

TERRY EAGLETON

---



# LITERARY THEORY

AN INTRODUCTION

---

SECOND EDITION

---

Literary Theory  
*An Introduction*

SECOND EDITION

Terry Eagleton  
*St Catherine's College*  
*Oxford*

Blackwell  
Publishing

© 1983,1996 by Terry Eagleton

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING  
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA  
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK  
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Terry Eagleton to be identified as the Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 1983  
Second edition 1996  
10 2005

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Eagleton, Terry, 1943-

Literary Theory: an introduction / Terry Eagleton - 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-631-20188-2 (pbk: alk. paper)

1. Criticism-History-20th Century. 2. Literature-History and criticism- Theory, etc. I.Title

PN94.E2 1996

96-4572

801'.95'0904-dc20

CIP

ISBN-13:978-0-631-20188-5(pbk: alk. paper)

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10.5 on 12.5 pt Ehrhardt  
by Best-set Typesetter Ltd, Hong Kong  
Printed and bound in India  
by Replika Press Pvt Ltd, Kundli

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on  
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:  
[www.blackwellpublishing.com](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com)

---

# *Contents*

---

Preface to the Second Edition	vii
Preface	ix
Introduction: What is Literature?	1
1 The Rise of English	15
2 Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory	47
3 Structuralism and Semiotics	79
4 Post-Structuralism	110
5 Psychoanalysis	131
Conclusion: Political Criticism	169
Afterword	190
Notes	209
Bibliography	217
Index	224

---

# 5

## *Psychoanalysis*

---

In the previous few chapters I have suggested a relationship between developments in modern literary theory and the political and ideological turmoil of the twentieth century. But such turmoil is never only a matter of wars, economic slumps and revolutions: it is also experienced by those caught up in it in the most intimately personal ways. It is a crisis of human relationships, and of the human personality, as well as a social convulsion. This is not of course to argue that anxiety, fear of persecution and the fragmentation of the self are experiences peculiar to the era from Matthew Arnold to Paul de Man: they can be found throughout recorded history. What *is* perhaps significant is that in this period such experiences become constituted in a new way as a systematic field of knowledge. That field of knowledge is known as psychoanalysis, developed by Sigmund Freud in late nineteenth-century Vienna; and it is Freud's doctrines that I now want briefly to summarize.

'The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one.' It was Freud, not Karl Marx, who made this statement, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. What has dominated human history to date is the need to labour; and for Freud that harsh necessity means that we must repress some of our tendencies to pleasure and gratification. If we were not called upon to work in order to survive, we might simply lie around all day doing nothing. Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle', but for some of us, and arguably for whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill. We are sometimes willing to forgo gratification to an heroic extent, but usually in the canny trust that by deferring an immediate pleasure we will

recoup it in the end, perhaps in richer form. We are prepared to put up with repression as long as we see that there is something in it for us; if too much is demanded of us, however, we are likely to fall sick. This form of sickness is known as neurosis; and since, as I have said, all human beings must be repressed to some degree, it is possible to speak of the human race, in the words of one of Freud's commentators, as the 'neurotic animal'. It is important to see that such neurosis is involved with what is creative about us as a race, as well as with the causes of our unhappiness. One way in which we cope with desires we cannot fulfil is by 'sublimating' them, by which Freud means directing them towards a more socially valued end. We might find an unconscious outlet for sexual frustration in building bridges or cathedrals. For Freud, it is by virtue of such sublimation that civilization itself comes about: by switching and harnessing our instincts to these higher goals, cultural history itself is created.

If Marx looked at the consequences of our need to labour in terms of the social relations, social classes and forms of politics which it entailed, Freud looks at its implications for the psychological life. The paradox or contradiction on which his work rests is that we come to be what we are only by a massive repression of the elements which have gone into our making. We are not of course conscious of this, any more than for Marx men and women are generally conscious of the social processes which determine their lives. Indeed we could not be by definition conscious of this fact, since the place to which we relegate the desires we are unable to fulfil is known as the unconscious. One question which immediately arises, however, is why it is human beings who should be the neurotic animal, rather than snails or tortoises. It is possible that this is merely a Romantic idealization of such creatures and that they are secretly a good deal more neurotic than we think; but they seem well-adjusted enough to an outsider, even though there may be one or two cases of hysterical paralysis on record.

One feature which distinguishes human beings from the other animals is that for evolutionary reasons we are born almost entirely helpless and are wholly reliant for our survival on the care of the more mature members of the species, usually our parents. We are all born 'prematurely'. Without such immediate, unceasing care we would die very quickly. This unusually prolonged dependence on our parents is first of all a purely material matter, a question of being fed and kept from harm: it is a matter of the satisfaction of what may be called our 'instincts', by which is meant the biologically fixed needs human beings have for nourishment, warmth and so on. (Such self-preservative instincts are, as we shall see, a good deal more immutable than 'drives', which very often alter their nature.) But our dependence on our

parents for these services does not stop at the biological. The small baby will suck its mother's breast for milk, but will discover in doing so that this biologically essential activity is also pleasurable; and this, for Freud, is the first dawning of sexuality. The baby's mouth becomes not only an organ of its physical survival but an 'erotogenic zone', which the child might reactivate a few years later by sucking its thumb, and a few years later than that by kissing. The relation to the mother has taken on anew, libidinal dimension: sexuality has been born, as a kind of drive which was at first inseparable from biological instinct but which has now separated itself out from it and attained a certain autonomy. Sexuality for Freud is itself a 'perversion' a 'swerving away' of a natural self-preservative instinct towards another goal.

As the infant grows, other erotogenic zones come into play. The oral stage, as Freud calls it, is the first phase of sexual life, and is associated with the drive to incorporate objects. In the anal stage, the anus becomes an erotogenic zone, and with the child's pleasure in defecation a new contrast between activity and passivity, unknown in the oral stage, comes to light. The anal stage is sadistic, in that the child derives erotic pleasure from expulsion and destruction; but it is also connected with the desire for retention and possessive control, as the child learns a new form of mastery and a manipulation of the wishes of others through the 'granting' or withholding of the faeces. The ensuing 'phallic' stage begins to focus the child's libido (or sexual drive) on the genitals, but is called 'phallic' rather than 'genital' because according to Freud only the male organ is recognized at this point. The little girl in Freud's view has to be content with the clitoris, the 'equivalent' of the penis, rather than with the vagina.

What is happening in this process - though the stages overlap, and should not be seen as a strict sequence - is a gradual organization of the libidinal drives, but one still centred on the child's own body. The drives themselves are extremely flexible, in no sense fixed like biological instinct: their objects are contingent and replaceable, and one sexual drive can substitute itself for another. What we can imagine in the early years of the child's life, then, is not a unified subject confronting and desiring a stable object, but a complex shifting field of force in which the subject (the child itself) is caught up and dispersed, in which it has as yet no centre of identity and in which the boundaries between itself and the external world are indeterminate. Within this field of libidinal force, objects and part-objects emerge and disappear again, shift places kaleidoscopically, and prominent among such objects is the child's body as the play of drives laps across it. One can speak of this also as an 'auto-eroticism', within which Freud sometimes includes the whole of infantile sexuality: the child takes erotic delight in its own body, but without

as yet being able to view its body as a complete object. Auto-eroticism must thus be distinguished from what Freud will call 'narcissism', a state in which one's body or ego as a whole is 'cathected', or taken as an object of desire.

It is clear that the child in this state is not even prospectively a citizen who could be relied upon to do a hard day's work. It is anarchic, sadistic, aggressive, self-involved and remorselessly pleasure-seeking, under the sway of what Freud calls the pleasure principle; nor does it have any respect for differences of gender. It is not yet what we might call a 'gendered subject': it surges with sexual drives, but this libidinal energy recognizes no distinction between masculine and feminine. If the child is to succeed in life at all, it obviously has to be taken in hand; and the mechanism by which this happens is what Freud famously terms the Oedipus complex. The child who emerges from the pre-Oedipal stages we have been following is not only anarchic and sadistic but incestuous to boot: the boy's close involvement with his mother's body leads him to an unconscious desire for sexual union with her, whereas the girl, who has been similarly bound up with the mother and whose first desire is therefore always homosexual, begins to turn her libido towards the father. The early 'dyadic' or two-term relationship between infant and mother, that is to say, has now opened up into a triangle consisting of child and both parents; and for the child, the parent of the same sex will come to figure as a rival in its affections for the parent of the opposite sex.

What persuades the boy-child to abandon his incestuous desire for the mother is the father's threat of castration. This threat need not necessarily be spoken; but the boy, in perceiving that the girl is herself 'castrated', begins to imagine this as a punishment which might be visited upon himself. He thus represses his incestuous desire in anxious resignation, adjusts himself to the 'reality principle', submits to the father, detaches himself from the mother, and comforts himself with the unconscious consolation that though he cannot *now* hope to oust his father and possess his mother, his father symbolizes a place, a possibility, which he himself will be able to take up and realize in the future. If he is not a patriarch now, he will be later. The boy makes peace with his father, identifies with him, and is thus introduced into the symbolic role of manhood. He has become a gendered subject, surmounting his Oedipus complex; but in doing so he has, so to speak, driven his forbidden desire underground, repressed it into the place we call the unconscious. This is not a place that was ready and waiting to receive such a desire: it is produced, opened up, by this act of primary repression. As a man in the making, the boy will now grow up within those images and

practices which his society happens to define as 'masculine'. He will one day become a father himself, thus sustaining this society by contributing to the business of sexual reproduction. His earlier diffuse libido has become organized through the Oedipus complex in a way which centres it upon genital sexuality. If the boy is unable successfully to overcome the Oedipus complex, he may be sexually incapacitated for such a role: he may privilege the image of his mother above all other women, which for Freud may lead to homosexuality; or the recognition that women are 'castrated' may have traumatized him so deeply that he is unable to enjoy satisfying sexual relationships with them.

