Interpreting the Imaginary Father: Julia Kristeva's Literary Interpretative Theory

Angela Helen Tidmarsh

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University
For all my family with thanks for their support.

In honour of my grandmother, Helen Cahill (née Griffin), whose instinctive understanding of people and love of literature dispenses with the need for studies such as this.
Statement

I would like to express my thanks to Professor Ian Wright who read my thesis at its final stage and provided many helpful suggestions. My thanks is also extended to Professor Penny Gosselin who has overseen this dissertation from its earliest stage and whose critical perspective startled me into re-evaluating many a passage.

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The content of this thesis entitled “Interpreting the Imaginary Father: Julia Kristeva’s Literary Interpretative Theory” is entirely my own original work.

Angela Tidmarsh

Signature
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I would like to express my thanks to Professor Iain Wright who read my thesis so carefully in its final stages and provided much helpful advice. My gratitude is also extended to Professor Penny Boumelha who has overseen this dissertation from its earliest stages and whose sharp perspective startled me into re-evaluating many a passage.

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Abstract

Julia Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology is largely unelaborated in her recent work. The purpose of this thesis is to articulate the literary interpretative methodology that occupies the ground between Kristeva’s psycholiterary theory and her actual literary interpretations.

I start with an exegesis of Kristeva’s account of the production of literature which maps the interplay of intra- and inter-psychical relations that lead to speaking subjectivity. In Kristeva’s theory the writer surrenders that subject position to explore the presubjective, intrapsychic space and its “semiotic” prelinguistic disposition. Subsequently, the artist imports rediscovered semiotic elements into the symbolic register to produce art. Hence, artistic production is, for Kristeva, the “semiotization of the symbolic.”

I assert that Kristeva’s theory of literary interpretation is an extension of her theory of literary production, and that literary interpreters undergo similar psycholinguistic processes to writers. Both attain speaking subjectivity, both explore the semiotic and both reimport the semiotic into the symbolic in their respective literary or interpretative texts.

I propose that Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology is three-phased. In the first phase, the literary interpreter adopts a principally symbolic position from which to undertake an objective analysis of the work of a writer. This analysis itself has three components: a linguistic analysis, an historical and/or biographical contextual analysis and a psychoanalysis. The second phase involves the literary

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analyst undergoing countertransference with the work. Relinquishing the
certainties associated with the symbolic order, the interpreter gives way to her
own desire in relation to the text. The third phase of Kristeva’s literary
interpretative methodology, I suggest, is analogous to the second-degree thesis
that semiotizes the symbolic for the writer. It involves renewed detachment from
the text by a return to the symbolic order and its register. From there the
interpreter writes her experience of the text and her analysis of the processes that
produced the text.

However, while the writer and interpreter each undergo similar processes, they do
not do so to the same degree and hence do not produce qualitatively equivalent
texts. The writer, in Kristeva’s theory, produces a text on the cusp of the
semiotic-symbolic divide. The interpreter, by contrast, produces a text which is
more firmly embedded in the symbolic, although it still bears traces of the
interpreter’s countertransferential exploration of the semiotic, perhaps in its style
and certainly in its analysis of textual processes.

I contend that, in Kristeva’s theory, it is the figure of the imaginary father with
whom both the writer and the interpreter undergo an identification with. Situated
on the semiotic-symbolic divide, the imaginary father is ambiguous as a law-
giving, paternal aspect of the supportive maternal body. Accordingly, the
imaginary father has access to both the semiotic and symbolic registers. It is
identification with the imaginary father, then, that allows both writer and the
literary interpreter to produce texts which each bear evidence of contact with both
the semiotic and the symbolic while remaining distinct from the other in
orientation.
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Introduction

Reading Kristeva as a literary theorist and interpreter is both an enlightening and a frustrating experience.

Kristeva offers a fascinating and detailed account of the production of literature, a journey that begins not with the figurative birth of the writer’s first work but with the literal birth of the writer. The individual (perhaps a future writer), who is as yet only a squalling and gurgling infant, is followed through a complex interplay of intra- and inter-psychical relations before arriving at the position Kristeva describes as speaking subjectivity. While most of us attempt to remain at this point of social and linguistic competence in order to comport ourselves with as much sophistication as we can muster, artists and writers, Kristeva asserts, let go of that hard-won subject position to once more explore the presubjective, intrapsychic space and its “semiotic” prelinguistic disposition. Subsequently, the artist imports rediscovered semiotic elements into the symbolic register to produce art. Hence, artistic production is, for Kristeva, the “semiotization of the symbolic.”

Interesting too are Kristeva’s many literary analyses which include detailed linguistic interrogations of Lautréamont and Mallamé’s works, studies of Céline’s abject texts, of Joyce, Proust and Baudelaire’s loving discourse and of Dostoyevsky and Duras’ melancholic writings.

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1 Kristeva provides an extensive explanation of the semiotic and its distinction from the symbolic in Part I of Revolution in Poetic Language (trans. Margaret Waller, intro. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)). A more succinct definition is to be found in her New Maladies of the Soul (trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)) where she writes: “I therefore distinguish between the semiotic, which consists of drive-related and affective meaning organised according to primary processes whose sensory aspects are often nonverbal (sound and melody, rhythm, color, odors, and so forth), on the one hand, and linguistic signification that is manifest in linguistic signs and their logico-syntactic organization, on the other” (104). For discussion and commentary on these (and other) key elements of the Kristevan schema refer to Kelly Oliver’s Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) and John Lechte’s Julia Kristeva (London: Routledge, 1991). Also refer to Footnote 2 in my Chapter One.

2 Kristeva, Revolution, 79.
The point of frustration for someone approaching Kristeva from a literary theoretical perspective, however, comes in trying to determine how Kristeva negotiates the shift from her highly formalised psycholinguistic theories to her distinctive literary analyses. The expected middle-point, a literary interpretative methodology, the procedure which Kristeva as literary analyst applies in order to arrive at her particular interpretations, is not clearly articulated. Admittedly there is, in Kristeva, an unsupported conflation of the roles of psychoanalyst and literary analyst and there are tantalising hints and remarks as to how the literary analyst, theorist or interpreter may go about her task, but nothing that might approach a defined methodology specific to her more recent psychoanalytic elaborations and literary interpretations.

Yet, beneath the perplexing convolutions of logical and metaphoric exposition, a solid, albeit evasive, literary interpretative position is discernible. I am reminded of Lily Briscoe’s philosophy of pictorial composition in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*: “Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent ... but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron.” My goal in this thesis is to locate, and to throw light upon, the hidden “bolts of iron” that form Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory and methodology. To do so, I shall not be tracing the changes that have taken place to Kristeva’s science of semanalysis. Rather, I shall start afresh, tracing the progression from Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, through her theory of literary production, to that which I take to be her literary interpretative theory. This latter theory meets with Kristeva’s presupposition that the psychoanalyst is fully equipped to function as literary analyst and interpreter.

The logical progression that places Kristeva’s theory of literary interpretation as an extension of her theory of literary production takes as its key premise the understanding that all subjects, writers and literary

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4 Refer to the first pages of my Chapter Four and to the Glossary for more on semanalysis.
interpreters included, undergo similar psycholinguistic processes in their advance towards symbolic mastery. Accordingly, my first two chapters will outline psychological development as Kristeva conceives it. Chapter One will survey Kristeva’s psycholinguistic theory of the construction of the speaking subject from birth. Chapter Two will address the dissolution and resynthesis of the subject and the subject’s language during artistic production.6

Informing these two chapters, and indeed the whole thesis, is an underlying principle in Kristeva’s theory of the speaking subject and literary interpretation: the principle of heterogeneity. Extending to flavour all aspects of her project, heterogeneity is grounded upon the theory of the split subject of psychoanalysis. Ever since Freud’s exploration of the unconscious, earlier models of the mind as monadic have given way to conceptions of the mind as being made up of two psychical agencies. Despite their co-existence, these agencies are not equivalent in content or organisation, nor are they normally open for inspection by one another. Freudian psychoanalysis instructs that one of these agencies, consciousness, remains ignorant of the workings of the repressed other, the unconscious, except through intricate analysis of symptomatic phenomena such as dreams, jokes, art and literature. Nevertheless, despite their being largely foreclosed to one another, exchanges between the conscious and the unconscious fashion an ambiguous psychical dialectic that redefines the way subjectivity is conceived. Modernist literature is heterogeneous, Kristeva argues, because it lays bare the dialectic between consciousness and the unconscious and between the symbolic and the semiotic modalities that produced it.

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6 Although the content of these two introductory chapters are an exposition rather than an extension of Kristeva’s theories, the approach differs from that taken by Kristeva’s principal commentators to date, such as Elizabeth Grosz, John Lechte, Toril Moi, who have either followed the chronology of Kristeva’s publications or have taken a thematic approach. Kelly Oliver is the notable exception to this pattern, having also undertaken an analysis of Kristeva’s theories by way of the developing subject.
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Part Two of my thesis (Chapters Three to Six) extends the theory of heterogeneous language production to the field of literary interpretation. The same conscious-unconscious, symbolic-semiotic interaction shapes Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology. Kristeva’s theory of literary interpretation is also coloured by one particular intrapsychic character, that of the imaginary father. The imaginary father is just one of the increasingly opaque manifestations of the paternal metaphor with which the protosubject identifies during its subjective development. Yet this particular figure is pivotal to Kristeva’s theory of literary production and to her method of literary interpretation because of “his” ambiguity as a law-giving, paternal aspect of the supportive maternal body and, consequently, for “his” privileged access to both the semiotic and symbolic registers. My contention is that identification with the intrapsychic position of imaginary father allows both writer and literary interpreter to produce texts which each bear evidence of contact with both the semiotic and the symbolic, while remaining distinct from the other in orientation.

The central chapters of my thesis will detail how the literary interpreter, positioned as imaginary father in relation to the literary text, explores and gives voice to both conscious and unconscious aspects of the text and of the interpretative process. The literary interpreter’s conscious exploration of the text broadly follows the “science of semiology,” an interpretative system devised by Kristeva in the 1960s and articulated in her Séméiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse (1969). As a system it interrogates the literary text from three angles. Analysis of the formal features of a text, a linguistic semiotics, distinguishes the features upon which the rest of the interpretation will be mounted. Socio-historical analysis then assesses the conscious, knowable factors which surrounded the text’s production. Lastly, a psychoanalysis of the text explores the unconscious processes that (a psychoanalyst would maintain) contribute to the text’s production. The literary interpreter, in order to perform these three phases of analysis effectively, must have a degree of expertise in each of the relevant fields.

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Introduction

Since the late 1970s, however, Kristeva's scientific aspirations and calibrating procedures have submerged in inverse proportion to the emergence of her interest in psychoanalysis. A current exposition of the theory supporting her interpretative practice would emphasise, as her early work did not, the psychoanalytic situation's structuring of experiences in terms of transference and countertransference, the roles played by the various intrapsychic positions that writers and their critics identify with and the importance of the subject's desire for the mother. Indeed, Kristeva indicates in her preface to *Desire in Language (Polylogue, 1977)* that the focus of her literary theory has shifted. There she writes that the style of her theoretical discourse, which rests "on the brink of fiction without ever completely toppling over into it ...," is provided by her experience as a psychoanalyst, an experience which simply was not present earlier.\(^7\) Henceforth, the literary interpreter still undertakes objective, conscious analysis of each of the linguistic, conscious and unconscious aspects of the text but she also gives way to unconscious desire in relation to the text in its entirety.

I should point out here that, on the whole, my own approach in reconstituting Kristeva's literary interpretative methodology draws fairly equally from Kristeva's works published in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Taking Kristeva's psychoanalytic theories as a group, just as I have taken her literary analyses as a group, may give the impression that I am glossing over shifts in her position. After all, Kristeva's practice of repeatedly analysing ever more minute areas of psyche and text from a variety of perspectives (linguistic, cultural, artistic, affective and so on) and of producing an increasingly subtle and nuanced network of hypotheses certainly gives the impression that Kristeva's theoretical position is forever in motion. It is my contention, however, that (aside from the unmistakable, mid-career reorientation of her theories from the social to the individual domain which I

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will deal with specifically) Kristeva's theories in general tend to explore "the same in depth, opening up an unsuspected, unfathomable substance." Hence, while I may rely heavily upon more recently introduced features such as the imaginary father and countertransference, I understand these to be elaborations within a theoretical continuity that do not (for the most part) invalidate Kristeva's earlier positions. In contrast to Kelly Oliver who emphasises "the ruptures and crises" in Kristeva's texts, I have sought continuity and stability in Kristeva's texts in my endeavour to uncover her literary interpretative theory.

Building on Kristeva's fuller and more psychoanalytically inclined later works (rather than on her scientifically and linguistically oriented earlier ones), I arrive at one of my central claims: that it is a logical extension of Kristeva's theories that the trajectory experienced by the writing subject, who inscribes within the text both objective symbolic language and her desires as released through reattachment to pre-oedipal modalities, is the same trajectory undergone by the literary interpreter. The interpreter inscribes within her work both objective analysis of the text and her subjective desire for the text. So, just as a work of art or literature is a reflowering of heterogeneous unconscious forces in the symbolic register, so too does the work of interpretation synthesise conscious, social and objectively communicable textual components with unconscious, psychical and subjectively experienced textual components.

While I will describe the psycholinguistic processes undergone by writer and interpreter as analogous, it is important to note that they are not equivalent in Kristeva's account. It is convenient to think: well off course both art and its interpretation partake of the same processes - after all, speaking from within the poststructuralist paradigm, all social production is to be understood as text, as writing. Whereas, in the past, art has been understood to be predominantly subjective with interpretation and criticism

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9 Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 70.
of it being taken to be objective (at least in intent), now both art and art commentary are conceived as being both subjective and objective activities. Nevertheless, while art and its interpretation each involve conscious and unconscious modes of thinking, they do not, in Kristeva, involve them equally. Rather, modernist literature and poetry rest on the cusp of the semiotic-symbolic divide and involve a discharge of the semiotic, while interpretation is weighted towards consciousness, objectivity and the symbolic and involves a description of the semiotic process itself.

In Kristeva’s theory, to go through the same processes and yet arrive at qualitatively different ends - the semiotisation of the symbolic that is literature and the more symbolically oriented interpretation of it - is possible because both writer and interpreter (as I have already observed) assume the position of the imaginary father allowing each access to both conscious and unconscious processes. The literary interpreter as imaginary father has the capacity to be fusionally desirous and distantly objective though transferential engagement and countertransferral disengagement.

In the third section (Chapters Seven to Nine) I will turn, finally, to Kristeva’s interpretative practice itself. One chapter each is devoted to Kristeva’s analyses of Joyce and Proust while the final chapter sweeps over a wide range of Kristeva’s literary analyses. In addressing Kristeva’s literary analyses, I am not particularly seeking to ascertain the degree to which they conform to the model of Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory that I claim lies embedded in her work. After all, I believe there is enough internal evidence to affirm the pertinence to Kristevan psycholiterary theory of the literary interpretative methodology I have mapped out. Further, it is not really possible from outside psychoanalysis to determine, by addressing a given interpretative text, the degrees or types of countertransference taking place in the mind of the interpreter. Rather, I interrogate Kristeva’s literary interpretations in order to shed further light upon the methodology that underpin them.

By plumbing the substratum of Kristeva’s literary theory in order to determine its implications for interpretation, I have performed an entirely
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different activity from the majority of Kristeva's other literary commentators. Much of the literary interpretative attention Kristeva's theories have received apply key Kristevan concepts such as the semiotic, abjection, melancholia and so on to literary texts in much the same way as the formal aesthetic concepts, such as unity or harmony for instance, have been applied to literary texts in earlier interpretative environments. Hence we have Makiko Minow-Pinkey's "Virginia Woolf 'Seen from a Foreign Land'" which takes a chronological survey of Woolf's novels to find instances of the necessary dialectic of semiotic impulses and thetic control ..."10 Maud Ellman argues in "Eliot's Abjection" that, like the hysteric, T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land "reinscribes the horrors it is trying to repress."11

Not only does my thesis differ from previous applications of Kristeva's psycholiterary theory, it also varies from the feminist analyses which have so dominated Kristevan studies to date. For instance, commentators have tended to describe the consequences and impact of Kristeva's dubious, even hostile, attitude toward female writers in relation to feminist ambitions and theory rather than in relation to literature. Feminist analysis, I suggest, has all but eclipsed analysis of Kristeva's theories in relation to other, including literary, issues. Consequently, I shall not be reading Kristeva against the grain in order to recuperate her to feminism nor shall I be expending any energy articulating how worthy or unworthy Kristeva is in relation to feminism. My concern here is on an area of Kristevan studies that has itself been largely marginalised, Kristeva's own literary interpretation.

