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FROM THE TEXT-AS-SYMPOM TO THE CRITIC-AS-ANALYSAND: NEW APPROACHES IN PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM

Abstract: From the critic's analysis of the author to the text's analysis of the critic and from the psychoanalysis of literature to the literature of psychoanalysis, what this paper seeks to offer is a dynamic perspective on the ways in which psychoanalytic criticism expanded and developed novel ways of approaching the literary text. It looks to show how the psychoanalytic reading of literary texts has been perpetually repositioning and reconsidering itself, how the roles between the object and the subject of analysis have been reversed and how the function of interpretation has shifted from a tool of diagnosis to a complex relation between text and interpreter. The main changes in the field are explored in light of three key themes: the perspective on the unconscious in literary study, the roles of the instances involved in the analytical/critical praxis and the relation between literature and psychoanalysis. After reviewing the previous models of critical analysis and their shortcomings, the focus is then turned towards some of the newer developments in the field. The examples from various types of critical readings serve to illustrate, not only the openness of this interdisciplinary approach, but also the plurality which characterizes it.

Keywords: psychoanalytic criticism, analyst, analysand, interpretation, unconscious of reading, literature, psychoanalysis

Regardless of its form, whether archetypal or Lacanian, Freudian or post-Freudian, object-relationist or post-Lacanian, what soon becomes apparent is that psychoanalysis begins, ends and is constituted on one pivotal concept: that of *the unconscious*. Now moving from psychoanalysis to its application within literary criticism, the question which naturally ensues is: *whose* unconscious does, or should a psychoanalytic reading examine? Towards which critical instance should it turn: the author, the reader, the text or rather, towards the critical reading itself? Can the unconscious of the author yield meanings in relation to the literariness of the text? Can one speak of the unconscious of the text, of a textual unconscious? Is meaning ultimately forced upon the text as an unconscious projection of its reader? What is the relation between the critical reading and the combined “unconscious” of the author, the text and the reader-as-critic or the critic-as-reader? In other words, who or what ultimately constitutes the object of analysis for the psychoanalytic critic? This fundamental question has constituted *ab initio* a lingering dilemma at the heart of psychoanalytic criticism, a dilemma which continues to haunt the field, spurring endless debates and fuelling the adoption of countless theoretical stances. Different answers to this central question were provided along the history and the evolution of this interdisciplinary field, yet the question somehow perpetually returns and is ceaselessly readdressed, reformulated, re-brought into discussion. Through a brief overview of the history of psychoanalytic criticism one may thus distinguish the various ways in which the idea of the unconscious in literary study moved from, in a first phase, the unconscious of the author, to, in a second period, the textual unconscious and, in a third phase, to the unconscious of

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the reader. But surveying some of the more recent approaches in psychoanalytic criticism, one may perceive a fourth paradigmatic change taking place, in the form of the movement from the exclusive focus on either one of the critical instances to a more inclusive approach, under what may be called the turn towards “the unconscious of reading.” Therefore, it may be said that the purpose of this outline is to highlight, not only the drawbacks of some of the earlier phases of psychoanalytically-oriented literary criticism, but also to present some of the key modifications brought by newer perspectives on the topic.

The earliest critical-psychoanalytical approaches envisaged the critic as a duplicate of the analyst and the author as a substitute for the analysand. With the critic positioned as analyst and the author as analysand, the literary text cannot but become a symptom or a cluster of symptoms produced by the psychical configuration of its author. The interpretation, in this case, then functions as an investigative analytical tool: it traces the symptom/text back to an individual pathological root. Ultimately, the result of such types of critical inquiries centers on the *post factum* psychological diagnosis of the author. In other words, in its early phase, psychoanalytic criticism treats the author as a patient, his/her work as a symptom and the critical analysis thus functions as pathological diagnosis. Originally published in French in 1933 and translated in 1949 as *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Marie Bonaparte’s *Edgar Poe: étude psychanalytique* provides an illustration of this early, so-called “traditional orthodox-Freudian” model of psychoanalytic reading of literary works. Drawing an equivalence between the production of the work of art and the production of the night dream, Marie Bonaparte postulates that a work of art always reflects an “author’s ontogenetic complexes” (Bonaparte 102). The critic’s task, she believes, is to trace the text back to the “deep infantile source” which inspired it (Bonaparte 102). Otherwise said, what Bonaparte implies is that, in order to truly understand a writer such as Edgar Allan Poe, one must rummage through his biography equipped with the essential tool of psychoanalysis. Consequently, what emerges from Bonaparte’s study is an Edgar Allan Poe diagnosed with various pathologies from impotence to necrophilia.