The story of the little girl's passage through the Oedipus complex is a good deal less straightforward. It should be said right away that Freud was nowhere more typical of his own male-dominated society than in his bafflement in the face of female sexuality — the 'dark continent', as he once called it. We shall have occasion to comment later on the demeaning, prejudiced attitudes towards women which disfigure his work, and his account of the girl's process of oedipalization is by no means easily separable from this sexism. The little girl, perceiving that she is inferior because 'castrated', turns in disillusionment from her similarly 'castrated' mother to the project of seducing her father; but since this project is doomed, she must finally turn back reluctantly to the mother, effect an identification with her, assume her feminine gender role, and unconsciously substitute for the penis which she envies but can never possess a baby, which she desires to receive from the father. There is no obvious reason why the girl should abandon this desire, since being 'castrated' already she cannot be threatened with castration; and it is therefore difficult to see by what mechanism her Oedipus complex is dissolved. 'Castration', far from prohibiting her incestuous desire as with the boy, is what makes it possible in the first place. Moreover the girl, to enter into the Oedipus complex, must change her 'love-object' from mother to father, whereas the boy has merely to carry on loving the mother; and since a change of love-objects is a more complex, difficult affair, this too raises a problem about female oedipalization.

Before leaving the question of the Oedipus complex, its utter centrality to Freud's work should be emphasized. It is not just another complex: it is the structure of relations by which we come to be the men and women that we are. It is the point at which we are produced and constituted as subjects; and one problem for us is that it is always in some sense a partial, defective mechanism. It signals the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle; from the enclosure of the family to society at large, since we turn from incest to extra-familial relations; and from Nature to Culture, since we

can see the infant's relation to the mother as somehow 'natural', and the post-Oedipal child as one who is in the process of assuming a position within the cultural order as a whole. (To see the mother-child relationship as 'natural', however, is in one sense highly dubious: it does not matter in the least to the infant who the provider actually is.) Moreover, the Oedipus complex is for Freud the beginnings of morality, conscience, law and all forms of social and religious authority. The father's real or imagined prohibition of incest is symbolic of all the higher authority to be later encountered; and in 'introjecting' (making its own) this patriarchal law, the child begins to form what Freud calls its 'superego', the awesome, punitive voice of conscience within it.

All, then, would now seem in place for gender roles to be reinforced, satisfactions to be postponed, authority to be accepted and the family and society to be reproduced. But we have forgotten about the unruly, insubordinate unconscious. The child has now developed an ego or individual identity, a particular place in the sexual, familial and social networks; but it can do this only by, so to speak, splitting off its guilty desires, repressing them into the unconscious. The human subject who emerges from the Oedipal process is a *split* subject, torn precariously between conscious and unconscious; and the unconscious can always return to plague it. In popular English speech, the word 'subconscious' rather than 'unconscious' is often used; but this is to underestimate the radical *otherness* of the unconscious, imagining it as a place just within reach below the surface. It underestimates the extreme strangeness of the unconscious, which is a place and a non-place, which is completely indifferent to reality, which knows no logic or negation or causality or contradiction, wholly given over as it is to the instinctual play of the drives and the search for pleasure.

The 'royal road' to the unconscious is dreams. Dreams allow us one of our few privileged glimpses of it at work. Dreams for Freud are essentially symbolic fulfilments of unconscious wishes; and they are cast in symbolic form because if this material were expressed directly then it might be shocking and disturbing enough to wake us up. In order that we should get some sleep, the unconscious charitably conceals, softens and distorts its meanings, so that our dreams become symbolic texts which need to be deciphered. The watchful ego is still at work even within our dreaming, censoring an image here or scrambling a message there; and the unconscious itself adds to this obscurity by its peculiar modes of functioning. With the economy of the indolent, it will condense together a whole set of images into a single 'statement'; or it will 'displace' the meaning of one object on to another somehow associated with it, so that in my dream I am venting on a

crab an aggression I feel towards somebody with that surname. This constant condensation and displacement of meaning corresponds to what Roman Jakobson identified as the two primary operations of human language: metaphor (condensing meanings together), and metonymy (displacing one on to another). It was this which moved the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan to comment that 'the unconscious is structured like a language'. Dream-texts are also cryptic because the unconscious is rather poor in techniques for representing what it has to say, being largely confined to visual images, and so must often craftily translate a verbal significance into a visual one: it might seize upon the image of a tennis *racketto* make a point about some shady dealing. At any rate, dreams are enough to demonstrate that the unconscious has the admirable resourcefulness of a lazy, ill-supplied chef, who slings together the most diverse ingredients into a cobbled-together stew, substituting one spice for another which he is out of, making do with whatever has arrived in the market that morning as a dream will draw opportunistically on the 'day's residues', mixing in events which took place during the day or sensations felt during sleep with images drawn deep from our childhood.

Dreams provide our main, but not our only, access to the unconscious. There are also what Freud calls 'parapraxes', unaccountable slips of the tongue, failures of memory, bunglings, misreadings and mislayings which can be traced to unconscious wishes and intentions. The presence of the unconscious is also betrayed in jokes, which for Freud have a largely libidinal, anxious or aggressive content. Where the unconscious is most damagingly at work, however, is in psychological disturbance of one form or another. We may have certain unconscious desires which will not be denied, but which dare not find practical outlet either; in this situation, the desire forces its way in from the unconscious, the ego blocks it off defensively, and the result of this internal conflict is what we call neurosis. The patient begins to develop symptoms which, in compromising fashion, at once protect against the unconscious desire and covertly express it. Such neuroses may be obsessional (having to touch every lamp-post in the street), hysterical (developing a paralysed arm for no good organic reason), or phobic (being unreasonably afraid of open spaces or certain animals). Behind these neuroses, psychoanalysis discerns unresolved conflicts whose roots run back to the individual's early development, and which are likely to be focused in the Oedipal moment; indeed Freud calls the Oedipus complex the 'nucleus of the neuroses'. There will usually be a relation between the kind of neurosis a patient displays, and the point in the pre-Oedipal stage at which his or her psychical development became arrested or 'fixated'. The aim of psycho-

analysis is to uncover the hidden causes of the neurosis in order to relieve the patient of his or her conflicts, so dissolving the distressing symptoms.

Much more difficult to cope with, however, is the condition of psychosis, in which the ego, unable as in neurosis partly to repress the unconscious desire, actually comes under its sway. If this happens, the link between the ego and the external world is ruptured, and the unconscious begins to build up an alternative, delusional reality. The psychotic, in other words, has lost contact with reality at key points, as in paranoia and schizophrenia: if the neurotic may develop a paralysed arm, the psychotic may believe that his arm has turned into an elephant's trunk. 'Paranoia' refers to a more or less systematized state of delusion, under which Freud includes not only delusions of persecution but delusional jealousy and delusions of grandeur. The root of such paranoia he locates in an unconscious defence against homosexuality: the mind denies this desire by converting the love-object into a rival or persecutor, systematically reorganizing and reinterpreting reality to confirm this suspicion. Schizophrenia involves a detachment from reality and a turning in on the self, with an excessive but loosely systematized production of fantasies: it is as though the 'id', or unconscious desire, has surged up and flooded the conscious mind with its illogicality, riddling associations and affective rather than conceptual links between ideas. Schizophrenic language has in this sense an interesting resemblance to poetry.

Psychoanalysis is not only a theory of the human mind, but a practice for curing those who are considered mentally ill or disturbed. Such cures, for Freud, are not achieved just by explaining to the patient what is wrong with him, revealing to him his unconscious motivations. This is a part of psychoanalytical practice, but it will not cure anybody in itself. Freud is not in this sense a rationalist, believing that if only we understand ourselves or the world we can take appropriate action. The nub of the cure for Freudian theory is what is known as 'transference', a concept sometimes popularly confused with what Freud calls 'projection', or the ascribing to others of feelings and wishes which are actually our own. In the course of treatment, the analysand (or patient) may begin unconsciously to 'transfer' on to the figure of the analyst the psychical conflicts from which he or she suffers. If he has had difficulties with his father, for example, he may unconsciously cast the analyst in that role. This poses a problem for the analyst, since such 'repetition' or ritual re-enactment of the original conflict is one of the patient's unconscious ways of avoiding having to come to terms with it. We repeat, sometimes compulsively, what we cannot properly remember, and we cannot remember it because it is unpleasant. But transference also pro-

vides the analyst with a peculiarly privileged insight into the patient's psychical life, in a controlled situation in which he or she can intervene. (One of the several reasons why psychoanalysts must themselves undergo analysis in training is so that they can become reasonably aware of their own unconscious processes, thus resisting as far as possible the danger of 'counter-transferring' their own problems to their patients.) By virtue of this drama of transference, and the insights and interventions which it permits the analyst, the patient's problems are gradually redefined in terms of the analytic situation itself. In this sense, paradoxically, the problems which are handled in the consulting room are never quite at one with the real-life problems of the patient: they have, perhaps, something of the 'fictional' relation to those real-life problems which a literary text has to the real-life materials it transforms. Nobody leaves the consulting room cured of exactly the problems with which he walked in. The patient is likely to resist the analyst's access to her unconscious by a number of familiar techniques, but if all goes well the transference process will allow her problems to be 'worked through' into consciousness, and by dissolving the transference relation at the right moment the analyst will hope to relieve her of them. Another way of describing this process is to say that the patient becomes able to recollect portions of her life which she has repressed: she is able to recount a new, more complete narrative about herself, one which will interpret and make sense of the disturbances from which she suffers. The 'talking cure', as it is called, will have taken effect.

The work of psychoanalysis can perhaps best be summarized in one of Freud's own slogans: 'Where id was, there shall ego be.' Where men and women were in the paralysing grip of forces which they could not comprehend, there reason and self-mastery shall reign. Such a slogan makes Freud sound rather more of a rationalist than he actually was. Though he once commented that nothing in the end could withstand reason and experience, he was about as far from underestimating the cunning and obstinacy of the mind as it is possible to be. His estimate of human capacities is on the whole conservative and pessimistic: we are dominated by a desire for gratification and an aversion to anything which might frustrate it. In his later work, he comes to see the human race as languishing in the grip of a terrifying death drive, a primary masochism which the ego unleashes on itself. The final goal of life is death, a return to that blissful inanimate state where the ego cannot be injured. Eros, or sexual energy, is the force which builds up history, but it is locked in tragic contradiction with Thanatos or the death drive. We strive onwards only to be constantly driven backwards, struggling to return to a state before we were even conscious. The ego is a pitiable, precarious

entity, battered by the external world, scourged by the cruel upbraidings of the superego, plagued by the greedy, insatiable demands of the id. Freud's compassion for the ego is a compassion for the human race, labouring under the almost intolerable demands placed upon it by a civilization built upon the repression of desire and the deferment of gratification. He was scornful of all utopian proposals for changing this condition; but though many of his social views were conventional and authoritarian, he nevertheless looked with a certain favour upon attempts to abolish or at least reform the institutions of private property and the nation state. He did so because he was deeply convinced that modern society had become tyrannical in its repressiveness. As he argued in *The Future of an Illusion*, if a society has not developed beyond a point at which the satisfaction of one group of its members depends upon the suppression of another, it is understandable that those suppressed should develop an intense hostility towards a culture whose existence their labour has made possible, but in whose riches they have too small a share. 'It goes without saying,' Freud declares, 'that a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence.'