Chapter One

Speaking the Law

In the best of cases, speaking beings and their language are like one: is not speech our "second nature"?

Julia Kristeva

Kristeva's literary theory does not seek to explain all literature but only a specific type, that which she identifies as poetic language. Epitomised by modernist literature and poetry, poetic language results, Kristeva asserts, from a dialectic that occurs between two psycho-linguistic modalities, the semiotic and the symbolic. Initially the semiotic and the symbolic are experienced diachronically with infants born into the semiotic realm which they gradually relinquish for the symbolic. In certain types of poetic and literary production, however, the semiotic and the symbolic are re-experienced synchronically with the semiotic becoming manifest within symbolic language. Hence, literature is, for Kristeva, the "semiotization of the symbolic."

1 Kristeva, Black Sun, 53.
2 Kelly Oliver notes that "Kristeva uses the symbolic in two senses to refer not only to the Symbolic order [Lacan's sole meaning] but also to a specifically symbolic [static] element within the Symbolic order that she opposes to the semiotic [rejecting] element. The Symbolic order is the order of signification, the social realm. This realm is composed of both semiotic and symbolic elements" (Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 10).
3 In Freudian terms this trajectory follows the child's oral, anal and genital phases to the resolution of the oedipal complex. In Lacanian terms it proceeds from the real, through the imaginary to the symbolic.
4 Kristeva, Revolution, 79.
Speaking the Law

For my purposes, discussion of poetic language is most readily approached diachronically in the first instance. Accordingly, this chapter follows Kristeva’s account of the biological, psychological and linguistic processes undergone by the future subject. The process begins with parturition, when the future subject is launched into the semiotic, and continues through oedipalisation, when the subjectively unified and linguistically competent speaking being crystallises and finds a home in the symbolic. My second chapter deals with Kristeva’s theory of the dissolution of this symbolic stasis, the subject’s renewed acquaintanceship with the semiotic, and the resynthesising of both in the form of poetry and literature.

Not only can poetic language be viewed both diachronically and synchronically, Kristeva maintains that it also has both linguistic and psychological aspects. In the following study I shall mount my exegesis in a broad psychological frame, introducing linguistic corollaries as appropriate. In so doing, I am taking Kristeva’s own lead for, while the linguistic and the affective are inextricably linked, Kristeva tends to investigate pre-linguistic representations principally in psychoanalytic terms. Perhaps she selects this path because the terminological and conceptual tools of psychoanalysis allow the greatest scope for detail and nuance in analysis and exegesis. Jacqueline Rose believes that this is the case, writing that “psychoanalysis became for Kristeva the means of taking that shift to subjectivity and the unconscious at its word (body and letter) through a clinical engagement with the acquisition, dissolution and pathology of language ....” Accordingly, I will trace Kristeva’s own painstaking account of phase after phase of intra- and inter-psychic growth, exposing the many stages and elements upon

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which subsequent linguistic performance must be erected. Finally, a fully functional psychic economy is established which can support a socially competent unified ego, at the expense of unconscious content. And a fully operational linguistic economy is established in which the subjectively unified speaking being can symbolically communicate, at the expense of semiotic primacy.

It should be noted that the contents of this chapter and the next do not seek to expand or even question Kristeva’s theory. They constitute an exegesis - albeit one more formally delineated than any undertaken by either Kristeva or her principal commentators - which is intended to establish a base upon which I will reconstitute Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology.

Maternal *chora*

Speech and body are born together: “Flash on the unnamable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible.” Born crying, but not yet signifying, the nascent infant inhabits a pre-linguistic sphere which Kristeva calls the “semiotic *chora*.”

The *chora*, which is taken from the Greek word for “enclosed space” or “womb,” imparts a spatial memory only: “No time at all,” Kristeva writes, “Fragrance of honey, roundness of forms, silk and velvet under my fingers, on my cheeks. Mummy. Almost no sight - a shadow that darkens, soaks me up, or vanishes amid

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flashes. Almost no voice in her placid presence.”

Here, in this choric space, there is no distinction between inside and outside or subject and object. The archaic mother, maternal container, or “Thing” as “she” is variously called, is not an other, not an object for the infant, but rather an intimate and inseparable part of

\[\text{Kristeva, Tales, 256. While I am not seeking in this thesis to enter into the debate regarding Kristeva’s relationship to gender politics and feminism - especially since, as Toril Moi notes, “Kristeva’s work can in no way be characterized as primarily feminist ....” (Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1990) 167) - this is an appropriate point at which to acknowledge the work of some of Kristeva’s commentators. Such rosily utopic images as conjured up in Kristeva’s “Stabat Mater” at first appear to situate Kristeva alongside exponents of feminine essence such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray of the group Politique et psychoanalyse (later Psych et po). Refer to Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” Signs 1.4 (1976) 881-92 and Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) 29. However, Anglo-American commentators have not tended to support the essentialist notions of women’s speech, parler-femme, or writing, écriture féminine. Refer to Domna C. Stanton, “Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-connection,” The Future of Difference, eds. Hester Eisenstein, and Alice Jardine (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980) 75, 81. Rather, adopting a sociological perspective, Nancy Fraser, for one, accuses Kristeva of a “quasi-biologistic, essentializing identification of women’s femininity with maternity” thereby creating “a sort of oppositional feminine beach-head within discursive practice” (Nancy Fraser, “The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics,” Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture 17.2 (1990) 96-9. Domna C. Stanton similarly maintains that Kristeva reiterates the traditional values that adhere to masculinity (rationalism, rigidity and so on) and femininity (materiality, fluidity, etcetera) and then countervalues this dichotomy so that “the feminine, devalued in phallogocentric, becomes the superior value, but the system of binary oppositions remains the same” (Domna C. Stanton, “Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva,” The Poetics of Gender, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 167). Jacqueline Rose agrees, suggesting that when Kristeva “too rigidly demarcates identity and drive, symbolic and semiotic, conscious and unconscious, and distributes them between the realms of the father and the mother” she falls “straight into that essentialism and primacy of the semiotic” which is one of the most problematic aspects of Kristeva’s work (Rose, Sexuality, 161, 157). For Rose, Kristeva’s adoption of Plato’s term “chora” carries with it his implicit understanding of the mother as an empty vessel or receptacle that is merely useful for gestation. Therefore, Rose writes, Kristeva’s use of the chora reinforces a “fully ideological division between maternal and paternal ....” (Rose, Sexuality, 154-53). As my exegesis in this, and my next, chapter will divulge, however, I believe such readings of Kristeva as an essentialist, regardless of whether they are favourable or unfavourable, to be misreadings or at best to be true only at a rhetorical level. Kristeva’s theory is much more complex and dialectical in its treatment of the nexus of maternity and paternity and the semiotic and the symbolic. Ewa Ziarek, too, in her discussion of the maternal body in Kristeva’s thought, recognises that Kristeva’s “approach to the maternal body via poetry ... and a larger socioeconomic analysis of the capitalist modes of production ... warns Kristeva’s readers from the outset against the hasty conclusion that the attempt to think the maternal is a plunge into mute biology, or a mere mystification of the prelinguistic unity between the mother and child” (Ewa Ziarek, “At the Limits of Discourse: Heterogeneity, Alterity, and the Maternal Body in Kristeva’s Thought,” Hypatia 7.2 (1992) 93). Refer to Kristeva’s own distinction between first-, second- and third-wave feminism (where she situates herself) in “Women’s Time” (1979) published most accessibly in The Kristeva Reader (ed. and intro. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 187-213).}
its own psychical being. Spellbound, mother and baby embrace in a state which is as close as one will ever get to dyadic unity.

Signification is neither required nor possible where there is no other to signify or to signify with, and no separate place of self to signify from. However, just because there is no signification, this does not mean that there is no articulation. The amorphous *chora* of rapturous *jouissance* and plenitude is plasticised and vocalised by the “semiotic modality,” that is, by the infant and mother’s shared gestures, cooing and crying. They create between them what Kristeva describes as “that overflowing laughter where one senses the collapse of some ringing, subtle, fluid identity or other, softly buoyed by the waves.”

**Heterogeneity**

These images bespeak unity, wholeness and amorphous oneness between mother and child, yet it is Kristeva’s mission to show how this apparently cosy homogeneity is troubled by divisive heterogeneity. Indeed, for Kristeva maternity itself is a privileged site of heterogeneity. It operates as a metaphor in much the same way as the phallus signifies, according to Lacan, symbolic unity and monology. Although the expectant mother performs a “closure of consciousness within the indolence of habit,” allowing her to imagine that she is undivided, in actual fact, Kristeva maintains, she is a “being of folds, a catastrophe of being” who is “cut in half, alien to [her] other.” Pervasive throughout Kristeva’s work, the logic of heterogeneity, in which one division is imposed ceaselessly upon another, finds in the maternal body a poignant metaphor for the divisions that rive

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10 Kristeva, *Tales*, 256.
11 Kristeva, *Tales*, 260, 255.
subjectivity and language. For Kristeva the mother is thus “a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language - and it has always been so.”

While heterogeneity is a concept which is articulated in many social and linguistic theories and is fundamental to psychoanalysis, what is striking in Kristeva is her relentless pursuit of its manifestations to the most minute instances of being and utterance, even into intrauterine life. Kristeva maintains that heterogeneity (along with the Freudian ordering principle of the classic triangular family model comprising mother, father and child) is a deep structuring characteristic. For Kristeva, heterogeneity structures not only the social order, symbolic language and subjectivity but also pre-subjective infancy where drives animate the body.

It is no great feat to conceive of a heterogeneous social order composed of groups diverse in terms of ethnicity, sex, class, religion, language and so on. Heterogeneity within these groups is also obvious in so far as they are made up of individual subjects. Further, each individual subject is heterogeneous in so far as the psyche is irrecoverably split and unknowable as an entirety to itself because the underlying unconscious irrigates and subtly subverts the “I” of consciousness. Kristeva combines the Freudian insight of subjective heterogeneity with Ferdinand de Saussure’s division of language into its social aspect as a shared system, *la langue*, and its specific aspect as individual utterance, *la parole*.

Accordingly, just as the unconscious undermines conscious, egoistic confidence so too does *la parole* modify *la langue*.

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12 Kristeva, *Tales*, 254.

Kristeva also draws on the Lacanian psychoanalytic postulation regarding heterogeneity in infancy, a characteristic which, for Lacan, becomes apparent at the mirror stage with the disjunctive and therefore heterogeneous experiences of the self specularised as unified in the mirror and the self felt as fragmented body.\footnote{Jacques Lacan, \textit{Écrits: A Selection}, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) 2, 4.}

Leaving the homogenous clarity of Cartesian consciousness even further behind, Kristeva explores the “murky, swampy, invisible drama” germane to the earliest phases of infant psycho-biological development.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales}, 376.} She examines the infant’s identification with its “imaginary father” and rejection of its “abject mother,” events which traumatise and make heterogeneous the apparent syncretic unity which the infant hitherto had enjoyed with its mother. Even the pulsating rhythms of the ostensibly physiological drives emanating from and through the infant’s body are not wholly biological but are always already mediated by socio-psychic effects imprinted by and in the mother. The expectant mother is, after all, “a strange fold that changes culture into nature, the speaking into biology” and, at the same time, nature into culture.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales}, 259.}

It is Kristeva’s self-appointed task to offer an enriched vision of heterogeneity as it pertains to language and subjectivity. She pursues its manifestations into the very earliest phases of infancy, and, concomitantly, into the very earliest pre-linguistic audible emissions.
Speaking the Law

Void of negativity

Tracing the logic of heterogeneity through further and further divisions, more and more minute distinctions reveal, at the limits of the fathomable, a void lying "at the root of the human psyche." When "the overabundance of meaning, desire, violence, and anguish is drained by means of language," the void remains.18

This core of nothingness, situated at the cusp of division of being, is registered in linguistics by de Saussure whose placement of a bar between signifier and signified signals the arbitrariness of the connection between the two terms (an arbitrariness which is surrendered to conventionality with accepted usage within linguistic communities).19 Lacan also theorises a "gaping hole" in being that is revealed at the mirror stage with the spatial gap between the infant's reflected Ideal-I and the emergent embodied ego. This space between the mirrored image and the observing proto-ego is an external manifestation of the psychic vertigo that occurs as the infant rives itself from the satiating maternal bond to narcissistically embrace its unified image. Kristeva argues that, since emptiness is revealed rather than created at the mirror stage, the void must already exist prior to coagulation of the ego. It is these earlier, pre-mirror experiences undergone by the infant in its attempt to parry the void that become one of Kristeva's principal concerns.

Kristeva bases her conception of the void upon German theologian and philosopher Georg Hegel's (1770-1831) notion of "negativity."20 "Negativity" is

17 Kristeva, Tales, 23.
19 De Saussure, 69, 71; Kristeva, Tales, 42.
20 Kristeva, Revolution, 109.
to be distinguished both from the “negative” and from “negation.” Taking Hegel’s ternary dialectic (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) as her starting point, Kristeva explains that thoughts moving along this trajectory from contradiction to reconciliation must necessarily emanate from an always already existing transcendental subject or ego. As John Lechte observes, Kristeva is indebted in this regard to Emile Benveniste who writes: “The characteristic of linguistic negation is that it can annul only what has been uttered, which it has to set up for the express purpose of suppressing, and that a judgment of nonexistence has necessarily the formal status of a judgment of existence.”

Similarly, for Kristeva, the subject’s positing of a negative antithesis or negation in dialectic judgement “is a mark of the symbolic and/or syntactic function” and, when it initially appears at the peak of the mirror phase at about fifteen months, is “the first mark of sublimation or the thetic” (the thetic being the identificatory break that produces the positing of signification).

However, since the maternal semiotic chora is a domain that exists prior to the unified subject and her or his thought (“no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on”), and thus anterior to the thesis/antithesis division, it is also prior to the signifier/signified, real/symbolic, subject/object, and, it follows, positive/negative distinctions. It is therefore incorrect to conceive of the semiotic as an “other” or “negative” posited by symbolic thought. Rather, by looking through the topological organising structure of Hegelian dialectics, negativity is identified by Kristeva, after Hegel himself, not as one of the three principal terms but as a fourth term that is the

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22 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 122. Refer to the section entitled “First-degree thetic transgression” later in this chapter and to the Glossary for more on the thetic.

material ground of dialectic movement itself. While Hegel represses negativity in his quest for knowledge of higher unity (W. T. Jones notes that: "Despite his frequent reference to the richness and variety of the actual, [Hegel] was a monist at heart"), Kristeva emphasises negativity, claiming that "Hegelian negativity prevents the immobilization of the thetic, unsettles doxy, and lets in all the semiotic motility that prepares and exceeds it."

To make this concept her own, Kristeva reads Hegel through Freud. Specifically, she reinterprets Hegelian negativity in the light of the Freudian theory of drives to posit negativity as "the very movement of heterogeneous matter." Dialectical negativity repositioned as the genetic, biological, material, concrete operations of drive activity transfers the concept from the realm of philosophy and logic to that of psychology and biology. Having incorporated Freudian connotations into the concept, Kristeva then renames negativity "rejection." Just as in Hegel’s theory, in which negativity always underlies the dialectic as it strives for synthesis, so too, in Kristeva’s theory, does drive rejection ceaselessly pulsate through the body as it strives for subjective unity. As this chapter and the next will explain, drives also underlie the psychic impetus of literary production and, during the literary process, they redistribute the order of language, varying styles and producing rhythms.

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24. Kristeva, Revolution, 113.
27. Kristeva, Revolution, 113.
28. Kristeva, Revolution, 119. Later, "rejection" will be manifest as "horror" or "abjection." Refer to Rose, Sexuality, 155.
Material drives are ambiguously both positive (assimilating and introjective) and negative (destructive and projective) since Freud assumes “the existence of only two basic instincts, Eros and the destructive instinct ... [which] operate against each other or combine with each other.” Despite there being two, opposing, drives, it is the drive processes of separation, doubling, scission and shattering that dominate, resulting in an over-riding “destructive wave” which Freud labels the “death instinct.” Kristeva’s own labelling of drives as “rejection” is germane given their overall destructive tendency.

At the nexus of biology and society: engrams

If unrestrained, rejection’s movement of scission would ultimately result in the destruction of the body. In the face of that threat, a defence mechanism is brought into play, a counter-charge that thwarts the dynamic death-like movement of the drives. Rejection is temporarily stabilised as the body accumulates drive energy. Death drives’ trajectory is halted and marked by a stasis in the infant’s “various material supports susceptible to semiotization: voice, gestures, colors” with a presignifying imprint or “engram.” Kristeva acknowledges the influence of Derrida’s work on writing (écriture), the trace and the gramma in her discussion.