As would be expected, however, this early phase of psychoanalytic criticism is also the one which received the most ample criticism. Milena Kirova, for instance, describes it as an essentially “imperialistic attitude” which transforms literature into “nothing more than just another colony of the psychoanalytic empire” (Kirova 462). The meeting ground between psychoanalysis and literature, she argues, becomes the site of an Oedipal drama, with psychoanalysis assuming the role of the “paternal authority” and literature playing its part as the “Oedipal child” (Kirova 463). Through this critic-as-analyst/author-as-analysand positioning, psychoanalysis basically asserts itself over literature. It invests the figure of the critic with a psychoanalytic insight which is directed at the psychical malfunctioning of the author by which the literary text-as-symptom has been produced.

With the change fuelled by the structuralists and the dissolution of the author, the bond between author and work dissolves and the literary text, the former “oedipal child,” is eventually granted autonomy. In what can be hereby designated as a secondary phase of psychoanalytical criticism, a positional conversion becomes apparent: mainly, the transformation of the text-as-symptom into the text-as-analysand. That is to say, the literary work is placed “on the analytical couch” in lieu of the author. With the reader still unacknowledged and the author done away with, the critic-as-analyst brings the force of psychoanalytic insight to bear entirely and exclusively onto the text. Repudiating the previous model of author-directed Freudianism, the “textoanalysts,” to use Jean Bellemin-Noel’s term, transmute the unconscious of the author onto a presupposed unconscious of the text, the secrets of which the interpretative endeavor sets out to discover. If, in the first phase, the interpretation/analysis functions as an instrument of diagnosis, in the second phase of psychoanalytic criticism, the analysis becomes a de-puzzlement tool which embarks on a quest to reveal to text’s hidden secrets. For instance, unlike Marie Bonaparte who seeks to find the author by examining the work, Jacques Lacan investigates the text so that he may find its “key”; a hidden key which would lead, not to Poe’s personal unconscious, but back to psychoanalytic theory, to the confirmation of its “truth.” Thus, the secrets of the text which the critic/analyst seeks to uncover are circumscribed within this area of the confirmation of psychoanalytic

formulations. In his *Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"*, originally published as *Le séminaire sur "La lettre volée"* in 1966, Jacques Lacan places Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* within the theoretical framework of Freud's "repetition automatism." It is within this framework that he sets out to demonstrate how the story illustrates the "decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier" (Lacan, *Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"* 40). In his critique of Lacan's Seminar, Jacques Derrida, however, remarks that, because it operates under the form of "applied psychoanalysis," the Lacanian analysis of Poe still favors psychoanalysis over literature, ascribing to the latter a mere "illustrative position" (Derrida 136). In Lacan, literature is not viewed as a truth in itself, but it is used to illustrate the "truth" of psychoanalysis: it is truth, not fiction, that is "the master of the house" for Lacan (Derrida 137). What Derrida implies is that Lacan fashions himself as the "postman" (*le facteur*) who carries the truth of *The Purloined Letter*.

But despite this slight variation at the level of the analysand, in both of these phases of psychoanalytic criticism, the critic/reader-as-analyst identification remains an invariable constituent of the interpretative process. Therefore, up to a certain point, the praxis of psychoanalytic criticism included, almost as a *conditio sine qua non*, the basic assumption that a text should be approached by the critic from a position equivalent to the one of the analyst: where the text said, the critic/analyst interpreted; where the text symbolized, the critic/analyst deciphered. The text was the analyzable object, the critic: the analyzing subject. The analyst solved the analysand's problems through analysis; the critic solved the text's ambiguities through interpretation. Both analyst and critic therefore operated as mirror-images of each other. Directed exclusively towards the text, or towards the equivalent of the analysand's discourse, this approach nonetheless failed to take into account what happened on the meeting ground between the text and its reader, between the critic and the work. The analysis or interpretation followed a unidirectional movement: from the critic-as-analyst to the text-as-analysand.

