Chapter II

Symptom as the Word: The Story of Psychoanalysis

"Anna O. (Bertha von Pappenheim) dubbed Freud's therapeutic method as 'the talking cure' and it is there—from the mouth of one who is to be cured—that psychoanalysis found its own discourse."

Psychoanalysis is not primarily a literary practice, but a therapeutic methodology for neurotic ailments. The first recorded use of the word 'psychoanalysis' occurs in "Heredity and the Aetiology of Neurosis," a paper prepared by Freud for a French neurological Review in early 1896. The classical method of psychoanalysis aims at digging out the repressed fears and conflicts lying buried in the dark dungeon of the unconscious mind. The analytical method attempts to effect the cure by integrating the two worlds that constitute our identity—the inner world of fantasies and impulses and the outer world of external reality. During psychoanalysis a person is made to acknowledge and take into account the repressed part of himself. As Jacques Alain Miller puts it, "you may get an idea of what happens in an analytic experience when the repressed which, as Freud says, always returns, returns in a new light, is recognized, admitted, taken into account."

The constitution of psychoanalysis, however, was motivated by Freud's unprecedented transformation of narration to theory. Psychoanalysis permeates its own history. It was the case study of Anna O. that opened up the possibility of 'talking cure' before Freud.
The significance of this case lay in the fact that in the conscious state the patient knew nothing about the origin of her symptoms, though she really knew something which the doctor did not know at all. So the aim of the treatment was to make the patient know something which she actually knew. During the treatment it became evident that her symptoms were residues of past experiences. Analysis revealed the underlying conflict. The symptoms had come into existence following the repression by other motives of the impulse to do something. "The symptoms appeared as substitutes for the unperformed act."\(^3\)

It was left to Freud to unfold the full implications of this momentous discovery. Freud understood the pivotal role that words play in the birth and cure of symptoms. Psychoanalysis became a kind of hermeneutics concerned with the exploration of the meaning behind the symptoms. The symptoms vanished when the patient spoke. The symptoms were found to be unarticulated verbal equivalents referring back to infantile experiences or some important event in the life history of the patient. If this event was recognized as being the cause of the symptom, it was because the putting into words of the event determined the lifting of the symptoms. Freud made the insightful discovery that the symptom itself is a piece of language. Lacan underscores the linguistic nature of the symptom. "... thus it is quite clear that the symptom resolves itself entirely in an analysis of language, because the symptom is itself structured like a language, because it is from language that speech must be delivered."\(^4\) It is the absence of speech that constitutes the symptom. During analytic treatment the symptom is
*made word.* To quote Lacan again: "And how could a psychoanalyst of today not realize that speech is the key to that truth, when his whole experience must find in speech alone its instrument, its context, its material, and even the background noise of its uncertainties." The private symptoms are translated into the public language of the innervation of the pharynx. The working material of analysis is speech and language is at the heart of psychoanalysis. Freud located all the conditions of psychoanalysis in the necessary conditions of language. It seeks wisdom from talking non-sense.

Psychoanalysis works its wonders through the use of a special kind of language called 'free-association'. The analysand has to *speak out* anything and everything that comes to his head. This *analytic speech* is itself treated as a *kind of symptom* standing for something that lies hidden in the recess of his mind. The analytic speech is over-determined in the Freudian sense. The analyst is concerned more with what is left unsaid than with what is said by the patient. Through verbalising his past experiences, the analysand *writes out* the text of his history in the present context. The analyst listens to the words of the analysand with 'evenly hovering' attention. The analyst's listening to the patient's discourse is a kind of reading. The analyst also speaks in the form of interpretation thereby jotting down his own personal comments on the margin of the text of the patient's speech. The analyst's interpretation is not an adjunct to the primary text of the patient's speech. The interpretation inserts itself in the interstices of the patient's verbal text, filling up gaps and holes which are there. "He
interprets the symbol and, lo and behold, the symptom which inscribes
the symbol in letters of suffering in the subject's flesh, disappears."^6
The analyst seeks out the meaning that lies buried behind the facade of
silence, involuntary slip of the tongue, obsessional repetitions, and
verbal infelicity. During analysis the unconscious significations behind
the symptoms will be unearthed and the secret knots untied. Interpretation establishes a new relation between the subject and his
words. The methods of interpretation are based on the fact that "the
unconscious is structured like a language that the material operates in it
according to certain laws, which are the same laws as those discovered
in the study of actual languages."^7

During analysis Freud was struck by a curious phenomenon. The
patient refused to speak and to free-associate. Experience taught Freud
that this absence of speech is more pregnant with meaning than speech
itself. Resistance and the resulting silence owed their existence to the
fact that the patient repressed his memory of an idea very painful or
dangerous. The patient was shying away from the memory of the
traumatic events that constituted the meaning of his symptom. The
silence was symptomatic. It was a resistance to signification. It is only
by uncovering the points of resistance that the analyst is able to read
the meaning behind the symptoms.