31 Freud, XVIII, 148; Kristeva, Revolution, 28. Freud himself did not use the term “Thanatos” to describe the death drive in his writings, although he is thought to have used it occasionally in conversation. It has since been employed by psychoanalysts in conjunction with eros to emphasise “the status of universal principals reached by the two great classes of instincts in the final Freudian theory” (J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith {New York: W.W. Norton, 1973} 447).

32 Kristeva, Revolution, 172.

33 Kristeva, Revolution, 28.
of the semiotic as being “articulated by flow and marks.”  

Similarly, the Derridean “gramme” is both movement and structure. It is, in Derrida’s words, “the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, and of the spacing which relates the elements to one another.”

Situated at the nexus of bodily drives and social mores, engrammatic gesturality is far from stable. Waves of drive-based rejection continue to bombard the engrams, destabilising them. Social needs and constraints impose themselves via the mother upon the body of the infant (regulating feeding times and during sphincteral training for instance) thereby directing and moulding the movement of the instinctual drives and creating psychical imprints and physical habits in their wake.

While the destabilised and socially moulded engrams eventually tip into the qualitatively new space of signs and affects at oedipalisation, in the meantime, drives and their stases create of the choric space a “syncopated void” that is “as full of movement as it is regulated.” Colouring and patterning the semiotic chora, these “archaic traces of the links between our erogenous zones and those of the other [are] stored as sonorous, visual, tactile, olfactory, or rhythmic traces” which can later be tapped or may appear unexpectedly in the works of artists and writers. Accordingly, to Lechte’s statement that the body becomes “the place of

36 Kristeva, Revolution, 25, 27, 170.
37 Kristeva, Tales, 240; Kristeva, Revolution, 25.
38 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 8.
the material support of the language of communication.” I would add that, for Kristeva, it also becomes the material support for the languages of art, including literature. Oliver, too, stresses the interconnectedness of language and the body, suggesting that Kristeva brings the speaking body back into signification by maintaining that bodily drives make their way into language and, at the same time, “reinscribe language within the body ... the dynamics that operate the Symbolic are already working within the material of the body and the presymbolic imaginary ....”

Engrams’ unstable inscription and shifting establishes a pattern that pervades the entire psycho-linguistic process. In the ever-agitated world of Kristevan psycholinguistics, rejection is followed by stasis, which is followed by rejection, and separation is followed by identification, which is followed by separation, and so on. This is what Kristeva calls the “logic of renewal.” Yet, the movement of rejection and separation followed by stasis and identification, while being without end (this side of death), is not without direction. Its trajectory follows the infant through its experiences with the archaic mother, the phallic mother, the imaginary father, the mirror phase, oedipalisation, speaking subjectivity and beyond.

The phallic mother

The first step in the Kristevan repetitive, alternating, psycho-linguistic developmental process comes with the disruption of the cosy, semiotic holism which the infant had striven to maintain in the chora. Indeed, syncretic plenitude with the mother is barely experienced, if at all, before it is traumatised by periodic

39 Lechte, Julia Kristeva, 99.
40 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 3.
41 Kristeva, Revolution, 172.
physical absences of the mother's breast. Within this experience of loss the infant
intuits, with a rush of insecurity, the void or nothingness underlying its own being.

Entering a slightly more psychological realm now, the infant parries its
catastrophic perception of the absent breast by constructing a fantasy of a whole,
unified "phallic" mother who is its omnipotent origin and its focus of being and
who is the receptacle and guarantor of all its demands. The infant can now re-
enter the "maternal paradise in which every demand is immediately gratified":

The maternal body is the place of a splitting ... Through a body, destined to insure [sic] reproduction of the species, the woman-
subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolizing, speaking subject like all others), more of a filter than
anyone else - a thoroughfare, a threshold where "nature" confronts "culture." To imagine that there is someone in that filter - such is the
source of ... the fantasy of the so-called "Phallic" Mother. Because if, on the contrary, there were no one on this threshold, if the mother
were not, that is, if she were not phallic, then every speaker would be led to conceive of its Being in relation to some void, a nothingness
asymmetrically opposed to this Being, a permanent threat against, first, its mastery, and ultimately, its stability.

Kristeva is using the term "phallic" here in the way that Lacan had intended, with
the phallus understood as patriarchal culture's primary signifier of power. The

42 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 41.
43 Kristeva, Desire, 238.
44 But, as Nancy Fraser has noted, Lacan has failed to prevent "the collapse of the symbolic signifier into
the organ" ("The Uses and Abuses," 89, note 13). With regard to Kristeva's use of the term "phallic" in
conjunction with the mother, Elizabeth Grosz finds that the infant's perception of its mother as phallic
rather than a subject in her own right complies with the patriarchal interest in promoting "a masculine
fantasy of maternity, rather than women's lived experience of maternity" (Elizabeth Grosz, Jacques Lacan:
A Feminist Introduction (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990) 151). Kristeva herself explains that the
patriarchal perspective sees women as vessels that operate according to the "cyclic" time natural to
biological rhythms, repetitions, cycles and gestation. A woman's biological role, from this viewpoint, is to
reproduce. She is not merely impelled to reproduce for the sake of it, but specifically to further the
patriarchal lineage of her husband's family. In this instrumental role she functions within "monumental"
time which is a massive temporality that fully encompasses both cyclic time and "masculinist" linear time
phallic mother is the all-powerful mother. This recasting of the mother as a feminine-phallic extension of the patriarchal order is then taken one step further by Kristeva, with her introduction of the psychic position of the “imaginary father.” This figure is adopted and adapted from Freud’s “father of individual prehistory” as outlined in *The Ego and the Id*.

**Freud’s father of individual prehistory**

Freud proposes that in the oral phase the infant’s object-cathexes (erotic object-choices such as the mother’s breast) and identifications (where it perceives of itself as continuous with the breast) are indistinguishable. At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother’s breast and is the proto-type for an object-choice on the anaclitic model; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. So, before any distinct object-cathexis emerges (an event contingent upon the subject-object distinction), the nascent ego makes one important direct and immediate identification with, or transference to, the father in its own personal prehistory.

This identification is paternal in so far as it will strengthen and develop over time to eventually take on the mantle of the oedipal father. And, as precursor to the oedipal father, this “personal” and “prehistorical” father is the origin of the ego-ideal and its heir the super-ego. However, although “he” (really a form, structure, or agency) will mature into a representative of the phallus, the father of individual

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46 Freud, XIX, 31.
47 Freud, XIX, 31; Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, 25.
prehistory is not equivalent to the biologically male parent. Rather this father-figure is a trope for an identification that takes place with both of the parents because this event takes place before a child has arrived at definite knowledge of the differences between the sexes: "it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother" (just as it cannot distinguish between its objects and its identifications).

Kristeva's imaginary father

Spurring the infant to hurriedly erect an image of a whole, phallic mother to protect itself from the void, Kristeva notes that the absence of the maternal breast also indicates to the infant that the focus of the mother's desire is not autoerotically "limited to responding to her offspring's request" but is located elsewhere, in an "other" position. Because she looks elsewhere for fulfilment and therefore cannot be self-sufficient, the mother is perceived by the infant as incomplete, that is, as castrated and not phallic after all. That other position desired and introjected by the mother is the phallus, that is, the law and language of the father. The child perceives that the father (or his substitute) possesses this phallic power and that the mother (in so far as she is a maternal container and a "threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture'" does not. So, according to Lacan, with whom Kristeva agrees in this regard:

we should concern ourselves not only with the way in which the mother accommodates herself to the person of the father, but also with the way she takes his speech, the word (mot), let us say, of his

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48 Kristeva, Desire, 238.
49 Freud, XIX, 31, note 1.
50 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 25.
51 Kristeva, Desire, 238.
authority, in other words, of the place that she reserves for the Name-
of-the-Father in the promulgation of the law.  

Mother's desire for the phallus and her introjection of its symbolic value into her unconscious describe what Kristeva calls "the imaginary father" after Freud's "father of individual prehistory."

**Figure of ambiguity**

Kristeva retains the sexual ambiguity of the Freudian prototype, "he" is "[s]omeone, of either sex," a totalising combination of the sexual aspects of both parents. That the imaginary father functions in an environment before sexual differentiation is discerned may explain why the sexually ambiguous "father-mother conglomerate" has been interpreted, by Elizabeth Grosz for one, as possessing no features that are distinguishable from the phallic mother. Cynthia Chase agrees: "Imaginary father, phallic mother - same identity." Certainly, the absence of any clear indication from Kristeva herself leaves the field open for such interpretations, however, I believe that differences between the two terms can be postulated.

I suggest that, perhaps, gendered difference is a theoretical nicety required, or maybe inspired, by the psychoanalytic assertion that primary narcissistic

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53 Kristeva, *Tales*, 251. I use the term "sexual ambiguity" rather than "gender ambiguity" here, not only because Kristeva herself does, but also because the imaginary father is an entity which exists in the pre-oedipal environment, before socially constructed gender models become imposed on individuals.


Identification is a homosexual affair. For, Kristeva writes: “the alliance with the parent of the opposite sex is only ephemeral, [it is] a screen set up to facilitate the rejection of the same.” Accordingly, the girl child, here identifying with the phallic mother, will eventually reject the phallic aspects of her for the feminine model. Similarly, the boy child, who at first identifies with the imaginary father, will come to eschew the imaginary, maternal, semiotic identifications of this figure to take up symbolic allegiance to the properly phallic father. These rejections come at the later oedipal stage but it would be typical of Kristeva to find a faint echo here in the semiotic phase.

Further, primary identification cast in alternative parental personae reflects the fundamental and pervasive emotional ambivalence of the proto-subject towards its father. This ambivalence is most strongly manifest during the oedipal crisis when the boy child respects and loves its father and at the same time hates him for prohibiting access to the mother; the girl child rejects the mother as a castrated inadequate and at the same time finds that she must nonetheless identify with her in order to gain eventual access to the desired phallus. Freud himself states that the emotional ambivalence of the father-complex is more correctly described as originating in the “parental complex,” surely an allusion to the dual sexuality of the father of individual prehistory. The phallic mother and imaginary father, then, are embodiments of ambivalence in the earliest of psychic identifications.

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56 Refer to “Eros, agape and primary narcissism” later in this chapter and the Glossary for further discussion of primary narcissism.
57 Kristeva, Revolution, 175.
59 Freud, XIII, 157, note 1.
Symbolic associations of the maternal with the chasm of negativity and of the paternal with the symbolic order, suggest a further imperative for distinguishing between the phallic mother and the imaginary father. In so far as she is maternal (rather than phallic) the phallic mother personifies the link back into the always looming void and the stasis of symbiotic unity. Her symbolic or phallic component is thus compromised by being hyphenated with the maternal. Accordingly, the phallic mother must be superseded by the virtually equivalent function, but rhetorically more positive term, of the imaginary father. Being paternal, the imaginary father screens the infant’s perception of the void more effectively and acts as an early embodiment of the third term, levering apart the dyadic bond of mother and child (see below).

This imaginary structure may be thought of as a planar triangle. The underside has the proto-subject, the maternal container and the phallic mother occupying the three angles. The upper, sunny side of the screen sees these figures transmogrified into the narcissistic subject, the abject mother and the imaginary father. The phallic mother stands in closer proximity to the “terrifying, abject referent” of the void that underlies the dark side of the screen, while the imaginary father is more closely associated with the Ideal-I which encourages the proto-subject to move towards the unity that will be demanded of it by symbolic order. The fear that the eternally present void generates, and the threat that it poses to the fiction of subjective unity, will require stronger and stronger identifications with the paternal metaphor in order to mobilise the protective function of the imaginary psychic screen.

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This last point introduces a chronological distinction to be made between the phallic mother and the imaginary father. Nothing is clearer in Kristeva than a continual alternation between drive rejection and stases and between psychic rejection and identification. A powerful trajectory is etched extending from birth to attainment of speaking subjectivity. The infant identifies firstly with the phallic mother, then with the imaginary father, then with its own mirrored image and finally with the symbolic father. Of course none of these identifications occur discretely or are resolved instantly, and the further back into psychic history one goes, the less clear are the borders between them. After all, as Kristeva insists, this “anterior and transversal” intrapsychic adventure with the imaginary father “escapes the labelling ... of ‘structures.”⁶¹ Hence, the infant’s construction of the fiction that the mother is omnipotent and phallic in herself, transmutes into its identification with the mother’s externally focused phallic desire, which is now called the imaginary father.

So, while the infant certainly cannot think through the distinction between the phallic mother and the imaginary father, we are not similarly constrained. It seems to me, then, that the phallic component of the phallic mother is imported into the choric environment while the imaginary father exports an aspect of the infant from the chora.

Bending the drive

Returning now to aspects of the developmental process which are made explicit by Kristeva. The infant still experiences a great yearning to remain enfolded

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within the *jouissance* of totalising unity with the archaic mother. This yearning is reinforced when the infant, now cognisant of the mother’s desire for the phallus, seeks to renew the autoerotism of the relationship with the mother by becoming the phallus for her.  

Nevertheless, perception of an external, phallic component in the mother’s psyche (an externality made manifest by absences of the breast) also lures the infant out of the closed binary ecosphere of mother and child. The imaginary father as a prototype for the third term and the phallus, “bends the drive toward the symbolic of an other,” toward someone and something that is other than the maternal container.

Attractive as an early model of subjective completeness and of linguistic normalcy, the imaginary father provides a precedent of a stable position for the future subject to signify from, a prototype of speaking subjectivity:

> When the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other - precisely a nonobject, a pattern, a model - I bind myself to him in a primary fusion, communion, unification. An identification ... In being able to receive the other’s words, to assimilate, repeat, and reproduce them, I become like him: One. A subject of enunciation. Through psychic osmosis/identification. Through love.

That the imaginary father functions “through love” is of central importance to the entire psycho-linguistic scenario that Kristeva lays out in her later works. The machinations of love, in Kristeva’s schema, operate in analogous fashion to the

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62 Freud explains that “in the symbolic language of dreams, as well as of everyday life, both may be replaced by the same symbol; both baby and penis are called a “little one …”” (“On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism,” XVII (1917) 128.


pre-oedipal psychic identificatory process, to the psychoanalytic transferential process and to poetic usage of metaphor. Indeed, loving identification with the imaginary father is that which enables the transubstantiation of bodily drives into language, a process which Kristeva calls the semiotisation of the symbolic. All of these points will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. In the meantime, it is important to define in what way love relates to the infant's identification with the imaginary father.

**Eros, agape and primary narcissism**

According to Kristeva, love is understood as having two dimensions pertinent to the western psyche, eros and agape. Kristeva takes as her starting point Plato's *Phaedrus* (366 B.C.) and *Symposium* (385 B.C.) in which she "apprehend[s] the first assertive apology for Western eros under the guise of homosexual love." Continuing with her interpretation of the Platonic eros, Kristeva writes: "Delirium, mania, power relationships, sadomasochistic violence - that sort of erotics is nevertheless reversed, at the very heart of Plato's text, and soars on a winged flight toward the supreme Good through the glowing, soothing, ebullient vision of the Beautiful." Combined, these forces suggest to Kristeva that eros is a manic desire for oneness with the ideal other.

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65 In her early works Kristeva tended towards a universality in her psychoanalysis, in fact, she sometimes sought to incorporate eastern models of thought, religion, society into her theories. Since the early 1980s or so, however, she has been careful to avoid charges of eurocentric imperialism and has explicitly narrowed her focus to the "western consciousness of self" (Kristeva, *Tales*, 108). Refer to Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (London: Marion Boyar, 1977) which Kristeva has since described as "an awkward book" (Julia Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole," *The Female Autograph*, ed. D. C. Stanton {New York: Library Forum, 1984} 275).


68 Kristeva, *Tales*, 79.
By emphasising the fusional qualities of eros and by locating them in the drive that aggressively seeks out assimilation or amorous unity with the other, Kristeva adopts Freud's own later usage of eros, which he understood as synonymous with "life instinct" (a term embracing sexual instincts and instincts of self-preservation). The aim of eros is, in Freud's words, "to establish even greater unities and to preserve them thus - in short, to bind together." Eros thus dislodges the subject's drives and ideals onto the other. This displacement creates an open and connected psychic system which "indissolubly ties together," not only the I and the other, but also the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. It is this opening up of the psyche to the full gamut of symbolic and semiotic possibilities which makes assumption of the psychic position of the imaginary father optimal for writers and literary analysts alike (as I will explain in later chapters).

