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My project analyzes an innate symbiosis between the fields of literature and psychoanalysis through the workings of transference within narratives of psychotherapy. In the texts I examine (e.g. *Tender is the Night*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The White Hotel*, *Fear of Flying*, and *Antichrist*), I argue that transference is a product of the transitional space created through the therapeutic encounter between patient and analyst. It's through transference, and its modulation within the created transitional spaces in my chosen texts, that a metaphorical and continuous mobius strip is created – bridging my texts to each other and the project. This mobius strip, crafted out of each text's narrative encounters with itself and with psychoanalysis, is, by its very nature of sharing psychoanalytic thought with literary representation, constitutive of a conduit and convergence point for narrative; in turn, this function of the mobius strip allows for intersectionality between the fields of literature and psychoanalysis.

TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE: FREUD'S THERAPEUTIC FRAME  
IN NARRATIVES OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

by

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In his essay “Reading Freud”, Harold Bloom makes an illuminating statement about the nature of psychoanalysis and its predilection for illusion: “Why should it be genuinely therapeutic to generate an illusive relationship merely in order to dissipate it? Is there any analogue available to us that might illuminate so odd a transaction? How has psychoanalysis won social acceptance of so knowing an illusion, of so imaginary and consciously deceptive a false connection?” (309). What Bloom addresses here points to the essential heart of my project; literature and psychoanalysis rely on fiction (understood as illusion) in form and content. This makes transference a convergence point between the two fields – a function that balances the two and sieves the workings of each. To say, as Bloom does, that the connection is “false” is a half-truth within the frame of my argument. Narrative is an illusion for both psychoanalysis and literature, but that does not demean its necessity for story-telling and human connection. All stories are illusion just as all memories are illusion – only definable by the impressions our experiences mark on the world.

In volume three of Anais Nin’s diary she intuits the relationship between analysis and illusion when she notes that “analysis creates illusory attachments” (21). On the other hand, having worked as an analyst under Otto Rank, she is also aware of the harsher realities of narrative within analytic practice: “Analysis is not an indulgence, it is a cruel discipline, it is a harsh confrontation. To pretend one can forget the self is playing the ostrich game” (153). That is to say, the self is always the core, but it is a core that relies on the ever-changing vicissitudes of narrative to be expressed, heard, and seen. None of this would be possible without the catalyst of transference in psychotherapeutic practice (in terms of psychoanalysis) nor the act of reading and identifying with fictional characters (in terms of literature). In regards to narrative, then, the

whole is greater than the sum of its parts between these two fields, of which transference is essential to this amalgamation.

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### **Literature & Psychoanalysis**

One of the central and reoccurring tensions that continues to plague literary criticism is the hostile relation between literature and psychoanalysis. At the same time, psychoanalytic literary criticism has become an increasingly marginalized branch of literary studies. Aside from the accusation that psychoanalytic criticism relies on esoteric and alienating language, this marginalization seems to have occurred in part because most psychoanalytic readings of literature still apply a discrete set of analytic formulations to “diagnose” or “decode” literature, fictional characters, or authors.

From the perspective of literature, Freudian psychoanalysis has been considered as nothing more than a reductive confluence of outmoded and perverse theories of sexual neuroses whose application within literature “reduces the products of their [literary works’] sublime inspirations to nothing but a sum of secretory, excretory, and ejaculatory fantasies” (Wolf 46). While earlier critics have fallen into the theoretical trap of directly, and crudely, overlaying a psychoanalytic application to literary works (e.g. Edmund Wilson’s reading of *Turn of the Screw*), the problem with “literature and psychoanalysis,” as Shoshana Felman has pointed out, lies in the “and” (5-10). The reference to psychoanalysis has been continually used to close rather than open the argument, and the text, as Wilson’s essay exemplifies. For Peter Brooks this perspective on psychoanalysis is not surprising, since the recourse to psychoanalysis usually claims as its *raison d’être* a system of discourse more penetrating and productive of insight than literary psychology has routinely practiced (“The idea of a psychoanalytic literary criticism” 3).

For Felman, the conjunction “and” has almost always masked a privileging of one term over another, in which psychoanalysis is considered as “subject” and literature as “object” (5). While this is a risk in theoretical writing in general, the effects of how psychoanalysis and literature are positioned within a theoretical frame more succinctly and microcosmically capture what’s at stake in the relation between literature and theory. In other words, this imposed hierarchy of the literature and psychoanalysis sees the use of psychoanalysis as a conceptual system in terms of which to analyze and explain literature, rather than an encounter between the two. Echoing this point, Peter Brooks argues that “psychoanalysis in literary study has over and over again mistaken the object of analysis” to the degree that, whatever insights this application may produce, the methodology of the critique fails to account for the structure and rhetoric of literary texts (“The Idea of Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism” 1).

Building on Felman and Brooks, Meredith Skura highlights the need for a reciprocity between the two fields that situates their resemblance as a dynamic interaction “between the free-ranging play of mind and the organizing response to it” (“Literature as a Psychoanalytic Process” 379). These fields should not be seen as competing with or subjugating each other, but, as Felman notes, as a means by which to initiate “a real exchange, to engage in a real *dialogue* between literature and psychoanalysis, as between two different bodies of language and between two different modes of knowledge” (“To Open the Question” 6). Considering this, the traditional method of simply applying psychoanalysis would be replaced by a “notion of *implication*”: the critic’s role would be to “generate implications” between literature and psychoanalysis by articulating how each domain informs and displaces the other (Felman 8-9). That is to say, literature is not simply outside psychoanalysis but is the language psychoanalysis uses to define itself.

In extending Felman's argument about the relation between literature and psychoanalysis, my project explores how the workings of narrative (shared by psychoanalytic therapy and literary works involving psychotherapy) emphasize a "feedback loop" of sorts between both modes that, consequently, blur the divisive "theoretical boundaries" between literature and psychoanalysis. Instead of upholding their theoretical distinction, I argue that the border between literature and psychoanalysis is as protean as it is undecidable since they are traversed, as they are defined, by each other.

Structurally, psychoanalysis elicits and tells stories. Like most of literature, psychotherapeutic practice is structured around the creation, maintenance, and subsequent interiority of narratives. The therapeutic relation between patient and analyst is, necessarily, mediated by a symbolic exchange of language in which multiple valences of communication are at play: "[Psychology] is rather a feature of language – in particular, the effects of language – that exists above and beyond what is plainly spoken" (Ogden 35). To that end, psychoanalysis is not simply an arbitrary lens for engaging in theoretical discourse on literature. Rather, I posit that psychoanalysis and literature similarly engage in narrative to explore certain complexities of human experience – particularly how identity is a consequence of narrative construction. In this project, these two modes of construction are also both modes of the analysis of narrative, and the narrative of analysis. In other words they are, in this context of literature on psychoanalysis, symbiotic and co-constitutive. Because narrative acts as a catalyst between literature and psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis becomes a particularly insightful intertext for literary analysis, "in that mapping across boundaries from one territory to the other both confirms and complicates our understanding of how the mind reformulates the real, how it constructs the necessary fictions

by which we dream, desire, interpret, indeed by which we constitute ourselves as human subjects” (“The idea of a psychoanalytic literary criticism” 17).

By evaluating the structure and construction of narrative shared between literature and psychoanalysis, my project analyzes the therapeutic dynamics of gender and identity in several psychoanalytic fictions: *Tender is the Night*, *Portnoy’s Complaint*, *The White Hotel*, *Fear of Flying*, and *Antichrist*. I argue for the centralized and interrelated roles of transference and counter-transference between patient and analyst that enact a transferential reading of the therapeutic situation. This work intervenes in traditional readings of the psychoanalytic process by reinterpreting the therapeutic situation as a site of “transitional space.”

While previous scholarship on the psychoanalytic process challenges the relation between Freudian psychoanalysis and literature in interesting ways, these same Freudian reinterpretations are ultimately predicated on a return to the didactic framework of Freudian orthodoxy. That is to say, these previous models often seem to undermine their interventions by relying on a limited and mechanistic contextualization of Freudian concepts as a mode of critique. For example, in Peter Brooks’s text *Reading for the Plot*, he proposes a “transferential model” of reading in which the relation between narrator and narratee, and between author and reader, is analogous to the relation between patient and analyst. However, Brooks’s model is simplistically Freudian: for him, transference is the effect of the patient’s desire, to be “read” by the analyst. As such, Brooks’s intervention comes up against its own conceptual limits given his model’s dependency on the qualitative dualism of instinctual drives. That is to say, Brooks’s use of transference-desire as a conceptual frame inevitably reflects a reductive binary between ego and libidinal instincts. Likewise, Meredith Skura falls into a similar theoretical positioning in *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* by making the past referred to in phantasy a personal past,

that of the author, reader, or both. In approaching Freudian concepts this way, Brooks and Skura read more like pop-Freudian theorists who, through their respective models, reduce the complexities of literary intertexts to something much simpler (e.g. transference-desire or phantasy).

The scholarship that runs parallel to my project is Jeffrey Berman's text *The Talking Cure: Literary Representations of Psychoanalysis*. Writing around the same period as Brooks and Skura – when Freudian and Neo-Freudian approaches to literature were in vogue – Berman examines the use modern writers like Roth, Fitzgerald, and Plath have of the psychoanalyst as a literary character. In particular, Berman analyzes the patient-analyst relationship in terms of the effect of psychotherapy on the creative process, and the ways in which the writer transmutes case study material into art. My focus differs from Berman's in that I reread the created narratives of the therapeutic situation not as products of the industry of Freudian analysis, but as a metamorphic site of “transitional space” that opens literary works to their dialogic and intertextual possibilities with psychoanalysis.

By foregrounding the interrelation and therapeutic dynamics of transference and counter-transference between literary portrayals of patients and analysts, I argue against the Freudian orthodoxy that frames these therapeutic relations within a parochial, mechanical, and phallogocentric model. What I am calling a “transferential reading” of *Tender is the Night*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *The White Hotel*, *Fear of Flying*, and *Antichrist* will reveal how each text engages with the transitional space, and the consequences of the patriarchal frame of Freudian psychotherapy. As opposed to the classical Freudian model that restricts narratives within the confines of its own deterministic constituents, my transferential reading challenges this model by opening literary texts to their intertextual possibilities with psychoanalysis. Concomitantly, I

argue that this transitional space recreates a relationship between psychoanalytic thought and literary representation that informs how we interpret gender, identity, and narrative within fictional works of psychotherapy. By looking at how five representative texts engage with this transitional space, I analyze the narrative and political consequences of the culturally inherited, patriarchal frame of Freudian psychotherapy. I'm interested in the way in which this patriarchal influence provokes and replicates gendered disparities between female patients and male analysts, and how these transitional spaces of psychotherapy open patient-analyst relations to the complexities, nuances, and detriments that define representations of subjectivity relative to their constant narrative reconstruction. This project is also attuned to the way in which the catalyst of narrative construction influences the transference dynamics of these transitional spaces and the intertextual possibilities of embodiment and expression – the literariness of literature – in each.

### **The Therapeutic Frame**

As Ogden and Ogden point out, psychoanalytic studies have regularly neglected so much of what actually makes up the experience of the practice of psychoanalysis: “its close attention to the effects of language and to other forms of human expression, its interest in the relationship between the use of language and the individual’s attempts to express and understand himself, and its therapeutic dimension” (*The Analyst’s Ear and the Critic’s Eye* 3). The last of these concepts, the therapeutic dimension, is significant for its function in bridging levels of communication and intertextual relations present in the dynamics between literature and psychoanalysis. Moreover, while literature may not involve direct interpersonal exchange – unlike the therapeutic workings of the psychoanalytic interview – it “inevitably has an interpsychic dimension, despite its mediational and unidirectional character” (Marotti 476). Expressed in the social and symbolic codes of language, literature is also communication, “the contact of human beings through a

medium in which their personal styles, to at least a minimal degree, interconnect” (476). What this speaks to is the interrelated and interpsychic modes between literature and psychoanalysis. As such, the relation between literature and psychoanalysis is dependent on how both are linked structurally through the cognitive and textual mirroring of narrative construction. To put it more succinctly, the structure of literature “is in some sense the structure of mind” (Brooks 4).

More to the point, this mirroring presents the need for a grounding methodological structure in the form of the psychoanalytic process of the therapeutic frame. Particularly, for Freud, the goal of psychoanalysis is that of making the unconscious conscious, thereby bringing irrational unconscious wishes and fears into the realm of conscious, realistic, chronological, and verbally symbolic thought processes. Freud believed himself to be restating in scientific language what the poets were able to express only in displaced and distorted form. He saw two poles of expression: one that is explicit and scientific, like his case histories, and one that is repressed and distorted by subjective fantasy. Thus, all poetic statement, according to Freud, could be measured by a standard of objective truth (*The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* 48). Freud’s own background as a researcher in neurology added to his tendency to couch his models in scientific terms to claim objectivity. His image of the analyst as an impartial observer in the analytic situation, who overcomes his subjective distortions (countertransference) and becomes an honest mirror to the patient, is an outgrowth of this emphasis (Berman 5). The psychoanalytic process, then, is more than a means of achieving isolated insights or retrieving isolated memories; rather, it becomes an end in itself – one that is continually replayed and reworked within the therapeutic space between patient and analyst.

Following Skura, my emphasis on the psychoanalytic process draws attention to psychoanalysis as an intertextual method rather than as a body of knowledge. Psychoanalysis

becomes a way of interpreting and foregrounding the implications it has for literature and vice versa, rather than as a specific production, application, or interpretation. Through Freud's aim to fill in the gaps of his patients' memories, we see the creation of a psychoanalytic process through a therapeutic and relational structuring between patient and analyst – creating a dynamic as focused on reciprocity as it is on the limits of its own narrative. While the methodology of this psychoanalytic process involves an almost *mise en abyme*-like psychodynamic within the therapeutic space, it also involves a particular understanding of both interpretation and communication. Since it locates the observer-interpreter in the midst of the field he/she analyzes, Freud's therapeutic method becomes dependent on a kind of "subjective objectivity" (Marotti 471-2). This linguistic posturing for the psychoanalytic process starts with the assumption that communication is multifaceted, and the analyst must draw on all the ways one human being understands another as he/she tries to put his/her experience into words. The analyst is as interested in why and how something is said as he/she is in the words that are actually spoken. In this way, the psychoanalytic process provides no esoteric means of reading the unconscious in literature; rather, its strength derives from two strategies: "first, it insists on paying attention to everything, and second, it mistrusts the seemingly obvious implications of what it observes" ("Literature as a Psychoanalytic Process" 374). As an analytic model for literary texts, it is not only more participatory than the classical Freudian model, but also more complex because it includes, along with a recognition of multiple discourses, an explicit emphasis on those moments of insight and self-consciousness that organize the self-referential interrelation between language, meaning, experience, and positionality. Avoiding the issues that plagued earlier models, the psychoanalytic process, as Skura describes it, is instead "designed to dismantle less rigorous modes of consciousness, to break up the defensively distorted versions of inner and



outer reality” represented in the symbolic, thematic, and linguistic subtleties of a literary text (375).

### **Psychotherapy & Language**

“But what is going to happen doctor? Is it just going to be talk?” (Storr 13). According to British psychiatrist Anthony Storr, this is the “very natural question” often put by puzzled patients at their initial interview with an analyst. The first of these questions, “what is going to happen?” is neither so naïve nor so easy to answer, for exactly what does transpire in psychotherapy – and even more so, how – is a matter of debate. The second, however, “Is it just going to be talk?” meets with an affirmative reply from Storr as he explains: “You have had these problems for some time. If we are going to understand them together, it is necessary for us to go into them in a lot of detail. This is why we must meet on a number of occasions” (13). “Just talk,” he adds, will during subsequent meetings, if they go well, acquire a new meaning for patients. For one thing, they will learn that their input is vital to the therapeutic endeavor. While the analyst will certainly interject questions or comments, later on offer interpretations and, most likely, reassurance, it is the patient who propels the journey that is psychotherapy. In this respect psychotherapy differs from other branches of medicine, where patients, having stated their symptoms and undergone sundry physical examinations and tests, then await from the physician diagnosis, prognosis, and prescriptions for treatment. Physicians will talk *to* patients, but they assume the dominant part in the exchange in contrast to psychotherapy that deliberately elicits patients’ input and fosters their participation. Although the amount of prompting needed to get going will vary from patient to patient, the principle of patients as the active agents in the probing and exploration of their problems is central to psychotherapy.

In his advocacy for “just talk,” Storr, while admitting that it “is an act which is less simple than it appears,” makes several arguments in its favor: “Putting things into words has the effect of giving reality to unformulated mental contents” (25). By extension, Storr also posits an alternate function of language in psychotherapy that allows for both introspection and objectivity:

Putting things into words has another function. It is the means whereby we detach ourselves from both the world about us and from the inner world of our own actions and thoughts. It is by means of words that we objectify, that we are enabled to stand back from our experience and reflect upon it. Words about the self make possible a psychic distance from the self, and, without that distance, neither understanding nor control, nor willed, deliberate change is possible. (26)

What in a British colloquialism was described as “getting things off one’s chest” therefore allows not only an immediately cathartic release but also forms the starting point for a deeper remediation. Words, more accurately understood as narrative constructions within the therapeutic exchange, create a site for a more understanding dialectic where patient and analyst could navigate each other without, hopefully, compromising the work of psychotherapy. For what is at stake is not only “a relation of contract and obligation” within the therapeutic setting, but also “the movement of something through the communicative chain, an act of transmission and reception” (“Psychoanalytic Constructions and Narrative Meanings” 56). Something is being transmitted or transferred from the teller and his told to the listener, and to listening: it has entered the realm of interpretation. And if story told has been effective, if it has taken hold, the act of transmission resembles psychoanalytic transference, “where listener, and reader, enter the story as active participants in the creation of design and meaning” (56). Language is the medium in which psychotherapy works and the main pathway for the mind to express itself. It is through language that the therapist and the patient touch each other’s mind. For the patient, language brings conscious and unconscious material to life. It gives this material emotional nuance and

power, elaborates content and conflict, holds, withdraws, separates, and presents for the analyst to understand and appreciate. For the therapist, language provides form for the patient's material, creates a space for it to be held, appreciated, manipulated, and played with in associated tangents. Language also provides a medium to supply support and interpretation to the patient.

The gradual realization of the therapeutic value of just talk was a salient change in psychiatry as it assumed its modern form. In 1886 the French psychologist Pierre Janet (1859-1947) experimented in La Havre with a patient named Leonie, getting her to engage in automatic writing to uncover the cause and meaning of her fits of terror (Ellenberger 358). Five years later in Paris he successfully tried automatic talking in the case of Madame D who was thereby able to recall unconscious memories while in a hypnotic state (366). Such a method of self-disclosure was in contravention to the accepted norms at the turn of the century. For example, one of the most influential physicians in the United States, William Osler (1849-1919), argued, "To talk of diseases is a sort of Arabian Nights' entertainment to which no discreet nurse will lend her talents" (Osler 94). Silas Weir Mitchell, the foremost American neurologist of the later nineteenth century, who treated Charlotte Perkins Gillman with a "rest cure" infamously depicted in "The Yellow Wallpaper," was equally outspoken in his opposition to any discussion of the patient's symptoms in the belief that they would disappear as the patient got "well" through physical measures.

The reversal from silencing patients to inducing them to talk occurred with psychoanalysis, whose basic rule was that analysands (i.e. patients) had to express whatever came to their mind, no matter how absurd, immoral, or painful it might seem. In a departure from the usual view that Freud's discovery of the unconscious and the irrational parts of the mind is "the revolutionary contribution of psychoanalysis" (Glenn 11), Storr declares: "If I was asked

why Freud's many contributions to the art of psychotherapy was the most significant, I should say it was his replacement of hypnosis by free association" (16). Free associative talk as the fundamental tool of therapy distinguished psychoanalysis from earlier dynamic approaches that drew their observations from hypnotized patients, whereas Freud elicited the waking patient's active participation. Whatever the current revisionist momentum against Freud, notably the charges that his system lacks a sound scientific basis and is phallogocentric, the introduction of psychoanalysis marks a turning point in the treatment of emotional disturbances by advocating talk instead of silence as the pathway to remediation.

Considering the increasing scope and expanding methods of psychotherapy, psychiatrist Lewis Wolberg offers an all-encompassing description of the practice as "*a body of procedures that overlap techniques used in counseling, social casework, education, and rehabilitation*" (6). The guiding principle of these procedures is the emphasis on verbal communication as the predominant vehicle for treatment, fundamental to most of the large spectrum of theoretical and practical approaches encompassed by the term. Whatever its specific form, the overall aim of psychotherapy is to enable patients to attain a deeper understanding of their behaviors, motives, personality, and relationships that lead in turn to a better understanding of the impact of their habitual conduct on both themselves and others. The insight gained in psychotherapy is intended to act as a catalyst. By working through a conflict or probing a problem, one may achieve a successful session in lieu of the persistent, rigid repetition of destructive and self-destructive patterns. Through the medium of talk difficulties can be aired and confronted in a manner conducive, ideally, to modifications that will result in a less stressful or neurotic life.

Language, particularly narrative, is central to the psychotherapeutic endeavors between patient and analyst. As Peter Brooks so aptly notes, "Psychoanalysis is, among other things,

implicitly a narratology” (“Psychoanalytic constructions and narrative meanings” 53).

Necessarily so, since the psychoanalyst is ever concerned with the narratives patients tell, patients who are there for the weakness of the narrative discourses they present, internalize, and live their lives by: “the incoherence, inconsistency and lack of explanatory force in the way in which they tell their lives” (53). The narrative accounts given by the patient is riddled with gaps, with memory lapses, and with inexplicable contradictions in chronology, with screen memories concealing repressed material. Its narrative syntax is faulty, and its rhetoric is unconvincing. The work of the analyst must in large measure be a re-composition of the narrative discourse to give a better representation of the patient’s story, to reorder its events, to foreground its dominant themes, to understand the force of desire that speaks in and through it.

### **Freud & Transference**

What makes the relation of narrative to the story of the patient’s past more problematic is Freud’s progressive discovery of transference, which brings into play the dynamic interaction of the teller and listener of and to stories, the dialogic relation of narrative production, cooperative sharing, and interpretation. One of the most formative texts in this regard is Freud’s essay “Constructions in Analysis” (1937). It, and “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937), represent a culmination of Freud’s developing ideas on transference. Many of the key concepts are expressed in two earlier pieces: “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912) and “Remembering, Repeating and Working Through” (1914). In these essays, Freud presents a view of transference as a special space created between patient and analyst, one where the patient’s past affective life and erotic impulses are reinvested in the dynamic of the interaction with the analyst. Freud calls transference “an intermediate zone between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made” (“Remembering, Repeating” 154). Within this intermediate

region, the patient's neurosis becomes what Freud calls "an artificial illness which is at every point accessible to our intervention" (154). In other words, transference is the realm of the "as-if", one in which the history of the past, with all its emotional conflicts, becomes "invested in a special kind of present, one that favors representation and symbolic replay of the past, and that should lend itself to its eventual revision through the listener's interventions" ("Psychoanalytic Constructions" 57). Within transference, recall of the past most often takes the form of its unconscious repetition, acting it out as if it were present: "repetition is a way of remembering brought into play when recollection in the intellectual sense is blocked by repression and resistance" (57). Repetition, thus, is both an obstacle to analysis – since the patient must eventually be led to renunciation of the attempt to reproduce the past – and the principal dynamic of the cure. This is the case since only by the way of its symbolic enactment in the present can this history of past desire, its object of scenarios and fulfillment, be made known, and become manifest in the present discourse. The analyst must treat the patient's words and symbolic acts as a natural force, active in the present, while attempting to translate them back into terms of the past. He must help the patient construct a more coherent, connected, and forceful narrative, one whose syntax and rhetoric are more convincing, more adequate to give an interpretive account of the story of the past than those that are originally presented, in symptomatic form, by the patient.

Our sense that transference, as a special artificial space for the reworking of the past in symbolic form, may speak to the nature of a narrative text between patient and analyst receives confirmation when Freud, in his discussion of what he failed to notice in time in the case of "Dora", calls transferences "new impressions or reprints" and "revised editions" of earlier texts (116). In accordance with Peter Brooks, I agree that transference is textual because it presents the past in symbolic form, "in signs, thus as something that is 'really' absent but textually present,

and which, furthermore, must be shaped by the work of interpretation carried on by both teller and listener” (“Psychoanalytic Constructions” 57). This dialogic “play” between patient and analyst triggers the transference relation: the patient’s entry into the special semiotic and transitional space of transference. This same “playing” also comes up in Freud’s own writing and, for the purposes of my argument, changes how we approach the nature of transference. In “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” Freud wrote of “transference as a playground...an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from one to the other is made” (154). As such, transference nurtures this capacity for “play” by transforming the psychotherapeutic space into a dress rehearsal for real life relationships. In the safety of the therapeutic space, where patients are assured of suffering no damaging rejection, they can experiment with the language and constructions of their own narratives to create new behaviors and, thereby, strengthen their egos. For this reason, the relationship between patient and therapist is “the core of the therapeutic process” (Furst 8). It is essentially a collaborative undertaking in which the analyst must deliberately plan, negotiate, and foster trust in the patient to affect changes in behavior.

In “Constructions in Analysis” Freud explicitly addresses the distinct yet interactive roles played by patient and analyst in the recovery of the past in a present narrative. He makes clear early in the essay that his narrative ideal remains faithful to his earlier premises: “What we are in search of”, he writes, “is a picture of the patient’s forgotten years that shall be alike trustworthy and in all essential respects complete” (258). This immediately presents an issue for therapeutic “objectivity” if we understand that both patient and analyst are presenting approximations of identity to both each other and, in the process of dialogic exchange, to themselves. As such, Freud at once complicates the nature of this search by noting that the work of analysis “involves

two people, to each of whom a distinct task is assigned” – the patient and the analyst (258). Since the analyst has neither experienced nor repressed any of the story under consideration, his task cannot be to remember anything. “What then is his task?” asks Freud, to answer: “His task is to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind or, more correctly, to *construct* it” (258-9). “Construction” is glossed at this point in the essay as “reconstruction,” but the latter term will not appear in the rest of the text. Construction/reconstruction is likened to the work of the archaeologist since both archaeologist and psychoanalyst “have an indisputed right to reconstruct by means of supplementing and combining the surviving remains”: a remark we may already find suggestive of the relation between interpretive narrative discourse and the story it attempts to reconstitute (259). But there are differences, since in the case of psychoanalysis one can claim that every essential of the past has been preserved, “even things that seem completely forgotten are present somehow and somewhere, and have merely been buried and made inaccessible to the subject” (260). Indeed, what the psychoanalyst is dealing with “is not something destroyed but something that is still alive,” since, as we know, his material consists in large part of “the repetitions of reactions dating from infancy and all that is indicated by the transference in connection with these repetitions” (259). That is, the “text” presented by the patient contains in raw form everything that will be needed for its interpretive construction, a premise familiar to the literary interpreter as well.

### **The Therapeutic Space as Transitional Space**

Through examining the workings of transference and countertransference in (post)modernist and filmic fictions of psychotherapy, I argue that the situation between analyst and patient becomes a transitional space in which the body and identity are constructed through a dialectic of linguistic and gendered relations. This transference reading of the therapeutic frame



challenges the classical model of psychoanalysis by foregrounding the workings of transference and countertransference and reading them as extensions of therapeutic practice. In doing so, a significant part of my project focuses on returning to and re-interpreting the role of Freud and psychoanalysis in literature by analyzing literary and filmic portrayals of the psychotherapeutic exchange between patient and analyst. While technically only *The White Hotel* features a fictionalized Freud, all of my texts directly engage with classical models of psychoanalysis; the analysts featured in them act as either models or parodies of a stereotypical Freudian analyst. This particular psychoanalytic process is concerned with the inter-dynamics of language and positionality between patient and analyst to emphasize a mode for reading the therapeutic frame within literature, particularly, fiction.

Psychoanalysis is about codifying, interpreting, and engaging with aspects of the unconscious and human sexuality. It is also, as Steven Marcus, Peter Brooks, and others have reminded us, and readings of Freud confirm, about the possibilities and limits of narrative within both literature and therapeutic practice. Indeed, these same possibilities and limits occupy a space of shared interpretation between critic and analyst: “With respect to the text, the literary critic occupies thus at once the place of the psychoanalyst (in the relation of interpretation) *and* the place of the patient (in the relation of transference)” (“To Open the Question” 7). To a degree, even Freud himself anticipated the possibilities of narrative construction between patient and analyst. In turning his attention to the psychoanalytic exchange in which the patient’s story emerged, Freud was interested not only in its content and representation, the way it functioned in the patient’s own psychic economy, but also in the social and rhetorical effect of what was being said. He saw the narrated events as acts which did something to or had some effect on the listening analyst, rather than as representations of any external reality (*The Literary Use of the*

*Psychoanalytic Process* 10). Working within this therapeutic model, Freud operates under the premise that all that appears, particularly within the therapeutic space, is a sign (Brooks 3). As such, all signs are subject to the “subjective objectivity” of interpretation between analyst and patient; the messages they convey constitute narratives that contain the same *dramatis personae* for analyst, patient, reader, and critic. To that degree, this research focuses on the transitional space of the therapeutic situation. As such, it analyzes how characters’ therapeutic dynamics speak to an “interest in the unconscious existence of literary characters” (*The Literary Use of Psychoanalysis* 31). Regarding the relation between patient and analyst, this project analyzes how character, self, and positionality are located within the transference limits and possibilities of narrative construction.

Because this work focuses on transference and countertransference within a therapeutic dynamic, my interpretation and contextualization of “transitional space” is reliant on André Greene’s conception of the therapeutic setting. In his landmark essay “Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience,” Greene argues that the intersubjective nature of analytic discourse is such that “the analyst even influences the communication of the patient’s material” just as “the patient’s aim is directed to the effect of his communication rather than to the transmission of its content” (3). Consequently, Greene asserts that it is only by rigorous exploration of the intervening “space” (10) in which this relation occurs that dialectical and interpretative procedures of the psychoanalytic process can be understood. Borrowing a term from D.W. Winnicott, Greene sees the link between subject and object in therapeutic dynamic as occupying a “transitional space.” For Winnicott, this “transitional space” is characteristic of the critical phase in early development when the child emerges from a world of omnipotent fantasy and dependence on the mother, entering culture and individuation. This transition is facilitated

by an “intermediate area of experience” (Winnicott 205), in which the line between fantasy and reality is kept blurred with the sanction of the parents. Like early Freud, Winnicott contends that this transitional space affords the child an opportunity for play and illusion.

Greene regards the psychoanalytic situation itself as exemplary of this mode of transitional space, in which a system of symbolic meaning is generated between patient and analyst. Rather than existing prior to the analytic relationship, this meaning is created within the unique therapeutic space linking patient and analyst at a moment in time. While, within this framework, Greene positions the analyst as an absence for the patient – wherein the analyst is the repository of absent possibilities that may be realized within the transitional space of the therapeutic relationship – I contend something different. Though I build on Greene’s re-contextualization of transitional space, I do not concede that the analyst is an absence. Rather, I argue that analyst and patient are recreated and understood through a dialectic of embodiment and expression within the space. The vicissitudes of the therapeutic relationship are the vicissitudes of symbolic exchange; the medium of the exchange rests in the tandem between how language and identity inform narrative constructions of literary representations and psychoanalytic thought.

### **Chapter Outlines**

For obvious reasons, the questions my project posits about the workings of transference in narratives of psychotherapy can only be addressed in twentieth-century writing because there are few, if any, earlier fictional accounts of psychotherapy. Mental disorders were not generally treated by talk before Freud launched psychoanalysis: “Janet’s experiments with automatic writing in 1886 and automatic talk in 1891 were sporadic ventures, harbingers of patient talk, tried but not systematically pursued” (Furst x-xi). In the nineteenth century patients were either

silenced or distracted from whatever was troubling them by means of various regimes, all of which precluded or even prohibited them talking about symptoms (Furst xi). While a great deal of confessional writing precedes psychoanalysis, this project is concerned with accounts of professionally administered psychotherapy, chiefly the relationship between a patient and a professional trained to “be both so close and yet so distant,” able simultaneously to empathize with patients’ difficulties and to maintain a degree of detachment that is considered central to an effective therapeutic alliance (Manning 31).

Only in the latter half of the twentieth century has the patient’s voice come to be heard alongside the analyst’s. As psychotherapy became a widespread mode of treatment, it was increasingly expressed in fictional form. My project aims at a more comprehensive and differentiated insight into the workings of transference as a site of transitional space afforded by a span of narratives: Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night*, Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Thomas’s *The White Hotel*, Jong’s *Fear of Flying*, and von Trier’s *Antichrist*. Through these narratives my project analyzes the ways in which transference affects literary portrayals of psychotherapy that encompasses the expressions and roles of both patient and analyst – since the dialogic therapeutic relation privileges both.

While this dialogic relationship is enacted in therapy, it is also circumspect to its own narrative constructions in practice. This brings up the issue of objectivity concerning any report of psychotherapy – either written or verbal. There are no witnesses to the confidential transactions between therapist and patient, no possibility of so-called “reality checks.” Nor are there any absolute truths, only the perceptions of the participants in the healing endeavor. Analysts, too, in their clinical notes strive for a certain objectivity, not least through translation into technical language and by following the conventions of psychiatric case charting. Patients,

however, hold to their own psychic reality, which is bound to be subjective. Therefore, as Lillian Furst argues, “all narratives of psychotherapy cannot be other than fictions in the wide sense of constructs filtered through the writer’s consciousness and presented as the protagonist’s view” (Furst xiii). Their fictional nature is heightened by the act of writing the self as an extension of talking the self. For example, Bonime and Eckardt indirectly comment on this aspect of psychotherapeutic narratives and its enactment in prose: “This exaggerated intensity, partly achieved by compression, is conventionally accepted as lifelike during a theatrical experience, and provides a means of achieving, from highly compressed and distorted scenes and characters, a powerful illusion of reality” (208-9). Within the vein of my own argument, I view the nature of “compression” in terms of textual compression between psychoanalytic thought and literary representation. Transference, and the resulting transitional space created in its evocation, determines how this compression between the two fields plays out and, in turn, shapes the dialectical psychotherapeutic relationship oriented in, as it is defined by, narrative constructions.

### **Tender is the Night**

My first chapter focuses on F. Scott Fitzgerald’s text of psychotherapy, which represents the romance and marriage of analyst Dick Diver and his patient-to-wife Nicole. Fitzgerald’s story of Dick and Nicole is relatively well-known in Modernist circles. *Tender is the Night* is a semiautobiographical novel, published in 1934. Following a standard x-plot, it is the story of a psychiatrist who marries one of his patients; as she slowly recovers throughout the narrative, Dick simultaneously loses his vitality and “charm” until he is, by the novel’s end, a disgraced doctor in America. The novel’s central conflict concerns how the workings of unregulated transference love dictates, and eventually erodes, the professional/personal boundaries of Dick and Nicole’s marriage – an erosion that makes Nicole stronger and more independent while, at

the same time, rendering Dick weak and full of self-doubt. To that end, my argument for this novel focuses on the inner workings of Dick and Nicole's marriage and, particularly, on how both allow transference to dictate the boundaries of their respective professional and personal lives. What I argue in this chapter is how transference operates in their marriage to create and extension of the therapeutic setting – a marriage that, in effect, creates a transitional space for the mired and tangled vicissitudes of a marital, sexual, and psychoanalytic relationship always already at stake.

### **Portnoy's Complaint**

Chapter Two examines Phillip Roth's novel *Portnoy's Complaint*, the literary representation of Alexander Portnoy, the protagonist, and both his relation both to psychoanalysis and the "present absence" of his psychoanalyst, Dr. Spielvogel. Written in 1969, the iconoclastic nature of Roth's novel catapulted him into major celebrity. The novel's notorious subject matter sparked a storm of controversy over its explicit and candid treatment of sexuality, including detailed depictions of masturbation using various props including a piece of liver. The novel chronicles a psychoanalytic session told from the humorous, first-person-limited monologue of a lust-ridden, mother-addicted Jewish bachelor, who confesses to his psychoanalyst in intimate, shameful detail, and coarse, abusive language. Structurally, the novel is depicted as a continuous monologic "rant" by Alexander Portnoy, held loosely together by the mnemonic associations of Portnoy's rapid, ever-changing, and sexually-charged ravings against society, sex, his family, himself, and, in some cases, Dr. Spielvogel. Set primarily in New Jersey from the 1940s to the 1960s, the novel's narration weaves through time describing scenes from each stage in his life; every recollection, in some way, touches upon his central dilemma: his

inability to enjoy the fruits of his sexual adventures even as his extreme libidinal urges force him to seek release in ever more creative and self-degrading sexual acts.

My reading of the novel, and particularly of the protagonist Alexander Portnoy, concentrates on both the limits and possibilities of narrative construction in terms of how it prefigures and establishes the therapeutic situation. Of particular interest to my argument is the absence of the analyst's voice throughout the narrative. This absence, I argue, acts as a cypher for how we read the transference nature of Portnoy's narrative and, in turn, Portnoy's parodic experimentation with psychoanalytic thought throughout his counter-productive posturing as both patient and analyst. In filtering the psychoanalytic process through Portnoy's skewed first-person-limited point of view, Roth experiments with the nature of narrative by situating psychoanalysis in strictly narrational terms. This positioning by Roth presents a view of psychoanalysis that is defined, as it is critiqued by, the narrative constructions that make up and define its limits. With this in mind, I analyze how the transitional space of the psychotherapeutic situation is situated and, through Portnoy's voice, exploited textually within the maze-like ravings of Portnoy's neurotic structuring. Of particular interest is the way Portnoy experiments with and uses language to position himself relative to psychoanalytic thought and highlight the "present absence" of his analyst while, simultaneously, obfuscating himself from the very psychoanalytic form he uses. What this culminates in is, ironically, a psychotherapeutic regression understood, in Portnoy's limited sense, as psychotherapeutic *progression*. Portnoy is ironically defined, as he is trapped, by his own perversion of Freudian thought to the degree that narrative constructions within the text are symptomatic of the very neuroses that are responsible for their genesis within the psychotherapeutic "exchange" of Portnoy's monologue.