Any theory as complex and original as Freud's is bound to be a source of fierce contention. Freudianism has been attacked on a great number of grounds, and should in no way be taken as unproblematical. There are problems, for instance, about how it would test its doctrines, about what would count as evidence for or against its claims; as one American behaviourist psychologist remarked in conversation: 'The trouble with Freud's work is that it just isn't *testicle!*' It all depends, of course, on what you mean by 'testable'; but it would seem true that Freud sometimes invokes a nineteenth-century concept of science which is no longer really acceptable. Disinterested and objective though it strives to be, his work is shot through with what might be called 'counter-transference', shaped by his own unconscious desires and sometimes distorted by his conscious ideological beliefs. The sexist values we have touched on already are a case in point. Freud was probably no more patriarchal in attitude than most other nineteenth-century Viennese males, but his view of women as passive, narcissistic, masochistic and penis-envying, less morally conscientious than men, has been searchingly criticized by feminists.<sup>1</sup> One has only to compare the tone of Freud's case study of a young woman (Dora) with the tone of his analysis of a small boy (little Hans) to catch the difference of sexual attitude:

brisk, suspicious and at times grotesquely off-target in the case of Dora; genial, avuncular and admiring towards that proto-Freudian philosopher little Hans.

Equally serious is the complaint that psychoanalysis as a medical practice is a form of oppressive social control, labelling individuals and forcing them to conform to arbitrary definitions of 'normality'. This charge is in fact more usually aimed against psychiatric medicine as a whole: as far as Freud's own views on 'normality' are concerned, the accusation is largely misdirected. Freud's work showed, scandalously, just how 'plastic' and variable in its choice of objects libido really is, how so-called sexual perversions form part of what passes as normal sexuality, and how heterosexuality is by no means a natural or self-evident fact. It is true that Freudian psychoanalysis does usually work with some concept of a sexual 'norm'; but this is in no sense given by Nature.

There are other familiar criticisms of Freud, which are not easy to substantiate. One is a merely commonsensical impatience: how could a little girl possibly desire her father's baby? Whether this is true or not, it is not 'common sense' which will allow us to decide. One should remember the sheer bizarreness of the unconscious as it manifests itself in dreams, its distance from the daylight world of the ego, before rushing to dismiss Freud on such intuitive grounds. Another common criticism is that Freud 'brings everything down to sex' – that he is, in the technical term, a 'pan-sexualist'. This is certainly untenable: Freud was a radically dualistic thinker, no doubt excessively so, and always counterposed to the sexual drives such non-sexual forces as the 'ego-instincts' of self-preservation. The seed of truth in the pan-sexualist charge is that Freud regarded sexuality as central enough to human life to provide a *component* of all our activities; but that is not a sexual reductionism'.

One criticism of Freud still sometimes heard on the political Left is that his thinking is individualist – that he substitutes 'private' psychological causes and explanations for social and historical ones. This accusation reflects a radical misunderstanding of Freudian theory. There is indeed a real problem about how social and historical factors are *related* to the unconscious; but one point of Freud's work is that it makes it possible for us to think of the development of the human individual in social and historical terms. What Freud produces, indeed, is nothing less than a materialist theory of the making of the human subject. We come to be what we are by an interrelation of bodies – by the complex transactions which take place during infancy between our bodies and those which surround us. This is not a biological reductionism: Freud does not of course believe that we are nothing *but* our bodies, or that our minds are mere reflexes of them. Nor is

it an asocial model of life, since the bodies which surround us, and our relations with them, are always socially specific. The roles of parents, the practices of child care, the images and beliefs associated with all of this are cultural matters which can vary considerably from one society or one point in history to another. 'Childhood' is a recent historical invention, and the range of different historical set-ups encompassed by the word 'family' makes the word itself of limited value. One belief which has apparently not varied in these institutions is the assumption that girls and women are inferior to boys and men: this prejudice would seem to unite all known societies. Since it is a prejudice with deep roots in our early sexual and familial development, psychoanalysis has become of major importance to some feminists.

One Freudian theorist to whom such feminists have had recourse for this purpose is the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. It is not that Lacan is a pro-feminist thinker: on the contrary, his attitudes to the women's movement are in the main arrogant and contemptuous. But Lacan's work is a strikingly original attempt to 'rewrite' Freudianism in ways relevant to all those concerned with the question of the human subject, its place in society, and above all its relationship to language. This last concern is why Lacan is also of interest to literary theorists. What Lacan seeks to do in his *Écrits* is to reinterpret Freud in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist theories of discourse; and while this leads to a sometimes bafflingly opaque, enigmatic body of work, it is nevertheless one that we must now briefly consider if we are to see how post-structuralism and psychoanalysis are interrelated.

I have described how for Freud, at an early point in the infant's development, no clear distinction between subject and object, itself and the external world, is yet possible. It is this state of being which Lacan names the 'imaginary', by which he means a condition in which we lack any defined centre of self, in which what 'self' we have seems to pass into objects, and objects into it, in a ceaseless closed exchange. In the pre-Oedipal state, the child lives a 'symbiotic' relation with its mother's body which blurs any sharp boundary between the two: it is dependent for its life on this body, but we can equally imagine the child as experiencing what it knows of the external world as dependent upon itself. This merging of identities is not quite as blissful as it might sound, according to the Freudian theorist Melanie Klein: at a very early age the infant will harbour murderously aggressive instincts towards its mother's body, entertain fantasies of tearing it to bits and suffer paranoid delusions that this body will in turn destroy it.<sup>2</sup>

If we imagine a small child contemplating itself in a mirror – Lacan's so-called 'mirror stage' – we can see how, from within this 'imaginary' state of

being, the child's first development of an ego, of an integrated self-image, begins to happen. The child, who is still physically uncoordinated, finds reflected back to itself in the mirror a gratifyingly unified image of itself; and although its relation to this image is still of an 'imaginary' kind - the image in the mirror both is and is not itself, a blurring of subject and object still obtains - it has begun the process of constructing a centre of self. This self, as the mirror situation suggests, is essentially narcissistic: we arrive at a sense of an '!' by finding that '!' reflected back to ourselves by some object or person in the world. This object is at once somehow part of ourselves - we *identify* with it - and yet not ourselves, something alien. The image which the small child sees in the mirror is in this sense an 'alienated' one: the child 'misrecognizes' itself in it, finds in the image a pleasing unity which it does not actually experience in its own body. The imaginary for Lacan is precisely this realm of *images* in which we make identifications, but in the very act of doing so are led to misperceive and misrecognize ourselves. As the child grows up, it will continue to make such imaginary identifications with objects, and this is how its ego will be built up. For Lacan, the ego is just this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify.

In discussing the pre-Oedipal or imaginary phase, we are considering a register of being in which there are really no more than two terms: the child itself and the other body, which at this point is usually the mother, and which represents external reality for the child. But as we have seen in our account of the Oedipus complex, this 'dyadic' structure is destined to give way to a 'triadic' one: and this happens when the father enters upon and disrupts this harmonious scene. The father signifies what Lacan calls the Law, which is in the first place the social taboo on incest: the child is disturbed in its libidinal relation with the mother, and must begin to recognize in the figure of the father that a wider familial and social network exists of which it is only part. Not only is the child merely a part of this network, but the role it must play there is already predetermined, laid down for it by the practices of the society into which it has been born. The appearance of the father divides the child from the mother's body, and in doing so, as we have seen, drives its desire underground into the unconscious. In this sense the first appearance of the Law, and the opening up of unconscious desire, occur at the same moment: it is only when the child acknowledges the taboo or prohibition which the father symbolizes that it represses its guilty desire, and that desire just *is* what is called the unconscious.

For the drama of the Oedipus complex to come about at all, the child must of course have become dimly aware of sexual difference. It is the entry of the

father which signifies this sexual difference; and one of the key-terms in Lacan's work, the phallus, denotes this signification of sexual distinction. It is only by accepting the necessity of sexual difference, of distinct gender roles, that the child, who has previously been unaware of such problems, can become properly 'socialized'. Lacan's originality is to rewrite this process, which we have already seen in Freud's account of the Oedipus complex, in terms of language. We can think of the small child contemplating itself before the mirror as a kind of 'signifier' - something capable of bestowing meaning -- and of the image it sees in the mirror as a kind of 'signified'. The image the child sees is somehow the 'meaning' of itself. Here, signifier and signified are as harmoniously united as they are in Saussure's sign. Alternatively, we could read the mirror situation as a kind of metaphor: one item (the child) discovers a likeness of itself in another (the reflection). This, for Lacan, is an appropriate image of the imaginary as a whole: in this mode of being, objects ceaselessly reflect themselves in each other in a sealed circuit, and no real differences or divisions are yet apparent. It is a world of *plenitude*, with no lacks or exclusions of any kind: standing before the mirror, the 'signifier' (the child) finds a 'fullness', a whole and unblemished identity, in the signified of its reflection. No gap has yet opened up between signifier and signified, subject and world. The infant is so far happily untroubled by the problems of post-structuralism - by the fact that, as we have seen, language and reality are not so smoothly synchronized as this situation would suggest.

With the entry of the father, the child is plunged into post-structuralist anxiety. It now has to grasp Saussure's point that identities come about only as a result of difference - that one term or subject is what it is only by excluding another. Significantly, the child's first discovery of sexual difference occurs at about the same time that it is discovering language itself. The baby's cry is not really a sign but a signal: it indicates that it is cold, hungry or whatever. In gaining access to language, the small child unconsciously learns that a sign has meaning only by dint of its difference from other signs, and learns also that a sign presupposes the *absence* of the object it signifies. Our language 'stands in' for objects: all language is in a way 'metaphorical', in that it substitutes itself for some direct, wordless possession of the object itself. It saves us from the inconvenience of Swift's Laputans, who carry on their back a sack full of all the objects they might need in conversation, and simply hold these objects up to each other as a way of talking. But just as the child is unconsciously learning these lessons in the sphere of language, it is also unconsciously learning them in the world of sexuality. The presence of the father, symbolized by the phallus, teaches the child that it must take up

a place in the family which is defined by sexual difference, by exclusion (it cannot be its parent's lover) and by absence (it must relinquish its earlier bonds to the mother's body). Its identity as a subject, it comes to perceive, is constituted by its relations of difference and similarity to the other subjects around it. In accepting all of this, the child moves from the imaginary register into what Lacan calls the 'symbolic order': the pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society. In Freud's own terms, it has successfully negotiated the painful passage through the Oedipus complex.