By contrast, in the last decades, more and more critics became interested in the two-way exchange between the instances of the critical-analytical process. A fresh approach was required; an approach that could formulate a comprehensive model of the dynamics operating in the relations between the instances of the critical endeavor. The discontent with both author-(psycho)analysis and text-(psycho)analysis prepared the ground for a new paradigmatic shift in critical-psychoanalytic theory. But what does this new repositioning bring? How does it change the scope of the critical reading? In this more recent phase, the immutability on the *critic-as-analyst* position gradually shifts to the point of a complete role reversal within the analytic/critical dyad. Under which circumstances can the critic/reader be viewed as the analysand and the literary work as the analyst? Does the critical interpretation contain the text or does the text contain the interpretation? Through the self-analytical function triggered by literature, is the critic not, simultaneously, both analyst and analysand? These fundamental questions articulated a new field of inquiry which transferred the scope of analysis from how the critic works on the text to how the text works on the critic; from how the text-as-analysand is structured to how the text-as-analyst structures the critic/reader-as-analysand. Drawn closer to the foreground is the act of analysis itself, the process of reading/interpretation, and the ways in which it affects and transforms both the work and the one who approaches it.

The fixed roles designated by earlier psychoanalytic critics, in this new phase, thus become more elastic, more interchangeable, while the effects of the analysis and the critical reading acquire new dimensions. The discovery of this particular flexibility characterizing the key elements of the psychoanalytic process and the critical reading constitutes the hallmark of the new paradigm in psychoanalytic criticism. As previously mentioned, it is no longer the critic/analyst's investigation of the text/analysand which preoccupies theoreticians, but the two-way interaction between them and especially the transferable quality of these positions. Both text and critic, in this new perspective on the psychoanalytic approach to the literary text, can therefore simultaneously split themselves into double and opposite roles, that of analyst and analysand, and fulfill them both at the same time. This paradigmatic change also opens up new questions on the nature and possibilities of the space of interaction formed

between the analyst and the analysand or between the reader and the text. The emphasis thus shifts from unidirectionality (critic/analyst to text as analysand, or critic/analyst to author as patient) to mutuality or how both the unconscious of the critic and that pertaining to the text interact, how they feed off each other, how they transform each other. Interestingly enough, one may find this new emphasis on the dynamics of the relation between analysis and analysand also present in the newer psychoanalytic theories on the subjects of transference and countertransference.

Yet with the newly discovered flexibility in the position of the critic, another simultaneous role reversal takes place: literature moves to the position of subject, while psychoanalysis takes the role of object. Shoshana Felman, for instance, argues that literature was “submitted to the authority, to the prestige of psychoanalysis” and what should have been a relationship of “coordination” between the two became, instead, one of “subordination” (Felman, “To Open the Question” 5). Psychoanalysis had been brought into the field of literature as “body of knowledge” whose role was to examine literature which acted as the “body of language,” from the position of the expert. Literature therefore became the *object* to be examined, analyzed and investigated, whereas psychoanalysis took on the role of the *subject* or the one performing the analysis (Felman, “To Open the Question” 5). Viewed in this context, the change in perspective on the position of the analyst in relation to the analysand can be considered as being part of a larger effort concentrated on reinstating equilibrium between psychoanalysis and literature. If the text, which until now had been cast into the role of analysand, could also act as analyst, this would imply that there could be a freedom of movement in the interchange between text and psychoanalytic insight. This means that the positions of *literature-as-object*, *psychoanalysis-as-subject* could be reversed to obtain newer perspectives on the analyst to analysand interaction. The text is no longer seen as something contained by or in the psychoanalytic formulation, but as having the power to encompass it within itself.