## **The White Hotel**

Chapter three's text, *The White Hotel*, seems the most orthodox of my chosen narratives of psychotherapy. Written in 1981, D.M. Thomas's novel chronicles the life of Lisa Erdman, an Austrian opera singer being treated by Sigmund Freud (and renamed "Anna G." in Freud's fictional case history) for psychosomatic pain in her breast. Although Lisa is a fictional character, her treatment is loosely based on some of Freud's real case studies. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes apparent that Lisa has uncanny foresight into the nature of her neurosis. In the first two chapters she gives Freud written accounts of her erotic hallucinations (in the guise of a narrative poem and accompanying prose piece, respectively), which have a prophetic, dreamlike quality. The novel ultimately suggests that Lisa's pain is not, as Freud believes, caused by trauma in her past but by the historically situated trauma that awaits her in the future: she will ultimately be killed in the Holocaust at Babi Yar.

The novel opens with an exchange of letters between Freud and members of his circle, including Sandor Ferenczi and Hanns Sachs. Gradually, these letters focus on a particular patient (Lisa), who has produced two seemingly obscene writings during her treatment to aid in Freud's case study of her. One of these writings, named "Don Giovanni" because it was written in between the staves of Mozart's opera, forms the second section of the novel. "Don Giovanni" is a narrative poem about a young woman – Lisa – who meets a soldier on a train. They immediately begin a passionate love affair, traveling together to a white hotel, a dreamlike place where the normal laws of nature do not apply. The soldier is revealed as Freud's son, Martin. While the young couple have sex, they dispassionately witness a series of disasters that kill the other guests at the hotel: a flood, a fire, a landslide, and finally a cable-car accident. Freud is baffled by "Don Giovanni" and asks Lisa to write her own analysis of the poem. Her response



forms the third section of the novel. Called “The Gastien Journal,” Lisa’s response is less an analysis than a retelling in equally dreamlike prose fiction of “Don Giovanni.”

The novel’s fourth section is Freud’s analysis of Lisa, modeled on his own published case studies. Anonymizing Lisa as “Anna G.,” Freud recounts the facts of her life, starting with her birth in Odessa, Ukraine, as the child of a Jewish father and a Catholic mother. When Lisa is still a child, her mother dies in a hotel fire, in the company of her uncle, leaving Lisa with a repressed suspicion that her mother was having an affair. “Anna” becomes increasingly estranged from her father and moves to St. Petersburg, where she attends a ballet school and falls in love with a young anarchist named Alexie. He abandons her while she is pregnant with his child, and she miscarries. After a brief period living with her mentor, Madame Kedrova, “Anna” moves to Vienna to live with her mother’s twin sister, Aunt Magda (whose husband died in the fire with “Anna’s” mother). In Vienna, “Anna” flourishes, becoming an up-and-coming opera singer and marrying a successful lawyer, until her career and her marriage are afflicted by a mysterious illness. “Anna” suffers from psychosomatic pains in her left breast and ovary. She also has dreams about fires and floods, and visions of similar catastrophes while she is having sex. Freud concludes that “Anna’s” symptoms are the result of repressing the knowledge of her mother’s affair and her own bisexuality. His conclusion seems to be confirmed when “Anna” recalls buried memories of her mother’s affair and her pain begins to subside. However, Freud remains uneasy about Lisa’s visionary writings. He admits that he believes Lisa’s claims to be clairvoyant or psychic.

The fifth section of the novel, “The Health Resort”, is told as a straightforward third-person narrative. With her therapy over, Lisa returns to her career as a singer. In Milan, where she is taking the part of a famous soprano, Vera Serebryakova-Berenstein, who has been injured,

Lisa becomes close friends with Vera and her husband, Victor. However, not long after Lisa's return to Vienna, Vera dies in childbirth. Shortly after that, Lisa learns that her mentor, Madame Kedrova, has also died of cancer. In the wake of this news, Lisa's psychosomatic pain returns stronger than ever. Freud writes to Lisa asking her permission to publish her writing as part of his case study. They begin a correspondence, in which Lisa admits telling Freud a number of lies about Alexie and her father. Finally, Lisa tells Freud that she disagrees with his analysis, and the correspondence is broken off. Lisa receives another letter, this time from Victor, in which he asks her to marry him. She moves to Kiev, Ukraine and becomes stepmother to Vera and Victor's son, Koyla.

The penultimate section of the novel, "The Sleeping Carriage", takes place ten years later. Lisa and Koyla are living in a slum. Victor has disappeared, after staging an opera which displeased the Soviet authorities. The German army arrives in the city, and signs appear instructing all Jews to assemble at the Jewish cemetery. As Lisa and Koyla follow the crowd from the cemetery, the neighbors speculate about where they are going: to the ghetto, perhaps, or to Palestine. When the Jews are herded into an enclosure, Lisa realizes that something more sinister is happening, but it is too late. The Jews are stripped and beaten. Lisa uses her identification card, which lists her as Ukrainian rather than a Jew, to free herself and Koyla. Her freedom is short-lived, however, as she and Koyla are taken to Babi Yar and executed by the SS, together with thousands of others. The novel's final section, "The Camp", returns to the white hotel, which is now a camp for travelers to the Holy Land. There, Lisa meets her mother, Alexie, and Vera. The hotel is crowded – thousands of immigrants are arriving – but Lisa is happy there.

The novel's depiction of Freud and his case study format is key to my selection of this text. Building on my focus on narrative boundaries and voice in chapter three, this chapter

highlights and foregrounds Lisa as a character to examine the narrative and feminist implications of the gendered and classical dynamic between woman patient (Lisa) and male analyst (Freud). My argument in this chapter focuses on the how the textual presence and gendered implications of Lisa's therapy with Freud operates as a transitional frame for both a Freudian and feminist critique of Freud. The psychotherapeutic relationship in the novel underscores the way in which feminine subjectivity is understood, negotiated, and constructed within a transitional space of psychotherapeutic work always already defined by Freud's phallogocentric model. What's intriguing, and what my argument hinges on, are the ways in which the novel engages with gender within a psychoanalytic frame that, given its very nature, seeks to nullify it. In focusing on acts of narrative construction within psychotherapeutic work between Freud and Lisa, I argue that these same narrative acts deconstruct the feminine subject just as Lisa's efforts and self-analysis prefigure the means for a positivistic feminine self-construction. With this in mind, I argue that the tension between these two tandems suggest a feminist critique of Freud that implicate him within the limits of his own psychoanalytic model. By foregrounding Lisa as a character, my aim is to analyze her position relative to Freud's psychoanalytic efforts and, concomitantly, the ways in which Lisa's inherent "womanliness" suggests a "fighting back" against the restrictions of Freudian orthodoxy in a text that both chronicles her downfall because of this system and elevates her as a sublime exception.

### **Fear of Flying**

Published in 1973 by American poet and novelist Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* was a literary catalyst of the second-wave feminist movement, which focused on previously marginalized issues in women's rights including sexuality, reproductive autonomy, and other subtle forms of inequality that are encoded rather than explicit. The novel is told from the

perspective of Isadora Wing, a Jewish journalist and accomplished erotic poet from New York City. Twice married, Wing travels with her husband, Bennett Wing, to Vienna, where she attends a conference for psychoanalysts. While there she starts, and carries on, an affair with a British psychoanalyst Adrian Goodlove – traveling throughout Europe in a sexual-charged tryst that spans the narrative. The narrative chronicles her affair with Adrian and is interspersed with chapters detailing Isadora’s past experiences with lovers, her mother, and her family. Along the way, Isadora finds her sexual fantasies are entangled with the systemic oppression of women and female sexuality, as well as her ambitions as an artist.

The novel begins on a plane, as Isadora travels to Vienna to a convention of psychoanalysts. The event is the first to convene in the city since the end of the Nazi regime. Joined by her psychoanalyst husband, Bennett, and more than one hundred other psychoanalysts, she reflects humorously on the insularity of her professional network. She does this partly to distract herself from her fear of flying, which she associates with her fear of being free of male company. She does not look forward to returning to Germany because of the recent Holocaust, and because she had found Heidelberg unwelcoming to her and Bennett, who are both Jewish.

Among the other passengers are six analysts who had directly treated Isadora at different points in her life. Isadora suspends explanation of the insights they had held or what they had told her. When she arrives in Vienna, she almost immediately encounters the well-known Langian analyst Adrian Goodlove. She is attracted to him for his energy, wildness, and visible eagerness to understand and explore the world. They soon become intimate at the convention, barely their affair. They express affection publicly at analysts’ events, stay out late, and lounge together by day near various pools. Adrian’s personality initially causes Isadora to realize that she had suppressed parts of herself after marrying her husband. The excitement that stems from

this causes her to overlook otherwise glaring awful things about him (e.g. he's terrible at sex and often impotent).

Isadora soon falls in love with Adrian, and at the end of the conference is faced with a choice of returning home with her husband or going off with Adrian to London (and eventually across Europe). One night, as she deliberates this decision, Isadora sleeps with Adrian. Bennett walks in and joins them in a threesome, never again acknowledging the event. Isadora decides to communicate her thoughts to Bennett in a letter but fails to complete it before Bennett walks in and begins arguing with her. She resolves to travel Europe with Adrian rather than endure Bennett any longer.

Isadora and Adrian travel through Italy, Germany, and France, sleeping out in nature and engaging in a hedonistic lifestyle. Isadora opens up to Adrian about her past, which is fraught with failed relationships and frustrated desires. She recounts meeting her first husband, Brian, at university where they fell in love over her poetry. The institution of marriage, however, separated them by enforcing a kind of lifestyle where they occupied distinct spheres. Driven insane, Brian experienced a religious breakdown in which he raped and physically assaulted Isadora. Her last memory of him is a fight after his departure for a psychiatric ward in Los Angeles, in which he blamed her for his condition.

Eventually, Isadora becomes jaded journeying with Adrian. Realizing that escapism is no better, worse even, than grappling with her dissatisfactions, she takes a train back to London and to Bennett. On the way, a train employee sexually assaults her, triggering a mental breakdown that resolves when she realizes that her sexual experiences are connected to the learned objectification and exploitation of women's bodies. This incident, just after her departure from Adrian, renders her unable to find romance or intrigue in chance encounters with men. She

decides to live a life of radical self-acceptance and to quit trying to fit into any internalized model of how a woman should live. At end of the novel she gathers herself together, emotionally and physically, and braces herself for Bennett's entrance into the hotel room.

Extending my feminist critique on Thomas's *The White Hotel*, chapter four looks particularly at the ways Erica Jong positions her female protagonist's body and sexuality relative to the pseudo-therapeutic situations that define her relations with men psychoanalysts. To that end, I'm interested in the ways in which Jong presents and negotiates embodiment in the novel to create a transitional space in her encounters with psychoanalysts that, invariably, rewrite preconceptions of femininity. Though Jong's novel is a stark departure from the more classical model of psychotherapy depicted in Thomas's, it offers intriguing feminist insights into the ways in which Jong approaches the psychotherapeutic encounter, particularly in the way Jong situates sexual relations and experiences relative to Isadora's journey toward self-actualization. This is one of the reasons that the chapters are not chronologically ordered; rather, they are thematically ordered. Although the novel doesn't depict a more "traditional" therapeutic situation between patient and analyst like *The White Hotel* or *Portnoy's Complaint*, it does engage in similar dynamics by having the protagonist engage in sexual trysts with the psychoanalysts in her life – transmuting the therapeutic space from the couch to the "bedroom." The uneven gendered dynamics of Isadora's trysts with the male psychoanalysts in her life speak to the ways in which psychoanalytic thought reifies the "myth" of woman by conceptualizing her from a masculine point of view. While Isadora's quest for emancipation and autonomy is meant to discover and nurture her authentic self through lived experience for self-realization, I contend that the masculine-influenced transferential frame of her sexual relationships opens a space for female

identity through language while, simultaneously, defining Isadora within the limits of masculine preconceptions of gender and sexuality.

### **Antichrist**

Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) is an experimental psychological horror film starring Willem Dafoe and Charlotte Gainsbourg. It tells the story of a couple who, after the accidental death of their son, retreat to a cabin in the woods where He (Defoe's character) experiences strange visions and She (Gainsbourg's character) manifests increasingly violent sexual behavior and sadomasochistic tendencies. The narrative is divided into a prologue, four chapters, and an epilogue.

In the prologue, an unnamed couple has sex in their Seattle apartment while their toddler son, Nic, climbs up to the bedroom window and falls to his death. The mother collapses at the funeral and spends the next month in the hospital crippled with atypical grief. The father, a therapist, is skeptical of the psychiatric care she is receiving and take it upon himself to treat her personally with psychotherapy. She reveals that her second greatest fear is nature, prompting him to try exposure therapy. They hike to their isolated cabin in the woods called Eden, where she spent time with Nic the previous summer while writing her thesis on gynocide, to continue therapy. During the hike, He encounters a doe that shows no fear of him and has a stillborn fawn hanging halfway out of her.

During sessions of psychotherapy at Eden, She becomes increasingly grief-stricken and manic, often demanding forceful sex. The natural world of Eden becomes increasingly sinister to Him; acorns rapidly pelt the metal roof, He wakes up with a hand covered in swollen ticks, and He finds a self-disemboweling red fox that warns him: "Chaos reigns!" In the dark attic of the cabin He finds Her thesis studies, which includes violent portraits of witch-hunts, and a

scrapbook in which her writing becomes increasingly frantic and illegible. She reveals that, while writing her thesis, she came to believe that all women are inherently evil. The man reproaches her for internalizing the gynocidal beliefs she had originally set out to criticize. In a frenzied moment, they have violent intercourse at the base of a dead tree, where bodies are intertwined within the exposed roots. He later suspects that Satan is her greatest fear after she ominously mentions that “Nature is Satan’s church.”

Upon viewing Nic’s autopsy file and photos She took of him while the two stayed at Eden, the man becomes increasingly aware that she had been systematically putting Nic’s shoes on the wrong feet, resulting in a foot deformity. While in the woodshed, She attacks Him, accuses Him of planning to leave Her, mounts Him, and then smashed a large block on his groin, causing him to lose consciousness. The woman then masturbates the unconscious man, culminating in an ejaculation of blood. She drills a hole through his leg, bolts a heavy grindstone through the wound, and tosses the wrench she used under the cabin. He awakens alone; unable to loosen the bolt, he hides by dragging himself into a deep foxhole at the base of the dead tree. Following the sound of a crow he has found buried alive in the hole, she locates him and attacks and mostly buried him with a shovel.

Night falls; not remorseful, she unburies him but cannot remember where the wrench is. She helps him back to the cabin, where she tells him she does “not yet” want to kill him, adding that “when the three beggars arrive someone must die.” In a flashback, she recounts Nic climbing up to the window, but she does not act, thus displaying her perceived essential evil. In the cabin, she cuts off her clitoris with a pair of scissors. The two are then visited by the deer, the fox, and the crow, revealed to be the three beggars. A hailstorm begins; earlier it had been revealed that women accused of witchcraft had been known to have the power to summon



hailstorms. When he finds the wrench under the cabin's floorboards, she attacks him with scissors, but he manages to unbolt the grindstone. Finally free, he viciously attacks her and strangles her to death. He then burns her on a funeral pyre. At the end of the film, he limps from the cabin, eating wild berries, as the three beggars look on, now translucent and glowing. Reaching the top of a hill, under a brilliant light he watches in awe as hundreds of women in antiquated clothes come towards him, their faces blurred.

This chapter analyzes how the film's constructs a gender binary and reconceptualizes the role of the natural world to create a transitional therapeutic space between the two protagonists: She and He. Like *Tender is the Night* and *Fear of Flying*, I read von Trier's film as an example of the corrupted and traumatic consequences of conflating a patient/analyst relationship with a marital one. The sexual violence that the two principal characters enact on each other makes up its own therapeutic valence, leading to a transference relationship devoted to destruction and codependency at the cost of nullification. The therapeutic and sexual violence that's exercised within this transference relationship, I argue, is also a commentary on the ways in which woman's positionality within a therapeutic space situates feminine subjectivity as aberrant and abject because of psychoanalysis's inherited patriarchal constituents. The failure of communication between He and She marks a failure of language within the therapeutic situation. This same failure is marked out and mirrored in the natural world of Eden that they occupy. Though both characters enact varying degrees of violence on the other, the systematic ways in which they adopt violence as a means of communication suggests the grotesque workings of a transference relationship left unchecked by therapeutic objectivity.

By looking at the way transference operates as a transitional space within select texts, my project argues that the gap separating the fields of literature and psychoanalysis is more porous

than we initially thought. The narratives practiced in psychoanalytic thought and portrayed in literary representations are key to understanding how storytelling shapes and changes both fields. Transference is the catalyst that connects these various narratives in whatever forms they take. Of course, when we talk about transference we are also talking about relationships and the narratives we tell ourselves, our therapists, and, perhaps, others that shape our identities and behaviors. *Tender is the Night* is an optimal example of this as it focuses on a decomposing marriage; this is a marriage that's as dependent on the transference workings of psychoanalytic practice as it is on the ever-renewing artifice of the Divers' social lives. The two are intertwined for better or worse and, in the Divers' case, this amalgam comes at the price of their marriage.

## CHAPTER II: TENDER IS THE NIGHT

“Why is it harder to leave a loveless marriage than a loving one? Because a loveless marriage is born of desperation, while a loving one is born of choice...” – Anonymous

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* remains one of the most poignant and multilayered fictional case studies in American literature. The novel’s impact is more acutely felt when we consider its genesis from Fitzgerald’s own anguished experience with Zelda’s mental illness. If read biographically, as Jeffrey Berman emphasizes, the novel becomes a testament to the consequences of Zelda’s psychiatric history and the extent to which Fitzgerald felt trapped through marriage (*The Talking Cure* 60). The (un)conscious implications of this suggest that while Zelda’s mental illness was not only the “catalytic agent” in Fitzgerald’s approach to the novel, but her tragedy also “provided the emotional focus of the novel” (Brucoli 82).

While critics of the novel have examined Fitzgerald’s exploration of the aesthetic dimensions of psychoanalysis (e.g. Boker), its function within narrative structure (e.g. Cokal), and its satiric use as self-referential critique (e.g. Blazek), there’s a significant gap in the scholarship; thus far, no one has explicitly examined the intertwined sexual, marital, and therapeutic situation between Dick and Nicole as it relates to transference and countertransference. To that end, I argue that the inter-dynamics of their marriage operate as a mirrored extension of the therapeutic situation which, in fiction, always invokes the relationship between a writer and his/her text. Consequently, Dick’s unregulated countertransference – in tandem with Nicole’s oedipal transference – situates the setting of the transitional space within the paradoxical workings of a marital, sexual, and psychoanalytic relationship. This makes the vicissitudes of their shared transitional space dependent on Dick’s unsuccessful use of marriage

as a substitute for the facilitating environment of the therapeutic situation (and Fitzgerald's use of the novel as a placeholder for his own entwined therapeutic and marital needs).

The issue of psychiatric objectivity rears its ugly head in Dick's understanding of Nicole's mental illness. "She's a schizoid – a permanent eccentric," Dick tells Baby Warren, "You can't change that" (*Tender* 151). As much as Fitzgerald attempts to valorize Dick Diver throughout his eminent decline, and at the inevitable cost of a failed marriage, it's no surprise that a deep pessimism and emotional bias towards Nicole's diagnosis colors her apparent "recovery" by the end of the novel. "A 'schizophrene' is well named as a split personality – Nicole was alternately a person to whom nothing need be explained and one to whom nothing *could* be explained. It was necessary to treat her with active and affirmative insistence, keeping the road to reality always open, making the road to escape harder going" (*Tender* 191). The definition of Nicole's mental illness in *Tender is the Night* implies that, for Dick Diver, "self-discovery and psychological insight are of little value in effecting any therapeutic cure" (Berman 70). Instead, Fitzgerald, through the character of Dick Diver, views the psychoanalyst as one who actively intervenes to prevent the patient from lapsing into insanity rather than who, as Freud argues, adopts a more passive, objective, and analytical role as interpreter of the patient's symptoms and resistance to recovery. Despite the case study approach of the novel, the descriptions of the sanitariums, Dick's patients, and, more specifically, the nature of Nicole's therapeutic "progress" evoke an image of the rest cure rather than the talking cure. Patients and psychiatrists do not engage in equitable therapeutic dialogue in the novel. As Berman observes, "Nicole never seems to do anything" (70) – beyond the transference restrictions of her marriage – that resembles a healthy recovery.

Marital dynamics between Dick and Nicole constitute both the cypher and frame for understanding the therapeutic dynamics of their corrosive relationship as husband/wife and analyst/patient. While scholars have made it apparent that Dick's fall is one of "losing the self, the disappearance of an identity" (Miller 93), it's misleading to mark his decline in the novel's X-plot as a result of Nicole's perceived parasitism on Dick's overflowing vitality. The tragedy at the heart of the novel lies in the very attempt, by Dick and Nicole, to share what they cannot by their very nature share. In the attempt, as the marriage hangs precariously, there are only suspicion and fear, antagonism and bitterness. The desire for complete possession mars the marital dynamics between Dick and Nicole as each attempt to navigate the husband/wife and patient/analyst tandems that their marriage engendered.

In an anonymous review of *Tender* published a year after the novel, the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* declared that "[for] the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst the book is of special value as a probing story of some of the major dynamic interlockings in marriage [...] conditioned by a set of economic and psychobiological situations" (Brucoli and Bryer 390-91). The "special value" for the medical practitioner in better understanding the workings of cause and effect, of stress and disorder in the marriage of Dick and Nicole Diver went beyond therapeutic exegesis and training; "for the article's confident explication of the novel, its insular language, and its underlying assumptions regarding the value of psychiatry itself" are revealing about the nature of psychiatry as Dick would have understood it (Blazek 68). What this review points to is evidence for what Nathan Hale, in his study of the development and impact of psychoanalysis in America, calls the pervasive "therapeutic optimism" that lay behind the appeal of Freud in the United States, enhanced by the "simplicity and certainty of psychoanalytic therapy, and the energizing power of the unconscious" (5-6). For Dick Diver, the essential

hopefulness of his early career is a product of this same therapeutic optimism which presented the ideal of universal applications, “such as unblocking the mysteries of the mind, and explaining the relationship between instinctual desires and social constraints” (Blazek 68-9). Moreover, this same optimism foregrounded emotions and instinct over reason and intellect, dismissing earlier beliefs in the importance of the will as a source of control.

This review not only helps to historicize the critique of psychiatry within the novel, it also suggests a comparative approach to Dick’s particular psychiatry within the book. Its official line of inquiry shows how aligning oneself with prescribed psychiatric practice and professional behavior can be misplaced and dangerous. Dr. Diver, the anonymous critic asserts, is “prepared to fully incorporate in his creative energetic organization the demands of [Nicole’s] further cure with the work already planned for himself” (Brucoli and Bryer 391). This dual effort fails, however, as Dick “slowly begins to slip” (391).

Where Dick falters with psychiatry is in his extreme, child-like naivety; his compassion is a therapeutic double-edged sword. As Miller points out, it is symptomatic of “a sinister kind of innocence that is debilitating in the face of evil, an innocence capable of transmogrification into corruption without passing through the intermediate steps of deliberate commitment, of conscious moral choice” (94). His innocence – blind to the deceptions of the world and the self – is a lynchpin for his own destructive psychiatric tendencies and the subtle psychiatric violence inherent in the patriarchal origins of psychoanalysis that leaves ruin in its wake. Judith Fetterley argues for this weaponization of psychoanalysis given the profession’s rise at the exact point when women began to challenge their biological destinies through increasing economic, social, and political opportunities (124). Concomitantly, the profession “arose precisely to provide a counterforce adequate to meet and defeat this challenge” (124), thus introducing the politics of

gender into what was otherwise understood as the “objectivity” of psychiatric practice. It’s no wonder why scholars have pointed out the condemnation of psychiatry in the novel: corrupted by its own success as a money-making market and by its own contradictions and inability to accept its limitations. With the onset of the Warren-funded sanitarium, psychiatry is shown in the novel to be an indulgence of the rich and powerful, becoming “a form of indifference to one’s self and others, through pretense of self-knowledge” (Blazek 72) while hoping, as is said of Dick Diver himself, “to build out some broken side till it was better than the original structure” (*Tender* 116). Given Dick and Nicole’s inability to accept the essential truths of each other, and the destructive capacity of Dick’s naivety in both his psychiatric techniques and marriage, it’s no wonder that, in the words of Irigaray, Nicole is torn between a world of “gold” or “phalluses.”

Dick’s treatment of the woman painter in Book 2 offers a stark glimpse into his own ideals of psychiatric help and the gendered power dynamics that inform his treatment of/marriage to Nicole throughout the novel. In coming to Dick for treatment, the unnamed woman artist admits to “sharing the fate of the women of my time who challenged men to battle” (*Tender* 184). As appalling as this fate is, her admission suggests the surreptitious workings of a male-dominated profession that appear more punitive than palliative to women patients: “On her admittance she had been exceptionally pretty – now she was a living agonizing sore” (183). Obviously, the treatment has been unsuccessful. In fact, it becomes clear that “treatment” is in reality punishment. All the prestige, equipment, and training cannot alleviate this woman’s suffering. Yet Dick, as Fitzgerald so acutely notes, is “the only doctor who could ‘do anything with her’ ” (182) – as if she were an afterthought of psychotherapeutic unimportance. The “doing anything with her” translates into an offer by Dick to rewrite her sense of self and experiences under the misunderstood guise of explanation and understanding; and “psychiatry legitimates

and sacralizes his act” (Fetterley 125). For the imprisoned patient, Dick becomes the master of her narrative and, through his naïve attempt to form a therapeutic connection with her, uses analysis to define her reality. He tells her who she is and interprets the meaning, or non-meaning, of her experience. Reinforcing the idea that treatment is some form of patriarchal-informed punishment, Dick meets the unnamed woman head-on in the battlefield of their shared therapeutic space. Through psychoanalytic technique, Dick strips the woman of heroic stature, dignity, and her experience of symbolic significance, even though to accomplish this “cure” he must lie. Meticulously, Dick re-interprets her own definition of her situation: “To your vast surprise it was just like all battles,” and he adds, in a further elimination of her worth, “You’ve suffered, but many women suffered before they mistook themselves for men” (*Tender* 184). To her effort to attach significance to her suffering – “I am here as a symbol of something” – he replies, “mechanically,” “You are sick” (185). Though dismissive in its cold and clinical nature, Dick’s therapeutic relation to the woman artist takes on new, and more dangerous, traits when, after seeing her, he is haunted by his incessant need to be loved: “Yet in the awful majesty of her pain he went out to her unreservedly, almost sexually. He wanted to gather her up in his arms, as he so often had Nicole, and cherish even her mistakes, so deeply were they part of her” (185). Through a flash of counter-transferential insight, Dick breaks down the therapeutic barriers he previously erected to cause harm. In doing so, he exposes the outward order of his life for its brittle artifice as insuppressible desires are mirrored and abstracted between the woman and Nicole.

It is difficult to trace the development of Freud’s ideas about transference in relation to technique. As is the constant refrain among Freud scholars, Freud was a notorious revisionist with a certain aversion to renouncing any old idea completely – usually trying to hold onto it in



one form or another with later writings. To that end, Freud's most complete definition of transference comes from *An Autobiographical Study*, published nine years before Fitzgerald's novel. Given the dangers of "improving upon" Freud's description, I'll quote it in full:

In every analytic treatment there arises, without the physician's agency, an intense emotional relationship between the patient and the analyst which is not to be accounted for by the actual situation. It can be of positive or of negative character and can vary between the extremes of passionate, completely sensual love and the unbridled expression of an embittered defiance and hatred. This *transference* – to give it its short name – soon replaces in the patient's mind the desire to be cured, and, so long as it is affectionate and moderate, becomes the agent of the physician's influence and neither more nor less than the mainspring of the joint work of analysis. Later on, when it has become passionate or has been converted into hostility, it becomes the principal tool of the resistance. It may then happen that it will paralyse the patient's powers of associating and endanger the success of the treatment. Yet it would be senseless to try to evade it; for an analysis without transference is an impossibility. (42)

As Reuben Fine succinctly puts it, transference "may be described as the observation that the patient in psychoanalysis does not submit to a dispassionate consideration of his difficulties, but rather enters at an early stage of the analysis into an intense relationship with the therapist" (96).

In Freudian theory of neurotic treatment, transference is an essential and necessary part of therapeutic progress. The analyst encourages the patient to play or talk out all the dreams, anxieties, and problems distressing him, while the analyst remains a neutral non-reacting "blank face," permitting all, anonymous and discreet. As therapy proceeds, the patient begins to unconsciously focus on the person or persons (usually parental) who is most troublesome to him and begins to behave toward the analyst as if he were said person(s). The analyst, however, refuses to "play back" and engage. Instead, the analyst insists that the patient work through and analyze his own problems, correcting the patient when they stray too far from the central theme, guiding him by example. In doing so, the analyst offers support and encouragement for the patient to rid himself of the neurosis and begin to live a life more consistent and in line with the

sociocultural norms of reality. If transference is completed – and held in check by the analyst – then a cure is hopeful.

Where the concept of transference gets “murky” is when we consider the ambiguity of its use in Freud’s rhetoric in accounting for its processes, technique, and meaning within psychotherapeutic practice. Freud himself was at least somewhat aware of this ambiguity in *The Interpretation of Dreams* when he observes that “words, since they are the nodal points of various ideas, may be regarded as predestined to ambiguity” (376). Tellingly, Freud’s rhetoric “brings us up against a difference *within* either the unconscious or the preconscious realm, instead of sustaining a difference, and an interaction, *between* them” (Chase 215). This brings us to the dual usage of the word “transference”: for the patient’s “transference” onto the analyst, and for the transference of affect from an unconscious idea onto a preconscious one. Or, as Cynthia Chase explains, “the same word designates a relationship to a person, a kind of *action* and a mode of expression, the condition of an idea’s entering consciousness, a condition of knowledge” (212). In *The Language of Psychoanalysis* “transference” onto the analyst is described as originating from what Laplanche would elsewhere call “metonymical derivation” from the concept of transference in the first sense (*Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* 134). The former is:

A particular instance of displacement of affect from one idea to another. If the idea of the analyst enjoys a special status, this is, first, because it constitutes a type of ‘day’s residue’ that is always available to the subject; and secondly, because this kind of transference *aids resistance* in that it is particularly hard [Freud suggests] to admit the repressed wish...to the very person the wish concerns. (*Language of Psychoanalysis* 457)

With this second reason why the specially favored preconscious idea should be that of the analyst, Laplanche touches on the way the metonymically derived meaning swerves from the original. According to Chase, “transference in the second sense is a resistance to the disclosure

of ‘transference’ in the first sense: the patient’s transference onto the analyst comes into play to thwart the effort to illuminate the fundamental transferential process revealed in free association” (212). That is to say, transference is an action destined to defeat a knowledge of transference, and to refuse the knowledge that transference is the condition of knowledge.

Seeing transference in these terms means seeing it not as a mere representation, not recognized as such, of a real conflict located prior to it and elsewhere; instead, as Chase argues, it is by viewing it “as a continuation, as derived metonymically from the past conflict it plays out, and metonymically related too to the interpretive discourse that combats it” (218). This view is most clearly seen towards the end of Freud’s essay “The Dynamics of Transference”:

But it should not be forgotten that it is precisely they [the phenomena of transference] that do us the inestimable service of making the patient’s hidden and forgotten erotic impulses immediate and manifest. For when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone *in absentia* or *in effigie*. (108)

The value of the transference, then, is that it is *not* a mere effigy of past erotic impulses. This last sentence by Freud is interesting because it appears paradoxical: it’s precisely *in effigie* – in the symbolic mode – that the past and its ghosts may be destroyed in analysis. In accordance with Peter Brooks, I believe that transference succeeds in making the past “and its scenarios of desire relive through signs with such vivid reality that the reconstructions it proposes achieve the effect of the real” (“The Idea of Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism” 13). That is to say, these therapeutic reconstructions do not change past history, but they rewrite its present discourse.

In his writings, Freud repeatedly describes the relationship between analyst and patient as one of struggle: struggle for the mastery of resistances, dialectic exchange, and the lifting of repressions. It’s through the crucible of struggle within this psychoanalytic model that the difficult and productive encounter between analyst and patient creates a transitional space – a symbolic and semiotic medium – in which, through transferential exchange, the vicissitudes of

the therapeutic relationship become those of symbolic exchange. Transference exchange, within this transitional space, actualizes the past in symbolic form so that it can be repeated, replayed, worked through, and reconstructed into a co-authored dialectic that ushers in a changed reality for both patient and analyst.

Although the workings of transference factor heavily in the novel, it's odd to note that Fitzgerald does not directly confront this concept – one that offers significant insight into Dick's fall and marital disillusionment. In fact, the word "transference" appears only three times in the novel. In referring to Nicole's growing attraction to Nick, Franz exclaims: "It was the best thing that could have happened to her...a transference of the most fortuitous kind" (*Tender* 120). Dr. Dohlmer later uses the word in a similar context but rather than lionizing its occurrence offers a sober warning to Dick: "this so-called 'transference'...must be terminated. Miss Nicole does well indeed, but she is in no condition to survive what she might interpret as tragedy" (139). Lastly, the word appears near the end of the novel when Nicole, now in love with Tommy Barban, tries to untether herself from Dick and their marriage. Feeling the pull of her old love for Dick, she "struggled with it, fighting him with her small, fine eyes, with the plush arrogance of a top dog, with her nascent transference to another man, with the accumulated resentment of years..." (301). As Jeffrey Berman observes, Fitzgerald's use of the term suggests that its connotation rests not in its classical psychoanalytic context, but rather "in the more general sense of an absorption or incorporation of one individual by another in a shifting love relationship" (72).

Despite the mechanistic connotations, Fitzgerald's use of the term does coincide with the psychoanalytic definition to the extent that Dick cannot maintain emotional attachment from entangling human alliances. In fact, Dick's sense of self and wholeness are both dependent on

and threatened by the “egos of certain people, early met and early loved, and to be only as complete as they were complete themselves” (*Tender* 245). Fitzgerald’s language suggests a classic Lawrentian dilemma: an ambivalent desire to love so intensely as to both engulf and be engulfed. It’s also telling that Fitzgerald uses the terms “ego” to characterize Dick’s dilemma. The term “transference” can also describe the metaphorical derivation of the ego. The status of the ego, in Freud’s thinking, is not only a “prolongation of the living individual,” a differentiated surface of the organism or the psyche, serving to adapt its impulses to reality, but also a projection or image of the individual and his/her intrapsychic reality (Laplanche 51-3). Here, it’s something more akin to ego-displacement in which Dick, through the dynamics of his marriage, weighs transference demands alongside human connection while, simultaneously, maintaining the fulcrum of therapeutic co-authorship with Nicole. Dick’s quest for love in those he meets paradoxically drains him; his outward behavior gradually becomes an empty artifice, while his marriage and himself become broken and incomplete in the process. For Berman, this insatiable drive for love – an extended expense of unchecked counter-transference – suggests that Dick’s “emotional involvement proves disastrous because it threatens the distinction between self and other” (72). Consequently, the loved object always becomes menacing to Dick because, by absorbing others, he finds himself absorbed, depleted, and violated. At the heart of male-female relationships in the novel – particularly within Dick and Nicole’s marital dynamics – haunts the specter of transference. With its ominous implications of the repetition-compulsion principle, transference threatens to both entangle and corrode partnerships given its unchecked condition throughout the narrative.

In some fundamental way, the psychoanalyst must be a mystery, a mystery filled by the patient’s loves and hates, emotions that can turn very quickly from one to the other. Within a

working and progress-oriented therapeutic session, unencumbered by the blurring of relationships, this push-pull of emotions can be manageable and even beneficial. However, in the case of Dick Diver's characterization and marriage, Fitzgerald paints a particularly grotesque figure of the psychoanalyst as one whose counter-transferential relations cross into therapeutic vulgarity. The most vulgar depictions of the psychoanalyst in literature may be a form of splitting (e.g. Jekyll and Hyde). The noble analyst falls at the hands of a "difficult" and "alluring" patient, and an emotionally/physically lecherous and compromised man takes his place. A more human portrait of a working therapist, therefore, depends on a point of view and approach to therapy that can healthily accommodate ambivalence. As such, it must also address the problem of the in-between: the charged transitional space that is neither analyst nor patient, but a mutual and co-authored creation. This is not an easy territory to articulate; it is not subject and object, but two subjects who necessarily mingle.

As Lisa Appignanesi has pointed out, "Shrinks in novels, if they appear at all, are largely devoid of that very inner life which is meant to be their trade; they often strut the fictional stage as grotesques" (4). I would be remiss, however, to put Fitzgerald's character of Dick Diver in this category. While it's true that his dual role as Nicole's husband and analyst is "grotesque," there also exists an exceedingly human and complex interiority to Dick that make him more than a reductive caricature of a Svengali-like analyst. While I agree with Jacquelin Tavernier-Courbin that "it's not Dick's superior morality or self-denial which makes him marry Nicole, but his own neurotic need for love, to *be* loved," I also think it's important not to minimize or de-emphasize the therapeutic harm done to Nicole as a result of his need to be loved (461).

Dick's desire for Nicole as a husband/therapist arises from a need to be loved which expresses itself as erotic desire. This, however, corresponds to an inner reality that has more to

do with the ambivalence invested in subject-object positioning than with spontaneous sensuality. As Fitzgerald himself indicates, “Dick’s necessity of behaving as he did was a projection of some submerged reality...just as another man once found it necessary to stand in front of a church in Ferrara, in sackcloth and ashes. Dick was paying some tribute to things unforgotten, unshriven, unexpurgated” (*Tender* 91). Although Fitzgerald makes this comment on Dick’s behavior as Dick is waiting for Rosemary outside the “Films par Excellence Studio,” it has wider implications concerning Dick’s behavior and inevitable decline. In his article “*Tender is the Night* and George Herbert Mead,” Lee M. Whitehead sees Dick as “the pure type of what David Riesman has called the ‘other-directed’ personality, or what Mead called the personality in which the sense of ‘Me’ dominates” (186). The sense of “Me” is the individual seeing himself as object – the attitude of the “generalized other” – which is Dick’s major weakness of character. As such, there’s little doubt that Dick is other-directed and views himself as object, even at the cost of his own perceived degree of agency and complicity in his marriage to Nicole. For instance, when he first kisses Nicole:

He felt the young lips, her body sighing in relief against the arm growing stronger to hold her...As he held her and tasted her, and as she curved in further and further toward him, with her own lips, new to herself, drowned and engulfed in love, yet solaced and triumphant, he as thankful to have an existence at all, if only as a reflection in her wet eyes. (*Tender* 155)

At this early stage in the relationship, Dick already perceives himself as an object in this transferential dynamic, even in his own eyes, which are viewing things as she must see them. Dick becomes, in this instance, a reflection of a reflection – seeing himself in Nicole’s eyes both literally and figuratively. And, although Nicole is drowning in love, she is clearly the subject, the acting principle. Dick does and becomes what women want him to do or become; he simply reflects their transferential desires, imagined or not; as Orwell once put it, “he wears a mask, and

his face grows to fit it.” In fact, he does not control relationships but is controlled by them. What this passive role indicates is that Dick has always been immoderately aware of women, and the various actions of his life have been conditioned and brought about by women to a significant extent. As Tavernier-Courbin observes, Dick “becomes a psychiatrist because of a girl who was taking the same course; he marries Nicole because she wants him; and he falls in love with Rosemary because she tells him to” (462). His counter-transferential desire becomes destructive because his self-image is dependent on a need to be loved – not to love, which involves being the subject, but to be loved, which means being the object.

