a stage-figure, Archie is a split personality. The impersonal narrative on the stage conceals the personal narrative of Archie's own life.

The conflict between the symbolic and the Real—language and the body—extends to all aspects of theatrical performance—stage and the audience. In traditional illusionist theatre, the body of the stage represents another space—being subject to a metaphoric transformation. The stage itself has contrary significations in the play—the figural and the literal. Many are the occasions when the symbolic reality of the stage is de-constructed and the stage returns to its own body. This destroys the illusion on the stage, since the spectator is made an observer of how reality is constructed on the stage. This
happens in the case of the audience also. Archie's direct address to the audience temporarily suspends the symbolic status that they have in the theatre. Just as in the case of the stage figure and the stage, the audience are also subjected to a split between the symbolic and the Real. As in the plays of Brecht, the audience are alienated from the stage-spectacle and become 'mere people'.