All, however, is not entirely well. For as we have seen, in Freud the subject who emerges from this process is a 'split' one, radically divided between the conscious life of the ego and the unconscious, or repressed desire. It is this primary repression of desire which makes us what we are. The child must now resign itself to the fact that it can never have any *direct* access to reality, in particular to the now prohibited body of the mother. It has been banished from this 'full', imaginary possession into the 'empty' world of language. Language is 'empty' because it is just an endless process of difference and absence: instead of being able to possess anything in its fullness, the child will now simply move from one signifier to another, along a linguistic chain which is potentially infinite. One signifier implies another, and that another, and so on *ad infinitum*: the 'metaphorical' world of the mirror has yielded ground to the 'metonymic' world of language. Along this metonymic chain of signifiers, meanings, or signifieds, will be produced; but no object or person can ever be fully 'present' in this chain, because as we have seen with Derrida its effect is to divide and differentiate all identities.

This potentially endless movement from one signifier to another is what Lacan means by desire. All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fill. Human language works by such lack: the absence of the real objects which signs designate, the fact that words have meaning only by virtue of the absence and exclusion of others. To enter language, then, is to become a prey to desire: language, Lacan remarks, is 'what hollows being into desire'. Language divides up – *articulates* – the fullness of the imaginary: we will now never be able to find rest in the single object, the final meaning, which will make sense of all the others. To enter language is to be severed from what Lacan calls the 'real', that inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of signification, always outside the symbolic order. In particular, we are severed from the mother's body: after the Oedipus crisis, we will never again be able to attain this precious object, even though we will spend all of our lives hunting for it. We have to make do instead with

substitute objects, what Lacan calls the 'object little *a*', with which we try vainly to plug the gap at the very centre of our being. We move among substitutes for substitutes, metaphors of metaphors, never able to recover the pure (if fictive) self-identity and self-completion which we knew in the imaginary. There is no 'transcendental' meaning or object which will ground this endless yearning - or if there is such a transcendental reality, it is the phallus itself, the 'transcendental signifier' as Lacan calls it. But this is not in fact an object of reality, not the actual male sexual organ: it is merely an empty marker of difference, a sign of what divides us from the imaginary and inserts us into our predestined place within the symbolic order.

Lacan, as we have seen in our discussion of Freud, regards the unconscious as structured like a language. This is not only because it works by metaphor and metonymy: it is also because, like language itself for the post-structuralists, it is composed less of *signs* - stable meanings - than of *signifiers*. If you dream of a horse, it is not immediately obvious what this signifies: it may have many contradictory meanings, may be just one of a whole chain of signifiers with equally multiple meanings. The image of the horse, that is to say, is not a sign in Saussure's sense - it does not have one determined signified tied neatly to its tail - but is a signifier which may be attached to many different signifieds, and which may itself bear the traces of the other signifiers which surround it. (I was not aware, when I wrote the above sentence, of the word-play involved in 'horse' and 'tail': one signifier interacted with another against my conscious intention.) The unconscious is just a continual movement and activity of signifiers, whose signifieds are often inaccessible to us because they are *repressed*. This is why Lacan speaks of the unconscious as a 'sliding of the signified beneath the signifier', as a constant fading and evaporation of meaning, a bizarre 'modernist' text which is almost unreadable and which will certainly never yield up its final secrets to interpretation.

If this constant sliding and hiding of meaning were true of conscious life, then we would of course never be able to speak coherently at all. If the whole of language were present to me when I spoke, then I would not be able to articulate anything at all. The ego, or consciousness, can therefore only work by repressing this turbulent activity, provisionally nailing down words on to meanings. Every now and then a word from the unconscious which I do not want insinuates itself into my discourse, and this is the famous Freudian slip of the tongue or parapraxis. But for Lacan all our discourse is in a sense a slip of the tongue: if the process of language is as slippery and ambiguous as he suggests, we can never mean precisely what we say and never say precisely what we mean. Meaning is always in some sense an approximation, a near-

miss, a part-failure, mixing non-sense and non-communication into sense and dialogue. We can certainly never articulate the truth in some 'pure', unmediated way: Lacan's own notoriously sibylline style, a language of the unconscious all in itself, is meant to suggest that language of the unconscious all in itself, is meant to suggest that any attempt to convey a whole, unblemished meaning in speech or script is a pre-Freudian illusion. In conscious life, we achieve some sense of ourselves as reasonably unified, coherent selves, and without this action would be impossible. But all this is merely at the 'imaginary' level of the ego, which is no more than the tip of the iceberg of the human subject known to psychoanalysis. The ego is function or effect of a subject which is always dispersed, never identical with itself, strung out along the chains of the discourses which constitute it. There is a radical split between these two levels of being - a gap most dramatically exemplified by the act of referring to myself in a sentence. When I say 'Tomorrow I will mow the lawn,' the '!' which I pronounce is an immediately intelligible, fairly stable point of reference which belies the murky depths of the '!' which does the pronouncing. The former '!' is known to linguistic theory as the 'subject of the enunciation', the topic designated by my sentence; the latter '!', the one who speaks the sentence, is the 'subject of the enunciating', the subject of the actual act of speaking. In the process of speaking and writing, these two '!'s seem to achieve a rough sort of unity; but this unity is of an imaginary kind. The 'subject of the enunciating', the actual speaking, writing human person, can never represent himself or herself fully in what is said: there is no sign which will, so to speak, sum up my entire being. I can only *designate* myself in language by a convenient pronoun. The pronoun '!' *stands in* for the ever-elusive subject, which will always slip through the nets of any particular piece of language; and this is equivalent to saying that I cannot 'mean' and 'be' simultaneously. To make this point, Lacan boldly rewrites Descartes's 'I think, therefore I am' as: 'I am not where I think, and I think where I am not.'

There is an interesting analogy between what we have just described and those 'acts of enunciation' known as literature. In some literary works, in particular realist fiction, our attention as readers is drawn not to the 'act of enunciating', to *how* something is said, from what kind of position and with what end in view, but simply to *what* is said, to the enunciation itself. Any such 'anonymous' enunciation is likely to have more authority, to engage our assent more readily, than one which draws attention to how the enunciation is actually constructed. The language of a legal document or scientific textbook may impress or even intimidate us because we do not see how the language got there in the first place. The text does not allow the reader to see

how the facts it contains were selected, what was excluded, why these facts were organized in this particular way, what assumptions governed this process, what forms of work went into the making of the text, and how all of this might have been different. Part of the power of such texts thus lies in their suppression of what might be called their modes of production, how they got to be what they are; in this sense, they have a curious resemblance to the life of the human ego, which thrives by repressing the process of its own making. Many modernist literary works, by contrast, make the 'act of enunciating', the process of their own production, part of their actual 'content'. They do not try to pass themselves off as unquestionable, like Barthes's 'natural' sign, but as the Formalists would say 'lay bare the device' of their own composition. They do this so that they will not be mistaken for absolute truth - so that the reader will be encouraged to reflect critically on the partial, particular ways they construct reality, and so to recognize how it might all have happened differently. The finest example of such literature is perhaps the drama of Bertolt Brecht; but many other instances are available in the modern arts, not least in film. Think on the one hand of a typical Hollywood film which simply uses the camera as a kind of 'window' or second eye through which the viewer contemplates reality - which holds the camera steady and allows it simply to 'record' what is happening. Watching such a film, we tend to forget that 'what is happening' is not in fact just 'happening', but is a highly complex *construct*, involving the actions and assumptions of a great many people. Think then on the other hand of a cinematic sequence in which the camera darts restlessly, nervously from object to object, focusing first on one and then discarding it to pick out another, probing these objects compulsively from several different angles before trailing away, disconsolately as it were, to frame something else. This would not be a particularly avant-garde procedure; but even this highlights how, in contrast to the first type of film, the *activity* of the camera, the way of mounting the episode, is being 'foregrounded', so that we cannot as spectators simply stare through this obtrusive operation to the objects themselves.' The 'content' of the sequence can be grasped as the *product* of a specific set of technical devices, not as a 'natural' or given reality which the camera is simply there to reflect. The 'signified' - the 'meaning' of the sequence - is a product of the 'signifier' - the cinematic techniques - rather than something which preceded it.

In order to pursue further the implications of Lacan's thought for the human subject, we shall have to take a brief detour through a famous essay written under Lacan's influence by the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. In 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', contained in his

book *Lenin and Philosophy* (1971), Althusser tries to illuminate, with the implicit aid of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the working of ideology in society. How is it, the essay asks, that human subjects very often come to submit themselves to the dominant ideologies of their societies – ideologies which Althusser sees as vital to maintaining the power of a ruling class? By what mechanisms does this come about? Althusser has sometimes been seen as a 'structuralist' Marxist, in that for him human individuals are the product of many different social determinants, and thus have no essential unity. As far as a science of human societies goes, such individuals can be studied simply as the functions, or effects, of this or that social structure – as occupying a place in a mode of production, as a member of a specific social class, and so on. But this of course is not at all the way we actually experience ourselves. We tend to see ourselves rather as free, unified, autonomous, self-generating individuals; and unless we did so we would be incapable of playing our parts in social life. For Althusser, what allows us to experience ourselves in this way is ideology. How is this to be understood?