Kristeva then goes on to modify eros by introducing the figure of Narcissus. Narcissus, she writes, "bequethed us a new conception of love - a love centred in the self although drawn toward the ideal Other." This is a love that magnifies the individual as a reflection of the unapproachable Other whom I love and who causes me to be." Internalised, the Other, at this point, is represented by the

69 Freud, XXIII, 148.
70 Kristeva, Tales, 7.
71 The imaginary psychological space, originally theorised by Lacan, is composed of conscious, unconscious, perceived, and imagined images and identifications occurring between the ego and its others. Kristeva's semiotic field is a conglomeration of Lacan's "imaginary" and bio-physical "real" dimensions. Although the two are more intimately connected in Kristeva than in Lacan, identification with the imaginary father marks the first stages of transition from one shade to another, from immersion in the real to orientation towards the imaginary (with a mere hint of the symbolic through the imaginary father's agency as the third party), within the semiotic.
72 Refer to Glossary for an explanation of "the Other" as distinct from "the other."
73 Kristeva, Tales, 59.
intrapsychic figure of the imaginary father. It is the imaginary father that the pre-subject loves, with an erotic mania, its effort to become unified and speaking and distinct from the now-abject mother (the abject mother will be discussed shortly). This transference of the pre-subject’s fledgling identity onto the imaginary father and rejection of the abject mother mobilise primary narcissism (which is a pre-existing structure for Kristeva and not a transitory phase as it was for Freud).

Primary narcissism’s three participants - the imaginary father as “an imaginary agent of love,” the abject mother and the unstable, narcissistic pre-subject - enact a psychic pattern that will be reduplicated in the mirror phase and then again at the oedipal phase.

Eros and Narcissus delineate the desiring, fusional, self-obsessive trajectory of love experienced by the narcissistic pre-subject for the imaginary father. A different type of love emanates from the imaginary father to the pre-subject: agape love. Developed out of the Christian Gospels, agape is the detached, non-judgemental, “disinterested gift” of love from “a Father who loves us before we are able to love him.” Agapic love flows from the imaginary father who embodies “a fatherhood that isn’t stern but familial and enlightening” (and therefore different from the harsh, judging and castrating oedipal father). The imaginary father is love in the same way that “God is Love.” As the earliest manifestation of the powerful paternal metaphor, the imaginary father transmits the means by which the proto-subject may eventually negotiate its entrance into

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74 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 71.
75 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 69; Kristeva, Tales, 374.
76 Kristeva, Tales, 60, 139.
77 Kristeva, Tales, 141.
78 Kristeva, Tales, 139.
the symbolic order. Yet the imaginary father relays the core of symbolic law with an agapic love befitting the narcissistic encounter.

The good, the bad and the untenable

Entry into the symbolic order is entry into an economy, and an economy requires discrete elements between which transactions are made. The signifying economy which is a (more or less) stable public system of communication requires, firstly, a unified ego as a position to signify from. Secondly, it needs others to signify to. Thirdly, it must have still others about which to signify. The infant bound dyadically with the archaic mother can comprehend neither objects separate from itself, nor any self or ego distinct from its choric environment. Fracturing of the infant’s “jubilant but destructive” psycho-physical relationship with the mother is therefore imperative so that she can become a signifiable other or object, and so that the infant can develop its own ego separate from the mother, as a position to signify from. 79

The imaginary father is the catalyst of separation. He is someone “of either sex, before the id speaks, before language, who might make me by means of borders, separations, vertigos.” 80 The loving, imaginary father creates separations by distinguishing what is good, unified and legitimate from what is bad, disintegrative and abject. As pseudo-representative of the symbolic order, the imaginary father takes upon himself the mantle of legitimacy and nominates the mother as abject. Pronouncing himself as the one, pure theology, the father

79 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 40.
80 Kristeva, Tales, 251.
Speaking the Law

declares: “Nothing is sacred outside of the One. At the limit, everything that
remains, all remainders, are abominable.” Thus:

It is ... not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what
disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders,
positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite ...
Abjection ... is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady ....

That which falls outside the systematic taxonomy of the symbolic is spurned and
marginalised as unclean wastage, as abject (as “uncanny” (literally “unhomely”) in Freud’s lexicon).

The child initially experiences abjection when confronting its body wastes,
particularly during the anal-sadistic phase (which follows the narcissistic oral
stage and pre-dates the genetically oriented oedipal crisis) when expelling faeces.
In this act of partition, the young child attempts to distinguish and close itself off
from the defilement because the unified subject must not identify with its own
urinating, defecating, vomiting body. Separation from the corporeal body must be
accomplished so “that the latter accede to the status of clean and proper body, that
is to say, non-assimilable, uneatable, abject.” However, since the subject is still
a proto-subject, without distinguishable objects, food cannot yet be an other, so its
anal or oral purgation is an expulsion of a part of the self which is repulsive to the
Other:

81 Kristeva, Abjection, 111.
82 Kristeva, Abjection, 4.
83 Editorial note, Freud, “The Uncanny,” XVII (1919) 219. Refer especially to Freud’s treatment of the
uncanny in literature (XVII, 249-52) and also refer to my Glossary.
84 Kristeva, Abjection, 108; Kristeva, Revolution, 150.
85 Kristeva, Abjection, 78.
since the food is not an “other” for “me,” who am only in their [my parents’] desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself ... During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.  

In the process of separation, the abject element becomes signifiable. Kristeva writes that “[l]anguage acquisition implies the suppression of anality; in other words, it represents the acquisition of a capacity for symbolisation through the definitive detachment of the rejected object, through its rejection under the sign.”  

Separation from unclean parts of one’s self, like separation from the maternal body, makes of these (faeces, the mother, etc.) others which may henceforth be symbolised.

It is the mother who translates the laws of the father onto the body of the child, dictating to it what is clean and what is unclean (this function may be thought of as the imaginary father in action). During sphincteral training maternal authority “shapes the body into a territory having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted.”

Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape.

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86 Kristeva, Abjection, 3.
87 Kristeva, Revolution, 152. Actually, anal ejections, like certain infantile gestures, spasms, and shouts, are equivalent to a pre-symbolic “no” according to Kristeva (Kristeva, Black Sun, 15). Here she agrees with Céline who writes that the “mechanical effort we make in speaking is more complicated and arduous than defecation” (Céline in Kristeva, Abjection, 144).
88 Kristeva, Abjection, 72.
If language, like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, concatenates an order, it does so precisely by repressing maternal authority and the corporeal mapping that abuts against them.89

Once sphincteral training is nearing completion, maternality is deemed “unclean and improper coalescence,” an undifferentiated power and threat to the integrity of the emerging subject and a defilement to be cut off from the purity of the phallic social order.90 As embodiment of a force that seeks to drag the struggling narcissistic subject back down into the mire of negativity and so prevent its attainment of language, the phallic mother will be recast as the abject mother who is shunned in horror once the normative social Other possesses the subject. Kelly Oliver restates Kristeva’s position carefully in this regard, making clear that it is the Thing not the woman who is rejected:

What the child must abject is the “maternal container.” It does not need to abject the mother’s body as the body of a woman. It does not need to abject the mother herself as a person. Rather, it needs to abject the maternal container upon which it has been dependent in order to be weaned from the mother. In our culture, however, since the maternal function is not separated from our representations of women or the feminine, women themselves have become abjected within our society.91

Kristeva explains the process of maternal abjection and its relationship to the imaginary father within the narcissistic structure:

The central node of connection and disconnection, fullness and emptiness, positions and losses, represents the instability of the narcissistic subject. He remains there, attracted on the one hand by

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89 Kristeva, Abjection, 72.
90 Kristeva, Abjection, 106.
91 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 6; refer to Kristeva, Tales, 374.
the magnet of *primary identification*, which is a father imagined to be loving, “father of individual prehistory,” the seed of the Ego ideal; and on the other, by a magnet of desire and hatred, fascination and disgust, constituted by the archaic mother who has ceased to be a container of needs but not yet made up into a taboo object of desire: neither subject nor object, an “*abject*”-mother, a place of warding off and differentiation, an infection.92

Not surprisingly, the task of fully abjecting a part of oneself is an impossibility: the impure remains forever enfolded within (as is the void) and continues to threaten the subject from that position.93 Abjection becomes the “foreigner” that lies within us, the “hidden face of our identity” that so often returns as a projection onto the other: the other sex, another race and so on.94

The abject other may be also subsequently reabsorbed into adult speech and writing, on occasions when the subject incestuously seeks out, or psychotically lapses into, abjection. Reinscribed within poetic discourse, abjection reveals itself in themes of horror and fear, in exclamatory intonation and in syntactical segmentation.95 In all these regards Céline is, for Kristeva, the exemplary abject poet: “Mama collapses against the rail .... She vomits herself up again, all she’s got .... A carrot comes up ... a piece of fat ... and the whole tail of a mullet ....”96

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92 Kristeva, *Tales*, 374.
93 Elizabeth Grosz states that the inescapable immanence of impurity is an innovation entirely Kristeva’s own, although she derives her general principle of abjection from the Freudian insights regarding society’s expulsion of the impure (Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* {Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989} 71).
Now that the maternal container has been identified as abject and abhorrent to the phallic order, drive pulsations no longer operate as a "mechanical repetition of an undifferentiated 'identity,'" rather, they have within their sights a specific pre-object, the abject mother, to attack and eventually shift into the qualitatively new space of signs. Although sign-making proper does not actually occur until the resolution of the oedipal phase, a foretaste of thetic activity is evident now, even prior to the mirror phase.

**The Lacanian mirror phase**

In Kristeva's early works, such as *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the mirror and oedipal/castration phases are the only two thetic points which see the subject, divided from its environment, encouraged to appropriate significatory systems to articulate and compensate for object losses: "In the development of the subject, such as it has been reconstituted by the theory of the unconscious, we find the thetic phase of the signifying process, around which signification is organised, at two points: the mirror stage and the 'discovery' of castration." Kristeva's more recent focus on nuancing the semiotic chora has not meant an abandonment of the Lacanian mirror phase nor of the orthodox oedipal and castration phases, however. They remain integral to her stratified psychological model that increasingly "explores the same in depth, opening up an unsuspected, unfathomable substance." Kristeva's studies of the semiotic and, in particular, her development of the imaginary father as a chronologically anterior, (sub-)thetic entity, have been added to the existing paradigms in the semiotic space

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98 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 46, my emphasis.
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governed by reduplication. Kristeva writes that: "Produced by the mirror, reduplication precedes the specular identification specific to the 'mirror stage.' It refers to the outposts of our unstable identities, blurred by a drive that nothing could defer, deny, or signify." Yet, as Oliver notes, "[p]atters [are] reduplicated on level after level until thresholds are crossed, the semiotic gives way to the Symbolic, biology becomes culture ...." Accordingly, the identificatory pattern first acted out between the narcissistic subject and the imaginary father is reduplicated at the mirror stage and then again during the oedipal phase.

Lacan’s mirror phase was conceived as a nuancing of Freud’s binary division of psychic development as pre-oedipal/post-oedipal. (Similarly, Kristeva’s imaginary father was conceived as a nuancing of Lacan’s division of psychic development as pre-mirror/post-mirror). Lacan writes of how the non-speaking infant is born into the realm of the Real and spends the first six months “sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence” in dyadic unity with its mother. Confronted with its image in a mirror (or {m}other as mirror) in the following year, the infant misrecognises itself as an integrated, totalised form, as a gestalt

While Kristeva’s psycho-linguistic phases have a broad progressional trajectory, like Freud’s oral, anal and phallic phases, they do not necessarily succeed each other in a clear-cut fashion. As in the case of Freud: “One may appear in addition to another; they may overlap one another, may be present alongside of one another” (Freud, XXIII, 155).

Kristeva, Black Sun, 246.

Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 73.

“The Mirror-Phase” was delivered as a paper in 1936. The revised version, “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,” was presented in 1949 (the latter is the version published in both the French {1966} and English {1977} Ecrits).

The following sections present classical Lacanian and Freudian psychical models which Kristeva has modified in her work on anterior psychic phases.

which contrasts delightfully with the “turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating ... [its] body in bits and pieces.”

The infant firstly apperceives the sensation of a visual image (over there) and then attributes that perception to an underlying subjective perceiver (here). Next it observes that external witnesses can see it as an object in its actual position (here) with the same visual appearance as its image over there. These realisations internally articulate the ego as simultaneously self and other, as “self as object/other.” Perception of the gap between itself and its image also impels the proto-subject to comprehend the gaping hole in its being, a hole which gives way to the void (as explained earlier in this chapter in the section entitled “Underlying the void of negativity”). Acknowledgment of absence, which henceforth will mark the subject as lacking and radically split, propels the alienated subject into identificatory relations with its new-found others in order to atone for this loss and to approximate the retrospectively perceived loss of syncretism with the mother. At the same time, fascinated with its own unified, and therefore legitimate and phallic image, the child internalises this mirrored Ideal-I as its Ego-ideal thereby founding its narcissistic ego (the beginnings of which have been posited at an earlier stage of psychic development by Kristeva with the proto-subject’s identification with the imaginary father).

While the unified mirrored image symbolises for the infant the “mental permanence of the I,” Lacan stresses that this Ideal-I (reflected in the mirror) “situates the agency of the ego ... in a fictional direction ....” The fictional

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nature of the ego’s *imago* is pertinent to the “imaginary” realm that the infant is now entering out of the ignorant comfort and plenitude that it enjoyed in the material field of the Real. The Kristevan infant has a foretaste of the imaginary earlier than the Lacanian infant through its identification with the imaginary father. Nevertheless, transition from the imaginary to the symbolic remains for Kristeva (as it does for Lacan) tethered to the classic Freudian theory of the oedipal crisis and the threat of castration.

**The Freudian oedipal crisis**

Separation from the mother and identification with the father is a process that began with recognition of the imaginary father and abjection of the mother, was reinforced with the introjection of the unified mirror image and the perception of its exteriority, and will be cemented at the oedipal and castration phases. Each identification further consolidates a more stable subject position for the child and each separation further augments a ternary signifying economy.

After passing through the oral and anal phases, socially signifiable sexual differentiation becomes paramount with the genital phase of development that the child passes through between three and four years of age. The genital phase coincides with the oedipus complex which, unlike the early intrapsychic dramas I have already described, operates quite differently for boys and girls. Kristeva, deriving her oedipal models virtually unchanged and unchallenged from Freud, takes the boy’s development as paradigmatic. The girl’s development is derivative and problematic.\(^\text{111}\)

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\(^{110}\) The Freudian oral phase coincides with the period in which the infant is involved with the archaic mother and then the phallic mother. Abjection is prominent for Kristeva during the Freudian anal phase.

\(^{111}\) As I explained in my introduction, the gender politics of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theories, while a vital area of interest, must be largely left to one side in this thesis simply because of a lack of space although I
Observing her own phallic lack, the girl abandons the also-castrated mother for libidinal attachment to the father who possesses the phallus and the power that it signifies. However, access to the phallus is conditional upon her accepting a passive, subordinate role in relation to the father in exchange for gaining future access to the phallus through her husband or a baby as substitute. The trajectory of the girl’s oedipalisation is awkward and rarely fully successful because, having already rejected the mother as not sufficiently phallic, she must then consent to identify with her mother as model for her own sexual identity. Psychic blows against the mother become internalised as melancholic and ambivalent attacks against herself. As I shall discuss in later chapters, girls’ complicated, compromised oedipal passage is at the root of women’s reduced ability to semiotise the symbolic and so produce literature, in Kristeva’s view.

Development of male sexual identity is more straightforward. For Freud it signifies “the nucleus of neuroses” and it illustrates and justifies the evolution and resolution of childhood sexual desire. In The Interpretation of Dreams Freud framed his psychoanalytic model within Sophocles’ mythological-literary story Oedipus Rex (thereby establishing an enduring link between psychoanalysis and literature). Remaining true to the structure of the myth, Freud suggests that as

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the male child enters the genital phase, his sexual wishes with regard to his mother become so intense that his father is perceived as an obstacle to them. Freud proposes that it is “from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother.” Thus, in his classic study of “Little Hans,” Freud concludes that “Hans really was a little Oedipus who wanted to have his father ‘out of the way’, to get rid of him, so that he might be alone with his beautiful mother and sleep with her.”

Prohibition and the threat of castration

In response to the child’s now unhealthy erotic love for the mother, the father interdicts, prohibiting this love with what Lacan calls the “no of the father.” This first social censorship, the prohibition against erotic mother-love, constitutes the universal taboo against incest (although Kristeva identifies a foretaste of this prohibition in the experience of abjection). In part, the incest taboo is willingly acceded to in so far as it reinforces the negative dimension of the child’s ambivalent attitude towards the mother; while she is the child’s first and most important love object, she is also loathed as abject. On the other hand, the specificity of the incest taboo acknowledges the intense desirability of the mother, for, as Freud points out, “there is no need to prohibit something that no one desires to do, and a thing that is forbidden with the greatest emphasis must be a thing that is desired.”