Language is the sole working material and the sole medium in
psychoanalysis. In analysis, the reality that is scanned is linguistic since
it is in speech itself that the analytic truth is constituted. During

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analysis, the repressed part of the subject's discourse emerges into consciousness wearing a mask. Analytic truth, just like literary truth, is at the level of meaning and not at the level of reference. The exact chronology of the facts recorded and even the reality or non-reality of the events are of little account in an analytic session. There cannot be any verification or reference to external facts "because verification is internal to the kind of speech that is the means of analysis, and internal verification occurs through gauging the coherence and the consistency of the speech." The analytic word enacts its own meaning. Freud had to abandon the "seduction theory" because one is not concerned with the materiality of facts during analysis. The reality that appears in analysis is symptomatic. Maud Ellman highlights the metaphoric nature of analytic reality: "Insofar as it is mediated by a myth, the Freudian theory is not a literal translation or reflection of reality, but its symptom, its metaphorical account." It is the linguistic context that precipitates meaning in analysis. It is only in the past context of his life that the words of the analysand explode into meaning. The present material unfolds a past history:

What we teach the subject to recognize as his unconscious is his history—that is to say, we help him to perfect the present historization of the facts that have already determined a certain number of the historical 'turning-points' in his existence.
It is through the speech-act that the subject comes into being. The subject is structured in his own narration.

It is only in an inter-subjective, trans-individual context that meaning is precipitated in analysis. It points to the trans-individual reality of the subject. The speech of the analysand is addressed to the analyst. It is the analyst as the Other who holds the meaning of the analysand’s words. This trans-individualisation relates meaning to otherness.

Psychoanalysis treats the analysand’s discourse as a literary text with its multiple referentiality. The ‘surface text’ or ‘manifest content’ of the discourse hides a ‘latent content’. Meaning is the result of the re-composition or re-writing of the surface level in terms of the deeper level. “Freudian psychoanalysis, then, relies on a systematic allegorical interpretation, for it treats the surface level as an allegory, since it is not conceived of as immediately meaningful in itself.” The symptoms also undergo a change of signification when a patient enters analysis.

Analysis is a repetition. The events in the patient’s life happen again. Compulsion to repeat underlies the drama of analysis. The Freudian view is that whatever is repressed is destined to repeat itself. A thing which has not been understood reappears like an unlaid ghost. Instead of remembering as something that belongs to the past, the patient repeats (re-enacts) the repressed as a contemporaneous experience. The analysand looks back into the past to decipher the meanings of the present.
Psychoanalysis holds great implications for literary criticism. Psychoanalytic literary criticism begins with Freud himself who inaugurates this critical genre with his essay "The Uncanny" which is a reading of Theodor Hoffmann's horror-story "The Sandman." Critics can make ample use of the insights embedded within psychoanalysis for the study of literature. Freudian psychoanalytic critics pay close attention to the unconscious motives and feelings whether they belong to the author or the characters. They also look for the presence of classic psychoanalytic symptoms in a work of art. The critics belonging to this school identify a psychic context for the literary work, at the expense of the social or historical context.

Lacanian psychoanalysis also has far-reaching influence on the study of literature. To critics belonging to this school, literature and psychoanalysis are attempts to grasp the signification behind the text of our experience. They excavate unconscious motives within the text itself uncovering contradictory undercurrents of meaning behind the 'conscious' of the text. This type of criticism is essentially deconstructive. The hidden parts of the text's personality are made accessible by focusing on absences, slippages and distortions. "By examining metaphors, similes and absence in the literary work, critics aim to reveal a hidden sub-text which may structure a text's personality."12

Psychoanalysis also encloses a reader theory. 'Transference' and 'countertransference' are the reader theory of psychoanalysis. In an
analytic situation, transference effects the cure by transferring the patient's thoughts that belonged to the repressed past to the person of the analyst. The case study of Dora makes it amply clear that Freud conceives of transference as textual in its implication. Note the words in *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*: "Indeed, one of the most striking of these occasions is when, in the Dora case history, he likened the transference to the new edition of an old text." Transference entails a transfer of significations. Transference works its wonders through mistaken identity. The analysand mis-reads the person of the analyst, and transfers all his libidinal longings and pathological attachments to the person of the analyst. The analyst acts as a signifier who is invested with the patient's repressed desire. He serves as the material space on which the patient can write his repressed unconscious longings. The task of the analyst is to help the analysand in reading transference which is structured like a symptom. Transference is the repetition of the patient's neurosis. "We are no longer concerned with the patient's earlier illness but with a newly created and transformed neurosis which has taken the former place—the transference is that neurosis." The dynamics of transference reflects how past experience is re-created and re-structured in the present situation. "Transference became an expression of a pathological Oedipal attachment to the analyst which represented the individual's earlier relationship to parental figures." Analyst as a present signifier is invested with past meanings.