Nicole seems to echo Dick’s earlier reference to being reflected when she offers a brief but astute aside concerning Dick’s influence and her own subjecthood: “You will feel your own reflection sliding along the eyes of those who look at you. You are no longer insulated; but I suppose you must touch life in order to spring from it” (*Tender* 160). What’s telling here is Nicole’s implied hesitancy at how she is perceived at the effect of Dick’s “charm.” Nicole’s need for Dick to be successful and stable is reasonable given her desire for the emotional stability he provides. Her admiration for her husband is clearly revealed at the beginning of her monologue, or flashback, when she sounds like any woman proud of her husband: “If you will kindly call my husband at the hospital. Yes, the little book is selling everywhere – they want it published in six languages” (159). One of the factors that begins to threaten their relationship, however, is the way in which Dick positions himself as an object in the marriage. For example, it’s obvious that Nicole reacts strongly against his abandoning his title:

Dick, why did you register Mr. and Mrs. Diver instead of Doctor and Mrs. Diver? I just wondered – it just floated through my mind. – You’ve taught me that work is everything, and I believe you...If you want to turn things topsy-turvy, all right, but must your Nicole follow you walking on her hands, darling? (*Tender* 161-2)



In linguistically positioning himself this way, Dick not only acquiesces to his status as a monetarily-inherited accoutrement – a direct result of marrying into the Warren fortune – but he also clearly defines his object status. That is to say, Dick ironically positions himself in “union” with Nicole through marital titles at the cost of linguistically negating his professional title as psychiatrist. This also marks the beginning of Dick’s loss of self-respect, as well as Nicole’s awareness of it. The fact that she will not stay with a husband whom she can no longer respect and who does not abide by his own principles is foreshadowed here as well. Coupled with this is the later indication by Dick in Book III that Nicole should be not so much his partner as his emotionally absent foundation. It’s ironic that he seems to repress his own awareness of his object status in their marriage by subsequently projecting his own inadequacy onto Nicole. In fact, by seeing her as a woman who is hard as “Georgia Pine” (*Tender* 276), one of the hardest woods known, Dick chooses to cast her as the “subject” of his suffering and need for fulfillment rather than by attempting to solve his problem. This, in turn, “evidences his refusal to place himself in a position where he could experience adult love” (Hunt and Suarez 159).

From admiration and respect for Dick, Nicole evolves towards contempt and pity, which spells the death of her love for him. That Dick’s degeneration brings about Nicole’s final recovery is in a sense true, but not in the way that is usually seen. As Tavenier-Courbin points out, he does not “sacrifice himself so that she may recover”; rather “he degenerates because of his own deep-seated psychological problems, and Nicole is left with nothing to hold on to” (460). Nicole is then faced with two alternatives: either go down with him or survive him. She finds a way to survive after a short moment, when she is tempted to “drown” with him literally and symbolically (*Tender* 274).

One cannot help but consider the valuable marital potential Dick could have offered to Nicole, for as Robert Sklar puts it:

The source of her disintegration lies in the same dissimulation which his social role was made to bolster. But where her disintegration arose from one ugly incident, his disintegration stems from the very core of his personal identity. The true neurotic in *Tender is the Night* is not Nicole Diver, but her husband. (285)

The novel, as Judith Fetterley argues, “intends toward the perpetuation of male power” (114). While to read *Tender is the Night* is to participate in the evocation of sympathy for Dick Diver, the victim of his own culture and morality, it is also to engage with the concomitant and culturally-inherited hostility that has destroyed him just as it’s affected women in the novel – particularly Nicole.

Even the characters in the novel, ironically, make references to this cultural inheritance, but from opposite sides of the gender spectrum. Abe North has his moment of insight when, in the station waiting for the boat train, trying to find both reason and scapegoat for his collapse, he turns to Nicole, “ ‘Tired of women’s worlds,’ he spoke suddenly” (*Tender* 81). The world Nicole inhabits, the world of the Riviera where Abe has spent his summer, the world Rosemary falls in love with, is the creation of Dick Diver and it is a woman’s world. Though situated this way in Abe North’s eyes as yet another masculine detriment in a world of women, Fitzgerald earlier intimates the exact opposite: “Their point of resemblance to each other and their difference from so many American women, lay in the fact that they were all happy to exist in a man’s world – they preserved their individuality through men and not by opposition to them” (53). Though conflicting in nature, these two accounts serve to emphasize the unspoken situation in which men purchase the sanity and perceived experiences of women at men’s expense. In fact, as Fetterley pinpoints, “First seeing Dick from the outside, through an other who is female, we brush against the novel’s central fear – the fear of being object, not subject; of being image, not image-maker;

of being useful, not using; of being female, not male” (114). Dick helped Nicole hide from the reality of sex as a normal urge as well as perpetuate the moral and social which had threatened her in the first place. What no one saw fit to tell her, Nicole had to discover on her own: one might say that she grew up in spite of Dick, not because of him. He could not help her face reality, when he himself was unable to face it in the midst of his self-delusional “repose” and need to be loved. What the story actually suggests was that he prolonged Nicole’s sickness and helplessness at the cost of real human connection and his marriage.

Just as Dick’s linguistic parapaxis of “Mr. and Mrs. Diver” invites scrutiny regarding his positioning in the marriage, so too does the instance in the text where he signs a note “Dicole” (*Tender* 103). Dick and Nicole write themselves as a single entity, Dicole, but the linguistic fusion, “like their relationship, is inappropriate, resulting from a derailing of the classic doctor-patient dynamic” (Cockal 90). Dick and Nicole seem to fall prey to the awful merging and loss of self that becomes characteristic of their marital dynamic. As Barry Scherr points out, “the ‘mingling and merging’ nature of the relationship between Dick and Nicole is symbolized by the epithet ‘Dicole’” (12). The fusion of names here emphasizes the fact that both parties lose their separate identities in this relationship. Scherr claims that Fitzgerald places the blame on Nicole for “ruining Dick’s potential” (13) because she forces the loss of self on him, making him subservient to her. Nicole doesn’t seem to do much to force Dick into a subservient position. On the contrary, he seems to place himself there willingly. In arguing for this self-fulfilling object positioning, Heather Brown is apt to note that “If Nicole were as powerless as Dick believes she is, then she would be wholly incapable of possessing him” (106). Scherr’s acknowledgement that Lawrence’s *Women in Love* carries the same themes as *Tender is the Night* should suggest that

the blame could only be placed on the relationship itself. Neither Dick nor Nicole is to blame individually, as both of them play a part in the failure of the relationship.

The corrosive marriage between Nicole and Dick comes to head when the Diver family attends the fair with disastrous consequences. This is a moment that highlights just how twisted and tangled their transference bond really is. While the linguistic bonding of their name, Dicole, signals the severity of identity erasure and engulfment, it's perhaps the explicit and symbolic symbiosis of both marital partners in Book II that most clearly illustrates the eroding push-pull of transference and consequential loss of ego boundaries: "...but somehow Dick and Nicole had become one and equal, not opposite and complementary; she was Dick too, the drought in the marrow of his bone. He could not watch her disintegrations without participating in them" (*Tender* 190). When the Diver family attends the fair, the transference bonds that connect Dick and Nicole show themselves most clearly through Nicole's breakdown. Her breakdown, by extension, turns the fair itself into a transitional space that distorts, inverts, and plays out their marital strife. Nicole herself is linked earlier on to the fair activities that delineate her breakdown when Dick reminisces that, "She was a *carnival* to watch – at times primly coy, posing grimacing and gesturing – sometimes the shadow fell and the dignity of old suffering flowed down into her finger tips" (*Tender* 149, emphasis added).

With this in mind, the fair episode Nicole experiences is much more than just a resurgence of her childhood trauma. In fact, it's an actualization of a transference bond Dick perpetuates that's marked on her body through his perception of her trauma. Fitzgerald illustrates with precision what happens in transference and emphasizes rightly the interdependence of Dick and Nicole's patient-analyst coupling. Both Nicole and Dick are so closely tied to the other that it recalls the metaphoric working of a mobius strip. It's no wonder that, as Robert Silhol

observes, “This is so often why we find the figure of the circle in the novel” (54). The concept of stasis and circles plays out on the very fairground itself and through the psychoanalytic “play” of both Dick and Nicole: “He darted off again but he had lost her; he circled the merry-go-round keeping up with it till he realized he was running beside it, staring always at the same horse;” following this event he then finds Nicole on “a small ferris wheel revolving slowly against the sky” (*Tender* 189). Fitzgerald is even explicit in pinpointing Dick’s own ambivalence and paralysis in dealing with Nicole’s “breakdown” at the fair: “Dick tried to think what to do. The dualism in his views of her – that of husband, that of psychiatrist – was increasingly paralyzing his faculties” (188). Not only do the scenes themselves connote paralysis, but they also echo a similar suspension in time back to when Nicole and Dick first kissed (136). This makes the fair episode not only a climactic moment of transference confluences, but also a reverberating echo chamber for the acts of transference love that led them to this point.

When we consider Dick’s treatment of Nicole up until this point in the narrative, it’s no wonder that the only recourse left to her is not conforming to Dick’s self-serving desires for an emotionally stable wife, but rather a perceived abreaction of unchecked mania. In the classical use, transference is anything but self-seeking; doctors encourage it not for pleasure but in service of a cure. If the doctor behaves irresponsibly, perhaps by playing the role of a lover actively involved in the patient’s life, he perpetuates or even exacerbates the disorder, even if, as in Nicole’s case, the patient might appear to be cured. Transference tends to prolong the stopped-time effect trauma has on its victims and, because it is more or less under the analyst’s control, it represents yet another way in which he might take control of the story. As Pamela Boker describes it, “In every instance, when transference love is not translated into self-knowledge, both the doctor and patient are forced into a continuous and unrelenting role-playing situation:

the patient forever repressing symptoms to earn love, the doctor upholding the image of protector and ideal” (302). This is similar to another sort of role-playing endemic to psychoanalytic story-space: the doctor pretends to he knows, and the patient shapes her behavior – even her apparent cure – to his pretense and contingent expectations. Good girls, again, are easy to please.

Nicole’s behavior at the fair displays itself for Dick not as emotional awareness and frivolity, but as a performative and delusional mania that jeopardizes her safety. I find it significant that towards the end of “Constructions in Analysis” Freud turns to the discussion of delusions produced in the patient by the analyst’s constructions: delusions that evoke a “fragment of historical truth” that is out of place in the story. Freud writes at this point, “The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment – attempts at explanation and cure” (“Constructions in Analysis” 268). That is, not only does the patient become his own analyst, the analyst becomes also becomes the patient, espousing his delusional system and works toward towards the construction of fictions that can never be verified other than the force of the conviction that they convey. This seems to illustrate a reversal of roles between Nicole and Dick during the fair episode, which involves a willingness to enter states of paralysis and delusion. In doing so, they espouse mirrored, but significantly distorted, perceptions of their relationship in an attempt to master and be mastered by their respective powers of conviction. The brief reference to the “Punch-and-Judy show” (*Tender* 188) they both pass by is no mere coincidence, as both Dick and Nicole vie for power in the “carnival”-esque setting of the fair; this struggle, however, is characteristic of an ironic inversion of marital dynamics.

The performative aspect of Nicole’s episode at the fair – a mother “under duress” acting like a manic child in Dick’s eyes – carries significant weight when we consider the nature of

performance and its role within the psychically-charged space of the fairground. Performance is an activity the connotes pretense, dissimulation, “putting on an act,” assuming a role. In other words, in the notion of performance as distance of some sort is implied between the “act” and the “real self” concealed behind it. As Kemp and Squires observe, “Performance proposes a subject which is at once both fixed in, and called into question by, this very distinction between assumed persona and authentic self. Performance, in other words, poses the possibility of a mutable self, of a fluid subjectivity” (404). This mutability of performance, however, is subject to the distortions of transference desires that serve more imply that the marriage is a funhouse battleground for dominance and a willingness to be heard. Framed this way, the setting of the fair become a “potential space”, to use Winnicott’s term, that’s psychoanalytically suspect. The fair, however, involves more complex play than that which Winnicott allows for, since he gives the participants (usually “mother” and “child”) a place already defined in the power structure (165-82). This is counter to the merging “Dicoles” relationship between analyst and patient in which power structures are continually distorted as they are negotiated. These same delusional states of distortion suggest, as Faith Pullin argues, that “All the central characters in *Tender* are performers, their expertise sometimes slipping and becoming caricature” (179). Or, as Rosemary puts it to Dick: ““Oh, we’re such *actors* – you and I”” (*Tender* 105).

Nicole’s episode at the fair loosely echoes her previous episode in the bathroom, though instead of Nicole being talked “at” it is Dick who is being placed in an object positioning through Nicole’s challenging of his therapeutic power:

“Why did you lose control of yourself like that?”

“You know very well why.”

“No, I don’t.”

“That’s just preposterous – let me loose – that’s an insult to my intelligence. [...]”

“Listen to me – this business about a girl is a delusion, do you understand that word?”

“It’s always a delusion when I see what you don’t want me to see.” (*Tender* 189-90)

What this exchange suggests, apart from Nicole's open revolt against Dick's authorship of her experience, is how "private personalities are inseparable from public masks and are shaped by public roles, that there is no self without the presentation of self" (Skura 176). Nicole's reaction to Dick serves as a way in which she engages in a "play" of sorts through both her interaction with the fair ground equipment and through her dialogic exchange with Dick. The "private mask" of Nicole's illness adopts a public face that threatens the socially-constructed dynamic of their "perfect" marriage to those present. In fact, Nicole's self-awareness here speaks to the ways in which her trauma becomes acted out in play. As Hans Loewald notes, "The patient experiences and acts without knowing at first that he is creating a play. Gradually he becomes more of an author aware of being an author..." (280). Where this fails is in Dick's ineffectual attempt at intervention that reflect back to the patient what she does or says, and through transference interpretations which reveal the relations between the play and the original action the play imitates. As Blazek asserts, "Out in the world, Dick protects his investment in his marriage by disguising the origins of the relationship, even practically renouncing his title, and also by covering up any manifestation of Nicole's illness" (77). The "vast secretiveness" (*Tender* 54) of the couple's intimacy is shattered in the Villa Diana, where Violet McKisco witnesses Nicole's reaction (168). It's also shattered in the bathroom of the Paris hotel, following the discovery and disposal of Jules Peterson's corpse, where Nicole yells out, "It's you [...] come to intrude on the only privacy I have in the world [...] don't come in the bathroom, the only place I can go for privacy, dragging spreads with red blood on them and asking me to fix them" (112). Dick's repeated insistence to "Control yourself!" seems ironic and even unnecessary in its psychological harm; Dick holds himself up as both "ideal therapist" and frustrated husband.



In approaching Nicole's performativity, it's important to first explain why the framing of the fair is integral to our understanding of Dick and Nicole's transference love. In "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" Freud wrote of "transference as a playground...an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from one to the other is made" (154). Freud was still thinking of transference as part of the compulsion to repeat, and he wanted to turn it into a motive for remembering and an intention to repair. He affirmed that the mode of accomplishing that was to allow the transference "to expand in almost complete freedom," so that a "new condition" is created, manifesting "all the features of the illness, but it represents an artificial illness at every point accessible to our intervention. It is a piece of real experience, but only one which has been made possible by especially favorable conditions, and it is of a provisional nature" ("Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" 154). In accordance with Peter Brooks, I understand transference particularly as "a realm of the *as-if*, where affects from the past become invested in the present, notably in the dynamics of the patient-analyst relation, and the neurosis under treatment becomes a transference-neurosis, a present representation of the past" (9). Or, as Freud puts it in the *Dora* case history, the transference gives us "new impressions or reprints" and "revised editions" of the past (116). To that end, the transference process itself can be understood as textual "because it is a semiotic and fictional medium where the compulsions of unconscious desire, and its scenarios of infantile fulfillment, become symbolically present in the communicative situation of analysis" (Brooks 9-10). Within transference, recall of the past most often takes place as its unconscious repetition, acting out as if it were present; repetition is a way of remembering, brought into play when recollection in the intellectual sense is blocked by repression and resistance. The fair itself, then, becomes the transitional space of this semiotic medium of exchange, one that carries with it the

resistances of both Dick and Nicole just as it acts as a crucible for their tangled dialectic. Rather, transference is new experiencing and new remembering of the past that unconsciously has never become the past. For Nicole, this literally and semiotically “plays” out in her manic romp through the fair as an actualized phantasy of escapism from her childhood trauma. In other words, as Roy Schafer emphasizes, “transference, far from being a time machine by which one may travel back to see what one has been made out of, is a clarification of certain constituents of one’s present psychoanalytic actions” (220).

If nothing else, the episode at the fair highlights the issues of boundaries and boundary crossing for Dick that only serve to further exacerbate his transference entanglements with Nicole. Throughout his youthful career, work at the clinic, and marriage to Nicole, Dick has continually redrawn and blurred professional and personal boundaries. His marriage to Nicole, as Blazek observes, “opened up a potentially rich seam of knowledge...with the daily and often intimate scrutiny of her behavior which [the marriage] allows him” (82). In taking over the privilege of medicine’s free gaze, along with his personal and financial investment in his marriage, Dick has elevated it to dangerous levels of intrusiveness and, worst of all, professional inadequacy. In the carnival, before Nicole takes flight through the crowd and is found on the ferris wheel, he thinks about his marriage and his life: “The dualism in his views of her – that of husband, that of psychiatrist – was increasingly paralyzing his faculties. In these six years she had several times carried him over the line with her, disarming him by exciting emotional pity” (*Tender* 188). Crossing the boundary “line” is paralyzing because of his efforts to retain professional distance from Nicole as patient; simultaneously, his natural feelings of sympathy and love pull him in another direction. Why does he, then, force himself out of the marriage? Was it the possibility that he was fulfilling his last professional obligation to her, or that his

disillusionment with the psychiatric profession leaves him with no other alternative than to set them both free? William Blazek offers the most cogent analysis of the marriage's dissolution: "If one feels that his departure from Nicole is a form of liberation, then it's easier to see Fitzgerald's critique of psychiatry as a dual portrait of, on the one side, Dick as a considerate doctor following his empathetic desire to help others, and on the other side a profession that proves vain, patriarchal, money-driven, largely ineffective in practice, and unstoppable in its growing influence" (82). Perhaps the answer lies somewhere in the middle, couched within the ambivalence of Dick's motivation to be equal parts husband and analyst. This public artifice slowly crumbles and loses its luster to the private transference entanglements which Dick addresses with cold and misplaced clinical engagement.

It comes as no surprise that Dick's response to Nicole's relapse after the car crash closely echoes the timbre of his response to the woman painter at the clinic: one of "a suffering man under the burden of his public role and private feelings, needing to express love and to be loved – but prevented from gaining either by the sterilized hand of medical practice and misapplied ethics" (Blazek 82-3). During Nicole's desperate relapse (or, conversely, her first major step towards independence), after the car crash, Dick finds that he "could not watch her disintegrations without participating in them. His intuition rilled out of him as tenderness and compassion – he could only take the characteristically modern course, to interpose – he would get a nurse from Zurich, to take her over tonight" (*Tender* 191). Even through Nicole's pleas for emotional connection, Dick simply offers: "I can only help you the same old way" (191). Professional care wins out and replaces human care, at the cost of a marriage and, to a degree, a sense of self. In the end, however, the doctor cannot cure himself. The help and support he wished to give to others cannot be reciprocated when he cracks under the pressures of living a

life of emotional artifice, distanced from the ideals of his father, the “illusions of a nation” (117), of a life that promised too much just as it made him a token in his own marriage, and, finally, in a profession that reveals its own shortcomings in the failure of one of its brightest stars.

Both Dick and Nicole are self-destructive because their actions work in opposition to the relationship itself. As neither character can successfully open up and work towards equality, the Divers seemed doomed from the start. Dick and Nicole’s marriage engenders a failure of communication and connection through Dick’s unrecognized ambivalence towards love and Nicole’s insular positioning within a marriage that replicates her trauma because of unbalanced therapeutic dynamics. Even Nicole’s decision to leave Dick by the end of the novel is not simply a rebirth into a new life of freedom, but rather something equally problematic. The moment Nicole chooses to pursue an affair with Tommy shows that she is no longer willing to be subject to Dick’s control. She comes to this decision after her frustration with Dick reaches its apex: she is unable to stomach Dick’s attempts to charm Rosemary again. After a solitary drive home that allows her to appreciate her newfound independence, she writes Tommy a “short provocative letter” (*Tender* 316). Not only does this action echo Nicole’s earlier letters to Dick, but it also shows the cyclical return to the same dynamics of psychotherapeutic narrative construction that defined her earlier relation to Dick; this time, however, Nicole is the one in control of the narrative.

While it’s true that physical intimacy between Tommy and Nicole leads to a connection of sorts, I disagree with Heather Brown’s reading that Tommy and Nicole’s affair allows them to “let go of external barriers and lapse out of consciousness as they enter into an equal partnership free from the compulsion to dominate the other” (112). Is it really an equal partnership if equanimity in the relationship is dependent on the ever-shifting erotic desire of each? Isn’t this

not so much “love” as it is a pure physical extension of transference love? The “love” Nicole feels for Tommy is more motivated by lust and erotic desire than it is by actual emotional connection. Even as Nicole is preparing for her date with Tommy, she physically, ritualistically, prepares her body for sex like a sacrifice, realizing the significance of the act (*Tender* 317). In fact, the closest they come to unity is through sex, but it’s a unity colored by the need for control and force: “Struggling a little still, like a decapitated animal, she forgot about Dick and in her new white eyes, forgot Tommy himself and sank deeper into the minutes and the moment” (*Tender* 321). Framed this way, Nicole is presented more as a prized animal from Tommy’s “hunt” than an equal partner; it seems more like Fitzgerald is posing the question “In that final look, does the deer forgive the wolf?” While the transference bonds between Nicole and Dick were problematic from the start, is it really any surprise that those same bonds that defined their therapeutic and marital relationships would be simply exchanged by Nicole in a switch of partners? Rather, as Mary Burton puts it, she “is not cured, has not worked out the original neurosis, but simply switched doctors, under the pretext that the new man is a more forceful father-figure than the man she has used up” (470). Nicole and Tommy are doomed for similar marital conflicts, it seems, as Dick and Nicole were. Therefore, the blame for the Divers’ failed marriage doesn’t rest in Fitzgerald’s inability to imagine a healthy relationship; their marriage fails because it relies on the transference destruction of the individual to form the identity of the couple.

### CHAPTER III: PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT

“Living backwards!” Alice repeated in great astonishment. “I never heard of such a thing!” “—but there is one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways.” “I’m sure *mine* only works one way,” Alice remarked. “I can’t remember things before they happen.” “It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,” the Queen remarked. – Lewis Carroll

Just as Alice feels confused about memories within the confines and ever-changing rules of the Looking Glass world, so too does Alexander Portnoy feel the pull of his past as he wrestles with the liberating and stifling deviations of his neurotic childhood memories. This aspect of the text, among others, makes *Portnoy’s Complaint* a psychological novel worth considering. Although its frank treatment of sexuality and use of obscenity might seem unexceptional to twenty-first century readership accustomed to erotic imagery in media (from television to fiction and fine art), its candid discussion of onanism was revolutionary in the late sixties, even for one written at the height of the Sexual Revolution – the normalization of homosexuality, premarital sexual relations, pornography, etc. (Delbandi 242). Major elements of the Sexual Revolution were freedom of language and an openness about sex. The cover once off, the subject would never startle so again, nor would its language. *Portnoy’s Complaint*, according to Alan Cooper, “would be a national cathartic (a function, though, that would cast a shadow over the novel’s status as a work of literature)” (106).

Roth thrusts his protagonist, Alexander Portnoy, into “the liberating events of the American cultural revolution of the 1960s” (Baumgarten and Gottfried 101), but, as Dan Colson observes, these liberating events of sexual revolution are “commodified into a discourse that furthers the deployment of sexuality as a constraining device” (141). Alex Portnoy lives on the threshold of a future Foucault had envisioned, where “one day, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power

that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to the austere monarchy of sex” (Foucault 159). The culture of the sexual revolution stood on this same threshold, but the urge to label the deployment of sexuality led the culture to an act of recognition, to the result of their actions instead of the actions themselves. As Coulson argues, “much of the Sexual Revolution, *Portnoy’s Complaint* included, generated discourses and knowledges that further the deployment of sexuality and the creation of particular types of subjects” (141-2). Not only that, but the “creation of subjects” within Roth’s fictional world become interdiscursive when we factor in the imbricated workings of language, psychoanalysis, and memory that both overlay and complicate the overt sexuality in the novel. The pleasure of the activities that, within the culture, led to the discourse of “cultural revolution” has been lost, and we are left with a “sexual liberation [that] imposes on us an even more insidious unfreedom” (Halperin 20). By writing *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Roth interjects himself into the discourse around and about psychoanalysis and sexuality: he offers a counterdiscursive response to the dominant knowledge surrounding twentieth century American sex.

As David Brauner points out, the novel’s “language was sufficiently explicit that it was banned from many public libraries in the United States” (45). In form, too, it was innovative. Instead of a conventional linear narrative, the book proceeds through a series of, as Roth explains, “blocks of consciousness, chunks of material of varying shapes and sizes piled atop one another and held together by association rather than chronology” (*Reading Myself and Others* 15). Instead of a chronological plot there are (apparently) random episodes linked only by the associative movement of memory. Instead of a sympathetic protagonist there is only a neurotic, self-obsessed, self-dramatizing, possibly misogynistic, arguably misanthropic, and compulsive

masturbator. And instead of development, recursive and self-abasing stasis that, in the restrictive and bathetic perspective of our narrator, masquerades as therapeutic insight.

Most of Roth scholarship is concerned with either reading the author's works biographically, situating the theoretical or historical context of his comedy, or juxtaposing the overt sexuality of his protagonists alongside the ingrained sociocultural ambivalence of their Jewish identity. To that end, the novel's psychotherapeutic complexity (particularly the nature of its psychoanalytic discourses) tends to go generally unremarked. This reading of the novel, and of the protagonist Alexander Portnoy, concentrates on the limits and possibilities of narrative construction in terms of how it prefigures and establishes the therapeutic situation. What's at stake in the text regarding these psychoanalytic discourses is the parodic absence of the analyst's voice throughout the novel – one that acts as a cypher for how we read the transference framing of Portnoy's narrative. In presenting the psychoanalytic process through a first-person limited point of view, Roth is also situating psychoanalysis in strictly narrational terms; this suggests the possibilities of Portnoy's identity formation while simultaneously demarcating the narrative limits and psychic resistances of its own construction. In other words, the transitional space of the therapeutic situation between Portnoy and his "absent" analyst is presented through Portnoy's kaleidoscopic and neurotic narrative. What is the significance of the absence of the analyst as an intermediary situation between his (the analyst's) narrative presence (as far as his imagined intrusion in Portnoy's narrative) and loss (as far as the threat of neurotic self-delusion or therapeutic resistances)?

Through his therapeutic "confession," Portnoy situates self as being constituted by a compression of mnemonic narrative actions – ones that affect the portrayal of time, space, and character (Bonime and Eckardt 204). Consequently, this textual compression foregrounds how



transference and resistance operate as narrative structures. Like other narrative structures, they prescribe a point of view from which to describe the events of analysis in, normally, a regulated and coherent fashion. While the events themselves are constituted through a systematic account of them between analyst and patient, Portnoy's self-referential narrative fragments, problematizes, and parodies therapeutic dialogue. Rather than moving toward self-actualization and clarification, Portnoy's transference narrative, ironically, obfuscates certain constituents of his present psychoanalytic actions. Through the character of Portnoy, Roth plays with the possibilities and limits of a transference narrative. In doing so, Roth exploits the normal trajectory of psychoanalytic therapy that moves toward constructing new modes of experience by comically reframing the "catharsis" of Portnoy's therapeutic confession as an increased series of diminishing returns. This makes Portnoy's psychic regression understood, through his distorted perspective and "engagement" with Dr. Spielvogel, as therapeutic progression. In the analytic setting, with its focus on communication, voice and language are among the principal ways in which individuals explore and, within a therapeutic exchange, construct a sense of self. As Ogden and Ogden note, "voice, for the patient, is a medium for intended and unintended experimentation with different forms of selfhood" (9). Instead of achieving clarification through therapeutic dialogue, Roth's burlesque construction of Portnoy's voice positions transference and resistance as memetic structures through which a circular study of past and present is comically misinterpreted as psychoanalytic progress.

Roth's engagement with psychoanalysis in the novel goes far beyond the "low-hanging fruit" of its oedipal underpinnings and satirical use. The form that Roth's novel takes owes as much to the Freudian structure of the "talking cure" as to any of Roth's literary predecessors. As David Brauner is quick to point out, "Roth was by no means the first American, or even the first

Jewish American novelist, to draw on Freud's ideas" (45). For example, as Eric Jong's *Fear of Flying* demonstrates, the influence of Freud on post-war Jewish American fiction is pervasive. This Freudian influence found its way to Roth through personal experience with the psychotherapeutic process. It was only when Roth took inspiration from a crucial element of his own 1960s experience – his psychoanalysis – that he discovered the exactly how to narratively present Portnoy's "complaint": "The psychoanalytic monologue – a narrative technique whose rhetorical possibilities I'd been availing myself for years, only not on paper – was to furnish the means by which I thought I might convincingly draw together the fantastic element [...] and the realistic documentation" (*Reading Myself and Others* 36). Roth even compared psychoanalysis to the process of writing his work *The Facts*:

In analysis you organize your life according to the perspective of psychoanalysis. You are a willing patient. This is not the work of a patient. The analysis isn't interested in the facts so much as the associations to the facts... Writing leads to controlled investigation. The object of analysis is uncontrolled investigation. The goal was to write about things that strike me as tedious without being tedious. (*Conversations with Philip Roth* 224)

This formulation by Roth offers a conception of psychoanalysis as a body of knowledge with possibilities and techniques ripe for exploitation by the trajectory, style, and form of the fictional narrative.

Considering this, *Portnoy's Complaint* also signals the beginning of a period of Roth's career in which an understanding of psychoanalysis "becomes almost essential to an understanding of fiction" (Gooblar 67). With the innovative format of a psychoanalytic monologue that masquerades as therapeutic dialogue Roth has taken advantage of the narrative possibilities inherent in the psychotherapeutic session as a site of self-storytelling. In shaping his novel this way, Roth explores the idea that a particular introspection expected in psychoanalysis is comparable to, and perhaps a catalyst for, the workings of narrative. The fact that Portnoy's

monologue dominates almost the entirety of the novel signals the narrative framing as a red herring; Roth uses the tenets of psychoanalysis to create a burlesque rendering of them through the diluted, hyper-focused, and neurotic vicissitudes of Alexander Portnoy. As the narrative develops, Portnoy's "monologue" feels less like an earnest exchange and willingness to progress in therapy. Instead, Portnoy's "gross" verbosity carries the makings of a neurotic self-construction that uses the very language of psychoanalysis to subvert and pervert the therapeutic space until it's merely a bathetic, self-defeating parody of itself. The resulting monologue combines the fantastic, the realistic, and the obscene. As Roth himself notes, "The writing of *Portnoy's Complaint* began with discovering Portnoy's voice – more accurately, his mouth – and discovering along with it, the listening ear: the silent Dr. Spielvogel" (*Reading Myself and Others* 36). And Portnoy's mouth expresses "brash, shameful, masochistic, euphoric, vengeful, conscience-ridden exhibitionism" (37). We are not being asked to endorse a voice speaking truth to power but to listen critically, analytically.

The tensions between the textual restrictions of a Freudian frame and the protean workings of the psychotherapeutic situation are emphasized time and again in the novel; this is one of the major problems of Alex Portnoy, who characteristically moves toward a resignation to the utter immutability of the self. This constricting aspect of the Freudian conception of the self becomes more apparent when we consider how psychoanalysis is a process in which narratives of the self are told. Just as the patient recounts history and experiences that led him/her to the analyst's couch, so too does the analyst suggest the stories that may lie behind a patient's dreams, symptoms, or even choice of words. To better understand this parallel between narrative and psychoanalysis (and where Roth's text fits in), we must first understand the ways in which Freudian interpretation proceeds: it is always retrospective, working backward from a symptom

or psychical production to its proposed causes or antecedents. For example, a patient's instances of parapraxis are not symptomatic of anything; it's only through the intermediaries of analysis that hidden meanings are revealed. Likewise, within a Freudian schema, dreams do not communicate meaning in themselves but must be elucidated, their meaning created by the analyst and situated in dialogic context with the patient. It is the fact that dreams and symptoms are theoretically construed as inscrutable to the patient that necessitates the analyst's interpretation.

In this sense, the analyst plays the role of the author, fashioning new narratives of the patient's self. But, as Philip Rieff indicates, the analyst is not the only author. First, the patient must tell his/her own story: "Meaning does not emerge out of the raw material of incident and language in apiece, at once. [...] The patient offers the dream (or fantasy or random number or name), and is then asked by the analyst to associate around it, and thereby make it symptomatic" (118). In the process of free association, one way in which the analyst procures the patient's story, Freud emphasizes the patient's freedom and authority to express anything, whether he thinks it relevant or not:

[The analyst] admonishes them to relate everything that passes through their minds, even if they think it unimportant or irrelevant or nonsensical; he lays special stress on their not omitting any thought or idea from their story because to relate it might be embarrassing or painful to them. ("Psychoanalytic Method" 267)

Although it must be emphasized that Freud privileges the analyst's story over the patient's (he claims that a patient cannot analyze himself), psychoanalysis nonetheless grants the patient the freedom to tell his/her own story and, as a result, coauthor it. It is this freedom and the absolute candor that this freedom entails that seems to appeal to Roth and can account for his use of psychoanalysis as a template for the novel. On the other hand, Freud also suggests that the patient cannot use one of the fundamental tools of narration: selection; they are meant to relate

everything. This makes the process a curiously passive form of vivisection where “freedom” is granted, but only to a theoretical degree. If Roth saw nothing else in psychoanalysis than a confessional mode designed to unearth repressed history, then his own poetics, with its highly self-reflective explorations of the unstable boundaries between fact and fiction, would indeed preclude a favorable view of the discipline.

Through a playful treatment of the linguistic and structural elements of the therapeutic process – tackling psychoanalysis as an aesthetic mode – Roth forges a captivating form of dialogue, finds an intriguing voice in Alex Portnoy for his interest in role-playing therapy, and gains an effective means to stage the most outrageous and offensive emotions and fantasies. I would argue, however, that Roth’s engagement with psychoanalysis is not hostile like Fitzgerald’s; rather, he engages with it in a more subtle, playful way, opening it to inspection and critique and broadening the scope of what we think of as psychoanalysis. To that end, Roth exploits psychoanalysis as a form of fiction narrative – with the psychotherapeutic authorship of Alex Portnoy as its key. As mentioned earlier, the novel takes the form of an extended monologue delivered in a psychoanalytic therapy session. The patient, Alex Portnoy, suffers from a “disorder,” defined in the mock academic forward as a condition “in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a pervasive nature” (*Portnoy* 1). It’s important, also, to examine the nature and placement of this forward relative to Portnoy’s narrative. Within Roth’s fictional world, the forward presents itself as an encyclopedic entry under the heading “*Portnoy’s Complaint*.” It purports to offer a scholarly definition of the self-named syndrome described by Dr. Spielvogel in an article titled “The Puzzled Penis,” which appeared in the journal *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, volume 24. Through the mimicry of psychoanalytic jargon, the forward

summarizes the main motifs on the narrative in coldly clinical, and detached, terms. This satirical blurb is laden with contradictions that, through its presentation and narrative placement, alert us to the ambivalent underpinnings of Portnoy's essential issue.

In the forward's detached objectivity it is the opposite to Portnoy's subjective and engaging emotionality. As Lillian Furst points out, "is also simultaneously elevates and deflates him by installing him in an international journal as a noteworthy case and reducing him to a set of unflattering symptoms" (62). Not only that but, by extending this logical thread, the name of the condition itself is intimated to be a fictionalized moniker to protect the patient's real identity. If this is the case, then Portnoy has been doubly erased within the fictional and psychoanalytic framing of his own "controlled" narrative. Thus at one level the forward "validates Portnoy's story by its semblance of erudition, yet at another it robs him on his uniqueness by turning him into an example of a pathological case" (Furst 62). By originating from the analyst it ultimately gives the first and last word of the novel to Dr. Spielvogel, thereby enclosing Portnoy and setting limits to his otherwise boundless verbal exuberance. While, as Gooblar is so apt to note, the reader is "from this point onward, in a Freudian world, populated by Freud's language, theory, and therapeutic practice," it's also of consequence to note that this same "world" is filtered through Alex's own neurotic distortions that ironically adopts an anti-productive stance relative to the Freudian schema it utilizes (69).

With this dual use of narrative (in terms of both self-authorship and theory), Roth sees in the psychoanalytic process, in its inherent potential for narrative, a ready-made structure to be exploited for its literary possibilities. To take full advantage of these possibilities, especially for their psychotherapeutic effects, Roth creates Alex Portnoy, "who seems an exaggeratedly imagined ideal for Freud's therapeutic measures" (Gooblar 69). On the surface, Portnoy appears

to be the perfect therapeutic patient given his working knowledge of Freudian orthodoxy, talkative nature, and detailed “insights” (in terms of recollection) into his childhood and its suggested psychological reverberations in adult life. However, to say Portnoy merely seizes the opportunity to tell his story in this psychoanalytic session is one of the largest understatements of the novel. His domineering “monologue” goes on for close to three hundred pages and details, in fragmented anecdotes appropriate to the psychoanalytic process, the immense variability of his neurotic hang-ups. A rapacious id warring with an officious superego, an oedipal fixation on his mother compounded by an emasculated father, and an identity crisis seemingly rooted in sexual desire (among other things) – Portnoy seems to have it all! That these neurotic tendencies are evident to the reader is unexpected as, until the novel’s final line, the analyst remains silent. As Freud states, the analyst is necessary to archivally retrieve buried narratives (in the forms of memories and experiences) of the patient’s self: “The situation of psychoanalysis involves a superior and a subordinate” (“On the History” 337). Of course, in Roth’s case, it’s Portnoy who reigns supreme.