As far as society is concerned, I as an individual am utterly dispensable. No doubt someone has to fulfil the functions I carry out (writing, teaching, lecturing and so on), since education has a crucial role to play in the reproduction of this kind of social system, but there is no particular reason why this individual should be myself. One reason why this thought does not lead me to join a circus or take an overdose is that this is not usually the way that I experience my own identity, not the way I actually 'live out' my life. I do not *feel* myself to be a mere function of a social structure which could get along without me, true though this appears when I *analyse* the situation, but as somebody with a significant *relation* to society and the world at large, a relation which gives me enough sense of meaning and value to enable me to act purposefully. It is as though society were not just an impersonal structure to me, but a 'subject' which 'addresses' me personally – which recognizes me, tells me that I am valued, and so makes me by that very act of recognition into a free, autonomous subject. I come to feel, not exactly as though the world exists for me alone, but as though it is significantly 'centred' on me, and I in turn am significantly 'centred' on it. Ideology, for Althusser, is the set of beliefs and practices which does this centring. It is far more subtle, pervasive and unconscious than a set of explicit doctrines: it is the very medium in which I 'live out' my relation to society, the realm of signs and social practices which binds me to the social structure and lends me a sense of coherent purpose and identity. Ideology in this sense may include the act of going to church, of casting a vote, of letting women pass first through doors; it may encompass not only such conscious predilections

as my deep devotion to the monarchy but the way I dress and the kind of car I drive, my deeply unconscious images of others and of myself.

What Althusser does, in other words, is to rethink the concept of ideology in terms of Lacan's 'imaginary'. For the relation of an individual subject to society as a whole in Althusser's theory is rather like the relation of the small child to his or her mirror-image in Lacan's. In both cases, the human subject is supplied with a satisfyingly unified image of selfhood by identifying with an object which reflects this image back to it in a closed, narcissistic circle. In both cases, too, this image involves a misrecognition, since it idealizes the subject's real situation. The child is not actually as integrated as its image in the mirror suggests; I am not actually the coherent, autonomous, self-generating subject I know myself to be in the ideological sphere, but the 'decentred' function of several social determinants. Duly enthralled by the image of myself I receive, I subject myself to it; and it is through this 'subjection' that I become a subject.

Most commentators would now agree that Althusser's suggestive essay is seriously flawed. It seems to assume, for example, that ideology is little more than an oppressive force which subjugates us, without allowing sufficient space for the realities of ideological *struggle*: and it involves some rather serious misinterpretations of Lacan. Nevertheless, it is one attempt to show the relevance of Lacanian theory to issues beyond the consulting room: it sees, rightly, that such a body of work has deep-seated implications for several fields beyond psychoanalysis itself. Indeed, by reinterpreting Freudianism in terms of language, a pre-eminently social activity, Lacan permits us to explore the relations between the unconscious and human society. One way of describing his work is to say that he makes us recognize that the unconscious is not some kind of seething, tumultuous, private region 'inside' us, but an effect of our relations with one another. The unconscious is, so to speak, 'outside' rather than 'within' us – or rather it exists 'between' us, as our relationships do. It is elusive not so much because it is buried deep within our minds, but because it is a kind of vast, tangled network which surrounds us and weaves itself through us, and which can therefore never be pinned down. The best image for such a network, which is both beyond us and yet is the very stuff of which we are made, is language itself; and indeed for Lacan the unconscious is a particular effect of language, a process of desire set in motion by difference. When we enter the symbolic order, we enter into language itself; yet this language, for Lacan as for the structuralists, is never something entirely within our individual control. On the contrary, as we have seen, language is what internally *divides* us, rather than an instrument we are confidently able to manipulate. Lan-

guage always pre-exists us: it is always already 'in place', waiting to assign us *our* places within it. It is ready and waiting for us rather as our parents are; and we shall never wholly dominate it or subdue it to our own ends, just as we shall never be able entirely to shake off the dominant role which our parents play in our constitution. Language, the unconscious, the parents, the symbolic order: these terms in Lacan are not exactly synonymous, but they are intimately allied. They are sometimes spoken of by him as the 'Other' – as that which like language is always anterior to us and will always escape us, that which brought us into being as subjects in the first place but which always outruns our grasp. We have seen that for Lacan our unconscious desire is directed towards this Other, in the shape of some ultimately gratifying reality which we can never have; but it is also true for Lacan that our desire is in some way always *received* from the Other too. We desire what others – our parents, for instance – unconsciously desire for us; and desire can only happen because we are caught up in linguistic, sexual and social relations – the whole field of the 'Other' – which generate it.

Lacan himself is not much interested in the social relevance of his theories, and he certainly does not 'solve' the problem of the relation between society and the unconscious. Freudianism as a whole, however, does enable us to pose this question; and I want now to examine it in terms of a concrete literary example, D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*. Even conservative critics, who suspect such phrases as the 'Oedipus complex' as alien jargon, sometimes admit that there is something at work in this text which looks remarkably like Freud's famous drama. (It is interesting, incidentally, how conventionally-minded critics seem quite content to employ such jargon as 'symbol', 'dramatic irony' and 'densely textured', while remaining oddly resistant to terms such as 'signifier' and 'decentring'.) At the time of writing *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence, as far as we know, knew something of Freud's work at second hand from his German wife Frieda; but there seems no evidence that he had any direct or detailed acquaintance with it, a fact which might be taken as striking independent confirmation of Freud's doctrine. For it is surely the case that *Sons and Lovers*, without appearing to be at all aware of it, is a profoundly Oedipal novel: the young Paul Morel who sleeps in the same bed as his mother, treats her with the tenderness of a lover and feels strong animosity towards his father, grows up to be the man Morel, unable to sustain a fulfilling relationship with a woman, and in the end achieving possible release from this condition by killing his mother in an ambiguous act of love, revenge and self-liberation. Mrs Morel, for her part, is jealous of Paul's relationship with Miriam, behaving like a rival mistress. Paul rejects Miriam for his mother; but in rejecting Miriam he is also

unconsciously rejecting his mother *in her*, in what he feels to be Miriam's stifling spiritual possessiveness.

Paul's psychological development, however, does not take place in a social void. His father, Walter Morel, is a miner, while his mother is of a slightly higher social class. Mrs Morel is concerned that Paul should not follow his father into the pit, and wants him to take a clerical job instead. She herself remains at home as a housewife: the family set-up of the Morels is part of what is known as the 'sexual division of labour', which in capitalist society takes the form of the male parent being used as labour-power in the productive process while the female parent is left to provide the material and emotional 'maintenance' of him and the labour-force of the future (the children). Mr Morel's estrangement from the intense emotional life of the home is due in part to this social division — one which alienates him from his own children, and brings them emotionally closer to the mother. If, as with Walter Morel, the father's work is especially exhausting and oppressive, his role in the family is likely to be further diminished: Morel is reduced to establishing human contact with his children through his practical skills about the house. His lack of education, moreover, makes it difficult for him to articulate his feelings, a fact which further increases the distance between himself and his family. The fatiguing, harshly disciplined nature of the work process helps to create in him a domestic irritability and violence which drives the children deeper into their mother's arms, and which spurs on her jealous possessiveness of them. To compensate for his inferior status at work, the father struggles to assert a traditional male authority at home, thus estranging his children from him still further.

In the case of the Morels, these social factors are further complicated by the class-distinction between them. Morel has what the novel takes to be a characteristically proletarian inarticulateness, physicality and passivity: *Sons and Lovers* portrays the miners as creatures of the underworld who live the life of the body rather than the mind. This is a curious portraiture, since in 1912, the year in which Lawrence finished the book, the miners launched the biggest strike which Britain had ever seen. One year later, the year of the novel's publication, the worst mining disaster for a century resulted in a paltry fine for a seriously negligent management, and class-warfare was everywhere in the air throughout the British coalfields. These developments, with all their acute political awareness and complex organization, were not the actions of mindless hulks. Mrs Morel (it is perhaps significant that we do not feel inclined to use her first name) is of lower-middle-class origin, reasonably well-educated, articulate and determined. She therefore symbolizes what the young, sensitive and artistic Paul may hope to achieve:

his emotional turning to her from the father is, inseparably, a turning from the impoverished, exploitative world of the colliery towards the life of emancipated consciousness. The potentially tragic tension in which Paul then finds himself trapped, and almost destroyed, springs from the fact that his mother - the very source of the energy which pushes him ambitiously beyond home and pit - is at the same time the powerful emotional force which draws him back.

A psychoanalytical reading of the novel, then, need not be an alternative to a social interpretation of it. We are speaking rather of two sides or aspects of a single human situation. We can discuss Paul's 'weak' image of his father and 'strong' image of his mother in both Oedipal and class terms; we can see how the human relationships between an absent, violent father, an ambitious, emotionally demanding mother and a sensitive child are understandable both in terms of unconscious processes and in terms of certain social forces and relations. (Some critics, of course, would find neither kind of approach acceptable, and opt for a 'human' reading of the novel instead. It is not easy to know what this 'human' is, which excludes the characters' concrete life-situations, their jobs and histories, the deeper significance of their personal relationships and identities, their sexuality and so on.) All of this, however, is still confined to what may be called 'content analysis', looking at what is said rather than how it is said, at 'theme' rather than 'form'. But we can carry these considerations into 'form' itself - into such matters as how the novel delivers and structures its narrative, how it delineates character, what narrative point of view it adopts. It seems evident, for example, that the text itself largely, though by no means entirely, identifies with and endorses Paul's own viewpoint: since the narrative is seen chiefly through his eyes, we have no real source of testimony other than him. As Paul moves into the foreground of the story, his father recedes into the background. The novel is also in general more 'inward' in its treatment of Mrs Morel than it is of her husband; indeed we might argue that it is organized in a way which tends to highlight her and obscure him, a formal device which reinforces the protagonist's own attitudes. The very way in which the narrative is structured, in other words, to some extent conspires with Paul's own unconscious: it is not clear to us, for example, that Miriam as she is presented in the text, very much from Paul's own viewpoint, actually merits the irritable impatience which she evokes in him, and many readers have had the uneasy sense that the novel is in some way 'unjust' to her. (The real-life Miriam, Jessie Chambers, hotly shared this opinion, but this for our present purposes is neither here nor there.) But how are we to validate this sense of injustice, when Paul's own

viewpoint is consistently 'foregrounded' as our source of supposedly reliable evidence?