At the core of transference is displacement. The patient displaces onto the analyst not merely affects and ideas, but all he has learned
throughout his mental development. The analytic relationship becomes a field of fantasy in which reality can be read only through the thick fog of fantasy. The mechanism of displacing past experience onto the figure of the analyst starts operating when the repressed wish is in danger of emerging. As Elizabeth Wright puts it, "psychoanalytic reader theory, as will be seen, looks for such points of resistance in both readers and texts as manifestations of the compulsion to repeat." During transferential relations, the patient's behaviour becomes a pure repetition divorced from external reality. The analysand is in the grip of the repetition compulsion, "the return of the repressed."

Transference is present in the analytic situation as a sign of absence, because 'trauma' which transference proposes to repeat is a 'missed encounter'. During transference, the analyst serves as a sign of absence. He pays with his own person—he is literally dispossessed of himself. Elizabeth Wright puts it thus: "In Lacan's model of transference, the analyst 'is absent' in order that the analysand may do the analysing, refusing the place assigned to him as 'subject presumed to know' playing dummy instead."

Since transference results from the analysand's speech which is directed at the analyst, the analyst is not external to the analysand's unconscious, but internal to it. The analyst is implicated in the subject's unconscious. There is a particular space in the subject's internal world that the analyst seems to occupy.
The fictional nature of the transferential relation links it to a literary text. The problems which are handled in the consulting room are never at par with the real life problems of the patient. This is why transference poses the question of the textual real and the real outside. Reality inside the text is only a verbal construct. A text shows the relation between the word and the word, not between the word and the world. External reality enters the analytic session only in the form of a fiction. "They have, perhaps, something of the fictional relation to those real-life problems which a literary text has to the materials it transforms."\(^{18}\)

The concept of transference is pregnant with many theories of reading. For the student of literature, transference is a paradigm of the reading process itself. Transference gives us an insight into how meaning is precipitated during the act of reading. During every act of reading there is a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader. The reader writes the text in the process of reading. The analyst serves as a blank page on which the analysand writes out his desires. No text is simply there; every text is only a reading. This view becomes quite clear if we take the analysand as the reader and the analyst as the text. During transferential relation, the analysand as the reader transfers the signification behind his past experiences to the analyst. The reader is inscribed in the text he reads. Text becomes a potential structure which is concretised by the reader. Roland Barthes's "A Lover's Discourse" (1979) and Shoshana Felman's "Turning the Screw of Interpretation" (1977) focus on the dilemma of the reader in transference. Every text
may be understood as fundamentally incomplete, to be constructed in the act of reading. The text is re-made in every reading. This idea is analogous to the idea of a *writerly text* that Barthes puts forth in the book *S/Z* (1970): "The writerly text though makes the reader 'no longer a consumer, but the producer of the text'. In other words the reader is activated and in effect becomes the writer of the text."\(^{19}\)

This is closely analogous to the theory of Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Michael Riffaterre that the theory of the text cannot be disengaged from the role that the reader takes. They all agree that it is the act of reading that precipitates meaning. In the theories of Iser, the act of reading involves an interaction between elements of the text and the act of reading itself.

He explores the way in which the text is 'concretized'—given shape or meaning in the act of reading. For Iser, neither the text nor reader should be studied in isolation; rather, the text produces certain 'blanks' or 'gaps' that the reader must attempt to complete. The reader is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said.\(^{20}\)

The term 'countertransference' has undergone a radical change in meaning since it was introduced by Freud in 1910. Broadly speaking, the term 'countertransference' now applies to those thoughts and feelings experienced by the analyst which are relevant to the patient's inner world and which are used by the analyst to understand
the meanings of the patient's communications. It is the analyst's unconscious reaction to the individual analysand.

The concept of countertransference also has many implications for the theory of reading; it shows the impact of the text on the reader. It is not only that the process of reading re-structures the 'text' or 'writes' the text. The text writes the reader also. "Readers not only work on text, but texts work on readers, and this involves a complex dialectic of two bodies inscribed in language."²¹ It is not only that the process of reading re-structures the text or 'writes' the text. The text writes the reader also.

The reader is implicated in the act of reading. A reader introjects the text so that the fantasy within the text becomes the reader's fantasy. As is said by Lynne Pearce in *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, "reading was also something texts could 'do' to us whenever we took the leap into their uncharted territories."²²
Notes


14 Forrester, Seductions of Psychoanalysis 84.


17 Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism 130.


21 Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism 17.

22 Lynne Pearce, Feminism and the Politics of Reading (London: Arnold, 1997) 31.