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114 Freud, XIX, 32.
116 Freud, XIII, 69.
Although the child may bow to the incest stricture with a degree of compliance, the unconscious “positive current of desire” for the mother is the stronger emotion.¹¹⁷ So, in order to make the infant take full heed of the incest taboo, the father threatens the boy child with castration, a threat that reinforces the child’s earlier perception of the mother’s phallic lack.¹¹⁸ Freud preferred to keep the term “castration complex” for those psychic excitations and consequences which are bound up with the loss of the penis. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the validity of Lou Andreas-Salomé, A. Stärcke, and F. Alexander’s assertions that the castration complex is prefigured by the regular loss of faeces, by the absence of the mother’s breast and, ultimately, by parturition.¹¹⁹ These roots of the castration complex are what Kristeva herself emphasises in her detailed study of the phallic mother/imaginary father identification, although for her, too, the formal threat of castration at the oedipal phase instigates the child’s most profound detachment from the mother; it is the definitive thetic model:

Castration puts the finishing touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say separate, always confronted by an other: *imago* in the mirror (signified) and semiotic process (signifier) .... The discovery of castration ... detaches the subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack [*manque*] makes the phallic function a symbolic function - the symbolic function.¹²⁰

Social, symbolic laws, foremost among them the prohibition against erotic love for the mother, conglomerate as the super-ego. The super-ego then becomes internalised as a system separated from consciousness: the unconscious. Its

¹¹⁷ Freud, XIII, 70.
¹¹⁸ Refer to Glossary and to Footnote 19 in Chapter Seven.
¹¹⁹ Freud, X, 8, note 2.
¹²⁰ Kristeva, Revolution, 47.
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opening up allows for the resolution, or more properly, accommodation of the internal conflict that results from the persistent desire for the mother and the simultaneous wish to obey the father. The latter is accomplished overtly while the love affair with the mother is continued covertly:

The child’s parents, and especially his father, were perceived as the obstacle to a realisation of his Oedipus wishes; so his infantile ego fortified itself for the carrying out of repression by erecting this same obstacle within itself. It borrowed strength to do this, so to speak, from the father, and this loan was an extraordinarily momentous act. The super-ego retains the character of the father.\textsuperscript{121}

Subsequently manifesting itself as conscience, the voice within, the laws of the father are assimilated so early and so completely by the child that he forgets their imposed origin and largely regulates himself in terms of social norms.

The unconscious structured like a language

Language bears the full effects of the split psyche. Symbolic language, dominated by syntactical and grammatical laws, is embraced and becomes our “second nature” while the semiotic tongue is repressed and rendered illegitimate.\textsuperscript{122}

Although Freud speculates that a linguistic model of the unconscious could be more useful than a topographical account, it was Lacan who, informed by the Saussurean linguistic innovation, effected a “most highly respected intervention into Freudian psychoanalysis” by insisting that the unconscious is actually

\textsuperscript{121} Freud, XIX, 34.

\textsuperscript{122} Kristeva, Black Sun, 53. Psycho-linguistics classifies syntax and grammar as “secondary processes.” These are juxtaposed to the “primary processes” of metaphor and metonymy which dominate in reclaimed semiotic tongues. Refer to my Glossary.
structured like a language. He asserts that the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious "the whole structure of language." While Kristeva, in the end, disagrees with some of the implications that flow from Lacan's proposition regarding the unconscious structured like a language, she does follow him a considerable way down this path.

A detailed explanation of Lacan's account of the linguistic workings of the unconscious is best begun (as Lacan himself begins) by studying a standard Saussurean algorithm (s/S):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{signified} \\
\text{Signifier}
\end{array}
\]

De Saussure undoes language to demonstrate that our words as signs are not composites of naturally bonded words and things but are composed of "concepts" or "signifieds" and "sound-images" or "signifiers" whose pairing is arbitrary. He stresses the psychological nature, not only of the concept, but also of the "sound-image," which "is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses."

Lacan takes exception to de Saussure treating the material signifier as a sound-impression or psychical imprint, insisting that this over-psychologises the sign.

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125 De Saussure, Course, 114; Lacan Écrits, 149.
126 Refer below in main text regarding the arbitrariness of the sign.
127 De Saussure, Course, 66-7.
Instead, Lacan emphasises the material properties of the signifier, an emphasis he formalises by reversing de Saussure's positions for the signified and the signifier: the signifier moves to the upper position and the signified falls below the bar (S/s). Kristeva, as I shall discuss in my next chapter, while adopting the Lacanian application of the linguistic algorithm to the psyche, feels that Lacan has over-materialised the sign and not left enough room for affect in signification.

Like de Saussure, Lacan perceives the two sides of the sign as chains which slide "horizontally" over one another. But whereas de Saussure conceives of the signifier and signified bonding together as positive values once functioning in a system, Lacan maintains that in conscious discourse they are fixed only momentarily in specific contexts. As the signifier leaves its temporary fix with a signified, the open and ambiguous potential of this, and all, signification is revealed. Any meaning retrieved from the concrete but fleeting adherence between signifier and signified is founded upon pure difference (with the exception of onomatopoeic words) and thus can only be understood in relation to other terms within the totality of language.

Lacan's adaptation of the Saussurean linguistic algorithm as outlined so far can be illustrated thus:

\[
S > S > S \quad = \quad \text{Signifiers: synchronically structured as pure difference;}
\]

\[
\text{--------} \quad = \quad \text{unrepresentable break between the two chains;}
\]

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130 De Saussure, *Course*, 115.
Then, in a move which has had a massive impact both upon psychoanalysis and literary theory, Lacan applies the above schema to the psyche, thereby providing a linguistic model for the unconscious:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Conscious} & = \text{consciously generated signifiers constitute the subject as an effect of language;} \\
\text{Censor} & = \text{signifiers repressed by the Other of the internalised socio-linguistic order.}
\end{align*}
\]

This intertwining of modern linguistic and psychoanalytic theories subverts the open significance of language. Kristeva affirms that Lacan’s “insolent” and “daring” introduction of the “great Other” into “the very heart of the speaking structure” has had profound implications both for the subject and for language.\(^ {132} \)

**Melancholia and depression**

Just as the signified has fallen below the bar to become a signifier in another position, so too at oedipalisation does the socio-linguistic law of the Other repress signifiers of desire for the mother into the newly constituted unconscious which lies below the bar of censorship.\(^ {133} \) With the co-ordinates of the unconscious mapped by the laws of the father, desire for the mother is now effectively shut

\(^{132}\) Kristeva, “My Memory’s Hyperbole,” 270.

\(^{133}\) The Lacanian schema, while broadly adopted by Kristeva, becomes modified and nuanced by her in order to account for the persistent drive pulsations which trouble the discourse of the speaking subject, as I shall discuss in my next chapter.
away in the unconscious. This psychological “matricide” generates a state of depression or melancholia which, as Freud explains “is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness ....”134 Kristeva prefigured the necessity of maternal loss to the wielding of language and the attainment of subjectivity, with the series of separations from the mother in the semiotic arena, most notably with the mother’s abjection. Separation from the mother becomes a linguistic imperative since if “I did not agree to lose mother, I could neither imagine nor name her.”135 At this, oedipal, point though, the child copes with its depression by summoning replacements for the lost mother out of the symbolic realm: “The child king becomes irredeemably sad before uttering his first words; this is because he has been irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, a loss that causes him to try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in the imagination, then in words.”136

First-degree thetic transgression

Despite the fact that the opening of the unconscious cannot quite forestall the melancholy the infant experiences on comprehending that it will now, surely, never regain the jouissance earlier enjoyed with mother, it does allow for the accommodation of the conflicting desires, to love the mother and to obey the father. Now, Kristeva writes, “the subject, finding his identity in the symbolic, separates from his fusion with the mother, confines his jouissance to the genital, and transfers semiotic motility onto the symbolic order.”137 In so doing, the child

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134 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” XIV (1917) 245.
135 Kristeva, Black Sun, 41.
136 Kristeva, Black Sun, 6.
137 Kristeva, Revolution, 47.
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shatters the mirror that held its former ideal, in order to “contemplate itself in the
Other.”

This normalisation of the Oedipus complex initiates a psycho-linguistic paradigm
shift from the pre-oedipal, pre-linguistic, semiotic world to the post-oedipal,
symbolic world of significance. This shift hinges upon what Kristeva calls a
“first-degree” transgression of the thetic barrier (which is shown on the diagram at
the end of this chapter as a ribbon of prohibitions spouting forth from the mouth
of symbolic father). In Kristeva, the thetic threshold, which divides the symbolic
from that which precedes it, has been previously surmounted in embryonic form
with the imaginary father/abject mother scenario and then again at the mirror
phase but it is only now, with the enforced renunciation of the maternal body at
oedipalisation and the concomitant appropriation of symbolic law, that it becomes
definitive.

Kristeva develops her usage of the terms “thetic” and “thesis” with reference to
the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl
considered syntactic competence “as a product of the conscious or intentional
transcendental ego, which judges or speaks and, simultaneously, brackets all that
is heterogeneous to its consciousness ... [as] a nominal category referring to a
‘thing’ always/already meant and apprehended.” Kristeva specifies that
Husserlian phenomenology is useful “for demonstrating the insurmountable
necessity of *posing* an ego as the single, unique constraint which is constitutive
of all linguistic acts as well as all trans-linguistic practice.”

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ty they are positable), Kristeva opens her research to that which produces them, while remaining foreign to them, and to that which exceeds them. Hence we have Kristeva's work on the semiotic (described earlier in this chapter) and on the subject in process (in my next chapter).

In the meantime, though, Kristeva's psycholinguistic developmental process is at the stage where the foreign semiotic element is held at bay from the symbolic by the institution of a thetic break (before this thesis is then exceeded by the re-emergence of the semiotic in poetic language). Finally, now, the subject becomes constituted as a unified ego, a subject who is "separate from and through his image, from and through his objects." Continuing, Kristeva writes: "This image and objects must first be posited in a space that becomes symbolic because it connects the two separate positions, recording them or redistributing them in an open combinatorial system." Defining the two separate positions, Kristeva writes that the "thetic phase marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic. The second includes part of the first and their scission is thereafter marked by the break between signifier and signified.

Having wrought the thetic break, the oedipal father offers the child access to the phallic order, to its power, its legality, its social legitimacy and to its language systems. In a manner that seems to roughly correspond to the "hailing" or "interpellating" process that recruits subjects to Althusserian ideological State apparatuses, the father instils in the child respect for paternal, that is, legal and

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141 Kristeva, Revolution, 36.
142 Kristeva, Revolution, 43.
143 Kristeva, Revolution, 43.
144 Kristeva, Revolution, 48, 49.
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state authority. In Althusser’s words: “there are no subjects except by and for their subjection.” He sanctions social customs such as education expectations, accepted religious practices, artistic limits, and he initiates the subject into “the universe of signs and creation,” that is, towards the appropriate social languages of dress, food, gesturation and, of course, speaking and writing. To the fragile, only just post-oedipal subject, this symbolic guidance, which operates by “[t]hat order, that glance, that voice, that gesture, which enact the law for my frightened body ...” is very reassuring.

In her later work, Kristeva also gives voice to the less regimented aspects of oedipal identification. So, while it is the frightening, castrating, oedipal father who insists that the child separate from the mother, it is the loving imaginary face of this otherwise stern patriarch that acts as a symbolic substitute for the abandoned mother. However, in the oedipal scenario the presence of the imaginary father is not merely compensatory. “He” also offers liberation from symbolic constraint by offering the possibility of semiotic articulation in symbolic language:

The supporting father of ... symbolic triumph is not the oedipal father but truly that “imaginary father,” “father in individual prehistory” according to Freud, who guarantees primary identification. Nevertheless, it is imperative that this father in individual prehistory be capable of playing his part as oedipal father in symbolic Law, for it is on the basis of that harmonious blending of the two facets of fatherhood that the abstract and arbitrary signs of communication may

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146 Althusser, 169.
147 Kristeva, Black Sun, 23.
148 Kristeva, Abjection, 10.
149 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 32.
be fortunate enough to be tied to the affective meaning of prehistorical identifications ....

The role of the imaginary father in the production of affective, poetic language will be pursued in subsequent chapters.

**Word came next to replace emotion**

Now in possession of a solidified ego and its equivalent in discourse, the "I," the unified subject, communicates on a symbolic plane. Indeed, Kristeva affirms that "[t]he subject's active use of the signifier truly dates only from this [oedipal] moment."\(^{151}\)

Kristeva identifies a number of symbolic discourse types, but whatever type is prominent at any given moment requires some sort of translation between the emotional and cognitive activities of the mind and the vocal or written inscription. Yet, just how the intaglio of the social and familial upon materiality is accomplished so as to make significance inherent in the human body and, concomitantly, just how the biological achieves signification, is problematic, as Kristeva acknowledges: \(^{152}\)

I shall posit that the register of psychic and, particularly, linguistic representation is neurologically transferred to the physiological occurrences of the brain, in the last instance through the hypothalamus' multiple networks. (The hypothalamic nuclei are connected to the cerebral cortex whose functioning underlies meaning - but how? - and also to the limbic lobe of the brain stem whose functioning underlies affects.) At present we don't know how this transfer takes place, but clinical experience allows us to think that it

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\(^{151}\) Kristeva, *Abjection*, 62.

\(^{152}\) Kristeva, *Abjection*, 10.
does actually take place (for instance, one will recall the exciting or sedative, “opiatic,” effect of certain words).

Freud too, in his endeavour to explain human life and functioning without reference to the Christian God or other supernatural agencies, maintained that, while science was still in ignorance of what lies between the brain and acts of consciousness, nevertheless, the edifice of psychoanalytic theory “is in truth but a superstructure, which will one day have to be set on its organic foundation ...” Close to a century later, scientific ignorance persists with regard to the biology-society nexus, compelling Kristeva to conceptualise its ordering principle metaphorically.

In Revolution in Poetic Language, Kristeva writes of successive and overpowering rejections of drive energy ceaselessly bombarding engrammatic stases, ultimately destabilising them and so allowing them to be rejected into a qualitatively new space, the thetic phase, which crystallises into the temporarily stable symbolic sign or “representamen.” She affirms that rejection’s tendency towards death “is deferred by this symbolic heterogeneity: the body, as if to prevent its own destruction, reinscribes [re-marque] rejection and, through a leap, represents it in absentia as a sign.” Semiotic drive pulsations are thereby regimented into an orderly network of referent, signified and signifier. (This stability is not permanent, however, since rejection is not only “at the root of the symbolic function,” {the topic of this chapter} but is also “at the root of its destruction ...” {the topic of the next}).

153 Kristeva, Black Sun, 38.
154 Freud, XVI, 389.
155 Kristeva, Revolution, 172.
156 Kristeva, Revolution, 171.
157 Kristeva, Revolution, 172.
What is at stake is the “moment that constitutes a leap and a rupture - separation and absence - the successive shocks of drive activity produce the signifying function.” Refining her description of this process, Kristeva explains the transformation from one system to another by way of literary metaphor: “No! In the beginning was emotion. The Word came next to replace emotion as the trot replaces the gallop ...,” is an enigmatic expression of the process, one borrowed by Kristeva from Céline. Decades after Kristeva initially broached this problem, understanding of the nature of this shift remains vague and is still explained in terms of a “leap” (of faith perhaps?): “And yet there is nothing today that allows one to set up any relation whatsoever - aside from a leap - between the biological substratum and the level of representations, be they tonal or syntactic, emotional or cognitive, semiotic or symbolic.” Nevertheless, in Kristeva’s psycholiterary theory, the leap between drive activity and signification does take place and it does so, most profoundly, with construction of the first-degree thesis during the resolution of the oedipal complex.

For the remainder of this chapter I will focus on the regulatory aspects of Kristeva’s schema, for it is only in relation to the phallogocentric symbolic order that the semiotic, all-important for emergence of poetic language, may be discerned.

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158 Kristeva, Revolution, 167.
159 Kristeva, Desire, 144.
160 In her work on James Joyce, Kristeva uses the metaphor of transubstantiation to explain the process. Refer to my seventh chapter and to Kristeva’s “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper.’”
161 Kristeva, Black Sun, 39. It is interesting, given Kristeva’s increasing interest in transferential relations and her persistent evocation of metaphor, that she has not made explicit the analogy between analytic transference of identification from one’s one psyche to that of another and the transference of socially mediated biological impulses to psycho-linguistic representations.
Symbolic phenotext

Although, as Andrea Nye affirms in her description of Kristeva’s psycho-linguistic theory, speakers retain the potential for two voices, “one patriarchal, one maternal,” for Kristeva, the semiotic mother tongue is normally repressed along with repression of the mother as erotic object of love (reclaiming the maternal voice is the subject of my next chapter). Heterogeneous drive pulsations and their ephemeral stases are rendered illegitimate. Instead, symbolic language, dominated by the syntactical and grammatical laws of the secondary processes, is fully embraced and becomes our second nature.