In *The Facts*, Roth describes *Portnoy’s Complaint* as a “full-scale comical counteranalysis,” which undermines but also uses its psychoanalytic foundation (156). Given the associative mnemonic links that make up Portnoy’s monologue, the novel follows at least one effect of psychotherapeutic practice. However, the novel’s overall structure disrupts the logical progression of analysis by beginning with an objective diagnosis, progressing through the patient’s monologue, and ending with Spielvogel’s invitation “perhaps to begin” (*Portnoy* 274). Portnoy thus never reaches the moment of cathartic insight or genuine introspection he reportedly seeks, but revels in the process of analysis himself. Without any hierarchical

interaction between patient and analyst, how does Roth situate the psychotherapeutic dynamic relative to the “absent” analyst?

Except for his forward and closing punchline, “Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?”, Dr. Spielvogel remains wholly mute while Portnoy’s garrulousness monopolizes the sessions (*Portnoy* 274). This, however, does not stop Portnoy from directly addressing Dr. Spielvogel as if he were an active part of the psychotherapeutic exchange that makes up talk therapy. In “The Analyst in Fiction,” Siri Hustvedt characterizes Spielvogel as “a remote, hidden being, not a *you* for the narrative” (227). It is true that Spielvogel is never an “interlocutor” (228), but he is a continuous “you” in the narrative. The transference relationship that develops because of this, then, is as much characterized by Portnoy’s monologic projections as it is by the dialectic implications of his interpellations. In other words, Spielvogel is consistently a “present absence” relative to Portnoy’s confessions; like a psychoanalytic Holy Ghost, he is there in “spirit” though not in “body.” Or, as Maren Scheurer suggests, “Portnoy’s monologue is dialogic not because Spielvogel actually talks back, but because Portnoy expects him to respond in a certain manner and phrases his own words accordingly” (38). While this patient-analyst relationship is unique for Roth’s novel, for Freud there develops an emotional relationship with the therapist that varies in intensity with the personality of the patient. There is also a strong fight on the part of the patient against the possibility of improvement. Within this resulting therapeutic tension, progress and psychological insight are gradually worked through and attained.

A constant, albeit silent, addressee of Portnoy’s discourse, Spielvogel – “Doctor, You Honor, whatever your name is” (*Portnoy* 102) – is treated with a variability that matches the vicissitudes of Portnoy’s neurosis. Spielvogel is confessed to and asked for explanations, advice, and salvation; he is attacked, ensnared, ridiculed, challenged, and identified with. He is



entreated, “Spielvogel, believe me” (215); charmed, “Surely, Doctor, we can figure this thing out, two smart Jewish boys like ourselves” (87); and castigated, “You’re a sadist, you’re a quack and a lousy comedian” (266). As André Green points out, “In analysis it is *always* the analysand who makes the first move. No analysis is conceivable in which [...] the analyst speaks first” (“Potential Space in Psychoanalysis” 180). The analyst can only respond to the first move, which is always played by the patient and only when he decides on it. In being the passive object to Portnoy’s erratic lines of inquiry, Spielvogel’s position as mostly silent in the narrative does not constitute an ignorance of or indifference to psychotherapeutic relations between patient and analyst. Rather, this textual positioning serves as playful critique, and constant reminder, by Roth on the believability and underlying ambiguity of narrative, the therapeutic relationship, and the psychoanalytic process. The analyst cannot get to know his patient’s real life; he can only imagine it. And, likewise, the patient can never know the analyst’s life; he too can only imagine it. Both are reduced to approximations. Even as the analytic process unfolds, each partner communicates, through verbalization, only a part of his life experiences.

In fact, when Spielvogel finally does speak, the unsettling effect is not just comical in nature, but a pyrrhic victory of sorts for the transference relationship an “ideal” Freudian patient has within a psychotherapeutic situation taken to the extreme. Debra Shostak argues that Spielvogel’s punchline – “Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?” (*Portnoy’s Complaint* 274) – destabilizes the narrative. In fact, it does so to the extent that “readers oscillate in the last moment between trusting and disbelieving all that has come before” and therefore concludes: “*Portnoy’s Complaint* is the first of many of Roth’s novels that emphasize voices in dialogue with monologue” (83-84). The punchline serves readers in a similar fashion to that of a psychoanalytic interpretation: it dialogically realigns their perception of a narrative they thought

they had already understood. However, due to Portnoy's unreliability as a narrator, this "realignment" is as superficial as it is misleading and self-defeating given Portnoy's unmitigated reign over his own single-authored narrative constructions within psychotherapy.

Even the therapeutic "setting" of the novel contributes to the building ambiguities and topsy-turvy whiplash of Portnoy's therapeutic "exchange." Instead of being defined spatially in the novel, the setting of this psychotherapeutic session is constructed and negotiated textually, through Portnoy's asides to, and invocations of, the analyst. Psychoanalysis, with its dyadic, co-constructed narratives and uneven distribution of roles, is a perfect model for Roth's dialogic restructuring of the monologue that's displayed within the textual construction of the therapeutic space. In fact, the setting mirrors the same kind of asymmetry that can be found in the novel without, as André Green points out, losing its dialogic essence:

In psychoanalysis, the contrived conditions of the analytical situation seek to create a kind of present absence or absent presence. The analysand does not see the analyst [...]. But he also knows that there is someone else, someone who is at the same time himself and yet not entirely himself, ready to assume any role the analysand attributes to him. ("The Double and the Absent" 282)

The analyst is not only constantly spoken to as an analyst but also as a transference figure standing in for parents, siblings, and other loved and hated ones. Therefore, he also enables patients to enter an internal dialogue with voices that haunt them. Psychoanalysis, which Thomas Ogden sees as a process enabling patient and analyst to "carry on richer, more interesting, livelier conversations with themselves [...], and consequently with each other" (*Conversations on the Frontier of Dreaming* 14), has evidently provided Roth with the narrative means to explore and co-construct identities in a setting that reflects the psychotherapeutic dialogue's own irregularity.

In moments that might be described as instances of “vulnerability,” Portnoy exhibits a need for connection in the text while, simultaneously, denying any potential for insight. In effect, Portnoy walls himself up within the, supposedly, objective space of therapeutic exchange by positioning himself an earnest patient, but without the ability to allow himself pause for genuine reflection: “Doctor, I had never had anybody like her in my life, she was the fulfillment of my most lascivious adolescent dreams – but marry her, can she be serious? You see, [...] and here is the source of much of our trouble – a ridiculously high opinion of me” (*Portnoy’s Complaint* 106). Portnoy’s breathless stream of talk doesn’t allow him a moment for the interpretive interventions of an analyst that’s customary in classical psychoanalysis. Instead, Roth presents a patient so loquacious as to completely silence the doctor. This represents a decidedly whimsical reversal of the nineteenth-century psychoanalytic situation where the patient was the one to be silenced (e.g. “Dora”). Portnoy’s analysis becomes yet another self-production rather than a therapy.

According to André Green, the therapeutic setting permits that “the analytic object is neither internal (to the analysand or to the analyst), nor external (to either the one or the other) but is situated *between* the two” (“Potential Space in Psychoanalysis” 180). The analytic object, then, corresponds exactly to Winnicott’s definition of the transitional object and to its location in the intermediate area of *potential space*, the space of “overlap” demarcated by the analytic setting. In the case of Portnoy, both his analysis and the analytic setting become defined by redoubled self-productions rather than progressive and introspective therapeutic exchange:

Doctor, what should I rid myself of, tell me, the hatred...or the love? Because I haven’t even begun to mention everything I remember with pleasure – I mean with a rapturous, biting sense of loss! [...] Memories of practically nothing – and yet they seem moments of history as crucial to my being as the moment of my conception. (*Portnoy’s Complaint* 27).

This pointed example about the nature of Portnoy's memories and his need to confess is an instance where "there is truth bouncing off the walls of the analytical room, but it's one person's shaped-and-bent truth – really many inconsistent truths – collected by passions the way filings are collected by a magnet" (Avishai 53). The pronoun "I" in the last passage is the metaphorical "magnet" given Portnoy's linguistic self-mirroring and distortion throughout his narrative constructions. For Émile Benveniste, it is in and through language that humans constitute themselves as a subjects, because language alone establishes the concept of "ego" in reality, "in its reality which is that of the being" (224). Language, according to Benveniste, is possible because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. "Because of this, *I* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to 'me,' becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and to who says *you* to me" (225).

In both trying to convince himself and pose an interrogative question to the "absent" Spielvogel, Portnoy encompasses two positions at the same time: neurotic patient and self-appointed analyst; through the latter he feels a degree of absolution from his direct or indirect line of inquiry with Spielvogel. The pronoun *I* "cannot be defined in terms of locution, not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. *I* signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*'" (Benveniste 218). Portnoy's repetition of the pronoun suggests his subjectivity is desperately situated in the doubling of pronoun *I*: "There is thus a combined double instance in this process: the instance of *I* as referent and the discourse containing *I* as the referee" (218). This mirroring of language for Portnoy takes on new and distorted psychoanalytic dimensions when we consider that, for Benveniste, language is organized so that it permits each speaker to appropriate to himself an entire language by designating himself as *I* (226). As such, the nature of Portnoy's self-analysis and the therapeutic setting itself become difficult to

distinguish in the novel since the style of *Portnoy's Complaint* might be characterized as a rhetoric of hysteria, or perhaps a rhetoric of neurosis. The setting suggests detailed, gripping, funny judgments. At the same time, the setting suggests no point of view from which to evaluate whether the judgments are accurate or fair. To judge prematurely would not be in the culture of psychoanalysis. Portnoy's vain idea that he can escape his many snares is part and parcel of the novel's self-ironic comedy concerning its parody of psychotherapy. Within the funhouse mirror of Portnoy's neurosis that dictates the narrative progression and psychoanalytic framing of his mono-dialogue, it's no wonder that the indicators *I* (Portnoy) and *you* (Spielvogel) cannot exist as potentialities. They exist only insofar as they are actualized in the instance of discourse, in which, by each of their own instances, they mark the process of appropriation by the speaker (220).

Though Portnoy's mono-dialogue is built upon mnemonic associations of his childhood past, they are constantly being actualized in the perpetual ("word vomit") present of the therapeutic "exchange" with the "present absence" of Spielvogel. Here we encounter Winnicott's concept of the silent self: "each individual is an isolate, permanently unknown, in fact unfound" (qtd. in "Potential Space in Psychoanalysis" 181). From this springs the importance and capacity to be alone (in the presence of the analyst) and its consequence: the analyst is always having to navigate between the risk of separation anxiety and that of anxiety concerning its intrusiveness in therapy. In Portnoy's world, these anxieties are magnified and understood as self-recriminating since he, throughout the novel, relies on his own neurosis to steer the direction of the therapeutic situation. Winnicott has created for us an essential paradox, one that, as he says, we must accept and that it is not for resolution:

If the baby is in health then he creates the object, but the object was there waiting to be created and to become a cathected object. I tried to draw attention to this aspect of the

transitional phenomena by claiming that in the rules of the game we all know we will never challenge the baby to elicit and answer to the question: did you create it or did you find it? (*Playing and Reality* 89)

The qualities peculiar to the transitional object confront us with a double truth: the analyst is not a real object; the analyst is not an imaginary object (“Potential Space in Psychoanalysis” 181). The analytic discourse, on the whole, is not the patient’s discourse, nor is it that of the analyst, nor is it the sum of these two. The analytic discourse is the relation between two discourses which “belong neither to the realm of the real nor to that of the imaginary,” but is, instead navigated through language and appropriated by the varying demands of subject/object positioning in the therapeutic situation (181). Accordingly, the analytic discourse has, in regard to past and present alike, only a potential relationship to the truth. Readers cannot even be sure if Portnoy confesses anything of value to Spielvogel, for it may just be a self-replicating and perpetuating fantasy. The writer’s task, Roth argues, is deeply rooted within such pretend play, the “art of impersonation,” the “sly and cunning masquerade” (*Reading Myself and Others* 123). He has repeatedly claimed that *Portnoy’s Complaint* is thus “imbedded in parody, burlesque, slapstick, ridicule, insult, invective, lampoon, wisecrack, in nonsense, in levity, in *play*” (28).

Play is exactly where Donald Winnicott locates psychotherapy: “Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together” (“Playing: A Theoretical Statement” 234). Winnicott’s terse but evocative arguments point to an affinity between the psychoanalytic setting, language, and play. Jay Frankel, deeming play to be one of the foundations of the therapeutic relationship, provides a more detailed comparative perspective:

Play is characterized by certain qualities: fragmenting, reordering, and lack of completion of behavioral and ideational sequences; mixing and matching elements from different contexts; exaggeration; repetition; non-literality; flexibility; reversing roles and relationships [...]. The psychoanalytic set-up fosters these qualities – free association, for

instance, facilitates mixing and matching, non-literality, reversals, and exaggerations, in relation to memories, fantasies, perceptions, and so on. Reversals and exaggeration can occur in the transference. A psychoanalytic patient can learn about his emotional reality and interpersonal capabilities [...] by playing with them. (“Ferenczi’s Concepts of Identification” 298-99)

Freud refers to transference as a “playground” where events from the past can be re-staged (“Remembering” 154), evoking play as much as theater. Via the displacement of emotions and fantasies originating in earlier relationships onto the therapeutic dyad, roles are created for therapist and patient to enact and re-enact. The ensuing oscillation between fantasy and reality allows the therapist to initiate a negotiation between past and present, inner and outer worlds. According to Winnicott this is also a feature of every kind of playing. Play takes place in potential space, which is “not *inside* by any use of the word [...]. Nor is it *outside*, that is to say, it is not a part of the repudiated world, the not-me, [...].” (“Playing: A Theoretical Statement” 236). Since subjective and objective worlds collide in play, it is, as Winnicott argues, “inherently exciting and precarious” (247). If fantasy not touching upon reality, it is harmless, but it has no creative and transformative potential either. Portnoy’s role-playing within the therapeutic situation creates personal entanglement with the distortions he himself created. His role-playing intentionally oscillates between fantasy and reality, to take artistic advantage of the precariousness of transitional space. In the novel, Roth has exploited the psychoanalytic setting and dialogue by turning it into material for artistic play. As Roth continues to do this, he creates overlapping areas of play, in which an analysis of his poetics and of therapy become comingled.

Henry James once remarked that “Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw the circle within which they shall appear to do so” (5). I believe the same can be said for the problem of the psychoanalyst regarding therapeutic dialogue – though made more problematic and entrapping for Portnoy’s session. Portnoy’s own

neurotic crises and points of inquiry to Spielvogel arrive circuitously in the narrative and self-augment themselves. They disappear and return and we as readers begin to see them differently as time passes. For Portnoy, the pattern is different. Lacking the analyst's "framing," Portnoy grows weary of his self-flagellations and need for approval; the situation becomes tiresome, and then becomes acute and painful. Eventually the crisis erupts, but even then it is not ended as Portnoy continues down the rabbit hole of his own neurotic excesses.

It would be enough for any reader to simply wade through the endless procession of Portnoy's pornographic remembrances, self-loathing, and desperate need for approval. However, the fact that Portnoy too, in the role of self-analyst, relies on Freudian language to author his onanistic narrative suggests another layered degree of psychoanalytic interaction within the therapeutic situation. Generally addressed as "Doctor," and often simply as "you," Spielvogel is Portnoy's projected listener and confidant. Because of his appropriation of psychoanalytic lore, Portnoy tends to be overfamiliar toward his analyst as if he already knew his unspoken reactions: "this of course you will understand, this of course is your bread and butter" (*Portnoy* 134); "(this'll amuse you)" (223); "wouldn't you say?" (262). Portnoy is a patient with a remarkable knowledge of Freud's writings and theories. In fact, his knowledge and use of Freud directly contributes to the dialectic relationship between patient and analyst: "Inasmuch as the analyst strives to communicate with a patient in his language, the patient in return, if he wishes to be understood, can only reply in the language of the analyst" ("The Analyst, Symbolization, and Absence" 3).

Indeed, as an explanation for his perpetual desire for sexual adventure, he remarks that "all the unconscious can do anyway, so Freud tells us, is *want*. *And want! And WANT!* Oh Freud, do I know!" (103). Likewise, when ranting about the feelings of guilt he has inherited



from his overbearing parents, he singles out the representative of parental authority in Freud's conception of the mind: "That tyrant, my superego, he should be strung up, that son of a bitch, hung by his fucking stormtrooper's boots till he's dead!" (160-1). And, like a good Freudian scholar, when he realizes that most of his girlfriends have had small breasts, he asks, "[I]s there an essay somewhere I can read on that?" (216). Portnoy, though at times seemingly desperate for the psychoanalyst's help, essentially diagnoses himself. Although Freud may have disagreed with Roth's conception of a patient who can detect the processes that formulate his self, Freud's theories have permeated the culture to the extent that the reader does not doubt the granules of truth in Portnoy's comical analysis. As Philip Rieff points out, Freud's "insistence that the unconscious has its own laws, and that no psychic product is without meaning, tends to make analysts of us all" (103). Roth, by giving Portnoy the analytical tools that Freud insisted could only be wielded by a trained analyst, is using Freud to pervert and subvert Freud, but in a way that pays homage to the pervasive cultural influence of Freud's theories. Portnoy's sexualized and comedic mode, in tandem with this cultural influence, allows Roth to fully exploit psychoanalysis as a site of stories of the self while skirting Freud's credo of the analyst as necessary for interpretation.

Roth takes full advantage of Portnoy's distorted use of Freudian language to have Portnoy delve into his psyche, but, importantly, he also plays with Freudian theory and its underlying premises. Psychoanalytic discourse is regularly subverted by Portnoy's comedic and caricatured use of its terminology, "LET'S PUT THE ID BACK IN YID" (*Portnoy* 124) being one of the most notorious, but by no means only, example of this Portnovian tendency. David Brauner has shown that Portnoy "continually vacillates between adopting [...] and undermining

or rejecting” its discourse (“Masturbation and Its Discontents” 79), so that psychoanalysis is always treated comically, without giving the up its capacity to provide actual insights.

This comic treatment for Portnoy tends to adopt sexual overtones to the degree that the body and Portnoy’s use of psychoanalytic language are sometimes blurred together. An example of this surfaces in, perhaps, the most explicit consideration of Freud in the novel:

Now, I am under the influence at the moment of an essay entitled “The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life”; as you may have guessed, I have bought a set of *Collected Papers*, and since my return from Europe, have been putting myself to sleep each night [...] with a volume of Freud in my hand. Sometimes Freud in hand, sometimes Alex in hand, frequently both. Yes, there in my unbuttoned pajamas all alone I lie, fiddling with it like a little boy-child in a dopey reverie, tugging on it, twisting it, rubbing and kneading it, and meanwhile reading spellbound through “Contributions to the Psychology of Love,” ever heedful of the sentence, the phrase, the *word* that will liberate me from what I understand are called my fantasies and fixations. (*Portnoy* 185)

Not only is Portnoy narratively engaging with Freud, but he is sexually engaging with him as well. The body, with all its excretions and erotogenic stimuli, is understood as an application of Freudian orthodoxy: Portnoy’s body becomes a text onto itself from which he writes the stories of his sordidness and neuroses. Not only that, but Portnoy’s body takes on Foucauldian definitions as well. Because Portnoy’s sense of self is constantly being remade and re-negotiated textually throughout the narrative, his body (understood here) is not a naturally different entity whose biological make-up permanently determines or limits his potential. Through the blurring of Freudian text with erotic pleasure, Portnoy’s body is presented as a cultural text, a surface upon which culture can be written, and a site for understanding the workings of psychoanalytic power structures that Portnoy himself both rejects and acquiesces to. In line with Foucauldian thought, Portnoy’s body is a site where dissent is articulated. Through the vehicle of onanism, Portnoy’s body constitutes a language of sexuality unto itself that transgresses, just as it is defined by, its own narrative, erotic, and psychoanalytic limitations. In Roth’s novels, *Jews*,

Jewish history, and identity are intertwined with aggression, anger, and sexuality (Leibovici 92). We see this, for example, when Portnoy “fucks his family’s lunch” by masturbating in a pound of liver that is meant to be served at lunchtime. Intertwining Judaism and sexuality seems to be at the heart of Portnoy’s dilemma. Jews, Jewish history, and the uncanny Jewish identity are sexualized. Talk therapy *itself*, in conjunction with Portnoy’s self-abasement, has become an acting out of aggressive sexual fantasies. In recounting his lunchtime sexual tryst, Portnoy doubly “fucks” over his family, Jewish heritage, and Jewish identity by refocusing and, cognitively, reliving the event within the transitional space of psychotherapy.

Portnoy is “torn by desires repugnant to my conscience and a conscience repugnant to my desires” (*Portnoy* 132). Is he, he asks, the “Assistant Commissioner of Human Opportunity,” the public servant to morality, or “Commissioner Cunt,” a slave to desire and immorality (204)? He must be one or the other, an eater or a talker, “baseless and brainless” (204) or “A hundred and fifty-eight points of I.Q.” (204). His “self-gratifying” reading of Freud’s “Contributions to the Psychology of Love” has convinced him that one current of feeling – need or purpose – must be subsumed in the other for a Freudian illumination to take place. Portnoy’s pulpit begins with Freud. Freud’s words ring as truth to Portnoy. He comes to Spielvogel not as a naïve and problemed layman but as a sophisticated reader of psychoanalysis. He narrates his own story as a Freudian case study, imposing Freud’s theories and semantics on his actions, looking to Freud to solve the problem of living in a post-Holocaust world. And yet his reading of Freud is faulty. Portnoy puts great emphasis on Freud’s suggestion that for catharsis to take place it is necessary that “two currents of feeling be united: tender, affectionate feelings, and the sensuous feelings” (*Portnoy* 185-86). Portnoy reads union to imply stasis. He reads Freud’s essay as making the case for the dissolving of disharmony rather than for the fostering of its continuation. Portnoy

seeks a blending, a melding of his duality, blaming his impotence on division and dissonance. With Freud as a guide, Portnoy waits for one current to fall to the other.

Freud's essay does state the need for a "confluence of two currents," but confluence, even more than union, suggests not a subduing of either but an intermixing, a continuing flux between the two ("Contributions to the Psychology of Love" 49). The currents remain separate, individual, distinctive, but rise together like waves, pushing and pulling at one another. Later Freud writes, "In times during which no obstacle to sexual satisfaction existed...love became worthless" (57). When needs are unrestrained love loses its value. Love, Freud goes on, "developed greatest significance in the lives of ascetic monks, which were entirely occupied with the struggles against libidinous temptation" (57). Where conscience intervenes with desire sexuality and love become more valued, more intensified. "Instinctual desire is mentally increased by frustration of it," Freud argues (57). Instinct comes alive when it is challenged by conscience; conscience finds its meaning in its joining with desire. Both are enlivened by the presence of the other, not by one's subjugation of the other. What Freud asked for is not a victory of need over purpose, or purpose over need, but their constant belittling interaction. But Portnoy, heedful of *his* Freud, rejects interaction and continues searching for that Freudian gem that will lead him to his own Palestine.

Moreover, Portnoy's attitude toward Freud is profoundly ambivalent. At times Portnoy appears to revere Freud – as his discussion of "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life" suggests. Portnoy often invokes Freud elsewhere in the novel, both implicitly and explicitly, as a source of wisdom (*Portnoy* 96, 133). At other times, however, Portnoy comes close to blaming Freud for his predicament, accusing him of trivializing complex human relationships and undermining human dignity (242). More than anything else, Portnoy adopts

Freudian ideas as a means of anticipating and deconstructing possible interpretations of his own behavior. By explicitly drawing attention to the Freudian symbolism of many episodes in the novel – his mother’s threatened castration with a knife; his late-descending testicle; or his impotence during his attempted rape of Naomi – Portnoy implicitly criticizes the tendency of psychoanalysis to incorporate all events into a phallogocentric narrative while, ironically, foregrounding the sexual adventures of his own penis from childhood to adulthood. Once Portnoy has preempted a Freudian reading of his psyche by presenting his narrative as a series of symbolic threats (of castration and emasculation) to his sexuality, such a reading loses its potency and immediately seems reductive and redundant. He then can present a counter-narrative in which Freud is cast not as a sage or a shaman but as a “sadist [...] a quack and a lousy comedian” (*Portnoy* 242). This rhetorical strategy allows Portnoy to adopt the posturing and knowledge of an analyst, but without the personal responsibility that accompanies the introspection of a patient. The advantages of this rhetorical stance, in Portnoy’s mind, far outweigh the inevitable negatives. The psychoanalytic situation provides a realistic justification for Portnoy’s vehement soul-baring and finger-pointing, for his use of words and images which would be unacceptable in a more public context, and for his emphasis on sexual memories. It also provides him with an audience, essential since Portnoy is both patient and performer, character and author in his own self-constructed ramblings. The mono-dialogue in which this situation provokes effectively locks us into Portnoy’s vision of the world; and his viewpoint is unqualified by any other (save for the punchline), reveals *his* interpretation of the burden of his reality. Through the mono-dialogue we learn what reality feels like to him and, in the process, we are forced (as he is) constantly to question where the line between objective reality and his pathological fantasies lie.

Portnoy's insistence on language, on talking, further animates his journey throughout the novel. For Portnoy there are two types of language, civilized discourse and animalistic howling, and they are synecdoches referring to his internal contradictions. Need is joined with ungrammatical declarations, noise, the screams of pain or pleasure, while purpose is joined with eloquence and perfect syntax. He is drawn to both the "pitiful and pathetic" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 206) writing of the Monkey and the "cutesy-wootsy" innocent language of the Pilgrim's speech (233). Portnoy believes in one linguistic sphere he will find his tone, his meaning. He derogates one and then the other, alternating in his distaste for sophisticated words – "babble-babble" – and for the nonsensical mouthings of his "slimy...Dionysian side" (79). Portnoy's search for a woman is consistent with his search for a language, with his search for wholeness. "This one has a nice ass," he says, "but she talks too much" (103). One woman's language undermines her physical attributes while, simultaneously, buffering Portnoy's sense of self-worth and sexual status. "On the other hand," Portnoy continues, "this one here doesn't talk at all, at least not so that she makes any sense – but, boy, can she suck" (103). Her sexual prowess seems to stem from her faulty vocabulary. Portnoy divides the world as he divides women; linguistic agility is linked with sexual limitation and linguistic coarseness linked with sexual-know-how. One precludes the other, and Portnoy must choose which sphere he must anchor himself to. When Portnoy states, "Words aren't only bombs and bullets – no they're little gifts, containing meanings," he touches upon the union which he has resisted (202). Words are both the provinces of aggression and love, of sense-making and senselessness. Language leads to the catharsis of screaming, while screaming informs the nature of prose. The tension produced, both in the speaker and in the text, is the tension that anticipates both, that creates the agony expressed and the comedy which offers a bridge to self-annihilation or abjection.

Alex's relationship with women confirms this linguistic tension that patterns his sexual exploits and social connections. He treats women as debased sexual objects – as ethnically inferior – because their language does not align with his aesthetic scruples. Of course, there are also sexual preconditions that Alex arbitrarily reinforces as well. He loses interest in Sarah Abbott Maulsby because she will not perform fellatio on him, in Mary Jane Reed when she complains of feeling humiliated after a series of threesomes, and in Kay Campbell when she refuses to contemplate a conversion to Judaism: when they refuse, that is, to fulfill the role of a debased sexual object, or when they assert their independence in terms that make it impossible for Alex to relegate them as ethnically inferior. As David Brauner argues, “Alex rejects these women not because he respects them, but because he doesn't; not because they have moral scruples, but because they don't have aesthetic ones” (82). For Alex, these various women are linguistically inferior because they do not “speak his language” (82).

To say simply that Alex's love life is more grist for the Freudian mill engendered by his neurosis is myopic at best. When Alex spends Thanksgiving with the Campbells, the greatest culture shock for him is the way they speak to each other. In Iowa, he soon discovers,

[...] they feel the sunshine on their faces, and it just sets off some sort of chemical reaction: Good *morning!* Good morning! Good *morning!* sung to half a dozen different tunes! [...] ‘Good *morning,*’ he [Mr. Campbell] says, and now it occurs to me that the word ‘morning,’ as he uses it, refers specifically to the hours between eight A.M. and twelve noon [...] He wants the hours between eight and twelve to be *good*, which is to say, enjoyable, pleasurable, beneficial! [...] The English language is a *form of communication!* Conversation isn't just crossfire where you shoot and get shot at! Where you've got to duck for your life and aim to kill! (*Portnoy's Complaint* 202)

As David Brauner observes, “Although Alex is ostensibly praising the good humor, politeness, and straightforwardness of the Campbells, the overall effect of this passage is to highlight – comically – the conventionality, the *banality* of their language” (83). The Campbells may use language to communicate with each other rather than, as Portnoy does, to compete for rhetorical

supremacy, but when we compare the richness of Portnoy's complaints alongside the platitudes of the Campbells, it's easy to see that both are (in their own unique ways) masquerades. After she rejects the idea of converting, Alex begins to find Kay "boringly predictable in conversation, and about as desirable as blubber in bed" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 211). But why does he – a self-appointed paragon for the self-hating Jew – ask her, jokingly, if she will convert in the first place, and why is he offended when she refuses? The implication is foreplay under the guise of ironic and faux condemnation: she's damned if she does and she's damned if she doesn't. He "has always found her conversion boring and his 'joke' about conversion had been a way of precipitating that fact" (Brauner 83). Kay may be "hard as a gourd on matters of moral principle," but because her discourse is flaccid in its affectation her body likewise takes on the property of "blubber" and Alex finds himself intellectually and physically impotent (*Portnoy's Complaint* 198).

Even with Mary Jane, it's apparent that linguistic differences are at the heart of Alex's sexual frustrations and impediments. For example, on the journey home Alex resents her uncultured nature by censoring her diction and parodying her slang:

'Like let's eat,' I said. 'Like food. Like nourishment, man.'  
'Look,' she said, 'maybe I don't know what I am, but you don't know what you want to be, either! And don't forget that!'  
'Groovy, man.' (*Portnoy's Complaint* 181)

Her response to Alex's baiting is acute, as his refusal to respond to it illustrates; later on in this exchange she parodies his slavish Freudianism: "can't I say hang-up *either*? Ok – it's a *compulsion*" (82). Does his irritation at her language indicate disillusionment with his own Jewish identity, or does it mask his relief that she is beyond the cultural pale? Or, as Brauner questions, "Does he really want to respect her, or is his apparent desire to educate her – and thus to render her respectable – nothing more than a desire to confirm that she is not respectable?"



(84). Alex's behavior in Rome, and need to give them all nicknames, indicates the latter.

Through monikers, Alex can control the rhetoric of his recollections and, concentrically, create individually warped "case studies" of his own within the frame of his own therapeutic session.

Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that Alex continually feels the pangs of guilt comingled with his exploits; one could argue he's rendered impotent from guilt. Guilt as a comedic mode is central to the novel; Alex even exclaims at one point: "Any guilt on my part is *comical!*" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 227). However, Alex's recognition of this is not considered a psychiatric breakthrough. Alex is speaking, whether consciously or not, ironically. He does not want his guilt to be comical, nor his shame to be a punchline. He craves a suffering that is "*Dignified*" and "*Meaningful*" – the regality of tragedy, rather than the burlesque of comedy (229). What he desperately wishes, and what he fails to achieve, is to be relieved from his role as the perennial Jewish son in a perennial Jewish joke. With this in mind, his self-ridicule is a defense against the fear that his whole life is a joke, that he inhabits "a world given its meaning by some vulgar nightclub clown," a sort of preemptive comic strike intended to disarm the barbed comments of others. Alex becomes, by the novel's end, a Pagliacci to a therapeutic stage of his own construction, only he doesn't know if he's laughing or crying.

In "fucking" the women physically, he also "fucks" them linguistically and ethnically. Through his psychotherapeutic mono-dialogue he asserts a linguistic dominance of sexual violence against these women as a means of repudiating his own self-loathing while bolstering his inflated sense of self-worth. As Portnoy himself observes, "I don't seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 214). Certainly, in the face of this sexual aggression, Portnoy's objectification of these women, as manifested in the nicknames he gives each one (Sarah Maulsby becomes "The Pilgrim," Kay Campbell "The

Pumpkin,” and Mary Jane Reed “The Monkey”), is patronizing and dehumanizing. Portnoy’s callous treatment of Mary Jane (leaving her in a suicidal state in Athens after a series of sexual debaucheries), attempted rape of Naomi, and rejection of Kay and Sarah after they fail to live up to his sexual appetites only seem to confirm the degree of his sexual violence. Yet to condemn the novel purely for its misogyny is parochial. To that end, Portnoy’s contempt for women is no worse than his contempt for men (not to mention his contempt for himself). If Portnoy is a misogynist, then it might be argued that his misogyny is part of a larger more convoluted misanthropy – a state that’s augmented and twisted by his own psychotherapeutic encounters.

Portnoy’s problem becomes apparent: “How have I come to be such an enemy and flayer of myself? And so alone! *Oh*, so alone! Nothing but *self!* Locked up in *me!*” (*Portnoy* 248). We catch the suggestion in that word “flayer” that masturbation is a form of skinning himself alive; Portnoy uses sex to “expose” himself to Spielvogel while, simultaneously, hiding behind Jewish guilt to give the appearance of therapeutic openness. “LET MY PETER GO” (251) he cries to his parents and their Jewish community. But he’s the one who’s holding on, which he sort of knows (or says he does): “My endless childhood! Which I won’t relinquish – or which won’t relinquish me!” (271). It’s enough to make you howl! Portnoy is the king of the culture of narcissism, a representative man – or, rather, a little prince in a kingdom of his own tortured making. In a casual manner Portnoy alludes to the secret behind his narrative when he grants, “everything is purple (including my prose)” (165). Here the dominant burlesque comedy of overstatement yields suddenly to a disarming self-bunking within the psychoanalytic situation. The ironic rhythm of the novel is a seesaw between the need for self-inflation (and self-justification) and the incursion of self-deflation (and self-condemnation). It’s within the space

between this tumescence and detumescence that Portnoy's "purple prose" is created, teased, and constantly frustrated – locked in a state of sexual and psychoanalytic stasis.

## CHAPTER IV: THE WHITE HOTEL

“The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is ‘What does a woman want?’” – Sigmund Freud

In his author’s note to *The White Hotel* D.M. Thomas describes the “terrain of [his] novel” as the “landscape of hysteria,” a terrain one “could not travel far in...without meeting the majestic figure of Sigmund Freud” (6). However, the Freud applauded by Thomas is not the scientist but the poet, a writer possessed of “myth-making power” (*Memories* 46). Writing about the “great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis,” Thomas calls it a “poetic, dramatic expression of a hidden truth” (*White Hotel* 7). But this truth remains elusive to psychoanalysis as it is to other forms of representation both in and outside of the novel. When we enter Thomas’s fictional world, it is as if we’ve entered the “daylight darkness” of a fog enshrouding Freud and Lisa (our protagonist) on the back of some slouching “prehistoric monster” that we can’t quite see, but nonetheless feel (9). Uncertain of our readings and of what directions we should follow in this disconcerting terrain, we encounter a text that “challenges the faith we have in our interpretive powers” (Loughey 91). Not only that, but as John MacInnes points out, it is a sublime fiction in the simplest sense of the word: “an imaginative thing made up by placing under a single cover numerous apparent documents – among which we find letters, poems, a Freudian case history, and even a narrative set somewhere beyond death – all of which revise, reflect, and structure one another” (254).

As we seek out certain generic conventions to ascertain meaning, such as identifiable narrative voices or recognizable points of view, we soon discover that the novel either denies us familiar landmarks or destabilizes their presence. The intense eroticism of the “Don Giovanni” and “Gastien Journal” chapters, for example, shatter whatever equilibrium the epistolary style of

the Prologue might have promised us, and we soon begin to feel like those “comical policemen pursuing...comical villains” that Freud and others watch in an early “moving picture” (*White Hotel* 10), in danger of stumbling or failing in our pursuit of that elusive culprit called meaning.

Building on my focus on the analysis of voice and narrative limitations in Roth’s text, this chapter will look at the narrative, psychoanalytic, and feminist implications of the gender dynamic between Lisa (a female patient) and a fictionalized Freud in D.M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel*. Working in part as a fictionalized case study, *The White Hotel* is perhaps the most “orthodox” of my chosen texts in terms of its situation of therapeutic practice and the psychoanalytic process. However, my argument focuses on how the presence, positionality, and gender of the protagonist acts as a transferential frame for both a Freudian and feminist critique of Freud. The workings of the psychotherapeutic relationship in the novel suggest an intersection between the structures of feminine subjectivity and positionality within a created transitional space always-already defined by Freud’s phallogentrism. The way Thomas prefigures gender within the space of Freud’s therapeutic relation to Lisa is as disconcerting as it is enlightening for how the novel engages with gender concepts inside a psychoanalytic frame. As such, I argue that these narrative acts of therapeutic construction systematically deconstruct the feminist subject, figure the possibility for a feminine subject, and construe an intersubjectivity that understands sexual difference as a means for self-division. Through the character of Lisa, both Thomas and feminist critique implicate Freud in a culture of sexual indifference that make his psychoanalytic process a symptom of masculine metaphysics and its dream of self-identity and self-mastery. In foregrounding Lisa’s positionality, I argue that the psychoanalytic power structures she encounters affect her perspective concerning these politics of location that define and redefine her relation to Freud, herself, and her imbricated positioning throughout.

In Thomas's novel, the distinctions between truth and fiction, reality and illusion, and even lived and dreamed experience tend to breakdown; because we prefer that our lives have a semblance of order and meaning, we attempt to interpret and bestow coherence upon events we witness or imagine. In doing so, however, we confront the same risks as the novel's central characters, who also attempt to understand what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. In this respect, *The White Hotel* is a fiction that testifies to the danger and instability of any interpretive act, disclosing those opaque and fragmented shards of experience that we can reconstruct into coherent and intelligible patterns or shapes only if we are willing to understand or falsify the experiences themselves. The destabilizing relationship between psychoanalysis and Thomas's novel that speaks to the novel's particular indeterminacy.