On the other hand, there are aspects of the novel which would seem to run counter to this 'angled' presentation. As H. M. Daleski has perceptively put it: 'The weight of hostile comment which Lawrence directs against Morel is balanced by the unconscious sympathy with which he is presented dramatically, while the overt celebration of Mrs Morel is challenged by the harshness of her character in action.'<sup>4</sup> In the terms we have used about Lacan, the novel does not exactly say what it means or mean what it says. This itself can partly be accounted for in psychoanalytical terms: the boy's Oedipal relation to his father is an ambiguous one, for the father is loved as well as unconsciously hated as a rival, and the child will seek to protect the father from his own unconscious aggression towards him. Another reason for this ambiguity, however, is that on one level the novel sees very well that though Paul must reject the narrowed, violent world of the miners for his venture into middle-class consciousness, such consciousness is by no means wholly to be admired. There is much that is dominative and life-denying as well as valuable in it, as we can see in the character of Mrs Morel. It is Walter Morel, so the text tells us, who has 'denied the god in him'; but it is hard to feel that this heavy authorial interpolation, solemn and obtrusive as it is, really earns its keep. For the very novel which *tells* us this also *shows* us the opposite. It shows us the ways in which Morel is indeed still alive; it cannot stop us from seeing how the diminishing of him has much to do with its own narrative organization, turning as it does from him to his son; and it also shows us, intentionally or not, that even if Morel *has* 'denied the god in him' then the blame is ultimately to be laid not on him but on the predatory capitalism which can find no better use for him than as a cog in the wheel of production. Paul himself, intent as he is on extricating himself from the father's world, cannot afford to confront these truths, and neither, explicitly, does the novel: in writing *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence was not just writing about the working class but writing his way out of it. But in such telling incidents as the final reunion of Baxter Dawes (in some ways a parallel figure to Morel) with his estranged wife Clara, the novel 'unconsciously' makes reparation for its upgrading of Paul (whom this incident shows in a much more negative light) at the expense of his father. Lawrence's final reparation for Morel will be Mellors, the 'feminine' yet powerful male protagonist of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Paul is never allowed by the novel to voice the kind of full, bitter criticism of his mother's possessiveness which some of the 'objective' evidence would seem to warrant; yet the way in which the rela-

relationship between mother and son is actually dramatized allows *us* to see why this should be so.

In reading *Sons and Lovers* with an eye to these aspects of the novel, we are constructing what may be called a 'sub-text' for the work – a text which runs within it, visible at certain 'symptomatic' points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis, and which we as readers are able to 'write' even if the novel itself does not. All literary works contain one or more such sub-texts, and there is a sense in which they may be spoken of as the 'unconscious' of the work itself. The work's insights, as with all writing, are deeply related to its blindnesses: what it does not say, and *how* it does not say it, may be as important as what it articulates; what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meanings. We are not simply rejecting or inverting 'what the novel says', arguing, for example, that Morel is the real hero and his wife the villain. Paul's viewpoint is not simply invalid: his mother is indeed an incomparably richer source of sympathy than his father. We are looking rather at what such statements must inevitably silence or suppress, examining the ways in which the novel is not quite identical with itself. Psychoanalytical criticism, in other words, can do more than hunt for phallic symbols: it can tell us something about how literary texts are actually formed, and reveal something of the meaning of that formation.

Psychoanalytical literary criticism can be broadly divided into four kinds, depending on what it takes as its object of attention. It can attend to the *author* of the work; to the work's *contents*; to its *formal construction*; or to the *reader*. Most psychoanalytical criticism has been of the first two kinds, which are in fact the most limited and problematical. Psychoanalysing the author is a speculative business, and runs into just the same kind of problems we examined when discussing the relevance of authorial 'intention' to works of literature. The psychoanalysis of 'content' – commenting on the unconscious motivations of characters, or on the psychoanalytical significance of objects or events in the text – has a limited value, but, in the manner of the notorious hunt for the phallic symbol, is too often reductive. Freud's own sporadic ventures into the field of art and literature were mainly in these two modes. He wrote a fascinating monograph on Leonardo da Vinci, an essay on Michelangelo's statue 'Moses' and some literary analyses, notably of a short novel by the German writer Wilhelm Jensen entitled *Gradiva*. These

essays either offer a psychoanalytical account of the author himself as he reveals himself in his work, or examine symptoms of the unconscious in art as one would in life. In either case, the 'materiality' of the artefact itself, its specific formal constitution, tends to be overlooked.

Equally inadequate is Freud's best-remembered opinion of art: his comparison of it to neurosis.' What he meant by this is that the artist, like the neurotic, is oppressed by unusually powerful instinctual needs which lead him to turn away from reality to fantasy. Unlike other fantasists, however, the artist knows how to work over, shape and soften his own day-dreams in ways which make them acceptable to others - for, envious egoists that we are, we tend in Freud's opinion to find others' day-dreams repulsive. Crucial to this shaping and softening is the power of artistic form, which affords the reader or viewer what Freud calls 'fore-pleasure', relaxes his defences against others' wish-fulfilments and so enables him to lift his repression for a brief moment and take forbidden pleasure in his own unconscious processes. The same is roughly true of Freud's theory of jokes, in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905): jokes express a normally censored aggressive or libidinal impulse, but this is made socially acceptable by the joke's 'form', its wit and word-play.

Questions of form, then, do enter into Freud's reflections on art; but the image of the artist as neurotic is surely much too simple, the solid citizen's caricature of the distraught, moonstruck Romantic. Much more suggestive for a psychoanalytical literary theory is Freud's commentary in his masterpiece, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), on the nature of dreaming. Literary works of course involve conscious labour, while dreams do not: in this sense they resemble dreams less than they resemble jokes. But with this reservation in mind, what Freud argues in his book is highly significant. The 'raw materials' of a dream, what Freud calls its 'latent content', are unconscious wishes, bodily stimuli while sleeping, images reaped from the previous day's experiences; but the dream itself is the product of an intensive transformation of these materials, known as the 'dream-work'. The mechanisms of the dream-work we have looked at already: they are the unconscious's techniques of condensing and displacing its materials, together with finding intelligible ways of representing it. The dream which is produced by this labour, the dream we actually remember, is termed by Freud the 'manifest content'. The dream, then, is not just the 'expression' or 'reproduction' of the unconscious: between the unconscious and the dream we have, a process of 'production' or transformation has intervened. The 'essence' of the dream, Freud considers, is not the raw materials or 'latent content', but the dream-work itself: it is this 'practice' which is the object of his analysis.

One stage of the dream-work, known as 'secondary revision', consists in the reorganization of the dream so as to present it in the form of a relatively consistent and comprehensible narrative. Secondary revision systematizes the dream, fills in its gaps and smooths over its contradictions, reorders its chaotic elements into a more coherent fable.

Most of the literary theory we have examined so far in this book could be considered a form of 'secondary revision' of the literary text. In its obsessive pursuit of 'harmony', 'coherence', 'deep structure' or 'essential meaning', such theory fills in the text's gaps and smooths over its contradictions, domesticating its disparate aspects and defusing its conflicts. It does this so that the text may be, so to speak, more easily 'consumed' so that the path is made straight for the reader, who will not be ruffled by any unexplained irregularities. Much literary scholarship in particular is resolutely devoted to this end, briskly 'resolving' ambiguities and staking the text down for the reader's untroubled inspection. An extreme example of such secondary revision, although one not altogether untypical of much critical interpretation, is the kind of account of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* which reads the poem as the story of a little girl who went on a sledge-ride with her uncle the Archduke, changed sex a few times in London, got caught up in a hunt for the Holy Grail and ended up fishing glumly on the edge of an arid plain. The diverse, divided materials of Eliot's poem are tamed to a coherent narrative, the shattered human subjects of the work unified to a single ego.

Much of the literary theory we have looked at also tends to view the literary work as an 'expression' or 'reflection' of reality: it enacts human experience, or embodies an author's intention, or its structures reproduce the structures of the human mind. Freud's account of the dream, by contrast, enables us to see the work of literature not as a reflection but as a form of production. Like the dream, the work takes certain 'raw materials' language, other literary texts, ways of perceiving the world and transforms them by certain techniques into a product. The techniques by which this production is carried out are the various devices we know as 'literary form'. In working on its raw materials, the literary text will tend to submit them to its own form of secondary revision: unless it is a 'revolutionary' text like *Finnegans Wake*, it will try to organize them into a reasonably coherent, consumable whole, even if, as with *Sons and Lovers*, it will not be always successful. But just as the dream-text can be analysed, deciphered, decomposed in ways which show up something of the processes by which it was produced, so too can the literary work. A 'naive' reading of literature might stop short at the textual product itself, as I might listen to your gripping account of a dream without bothering to probe it further. Psychoanalysis, on

the other hand, is in the phrase of one of its interpreters a 'hermeneutic of suspicion': its concern is not just to 'read the text' of the unconscious, but to uncover the processes, the dream-work, by which that text was produced. To do this, it focuses in particular on what have been called 'symptomatic' places in the dream-text – distortions, ambiguities, absence and elisions which may provide a specially valuable mode of access to the 'latent content', or unconscious drives, which have gone into its making. Literary criticism, as we saw in the case of Lawrence's novel, can do something similar: by attending to what may seem like evasions, ambivalences and points of intensity in the narrative – words which do not get spoken, words which are spoken with unusual frequency, doublings and slidings of language – it can begin to probe through the layers of secondary revision and expose something of the 'sub-text' which, like an unconscious wish, the work both conceals and reveals. It can attend, in other words, not only to what the text says, but to how it *toorks*?

Some Freudian literary criticism has pursued this project to a certain extent. In his *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1968), the American critic Norman N. Holland, following Freud, sees works of literature as setting in motion in the reader an interplay of unconscious fantasies and conscious defences against them. The work is enjoyable because by devious formal means it transforms our deepest anxieties and desires into socially acceptable meanings. If it did not 'soften' these desires by its form and language, allowing us sufficient mastery of and defence against them, it would prove unacceptable; but so would it if it merely reinforced our repressions. This, in effect, is little more than a restatement in Freudian guise of the old Romantic opposition between turbulent content and harmonizing form. Literary form for the American critic Simon Lesser, in his *Fiction and the Unconscious* (1957), has a 'reassuring influence', combating anxiety and celebrating our commitment to life, love and order. Through it, according to Lesser, we 'pay homage to the superego'. But what of modernist forms which pulverize order, subvert meaning and explode our self-assurance? Is literature just a sort of therapy? Holland's later work would suggest that he thinks so: *Five Readers Reading* (1975) examines the unconscious responses of readers to literary texts in order to see how these readers come to adapt their identities in the process of interpretation, yet thereby discover a reassuring unity in themselves. Holland's belief that it is possible to abstract from an individual's life an 'unchanging essence' of personal identity aligns his work with so-called American 'ego-psychology' – a domesticated version of Freudianism which diverts attention from the 'split subject' of classical psychoanalysis and projects it instead on to the unity of the ego. It is a psychology concerned with how the ego adapts to social life: by therapeutic

techniques, the individual is 'fitted' into his natural, healthy role as an aspiring executive with the appropriate make of automobile, and any distressing personality traits which might deviate from this norm are 'treated'. With this brand of psychology, the Freudianism which began as scandal and affront to middle-class society becomes a way of underwriting its values.