Symbolic language is formally realised as the “phenotext,” a signifying modality which largely suppresses any semiotic, or what Kristeva called “genotextual,” tendencies. Locked into the coordinates of the symbolic matrix, the phenotext is a static sign system geared towards unambiguous communication between a unified subject of enunciation and an equally unified addressee. Clear communication is conditional upon such subjects being unhindered by unconscious desires or the semiotic modality that attaches to those desires.

Although Kristeva does not use Jean-Paul Sartre as an example, his understanding of language function is typically phenotextual. For him, linguistic signs are transparent as a means of communication and opaque as aesthetic material forms: “The ambiguity of the sign implies that one can penetrate it at will like a pane of glass and pursue the thing signified, or [the poet can] turn his gaze towards its

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163 “Phenotext” and “genotext” are terms used principally in Kristeva’s early works. They are still useful for broadly classifying types of language usage when discussing Kristeva’s work.

164 Kristeva, Revolution, 87.
However, he continues, one cannot do both at once, and since “the end of language is to communicate,” aesthetic considerations are to be rejected as “poetic” distractions to the political commitment which is, for the existentialist, considered the only legitimate and logical end of writing.

Scientific and metalinguistic discourses are paradigmatically phenotextual since, Kristeva explains, the enunciatory “we” hovers above the sign and its system, indifferently and objectively linking the terms of logical arguments. Such “metalanguage” is the phenotextual ideal. Everyday intersubjective communication strives for and depends upon this metalinguistic model of clear symbolic interchange. Indeed, Kristeva insists that she herself would “look with horror on a humanity which tried to wipe out this symbolic moment.”

In Revolution in Poetic Language, Kristeva proposes several variants to the classic phenotextual model. While in her earlier Le texte du roman she had emphasised the open-ended and polymorphic aspects of the novel, in Revolution this art form is linked to, and restricted by, the “narrative” structure that sees any of the three oedipal positions, but only those three positions, taken up and articulated. As John Lechte explains: “The key pronouns in this situation are of course those of the first, second, and third person (I/you/he). The possibility of these three fundamental discursive instances derives from a successful entry into the

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166 Sartre, What is Literature? 15.
Speaking the Law

symbolic: 'I' (subject/son) separate from 'you' (mother) because 'he' (father) intervenes. According to Kristeva, since the narrative process merely reallocates a pre-existing sign, that is, repeats according to prescribed grammatical rules a structure in which instinctual drives have already been captured and assigned meaning, any further influx of semiotic drive charges is virtually foreclosed. Yet, in such works as Lautréamont's Les Chants de Maldoror, the shifting and multiplying of the authorial voice among all of these discursive positions renders subjectivity kaleidoscopic, thus inclining the work towards the semiotic.

In metalanguage, then, negativity is foreclosed and in narrative it is structured according to the triangular family model. The “contemplative” signifying system, by contrast, wallows in negativity by enclosing the chora within itself. Kristeva suggests that contemplative signification is practiced by elites such as the clergy and academics. Such groups are a “a symbolic cog in a hierarchical totality, a hierarchy within a hierarchy, the social cell that shelters or stimulates the sealing off of drives ....” According to Kristeva, Derridean deconstruction falls into this category since the grammatological “trace” forecloses the symbolic allowing for a deluge of meaning to open out only within the semiotic pre-signifying arena. In so neglecting the heterogeneity of the symbolic, Derrida is accused of following his own “systematic and philosophical movement of metalanguage or theory,” of

169 Lechte, Julia Kristeva, 145.
170 Kristeva, Revolution, 91-3.
172 Kristeva, Revolution, 96.
creating "a mere precious variant within the symbolic enclosure: contemplation adrift."

**Semiotic-symbolic interplay**

The fourth textual category to be identified by Kristeva is that of textual practice as exemplified by avant-garde modernist literature and poetry. Rather than being pure expressions of either contemplative semiotic enclosure or of metalinguistic attempts at symbolic objectivity, modernist texts bear witness to an interplay between semiotic, maternal heterogeneity and symbolic, paternal homogeneity. Jacqueline Rose correctly ascertains that, in Kristeva’s theory, there is no strict demarcation between the semiotic and the symbolic, but they stand together in a dynamic relation, each feeling the effects of the other’s activity. Accordingly, under the sway of biological, psychological and social influences, the speaking subject has no option but to speak both semiotic and symbolic modalities which are forever enfolded within the other. It is the dialectic between these two modalities that determines the discourse type, whether that be narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry or whatever: “in other words,” writes Kristeva, “so-called ‘natural’ language allows for different modes of articulation ....” So, while symbolic language is geared towards unambiguous communication, its

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174 Rose, _Sexuality_, 146-47.

175 Kristeva, _Revolution_, 24.
clarity is continually challenged and corrupted by the drive-induced semiotic register. The semiotic can, at best, transform language into poetry and modernist literature, as I shall explore in the following chapter.
Chapter Two
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

It is there ... rooted in that disposition of motherly love ... that the speaking subject finds when his/her symbolic shell cracks and a crest emerges where speech causes biology to show through: I am thinking of the time of illness, of sexual-intellectual-physical passion, of death ....

Julia Kristeva

In the previous chapter I explained how, in Kristeva's theory, drive rejection, having welled up through maternality, is disciplined by, and subsumed into, the dominant logos in western societies - the logos pertinent to communicational and scientific registers. The overt capitulation of the semiotic to the regulating might of the symbolic does not mean, however, that the former is ordered out of existence. The tumultuous forces of the semiotic are never fully contained beneath their "symbolic shell" but maintain a usually stultified presence in signification. Kristeva writes in this regard:

Our conception of rejection will oscillate between the two poles of drives and consciousness, and this ambiguity will reveal the ambiguity of process itself, which is both divided and unitary. But to the extent that these two threads (drives and consciousness) intersect and

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1 Kristeva, Tales, 263.
2 Refer to Footnote 66 in Chapter One.
3 Kristeva, Tales, 263.
interweave, the *unity of reason* which consciousness sketches out will always be shattered by the *rhythm* suggested by drives: repetitive rejection seeps in though "prosody," and so forth, preventing the stasis of One meaning, One myth, One logic.  

It is possible to tease out, from Kristeva’s theory, a number of different ways in which the semiotic and the symbolic “intersect and interweave.”

In the first instance, drive activity is the *material ground* of the semiotic. Without it, the symbolic would have no material basis to be ordered into signifying structures.

Second, not only is the semiotic the physical ground of the symbolic, it is also the *psychical foundation* of the socially dominant symbolic signifying economy that “englobes” it. It is within the time-space of the semiotic that the proto-subject interacts with pre-objects that precede the familial structure which in turn shapes signifying stases.

Third, the semiotic is a *chronological precondition* of the symbolic; the infant must pass through the stage of echoglossic gurgling, cries, and babble, articulated from within its “holophrastic, fluctuating lexical system that grammar has yet to grasp or master,” before acquiring language.

Such pre-signifying articulations are the forerunners of signs. In so far as signification is a diachronic phenomenon, the immanence of the semiotic is assured.

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6 Refer to Kristeva's *Polylogue*, 14, and to Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 130.
7 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 41.
Fourth, the semiotic is a *logical precondition* of signification: all discourse “moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it.”9 (The chronological and logical pre-existence of semiotic materiality does not alter the fact that the symbolic is a logical and chronological prerequisite to the *organisation* of semiotic elements within the *chora*.10)

Fifth, the “repetition compulsion” ensures that rejecting drive activity is a persistent and *continual force* that does not come to a halt with the establishment of signifying and subjective stases. Kristeva, following Freud, argues that rejection is an “ultimate mechanism of psychic functioning” which occurs in order to stop “the galloping evolution of organic forms and their symbolizing capacity” and instead sends the signifying body back to the semiotic space of biological a-significance (and finally to death).11 The body does not normally utterly disintegrate or die (or at least not more than once!) since the rejection which disrupts existing objects and meanings also allows for the reconstitution and recreation of new realities and novel symbolisations.

Sixth, Kristeva’s foundational principle of heterogeneity necessitates the *interdependence and interpenetration* of the semiotic and the symbolic. Just as the primarily material semiotic is always already patterned by socio-symbolic forces, so too, the symbolic is always already infiltrated by semiotic motility. Consequently, “the subject is always *both* semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.”12

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9 Kristeva, Revolution, 26.
11 Kristeva, Revolution, 160.
12 Kristeva, Revolution, 24.
Seventh, a point made by Bakhtin that is applicable to Kristeva’s theory is that language mastery is only in the most obvious way dependent upon acquisition of syntactical rules, vocabulary and grammatical norms. As Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist interpret, such mastery “consists rather in being able to apply such fixed features in fluid situations, or in other words, in knowing not the rules but the usage of language.” In Bakhtin’s words, “[t]he speaker’s focus of attention is brought about in line with the particular, concrete utterance he is making .... What the speaker values is not that aspect of the form which is invariably identical in all instances of its usage ... but that aspect of the linguistic form ... which become[s] a sign adequate to the conditions of the given, concrete situation.” This sign may signify, as Kristeva suggests, not only its socially shared meaning but also a more personal, emotional or affective meaning.

Eighth, the fact that human history goes on, and that signification is continually modified, indicates that symbolic stases have not achieved total domination. Indeed, for the symbolic order and its register to be impervious to semiotic pulsations would be to render society and subjectivity rigidly totalitarian and unchanging (notwithstanding the changes to the symbolic order that are engineered by power elites). In the Kristevan schema, then, the disrupting and renewing impetus of semiotic drive activity has a perpetual, dialectical role in the evolution of signification.

Combined, the above-listed indices of the semiotic’s continued activity within the symbolic, suggest that its total suppression can never be completely successful.

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Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

The material pulsations which reverberate throughout the semiotic *chora* escape confinement to the prediscursive realm and infiltrate the overlying symbolic structure as material yet non-phenomenological traces. Consequently, symbolic unity as the structuring force of the social and linguistic order is inherently unstable.

Nevertheless, although the threat of collapse is a constant factor for symbolic unity, rejection is not a purely destructive force but, as Kristeva writes, it is "the mechanism both of the symbolic function’s re-newal and of its demise."\(^{15}\) It is one of Kristeva’s principal projects to demonstrate just how and why heterogeneous rejection escapes confinement to the semiotic worlds of infancy and madness to infiltrate, disturb and, most particularly, to *renew* subjectivity, language and even (in her early work) society itself. I shall address three of these (re)experiences of the semiotic - infancy, madness and literature - in turn (leaving aside social revolution until Chapter Four).

**Subjective unity compromised**

I have already traced the articulation of the semiotic in infancy and early childhood, and the way in which the semiotic drive pulsations are eventually tamed and distributed into a relatively orderly network or hierarchical cluster of referent, signified and signifier as the subject passes through the first-degree thesis at oedipalisation.\(^{16}\) While the subject remains under the sway of the paternal stricture, effectively repressing desire for the mother and confidently assuming the subject position and linguistic competence bestowed by the phallic order, drive rejection is constrained and stabilised by the lexicon itself. Nevertheless, drive

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\(^{15}\) Kristeva, *Revolution*, 172.

\(^{16}\) Refer to my Chapter One.
rejection's "logic" of scission remains a potent force that ceaselessly pulsates beneath the symbolic shell imposed by the father, ready to make its presence felt when the subject lowers her or his guard.

Psychosis, a term which incorporates schizophrenia, manic depression and paranoia, does not comply with the unified subject positions sanctioned by the social order. Technically, psychotics lack insight into the fact that they are ill and they are incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and external reality. Failure in reality-testing, resulting in a lapse of psychic consolidation and the concomitant communicational capacity, sees the destructive wave of drive rejection bombard, penetrate and then perhaps even obliterate the first-degree thesis. Psychoanalysis locates the cause for such dissolution of (or failure to constitute) the first-degree thesis in repressed childhood sexual trauma. Return of the repressed trauma corrupts the structured surface of subjective and linguistic unity, spinning the subject into madness and discourse into flight. This process has the opposite effect to the original thetic procedure, "de-syn-thesizing" its symbolic organisation. Taken to its extreme, as in the case of schizophrenics, the semiotic's negativity-attack on the thetic barrier may result in a total loss of the symbolic function.

Not all transgressions of the thetic barrier are as devastating as those pertaining to psychosis. The return of rejection may also occur in other psychically critical

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18 Reality-testing is the capacity to distinguish between mental images and external percepts and the failure to correct subjective impressions by reference to external facts. Classical psychoanalysis determines that infants lack the capacity for reality-testing (Ryecroft, 153).
19 Kristeva, Revolution, 69.
moments, for instance, in poetry and in states of holiness.\textsuperscript{20} Thetic dissolution spurred by madness is radical and violent in its effect compared with the more restrained thetic disturbance spawned by some literary processes:

The division, indeed the multiplication, of matter is thus shown as \textit{one of the foundations} of the signifying function. This foundation will be repressed or reorganized by the constraints imposed by signifying social reality, but will nevertheless return, \textit{projecting itself} onto the structured surface - disturbing and reorganizing it (as “poetry”), or by piercing and annihilating it (in “madness”).\textsuperscript{21}

As this passage indicates, the intensity with which drives are projected onto the thetic structure differs with the drives’ particular impetus. Nevertheless, both madness and poetry, as instances where the semiotic is privileged, entail a buffeting by drives of the thetic boundary which was originally erected by the paternal interdict in order to fabricate and fortify symbolic subjectivity and signification. Such drive-induced thetic transgressions expose the subject synchronically to the field of semiotic processes that had initially constituted the pre-subject diachronically.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Subject in process}

Whatever triggers regression away from the symbolic, the transcendental ego, being insufficiently flexible to accommodate the semiotic drive economy, is abandoned along with the mask of objective meta-positionality. In a “schizoid moment of scission,” the subject undergoes “this multiple rupture of all unity

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\textsuperscript{20} While the impact of the semiotic on those subscribing to the Christian faith is a major area of interest for Kristeva, especially in such works as \textit{Tales of Love} and \textit{In the Beginning was Love}, I will not be addressing the semiotic in relation to religion in any detail.

\textsuperscript{21} Kristeva, \textit{Revolution}, 169.

\textsuperscript{22} Kristeva, \textit{In the Beginning}, 8, 9.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

including that of the body ...” in accordance with the heterogeneity of the semiotic (drives and stases).\(^{23}\) The now deunified subject (conscious and unconscious, speaking subject and biological organism) becomes a “subject in process.”\(^{24}\)

The subject in process or “on trial” (sujet en procès) is Kristeva’s description of someone whose identity is forever challenged, of someone who never achieves the certain stasis of the phenomenological transcendental ego.\(^{25}\) In so far as we are divided beings, harbouring a division between consciousness and the unconscious, we are all, in Kristeva’s estimation, subjects in process. Knowingly living on trial, the subject in process, who may be an artist, experiences the body as a “plural totality [which has] ... no identity but constitute[s] the place where drives are applied.”\(^{26}\) The slackening or cutting loose of subjective self-sufficiency and unity opens up “that irremediable cataclysm” over which teeters a “[v]ertigo of identity, vertigo of words ....”\(^{27}\) The subject in process now experiences itself as a product of heterogeneous drives as much as a construct of its unified ego, and as unconscious impulses as much as conscious decisions.