In other words, the change of focus is not only from the text to the reader or the reading, but from a psychoanalytic insight into literary works to a literary insight into psychoanalysis. The literature-psychoanalysis relationship, in this new view, is a mutually enlightening one. It brings the possibility of exploring, not only the psychoanalysis of literature, but the literariness of psychoanalysis. What are some of the more recent models of psychoanalytic reading? Norman Holland’s approach, for instance, completely reverses the critic-as-analyst, text or author-as-analysand premise of earlier readings of Poe. In Holland, it is the text which becomes the analyst. The critic becomes his/her own analysand. If Marie Bonaparte saw in *The Purloined Letter* Poe’s unconscious infantile sources and Jacques Lacan treated it as an illustration of psychoanalytic theory, Holland, on the other hand, recognizes in Poe’s story his own unconscious associations. To him, the text hides, not the author’s unconscious or the text’s secrets, but his own unconscious and his own secrets. Under the name “transactive criticism,” Norman Holland proposes a model of psychoanalytic criticism in which the reading acts similarly to a therapeutic act, in that it reveals one’s own secrets. Reading psychoanalytically becomes a form of “criticism in which the critic works explicitly from his transaction of the text” (Holland 316-317). In *Re-covering “The Purloined Letter”: Reading as Personal Transaction*, Norman Holland aims to recover the text from both the Bonapartian façade of objectivity and the Lacanian rigid intellectualization.

In other recent models of psychoanalytic criticism, the scope of the reading is not turned exclusively towards the critic-as-reader, but towards the dynamic workings of a reading as a space of interrelatedness between the unconscious behind the text and the unconscious of the reader. At the same time, many new critics turned to the concept of transference, envisaging both the intra-textual and extra-textual relationship as essentially transferential. Discarding previous narratological models, Peter Brooks is interested, not necessarily in the narrative conventions which describe the text, but in what makes the reader want the text, in “the play of desire in time that makes us turn pages and strive toward narrative ends” (Brooks XIII). Combining the Barthian “passion of (for) meaning” and Lacan’s “desire of the analyst” he focuses on what he calls “the desire of the narrative,” including here both the “narrative’s desire” and the “desire for the narrative” (Brooks 48). The concept of desire is used here in its Lacanian sense: something born out of the gap between need and demand which is essentially unsatisfiable because

the very structure of the linguistic sign, “through the bar of repression” separating the signifier from the signified, prevents it from being articulated in language (Brooks 55-56). The narrative text is thus viewed as the locus of desire, but desire also inhabits the reader. Therefore, the process of reading may be viewed in the way that Lacan describes the relation of transference, that is, as a relation of desire to desire (Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 235).

Brooks conceives the text as a “fictional” “as-if medium” corresponding to the “artificial illness” which articulates “the investments of desire on the part of both addresser and addressee, author and reader” (Brooks 235). This fictional medium thus becomes a “place of rhetorical exchange or transaction” which comes together in “the desire of the narrative” (Brooks 235). The “desire of the text” ultimately capitalizes both on the need to tell or to recount and on the desire to read or listen. The concept of “textual energetics” envisages the text as the site of an interplay of dynamic forces which are “ultimately images of desire and correspond to the arousals, expectations, doubts, suspense, reversals, revaluations, disappointments, embarrassments, fulfillments and even incoherences.” (Brooks 123).

Shoshana Felman provides another new model of psychoanalytic reading. What she proposes is the reading of a text alongside its readings, that is, a double reading. Applying this approach to Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*, Felman’s analysis reveals how the text re-articulates and reenacts itself in the rhetoric of the critical debates surrounding it. “Turning the Screw of Interpretation” endeavors to articulate a theory of reading-as-transference and transference as a reading-effect. The aim of such a theory would be, in the end, a reflection “not only on what psychoanalytical theory has to say about the literary text, but also on what literature has to say about psychoanalysis” (Felman, “Turning the Screw” 102). Felman starts her premise by examining two sequential reactions to Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw*: the first refers to the reception of the text itself, while the second takes into account the critical response to Edmund Wilson’s first psychoanalytical interpretation of the text. Both the Jamesian story and its psychoanalytic interpretation were met with successive waves of indignation. The first “Freudian” reading of James’ *The Turn of the Screw* postulated that the text was, not a ghost story, but a story of madness brought by repressed sexual desire (Felman, “Turning the Screw” 97).