Freud's presence in the novel, as well as Thomas's use of various Freudian texts, are not hard to miss upon an initial reading. Freud is front and center in the novel, particularly his therapeutic relationship with Lisa that's carried across large portions of the narrative. As Robert Lougy points out, it seems only appropriate that Freud, who at the age of eighty wrote "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," a paper concerned with "nothing less than dismantling the authority of analysis itself, should share center stage in a work that explores textual instability and the necessarily indeterminate nature of any interpretive act" (92). When Freud speaks of the deciphering of texts, both of his own and of others, he often calls our attention to the provisional shape and open outline of texts and to the indeterminate nature of analysis and interpretation. In *Interpretation of Dreams*, for example, Freud often speaks of the textuality of dreams and, comparing them to transcripts to be deciphered or pictographic scripts to be interpreted (277-78). And, as he tells us, every dream contains an ultimate indeterminacy, that point beyond which interpretation cannot go: "There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream

which has to be left obscure...the dream's navel, the spot which it reaches down into the unknown" (135). Similarly, Edward Said has written of how "Freud believed that words in fact continued to imply their opposite, the known carrying with it a considerable freight of the unknown," and of how the reading of a text therefore involves us in a process whereby we move "away from the text to what the words drag along with them" (75). As such, as Said observes, texts "exist in a constantly moving tangle of imagination and error" (206), constantly frustrating our attempts to fix them within stable readings. And when we also remember, as Spivak points out, that "textuality is not only true of the 'object' of study but also true of the 'subject' that studies" (lvii), we are doubly reminded of the inherent difficulties of any interpretive act.

With its gradual penetration of the psyche's elaborate and destructive defenses, it's no wonder that, as David Cowart suggests, "psychoanalysis is an ideal structural device for a fiction" that elevates the tensions between ambiguity and interpretation/meaning (216). The Freudian therapist deals with a world of deceptive appearances that he/she must pierce before reaching psychological bedrock; Freud even compared the labor of therapeutic practice to being on an archaeological dig. Nevertheless, Freudian psychoanalysis does not countenance an ultimate or transcendental reality; Freud rejected all forms of supernaturalism. Though he saw that the unconscious lies beneath many layers of repression, he resolutely refused to believe that the psychic mechanisms he studied might have, as Cowart observes, "ontological or epistemological analogues" (216). Thus, in Freud's writings he often refers to a "reality principle" that the healthy mind must recognize and accept.

But while Thomas exploits the formal convenience of Freudian procedure, he also subverts the positivistic (not to mention male-centered) assumptions of Freudian theory. Undermining these assumptions, Thomas undermines the vaunted empiricism of science itself to

make space for a new aesthetic: woman's lived experience within a psychoanalytic mode that transcends the Freudian model just as it's trapped by it. Thomas adopts the onion-peeling technique of psychoanalysis because it demonstrates with great cogency the gulfs between appearance and reality. But, as one sees in the fluid symbolism of the white hotel itself and the therapeutic relation between Freud and Lisa, the author also reveals the fallibility of the system's rational and empirical biases. The white hotel, setting for the erotic fantasies produced by Lisa Erdman as part of her psychotherapy, is the embodiment of truth's ambiguity and the seat of her repressed ideations of femininity and womanhood. Lisa's analyst first describes the white hotel as a general symbol of the mother's body, then speaks more specifically of "the haven of security, the original white hotel – we have all stayed there – the mother's womb" (129). But like many Freudian hypotheses (as the real-life Freud understood), this one falls short of complete accuracy. The patient comes to see that the white hotel in fact represents her life in its entirety – a view the narrator endorses in the elegiac remarks about the escalating genocide in which Lisa Erdman dies: "a quarter of a million white hotels in Babi Yar" (221). By the end of the novel the reader recognizes that the white hotel as a corporeal existence, made even more real by how Lisa's lived experiences are brought to bear against Freud's therapeutic practice.

As a contemporary work of fiction, Thomas's novel foregrounds the question of meaning while simultaneously leading us to events where meaning is demanded. It is what the novel has to tell us about the vicissitudes of meaning so urgently desired, particularly in regard to woman and psychoanalysis, that I shall attempt to trace here. We open the novel to find a table of contents, a gesture that may carry with it unsettling psychoanalytic undercurrents for its "clinical" structuring when understood alongside the novel's psychoanalytic focus. After an Author's Note and an epigraph, we find a Prologue composed of a series of five letters,



apparently written by Sigmund Freud and his colleagues Hans Sachs and Sandor Ferenczi, between 1909 and 1931. Under the numeral “1” we encounter the title “Don Giovanni,” which opens on to a lush, erotic, and, at times, violently morbid poetic text of a dozen pages. The series of phantasmatic adventures that the poem recounts is set in or near an unnamed European resort hotel, allowing us to infer that we are reading a copy of the poem alluded to by Freud and Sachs in the preceding letters dated 1920, and which is called by Sachs “your young patient’s white hotel” (*The White Hotel* 14). The poem is followed by a break, the numeral “2,” and “The Gastien Journal” – almost seventy pages of prose commentary that assumes a dream-like passivity in its gloss of the prior poetic text. Throughout this commentary, the poem’s “I” has been replaced by an objectifying “she,” but the poem’s leaps and contrasts are noted with equanimity. Next, beneath the numeral “3” we encounter another title: “Frau Anna G.” This section turns out to be a pseudo case history written by Freud about his therapeutic work in 1919 with the woman who wrote both the hotel poem and its gloss. The case history, complete with footnotes by Freud and by an unnamed editor, continues for some sixty pages. After the case history, however, we find the section “The Health Resort” under numeral “4.” In this section, we find a traditional narrative from a limited-third-person point of view that tells us that “In the spring of 1929, Frau Elisabeth Erdman was travelling by train between Vienna and Milan” (133). As we read on, we conclude that Lisa Erdman, Anna G., the “she” of the prose gloss, and the “I” of the poem are the same individual. Thomas then modulates his narrative persona in the following, fifth section called “The Sleeping Carriage,” where the account of the massacre at Babi Yar will be told with a distanced omniscience, through which Lisa becomes reduced to “an old woman” (196). In section six, “The Camp,” the narrative intimacy is restored at the moment of, and perhaps in some mythical time beyond, Lisa’s death.

The Prologue of the novel invites us to read the text “as psychoanalytic detectives, drawing on events and images from the past in our epistemological search” (Newman 194). Consisting of credible imitations of letters by the pioneers of psychoanalysis, the Prologue establishes a high degree of verisimilitude at the outset and keys the reader in to the next two segments of the novel: he/she is to regard them as psychological documents rather than autonomous aesthetic documents. This is an ironic position within the novel’s world as, earlier in the Prologue, Freud’s letter to Ferenczi describes Lisa’s hysterically-informed writings (the reproduced basis of her neurotic phantasies) as a “birth”: “One of my patients, a young woman suffering from severe hysteria, has just ‘given birth’ to some writings which seem to lend support to my theory: an extreme libidinous phantasy combined with an extreme morbidity” (*White Hotel* 12-13). To label her writings in such a biological and intimate way and then, in the next letter to Hanns Sachs, describe them as “afterbirth” (14) connotes an approach to Freud’s style and fictionalized self that highlights for Thomas “his rather dry reticent way of approaching very lurid erotic events” (“Freud and *The White Hotel*” 1959).

Though the mention of “birth” in Freud’s letter is not explicitly lurid, it does suggest a mythologizing of Freud that depicts him as clinical to the degree that he, ironically, robs agency from those he treats – in this case Lisa. In fact, Thomas is quick to note how Freud stands for “a kind of nineteenth century tradition” but, also sets him up as a prophet of sorts: “the analysis created by Freud was a kind of opposition dogma to the religion which he had rejected – a new faith” (1958). The exploration by Thomas’s Freud of those dark recesses of the human psyche is starkly depicted and we are seduced by the confident logic of his voice and by his ability to establish connections and make sense out of the experiences described. Like the historical Freud, however, Thomas’s Freud is too honest to be wholly satisfied with his own analysis, and at times

he seems to intuit truths that remain only vaguely realized. At one point, for example, he begins to understand the relationship between Lisa's story and his own theory of the death instinct: "at certain moments," he writes, "Frau Anna's expression reminded me of the faces of the victims of battle traumas" (*White Hotel* 83), and he finds in her a woman "in whom an hysteria exaggerated and highlighted a universal struggle between the life instinct and the death instinct," evidence of "the 'demon' of repetition" that stems from "the profoundly conservative" nature of our human instincts (84). And yet, even in the face of such musings and his knowledge of Anna's gift of foresight, he still identifies the origin of her neurosis in specific previous sexual experiences she has repressed. Thomas's Freud, unable to free himself from his pre-existing convictions, remains limited by the questions he asks and presumptions he makes. His assumptions about the sexual origins of neurosis, for example, lead him to interpret Lisa's pains as symptomatic of an hysteria rooted in her childhood experiences, even though he had earlier suggested that "it may be that we have studied the sexual impulses too exclusively, and that we are in the position of a mariner whose gaze is so concentrated on the lighthouse that he runs on to the rocks in the engulfing darkness" (13). Freud sees much during his courageous journey, but because his gaze is so intense, he sees only fragmentary pieces of the picture in front of him. Though positioned as a frame narrative of sorts in the novel's structure, the Prologue also exists outside the text through Freud and his inner circle's clinical need to distance themselves from the "afterbirth" of Lisa's writing – operating behind the thick pall of academic and psychoanalytic practice.

In part a psychological novel about a woman's experience in an analysis with Freud, in part a commentary on the practice of psychoanalytic technique, and in part a historical novel that leads irrevocably toward the mass killing at Babi Yar, the novel is a multiplicity that calls us to articulate the personal, the political, the psychological, and the historical, demanding that any

literary analysis be performed always with a synthesizing moment in mind. Thomas may have provided readers with a key to such an articulation when he mentions that hysteria is “the terrain of the novel” (6). It was Freud and Breuer who gave us our initial understanding of hysteria as a dynamic psychological dysfunction of memory. The collaborative introduction to *Studies in Hysteria* contains the well-known maxim that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.” His work with hysterics led Freud to propose that peculiar kind of forgetting called repression, and to posit the symptom as a representation of an otherwise unconscious memory. The terrain of hysteria is none other than the shifting ground of memory itself – that function that psychoanalysis has so thoroughly problematized by positing the work of unconscious agencies within it. Clinically, hysteria signals the general complexity of remembering in which the onset of hysterical symptoms were explained as the result of repressed memories and the conversion of ideas into physical symptoms.

The third chapter of the novel, “Frau Anna G.,” provides Freud’s case history of Lisa, his analysis of the poem (chapter 1) and the journal (chapter 2) and his attempt to locate the source of Lisa’s breast and ovary pains. Chapter three is a masterful imitation of Freud’s case histories and in its organization, rhetoric, and tone. Freud was an accomplished storyteller and his case histories read like novels. As Hana Wirth-Nesher observes, Thomas has given us the Freudian strategy – “from the patient’s story as she presented it to Freud through the process of guiding, manipulating, and teasing out of the patient the hidden, repressed aspects of that story that are, Freud would argue, responsible for the neuroses” (20). Freud’s case histories are detective stories, his method based on the belief of the power of the past, the tyranny of the repressed primal event that determines future behavior. Always aware, as Thomas’s Freud points out, that “the unconscious is a precise and even pedantic symbolist” (91), Freud relentlessly digs deeper,

to use his own archaeological metaphor, for what the patient is intent on keeping from the analyst and from herself as well. Usually, the climactic moment is the report of a dream that Freud successfully decodes so that the primal event can be reconstructed, or, as may often be the case, the memory of the event, itself a reconstruction, can be recalled. That is, the primal event is as likely to be a narrative construct which the patient creates, indeed, even a fiction which has been repressed. Thus, the patient constructs tales about her life that make her “guilty” enough to “forget” them. Freud attempts to reconstruct that narrative which may itself be a reconstruction. Taking notes after the patient’s visit and writing his case histories after the completion of therapy, all the narratives that are evidence for Freud’s job of reconstruction are themselves constructs. In explaining the method of writing up case histories, Freud claims that “I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic facts end and my constructions begin” (*Dora* 27), yet he admits to having abridged, edited, and synthesized, despite his disavowal of any artistic inventiveness. “If I were a writer of novellas instead of a man of science” (*White Hotel* 111), writes Thomas’s Freud, just as Freud himself sets the record straight in the preface to *Dora* by denying that he wrote a roman a clef. While Freud repeatedly makes scientific claims for his method, he is a man so sensitive to artistic method that he criticizes other analysts for the poor way in which they write up stories of their patients; he even goes so far as to criticize *patients* for being poor storytellers. Freud implies that a coherent story is in some manner connected with mental health. In discussing ailments, Freud characterizes them by the various types of narrative insufficiency that he commonly finds. The aim of treatment, for Freud, is to repair damage to the patient’s memory so that he or she can come “into possession of one’s own story” (qtd. in Marcus 62).

Thomas misses none of Freud's characteristics, such as his sense of all results being somewhat incomplete, most evident in *Dora's* case history. When Freud cannot explain why Anna's (Lisa's) *left* breast and ovary are always a site of pain, he concludes, "perhaps left-sidedness arose from a memory that was never brought to the surface. No analysis is ever complete; the hysterics have more roots than a tree" (*White Hotel* 127). Thomas also gives us the Freud impatient of his subject's evasiveness, forcing what he believes to be the truth out of her by threats, as well as Freud the proud professional, offended by resistance to his theories: "I told her she was wasting my time; that I could no longer tolerate her lies; that unless she would be completely frank with me there was no point whatever in continuing the analysis. Eventually, by such threats as these, I managed to drag from her the truth about her marriage" (112). Thomas's narrative here echoes the tone of *Dora's* case study to an unsettling degree. In the case of *Dora*, Freud blames her for leaving analysis, not so much because she needed therapy but because it prevented him from achieving a thorough investigation of hysteria. But most noticeable is Freud's ingenious singlemindedness, his unwillingness to consider evidence extraneous to the nuclear family drama (a short-sightedness that Thomas's Freud repeats in his efforts to help Lisa). In the case of *Dora*, he blames a young woman for being inhibited sexually because she won't admit enjoying the advances of a man as old as her father and the husband of her father's lover. That the girl may just not have been attracted to a man Freud considered handsome and virile is out of the question, as is the possibility that the girl may have considered such a liaison improper under the circumstances. Freud's case histories are dazzling for their singlemindedness; Thomas stresses this quality in the fictional analysis of Lisa's case in *The White Hotel*.

Through its use of psychoanalysis as a narrative frame, Thomas's novel overtly poses questions about subjectivity that involve the issues of sexuality, sexual identity, and the

representation of women. *The White Hotel* is also a novel which both enacts and thematizes the issue of woman as spectacle, as the result of the inscriptions of her subjectivity by herself and by others. Lisa is not merely the reflection of any authorial subjectivity upon which she might be based. Rather, as Linda Hutcheon posits, she is “presented as the ‘read’ subject of her own and others’ interpretations and inscriptions of her” (80). She is literally the female product of readings. It is this this female subject who is addressed as both product and viewer, as spectacle and spectator.

For Freud’s female patient, Lisa, this plays out in the gendered arena of therapy where Freud lionizes his theories at the cost of Lisa’s “silencing.” Lisa’s psychoanalytic therapy with Freud consists of a push-pull relationship in which Lisa is always, in some way, coming up against the strictures of a patriarchal model for psychoanalytic technique – embodied in the figure of Freud. Throughout her analysis, Freud is quick to insert his own values of truth and ethics onto the psychotherapeutic situation, to the degree that Lisa is understood as an uncooperative passive object within Freud’s schema:

A much more decisive factor in the slowness of our progress was her strong resistance. Though not as prudish as many of my patients, the young woman was reticent to the point of silence when any question of her sexual feelings and behavior rose in the course of the discussion. [...] She was unreliable, evasive: and I became angry at the waste of my time. To be just to her, I should add that I soon learnt to distinguish her truth from her insincerity. [...] I was forced to lure the truth out of her, often by throwing out a provocative suggestion. As often as not, she would take the bait, offering a retraction or modification. (*White Hotel* 92)

Within this passage Freud is presented as the acting agent that is not only in sole control of Lisa’s narrative, but also reads his female patient’s reluctance as open insubordination in need of combating and correction. In fact, therapy in Thomas’s Freud’s mind is only considered progressive when Anna agrees with his own presumptions and theories about her own experiences: “The poor girl struggled with her feelings, and then admitted that I was right” (93).

In a moment of therapeutic exchange with Lisa, Freud seemingly robs her of her of her own agency as both woman and patient through his psychoanalytic rhetoric and posturing: “Because your story of putting on weight, and so having to stop dancing, didn’t ring true. I should guess *you* would find it difficult to gain weight, at any time, much though it would improve you. It was an obvious way of telling me what happened, indirectly – for you really wanted me to know” (93). In situating Lisa in this passive way, Freud not only recapitulates the active (masculine) and passive (feminine) positioning of his psychoanalytic model of sexuality, but he also positions Lisa as “other” within the therapeutic situation.

Thomas’s Freud’s treatment of Lisa in the “Frau Anna G.” chapter of the novel has theoretical roots in the real Freud’s understanding of women and female sexuality. Lisa’s psychoanalytic “othering” in the text is a critique by Thomas on the patriarchally-informed undercurrents that lie beneath the surface of Freud’s mythos (“Freud and *The White Hotel*” 1959). Sarah Kofman, in her work *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud’s Writings*, argues a similar position concerning woman as other in Freud’s oeuvre: “It is by virtue of her sexuality that woman is enigmatic, for sexuality is what constitutes that ‘great riddle’ of life which accounts for the difference between men and women” (36). The question of woman cannot help arousing debate. For if “throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity” (“Femininity” 342), this question is quite a singular one even though it carries with it the psychoanalytic weight of disavowed lived experience. However, Freud does not *wholly* reduce women to their sexuality; at the end of his “Femininity” lecture he reminds his listeners that women as individuals may equally well be considered human beings (362). How considerate! Woman as “female sexuality” is a purely theoretical construct, a mere object of study: “Do not forget that I have been describing women in so far as their nature is determined



by their sexual function” (362). Even though he considers that function quite important, Freud nevertheless believes that what he has to say on the subject of femininity is “incomplete and fragmentary” (362). It would be enough to leave it at that; however, Freud’s rhetoric following this statement about femininity implies a privileging of male-dominated science over a woman’s lived experience (362). With this in mind, what interests Freud in woman is what constitutes her difference, and that this difference lies in her sexuality – which thus acquires a privileged status as the object of study.

In his treatment of Lisa, Thomas’s Freud enacts similar rhetorical moves when reflecting on his therapeutic engagement with Lisa. The rhetorical privileging, in this instance, takes the shape of militaristic language that permeates Freud’s reflection to an intense degree:

Frau Anna was simply in the *front line*, as it were; and her journal was the *latest dispatch*, But the *civilian populace*, if I may so term the healthy, were also only too familiar with the constant struggle between the life instinct (or libido) and the death instinct. Children, and *armies*, build *towers* of bricks only to knock them down. Perfectly normal lovers know that the hour of *victory* is also the hour of *defeat*; and therefore mingle funeral wreaths with garlands of *conquest*, naming the land they have won *la petite mort*. (*The White Hotel* 117; emphasis added)

In the battleground of Lisa’s therapy, Freud’s use of such rhetoric only reinforces the gendered dynamics of the therapeutic session at the cost of woman’s suffering and silence. Instead of an equitable therapeutic exchange, Thomas’s Freud views therapy (and Lisa’s body) as something to be won, as a palimpsest in which the “correct” Freudian interpretation takes precedent over the lived and rooted reality of Lisa’s hysteria. In confronting the “profound silence” of women, which Freud compares to a “locked door” or “a wall which shuts out every prospect,” Freud tries to bring it to an end, if not through “gentleness” toward women, at least by means of a treatment that cannot proceed without a simulacrum of gentleness, in transference, “the strongest lever” (*Studies in Hysteria* 282), for lifting the bolt, knocking down the wall, stifling resistance,

bringing into the open the *secret* that is buried in the depths. That said, there is not “gentleness” towards Lisa being shown in Freud’s schema, only a stubborn need to be correct at all costs using whatever means necessary (*White Hotel* 92). Because woman, as Kofman notes, lacks the right to speak, she may merely have “secrets,” “love secrets,” which make her ill: “hysteria is nothing else” (*Enigma of Woman* 42). As a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, hysterical women become responsible for the mysticism of their sexuality: “Because woman does not have the *right* to speak, she stops being *capable* or *desirous of speaking*; she keeps everything to herself, and creates an excess of mystery an obscurity as if to avenge herself, as if striving for mastery” (43). Woman, for both Freud and Thomas’s Freud, lacks sincerity in the therapeutic exchange: “My explanation had the effect of bringing back her fierce pains, but also of recalling to her mind a host of forgotten memories of that evening, and thence to untying the knot of hysteria. Needless to say, it did not happen without much distress on her part and much probing of her defenses on mine” (*White Hotel* 119). Woman dissimulates, transforms each word into an enigma, an indecipherable riddle. That is why the patient’s narrative is full of gaps, foreshortened, defective, disconnected, incomplete, lacking in “links”; it is disordered, comparable “to an unnavigable river whose stream is at one moment chocked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost along shallows and sandbanks” (*Dora* 16). It is as if the pathogenic materials formed a spatially extended mass that had to cross a narrow cleft, like a camel passing through the eye of a needle, so that it arrived fragmented and stretched into consciousness (*Studies in Hysteria* 291).

The narrative mode that begins in “The Health Resort” offers a retort to – though more akin to a veiled critique of – Freud’s own case study of Lisa, but this time it is Lisa’s voice that is foregrounded. Lisa Erdman, a character of marginal interest in her own story, is a second-rate

operatic soprano nearing the end of her prime, such as it was, who has a history of hysterical symptoms, some of which have persisted despite the efforts of her analyst. Our attention is propelled, however, by the fact that the narrator's Lisa and Freud's "Anna" are one in the same. Lisa comes recommended to us as "scientifically" significant by the clinical Freud of the case history as well as by the epistolary gossip among prominent analysts about her. And the documentation preceding Freud's history had already shown us the potential for a powerful imagination, rich in its intertwining of the morbid and the erotic, beneath the somewhat dour surface of this child of *fin-de-siecle* Vienna. Lisa Erdman is most ordinary and most special when the telling of her story begins midway through the novel: we have already encountered the "white hotel" of her poetic and prose imaginings and saw how they were distilled through Freud's vision of treatment. Lisa's artistic renderings she submits to Freud take the form of a "birthing" of woman's experience (*The White Hotel* 12) and, consequently, are reduced to a clinically cold and hysterically informed spectacle. In "Frau Anna G." Lisa's artistic writings are transmuted into an appraisal of afterbirth in Freud's hands, and we are left to watch him meticulously sift through the offal of Anna's writings and life while she watches, and participates, from the couch.

As we read on, drawing on the inference that Lisa Erdman and Anna G. are the same woman and letting that inference suggest its implications to us, we substantiate – through the very act of reading – the ethical claim of the novel: "that the intricacy, pain, and longing to be found in the human psyche validate human life" and, particularly, woman's experience (MacInnes 257). It is not simply that we "know" Lisa's "secrets." The novel's fragmentary structuring of Lisa's story dramatizes a sentence from Heraclitus cited by Freud in a letter to Lisa, saying that "[t]he soul of a man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored"

(174). The very fact that it's Freud who offers this citation shows the extent to which the novel presents psychoanalysis itself only as a tentative exploration of human truth and, ironically, the weight of woman's sexuality and psychic worth in matters of living. Freud shows how the unveiling of a woman's soul fails to bare it completely, his efforts to disclose resulting in revelations of the unknown, or of his own limitations. As Linda Hutcheon has noted: "This is a novel about how we produce meaning in fiction and in history. Its multiple and often contradictory forms and points of view...call attention to the impossibility of totalizing narrative structures..." (83). This impossibility, though, is given moral value by the novel. If neither Freud nor the novel can wholly master the intricacy of subjectivity, the narrator of "The Sleeping Carriage" can nonetheless gesture toward it in an epigram molded around an exclamation on the victims of Babi Yar: "The thirty thousand became a quarter of a million. A quarter of a million white hotels in Babi Yar. (Each of them had a Vogel, a Madame Cottin, a priest, a prostitute, a honeymoon couple, a soldier, a poet, a baker, a chef, and a gypsy band.) The bottom layers became compressed into a solid mass" (*The White Hotel* 221). Here the value of life is not a reflection of the biological intricacy that guarantees it, but of the psychological complexity that both informs and is informed by woman's subjectivity.

Writing a clinical case study, Freud must naturally use pseudonyms for persons who figure in the case, a device that happens also to be aesthetically apt in a novel concerned with the indeterminacy of narrative, positionality, and, in this case, assigning people their right names. For example, of hysteria Thomas's Freud remarks that "those whom Medusa petrifies have glimpsed her face before, at a time when they *could not name her*" (*The White Hotel* 100; emphasis added). In the same vein, he speaks of his patient's being subject to "an absolute edict, imposed by some autocrat whom I *could not name*, against having children" (128; emphasis

added). Freud's calling his patient "Anna" is, as one would anticipate, pregnant with significance. While the most obvious connection is with Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, there are also several other possibilities for this moniker.<sup>1</sup> "Frau Anna G." offers Thomas a chance to fill in crucial aspects of his heroine's history. There is, for example, her highly complicated tie to the warm, spirited mother who dies when she was just five. And, for Richard Cross, Freud puts the relationship with the mother at the center of both Anna's narratives and her neurosis (31). The white hotel, Freud claims, is the mother's body, the breast at which the baby sucks in "blissful narcissism" (*The White Hotel* 105), if not the womb itself (97): "It is a place without sin, without our load of remorse" (105). In taking this track, Freud follows Sachs, who declares the protagonist's fantasy "Eden before the fall" (14). The death of Lisa's mother was, Freud believes, the arch-disaster from which derive her visions of hotel fires, storms at sea, and other catastrophes. Simply put, it represents Anna's "cruelly sudden expulsion from her paradise" (93). Freud's interpretation of the white hotel in terms of the delights and difficulties of childhood sexuality is inevitable, given his hermeneutic assumptions. The novel makes it seem not so much mistaken as too restrictive and, in Lisa's case, prone to linguistic erasure no matter how well-meaning.

The heroine, who has many names before *The White Hotel* ends, but none at all until we are a third of the way through it, figures only incidentally in the Prologue. She is first mentioned in a 1920 letter that Thomas's Freud writes to his Hungarian disciple Sandor Ferenczi informing

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<sup>1</sup> Several other Anna figures are relevant: Specifically, on the psychoanalytic side, there are "Anna O.," the hysteric whose treatment by Breuer in the early 1880s became the new therapy's founding case, as well as Anna the sister of the Wolf Man, Freud's report on whom the protagonist of *The White Hotel* reads while she is his patient.

him that he has returned to work on *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, his essay on the compulsion to repeat and its relation to a hypothetical death instinct: “One of my patients, a young woman suffering from a severe hysteria has just ‘given birth’ to some writings which seem to lend support to my theory: an extreme libidinous phantasy combined with an extreme morbidity. It is as if Venus looked into her mirror and saw the face of Medusa” (*The White Hotel* 12-13). In “Frau Anna G.,” Freud modifies the paradox, substituting Ceres – the personification of a life – giving love, however much related to the dark – for the mirror-gazing Venus. Ultimately, the novel challenges the other term of this classification as well; death comes to be viewed not just as the Medusa-like transformation of the organic to the inert, but also as a reversion to another kind of life – of which Lisa is always just on the brink of actualizing. And, as Richard Cross observes, “The question of whether death is merely a terminus or a threshold as well – and, if so, to what – figures in every stage of the narrative” (23). Freud represents the former outlook. In the same letter, Freud declares with reference to the death of his favorite daughter, Sophie: “Since I am profoundly irreligious there is no one I can accuse, and I know there is nowhere to which my complaint could be addressed”; there is only “blind necessity,” a veiled call to Ananke and Freud’s own parochial psychoanalytic vision, to which Freud the stoic’s response must be “mute submission” (12).

We see the consequences of Freud’s plans for Lisa in “Frau Anna G.” with the ever-protean nature of her positionality in the text. That Freud the character may, as he says himself, be “in the position of a mariner whose gaze is so concentrated on the lighthouse that he runs on to the rocks in the engulfing darkness” (13) hints at an ever-present presentiment that engulfs Lisa in its lengthening umbrage. D.M. Thomas presumes an audience familiar with the written conventions of psychoanalysis, history, and literature – an intensive labor for the reader that

seems, ironically, lost to the fictional Freud. Thomas assumed in narrative guises the seductions of these various discourses so he may work out the trajectory and positionality of Lisa within the narrative's shifting currents. In the mutability of the text itself, we also encounter a concentric mutability of Lisa's name, placement, and identity; and, as Bartkowski and Stearns aptly figure, we may be "required to rethink narrative *and* gender codes as performative, that is, as troubling in the deepest sense our wishes to be firmly anchored in time and place when encountering persons in fiction and fact" (284).

Throughout *The White Hotel* names are given, changed, denied, and withheld. Even minor characters suffer from a profusion of identities, a symptom of the hysteria that brings Lisa to the fictional Freud. The main character, presented as a series of fragmented selves, is variously known to the reader as the young woman, the old woman, Frau Anna G., Frau Elizabeth Erdman, Lisa Morozova, and finally Lisa Konopnicka. On a first reading the array of names appears as disarray; the confusion, however, makes the reader confront the complexity of naming – the always provisional constitution of the self in language. Lisa's fragmented self, named by the language of the hysteric and the patriarchally-inherited language of psychoanalysis, coalesces into a unified sense of self shown only in the glancing refractions of these fragmented shards.

These various locations and senses of self suggest a similar positioning of self that Adrienne Rich elucidates in "Notes Toward a Politics of Location":

I will speak these words in Europe, but I am having to search for them in the United States of North America. When I was ten or eleven, early in World War II, a girlfriend and I used to write each other letters which we addressed like this:

Adrienne Rich  
14 Edgevale Road  
Baltimore Maryland  
The United States of America

The Continent of North America  
The Western Hemisphere  
The Earth  
The Solar System  
The Universe

You could see your own house as a tiny fleck on an ever-widening landscape, or as the center of it all from which the circles expanded into the infinite unknown. It is a question of feeling at the center that gnaws at me now. At the center of what? As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divest myself of that country merely by condemning its government or by saying three times ‘As a woman my country is the whole world’. [...] I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create. (30)

Within this ever-expanding series of locations, there arise tensions between the personal and collective. Just as the possibility of “no address” challenges Rich’s sense of identity, here lines of multiple addresses presents the problem of identity and of uncertain relationships between these identities (“Notes Toward a Politics of Location” 32). The child may see herself insignificant in the face of these forces and respond with awe, or feel rooted at the center (the locus from which everything expands). What, in the child, can be a necessary defense against vulnerability can become, in the adult “the arrogance of believing ourselves at the center” (37). Thus, in criticizing the homogenization of space implicit in this act of centering, Rich is arguing that all spaces become transparent and consistent because of their subordination to the self.

The issue for Rich is the same issue for Lisa: one of positioning the self and body within situations that dilate at every turn. Rosi Braidotti summarizes this aspect: “This idea [the politics of location], developed into a theory of recognition of the multiple differences that exist among women, stresses the importance of rejecting global statements about all women and of attempting instead to be as aware as possible of the place from which one is speaking” (163). To understand “the place from which one is speaking” involves us in an ongoing, never-to-be-finished analysis. What is integral concerning these “stop-gaps” in introspection is understanding the self in these brief, self-replicating moments – a process mirrored in the ongoing work of



psychotherapy. We are located in multiple ways; these locations interconnect with intricate patternings; and, though certain locations may be the fore at specific moments, a whole range of determining factors will always be operating. What constitutes a location change is constantly reformed while earlier locations can be remembered and reconstructed in different ways. As such, Rich's understanding of location brings together geography, history, several identities, memory and process.

Elizabeth Grosz describes the body as “neither – while also being both – the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychological or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined” (23). The body is intensely “I”, “me”, and “mine” while also being “we”, in and of the world. It “is” and yet, hovers indeterminately “between”. How to work across the “I” and “we” is the problem of every location and the body as an elaborate sign system, always open to reinterpretation, is a particularly fraught interface. Bodies may be defined in terms of common identities but also tend to slip away from the grasp of those identities. Rich writes not about bodies but specifically “this body”, “my body”, using a personal pronoun which, as she says, “plunges me into lived experience” (“Notes Toward” 32). That phrase, particularly the emphatic word “plunges,” suggests intensity and depth. Yet what follows in this section is, initially, composed, almost coolly distant in tone (32). There is no heavy charge of emotion. Despite the promise of “plunges me into lived experience”, most of the bodily descriptions are not in fact depth but surface, immediately visible to an attentive observer. She speaks of her body as if outside of it. Grosz further remarks that “If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency” (*Volatile Bodies* xi). The body that Rich observes in that dissociation from the self is also the body that feels and,

hence, what she ultimately sees is not an object but a palpable, experienced body produced in history and culture.

Lisa's body, that location which is both public and private, is the borderline between – one that constantly transfers her from “I” to “we”, while the sensations and the ethical responsibilities of those situations repeatedly return her to “I”. While Lisa is multiple women at once with multiple senses of self, she is also construed as “object” within Freud's constraining psychoanalytic tradition that views her not in terms of multiplicity, but in terms of “Frau Anna G.” It is here that names (and identities) are surgically truncated, erased, and mythologized into a totalizing psychoanalytic narrative where one woman's hysteric suffering is universalized on a scientific scale. Lisa is defined by her hysteria that's localized in the name “Anna” – itself a masculine product of the patriarchal inheritance of psychoanalysis. Rich, just as Thomas's Lisa, must move both outwards and inwards, outwards to social structures, power groups, and political relationships and inwards to her own psyche, desires, and conscience.

But Freud's case history, with its clear delight in reconstructing Lisa's narrative and its confident tone about her recovery, is severely flawed in light of the rest of the novel. In “The Health Resort,” the next section narrated in a third-person omniscient manner and in the style of a realistic novel, we discover that Lisa Erdman, the “real” Anna G., withheld important information from her therapy sessions. “You saw what I allowed you to see...It was not your fault that I seemed to be incapable of telling the truth,” she writes to Freud (*The White Hotel* 163). She never told him about an earlier scene than that of the guest house – that at the age of three she wandered on to her father's yacht to observe her mother, aunt, and uncle engaged in *coitus a tergo*. In her account of her first lover, the revolutionary student who left her because marriage, bourgeois domesticity, would have taken him away from his mission, she fabricated

his brutality to her. But her grossest lie and violation of trust between patient and analyst was in her account of being harassed by sailors on a merchant ship who claimed to have read newspaper accounts of her mother's death by fire and to have known about her loose reputation. They knew *nothing* about her mother, she writes Freud. They sexually assaulted her because she was Jewish. "Eventually they let me go," she writes to Freud, "but from that time I haven't found it easy to admit to my Jewish blood" (168). Because she knew that Freud was Jewish, "it seemed shameful to be ashamed" of her own Jewishness and she hid the true nature of the incident from him (168). Her hatred for her father, she believed, stemmed from his being her Jewish parent, the source of her hateful identity and, perhaps in Lisa's mind, the direct cause of her sexual assault. In keeping with her reticence about her Jewishness, she failed to tell Freud that the reason she left her husband was her realization that he was a jealous anti-Semite and, having deceived him about her Jewishness, she felt his hatred and revulsion for her true identity.

In short, what she kept from Freud was the trauma of her Jewish identity – a trauma that retroactively defined and drove the psychoanalytic situation behind the curtain. Given Freud's method of excluding any life experience outside of the family drama, such information probably would not have altered Freud's diagnosis based on his reconstruction of what he considered to be crucial elements of every person's life history. As Hana Wirth-Nesher posits, "collective identity was negligible to Freud in his theories" and, in this case, case histories (22). Indeed, in his single-minded determination to keep social identity out of his paradigm, Freud was unable to fully explain Lisa's hysteria. More to the point, later chapters show that two of her repeated hallucinations during sexual relations with her anti-Semitic husband – falling from a great height and mourners buried by a landslide – both inexplicable to Freud, are premonitions of her death at Babi Yar as a Jew. And her pain in her ovary and breast, far from being the result of nuclear

family drama, are premonitions of her suffering as part of a collective identity as a Jew: the victim of history, social hatred, and the brutality of fellowmen. That which Freud so systematically denied in his life and in his scientific methods is the very thing that is mysteriously associated with Lisa the Jewish victim, not Lisa the hysterical female.

The issue of Jewish identity also figures heavily in Rich's essay and, as such, is integral in helping us situate Lisa's own sense of self relative to both her trauma and the convergence of selves. Towards the end of the essay, Rich moves to suppositions about different times and places, specifically the Second World War and incidents in Europe, and confronts the possibility of "no address", no location and "no body at all" ("Notes Toward" 32-33). At that momentous point a lacuna opens up and this threatening space prompts Rich to reassert immediately a distinct and explicitly placed identity: "But I am a North American Jew, born and raised three hundred thousand miles from the war in Europe" (33). Lois McNay comments on the body in a way similar to Grosz: "It is neither pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always material residue that resists incorporation into dominant symbolic schema" (98). This is Rich's predicament. Though in this section of the essay she, at first, assumes a position approximating scientific rationality, viewing and, apparently, commenting at a distance on the body in question, this position cannot be maintained, partly because she is both the knowing subject and the object under examination, both feeling and looking. It is also partly because the issue she raises of anti-Semitism is located in contexts from which Rich cannot remain distant – the details of her birth and the mass extermination of Jews during the Second World War – just as her body continues to give expression to an unaccommodated "material residue".