Language in process

Kristeva suggests that writers and other artists are among those subjects in process who do not try to halt the permeation of the thetic barrier by re-emergent drives. Desynthesis of the thetic barrier allows writers to retraverse the semiotic territory. Once reconnected with this archaic territory, experience is conflated: drives and their engrams, desires and their affects and primary and secondary processes enjoy

\(^{23}\) Kristeva, Revolution, 156, 160.
\(^{24}\) Kristeva, Desire, 135; Kristeva, In the Beginning, 26.
\(^{25}\) Kristeva, Revolution, 37.
\(^{26}\) Kristeva, Revolution, 101.
\(^{27}\) Kristeva, Tales, 3.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

an incestuous intimacy rarely found in symbolically structured existence. As distinct from the mad and the holy, writers as subjects in process re-experience the semiotic in relation to language and subsequently present this experience in language. Specifically, for the semiotically motivated writer, drives syncopate and restyle language, and primary processes re-emerge to share with secondary processes the task of shaping affective experience and its representations in language.²⁸

The picture of Kristeva’s psycholinguistic theory that is developing, a picture which features semiotic experience regained and reinscribed, is starting to sit uncomfortably with Lacan’s formulation of the intersection of language and the psyche as described in my first chapter. For Lacan, language exists “prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it” thereby conditioning and structuring the unconscious.²⁹ The unconscious henceforth speaks “the discourse of the Other” and Lacan to goes on to argue that the subject is then not an agent but rather an effect or even a “slave” of language.³⁰

Whereas Lacan complains of de Saussure’s overly psychological conception of the sign, Kristeva feels that Lacan has gone too far in the other direction, over-formalising the sign, as in the following passage:

This passion of the signifier [since de Saussure] now becomes a new dimension of the human condition in that it is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man it speaks (ça parle), that his

²⁸ Refer Glossary and also to my discussion later in this chapter of Jakobson and Lacan’s linguistic application of the primary processes.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

nature is woven by effects in which is to be found the structure of language, of which he becomes the material.\[^{31}\]

While she has no argument with Lacan’s utilisation and inversion of the Saussurean algorithm, saying that “one should not forget the advantages that centring the heterogeneous Freudian sign in the Saussurean one afforded,” Kristeva does protest at its rigidity under Lacan’s most well known proposition—that the unconscious is structured like a language. So, while supporting Lacan’s return to the linguistic frame as it had been speculated by Freud,\[^{32}\] Kristeva maintains that Lacan only offers a stripped-down and insufficiently nuanced version of language acquisition and practice.

Kristeva argues that Lacan’s theory fails to account for the preverbal and nonverbal elements that escape “the safety net” of language, as Shuli Barzilai also observes.\[^{33}\] In other words, the capitulation of the production of significance to the primacy of the signifier leaves no room for the capacity of instinctual drives and affects to contribute to language’s structuration. So, whereas in the above-cited passage Lacan writes of the subject becoming the material of language, Kristeva focuses on the opposite dimension: the ways in which the subject’s bodily based, material drives impact upon language. Accordingly, “the unconscious is not structured like a language but like all the imprints of the Other, including and most particularly so those that are most archaic, ‘semiotic,’ it is constituted by preverbal self-sensualities that the narcissistic or amorous experience restores to ‘me.’”\[^{34}\]

\[^{32}\] Refer to Freud, “The Unconscious,” XIV (1915).
\[^{34}\] Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 204-05.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

To argue her case and redress what she perceives to be the Lacanian imbalance, Kristeva returns again to Freud and his notion of the sign as outlined in “On Aphasia”:

We should keep in mind the incredible complexity of Freud’s notion of a “sign,” which is exorbitant compared with the closure imposed in the sign by Saussure’s stoicism. The Freudian “sign” is outlined in On Aphasia: visual, tactile, and acoustic images linked to object associations which refer, principally through an auditory connection, to the word itself, composed of an acoustic and kinesthetic image, reading and writing. The fact that the acoustic image is privileged in this case does not diminish the heterogeneity of this “psychological blueprint of word-presentations,” ... Freud’s conception of the unconscious derives from a notion of language as both heterogeneous and spatial, outlined first in On Aphasia when he sketches out as a “topology” both the psychological underpinnings of speech ... as well as language acquisition and communication.35

This reference to kinaesthesia reveals Kristeva’s interest in signification which exceeds the verbal communicational paradigm to embrace gesturation, musicality and visuality, all of which mingle in the semiotic.

Nevertheless, Kristeva renders her confrontation with Lacan less dramatic by sanctioning his notion of la langue (mother-tongue) as presented in one of his relatively late seminars.36 La langue allows for the animation in language of the maternal and paternal affective and drive traces which cannot be reduced to, or embraced by, thetic language. Here Lacan, like Freud and Kristeva, has sought to emphasise the interconnectedness of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. In Kristeva, fusion of the three psychic modalities was initially experienced (as discussed in my previous chapter) upon primary identification with the imaginary

35 Kristeva, Within the Microcosm, 37, note 8.
father. Here it arises again in post-oedipal linguistic excess, in an overflow of the semiotic into the symbolic which may be tapped by artists and writers.

The opening up of the semiotic onto the symbolic, that accompanies the disintegration or disruption of the thetic barrier from an already-mastered symbolic position, is not a haphazard affair. Rather, the welling up of subterranean affects is structured by the primary processes. These processes, like the pre-oedipal experience of the imaginary father and the post-oedipal thetic lapse, have both psychological and linguistic manifestations. Pertinent in this regard, to Kristeva no less than to any other contemporary psycholiterary theorist, is Lacan’s marrying of the Freudian primary psychic processes of condensation and displacement to the linguistic tropes of metaphor and metonymy. So, while finally diverging from Lacan’s positioning of the subject as an effect of discourse, Kristeva does follow him a long way down the same path, particularly in regard to Lacan’s work on metonymy and, even more so, on metaphor.

**Metaphor and the primary processes**

In the previous chapter I discussed Lacan’s schema in relation to de Saussure’s. Both conceived of signifying chains sliding across each other but whereas de Saussure speculated that the signifier and signified congeal (preventing the chains from sliding on to form new connections and meanings) in conscious discourse, Lacan maintains that conscious discourse is the result of merely momentary adherences between signifier and signified. These adherences are then dissolved to expose an absence of durable significance. Coagulation of signifier and signified does occur but only in dreams and other unconscious processes that take place when the censor is at its least vigilant.  

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Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

In order to explain the way in which the unconscious signified, normally suppressed by the censor/bar, is given a consistent voice (without speakers being aware of it) through the conscious signifier, Lacan appropriates, then modifies, Roman Jakobson's application of the literary figures metaphor and metonymy to the unconscious primary processes. It was Jakobson who first postulated (with Morris Halle in 1956) the connection in his essay, "The metaphoric and metonymic poles." There he writes:

A competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric, is manifest in any symbolic process, either intrapersonal or social. Thus in an inquiry into the structure of dreams, the decisive question is whether the symbols and the temporal sequences used are based on contiguity (Freud's metonymic 'displacement' and synecdochic 'condensation') or on similarity (Freud's 'identification and symbolism').

Lacan revised Jakobson's assignations, equating metaphor with condensation and metonymy with displacement:

Verdichtung, or 'condensation', is the structure of the superimposition of the signifiers, which metaphor takes as its field....

[T]he mechanism is con-natural with poetry to the point that it envelops the traditional function proper to poetry.

In the case of Verschiebung, 'displacement', the German term is close to the idea of that veering off of signification that we see in metonymy, and which from its first appearance in Freud is represented

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38 Roman Jakobson, "Two aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbance," Fundamentals of Language, Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle (The Hague: Mouton, 1956) 76; Elizabeth Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen, 1987) 111. Jean Laplanche praises Jakobson, not only for the impact of his association of metaphor and metonymy with unconscious process on the psychical model but also for reunifying the "almost macaronic diversity of figures which rhetoricians have indulged themselves in proliferating" under these twin rubrics (Jean Laplanche, Life and Death in Psychoanalysis, trans. and intro. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976) 131.

Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

as the most appropriate means used by the unconscious to foil censorship.

What distinguishes these two mechanisms, which play such a privileged role in the dream-work (Traumarbeit), from their homologous function in discourse? Nothing ....40

In order to evade the censor, condensation or the metaphoric process represses one term so that it falls below the bar (into the unconscious) to become a fixed signified to the symptom or signifier which replaces it above the bar (in the conscious). Thus restrained, the signified is no longer free to extend into an infinite play of pure difference.41 Metaphor opens up a “vertical” articulation of the signifying chain. Lacan explains that there is “no signifying chain that does not have, as if attached to the [horizontal] punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended ‘vertically’, as it were, from that point.”42 It is now apparent how establishment of the speaking subject is founded upon metaphor. “Name-of-the-father” as signifier is imposed upon the pre-subject who represses the signifier “desire-for-the-mother” below the bar, as/at the nucleus of the unconscious. Subsequently, the repressed signifier desire-for-the-mother functions as the signified for the overt signifier name-of-the-father.43

The subject, by virtue of this process of metaphoric repression, remains a desiring subject. Although desire for the first love is now socially censored and consciously inaccessible to the subject, the repressed term generates a potentially infinite chain of (only partially satisfactory) substitutes which are accessible to the conscious.44 So, just at the moment when the subject attains a subject-position in language by adopting the “I” bestowed by the name-of-the-father so that s/he can

41 Grosz, Lacan, 100.
44 Grosz, Lacan, 100.
confidently wield communicational signs (signifier plus signified), the very existence of the unconscious as repository of repressed signifiers allows for the unconscious subversion of consciously transmitted messages. This subversion is accomplished by the primary process of displacement-metonymy which sees “the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain.”

In contrast to metaphor/condensation, which stresses the “vertical” repressive structure of the relationship between two terms, metonymy/displacement maintains the “horizontal” connection between the latent signifier and that which replaces it (and still others along the chain). One signifier takes the place of another by virtue of their mutual association as signifiers (that is, by their verbal or signifying relations) to the first repressed term. The metonymic process takes place above the bar, thus maintaining, like desire, the pure difference of associative relations.

The metaphoric and metonymic processes operate in tandem. Every metaphoric repression of one signifier (which falls below the bar) by another requires the metonymic shift of above the bar signifiers to take its place. Conversely, metonymic displacement of terms above the bar requires terms generated by metaphor to absent themselves from conscious articulation. As Laplanche states: “metaphor and metonymy, in varying proportions, are always to some degree present and intersecting.”

46 Lacan, Écrits, 157, 175.
48 Laplanche, 136.
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The dynamics of the primary processes of metaphor and metonymy explain, then, how the unconscious is able to make itself heard in discourse at symptomatic moments. Freud’s principal instantiation of this phenomenon is dream-work, in which the content of the unconscious “follows the laws of the signifier,” congealing certain unconscious signifieds to particular conscious signifiers.\(^{49}\) That the unconscious follows laws enables representations to be classified as symptomatic and thus interpreted or decoded through the psychoanalytic technique of free association.

Putting aside until later the question of whether it is legitimate to interpret or decode literature in the same manner as analytic discourse (as Kristeva does), I shall continue with the assumption, Kristeva’s assumption, that the semiotic does infiltrate language to produce literature in some systematic way through the primary processes. In doing so, it carries into literature pre-subjective, and now unconscious, affects and pre-linguistic, and now stylistically deviant, effects. Such linguistic representations are treated as symptoms of unconscious activity. As Lacan asserts: “if the symptom is a metaphor, it is not a metaphor to say so...”\(^{50}\)

A theory of metaphor

Kristeva employs Lacan’s application of a structuralist linguistic paradigm to the psyche to great effect, extending the mechanics of primary processes from Freudian analysis of dreamers and psychotics to literary discourse. Metaphor, in particular, is resonant in her exploration of literature, whereas Lacan tends to focus on the metonymic motion of desire as indicator of lack. Yet, it was Lacan

\(^{49}\) Lacan, Écrits, 161.
\(^{50}\) Lacan, Écrits, 175.
who suggested of metaphor’s vertical suspension of contexts from a single term, that “one only has to listen to poetry ... for a polyphony to be heard, for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a score.” The two most clearly inscribed literary staves to be discerned through poetic metaphor are, according to Kristeva, those which inscribe conscious and unconscious elements. Other, more finely nuanced, staves may also be detected as Kristeva’s literary theory is more fully advanced and described.

Metaphor comes to be as pervasive in Kristeva’s later writings as heterogeneity was in her early works and, moreover, it seems a natural framework for her discussions of poetic language given that poetic language itself is frequently metaphoric. In *Tales of Love*, for instance, Kristeva explores the relationship between metaphor and poetic language in order to establish “a theory of metaphor.” Through her theory she explains the unstable and transformational states of subjectivity and signification and then proceeds to work out the rules of “production of metaphoricalness in poetic discourse.”

Kristeva employs an interactive model of the metaphor to draw associations between psychic states and their linguistic expression. To this end she relies on the work of I. A. Richards and Max Black whose theories of metaphor bring to the fore the interaction between “two nonhierarchized semantic fields and two reference areas also nonhierarchized; it does so by giving greater importance in analysis to the sentence or discourse context of metaphorical motion as well as to the utterance act as referential and intersubjective act.” Richards, who was openly indebted to psychoanalytic insights regarding transference relations,
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challenged the received Aristotelian "comparison" and Dr Johnson's "substitution" views of metaphor with an "interactive" model (Black's terminology) that took the mind's contextualising skill and habit into account.\footnote{Richards supplies a passage from Aristotle to describe the latter's comparison view of metaphor: "to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances" and a passage from Dr Johnson to describe his substitution model of metaphor: "As to metaphorical expression, ... it gives you two ideas for one" I. A. Richards, \textit{The Philosophy of Rhetoric} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 89, 93; Max Black, \textit{Metaphor and Thought}, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 31-38.}

The mind is a connecting organ, it works only by connecting and it can connect any two things in an infinitely large number of different ways. Which of these it chooses is settled by reference to some larger whole or aim, and, though we may not discover its aim, the mind is never aimless. In all interpretation we are filling in connections, and for poetry, of course, our freedom to fill in - the absence of explicitly stated intermediate steps - is the main source of its powers.\footnote{Richards, 125.}

Consequently, copresence of vehicle and tenor allows for considerable contextual extension; metaphor reverberates with new significance that is not reducible to either of the two terms. The interactive metaphor's ambivalence is drawn from its terms' similitude and contradiction thus enabling the transubstantiation of elusive unconscious affects into literary texts.\footnote{Refer to my Chapter Eight on Proust for a fuller account of the role of transubstantiation in relation to literature and to metaphor.}

\textbf{Love: the psychic foundation of poetic discourse}

The metaphor replete with transubstantive properties becomes increasingly prominent in Kristeva's later work, featuring particularly in \textit{Proust and the Sense of Time} and in \textit{Tales of Love}.\footnote{What is more, metaphor is not only a theory that becomes increasingly prominent in Kristeva's later work but so too does the metaphoric form. Compare for instance the writing style of Kristeva's \textit{Revolution in Poetic Language} and her \textit{Tales of Love}.} Its rise in prominence coincides with Kristeva's
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work on love, in particular love for, and transference of identity onto, the imaginary father. Importantly for Kristeva’s psycholiterary theory, which proposes that literature is typically metaphoric and produced by a subject in a state of transference, transference and metaphor both mean “carrying over.”

Kristeva maintains that loving attraction is in its purest form when the fledgling ego transfers an idealising love onto its imaginary father. After oedipalisation object-love sees the subject fuse itself in symbolic union with the ideal other. Although we remain “securely ignorant” of the twists and turns of the “alchemy of idealization,” Kristeva insists that adult love, in so far as it is transferential and bonding, replicates the foundational relationship between the pre-subject and its imaginary father: “One is in love with what resembles an ideal that is out of sight but present in memory ... love in concert with image-making, resemblance, homologation.” Identification with an other is an act of transference in which the subject destabilises and decentres itself, transferring the core of its identity and its ego onto the lover: “the individual is no longer indivisible and allows himself to become lost in the other, for the other,” “unstabilizing the same through its identification with the other.” As I explained in the previous chapter, in Kristeva’s theory amatory experience dislodges the subject’s being, drives and ideals onto the other thereby creating an open and connected psychic system which sees the merging of the subject and its ideal and of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The subject in process may utilise this open connectedness

59 Laplanche, 138.
60 Refer to the section entitled “Eros, agape and primary narcissism” in my previous chapter.
61 Kristeva, Tales, 169.
62 Kristeva, Tales, 269.
63 Kristeva, Tales, 4, 279.
64 Kristeva, Tales, 15, 162.
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between the psychic orders to achieve psychological rebirth along with a renewal of signifying structures.

Metaphor's muddled borders

While the subject and loved object "muddle their borders," it is interesting to note that love and poetic writing, and more specifically love and metaphor, typically have their borders muddled by Kristeva. It is possible, though, to tease apart the terms love and metaphor to show that they are aligned in (at least) three ways in Kristeva’s usage of them.

First and fundamentally, metaphor and love function analogously by means of condensation. In Kristeva, their cofunctionality combines the effect of a subject’s transferential love for the imaginary father, which sees the opening up of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, with the effect of metaphor, which sees the opening out of significance to encompass those flights of imagination which the conscious mind can barely grapple with. While metaphor is the principal linguistic process underpinning literary production, love is the primary psychical process underlying literary production. Second, because one is the linguistic process and the other the psychic process of the literary text, "a flight of metaphor" is an appropriately imprecise but allusive mechanism for articulating the "impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive" nature of love. Third, by virtue of their analogous, condensing operations, the linguistic metaphor also functions as a metaphor for the amatory experience.