Two very different American critics indebted to Freud are Kenneth Burke, who eclectically blends Freud, Marx and linguistics to produce his own suggestive view of the literary work as a form of symbolic action, and Harold Bloom, who has used the work of Freud to launch one of the most daringly original literary theories of the past decade. What Bloom does, in effect, is to rewrite literary history in terms of the Oedipus complex. Poets live anxiously in the shadow of a 'strong' poet who came before them, as sons are oppressed by their fathers; and any particular poem can be read as an attempt to escape this 'anxiety of influence' by its systematic remoulding of a previous poem. The poet, locked in Oedipal rivalry with his castrating 'precursor', will seek to disarm that strength by entering it from within, writing in a way which revises, displaces and recasts the precursor poem; in this sense all poems can be read as rewritings of other poems, and as 'misreadings' or 'misprisions' of them, attempts to fend off their overwhelming force so that the poet can clear a space for his own imaginative originality. Every poet is 'belated', the last in a tradition; the strong poet is the one with the courage to acknowledge this belatedness and set about undermining the precursor's power. Any poem, indeed, is nothing *but* such an undermining a series of devices, which can be seen both as rhetorical strategies and psychoanalytic defence mechanisms, for undoing and outdoing another poem. The meaning of a poem is another poem.

Bloom's literary theory represents an impassioned, defiant return to the Protestant Romantic 'tradition' from Spenser and Milton to Blake, Shelley and Yeats, a tradition ousted by the conservative Anglo-Catholic lineage (Donne, Herbert, Pope, Johnson, Hopkins) mapped out by Eliot, Leavis and their followers. Bloom is the prophetic spokesman for the creative imagination in the modern age, reading literary history as an heroic battle of giants or mighty psychic drama, trusting to the 'will to expression' of the strong poet in his struggle for self-origination. Such doughty Romantic individualism is fiercely at odds with the sceptical, anti-humanist *ethos* of a deconstructive age, and indeed Bloom has defended the value of individual poetic 'voice' and genius against his Derridean colleagues (Hartman, de Man, Hillis Miller) at Yale. His hope is that he may snatch from the jaws of a deconstructive criticism he in some ways respects a Romantic humanism which will reinstate author, intention and the power of the imagination.

Such a humanism will wage war with the 'serene linguistic nihilism' which Bloom rightly discerns in much American deconstruction, turning from the mere endless undoing of determinate meaning to a vision of poetry as human will and affirmation. The strenuous, embattled, apocalyptic tone of much of his own writing, with its outlandish spawning of esoteric terms, is witness to the strain and desperateness of this enterprise. Bloom's criticism starkly exposes the dilemma of the modern liberal or Romantic humanist – the fact that on the one hand no reversion to a serene, optimistic human faith is possible after Marx, Freud and post-structuralism, but that on the other hand any humanism which like Bloom's has taken the agonizing pressures of such doctrines is bound to be fatally compromised and contaminated by them. Bloom's epical battles of poetic giants retain the psychic splendour of a pre-Freudian age, but have lost its innocence: they are domestic rows, scenes of guilt, envy, anxiety and aggression. No humanistic literary theory which overlooked such realities could offer itself as reputedly 'modern' at all; but any such theory which takes them on board is bound to be sobered and soured by them to the point where its own capacity to affirm becomes almost maniacally wilful. Bloom advances far enough down the primrose path of American deconstruction to be able to scramble back to the heroically human only by a Nietzschean appeal to the 'will to power' and 'will to persuasion' of the individual imagination which is bound to remain arbitrary and gestural. In this exclusively patriarchal world of fathers and sons, everything comes to centre with increasing rhetorical stridency on power, struggle, strength of will; criticism itself for Bloom is just as much a form of poetry as poems are implicit literary criticism of other poems, and whether a critical reading 'succeeds' is in the end not at all a question of its truth-value but of the rhetorical force of the critic himself. It is humanism on the extreme edge, grounded in nothing but its own assertive faith, stranded between a discredited rationalism on the one hand and an intolerable scepticism on the other.

Watching his grandson playing in his pram one day; Freud observed him throwing a toy out of the pram and exclaiming *fort!* (gone away), then hauling it in again on a string to the cry of *da!* (here). This, the famous *fort-da* game, Freud interpreted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) as the infant's symbolic mastery of its mother's absence; but it can also be read as the first glimmerings of narrative. *Fort-do* is perhaps the shortest story we can imagine: an object is lost, and then recovered. But even the most

complex narratives can be read as variants on this model: the pattern of classical narrative is that an original settlement is disrupted and ultimately restored. From this viewpoint, narrative is a source of consolation: lost objects are a cause of anxiety to us, symbolizing certain deeper unconscious losses (of birth, the faeces, the mother), and it is always pleasurable to find them put securely back in place. In Lacanian theory, it is an original lost object – the mother's body – which drives forward the narrative of our lives, impelling us to pursue substitutes for this lost paradise in the endless metonymic movement of desire. For Freud, it is a desire to scramble back to a place where we cannot be harmed, the inorganic existence which precedes all conscious life, which keeps us struggling forward: our restless attachments (Eros) are in thrall to the death drive (Thanatos). Something must be lost or absent in any narrative for it to unfold: if everything stayed in place there would be no story to tell. This loss is distressing, but exciting as well: desire is stimulated by what we cannot quite possess, and this is one source of narrative satisfaction. If we could *never* possess it, however, our excitation might become intolerable and turn into unpleasure; so we must know that the object will be finally restored to us, that Tom Jones will return to Paradise Hall and Hercule Poirot will track down the murderer. Our excitation is gratifyingly released: our energies have been cunningly 'bound' by the suspenses and repetitions of the narrative only as a preparation for their pleasurable expenditure." We have been able to tolerate the disappearance of the object because our unsettling suspense was all the time shot through by the secret knowledge that it would finally come home. *Fort* has meaning only in relation to *da*.

But, of course, vice versa too. Once installed within the symbolic order, we cannot contemplate or possess any object without seeing it unconsciously in the light of its possible absence, knowing that its presence is in some way arbitrary and provisional. If the mother goes away then this is merely preparatory to her return, but when she is with us again we cannot forget the fact that she might always disappear, and perhaps always not return. Classical narrative of the realist kind is on the whole a 'conservative' form, which slides our anxiety at absence under the comforting sign of presence; many modernist texts, such as those of Brecht and Beckett, remind us that what we are seeing might always have happened differently, or not happened at all. If for psychoanalysis the prototype of all absence is castration – the little boy's fear that he will lose his sexual organ, the little girl's supposed disappointment that she has 'lost' hers – then such texts, post-structuralism would say, have accepted the reality of castration, the ineluctability of loss, absence and difference in human life. Reading them, we too are brought to encounter

these realities to prise ourselves loose from the 'imaginary', where loss and difference are unthinkable, and where it seemed that the world was made for us and we for the world. There is no death in the imaginary, since the world's continuing existence depends upon my life just as much as my life depends upon it; it is only by entering the symbolic order that we confront the truth that we can die, since the world's existence does not in fact depend upon us. As long as we remain in an imaginary realm of being we misrecognize our own identities, seeing them as fixed and rounded, and misrecognize reality as something immutable. We remain, in Althusser's terms, in the grip of ideology, conforming to social reality as 'natural' rather than critically questioning how it, and ourselves, came to be constructed, and so could possibly be transformed.

We have seen in our discussion of Roland Barthes how much literature conspires in its very forms to forestall such critical interrogation. Barthes's 'naturalized' sign is equivalent to Lacan's 'imaginary': in both cases an alienated personal identity is confirmed by a 'given', inevitable world. This is not to say that literature written in such a mode is necessarily conservative in what it *says*; but the radicalism of its statements may be undermined by the forms in which they are held. Raymond Williams has pointed to the interesting contradiction between the social radicalism of much naturalistic theatre (Shaw, for example) and the formal methods of such drama. The discourse of the play may be urging change, criticism, rebellion; but the dramatic forms itemize the furniture and aim for an exact 'verisimilitude' - inevitably enforce upon us a sense of the unalterable solidity of this social world, all the way down to the colour of the maid's stockings." For the drama to break with these ways of seeing, it would need to move beyond naturalism altogether into some more experimental mode - as indeed did the later Ibsen and Strindberg. Such transfigured forms might jolt the audience out of the reassurance of recognition - the self-security which springs from contemplating a world which is familiar. We can contrast Shaw in this respect with Bertolt Brecht, who uses certain dramatic techniques (the so-called 'estrangement effect') to render the most taken-for-granted aspects of social reality shockingly unfamiliar, and so to rouse the audience to a new critical awareness of them. Far from being concerned to reinforce the audience's sense of security, Brecht wants, as he says, to 'create contradictions within them' - to unsettle their convictions, dismantle and refashion their received identities, and expose the unity of this selfhood as an ideological illusion.

We can find another meeting-point of political and psychoanalytical theories in the work of the feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's thinking is much influenced by Lacan; yet for any feminist such influence clearly

poses a problem. For the symbolic order of which Lacan writes is in reality the patriarchal sexual and social order of modern class-society, structured around the 'transcendental signifier' of the phallus, dominated by the Law which the father embodies. There is no way, then, in which a feminist or pro-feminist may uncritically celebrate the symbolic order at the expense of the imaginary: on the contrary, the oppressiveness of the actual social and sexual relations of such a system is precisely the target of the feminist critique. In her book *La Revolution du langage poetique* (1974), Kristeva therefore opposes to the symbolic not so much the imaginary, as what she terms the 'semiotic'. She means by this a pattern or play of forces which we can detect inside language, and which represents a sort of residue of the pre-Oedipal phase. The child in the pre-Oedipal phase does not yet have access to language ('infant' means 'speechless'), but we can imagine its body as criss-crossed by a flow of 'pulsions' or drives which are at this point relatively unorganized. This rhythmic pattern can be seen as a form of language, though it is not yet meaningful. For language as such to happen, this heterogeneous flow must be as it were chopped up, articulated into stable terms, so that in entering the symbolic order this 'semiotic' process is repressed. The repression, however, is not total: for the semiotic can still be discerned as a kind of pulsional pressure within language itself, in tone, rhythm, the bodily and material qualities of language, but also in contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silence and absence. The semiotic is the 'other' of language which is none the less intimately entwined with it. Because it stems from the pre-Oedipal phase, it is bound up with the child's contact with the mother's body, whereas the symbolic, as we have seen, is associated with the Law of the father. The semiotic is thus closely connected with femininity: but is by no means a language exclusive to women, for it arises from a pre-Oedipal period which recognizes no distinctions of gender.