This same positionality rings true for Lisa as her suppressed guilt and shame at being Jewish was compounded by her own sense of having “failed” therapy: “It was not your fault that I seemed to be incapable of telling the truth, or facing it” (*The White Hotel* 163). Not only that, but Lisa’s body and identity are, like Rich’s, both subject to the issue of bodily presence and/or absence. Where this similarity differs, however, is in Lisa’s entrapment in her own narrative and the overarching narrative of the novel itself. For Rich, her sentence, “But I am not a North American Jew, born and raised three thousand miles from war,” distinguishes her from Lisa and the Jews of the Final Solution. While the chapters in Thomas’s novel are presented as ahistorical in nature, they are crucially linked by the historicity of Lisa’s lived experiences as a Jew and Holocaust victim, the product of her hysterical sufferings, that looks both backward and forward in time. Lisa is Jew, woman, patient, mother, singer, daughter, etc., and multiple identities, possibly complementary, possibly competing, possibly clashing are in play. For Lisa, no matter how many identities are claimed or how carefully they are configured, difficulties escalate rather than lessen. One never knows who one is; one can never know, already, one’s identities or hold them in some perfect political and psychic synthesis. Far from being a *tabula rasa*, Lisa’s body is already subject before the birth to a range of culture meanings. In her case, her body was marked for death with the onset of her hysterical pains, explained by the end of novel to be from an SS officer’s jackboot kick and bayonet wound towards the end of her life as an older woman at Babi Yar.

In *The White Hotel*, Lisa’s pain serves as the variable that generates a hermeneutical contest; the narrative documents opposing interpretations of Lisa’s symptoms that vie for authority in the text. Although it initially appears to endorse Freud’s psychoanalytic model of understanding that pain, the novel goes on to expose the degree to which Freud’s critical forms

misrepresent Lisa's experience by recasting it in purely symbolic terms. By probing the operation of metaphor and tracing the way in which symbolic forms may be used to contain and transform violence, Lisa's poem and narrative expose the limitations of Freud's hermeneutics. As the representations of violence in the Babi Yar section of the novel show, the symbolic structures employed by Freud not only obscure but also exploit the violence that is subsumed within their abstract systems of understanding. It is not surprising, then, that Thomas invokes the figure of Freud and the language of psychoanalysis as a means of exploring the manipulative and patriarchally-informed power of Freud's psychoanalytic schema.

Thomas's figure of Freud, as well as his Freudian schema in the novel, work in similarly exploitative way for the feminine subject as Irigaray outlined in her essay "Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the Masculine." For Irigaray, the psychoanalytic schema is mediated exclusively by a masculine paradigm of the subject as self, leaving what subjectivity might mean to a feminine subject partially or wholly out of the picture. Psychoanalysis, she claims, is an extension of the transcendental masculine subject. Not content with surveying reality from the heights, man wants to penetrate its depths. Past mastery had been tied to "clarity," says Irigaray; how now will man master these "dark continents" (136-7). Among other things, she claims, man will turn the unconscious into a "property of his language" (137). Irigaray is not saying merely that a male psychoanalyst treating a female patient will induce her to give meaning to her experience according to the linguistic and theoretical categories which make *his* experience meaningful. Her interest goes much further than this problem in doctor/patient ethics. She is concerned with the manipulation of the unconscious through language that, as she notes in her critique of the epistemological subject, is tied to a

psychological law giving dominance to the position of the male speaker over that of his female counterpart. She characterizes the psychoanalyst as being caught up in the following ritual:

Session after session, in a procedure that is now regulated by visual – rememorative – laws, he [the analyst] repeats the same gesture reestablishing the bar, the barred. While all the while permissive, listening with benevolent neutrality, collecting, on a carefully circumscribed little stage, the inter-dict. The lines between the lines of discourse. But he restricts himself to reframing, re-marking, or “analyzing” its contours...so that order, good “conscious” order, may prevail. Elsewhere. (138)

In this sense, the analyst, caught in his own discursive role, is blocked from the possibility of understanding, or appropriately interpreting the heterogenous experiences of woman. For Irigaray, then, to say that the field of the unconscious contains something that is undefinable is to position the unconscious on the same side as the woman whose otherness lies beyond representation before the phallic law. In other words, if the transcendental subject has been linked to a male speaking subject and he makes the unconscious property of his language, the unconscious (as other to the appropriating act) will come to stand for woman.

Thomas’s Freud is caught up in this same self-recriminating model through his insistence to identify the origin of Lisa’s neurosis in specific experiences she has repressed; if her experiences do not fit into the ready-made mold of the psychosexual family drama, then Freud will coerce and equivocate her experiences until they do fit. The symbolic forms through which Freud approaches Lisa’s situation blind him to the reality of her pain; within his psychoanalytic system of understanding, the immediacy of Lisa’s suffering is denied as her pain is relegated to a purely symbolic status:

In a sense, too, her mind was attempting to tell us what was wrong; for the repressed idea creates its own apt symbol. The psyche of a hysteric is like a child who has a secret, which no one must know, but everyone must guess. And so he must make it easier by scattering clues. Clearly the child in Frau Anna’s mind was telling us to look at her breast and her ovary: and precisely the left breast and ovary, for the unconscious is a precise and even pedantic symbolist. (*The White Hotel* 91)

Given the limitations of his interpretive model, Freud's misguided assessment of Lisa's pain is inevitable. After ruling out any physiological source for Lisa's suffering, Freud transforms his patient's body into a text and proceeds to interpret the pain that is written on that body in symbolic terms. He concludes that Lisa's suffering is the result of several psychological factors, including repressed homosexuality and a "profound identification with her mother, preceding the Oedipus complex" (*The White Hotel* 135). It is later, in Lisa's letter to Freud, that the reader receives the first inkling of the inadequacy of his psychoanalytic reading. In that letter, Lisa corrects Freud's reduction of her experience to sexual terms, claiming that her trauma "had very little to do with sexual problems" (170). She traces Freud's conclusions about her vexed relationship with her mother to their origin in his own obsession with maternal influence. The issue of her mother's sexual transgression, she claims, is manufactured and sustained by Freud's psychoanalytic concerns: "In a way you *made* me become fascinated by my mother's sin... I don't believe for one moment *that* had anything to do with my crippling pain" (170). Instead, Lisa anticipates the true origin of her pain by relating her own symptoms to the omnipresent suffering that she senses all around her: "I have always found it difficult to enjoy myself properly, knowing there were people suffering 'just on the other side of that hill'" (170). In the Babi Yar section of the novel, that "hill" assumes a literal presence, while the violent source of Lisa's pain overwhelms any symbolic interpretation of her symptoms.

As Lisa's response to Freud suggests, Freud's interpretive framework is responsible for dictating not only his reaction to her situation, but the substance of her commentary on that situation as well. Freud's choice of questions channels the conversation between patient and analyst, confining their discourse to the narrow categories of his own understanding. In her letter to Freud, Lisa protests such manipulative inquiry: "Frankly I didn't always wish to talk about the



past; I was more interested in what was happening to me then, and what might happen in the future” (170). Lisa’s letter criticizes Freud’s model of analysis and initiates a skepticism in the reader that is born out when it is revealed that Lisa’s pain is real rather than symbolic, that it is the literal mark of a future event rather than a symbolic, mnemonic trace of an incident in the past. Instead of recognizing the lived experiences of Lisa as woman, Freud subordinated her to the imperatives of his own narrative as Anna G the hysterical patient. Clearly, Freud’s psychoanalytic perspective precludes his recognition of the very categories of experience on which Lisa’s situation is based. In his attempt to “give voice to the unconscious,” Freud’s limited forms of understanding lead him to read Lisa’s suffering as a symbolic manifestation of the established family drama of a past event as opposed to its literal demarcation as future violence. What we have, instead, is how the true import of Lisa’s suffering refuses to be contained in the dichotomous presumptions that underlie Freud’s assessment of her symptoms.

Only toward the end of the novel do we discover that Lisa’s pains have their origin in this terrifying future of the Final Solution being played out at Babi Yar and not located, as Freud believed, in the past at all. Rather, this was Lisa’s body re-experienced itself inside the self-contained lacuna of her own historical trajectory, but one that’s stretched across the novel’s sections like an ocean of time. Those fragments missing from Freud’s analysis, the part of the puzzle he could not account for, existed in Babi Yar in a nightmare that had not yet taken place. Within *The White Hotel*, however, there is wholeness as well as fragmentation, continuity as well as discontinuity. In fact, during one visionary moment, Lisa comes to an epiphany about the unbroken continuum of human existence and individual identity, offering us a peak into the significance of her lacuna pocket of time that defines her experiences in the novel:

As [Lisa] looked back through the clear space to her childhood, there was no blank wall, only an endless extent, like an avenue, in which she was still herself, Lisa. She was still

there, even at the beginning of all things. And when she looked in the opposite direction, toward the unknown future, death, the endless extent beyond death, she was there still. It [her moment of vision] all came from the scent of a pine tree. (*The White Hotel* 190)

Thomas ends by insisting on the signifier – “the scent of the pine tree” – whose signified is no more, or no less, than some ineffable sense of unbroken continuity. For a problematic character who had only a moment before felt that “herself was unreal,” this sense of grounding credibility leads to a feeling of “unbearable joy” (190). The triggering memory through one of the primitive senses of taste or smell recalls Proust’s *madeleine*, but played here in a minor key. In fact, if the passage opens by recalling Proust, it ends, perhaps, by evoking Freud’s comment of the dream navel: “There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure...the dream’s navel, the spot which it reaches down into the unknown” (*Interpretation of Dreams* 135). Like that unfathomable “spot” in a dream, where signification is not only overdetermined but indeterminate simultaneously, the scent of a pine tree is a point of contact with the “unknown.” Along with the affect of joy, it produces the effect of perspective: for Lisa, this is an encounter with Eliot’s “rose garden.” The piney smell establishes a point of contact that reassures the subject in the same gesture that it erases her as subject. In this moment, Lisa becomes Rich’s child, staring into the infiniteness of the universe, eyes dilating in rhythm to the indifferent twinkling of the stars.

## CHAPTER V: FEAR OF FLYING

“It beats me how Freud could say ‘What do women want?’ as if we all must want the same thing.” – Katharine Whitehorn

The early seventies were a period of enormous productivity for women writers, especially American ones. That the early seventies was also the time when the women’s liberation movement was at its height and when feminist literary criticism came into existence is no coincidence, for both fiction and criticism were responding to the same social and intellectual climate: women were experiencing a new sense of possibilities, a breaking away from the constraints of the past, and this shaped both the literature they were writing and the criticism they were developing (Greene 82). Protagonists of feminist fiction – particularly of Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* – speculate about images of women and cultural stereotypes at the same time that critics contemplate these issues (e.g. both Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and Josephine Donovan’s *Feminist Literary Criticism* were published between 1968 and 1975).

At the time of its 1973 release, *Fear of Flying*, with its unabashed presentations of the female body, and indeed all bodies, was widely considered controversial and risqué. Many critics, whether they loved the novel or detested it, found a use for it. As Charlotte Templin observes in her book *Feminism and the Politics of Literary Representation*, “For those who liked it, it was a useful way of understanding and ordering reality and, for some feminists, the impetus for an exuberant flight of self-affirmation”; whereas “For those who disliked it, it was useful for clarifying some aspects of modern culture and as a vehicle for exploring, or expressing, their own views” (26). It seems there really is no such thing as bad press! One reviewer wrote that *Fear of Flying* was a “dull and dirty book” (*Best Sellers* 425). Another noted that it was “difficult

to review in a gentlemanly manner”; then, apparently finding the strength to do so, he concluded that “everyone and everything Miss Wing describes with enthusiasm is disagreeable, and whatever she sneers at is generally pleasant” (*Times Literary Supplement* 813). Among the “disagreeable” depictions are, the reviewer suggests, the nude male and female body: what they look like, feel like, smell like.

That said, the “conservative” criticism the novel received was not restricted to prudish male reviewers: feminist critics also cited issues with the novel concerning its gravitas and permanence within the literary canon and feminism at large. Jane Larkin Crain, writing in *Commentary*, is empathetic about “feminist novels”: “Taken one by one, no feminist novel really rewards critical scrutiny” (59). She is consequently fascinated but also dismayed by the fact that “these novels have not only sold extremely well but have been widely, respectfully, and even enthusiastically reviewed” (59). She finds Jong’s novel (along with several other novels by women discussed in the same review) “too steeped in ideology to pay the elementary respect to human complexity that good fiction demands” (59). Crain sees and deplores an attack in the novel on marriage as an institution. She is annoyed by an absorption in the woman’s point of view and asserts that Jong “falsifies reality irrevocably” (61) by depicting women as victims of forces they cannot control. The central characters are one-dimensional, and the author has no capacity for irony. Crain insists that it strains credibility to suppose that an intelligent woman such as Isadora Wing (the protagonist of Jong’s novel) would put up with so much abuse. Why would such a person endure “grotesque domestic unpleasantness” and then, searching for help “pay good money to a buffoonish quack disguised as a psychiatrist?” And furthermore, she doubts whether “if this were what psychiatrists did there would still be any practicing today” (61).

With heroines who suffer “for no apparent reason” (Crain 61), the reviewer concludes that “there is something repugnant in all this celebration of cowards, cripples, and losers. It is an offense to the memory of Natasha Rostov, of Jane Eyre and Emma Woodhouse, of Isabel Archer; it reeks of the hatred of women” (62). Crain, like some other women reviewers, is adamant in her contention that Jong falsifies reality. She explicitly rejects “the world [the feminist novelists’] bitter fantasies have created” (62). Her evaluation of the novel is presumably related to her conviction that a woman can find fulfillment in society as it is presently constituted. This reviewer supports the status quo: society’s gender roles, the institution of marriage, and other institutionalized practices, such as psychiatry. Cutting through the disdain, the criticism raises questions about why Erica Jong was so invested in depictions of material bodies and, by extension, representations of female sexuality.

To understand the nettled responses of reviewers, we must first consider the novel in the context of the feminism of the early seventies. The ideas of those who began to do feminist analysis in the late sixties soon spread to the larger society. Victoria Geng describes the involvement of many women in the movement:

Buoyed by the optimism and energy generated in the Sixties, radical feminism carried along many of us – for we had begun to think of feminists as “us” – who never joined either a radical organization or NOW. Radical feminism – and this still surprises people who misunderstand “radical” – did not ask us to start by getting out on the barricades. It asked us to think, to talk to other women, and to tell the truth, even if we weren’t prepared to act on it. (52)

Consciousness raising (CR) groups invited women to rethink their relation to the men in their lives and to social structures. The female tendency to self-blame was directly addressed in CR, where women were encouraged to think that what they formerly considered personal problems were, in fact, social problems (Templin 58). Although there was a difference of opinion among feminists about sex, with some suggesting that sex was something that women need to be

liberated from, the majority sought new sexual freedoms. Women were no longer allowing themselves to be positioned by a dominant discourse but were positioning themselves in active roles. Radical feminism was an important force within the women's movement in its early years (it came in conflict with cultural feminism about 1973 and was superseded by cultural feminism after 1975). Insisting on the primacy of gender as the basis for their oppression, radical feminists insisted that women were a sex-class, whose position of inferiority in the public sphere was bound up with their position of subordination in the family (Echols 3). Unlike the later cultural feminists, who emphasized women's differences from men, radical feminists emphasized similarities between men and women and pursued the political goal of equality. Thus one radical feminist, Kathie Sarachild, described the early women's groups as anti-capitalist, anti-racist and also anti-male-supremacist (*Feminism and the Politics of Literary Representation* 39). For these women elimination of gender oppression was an extension of the goals of the left. Sarachild held the view that it was "primarily in terms of the family system that we are oppressed as women" (Echols 78). An iconoclastic radical feminist book that shocked the public in the early 1970s was Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, which delineated a woman's role as chattel compared to her male counterpart.

Contrasting with, as Jay Hood puts it, the "programmatic fantasies of consumer culture" are the countercultural productions of CR novels (150). The CR novel depicted a woman's process of consciousness-raising, more or less explicitly engaging the women's liberation movement's concern in the 1970s with CR as a wholly new way of understanding and of making political change. The process of consciousness-raising, according to the CR outline published in the collection *Radical Feminism* in 1973, was "one in which personal experiences, when shared, are recognized as a result not of an individual's idiosyncratic history and behavior, but of the

system of sex-role stereotyping. That is, they are political, not personal questions” (280-281). Personal narratives were shared and analyzed by the women in the group in order to shift the terrain of their interpretation from the personal to the political. The “master plot” of the CR novel traces a similar trajectory, as the protagonist moves from feeling somehow at odds with others’ expectations of her, into confrontations with others and with institutions, and into a new and newly politicized understanding of herself and her society.

For the most part, as Lisa Hogeland notes, “the CR novel moderated the radical feminist issues of sexuality they addressed,” in part, as I will argue about *Fear of Flying*, simply by providing contradictory arguments about sexuality that emphasize and elevated women’s experiences while simultaneously trapping them in a patriarchal mode of expression (606). With that said, the moderating of radical feminist analyses in CR novels “was a function of the logical contradiction between radical oppositional politics and the arena of popular fiction” (606). In “Are Women Novels Feminist Novels?,” Rosalind Coward argued that popular fiction – the so-called women’s novel – was problematic for feminists precisely because its radical potential could be undercut by its focus on sexuality. Such novels risked becoming just another way of commodifying women’s sexuality; the novels’ critiques of the oppressive social conditions under which women experienced sexuality could be lost in similarities to patriarchal discourses about sex. Coward argued that feminist working with the “confessional” structure of the popular novel because of the “preoccupation with sexuality” typical of that confessional structure, might “never escape defining women entirely by their sexuality” (59). At the same time, Coward suggests that “this preoccupation undoubtedly at a certain level represents a response to a problem: what is female sexual pleasure?” (61). Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs, by contrast, argue than an emphasis

on “sexual liberation contributed to the populist outreach that eventually brought the movement itself into the mainstream of American culture and politics” (72).

Feminism, especially the feminism of the early seventies, was more than just another example of the social disintegration that critics identified with the social movements of the sixties. The women’s liberation movements of the early seventies were concerned with social equality, to be sure, but also focused on sexual relationships between men and women (*Feminism and the Politics of Literary Representation* 39). Some feminists later became uneasy with the connection between feminism and the sexual revolution, but in the early seventies, women’s liberation and sexual liberation were closely linked. The fact that the burgeoning revolution had invaded the bedroom and had implications for the most intimate relationships between men and women was in the minds of male and female reviewers. For example, Charlotte Templin suggests this very thing when she notes that “Many of Jong’s early reviews [of *Fear of Flying*] project a deep uneasiness with changes that have characterized modern life, and in their indictment of modern culture they associate feminism (or what they perceive as feminism) with what they view as degenerative changes” (*Conversations with Erica Jong* xii). For several reviewers, aggressive female sexuality and aggressive female authors are associated with a zeitgeist that deconstructs fundamental truths: the natural “roles” of men and women and the “natural” institutions of a mythic past. They align Eric Jong with narcissism, moral decline, and the disintegration of the self. Jong, however, goes on to comment in a 1981 interview with Dianna Cooper-Clark on the nature of her own verities concerning women writing on women during that time: “In the early seventies, it was very important for women writers to make sense of their own presence, to understand their own oppression and anger. As the feminist movement



matured, it became important to see our own struggles in an historical context [...] and to discover our own histories” (*Conversations with Erica Jong* 109).

In *Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex*, Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs state the thesis that the so-called sexual revolution of the sixties was a *women’s* sexual revolution: “If either sex has gone through a change in sexual attitudes and behavior that deserves to be called revolutionary, it is women, and not men at all” (2). Men had always sought numerous sexual encounters in and outside of marriage; that women should feel free to do the same was something new. Women also wanted to change the quality of the sexual relationship: “At the same time, the social meaning of sex changed too: from a condensed drama of female passivity and surrender to an interaction between potentially equal persons” (5). Furthermore, women had been “barred from the discourse on sex. They had nothing to say and no reason to be told anything, and whatever they felt was the product of male effort” (48). In the early seventies women began to participate in the discourse on sex. Women’s participation in the talk about sex undermined physicians’ authority on sexual matters, and the new authorities began to explore new sexual options, including oral sex (80-81). The new discourse on sex also centered the novel, enter *Fear of Flying*. The early feminists rewrote female sexual identity, and Jong’s work, celebrating female sexual energy and in search of female autonomy, became a convenient focal point for backlash. In 1975, Jong commented on the reasons her novel struck a responsive chord: “Women are confronting their own sexuality, dealing with things inside themselves they’ve been afraid of dealing with before: their own aggression, their negative feelings toward families, possibly toward men” (*Conversations with Eric Jong* 66). As Charlotte Templin is apt to note: “Social history and the history of ideas suggest that there is hardly a more emotion-laden subject than female sexuality” (*Feminism and the Politics of Literary Reputation* 40). The importance to

her reputation of Jong's role as spokeswoman on behalf of the women's crusade for freedom to speak her own body, assume her own subjecthood cannot be overestimated.

The question of women's roles had two faces – public and private – and we cannot forget that a very intimate and personal upheaval underlay the public conflict. Public and private selves are indivisible, and the men and women critics were very personally implicated in the issues raised by the novel, especially the issue of female sexuality. The social conflict engendered by and surrounding the novel had a bearing on sexual identity, and for male critics, probably on their relationship to women in their own lives. Men, who might have been in control of the discourse on sex, might well have been threatened by a new discourse that stripped away illusions perpetuated by men about themselves. The response of women critics also involved beliefs about sexuality and the relation of sexuality to larger questions of identity. At the time of the novel's publication women were rethinking their sexuality, or at least going public with their concerns and feelings, thus creating for both sexes a situation fraught with anxiety.

Jong's novel was evaluated within this larger social conflict, and its reception became part of that conflict, which was particularly intense because it appeared that women's public roles might undergo dramatic change and bring about a concomitant change in institutions based on women's subordination, preeminently marriage and the family. The reception of Jong's novel illustrates how the feminist movement of the 1970s – like the earlier movement for women's suffrage – became a cultural lightning rod, the focus of a multitude of fears about changes in the status quo in a time of great social upheaval. As Templin is quick to point out, "It is an extraordinary thing that for well over a hundred years fears about social change in a rapidly developing industrial society have been focused on women, and the women's movement has been blamed for the myriad social changes that characterized this period in history" (30-31).

Perhaps paradoxically, Jong's novel became the beneficiary of the notoriety of the women's movement of the 1970s. The attacks on Jong's novel, which was seen as a symbol by the two camps, respectively of negative and positive social changes, gave it extraordinary visibility.

In extending my feminist analysis of Thomas's *The White Hotel*, chapter four will look particularly at the ways Erica Jong positions her female protagonist's body and sexuality relative to the pseudo-therapeutic situations that define her relations with men psychoanalysts. In adopting Simone de Beauvoir's maxim that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman," I intend to explore the ways in which Jong uses female sexuality, through writing women's body and bodily experiences, to create a transitional space that rewrites socially constructed notions of femininity. Although the novel doesn't depict a more "traditional" therapeutic situation between patient and analyst like *The White Hotel* or *Portnoy's Complaint*, it does engage in similar dynamics by having the protagonist engage in sexual trysts with the psychoanalysts in her life. Though deeply personal in scale, these sexual relations with psychoanalysts are plagued by overtones of therapeutic introspection and barbed psychoanalytic attacks as a violent consequence of conflating sexual and transference desire. As such, Isadora Wing's sexual awakening in the text is dependent on how psychoanalysis conceptualizes female sexuality from a masculine point of view to reproduce the norms of patriarchy in a phallogocentric discourse. It's also important to consider how the novel, published in 1973, figured in the development of second-wave feminism. The amalgamation of the women's movement and sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s gave momentum to discussions associated with female sexuality. The ways in which women began talking about their carnal desires and female sexuality from a female point of view was acknowledged and, particularly, encapsulated within Jong's now (in)famous novel. While Isadora's quest for emancipation and autonomy is meant to discover and nurture

her authentic self through lived experience for self-realization, I contend that the masculine-influenced transference frame of her sexual relationships opens a space for female identity through language while, simultaneously, reifying Isadora as a myth of woman. As such, I argue that the transference dynamics of Isadora's sexual relationships grant her a sense of agency and feminine subjectivity through language, while also reconceptualizing her sexuality within a masculine psychoanalytic process that subordinates her experiences to a feminine ideal.

*Fear of Flying* tells the story of poet/writer Isadora Wing who goes to Vienna to attend a psychoanalytic conference with her psychiatrist husband. While there she meets a British Laingian analyst, Adrian Goodlove, who seems to be the embodiment of her sexual fantasies. She, inevitably, decides to put her marriage on pause to accompany Adrian on a sexually charged jaunt across Europe. In actuality, he is often impotent, and he has a prearranged date to meet his wife and children in France. The novel also recounts Isadora's mental journey back in time as she revisits scenes from her past: her first sexual experiences, her lovers, and her marriages. Left alone in Paris, she takes stock of her life and goes back to her husband, who is now in London. The novel ends with Isadora in a bathtub in her husband's hotel room, awaiting a reconciliation but determined not to grovel.

While on the surface this novel may seem like yet another derivative CR novel about "one woman's journey to self-discovery," Jong's use of female sexuality within a psychoanalytic frame speaks to a journey of self-discovery that's as motivated by Isadora's sexual longings for freedom as it is by the patriarchal limits of the analysts she encounters (e.g. Adrian and her husband). Similar to Phillip Roth, Erica Jong was no stranger to psychoanalysis; in fact, the novel was informed by her own experiences with it: "I was in analysis for 8 years. [...] Analysis really did help me enormously. It freed me to write about things that matter deeply to me. If you

can learn to be authentic and honest about your feelings on the couch, you can bring that authenticity into your writing” (*Conversations With Erica Jong* 56). The concept of psychoanalysis was also of thematic interest to Jong, who saw it as the one of the quintessential gateways to attaining and managing desires for herself as an artist and, as I argue, for Isadora as well on her sexual odyssey for meaning: “The other thing (unfashionable as it’s become) was psychoanalysis. Artists tend to be afraid of it. But what analysis teaches you is how to surrender yourself to your fantasies. How to dive down into those fantasies. If you can do it on the couch – and not all people can do it on the couch either – then, you may learn to trust the unconscious” (5).

While female sexuality operates as a key in the text for understanding Jong’s use of psychoanalysis, they also become an amalgamation, like that of Dick and Nicole’s marriage in *Tender is the Night*. However, unlike Nicole who is trapped by the rigid class structure and conventions of her marriage that directly inform her doctor/patient relationship with Dick, for Isadora unmasked sexual desire is both the key to her “freedom” from a cold marriage and the defining, reflected, and transference feature of her relationship with the analysts in her life. In Jong’s world, psychoanalysis is weaponized like sex and, for all its frankness, the text replaces the analysts couch with bawdy – though nonetheless honest and destabilizing – descriptions of sexual desire and experience. Isadora’s sexual liaison with Adrian becomes the couch where she is “laid.”

Isadora’s expressions of, and thoughts about, sexual desire suggest a heterotopia of sorts within the context of her gradual “awakening” to her true self. Through Isadora’s trysts and reflections on sexuality, Jong creates a transitional space in the narrative that allows for eroticism to be marked and focused on the site of Isadora’s body. According to Jay Hood, *Fear of Flying*,

“in the CR tradition, attempts to promote a specific female conceptualization of the body, cultural prescriptions and all” (150). Isadora’s anxieties about her body and how others perceive it exemplify a feminist project that directly confronts patriarchal attempts at circumscribing women’s experience within a private sphere, one in which female bodies are regulated by masculine desires and anxieties. For example, when Isadora is on the plane to Vienna she remarks, “And here I was back in my own past, or in a bad dream or a bad movie: *Analyst* and *Son of Analyst*. A planeload of shrinks and my adolescence all around me. Stranded in midair over the Atlantic with 117 analysts many of whom heard my long, sad story and none of whom remembered it” (*FOF* 3). Not only is Isadora trapped in a plane with her previous analysts, which would be bad enough, but she is also feels defined by the perceived lacuna of forgotten analytic exchange regarding her own personal history. It’s important to stress that, in this moment, masculine desires and anxieties are perceived by Isadora to be true in the present because they have been internalized from repeated past experiences of her trying and, in the analysts’ minds, failing to “ackzept being a vohman” (*FOF* 2). To that end, Jong’s project is ultimately exhibitionist in its unregulated, uncensored, and distinctly unflattering representations of the physical form and its mobilization of the body to achieve individual pleasure.

If such a project can be understood in any one sense, it is perhaps best understood as establishing a counternarrative to what Susan Bordo describes as the “deterministic fantasy” of the female body. Such a fantasy, Bordo writes, is a fantasy of constant physical change, albeit within a limited and static framework of representation. As Bordo argues, “Fantasies of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, and ideology of limitless improvements and change,” an order based upon top-down arrangements and hierarchical power, marks the deterministic fantasy of patriarchal society (245). These improvements, as Hood is quick to note, “directly

coincide with the marginalization of nonnormative experience and of the slow destruction of variation among culturally acceptable physical bodies models” (150). Jong’s novel recuperates a way of conceiving of bodies as loci of desire, rather than loci of individual power. Indeed, Isadora’s body in the novel, coupled with her sexual desire that seems to mark it both inside and out, frequently serve to deconstruct notions of physical power, personal agency, and the patriarchal influence of psychoanalysis. The latter of these is, perhaps, more palpable; it’s ingrained both in her marriage to Bennet and her sexual (or lack thereof) relationship to the frequently impotent Adrian: “I’m talking about the time when your marriage has become a *menage a quatre*. You, him, your analyst, his analyst. Four in a bed. This picture is definitely rated X” (*FOF* 6). In fact, not only is sex and the body virtually inextricable from therapeutic experience, but it’s also weaponized in Isadora’s relationships throughout the novel: “(First technique of being a shrink’s wife is knowing how to hurl all their jargon back at them, at carefully chosen moments)” (*FOF* 7). For Isadora, the body is too open to the world, too easily influenced by the desires depicted in the media and consumer culture around her, yet also too limited in the options such depictions provide for managing fantasies or desires. The fantasies and desires in Bordo’s world of “improvements” reduce the significance and ubiquity of bodies in the world, not only through limiting representations of individual bodies, but also through representing individual bodies in terms of how they differentiate from preexisting models or ideals (Bordo 278).

Employing a peculiarly heedless yet self-conscious form of exhibitionism, *Fear of Flying* combines formulaic sexual fantasies with obscure literary references, clichés with witticisms, and psychoanalytic thought with sexual desire, yoking together the conventions of romance fiction, the ideals of CR novels, and the seriousness of *literature*. As Timothy Aubry argues, the

“competing demands of romance fiction and serious literature also structure the subjective experience of Jong’s protagonist and narrator Isadora Wing, whose ambivalence epitomizes, according to Jong, the condition of many middle-class American women” (420-421). Wing, a published poet, is particularly troubled by the media mechanisms that construct femininity in the United States and thus delineate the aspirations available to women:

Growing up female in America. What a liability! You grew up with your ears full of cosmetic ads, love songs, advice columns, whoreoscopes, Hollywood gossip, and moal dilemmas on the level of TV soap operas. What litanies the advertisers of the good life chanted at you! What curious catechisms! “Be kind to your behind.” “Blush like you mean it.” “Love your hair.” “Want a better body? We’ll rearrange the one you got.” [...] What all the ads and all the whoreoscopes seems to imply was that if only you were narcissistic *enough*, if only you took proper care of your smells, your hair, your boobs, your eyelashes, [...] – you would meet a beautiful, powerful, potent, and rich man who would satisfy every longing, fill every hole, make your heart skip a beat (or stand still), make you misty, and fly you to the moon (preferably on gossamer wings), where you would live totally satisfied forever.

And the crazy part of it was that even if it was that even you were *clever*, even if you spent your adolescence reading John Donne and Shaw, even if you studied history or zoology or physics and hoped to spend your life pursuing some difficult and challenging career – you *still* had a mind full of all the soupy longings that every high-school girl was awash in. (*FOF* 8)

Isadora delivers an impassioned and impressive barrage of clichés here. Most of them are deliberate, but she benefits or suffers, from the fact that it is impossible to distinguish her parodic appropriations of pop culture from her accidental infelicities. In either case, Isadora refuses to accept responsibility for them. Because women are, from birth onward, the targets and products of a relentless mass media campaign, their ambitions, habits, and perhaps even artistic creations, she maintains, will necessarily be saturated with the trite rhetoric of romantic desire. Similar to the representation of Joyce’s Gerty MacDowell, Isadora critiques the social constructivism of femininity and its inscription on the body. Unlike Gerty, however, Isadora is painfully aware of her own complicity in this patriarchally-enforced idealism of femininity. The great irony is that



just as she, throughout the narrative, takes great pains to distance herself from these forms of socialization, so too does she seek validation from this same system throughout her relationships.

Isadora's identity is an ongoing tug-of-war between these two mandates and, as such, shows itself most clearly through the fantasy of the "zipless fuck." The opening chapters of *Fear of Flying* place Isadora's well-known fantasy within an ironic context that deconstructs the fantasy itself while, paradoxically, rebelling against the social constructivism of femininity. Isadora describes this idealized sexual encounter as "a platonic ideal. Zipless because when you came together zippers fell away like rose petals, underwear blew off in one breath like dandelion fluff. Tongues intertwined and turned liquid. Your whole soul flowed out through your tongue and into the mouth of your lover" (*FOF* 10). Isadora also insists that this ideal encounter must be brief; spending too much time with a person would inevitably lead to over-analysis and to his becoming little more than "an insect on a pin, a newspaper clipping laminated in plastic" (*FOF* 11). The sublime kernel of the fantasy rests its impermanence.

Jong foregrounds the fictionality of the zipless fuck by presenting it as a fantasy articulated in explicitly cinematic terms:

One scenario of the zipless fuck was perhaps inspired by an Italian movie I saw years ago. As time went by, I embellished it to suit my head. It used to play over and over again as I shuttled back and forth from Heidelberg to Frankfurt, from Frankfurt to Heidelberg: A grimy European train compartment (Second Class). The seats are leatherette and hard. (*FOF* 11)

Isadora links her fantasy to a memory of an Italian film in which a "tall languid-looking soldier, unshaven, but with a beautiful mop of hair, cleft chin, and somewhat devilish, lazy eyes," seemingly forces himself upon a widow in a "tight black dress which reveals her voluptuous figure" (11). Initially the soldier massages between the legs of the crying widow, engaging in full sex only when the train, all too symbolically, enters a long, dark tunnel. What is telling about this

scene is how it positions the woman relative to the man, making the fantasy of the zipless fuck different from the typical romance novel fare that Jong's novel subverts. The central participant in this erotic encounter is a widow still in mourning, a detail signaling either an irreverent desire to smash all the conventional proprieties, including a respect for the dead or, on the other side of the spectrum, the narrator's prudish reluctance to defy the marital bond by imagining an act of adultery. The man initiates the sexual contact with a presumption that could qualify his overture as sexual harassment, while the woman remains passive, but throughout the episode she appears to be quietly orchestrating the affair, with a distant gaze so powerful, Isadora compares it to God (11). The scene begins with the woman's perspective and ends with the man's, as if he has, in the course of the seduction, appropriated the narrative gaze, but his final act is to stare longingly in the direction of the now-vanished woman. He is weighed down with lingering desires; she's gone; the traditional gender roles have been reversed. As Tim Aubry so succinctly put it, "The price the woman must pay for this reversal is her participation in a scene whose ideological valences remain dangerously obscure" (424). Still, her sexual independence makes this scene the closest thing to a feminist fantasy in the entire text.

This scene could be read as an act of public rape, a sexual aggressor taking advantage of a woman in mourning. Yet, the scene's significance within the novel is best understood in the context in which it appears. Isadora is on an airplane flying to Vienna with her husband, literally surrounded by psychoanalysts, many of whom have psychoanalyzed her. While her fantasy of the zipless fuck is innately malleable – a train can easily be replaced by an airplane, and a nameless soldier can easily be replaced by a captain, male flight attendant, or any other fellow passenger – the reality of her surroundings highlights the problematics of the fantasy itself. What Isadora (and, in her musings, women) want is ambivalent to say the least: security in marriage,

but the occasional zipless fuck to keep things interesting; freedom to explore herself, but a safety net should she stray to close from “losing herself” in the process. The symbolic power of, and status qualified by, sex seems to be the answer for Isadora: “Underneath it all, you longed to be annihilated by love, to be swept you’re your feet, to be filled up by a giant prick spouting sperm, soapsuds, silks and satins, and of course, money” (*FOF* 9). The eroticism of the fantasy suggests the possibility of wordless passion, but the immediate presence of dozens of psychoanalysts drowns the fantasy in discourse. “Sex,” for Isadora, “is all in the head” after all (*FOF* 32).

Almost simultaneous to informing the reader of Isadora’s fantasy, the narrative also informs us of the cultural conditions that limit and define the zipless fuck. The culture of which she is a part has talked desire to death and produced as delinquent or pathological those who attempt to make such desires real:

I knew my itches were un-American — and that made things still worse. It is heresy in America to embrace any way of lie except as half of a couple. Solitude is un-American. It may be condoned in a man – especially if he is a “glamorous bachelor” who “dates starlets” during a brief interval between marriages. But a woman is always presumed to be alone as a result of abandonment, not choice. And she is treated that way: as a pariah. (*FOF* 9).

Significantly, what seems to define the fantasy for Isadora is its representation of female sexuality outside the context of an established or defined relationship; the fantasy itself is not shocking because of its anonymity alone, but because of the threat of agency it poses to women and the freedom of autonomous sexuality therein. In other words, what is unusual about the fantasy of the train is not the public exposure of sexuality (since, after all, marriage “exposes” sexuality within certain confines), but rather the woman’s desire for an autonomous sexuality that is not defined by her partner’s sexuality, sexual desire, or proximity. “For the true, ultimate zipless fuck A-1 fuck, it was necessary that you never get to know the man very well,” proclaims Isadora (*FOF* 10). Such a statement further emphasizes the relationship between the fantasy and

the culturally constraining conditions of Isadora's life. Isadora is trapped in a loveless marriage, a fact that gives the train scene more significance, particularly the detail of the woman being a recent widow, someone permanently free of her husband. While the fantasy itself is devoid of dialogue, it is not devoid of meaning and signification. What Isadora attempts to depict as an act of intense physical desire between two individuals may be better described as a fantasy of the possibilities of desire and sexual expression outside of the confines of marriage. In Isadora's case, marriage is depicted as anathema to the definition of the ziplined fuck while, simultaneously, being the root of its existence.