Yet, when Felman closely examines the rhetoric of the critical debate, she finds that the critics’ interpretative discourse actually repeats the lexical motifs of the text. Like a “ghost effect,” all the key motifs of the story (such as the motif of averted danger or violent aggression) find themselves reiterated in the language of the critical debate (Felman, “Turning the Screw” 98). “Whichever way the reader turns,” Felman says, “he can but be turned by the text, he can but *perform* it by *repeating* it” (“Turning the Screw” 101). The typical roles of critic-as-analyst, text-as-analyst are therefore hereby reversed. For Felman “it is not so much the critic who comprehends the text, as the text who comprehends the critic” (“Turning the Screw” 115). The text anticipates and incorporates its critical reception and finally, what is analyzed is not the story, but the critic. This constitutes another way by which the critical-analytical instances are reversed: the subject supposed to know is no longer the critic, but the text. The authority of presumed knowledge does not reside in the interpretation, but it is inscribed in the story, in the narrative. Reading, in Felman’s view, implies, however, a repetition, a “performative enactment,” not of the meaning of the text, but of its rhetoric (*Writing and Madness* 31). What she is interested in is “the occurrences of transference in both the text, and its critical readings” (Felman, *Writing and Madness* 30). That is to say, the object of analytical inquiry, in this case, is a bi-focal one, encompassing both *transference-as-reading* (transference as a reading-effect) and *transference-in-reading*. The critical scope is thus positioned both in the text, as well as on the border between the text and its analyzer.

Coining the concept of “listening” in literary criticism, Jean Bellemin-Noel pictures the reading process as similar to the psychoanalytic cure. “Listening” is viewed in this case as an activity which encompasses three uses: listening actively (to the text), listening passively (being listened to by the text) and a third dimension, listening “pronominally,” which involves listening to ourselves in the text (Bellemin-Noel, para. 11). The purpose of this “listening” is to uncover the “unconscious effect” of the text or that imperceptible discourse which, though present from the start of the reading, may be

nonetheless overlooked in a normal reading. For Bellemin-Noel reading is an “autotransference” formed between listening to the text and making it speak, while the literary text constitutes “the place of encounter or the exchange of two autotransferential mycosystems” (Bellemin-Noel, para. 17).

Pierre Bayard offers perhaps one of the most thought-provoking recent perspectives on the scope of psychoanalytic criticism. If the early psychoanalytic critics were concerned with what the author meant, or rather, with what the author meant without his/her being aware of meaning it, and the “textanalysts” asked what the text meant besides what it appeared to mean, Pierre Bayard asks instead “what is it in a text that incites meaning?” Like Felman or Kirova, Bayard is aware that the model of “applied psychoanalysis” more often than not “places knowledge on the side of psychoanalysis and not on the side of literature” (Bayard, para.3). Exploring the possibility of reversing this issue, he operates within a space of potentiality and interrogation. When Bayard asks “is it possible to apply literature to psychoanalysis?” he sets out, not so much as to devise a new method, but to explore what happens when the old one is turned upon its head. Having seen what psychoanalysis has to offer literature, what does literature, on the other hand, have to offer psychoanalysis? Or what does literature teach us about psychoanalysis?

These are some of the questions which frame Bayard’s paradoxical notion of “applied literature.” Yet, supposing it would indeed be a possibility, how would one go about applying literature to psychoanalysis? First, suggests Bayard, one would have to change the way we see literary texts in what he terms as the “refusal of hermeneutics” (Bayard, para.6). By “hermeneutic reading” he refers to those readings which posit that a text is composed of surface and deeper meaning, the latter also being the “true” meaning of a text. The critic must thus reconstruct, rediscover and retrieve the “truth” of the text. Relying on Freud’s theory of the dream, psychoanalytic criticism remained in the same hermeneutic framework, replacing the idea of “surface” and “depth” with that of a “conscious” and a “latent” meaning. Hermeneutic interpretations believe in a single, unified meaning that is “already present or inscribed as if waiting for the act of reading which can hope to rediscover it” (Bayard, para.8). The language usually employed in such interpretations is that of discovering a secret, or better said, of finding the secret text within the text. Bayard’s problem with the model of hermeneutic readings is not so much what it does, but what it claims to do. That is, what bothers him is “a certain tonality of enunciation,” an air of certainty which “risks leading to the confidence of having reached the truth of a text” (Bayard, para.13). The hermeneutic view of the text implies that the reader’s unconscious is something which steers him away from reaching the “truth” of the text. But it is this very detour, or “the intervention of the reading subject,” as he calls it, that Bayard is especially interested in.