Kristeva looks to this 'language' of the semiotic as a means of undermining the symbolic order. In the writings of some of the French Symbolist poets and other avant-garde authors, the relatively secure meanings of 'ordinary' language are harassed and disrupted by this flow of signification, which presses the linguistic sign to its extreme limit, values its tonal, rhythmic and material properties, and sets up a play of unconscious drives in the text which threatens to split apart received social meanings. The semiotic is fluid and plural, a kind of pleasurable creative excess over precise meaning, and it takes sadistic delight in destroying or negating such signs. It is opposed to all fixed, transcendental significations; and since the ideologies of modern male-dominated class-society rely on such fixed signs for their power (God, father, state, order, property and so on), such literature becomes a kind of

equivalent in the realm of language to revolution in the sphere of politics. The reader of such texts is equally disrupted or 'decentred' by this linguistic force, thrown into contradiction, unable to take up anyone, simple 'subject-position' in relation to these polymorphous works. The semiotic throws into confusion all tight divisions between masculine and feminine - it is a 'bisexual' form of writing - and offers to deconstruct all the scrupulous binary oppositions - proper/improper, norm/deviation, sane/mad, mine/yours, authority/obedience - by which societies such as ours survive.

The English-language writer who perhaps most strikingly exemplifies Kristeva's theories is James Joyce." But aspects of it are also evident in the writings of Virginia Woolf, whose fluid, diffuse, sensuous style offers a resistance to the kind of male metaphysical world symbolized by the philosopher Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Ramsay's world works by abstract truths, sharp divisions and fixed essences: it is a patriarchal world, for the phallus is the symbol of sure, self-identical truth and is not to be challenged. Modern society, as the post-structuralists would say, is 'phallogocentric'; it is also, as we have seen, 'logocentric', believing that its discourses can yield us immediate access to the full truth and presence of things. Jacques Derrida has conflated these two terms to the compound 'phallogocentric', which we might roughly translate as 'cocksure'. It is this cocksureness, by which those who wield sexual and social power maintain their grip, that Woolf's 'semiotic' fiction could be seen as challenging.

This raises the vexed question, much debated in feminist literary theory, as to whether there is a specifically feminine mode of writing. Kristeva's 'semiotic' is not, as we have seen, *inherently* feminine: indeed most of the 'revolutionary' writers she discusses are male. But because it is closely related to the mother's body, and because there are complex psychoanalytical reasons for holding that women retain a closer relationship to that body than men do, one might expect such writing to be on the whole more typical of women. Some feminists have sharply rejected this theory, fearing that it simply reinvents some 'female essence' of a non-cultural kind, and perhaps also suspecting that it may be no more than a high-falutin version of the sexist view that women babble. Neither of these beliefs is in my view necessarily implied by Kristeva's theory. It is important to see that the semiotic is not an *alternative* to the symbolic order, a language one could speak instead of 'normal' discourse: it is rather a process *within* our conventional sign-systems, which questions and transgresses their limits. In Lacanian theory, anyone who is unable to enter the symbolic order at all, to symbolize their experience through language, would become psychotic. One

might see the semiotic as a kind of internal limit or borderline of the symbolic order; and in this sense the 'feminine' could equally be seen as existing on such a border. For the feminine is at once constructed within the symbolic order, like any gender, and yet is relegated to its margins, judged inferior to masculine power. The woman is both 'inside' and 'outside' male society, both a romantically idealized member of it and a victimized outcast. She is sometimes what stands between man and chaos, and sometimes the embodiment of chaos itself. This is why she troubles the neat categories of such a regime, blurring its well-defined boundaries. Women are represented within male-governed society, fixed by sign, image, meaning, yet because they are also the 'negative' of that social order there is always in them something which is left over, superfluous, unrepresentable, which refuses to be figured there.

On this view, the feminine - which is a mode of being and discourse not necessarily identical with women - signifies a force within society which opposes it. And this has its obvious political implications in the form of the women's movement. The political correlative of Kristeva's own theories - of a semiotic force which disrupts all stable meanings and institutions - would appear to be some kind of anarchism. If such an unending overthrow of all fixed structure is an inadequate response in the political realm, so too in the theoretical sphere is the assumption that a literary text which undermines meaning is *ipso facto* 'revolutionary'. It is quite possible for a text to do this in the name of some right-wing irrationalism, or to do it in the name of nothing much at all. Kristeva's argument is dangerously formalistic and easily caricaturable: will reading Mallarmé bring down the bourgeois state? She does not, of course, claim that it will; but she pays too little attention to the political *content* of a text, the historical conditions in which its overturning of the signified is carried out, and the historical conditions in which all of this is interpreted and used. Nor is the dismantling of the unified subject a revolutionary gesture in itself. Kristeva rightly perceives that bourgeois individualism thrives on such a fetish, but her work tends to halt at the point where the subject has been fractured and thrown into contradiction. For Brecht, by contrast, the dismantling of our given identities through art is inseparable from the practice of producing a new kind of human subject altogether, which would need to know not only internal fragmentation but social solidarity, which would experience not only the gratifications of libidinal language but the fulfilments of fighting political injustice. The implicit anarchism or libertarianism of Kristeva's suggestive theories is not the only kind of politics which follows from her recognition that women, and certain 'revolutionary' literary works, pose a radical question to existing society

precisely because they mark out the frontier beyond which it dare not venture.

There is one simple and evident connection between psychoanalysis and literature which is worth touching on in conclusion. Rightly or wrongly, Freudian theory regards the fundamental motivation of all human behaviour as the avoidance of pain and the gaining of pleasure: it is a form of what is philosophically known as hedonism. The reason why the vast majority of people read poems, novels and plays is because they find them pleasurable. This fact is so obvious that it is hardly ever mentioned in universities. It is, admittedly, difficult to spend some years studying literature in most universities and still find it pleasurable at the end: many university literature courses seem to be constructed to prevent this from happening, and those who emerge still able to enjoy literary works might be considered either heroic or perverse. As we saw earlier in this book, the fact that reading literature is generally an enjoyable pursuit posed a serious problem for those who first established it as an academic 'discipline': it was necessary to make the whole affair rather more intimidating and dispiriting, if 'English' was to earn its keep as a reputable cousin of Classics. Meanwhile, in the world outside, people carried on devouring romances, thrillers and historical novels without the faintest idea that the halls of academia were beset by these anxieties.

It is a symptom of this curious situation that the word 'pleasure' has trivializing overtones; it is certainly a less serious word than 'serious'. To say that we find a poem intensely enjoyable seems somehow a less acceptable critical statement than to claim that we thought it morally profound. It is difficult not to feel that comedy is a more superficial business than tragedy. Between the Cambridge roundheads who speak dauntingly of 'moral seriousness', and the Oxford cavaliers who find George Eliot 'amusing', there seems little space for a more adequate theory of pleasure. But psychoanalysis is among other things precisely this: its bristling intellectual armoury is bent on the exploration of such fundamental matters as what people find gratifying and what they do not, how they can be relieved of their misery and made more happy. If Freudianism is a science, concerned with an impersonal analysis of psychological forces, it is a science committed to the emancipation of human beings from what frustrates their fulfilment and well-being. It is a theory at the service of a transformative practice, and to that extent has parallels with radical politics. It recognizes that pleasure and displeasure are

extremely complex issues, unlike the kind of traditional literary critic for whom statements of personal liking or disliking are merely propositions of 'taste' which it is impossible to analyse any further. For such a critic, saying that you enjoyed the poem is the end-point of the argument; for another kind of critic, this may be precisely where the argument begins.

This is not to suggest that psychoanalysis alone can provide the key to problems of literary value and pleasure. We like or dislike certain pieces of language not only because of the unconscious play of drives they induce in us, but because of certain conscious commitments and predilections we share. There is a complex interaction between these two regions, which needs to be demonstrated in the detailed examination of a particular literary text." The problems of literary value and pleasure would seem to lie somewhere at the juncture of psychoanalysis, linguistics and ideology, and little work has been done here as yet. We know enough, however, to suspect that it is a good deal more possible to say why someone enjoys certain arrangements of words than conventional literary criticism has believed.

More importantly, it is possible that by a fuller understanding of the pleasures and displeasures readers reap from literature, a modest but significant light may be cast on some rather more pressing problems of happiness and misery. One of the richest traditions to have emerged from Freud's own writings is one very far removed from the preoccupations of a Lacan: it is a form of political-psychoanalytical work engaged with the question of happiness as it affects whole societies. Prominent in this lineage has been the work of the German psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, and the writings of Herbert Marcuse and other members of the so-called Frankfurt school of social enquiry." We live in a society which on the one hand pressurizes us into the pursuit of instant gratification, and on the other hand imposes on whole sectors of the population an endless deferment of fulfilment. The spheres of economic, political and cultural life become 'eroticized', thronged with seductive commodities and flashy images, while the sexual relationships between men and women grow diseased and disturbed. Aggression in such a society is not only a matter of sibling rivalry: it becomes the growing possibility of nuclear self-destruction, the death drive legitimated as a military strategy. The sadistic satisfactions of power are matched by the masochistic conformity of many of the powerless. In such a condition, Freud's title *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* assumes a new, ominous meaning. One reason why we need to enquire into the dynamics of pleasure and unpleasure is because we need to know how much repression and deferred fulfilment a society is likely to tolerate; how it is that desire can be switched from ends that we would value to ends which trivialize and degrade it; how it comes

about that men and women are sometimes prepared to suffer oppression and indignity, and at what points such submission is likely to fail. We can learn from psychoanalytical theory more about why most people prefer John Keats to Leigh Hunt; we can also learn more about the nature of a 'civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt, [...] neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence'.