The marriage between Isadora and Bennett is rife with conflict because it is framed within a psychoanalytic context that mistakes, whether intentionally or not, the marriage bed for the analyst's couch. Not only that, but the "shelf-life" Isadora attaches to her analyst eerily mirrors her self-justification she gives for marrying Bennett:

You make the process like some sort of Catch-22. The patient goes and goes and goes and keeps paying in her money and whenever you realize that you can't help the patient, you simply up the number of years they have to keep going or you tell them to go to *another* analyst to figure out what went wrong with the *first* analyst. (FOF 17)

Earlier, Isadora tellingly describes the stagnancy that marriage inevitably propagates which, when we consider her earlier rant against the entrapment of therapy, point to similarities between the two sentiments: "What *was* it about marriage anyway? Even if you loved your husband, there came that inevitable year when fucking him turned as bland as Velveeta cheese [...] And you longed for an overripe Camembert, a rare goat cheese: luscious, creamy, cloven-hooved" (7). Though these parallels are only intimated in the text, Isadora is quick to affirm their accuracy when she describes her marriage to Bennett as the perfect union of lover and analyst: "And silent Bennett was my healer. A physician for my head and a psychoanalyst for my cunt. He fucked and fucked in earsplitting silence. He listened. He was a good analyst" (31).

Their (Bennett and Isadora's) mutual disdain, annoyance, and constant over-analysis is palpable: "Wide up Bennett, old boy...you'd probably marry someone even more phallic, castrating, and narcissistic than I am," Isadora taunts him (*FOF* 7). Such an expression of physical pleasure as she describes in her fantasy of the zipless fuck cannot exist in this marriage, largely because of the limitations Isadora and Bennett place on one another. For example, Bennett's response to Isadora's implied request for oral sex is met with the question, "Why don't you buy yourself a little dog and train him," suggesting Bennett's own sexual neuroses at the possibility of being rendered sexually subordinate (or, to follow the dog comparison to its natural conclusion, obedient) to his wife while simultaneously devaluing Isadora's sexual desires as a superficial cry for dumb affection (35). Not only that, but Isadora's imagined and real fights with Bennett are less about fixing the issue together, as a couple, and more about sparring with the language the psychoanalysis to see who will draw first blood: "And don't throw me any psychiatric interpretations, Bennett, because I'll throw them right back at you" (75). Given the nature of the relationship between Isadora and Bennett, it is no wonder that Isadora's fantasies suggest that to be a part of a couple is not to grow as a person, but to be limited, to be a component part of something else and fundamentally incomplete sexually, romantically, and physically.

This notion of the zipless fuck as a fantasy of liberation is, however, just as readily contradicted by the fantasy itself. While the primary conflict and topic of the text is Isadora's affair with another man, what ultimately develops from the fantasy is her immense effort to find happiness in her marriage with Bennett. The seeds of this are in the setting of the zipless fuck fantasy and in its nature as a transitional space. It is transitional in that the fictional train scene was constructed as a specific fantasy scene, as a story. While this affords Isadora room to

develop an awareness of her own needs and desires with Bennett (and, to a degree, Adrian), it is also innately carceral in the setting of this imagined film scene. It takes place in the restricted, public, and paradoxically private confines of the train car just as it is exercised by Isadora in public settings, spurred on by the private ideology that drives it. The depiction of the train entering the tunnel, while on one level symbolic, also obfuscates the difficulty inherent in producing sexual pleasure between two bodies when the bodies are confined by their immediate conditions and surroundings. The moment of pleasure that seems to be the defining aspect of the fantasy itself is deconstructed by the very nature of the fantasy. As Jay Hood so aptly observes, “The fantasy of the zipless fuck, it would seem, offers far fewer promises than Isadora initially perceives, merely trading the confines of one relationship for the confines of another” (153).

Considering the problem of her marriage, Isadora attempts to find the zipless fuck in her actual life, to mobilize her fantasy in a material approximation of the consequence-free relationship, devoid of her usual neuroses and anxieties. She attempts to make the psychoanalyst Adrian Goodlove into her ideal: “Sweet Jesus, I thought, here he was. The real z.f. The zipless fuck par excellence” (*FOF* 38). Because Adrian operates in a heterosocial sphere, his language, including the consistent use of words like “cunt,” implies a degree of superficial, racist sexual interest (“it’s actually more Chinese girls that I fancy – but Jewish girls from New York who like a good fight strike me as dead sexy”); his lack of shame towards bodily processes (“he farted loudly to punctuate” a comment about his parents, and Isadora energetically responding with “You’re a real primitive... a natural man”) suggest an unrefined, anti-intellectual crudity that’s, paradoxically, out of place with Adrian’s presentation as an urbane English analyst (*FOF* 39, 40).

Adrian has, superficially at least, the potential to satisfy some of the elements of the fantasy Isadora envisions. The reliance on crudity to attract her is telling, considering the problems Isadora later faces in navigating Adrian's sexuality. Indeed, Adrian's superficiality is what eventually deconstructs Isadora's fantasies; he is far from "natural" in terms of Isadora's desires. His heterosexual desire and hypermasculine presentation, we come to see, are simulated, and his crudity turns out to be, as Jay Hood observes, "the type commonly worn by men in an effort to hide femininity and sexual ambiguity" (154). The brilliant irony of this affair is that Adrian is almost completely impotent, at least with Isadora. While Isadora good naturedly comes to terms with this, it is a surprising turn of events given how she attempted to fulfill the zipless fuck by exercising sexual prowess (understood, for her, as a means of exploring sexual, emotional, and psychic liberation) in the first place. In fact, throughout her European romp with Adrian the closest we get to actualized sex between them are repetitive and *pricking* psychoanalytic arguments. In fact, in describing their relationship, Isadora insightfully notes that "I felt I had been transported to some looking-glass world where, like the Red Queen, I would run and only wind up going backward" (*FOF* 79). Her conversations with Adrian "always seemed like quotes from *Through the Looking-Glass*" (80). Isadora adopts the language, but never the intellectual stance, of psychoanalysis because she herself is an artist and not an analyst. I mention the obvious to point out that the artifice of her performance is what's telling about how she positions herself relative to the influence of psychoanalysis in her life, which she views as all-encompassing from the womb to the tomb: "Life was a long disease to be cured by psychoanalysis. You might not cure it, but eventually you'd die anyway. The base of the couch would rise around you and become a coffin, and six black-suited analysts would carry you off (and throw jargon on your open grave)" (*FOF* 131).

By punning on the title of an Anais Nin novella, the “spy in the house of analysis” (*FOF* 23), Isadora sets up a witticism that exposes the primacy of psychoanalytic thought in her life over that of love. However, she is quickly in over her head with Adrian as the pair jousts with the language of psychoanalysis:

“You can fuck me and call it poetry. Pretty clever. You deceive yourself beautifully that way.”

“You really are a great one for unloading two-bit analyses, aren’t you? A real television shrink.”

Adrian laughed. “Look, ducks, I know about you from *myself*. Psychoanalysts play the same game. They’re just like writers. Everything’s at one remove, a case history, a study.” (*FOF* 84)

This is just one example, among countless others in the text, concerning repeated and psychoanalysis-laden “discussions” between them that, as Isadora’s continues on her sojourn with Adrian, become almost an inside joke: “We talked. We talked. We talked. Psychoanalysis on wheels” (*FOF* 178). What’s telling here is that while Adrian claims to see through Isadora’s defenses, he also exposes himself in a transference exchange that highlights commonality between the two. Repetition in transference is (at least potentially) therapeutic because it brings the original unconscious experience to consciousness, thus enabling the patient to master it. For Isadora, this exchange (along with others) does not force introspection and commonality as Adrian’s posturing implies, but merely sets up a masculine-enforced hierarchy of knowledge in which the man understands the woman better than she understands herself. Narration-as-repetition, then, seems double-edged: it may lead to a working through of and an overcoming, but it may also imprison the narrative, and the characters therein, in a kind of textual neurosis, an issueless re-enactment of the events it narrates and conceals.

With this in mind, the most useful element of the failed zipless fuck is that Isadora is forced to encounter the signification of the fantasy itself. As a fantasy, the zipless fuck exists



within a potential conceptual vacuum – a fantasy heterotopia. To mobilize such fantasy in reality is to deny the reality of action and consequence, of overdetermination and signification. When Isadora is forced to deal with Adrian's impotence, she confronts the failure of her fantasy and the inherent issues of a fantasy defined by its refutation of more complex forms of relationship and by its rejection of the dialogic in sex. In fact, the closest Isadora gets to actualizing the ideal of the zipless fuck comes as a result of the pseudo-menage-a-trois, as Bennett invades Adrian and Isadora's shared hotel room. Bennett, Isadora recalls:

fucked me violently right there on the cot adjoining Adrian's. In the midst of this bizarre performance, Adrian awoke and watched, his eyes gleaming like a boxing fan's at a particularly sadistic fight. When Bennett had come and was lying on top of me out of breath, Adrian leaned over and began stroking his back. Bennett made no protestation. Entwined and sweating, the three of us finally fell asleep [...] The whole episode was wordless – as if the three of us were in a pantomime together and each had rehearsed his part for so many years that it was second nature. We were merely going through the motions of something we had done in fantasy many times [...] In the morning we disowned each other. Nothing had happened. It was a dream. (*FOF* 140-141)

This scene serves as an intriguing evolution of Isadora's fantasy, not to mention the way in which sex and psychoanalysis intermingle in the text. Indeed, the elements of the encounter suggest the zipless fuck: silence, violent sexuality, performativity, and the absence of any acknowledgement of the event. Even Isadora's body does not escape this experience unmarked as, within the throes of sexual exchange, her body acts as a homoerotic site of psychotherapeutic exchange between analysts through the vehicle of sexual expression. Coupled with this idea, the scene more strongly, and bawdily, suggests the theatricality of the psychoanalytic situation. Isadora and Bennett are literally and figuratively role-playing the marriage bed in front of another analyst who is, perversely enough, a passive participant. Also, where before she seems to lament the constant belaboring of desire and sexuality within the construct of psychoanalytic discourse, this scene demonstrates the failure of desire through

silence. As in Laura Mulvey's film theory, there is an extreme visual and observational element to this event, to-be-looked-at-ness in which the participant and observers are hyperconscious of one another. The tragedy of this scene is that it performs the function of the zipless fuck all too well. Any progress to be made on an interpersonal level with either Adrian or Bennett is subsumed in the segregation of this fantasy heterotopia from the rest of their respective worlds.

Tellingly, Isadora has now, at the very end of the chapter, mythologized herself in relation to both these men and within the fictional context of the zipless fuck fantasy. She is "Pandora and her evil box," the box implying her body, or, more specifically, her vagina (*FOF* 142). Rather than a female body as pure locus of sexual desire, waiting to consume and be consumed by pleasure as the script dictates, the female body at the end of this scene is recast as an expulsive source of chaos and change through its sexuality. The significance of this expands Isadora's personal agency. She has, at last, achieved some form of change in her life, but only through action. The fact that she is still dissatisfied with the nature of the change "is essential to the further production of fantasies, new fantasies embedded in the physicality of her writing instead of merely in the immateriality of her thought" (Hood 156). Isadora as Pandora seems to reflect Hélène Cixous's sentiment that "I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune" (876). Cixous's call for women to produce and create through the body is answered by Isadora later in the novel when the body is both exposed and full of productive energy.

This sexual relationship between Adrian, Bennett, and Isadora suggests a collision between the fantastic and the actual that may be more liberating for Isadora. It is the closest we

see her come in the text to achieving her fantasy as she perceives it. She gets her zipless fuck, a seemingly no-strings-attached, highly visceral, potentially uncomfortable, but still satisfying sexual encounter. It even exists within the confines of her marriage – Bennett does exactly what Isadora had wanted; here their desire is not subordinated to the ambiguities or outright assaults of language and interpersonal power, as so much of their relationship seems to be. The reality of the fantasy is one in which it exists not only in the doing, but in Isadora’s retelling. Her fantasy comes to encompass her vision of herself as a writer, as someone for whom the fantasy, while fun for what it is, is most important for what it does.

Finding no answer to what it means to be a woman in life, Isadora looks to literature, but here too she is frustrated. She laments, “I learned about women from men,” and what she learned was her own inferiority (*FOF* 168). Women writers were no help either: “Where was the female Chaucer? One lusty lady who had juice and joy, love and talent too...Almost all women we admire were spinsters and suicides” (109-110). She decides, “No lady writers’ subjects for me. I was going to have battles and bullfights and jungle safaris,” but she confesses she knows nothing about any of it (129). The principle disseminated by romance narratives, Isadora observes, is that a man represents the answer to all of a woman’s desires and needs. But Isadora, who never conceals her own serious literary ambitions, evinces disdain for this ideology even as she acquiesces to its demands, precisely in and through her literary practices. Describing the late adolescent desires she shared with her friend Pia, she writes:

We were both bookworms, and when life disappointed us we turned to literature – or at least to the movie version. We saw ourselves as heroines and couldn’t understand what had become of all the heroes. They were in books. They were in movies. They were conspicuously absent from our lives. (*FOF* 98)

Pia and Isadora collaborate on stories depicting absurd sexual encounters, which Isadora characterizes as “the soupiest romanticism since Edward Fitzgerald impersonated Omar

Khayyam” (97). Through the creation and embellishment of self-narratives, Isadora creates an artistic space for sexual freedom that challenges the romance pulp novels of her youth, while also still defined by those same masculine-enforced standards of love. As Timothy Aubry suggests, “Literature, for them, functions as a source of both fantasy production and fantasy fulfillment; it fills up the lack created by impossible romantic expectations – themselves partially the product of literature in the first place” (422). In other moments, literature is more than just a compensatory substitute for romantic experiences that fail to materialize. Isadora uses literature as a means of furthering her romantic interests. She offers her published poems to Adrian, for example, to sexually ingratiate herself as both artist and woman: “Meanwhile, he’s got my ass and is cupping it with both hands. He’s put my book on the fender of the Volkswagen and he’s grabbed my ass instead. Isn’t that why I write? To be loved? I don’t know anymore. I don’t even know my own name” (*FOF* 78). It is not merely that she exchanges her poetry for sexual pleasure; she exchanges her poetry for pop song clichés. Later she writes, “I found myself acting out the vocabulary of popular love songs, the clichés of the worst Hollywood movies. My heart skipped a beat. I got misty whenever he was near. He was my sunshine. Our hearts were holding hands” (*FOF* 116). Adrian’s advances, she fears, make her into a bad poet. He is an avatar of the cultural forces that would circumscribe her literary ambitions. Under his influence – an influence she has been in thrall to her whole life – Isadora is capable of turning literature into romantic mush, a mere tool for meeting and dreaming about men. This is one of the struggles with ambivalence Isadora has as an artist: “...but the big problem was how to make your feminism jibe with your unappeasable hunger for male bodies” (87).

But if she uses literature as a vehicle for generating real and imagined sexual encounters, she also uses her sexual encounters as a vehicle for creating literature. She and Pia have a series

of one-night stands in Europe: “The best part of these adventures seemed to be the way we went into hysterics describing them to each other. Otherwise, they were mostly joyless” (*FOF* 100). Men are, for Isadora, an inspiration for narrative, and even the self-involved Adrian realizes this. Upon deserting her in France, he says, “I only wanted to give you something to write about,” and then, “Doesn’t this make the perfect end to your story?” (270). But his comments infuriate Isadora, and, though she has not written a word since she met him, she is desperate for him to stay with her. Her hierarchy of priorities is unstable and unknowable. Means and ends constantly switch places; romantic and literary ambitions are at moments inseparable, at other moments mutually exclusive, and whether her paramount aim is to win the attention of men or to win literary acclaim, or whether the two are even distinguishable, remains uncertain.

The relationship between Isadora’s body and her art are interlinked and almost symbiotic in defining the limits of each: “One’s body is intimately related to one’s writing, although the precise nature of the connection is subtle and may take years to understand. Some tall thin poets write short fat poems. But it’s not a simple matter of the law of inversion. In a sense, every poem is an attempt to extend the boundaries of one’s own body” (*FOF* 285). Although, at the end of the novel, she uses her poetry to contain her body’s flow, in other moments she characterizes menstruation and writing as metaphors for each other. Complaining about the canon’s exclusion of women, she remarks, “Throughout all of history, books were written with sperm, not menstrual blood” (24). With this image, Isadora envisions a form of writing that is messy, a bodily function beyond the control of its author, and distinctly feminine in character.

Her creative writings, which are arranged in “no particular system” (*FOF* 287), free Isadora from the rigid plans others have made for her throughout her life and give her a fresh, open view. Infusing the scattered observations of her notebook with her own artistic imagination,

her writing begins to take shape as a “novel” in which she is being “drawn” (288). Just as in an earlier scene she began to view herself as “a fictional character created by me,” she now assumes a liberating identity which is as free as the fiction she creates (258). Giving birth to herself in much the same way as the novelist creates characters, she has the “curious revelation” that her life should not be a source of guilt that she has not lived up to the expectations of others but, on the contrary, a source of pride because she is finally realizing her own expectations, outside the cultural constraints of patriarchy:

As I read the notebook, I began to draw into it as into a novel. I almost began to forget that I had written it. And then a curious revelation began to dawn. I stopped blaming myself; it was that simple. Perhaps my finally running away was due not to malice on my part, nor to any disloyalty I need to apologize for. Perhaps it was a kind of loyalty to myself. A drastic but necessary way of changing my life. (*FOF* 288)

Seen in this context, as Robert Butler observes, “her journey with Adrian has become open because it is not a way of either becoming attached to a man or an acting out of neurotic fantasies but instead a radical break from a confining past done in loyalty to the integrity of one’s self” (324-325). She realizes at this point that the central failing of her life was “to confuse dependency with love” and, understanding this, she resolves not “to return to the marriage described in the notebook,” all the while leaving open the possibility of later establishing a new and more liberating relationship with Bennett.

This change, of course, is a direct result not of embellishing existing self-narratives, but of reflecting on her past experiences with her writing and bodily experiences (i.e. her menstruation in the tub). This is Isadora listening to and experiencing her body for the first time since adolescence, but with the accumulated wisdom of age and sexual experience. This has interesting cultural implications for how Isadora’s femininity is understood and conceived of in the text. Jay Hood, for example, notes that, “if the patriarchal ideal for a woman is one of less-

ness of the female body and its discursive abilities, then we can also understand a counternarrative to his ideal as one that understands masculine fear of the female body in the female body's ability to violate these cultural boundaries" (160). Because narrative and the body are so symbiotic for Isadora, the public female body could be understood to be a contaminating agent for patriarchy, "one that explicitly highlights its fundamental lack of control over the female body" (Hood 160). Towards the end of Isadora's journey, after she has been abandoned by Adrian, Jong conceives of a menstrual experience for Isadora so intense that the floor of her hotel room "was beginning to look like the aftermath of a car wreck" (*FOF* 402). So profuse is her bleeding that Isadora, who has always welcomed her period for its proof of her not being pregnant, for the first time regards it as part of the overall hassle of female body management – complete in her memory alongside training bras and various half-understood facts of sex gleaned from late-night television. Her period takes on special significance in the context of patriarchal conceptualizations of female menstruation.

Yet, while Isadora regards her body's corporeality with marked disdain, she perceives her period as something of a mark of freedom, of the potential for independence from a purely reproductive act of femininity. In some sense, the reconceptualization of the period demonstrates a clear evolution from Isadora's once gilded conceptualization of the zipless fuck. The heterotopic fantasy has been overcome by this crisis, a state in which Isadora must successfully mediate her own bodily needs and desires with her own surroundings, compromising and improvising (even making herself a makeshift tampon pad). To this end, Isadora's period also marks the end of this transitional period in her life. She comments that "leaving Bennett was my first really independent action, and even there it had been partly because of Adrian and the wild sexual obsession I had felt for him" (*FOF* 390). The zipless fuck, a model of a potentially

unachievable ideal – all sex carries with it some burden of consequence, even if left unspoken –  
has served a useful purpose in a journey of self-discovery.



## CHAPTER VI: ANTICHRIST

“The male protagonists in my films are basically all idiots who don’t understand shit. Whereas the women are much more human, and much more real. It’s the women I identify with in all my films.” – Lars von Trier

*Antichrist* (2009), by Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier, is the 10<sup>th</sup> feature film of his career, which includes well-known works such as *The Idiots* (1998), *Dancer in the Dark* (1999), *Dogville* (2003), and *Melancholia* (2011). While his works are often received with a certain degree of discomfort, *Antichrist*’s premiere at Cannes caused considerable stir. A great deal of controversy centered on the fact that the film was perceived as misogynistic by critics. On one hand, the film contains graphic scenes of violence, mutilation, and torture reminiscent of the horror genre: the Woman, for instance, bludgeons her husband’s genitals and mutilates her own with a pair of scissors. Combined with the film’s supernatural moments, such sequences caused Cannes audiences to jeer, laugh, and faint during the film’s screening (Loreck 18). On the other hand, *Antichrist* also circulates in ways that characterize it as an art film.

The film premiered in competition at the prestigious Cannes Festival, where von Trier had already forged a reputation as an accomplished (albeit iconoclastic) auteur. Moreover, as Janice Loreck emphasizes, due to the film’s combination of “low” culture iconography with a “high” cultural setting (or, more accurately, what is constructed in the discourses of film criticism as “high” and “low”), scholars have identified *Antichrist* as part of the New Extremity: a much-discussed category of art cinema that emerged on the European festival circuit in the late 1990s (18-19). The category is a variant of “New French Extremity:” a phrase used to describe a growing vogue for shock tactics in French cinema. This genre (with defining films such as Claire Denis’s *Trouble Every Day* and Gaspard Noe’s *Irreversible*) is evidence of a filmmaking trend towards aesthetics borrowed from “lower” cultural forms, particularly pornography and

exploitation cinema. That is to say, this film offers an array of rich and subversive thematic (not to mention stylistic) trappings that go beyond the often myopic and prudish critique by some critics as merely “torture porn” under an arthouse glaze.

This chapter looks at this contemporary narrative of psychotherapy in terms of both its cultural relevance and engagement with the structures of transference and countertransference. I will analyze how *Antichrist* constructs a gender binary and reconceptualizes the role of the natural world to create a transitional therapeutic space between the two protagonists: She and He. Similar to my arguments for *Tender is the Night* and *Fear of Flying*, I read von Trier’s film as a penultimate example of the corrupted, grotesque, and traumatic consequences of conflating a patient/analyst relationship with a marital one. Instead of the patient’s voice and narrative construction being accompanied by a “therapeutic valence,” that is, a desire to do productive analytic work with a patient, an otherwise transformative transference relation between patient and analyst is replaced by one of sexual violence (Ogden and Ogden 17). The therapeutic and sexual violence that’s exercised within this transference relationship, I argue, is also a commentary on the ways in which woman’s positionality within a therapeutic space situates feminine subjectivity as aberrant and abject because of psychoanalysis’s inherited patriarchal constituents. The failure of communication between He and She marks a failure of language within the therapeutic situation. As such, the symbolic exchange of language and positionality within the intended transitional space of therapeutic “healing” instead become internalized symbols of abnegation, sacrifice, and victimhood.

Lars von Trier has described the experience of making *Antichrist* as “the closest film [comes] to a scream” (Schwarzbaum), a remark that has generated a great deal of publicity for a film that infamously caused critics to faint in the auditorium after they had “yelped and howled

and covered their eyes” (Brooks), and that has been described as “the most shocking film in the history of the Cannes Film Festival” (Singh). This film, more than those that precede it in the director’s catalogue, situates von Trier as a prime player in the world this genre, where the aim is to indulge in “an aggressive desire to confront...audiences, to render the spectator’s experience problematic” in the name of causing outrage (Falcon 11). For von Trier, however, extremism is a means of embarking on a deeply personal odyssey into domains of intense pain in order to, as Bainbridge frames it, “find spaces for reflection and opportunities to process” (“Cinematic Screaming” 54).

In *Antichrist* a woman (She) and a man (He) tragically lose their son, a tragedy that leaves her psychologically devastated. He is a therapist, and discontent with the help she is offered upon the death of their son, he wants to treat She psychotherapeutically himself, believing that her catatonic trauma is enforced by anxieties more deep-seated than the loss of their son. As part of an imposed treatment, She and He retreat to a secluded cabin in the forest tellingly named Eden. It should be noted that this is the same cabin where She wrote her doctoral thesis on gynocide, which gradually becomes an issue as She comes to believe that all women are inherently evil, a belief her thesis initially set out to criticize. While there, he wants her to expose herself to her innermost traumas, revolving around the cabin and the area around it. By the end of the film his therapeutic project fails utterly, and the deeper the therapist/husband makes She dig into her anxiety, the more agonizing, brutal, and self-destructive she becomes. The extreme depictions of violence have led to this film receiving wide-ranging criticism, perhaps most succinctly summed up in Xan Brooks’ review, which asked the question, “a work of genius or the sickest film in the history of cinema?” (The Guardian). The violence appears to deliberately reduce the relationship between the couple to a basic sexual power struggle, while

also creating “a grotesque elaboration of the misogynist fear of the ‘natural’ urges of womankind that pervades the film” (Herring). Psychological enlightenment and self-unveiling are not portrayed in a flattering way in the film, to say the least. In fact, one possible interpretation of the film is to see it as a passionate denunciation of psychotherapy. In the film, achieving knowledge through the excavation of the psyche and verbalizing one’s fears is thus essentially mistrusted.

The blurred and problematic relationship of therapist/husband and patient/wife is played out in von Trier’s narrative with disastrous consequences for both parties. What is telling, however, is the way in which this troubled therapeutic dynamic recreates the figure of woman within its own patriarchal constraints. Given the film’s penchant for new extremity aesthetics, *Antichrist* presents a layered case study in its attempt to confront representations of female aggression within a therapeutic frame that denies agency but promotes suffering. The depiction of a violent, psychologically disturbed woman in *Antichrist* recalls the diagnosis of hysteria, a predominantly feminine disease of both the mind and body. What is interesting to note, and as Loreck point out, “the term originates from the Greek ‘hystera’ meaning ‘uterus,’ and one of the earliest accounts of hysteria-like illness is found in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in which he describes the disorder as the consequence of a distressed, ‘unfruitful’ uterus that moves around the body” (19). *Antichrist* similarly links the female protagonist’s aggression to her reproductive capacity insofar as her symptoms arise from the death of her only child.

Considering the film’s combined art-horror modality within the new extremity genre, it’s interesting to note the way in the film examines how She is produced as a violent and hysterical patient who turns against her therapist husband. What this points to is how, through the therapeutic valences of transference, *Antichrist* engages with the violent woman’s (She’s) cultural construction as an enigma and othering figure. As Janice Loreck suggests, “filmic

narratives frequently betray a specifically epistemological anxiety about the violent woman's subjectivity, positioning her as a 'problem' that must be solved" (19). By foregrounding She's debilitating grief and anxiety, *Antichrist* certainly constructs a scenario that positions her as a mysterious entity. The commentary around the film at the time of its release, however, shows the critics expected the film to demonstrate artistic insightfulness into the protagonists' lives; instead, many critics deemed the film confused, even misogynistic, in its representation of the two protagonists (20). Within the context of the film's critique on the nature of therapy, however, *Antichrist* engages with the themes of sexuality and psychotherapy in interesting, albeit graphic, ways that on the surface appear stolidly misogynistic and lacking in artistic merit.

Throughout *Antichrist*, von Trier renders crystal-clear his own ambivalence towards psychiatry; however, his main target is the domineering power of the man, a misguided therapist, who attempts to treat his wife without medication. After their son's funeral, the woman sinks into a catatonic state, and is hospitalized and heavily medicated for a month. Her husband's controlling behavior is apparent from an early sequence, when he breezes into her room holding a bunch of long-stemmed blue flowers. Here, the film's sense of wretchedness is palpable, and so distinct from the sexual euphoria of the opening sequence. As he reaches over the bed to kiss her, the handheld camera stays close to her brittle body language and the drained cast of her facial features. Here, through streams of tears, she tells him candidly that she had recently been aware of Nic (their son) climbing out of his cot at night, and that she could have prevented the accident. Clearly unperturbed by this worrying revelation, He responds by saying that her "grief is a natural, healthy reaction", and "no therapist" can know as much about her as He does. Significantly, this pivotal scene establishes the dynamic between them. He is slick, smart, tactical, rehearsed, and even cold-blooded in his clinical approach. She is isolated, exhausted,

unstable, and unpredictable. Convinced he knows his wife best, he disagrees with her doctor's diagnosis of her grief as being "atypical" and demands that she be released into his care. This, in turn, is the start of an imminent downfall for the couple as unchecked transference gives way to misogynistic gaslighting and extreme sexual violence under His therapeutic guidance.

A common criticism of von Trier's work in general, and *Antichrist* in particular, is that it's misogynistic – that von Trier perpetuates "a patriarchal view of femininity as irrevocably 'other'" (Bainbridge 138). However, this is too simplistic an argument against the film. As Harriet Earle notes, this is the case because the violence that is perpetrated on Her does not exist within a straightforward narrative of spousal abuse (5). Rather, it is related to the complex traumatic guilt of parents who have lost a child and, in doing so, uncover deeper rifts within the marriage. Furthermore, the woman's overt sexuality turns the tables on the typically held view of female sexuality in an androcentric society. Indeed, Caroline Bainbridge suggests that, "von Trier's work can thus be seen to draw attention to the way femininity often exceeds the boundaries imposed on it by patriarchal systems" (*The Cinema of Lars von Trier* 138). In *Antichrist*, She shifts the paradigm of sex and becomes the sexual aggressor in response to her husband's draconian therapeutic hold over her. This is not to say that a female sexual aggressor automatically means a film cannot be misogynistic; rather, this categorization is far too myopic because von Trier's work is not a naïve reiteration of patriarchal sexual power structures.

On first viewing, it becomes immediately apparent that the woman's traumatic grief can be easily read in accordance with Freud's article "Mourning and Melancholia." Freud distinguishes two reactions to grief: mourning "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on" (248). In comparison, Freud defines melancholia as being

the result of an unhealthy work of mourning: “the patient allows the loss to absorb him entirely [...] He vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished” (245). With only two short definitions to work with, we can instantly recognize the woman’s experience grief as belonging to the category of unhealthy melancholia. Her grief transcends typical:

In mourning we found that the inhibition and loss of interest are fully accounted for by the work of mourning in which the ego is absorbed. In melancholia, the unknown loss will result in a similar internal work and will therefore be responsible for the melancholic inhibition. The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely. The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning – an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, and impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. (244-245)

Freud goes on to say that to the melancholic’s symptoms are added “sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment, and – what is psychologically very remarkable – by an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life” (246). After the funeral, She actively disengages with “clinging to life” – choosing instead to retreat into herself and is, subsequently, hospitalized.

In showing us the immense depth of her grief in the hospital scene, von Trier also introduces the husband as therapist in such a way that it denies us access to Her thoughts. This scene, rather, displays her disengagement as something beyond her control which positioning Him as the voice of reason:

He: How are you?

She: Didn’t we just talk about that?

He: That was yesterday. Today is Tuesday.

She: So I’ve been here long?

He: A month.

She: Wayne says that my grief pattern is atypical.

He: I think he gives you too much medication, way too much.

She: Stop it, please. Trust others to be smarter than you.

He: He’s straight out of medical school. He don’t know what he’s doing. I’ve treated ten times as many patients as he has.

She: But you’re not a doctor.

He: No, I’m not. And I’m proud that I’m not when I meet a doctor like him. There is

nothing atypical about your grief. (*Antichrist*)

This is the first conversation of the film. Immediately the viewer is made to understand two things: first, that She is grieving in an unhealthy way, and secondly, that He finds it nearly impossible to relinquish control when it comes to the condition and degree of his wife's suffering. Though viewers can see through His concerns as being an example of gaslighting, this is by no means a straightforward narrative of abuse. Rather, as Harriet Earle emphasizes, von Trier's film "enables a critical interrogation of the ambiguities and ambivalences around [any binary formation] of good and evil" (7). He may well be neglectful and controlling to the point of abuse, but She is not blameless. At first her statement that she knew her son was able to get out of his cot and walk around seems to be rooted in grief and the need to find blame, even within herself, for the death. However, it becomes apparent later that she was routinely forcing her son's shoes onto the wrong feet, causing them to become damaged and deformed.

Adding to the film's ambiguity and, subsequently, to how we characterize the ambivalent maternal figure of She, von Trier manages to exactly measure the critical distance required to achieve an almost grudgingly empathetic portrait of the female character in conjunction with a trajectory of events, which (perhaps at first) move inexorably beyond our control or understanding. In this way, as Amy Simmons points out, "by neither condoning nor condemning Her actions, *Antichrist* asks us to glean the limited information offered, concerning a mother driven to hurt her own child" (41). So what is the meaning of von Trier's new female character? After all, this Eve-like unnamed woman is not simply the passive victim of male control. Rather, as Simmons notes, "her violent, unpredictable behavior and rampant sexual appetite is of itself, a carnivalesque destabilizing of the status quo" (42). Her destructive need for her son and husband says much about the ties that bind, and as both mother and wife, she wears her utter



dissatisfaction on her sleeve. She is positioned as the vengeful and anti-maternal antagonist, inconsolable and violent, but she is also complicit. We know something is going on with her, something that only she can know, but these suspicions soon become codified and twisted by His controlling nature and therapeutic abuse regarding Her treatment. Consequently, if we consider the film carefully, free of the prejudices von Trier stirs up by activating our fear and disgust, the film can be seen as a radically insightful exploration of female emotions and politics of location in a psychotherapeutic landscape that remains primarily patriarchal. Though Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" first made the case for the predominance of the male gaze and the objectification of women in mainstream cinema in 1975, it is still very unusual to experience a film that expresses female consciousness in a significant way.

On one hand, this narrative of female psychological disturbance reinscribes a set of well-established – and problematic – ideas about violent femininity. As it is explained and performed in the film, the Woman's symptomatology strongly recalls the now defunct medical diagnosis of hysteria. Rather than adhering to one single proponent's view of the malaise, however, the Woman performs a repertoire of symptoms that have been associated with the illness in Western medical discourse. For example, her physical afflictions recall those described Breuer and Freud in their analysis of "Anna O.," a patient featured in *Studies on Hysteria*; like Anna O., the Woman in *Antichrist* suffers from neuralgia, hallucinations, and mood swings (74-81). In a scene shortly after the Woman returns home from hospital, for example, she experiences a nightmare and panic attack while lying in bed. During the sequence, a montage of her symptoms appears onscreen: a dilated pupil, a palpating chest, twitching fingers, and a pulsating neck. Dark and blurred at the peripheries with an ominous drone rumbling over the soundtrack, this montage not only directly presents the symptoms of the Woman's hysteria for the viewer's attention, but also

adopts a hysterical aesthetic, simulating the vision distortions and aural hallucinations that Freud and Breuer describe (74).

By shortening or eliminating the space between the female character and the spectator, von Trier practically forces us to get to know her, to care about her, and to feel some part of the physical distress of her body onscreen. After the child falls to his death, Her deep depression becomes a plot event that requires resolution; it is the puzzle that organizes the narrative. The spectacle and narrative fact of her grief encourage spectators to scrutinize her symptoms for clues regarding the nature of her malaise and to participate in her diagnosis, casting Her in the role of hysteric and the viewer as analyst. Gainsbourg's angular frame perfectly conveys her character's anxieties; and the limpid intelligence of her face is such that we clearly see not only her variously shifting emotions, but her agonized thinking about her emotions. Through most of the film, She appears as a figure incapable of sustaining herself, her body reflecting a state of psychological collapse, exemplified by her wildly erratic panic attacks. When She tells her husband that her symptoms are "dangerous", he calmly replies that she is passing into a new stage of grief, namely, that of "anxiety" in which she will feel nausea, tremors, dry mouth, and dizziness. During these scenes of physical distress, the film propels us closer to understanding her mental state, by keeping the camera close to her sensual reactions, particularly her skin, her eyes, the nape of her neck, and her rapidly beating pulse. The way von Trier plays with these images, however, is of note for how it prefigures the implications of His therapy sessions. When these grayed and blurred images are first introduced in the film they are presented as dream residue that precludes Her intense panic attack. In this instance they are tied with both her body and her unconscious mind in a way that suggests intermingled aspects of both grief and embodiment. Soon after, when He enters the room to calm her through forced breathing

techniques, the images occur again; the difference is this time they have been recodified by His psychotherapeutic language to reflect the clinical process of her body's psychosomatic responses to anxiety. In this second instance, She is literally deconstructed, and somewhat fetishized, by Him into a series of body parts more in line with a medical presentation. Under His psychotherapeutic voiceover, these snapshots are not valued for the wholeness of embodiment they represent, nor for the depths and richness of Her psychological suffering, but for the medical and surface-level accuracy of how they reflect her body's psychosomatic responses.

These blurred, haptic images highlight her ongoing detachment from the surrounding world and directs our attention to her fractured psychological state. In one scene, her paralyzed physicality moves impulsively towards self-destruction as she proceeds to pound her head against the toilet seat until it bleeds. For Loreck, this suggests that She – her emotions and her subjectivity – “becomes the enigma that initiates the narrative and positions the viewers in a state of non-knowledge about the woman onscreen” (24). He (the husband) acts as the only voice of exposition that both the viewer and the woman are reliant on for meaning and narrative structuring. Moreover, the dialogue in these scenes invokes the discourse of psychology as a basis for understanding her behavior. He insists that Her grief is “not a disease” but “a natural, healthy reaction” and encourages her to explore her emotions – to fully embrace them and not to retreat into her grief or sublimate those emotions (*Antichrist*). He is clearly overconfident in his approach; he superciliously brandishes his wife's medication and insists that she return home from the hospital. Yet his words signal that Her malady can be made intelligible according to the principles of psychological motivation and causality. As such, *Antichrist* is initially established as a film interested in the human condition, a film of “psychological effects in search of their causes” (Loreck 25). The exposition thus suggests that *Antichrist* will provide some resolution to

Her affect. It creates the desire for insight about her overwhelming grief and, at the same time, about her fraught relationship with her husband.

As her hysteria becomes more evident, so do her wild, uncontrollable sexual desires. However, the physical nature of their relationship appears unerotic and alienating, resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle of regret, frustration, and remorse. In this way, by distilling the communication between the characters to an instinctual and primal level, the film underscores the void of communication and the absence of “real” intimacy. In the end, her attempts to suppress her guilt in the narcotic of sex only delivers greater suffering and uncertainty. Consequently, intercourse becomes violence, which culminates in dissatisfaction, ennui, and masochism. Even so, the resultant horror is perhaps an inevitable consequence of her husband’s indifference and domination. In the beginning, the viewer can’t help but sympathize with her as Gainsbourg carries the believable character, whereas the husband is presented as a foolish idealist believing in the power of his limited therapeutic methods. Her intense rage can no less exist without his pronounced egotism, and he is up against her at every turn, deluded by his role in their relationship and unable to come to terms with this.