Instead of the hermeneutic model (a model deeply embedded not only in how we see a text, but the language we use to speak about it), Bayard proposes the notion of “undecidability” or “plural reading.” A “plural reading” does not concern itself with whether an interpretation is true or not because it views the text as calling, not for a single meaning, but for “an interminable plurality of meanings” (Bayard, para.15). In other words, the question which a plural reading asks is not “what the text means,” but “what is it in a text which *incites* meanings(s)?” For Bayard, the text encapsulates, not one, but a “multiplicity of possible meanings.” Yet this multiplicity, he says, “most often remains prisoner of a privileged orientation of interpretation” (Bayard, para.18). Different interpretations, even or especially contradictory ones attest to the “productivity” and “real plurality” of the text. Bayard’s notion of “plural reading” may be connected to Felman’s earlier notion of the “double reading,” that is, a reading of the text alongside the reading of its readings.

For psychoanalytic criticism, Pierre Bayard’s “applied literature” implies a break with the dream model and the therapy model, as well as a repositioning of literature *vis à vis* theory. This means showing how literature, at the same time, both submits to and resists theory. Thus, literature applied to psychoanalysis, in Bayard’s view, does not contend itself with pointing out the multiplicity of meanings incited by the text, but is also interested in how the text, while provoking, also resist these meanings:

...every approach of applied literature is autoreferential, simultaneously a reflection on a work, and also a reflection on the difficulties or the impossibility of understanding it, on the particular resistance that it offers to psychoanalysis and that gives it its whole singularity. (Bayard, para. 27)

The ultimate seducer, the ultimate tease, literature beckons theory, without ever fully yielding to it. It thus both suits and evades it. Even if it may contain various degrees of “theorization,” says Bayard, literature will never be, “by itself, a theory.” And it is this precisely this ability “to surprise and unravel itself” which provokes the plurality of interpretation.

To apply literature to psychoanalysis, says Bayard, one would have to put literature in the position of “instructing psychoanalysis.” This means exploring what literature has to teach psychoanalysis by returning to what he calls a certain “original Freudian practice” (Bayard, para.21). When Freud developed psychoanalytic theory he repeatedly turned to literature. Literature served not only as illustration for the theory, but as inspiration for what he would develop as theory. At the same time, Bayard is aware that, for the modern reader, recreating the “original Freudian practice” is impossible because psychoanalysis has already been invented. Instead, he proposes an exploration of the literary text’s relation to psychoanalysis considering its chronological position to it: texts preceding psychoanalysis, texts contemporary with psychoanalysis and texts written after psychoanalysis. Ultimately, the idea is to see how literature may expand our knowledge of the human psyche.

What this outline of some of the new directions in psychoanalytic criticism shows is how its scope enlarges to accommodate for the prospect of the analyzer becoming the analyzed, or the analyst becoming the analysand. This can be materialized and envisaged either through the text which, by containing its own criticism, can be transformed from object to subject, or through the self-analytical function triggered by the literary work. These current developments have also modified the perspective on the nature and function of the interpretative process. In its early phase, author-oriented psychoanalytic criticism produced an understanding of interpretation as a tool of diagnosis, whereas the orientation towards the text converted it into an instrument of de-puzzlement or a sort of textual riddle-solver. More recently however, interpretation is no longer a tool or an instrument, but a relation: a relation to the other and to oneself though the other. In this view, the critic intervenes in the text and the text intervenes in the critic. Interpretation thus becomes a mutually-transformative encounter. Finally, it may be said that what such new models offer, in the analysis of literary works, is the possibility of a double focus: a perspective both on the text and its reading. It constitutes a way of positioning the interpretation so that it encompasses, in its scope, both what happens in literature and in our relation to literature. Through this approach, the critical endeavor aims to do justice both to the text and to the experience of the text. The text is no longer an object, but it becomes, simultaneously, the experience of that object; it becomes an “other” in which the critic/reader identifies his/her own irrevocable “I-ness.”

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