At best, She is an ambivalent mother. Paula Quigley situates *Antichrist* (along with many other films by von Trier) with a catalogue of women’s films, specifically films of “maternal melodrama”:

*Antichrist* is concerned with maternal loss; however, the sleight of hand that the film performs is to identify the grieving mother as the architect of her own annihilation. This is achieved by segueing from the terrain of the maternal melodrama to its inverse, the dark and dangerous realm of the “monstrous feminine.” (165)

Quigley goes on to suggest that, in the maternal melodrama, femininity is “condensed into the image of the de-sexualized mother who claims self-sacrifice as her right and through the exercise of her inherently destructive capacity for love ensures the perpetuation of this cycle” (167). In

*Antichrist*, however, the mother is re-sexualized to a rapacious degree, and it is not herself she sacrifices but her child. The negation of the typical maternal drive to protect the child at all costs makes her, according to Earle, “a monster before the main action of the film has a chance to occur” (8). Though both parents refuse the typical parental role, She is presented as far more monstrous than He considering her transformation (more akin to self-destruction and abnegation) at the hands of his therapy. The film toys with the viewer through how the onus for parenting seems to weigh heavier on the mother than the father, allowing us to some degree to forgive his distance from his family by the very nature of his gender. The grief she experiences is atypical in this instance because it is tinged with guilt – not a conditional guilt of “could have” or “should have” that we often witness following a traumatic loss, but guilt that is tied to an anti-maternal drive of real abuse that the child suffered at her hands.

The film’s “extreme” aesthetics becomes a mask of sorts, one that screams out at us that what we see on screen is grounded not in reality but rather in the potential spaces that cinematic narrative (played out in the couple’s therapeutic relation) “opens up for playing and experimentation with dimensions of affective experience” (“Cinematic Screaming” 54-55). As Donald Winnicott has it, “potential space” allows us to negotiate the relationship between the very separate worlds of inner and outer experience. This process allows us to acquire perspective on emotional life in ways that foster an illusion that the fantasy of maternal holding can be sustained despite the psychological challenges of having separated from the mother. As such, both patient and analyst function as active players within the created potential space of psychotherapy because of the “working through” efforts of the therapeutic encounter. This, in turn, makes the transference relationship between patient and analyst an extension of the

“transitional object”<sup>2</sup> of childhood and its role in shaping adult relations and engagement with culture. Arguably, it can also be linked to the creative dimension entailed in filmic narratives, signaling the extent to which potential space provides important scope for what Winnicott describes as “the location of experience” (95-103) by opening up “common ground” (96) “into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw if we have somewhere to put what we find” (99). For Winnicott, the potential space of cultural encounters “is at the interplay between there being nothing but me and there being objects and phenomena outside omnipotent control” (100), and the experiences to be had in such a space are fundamental to “ego-relatedness” (101) that “expands into creative living” (102). The symbols that emerge in potential space “stand at one in the same time for external world phenomena and for the phenomena of the individual person who is being looked at” (109) and offer space in which to contemplate those aspects of internal experience that may resonate with others and take on new meanings through their cultural exploration. Here, there is a sense in which the foray into the terrain of cultural experience facilitates a re-working of personal (internal) experience in light of what is observed in the reactions and/or contributions of others. The oscillation between these poles of experience seemingly operates analogously to the therapeutic encounter between patient and analyst. Thus, the scope of such thinking for examining the powerful potential of cultural experience as a working through of psychological experiences becomes rich in this regard, and

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<sup>2</sup> Winnicott uses this term to describe the particular object that enables the infant to begin the complex process of separation from the mother. Often aligned with the favorite teddy bear or the comfort blanket, the transitional object is something that the child understands as both “me” and “not-me” at one and the same time. The degree of emotional attachment to the transitional object is such that it continues to have meaning long after childhood has passed.

*Antichrist* arguably furnishes us with some of the most clear-cut examples of how exactly this might be done. With its key themes of trauma, loss, anxiety, and psychological pain, von Trier's film provides substantial material for further analysis, not least because it also regularly produces journalist and critical commentary on the acceptability or otherwise of such thematic psychotherapeutic endeavors.

Given the nature of His and Her relationship, they are continually positioned as active players within the transitional space of their marriage. As such, the triadic relationship between She, He, and Nic (the dead son) becomes a twisted rendering of the Oedipal myth with dangerous consequences. The relationship in *Antichrist* is triadic rather than dualistic, since the death of the toddler is not the only reason for the sojourn into the woods, but also a major catalyst of catastrophic events that will develop throughout the narrative. The triadic relationship between father, mother, and (male) child is the classic model of the Oedipal relation as described by Freud, and the movie makes quite an explicit reference to this model when He discovers polaroid pictures of his son in which the child is wearing shoes on the inverse feet. A flashback shows how She deliberately puts the shoes on her son's wrong feet, thus causing the mysterious foot mutilation revealed to the father in the autopsy report. However, as von Trier shows, the relationships of the Oedipal triangle can be permuted and commuted. While the child was not literally killed by the parents, a flashback of this event reveals, later in the movie, that She was watching her child climb out of the window during sex with Him and did nothing to prevent it from falling. The incestuous nature of the oedipal triad translates in the film into an "incestuous" breach of ethics and boundaries by His merging of patient/analyst with husband/wife relations. He even admits that it's unethical to "screw your therapist" (*Antichrist*). In another twist of the oedipal relation, although He proposes to Her that they abstain from sex during her therapy, she

continually and more frequently forces sex on him. The oedipal model in the film, however, takes on new dimensions when we consider the generational and gender reversal of roles: in the film, She is presented as the violent and main antagonist who mutilates her son's feet and, at least passively, bears a degree of responsibility for his death. What provides the lynchpin for von Trier's warped oedipal model is that it is not the son who rivals with the father over possession of the mother, but the mother who rivals with her son over possession of the father. They start off as a cooperative pair of players through therapy: He wants to help Her to overcome her fears, and She wants his love and attention. Their problem is, however, that they are not sure of each other's motives and intentions. She accuses him of having been "a distant husband and father" and fears that He will eventually leave her: "Bastard, why did you leave me?" she shouts in the final part of the movie (*Antichrist*).

By intimating hysteria so strongly in the plot, *Antichrist* engages in a critique of the subjecting therapeutic power that He wields over Her. Although the film rearticulates a "mad" or "bad" cultural narrative of female violence – a formulation that imagines women's aggression as a product of either her intrinsic evil or insanity – it is also highly concerned with problematizing masculine authority (Morrissey 33). As Larry Gross suggests, "von Trier doesn't have a problem with women. He has, on the other hand, a serious problem with men" (42). Through the Woman's fate, the film dramatizes the precise point made by psychiatrist Eliot Slater in his essay on hysteria's therapeutic deficiencies. Far from being a true medical condition, Slater writes, hysteria has always indicated an analyst's lack of medical knowledge. "In the main," Slater observes, "the diagnosis of 'hysteria' applies to a disorder of the doctor patient relationship. It is evidence of non-communication, of a mutual misunderstanding" (40). Such misunderstanding is a central theme in the plot of *Antichrist*. The narrative insistently focuses on His inability to



comprehend Her experience, an incompetence that the film expresses on a narrative level. Despite His initial belief to the contrary, He is never able to determine the true cause of Her affliction. First, the Woman tells Him that she is afraid of the forest; hence, the Man surmises that his wife's fear is caused by "nature." Then, when the Woman declares that "nature is Satan's church", the Man revises his initial hypothesis, deciding that it is Satan, not nature, which terrifies her (*Antichrist*). Finally, the Man concludes that the Woman's greatest fear is herself, although the Woman attacks him before he can explore the implications of this revelation. These events certainly suggest a disorder of the doctor-patient relationship. Confused and enraged, the Man strangles the Woman to death in the film's climax, thereby permanently eliminating the threat she poses to his life and his authority as an analyst. By so strongly emphasizing the "disordered" patient-analyst relationship, *Antichrist* uses the figure of the feminine hysteric to foreground the oppressiveness, and limits, of masculine knowledge.

Under the strain of His guidance, Her experience with their therapeutic encounters gradually become exercises in desperation and suffering under the misunderstood guise of breakthrough and insight. What this speaks to is the ways in which transference is operating within their therapeutic encounters. Similar to Freud, Ralph Greenson defines transference as "the experience of feelings, drives, attitudes, fantasies, and defenses toward a person in the present which are inappropriate to that persona and are a repetition, a displacement of reactions originating in regard to significant persons of early childhood" (151). In early phases of therapy, transference presents itself in "sporadic, transient reactions" aptly called "floating transference reactions" (151). Freud described more enduring transference phenomena which develop when the transference situation is properly handled. Then all the patient's neurotic symptoms are replaced by a neurosis in the transference relation of which he can be cured by therapeutic work.

According to Greenson, and what we see in *Antichrist*, is that the transference neurosis is in effect when the analyst and the analysis become the central concern in the patient's life (151). The transference neurosis includes more than the infantile neurosis; the patient also relives the later editions and variations of his original neurosis.

In the film we see this same transference neurosis play out in the therapeutic encounter with dire consequences for both patient and therapist as both attempt, and fail, to understand each other. The therapeutic "working alliance" – understood as "the patient's ability to [effectively] work in the analytic situation" – is under strain in this instance (and many others throughout the film) as understanding between the two protagonists gradually erodes (Greenson 152). The "working alliance" between patient and therapist has the advantage of stressing a vital therapeutic element: "the patient's capacity to work purposefully in the treatment situation" (152). It can be seen at its clearest when a patient, in the throes of an intense transference neurosis, can yet maintain an effective working relationship with the analyst. According to Greenson, the reliable core of the working alliance is formed by "the patient's motivation to overcome his illness, his conscious and rational willingness to cooperate, and his ability to follow the instructions and insights of his analyst" (152). The actual alliance, then, is formed between the patient's reasonable ego and the analyst's analyzing ego. The medium that makes this possible is the patient's partial identification with the analyst's approach as he attempts to understand his patient (152). A recurring feature in the dialogue between He and She in Eden is the wife's angry attacks on her therapist husband: "You think you're so much smarter...you're so damned arrogant...you're so clever. You can't just be happy for me, can you?" (*Antichrist*). The husband typically answers by trying to explain and trying to understand. In one of the central scenes we have the following dialogue:

He: I see  
She: No, you *don't* see (*Antichrist*).

Then, somewhat unexpectedly, the Woman throws herself against him, kisses him frantically, unzips her pants, and sits down on him to have intercourse. Emotional intimacy is absent in this scene (and many other depicting sex between the two). There is a frantic, instrumental quality to the wife's sexual approach as she continues to relive the initial sexual encounter of the film's prologue by forcing herself onto her husband/therapist. The key to understanding this scene, and the nascence of Her neurosis, is the line "No, you *don't* see." The Woman's experience is that her husband does not understand her and, in his professional hubris, He does not and cannot understand her. Von Trier's images, as Siri Gullestad observes, "convey that not being understood is unbearable." (82). Lack of understanding means that the two of them are distinctly separate individuals – there is a distance between them. That is the irony at heart of Her transference neurosis: She understands and identifies with Him insofar as She understands and identifies with herself and the depth of her melancholia. As such, acknowledging this separateness may imply recognizing the other's otherness, thereby making possible a deeper interpersonal connection. To von Trier's woman, however, otherness is dangerous. The difference of the other person means that She is not alone, which is intolerable. Sexuality, in this setting, serves as a glue. Through erotic possession, She can protect herself against the feeling of aloneness and separation. There is much copulation in *Antichrist*, but little sensuality and tenderness. Intercourse becomes violence. What we observe is not mature sexuality but rather something that serves symbiotic needs and the warding off of separation anxiety.

Just as sex is weaponized by Her in the film, so is language itself barbed throughout Her extended "therapy sessions" (really their marriage as a whole) with Him and, later, transformed into outright violence. Earlier in the film she accuses him of having been distant from her and

their son, that he became interested in her only when she became his patient and tell him “you’re indifferent to whether your child is alive or dead” (*Antichrist*). Now, her statement suddenly rings true. Her subsequent attack by the film’s end, then, can be viewed in two different ways. On the surface, it seems to be an early reactionary attack as she realizes he must leave her after her viciousness with Nic is exposed (i.e. how she “willingly” put shoes on the wrong feet of her toddler to “punish” him). She does shout “you’re leaving me you bastard” as she hits him (*Antichrist*). At a deeper level, however, her attack is an attack on pretense, on his arrogant position of assuming the role of knowing and rational subject, and on his deliberate slighting of her identification with medieval and early modern ideas of demonizing some women and considering them evil by nature. It is an attack on his notion of “therapeutic truth” or indeed, on “truth” as such. This view is confirmed by what happens next. She manages to overpower him on the floor and he, exhausted or playing submissive, lets her grab his penis. She gets on top of him and copulates frantically with him. But he spoils it by saying the most charged and misread statement “I love you”, to which she replies, with a ferocious tone, “I don’t believe you!” (*Antichrist*).

The Woman’s “I don’t believe you!” is not simply about distrusting her husband’s expression of love. On one level, it is about disbelieving that he can still utter such an ideological message which, at this point, sounds not only pretentious, but supremely unethical and irresponsible. On another level, his “I love you”, located precisely where it occurs in the scene, ultimately contains and underlying and patronizing disrespect for her conscious identification with the mythical yet historical and real image of woman as evil in witchery texts. Her line might as well go like this: I don’t believe that you have the audacity – or the idiocy – to hold onto your belief in both of our constructed narrative identities as modern subjects against my chosen

identification to such a ridiculous and incredible limit. Her yelled statement “I don’t believe you!” also seems to purge what the viewer always wanted to say out loud regarding His therapy sessions.

The main drama of the film is therapeutically enacted between He and She. Similar to *Tender is the Night*, the heart of the story is two unable to reach each other, although the husband’s determination indeed was to help his wife. The nucleus of their communication is the so-called therapy, the main feature of which is exposure and corrections of irrational thoughts. Exposure for Him means forcing his wife to confront feared situations. For example, he commands her to walk on grass, which in her fantasy is on fire, her naked feet touching the blazing branches. What is remarkable here is “the therapist’s neglect of his patient’s inner world, which is left unexplored” (Gullestad 82). Moreover, there is coaching and correction from Him that tampers with the efficacy and ethics of his therapeutic exercise. The following dialogue is a role play suggested by the therapist, where he will play the role of the thoughts that provoke Her:

He: I’m nature, which makes people do evil things to women.

She: That nature was the subject of my thesis. If nature is evil, women are evil.

Women do not control their own bodies. Nature Does. (*Antichrist*)

The therapist, obviously provoked by her statement implying that she herself is evil, replies in a loud, angry tone: “Good and evil has nothing to do with therapy. The evil you talk about is an obsession. Obsessions cannot materialize – it’s a scientific fact” (*Antichrist*). His approach is a rational correction of a “wrong” idea: Her subjective experience is rejected as being unscientific. This is understood under the masculine-coded (through His positioning as therapist and husband) and patriarchally-inherited tenants of psychoanalytic thought that regard woman’s experience not as subjective reality rich with experience and intrinsic value, but as an expression of a symptom in need of controlling. Furthermore, He is intrinsically instructing Her to do what is “right,” what

he thinks is right. His words, therefore, are not in touch with the emotional reality of his wife and patient, even though he, supposedly, has shared stock in the genesis of her grief.

The ways in which the von Trier articulates and frames the therapeutic encounter characterizes the drive for knowledge as an explicitly masculine mode of looking: He is depicted as coldly clinical and the embodiment of rationality, whereas She is depicted as embracing the myth of the inherently “evil” and abject “otherness” of her own sexuality. As the narrative progresses, it is exposed that Her encounter with misogyny and work on gynocide has “activated archaic layers within herself” (Gullestad 80). When her husband, trying to understand what happened last summer, finds her thesis, written by hand, he discovers that her handwriting is collapsing page by page. Are we witnessing a breakdown of self? Her empathy with women as victims of brutality – the intended subject of her study – seems gradually to have given way to an activation of a self-representation of herself as someone cruel. She acknowledges that evil, attributed to women who are persecuted as witches, is present in her. She herself has become the evil women of her study. In the context of the film, psychology is a male discourse that is weaponized and superciliously acted upon Her via the husband. By characterizing femininity as mysterious and possibly evil, *Antichrist* allows its female protagonist to evade the Man’s – and the viewer’s – categorical framing and subjectifying desire to account for her *illness*. As a viewer, one is deeply provoked by his unbearable, verbose self-righteousness, empathizing with the exasperation the woman must feel being (mis)understood in this way. Not getting what she needs – understanding and affirmation of her inner world – the woman gradually becomes more and more furious. However, she is not able to express her anger and protest in a self-representing way. Rather, she submits to her therapist’s/husband’s demands to understand him.

As their therapy sessions evolve, the couple sojourn to “Eden” (their cabin getaway in the woods). From the husband’s intimated point of view, it was an intended site of healing and, earlier in the film, suggested to be a pastoral retreat of sorts. However, in actuality “Eden” is shown to be an ominous *locus horridus* that carries import for the Woman as a site of therapeutic “healing.” In an article published in 1932, Germaine Dulac lists one of the goals of avant-garde cinema, where she states that “cinematographic action should not contend itself the personal, but stretch beyond the human to the domain of nature and dream” (qtd. in Simmons 32). *Antichrist* obeys this rule by pushing our collective faces in the moss and debris of unorganized nature, through a slow zoom into a vase holding flowers by the grieving mother’s bedside. Rather than capturing the cheerful blooms, the camera closes in on the flower stems, submerged in their murky water, swirling with dead plant tissue and microorganisms. Expertly crafted, this indistinct, haptic image of rotting stumps of green, invites the sensation of ominous decay, while a queasy rumbling effect that sounds like a distant train surfaces, affectively resonating with the scene. Hence, the tone is set, for von Trier’s paranoid, hypnotic, and misanthropic vision of human life behind the curtain, as a creeping, crawling chaos.

From the outset, *Antichrist* has the mark of nightmare upon it, weaving all the potentialities of the Eden forest into a miasma of menace and death, which resonates as something supernatural. For example, von Trier employs expressionist technique when the couple retreat to Eden by train that intimates at portentous happenings to come. Ominously foreshadowing the potent crisis to come, the Woman’s thoughts and fears become manifest, as shots of the smeared countryside rushing by the train window are interspersed with subliminal inserts of her screaming face. As the scene continues, He tells her to close her eyes and imagine herself arriving at their woodland cabin through the woods. In the following dream sequence, we

see her materialize in Eden, from a distance as a silvery nymph, crossing the footbridge. Here, the thin, tall trees of the woodland are surrounded by a dense mist where the sunlight never penetrates, giving the impression of a cathedral in which a strange ritual is about to be enacted. Shot in extreme slow motion, her image is bleached out and ghostly, lit like a negative imprint against the menacing pitch sky and muted foliage of the forest. Gliding through the landscape, she describes the surrounding scenery in a whisper. “The little deers are hiding among the ferns, as usual” she says, as if recalling familiar memories (*Antichrist*). As the sky turns darker, she mentions “the old fox-hole” and a large rotting tree, which she defines as having a “strange kind of personality” (*Antichrist*). Significantly, this scene is just the first of many that illustrates the merging of the feminine and therapeutic with the landscape in a particularly vivid way.

Once the couple arrive in Eden, via a footbridge (no doubt signifying the boundary between the real and fantastical, sanity and madness), the narrative disintegrates and the ferocious battle of the sexes becomes the dynamic and complex heart of the story. Moreover, with its characteristic scenes of loss, abuse, madness, death, and sexual excess set in a wild, “uncivilized” territory, *Antichrist* conveys a gothic tradition, which turns the familiar and known into the strange and uncanny. Indeed, what makes the film so truly disturbing is its primal, elemental aesthetic, represented in the rawness of the characters’ psyches and in the dreamlike atmosphere. However, despite the abundance of the “mythical” in *Antichrist*, what von Trier achieves is the banishment of any notion pertaining to the sublime romantic joining between man and the natural environment. Nature in *Antichrist* does not welcome, embrace, or even emotionally overwhelm in the romantic sense. It is instead an actively hostile and frequently murderous force.



Nature not only functions as an ominous setting in the film, but it also operates as an equally portentous extension of the transitional space of the therapeutic encounter between the two protagonists. Understood this way, the depiction of nature as an extension of transitional space suggests aspects of regression within the therapeutic encounter. As Ida Macalpine notes, “psychoanalytic technique creates an infantile setting, of which the neutrality of the analyst is but one feature among others” (205). To this infantile setting the patient – if he/she is analyzable – has to adapt, albeit by regression. In their aggregate, then, “these factors, which go to constitute this infantile setting, amount to a reduction of the patient’s world and denial of object relations in the analytic room” (205). For the Woman, the natural world contributes to the unreality engendered by the analytic situation and, as such, nature becomes a liminal space of transformation spurred on by regressive instincts. As Macalpine notes, the reality value of the analytic session “lies precisely in its unchanging unreality, and its unyielding passivity lies in the ‘activity’, influence which the analytic atmosphere exerts” (207-8). With this unexpected environment, the patient – if he/she has any adaptability – must come to terms, and he/she can only do so by regression.

The infantile setting of the therapeutic space, which becomes the forest of Eden, is first reflected in a therapeutic exercise He has her complete on the train ride to Eden. He asks Her to do a visualization exercise as if she is already in Eden, which can enact a link between both her previous and upcoming interactions with nature. The train they use for travel functions as a liminal part of their journey: they leave the domestic space so that they can enter the natural world. Yet in order for them to reach the woods, they must travel on a manmade machine, so this transition from civilization to nature is mediated through both modern technology (the train) and modern science (the husband’s psychotherapy). Once she closes her eyes, she imagines walking

across the bridge, and then, at her husband's suggestion, She visualizes lying down on the grass. He tells her, "I want you to melt into the green. Don't fight it. Just melt into the green" (*Antichrist*). Although she only "melts into the green," or communes with the impression of nature at her husband/therapist's behest, this scene prepares both She and the viewer for the dissolution of the barrier between nature and the human body once He and She arrive in Eden. Jane Bennett discusses this breakdown between the human and the nonhuman, claiming that they work together as actants, or "a source for action; an actant can be human or not, or, most likely, a combination of both" (9). This erasure of the strict boundary between human and nonhuman becomes more significant once they arrive in Eden, but Her psychic preparation allows her to be ready to blend in with both the environment and the misogynistic ideas she's realized in this environment. The grass is an entity that blends with her body until the two are indistinguishable. Symbolically, Her melting into the grass becomes representative of a return to the womb, only this womb is filled with fear, anger, and grief that're reflected in the natural world and the psychic state of Her mind. Not only that, but the positioning of Her body bears a striking resemblance to a corpse in a coffin, "as well as to medieval Christian figures of female saints in a pietistic gesture of complete surrender to the divine" (Zolkos 183). Both references illuminate this experience as proximate to dying (either as a transitional or unifying figuration of the body). This re-inscribes the feminine subject of the film through a relation of submission or capitulation to nature (wilderness) to the point of inseparability and indistinction from it. While this blending exercise appears to relax Her, her husband's treatment is often met with resistance. Even though she mentally aligns herself with nature at his request, she is the one who has been to Eden before, so her "cooperation" with bodies of nature does not necessarily depend on what he tells her to do.

As an actant, She has psychically opened herself up to nature and has reintroduced the mental state she seems to have experienced during her previous trip to Eden. This openness helps her to develop a sense of agency that she does not feel when under treatment in civilization, for she has become part of the natural assemblage, which allows her to acknowledge the unrestrained experiences of nature – both human and natural. The communication between Her and nature is exemplified but not encompassed by “melting into the green”; even this visually arresting scene is only a part of her thoughts. Rather, She creates a connection between her body and the environment by discovering the agency she can acquire by being in nature and divesting herself of her inhibitions. This regression allows her to feel an unencumbered sense of self, although it ironically entails becoming the “evil” woman that patriarchal history (which she misreads as nature) seems to intend. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz illustrates the agency of the individual body to assemble among things, stating that the body is “a series of linkages (or possibly activities) which form superficial or provisional connections with other objects and processes...always in conjunction and through linkages with other surfaces and planes” (116). By participating assemblages, She links herself to various objects and planes, such as the grass and her thesis, and destabilizes the boundary between idea and action, between human thought and environmental manifestation, as She acts on her “natural” evil by becoming increasingly open to violence and resistant to her husband’s treatment.

In chapter 3 (despair), von Trier aligns humanity and the transitional space of the natural world side by side in a dangerous re-inscription of a patriarchal endorsement of violence against women. This revelation occurs during a therapeutic role-play scene where He plays Nature (Her source of fear) while she plays herself. He as Nature claims that he wants to kill her. Not only does he assume that She fears death, but also he can express a wish for her death under the guise

of Nature. He even posits a riddle that shows the melting of boundaries: “I’m outside, but also within” (*Antichrist*). She does not understand until he pontificates that He means “human nature.” Consequently, she responds, “The kind of nature that causes people to do evil things against women” (*Antichrist*). He erases the boundary in his role as both Nature and Man, a figure that can encompass death from within an outside body. Here, the couple’s exchange suggests a gender-based conflict beyond themselves as they speak of men and women in general and the type of nature that promotes “evil”: misogyny.

Later, when they are having sex in bed in the cabin, She begs her husband to hit her, but He refuses, even when she claims that his refusal symbolizes a lack of love. They must fully integrate into the natural assemblage to achieve sexual satisfaction now that they have been exposed to the disturbing knowledge about humans and nonhumans in Eden. She leaves the quasi-domestic space of the cabin and masturbates while lying against a tree. Soon he joins here where they consummate their openness to all the grief, pain, and despair that Eden has to offer. In this scene, the naked female body remains hidden from the audience’s view behind the male. Then, as the camera recedes, a sudden transformation becomes apparent: the roots and branches change into arms in a hybrid and dynamic constitution of a human-dendrological form. As Magdalena Zolkos observes, “the connection between the arms and the roots is both metonymic and metaphoric – i.e., it invokes a primal relation of proximity (shared space) and a relation of resemblance (shared beginnings)” (181-2). It points to a within-ness or inside-ness of the human and the other-than-human in their mutual permeability. As Zolkos goes on to point out, at issue is an “experience of nature as something ‘within’, and not as something situated beyond our own corporeality” (182). The naked bodies of the couple and the naked arms/roots are cross-coded within the economy of alienation and abandonment. In spite of its representation of intimate

connectivity and permeability of bodily boundaries (in sexual penetration and in the hybrid incorporation of the human and dendrological forms), the scene also communicates a failed gesture of connection with another in the subject's desperate grasping, or holding on, or encountering another's body. Lorenzo Chiesa finds an ironic agency when the characters expose their bodies and their drives in the wilderness: "For a fleeting moment, she does become green, rendering her most intimate "within" – pure absence – undistinguishable from the 'whole greenery outside.' This is why he can finally hit her, penetrate her violently against his conscious will" (205). Recalling His command that She "melt into the green," She willingly accepts her status as naturally evil though He, in contrast, participates in the assemblage despite himself. This scene, therefore, actively reverses the evil of misogyny and foreshadows Her brutal acceptance of human nature.

By opening themselves to the transitional space of Eden, He and She perform increasingly violent acts against one another as if they have shed their civilized skins and become primordial beings. The "infantile space" of the therapeutic setting (understood, toward the latter half of the movie, as an extension of Eden's natural world) becomes atavistic in its violence and unmasked abjection. His and Her anonymity now does not reflect the isolation of their domestic space but rather identification with the primal, natural self. She attempts to rape him in the woodshed, but only after accusing him of waning to abandon her. Subsequently, she crushes his testicles with a log, rendering him unconscious as she masturbates him until he ejaculates blood. Afterward, she drills a hole in his leg while he is still unconscious and places a grindstone through it, ensuring both pain and – more significantly – limited mobility. What she does to her husband is not an isolated incident but instead part of the expression of becoming a primordial Woman, engaging in acceptance of her supposedly "evil" nature. Ironically, the only

way for her to imagine an ideal family is to injure and subdue her husband so that they both must depend on her. However, this violence suggests that she is perpetuating her own lie. Perhaps gynocide is not simply a lie but a marker of the atavistic assemblage so that she can justify acting on the ruthless, even fatal, expression of her human nature as a direct result of his therapeutic guidance.

## CHAPTER VII: CODA

“Psychoanalysis in the hands of the physician is what confession is in the hands of the Catholic priest. It depends on its user and its use, whether it becomes a beneficial tool or a two-edged sword.” – Ellen Jensen

My introduction opened with a quote from Harold Bloom concerning the “illusive relationship” between psychoanalytic thought and literature that speaks to an inherent tension between the two fields. This is a tension resides in the catalyst of transference, in their convergence through narrative and narrative and psychoanalytic scholarship. The epigraph above underscores the narrative implications of this “illusive relationship” as it relates to fictional representations of psychotherapy between analyst (often male) and patient (often female). Freud made a similar comparison but argued that “[i]n confession the sinner tells what he knows; in analysis the neurotic has to tell more” (qtd. in Berman 4). Despite the rhetorical positioning of authority, Freud’s remark intimates symbiosis between analyst and patient through, as my project argues, the workings of transference within fictions of psychotherapy. In the texts I examined, transference is a product of the transitional space created through the therapeutic encounter between patient and analyst. It’s through transference, and its modulation within the variously created transitional spaces in my chosen texts, that a metaphorical and continuous “mobius strip” is created – bridging my texts to each other and the project as a whole. This mobius strip, crafted out of each text’s narrative encounters with itself and with psychoanalysis, is, by its very nature of sharing psychoanalytic thought with literary representation, constitutive of a conduit and convergence point for narrative. In turn, this function of the mobius strip allows for intersectionality between the fields of literature and psychoanalysis – a move that shines light on what each has to offer without dimming the other’s contributions.

In a similar vein to Catholic confession, the problem of confidentiality exists even when the author of a psychoanalytic case study is the patient, and even within the therapeutic encounter itself. Just as the psychiatrist worries about preserving the patient's confidentiality, so too the patient feels obliged to respect the analyst's privacy and professional reputation. As such, both the analyst and patient must resort to fictional disguises, omissions, and evasions to protect the living protagonists and antagonists of the story. While these modulations may not directly correlate between case studies and fictional portrayals of psychotherapy, they do, however, suggest an open exchange between the two through the workings of narrative. The distinction between real and fictitious patients becomes tenuous, at best, when we also consider how, for example, von Trier, Jong, Roth, and, by extension, Fitzgerald draw from their own experiences with psychotherapy, experiences played out in the fictions they create. F. Scott Fitzgerald acquired the clinical material for *Tender is the Night* partly from his readings on psychiatry and partly from his marriage to Zelda, whose incurable schizophrenia and repeated hospitalizations served as the background material for Nicole Warren. But Fitzgerald's psychiatrist-hero, Dr. Dick Diver, also embodies the novelist's own fears of dissipation and loss of creativity. The celebrated Dr. Otto Spielvogel of *Portnoy's Complaint* is modeled on the psychoanalyst who treated Philip Roth for many years. Roth writes with clinical expertise few creative writers can equal and, while his feelings toward psychoanalysis are typically equivocal, the therapeutic setting has given rise to many of his finest stories. Similarly, Erica Jong based her character Isadora Wing on her own brief relationship with psychoanalysis – aptly transmuting these experiences onto the page. Regarding his writing and directing of *Antichrist*, Lars von Trier has spoken on numerous occasions about how his project was born from the throes of a deep depression. D.M. Thomas also figures prominently into any discussion of literary representations



of psychoanalysis, although he hasn't (to anyone's knowledge) undergone analysis himself. To that end, Thomas' *The White Hotel* is an astonishing recreation of the Freudian case study, a novel that at once reconstructs the historical Freud and transcends a purely psychological approach to human suffering. The patients presented in these narratives cross the bisection of reality and fiction with pseudonyms that distance them from preexistent personas. In narratives of psychotherapy reality becomes fiction in the same way that fiction becomes reality. By what means and in what ways, then, has psychotherapy been portrayed in literary texts? Its verbal character opens it to ready conversation into narrative. Its predominant genre is narration where the patient's perspective can most directly be explored, frequently in the first person. Issues of both a psychological and a literary nature come into play in narratives of psychotherapy – both of which are joined by the workings of transference within each field.

The talking cure remains enshrouded in mystery. "You cannot be present as an audience at a psychoanalytic treatment," Freud informs his audience of medical students in the *Introductory Lectures*; "You can only be told about it; and, in the strictest sense of the word, it is only by hearsay that you will get to know psychoanalysis" ("Parapraxis" 18). Yet hearsay is notoriously unreliable, as Freud well knew. Through the power of language, the storyteller succeeds in spinning his web, and Freud never underestimated the magical power of words to make one person blissfully happy and to drive another to despair. Both the psychoanalyst and storyteller succeed or fail through their language. Freud remained pessimistic, though, about the power of language alone to create conviction in the disinterested reader. In the *Wolf Man*, for example, he remarks on the regrettable fact that no written account of psychotherapy can create the conviction achieved through the actual experience of analysis. This, of course, creates a tautology. Why publish a case study if it cannot persuade the reader? The convert to

psychoanalysis requires no further proof, while the cynic remains unconvinced. Is Freud's admission merely a defense against failure or an accurate statement about the unique validation required for psychoanalytic belief?

The question brings us to the unconscious projective tendencies unleashed by psychoanalysis and the interactional nature of the patient-analyst relationship. Any account of the talking cure must include the phenomenon of transference, one of the most central but misunderstood issues in therapy. Freud insisted that the recognition of transference is what distinguishes psychoanalysis from other forms of psychotherapy. The patient sees the analyst, Freud writes in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, "the return, the reincarnation, of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers on to him feelings and reactions which undoubtedly applied to this prototype" (52). The psychic mechanism behind transference is projection, in which a perception, fear, or drive is denied and then displaced upon another person. Transference is usually ambivalent, consisting of positive (affectionate) or negative (hostile) feelings toward the analyst, who generally occupies the role of a parental surrogate. Freud learned from experience that transference is a factor of undreamed-of importance, a source of grave danger and an instrument of irreplaceable value. The patient has both a real and an unreal symbolic relationship to the analyst; the unreal relationship must be explored and traced back to its distant roots. The analyst in turn must guard against the tendency toward countertransference, which would hopelessly entrap the patient in the analyst's own confusion. Liberator and enslaver, healer and quack, the analyst serves as the object of intense ambivalence. Alternately worshipped and reviled, deified and damned, the analyst evokes simultaneously the artist's fascination and contempt. The difference between the therapist and the rapist is a matter of spacing.

The narrative implications of transference are far reaching. Both the analyst and the patient influence what is observed and felt. The observer's point of view always influences what is observed. The analyst's interpretation, for example, may be perceived as intrusive or aggressive and thus have undesirable consequences for the patient – such as the dissembling and belittlement in the case of Lisa from *The White Hotel*. And the most important moments in therapy may remain un verbalized or concealed in an ambiguous silence. Freud himself remained contradictory on the analyst's proper stance, and many of his metaphors seem profoundly misleading. In "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psycho-Analysis" (1912) he equates the analyst with the surgeon, "who puts aside all his feelings, even his human sympathy, and concentrates his mental forces on the single aim of performing the operation as skillfully as possible" (115). He then uses an even more impersonal analogy, comparing the analyst to a telephone receiver, converting sound waves into electric oscillations (115-16). Not only are these bad analogies, evoking a mechanistic image of the analyst, but Freud also returns to them in his writings, as if he could not stress too strongly the analyst's objectivity and detachment: "The doctor should be opaque to his patients and, like a mirror, should show them nothing but what is shown to him" (118). This is the same Freud whose discover of the unconscious projective mechanisms shattered the myth of human objectivity and its literary equivalent, the "ideal" reader. Of course, it's understandable, given historical context, why these pedagogical analogies would be stressed. But I'm not sure if Freud anticipated the far-ranging effect on the development of scholarship and fiction these same ideas would have today.

Transference undercuts the traditional distinction between the outer and inner world, objectivity and subjectivity. The external world can be seen only through the internal world, but this perception invariably alters the object in the mind's eye. Building upon the theory of British

psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, psychoanalytic literary critics have defined the text as a “potential space” or “transitional object” in which there is an active interplay between objectivity and subjectivity, the external world of objects and the internal world of readers. The interactional nature of the patient-analyst relationship is analogous in some ways to the reader’s reconstruction of the text in the literary process. The object is incorporated and transformed into a new creation consistent with the reader’s unique identity. The difference is that the therapeutic process involves a different act of reading: the patient attempts to read the analyst as if he/she were a text (“reading” his mind, “interpreting” his motives, “locating” his authorial point of view), just as the analyst is seeking to decipher the patient’s text.

Clearly it is the quality of the rapport between therapist and patient that is at stake. The congruence – and the success – of the match cannot, however, be determined primarily by the rather obvious traits such as patience, tolerance, and persistence of either the analyst or the patient. As in love or hate, the elusive chemistry of sometimes conflicting emotions is implicated in the formation and maintenance of a therapeutic relationship. It is precisely the intangibles and imponderables in the relationship that often drive patients from one therapist to another in an instinctive quest for optimal partnership. However, this is not the case in literatures of psychotherapy. In these texts, characters are not afforded such a luxury; rather, they are trapped by their own narratives (and their authors’).

Of course, we are always telling stories about ourselves. In telling these stories *to others* we may, for most purposes, be said to be performing straightforward narrative actions. In saying that we also tell them *to ourselves*, however, we are enclosing one story in another. This is the story that there is a self to tell something to, a someone else serving as audience. Additionally, we are forever telling stories about others. These others, too, may be viewed as figures or other

selves constituted by narrative actions. Other people are constructed in the telling of and about them; more exactly, we narrate others just as we narrate selves. The other person, like the self, is not something one has or encounters as such but an existence one tells. Consequently, telling 'others' about 'ourselves' is doubly narrative. Generally, these narratives focus neither on the past, plain and simple, nor on events currently taking place outside the psychoanalytic situation. They focus much more on the place and modification of these tales within the psychoanalytic dialogue. This psychoanalytic dialogue is characterized most of all by its organization in terms of the here and now of the psychoanalytic relationship. Like the reciprocity of literature, transference, far from being a time machine by which one may travel back to see what one has been made from, is a clarification of certain constituents of one's present psychoanalytic actions. This clarification is achieved not only through the circular and coordinated study of past and present, but also in the workings of a transitional space that generate transference actions and reactions. A space of reading.

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