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65 Kristeva, Tales, 268.
66 Kristeva, Tales, 1.
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These distinctions are barely hinted at in Kristeva and her discourse on metaphor and love remains highly condensed. It is difficult to tease out the subjective affect of love and its linguistic effects, the linguistic trope of metaphor and its psychic equivalents, the role of the imaginary father as Other and of the symbolic as Other, and the meeting of all these in poetry. To expand upon the nexus between metaphor and love, Kristeva turns to poetry, to Baudelaire for his suggestion that perfume is “the allegory of the pulverization of meaning and language, the pulverizing of one’s own identity.” Honing the association and simultaneously heightening the headiness of the “perfume,” Kristeva maintains that it is the dynamics of metaphor that intermixes meaning, language and identity in poetry. Here, as elsewhere, metaphor exceeds itself many time over. Yes, it is a literary trope or tool and yes, it is a linguistic equivalent to the psychic primary process of condensation, but it is also, as perfume is for Baudelaire, a metaphor for “that archaic universe, preceding sight, where what takes place is the conveyance of the most opaque lovers’ indefinite identities ....” In other words, metaphor is not only a tool for achieving a conveyance, and an enactment of that conveyance, it is also a metaphor for that same transposition and a means of reversing the procedure, of proceeding from the poetic vehicle to the psychic tenor. Accordingly, there comes a stage in Kristeva’s theory of the production of poetic, metaphoric discourse when only metaphor will suffice to explain the theory:

Would metaphor be, on the near and far side of angels and satans, the successful discourse of an amorous pervert who, out of his unstable objects, produces a cloud of meaning, and thus transfers his solid, suffering, and parceled body to the scented sublimation of a language in the throes of condensation?

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67 Kristeva, Tales, 329.
68 Kristeva, Tales, 334.
69 Kristeva, Tales, 340.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

Love and metaphor: infinite and void

Just as the effect of love on the subject is destabilising, so too the effect of metaphor on meaning is imprecision. Although imprecise, metaphor "muddles" meaning in two different ways.\(^7\) Meaning, under the sway of metaphor, is both overdetermined and underdetermined.

Just as the subject in love experiences an escalation of sensation as it reaches towards and identifies with its ideal, so it is with metaphor, where the fusion of terms leads to an "infinitesimal overdetermination" and "elevation" of meaning and connotation generated by the dynamics between the two terms.\(^7\) Kristeva writes in this regard: "[m]etaphor as damaging the Single meaning, as symptom of its toppling over into infinity, is then the very discourse of love ...."\(^7\)

In as much as a metaphor is ambiguous in its meaning, reducible to neither one nor another of its terms, it also reaches down through sensation and drive rejection towards "the void of nonmeaning."\(^7\) Kristeva describes the void as "simply what remains when the overabundance of meaning, desire, violence, and anguish is drained by means of language."\(^7\) Consequently, the metaphor appears to Kristeva "as the indication of uncertainty concerning the reference .... The 'like' of metaphorical conveyance ... [which] questions the very probability of the reference. Being? - Unbeing."\(^7\) One recalls the interactive view of metaphor which sees "a continuous linking together of circular elements [which] has the

\(^{70}\) Kristeva, Tales, 268.
\(^{71}\) Kristeva, Tales, 330; Kristeva, My Memory's Hyperbole, 267.
\(^{72}\) Kristeva, Tales, 336.
\(^{73}\) Kristeva, Tales, 330.
\(^{74}\) Kristeva, In the Beginning, 34.
\(^{75}\) Kristeva, Tales, 273.
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effect of opening up the surface of signs in the direction of depth ....”  

The subject too, in so far as it reaches towards its ideal, empties itself, experiences loss of unified subjectivity.

The language of love heterogeneously embodies both of these aspects simultaneously:

to speak of love may be, perhaps, a simple condensation of speech that merely arouses, in the one spoken to, metaphorical capabilities - a whole imaginary, uncontrollable, undecidable flood, of which the loved one alone unknowingly possesses the key ... what does he understand me to be saying? What do I understand him to be saying? Everything? - as one tends to believe in those moments of merging apotheoses, as total as they are unspeakable? Or nothing? - as I think, as he may say when the first wound comes and unsettles our venerable hall of mirrors ....

Speaking from the position where the limits of one’s own identity vanish into that of the other, saying everything and nothing at the same time results in meaning being elaborated and destroyed, placing truth in jeopardy: Kristeva writes that “the precision of reference and meaning becomes blurred in love’s discourse .... The ordeal of love puts the univocity of language and its referential and communicative power to the test ....” Literature and poetry, which share with love a predilection for metaphor, also simultaneously elaborate and destroy meaning thereby exceeding the communicative function.

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77 Kristeva, Tales, 3.
78 Kristeva, Tales, 279.
79 Kristeva, Tales, 2.
Baudelaire is, for Kristeva, exemplary in his production of a text “wholly founded on metaphor,” a text that inscribes a “heartrending account of our amatory identity’s archaeology” and consequently of language’s potential for inscribing meaning’s excesses and absences. Poetic Rejection Resurfaces Baudelaire’s metaphors are the linguistic embodiment of his affective experiences, according to Kristeva. Yet, it is the poet’s theoretical work, in which Baudelaire states that man is “a conjunction of two opposite but equally centrifugal motions, one of which goes upward and the other downward,” which even more explicitly announces that the archaeology of love is simultaneously founded upon “ideal and abjection, image and emptiness, infinity and lack of meaning ....”.

Language as imaginary father

The opening out onto meaning and non-meaning that the affect of love and the linguistic device of metaphor bring about, is reminiscent of the dual aspects of the imaginary father. Indeed, while the writer’s transference to language bears some similarities to adult object love, it is more strongly characteristic of the type of psychic functioning initially experienced between the pre-subject and its imaginary father. In its transference onto the imaginary father, the obsessive introspection of the I/other relationship is reworked “on a higher level of symbolic organization” where a relationship between I and Other develops. While the Other is represented by the analyst in the psychoanalytic clinic, by the father at oedipalisation and by the imaginary father in infancy, for the writer the Other is language itself (although, as I shall discuss below, language in the poetic context behaves more like the imaginary father than any other):

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80 Kristeva, Tales, 318-19.
81 Kristeva, Tales, 320, 324. Baudelaire quote unreferenced by Kristeva.
82 Kristeva, Tales, 15.
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The univocity of signs undergoes equivocality and is resolved in a more or less undecidable connotation when the subject of the utterance, in a state of transference (of love) toward the other transposes the same process of identification, of transference, to the units of language - the signs .... The signifying unit ("the sign") opens up and reveals its components: drives and sensory elements (as in a synesthethic metaphor) - while the subject itself, in a state of loving transference, flares up from sensation to idealization.  

The writing subject may undergo transference with a lover or loved one and, indeed, these experiences of love frequently constitute the subject of literary and poetic texts. However, the process that produces the literary text (as distinct from selection of the text's subject) is brought about by a transference "to," as the above-cited passage states, "the units of language, - the signs ...." Kristeva states the case even more explicitly in Revolution in Poetic Language where she writes that:

the text[']s] ... "addressee" is the site of language itself or, more precisely, its thetic moment, which the text appropriates by introducing within it ... semiotic motility. In so doing, the text takes up strictly individual experience and invests it directly in a signification ....

By specifying the thetic point in language as the locus of writerly attention, Kristeva avoids aligning the Other with He Who Must Be Obeyed, the stern and

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83 Kristeva, Tales, 275.
84 Kristeva, Tales, 275.
85 Kristeva, Revolution, 208. The missing words from this passage are as follows: "The text, by contrast, is not based on personified transference: its always absent 'addressee' is the site of language itself or, more precisely, its thetic moment ...." (208). This specification of a transference that is not personified and of an absent addressee would seem to undermine my claim that the writer identifies with the imaginary father. It must be recalled, however, that at the time of writing Revolution in Poetic Language, Kristeva had not yet developed her notion of the imaginary father nor, as I shall discuss in due course, had she entertained the idea of countertransference in relation to psychoanalytic and literary interpretation. I will return to this issue again in my next chapter.
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mighty oedipal father. Such an association would probably result in grammatically perfect and syntactically regular prose but not in modernist literature or poetry. Instead, language for the writer is more like the imaginary father, it provides support and guidance as to what is right and proper but also tolerates deviation. Baudelaire, as Kristeva reads him, is a poet who abstracts the imaginary father as Other (who is but a symbol - of unity, probity and power - anyway), understanding and loving the signs of language as the Other. “The artist ...,” writes Kristeva, “creates himself through numbers and signs.”

As the object of writers’ transference, the units of language which have become the linguistic equivalent of the imaginary father, far from being a constraining force, open themselves up to reveal, like metaphor itself, their components: “drives and sensory elements.” Indeed, Kristeva specifically confronts the conflation of love, the imaginary father and metaphor, asking whether metaphor would be “the continuous celebration of primary identification?” Responding to her own question, she confirms that “[e]very metaphor that one modestly takes to be a putting into image of an abstract term or one made commonplace is in fact pregnant with such a metamorphosis in which the subject becomes stable only by identifying with a heard, seen, touched, tasted, or smelled object ....”

In Kristeva’s view, this multiplicity of positions experienced in the very process of writing his metaphoric poetry, is jouissance for Baudelaire. A body of jouissance is a body totally eroticised, and the “archaeologist-writer” achieves this state by writing the body as a “multiplicity of its levels,” or staves, “moving from

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86 Kristeva, Tales, 324.
87 Kristeva, Tales, 275.
88 Kristeva, Tales, 275.
89 Kristeva, Tales, 333.
90 Kristeva, Tales, 319.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

At the level of drives, real, bodily rejection is transposed into language, thereby reintroducing that element which Kristeva felt Lacan had neglected in his proposition that the unconscious is structured like a language. With this activation of real, drive-induced semiotic elements the writing subject and language, alike, are released from the strictures of the communicational paradigm. Consequently, the potential for linguistic, subjective and aesthetic innovation escalates. At the other end of the score, the semiotic, socially shared symbolic aspects of language are not eclipsed. Both the semiotic and the symbolic are necessary for poetic innovation. While treading the paths of drive facilitations and exploring ancient affects in order to articulate the "subtle, fragile, and mobile equilibrium" that exists between the semiotic and the symbolic, the artist must also retain a capacity to remain apart so as to resecure these explorations in language.

Writing as the imaginary father enables the poet to articulate two "staves" of the literary "score." The stave of semiotic drives and the stave of normative language occupy the two extremes of literature’s potential. The intermediate staves are the affective associations and significance that drive rejection induces and which the symbolic components of the signs seek to tame. Linking the entire score and bringing about a transference of bodily drives and their affective contexts into the body of the written text is metaphor, nexus between psycho-physical and literary bodies.

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91 Kristeva, Tales, 320.
92 Kristeva, Revolution, 179.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

Love antithetical to modern life

Notwithstanding the fit between transfigurational love and poetic metaphor, Kristeva observes that while the amatory condition is the psychic state most suited to the production of poetic metaphor, in these post-religious, post-holocaust days it is less likely to be the psychic impetus of art. Even Baudelaire, at the same time as providing a “heartrending account of our amatory identity’s archaeology” in texts which are “wholly founded upon metaphor,” exposes the poet as a victim. Kristeva maintains that by setting his condition to verse “he brings forth, for him as well as for us, the painless, anesthetized defense of a permanent suffering.”

As I showed in the last chapter, Kristeva’s normative model of psychological development entails successive, and increasingly intense, identifications with the loving paternal figure of the imaginary father who provides guidance to what is legitimate and to what is abject. Embroidered onto this legal model, is the subject’s increasingly resilient ego that functions, in part, as a screen from the maternal void and as a parry to the abject mother. Yet, in Tales of Love, Kristeva maintains that contemporary western secular discourse does not offer convincing symbolic images or mirrors either of the imaginary father or of the abject mother. Given the inadequacy of current images for maternal abjection, feminine abjection becomes imposed on social representation, causing actual denigration of women. And, given the lack of a secular variant of the loving father, contemporary discourse often finds itself incapable of properly assuming, let alone elaborating, primary identification which is “the substratum for our idealizing constructions.”

94 Kristeva, Tales, 319-18.
95 Kristeva, Tales, 337.
96 Kristeva, Tales, 374. Recall Oliver’s clarification of Kristeva’s position, as mentioned in my previous chapter, that “since the maternal function is not separate from our representations of women or the feminine, women themselves have become abjected within our society” (Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 103).
97 Kristeva, Tales, 374.
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Under such circumstances a subject remains suspended within a field of unresolved identifications, never properly assuming the symbolic order or its register with assurance. The resultant shattered, borderline being is "without a precise body or image, having lost his specificity, an alien in a world of desire and power ...." Without specificity of image, of either self or other, the subject suffers a crisis of love: “Because today we lack being particular, covered as we are with so much abjection, because the guideposts that insured our ascent toward the good have proven questionable, we have crisis of love. Let’s admit it: lacks of love.” The absence of love and neglect of values allow the falling away (or non-construction) of the protective screen that loving identifications ideally build to protect and strengthen the ego, leaving it instead as a tentative, fragile entity. The paucity of loving images results in a catastrophic “deep challenge to psychic space” which leaves the speaking subject too close to the void, too close to psychosis.

Abandoned by the loving father, the subject lacks an identificatory model for which “the often fierce but artificial and incredible tyranny of the Law and the Superego” is an inadequate substitute. The anguished subject, who is “seized by an unnameable solitude,” responds by withdrawing within where s/he discovers the psychic being of One (super-ego) who compensates for the absence of the loving father. “It is a paroxysm of identification, in which, without a stable

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98 Kristeva, Tales, 382-83. The clinical definition of a borderline case is “a patient who is on the border between neurosis and psychosis.” (Ryecroft, 16). Kristeva seems to describe a psychic state similar to that in clinical usage. However, she applies the term borderline to the abjection scenario, using it interchangeably with the term “deject.” (Refer below, main text, for discussion of the deject. Also refer to the Glossary).
99 Kristeva, Tales, 7.
100 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 55.
101 Kristeva, Tales, 375.
102 Kristeva, Tales, 378.
103 Kristeva, Tales, 376.
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object, the lover identifies with his contemplation; he passes into it, he is it - the artist, like the poet, is both ‘cause and effect, subject and object, mesmerist and one entranced’” writes Kristéva after Baudelaire.

Writing disaffection

Kristeva questions whether it is possible, or even desirable for the disintegrated contemporary psychic space to be repaired or fortified. She ponders, instead, whether the unified subject might not be an outmoded concept in which, perhaps “the machinery of projections and identifications that relied more or less on neuroses for reinforcement, no longer hold together?” Kristeva suggests that the current widespread psychological crisis is a sign that a new unstable, uncertain and open psychic space is developing. The psychoanalyst’s task, rather than seeking a cure, should, in these circumstances, be to encourage such “wounded beings” to engage in artistic production that is expressive of their psychological crises: “Music, film, novel. Polyvalent, undecided, infinite.”

Modern, unstable subjects are urged to:

speak and write themselves in unstable, open, undecided spaces. The free associations of analytic discourse paves the way for the polylogic of such a nomination and such eccentric writing ... to trigger a discourse where his own “emptiness” and her own “out-of-placeness” become essential elements, indispensable “characters” if you will, of a

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104 Kristeva, Tales, 333.


106 Kristeva, Tales, 383.
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work in progress. What is at stake is turning the crisis into a work in progress.\(^\text{107}\)

The emptiness of melancholy and the out-of-placeness of abjection are explored in both their psychological and artistic guises by Kristeva in her two books, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* and *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

Re-engagement with the abject

Abjection, as I explained in Chapter One, is a by-product of the processes that help establish the monological symbolic order. This order, being based upon distinctions and classifications that adhere to binary hierarchical structures, demands division of the proto-subject from its abject mother and expulsion of its abject bodily impurities so as to establish a clean and proper body that defines the corporeal and psychological limits of the unified speaking subject. However, aside from the public success of this symbolising project, Kristeva stresses that abjection is never fully foreclosed but lurks beneath subjectivity, beseeching and pulverising the subject with its negativity.

Absence of loving models exacerbates abjection’s subversive activity since, without stable identificatory models and mirrors of the Other, narcissism spins into crisis. The subject remains or becomes brittle and fragmentary, revealed to itself as only roughly sutured together over the void and primal abjection. The abject “takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away - it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death.”\(^\text{108}\) The subject who is in crisis from lack of love comes to understand that all its objects are based merely on “the inaugural loss” that laid the

\(^{107}\) Kristeva, *Tales*, 380.

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foundations of its own being.\textsuperscript{109} Kristeva writes that: “[t]here is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded.”\textsuperscript{110} So, in contrast to idealised love which emphasises identification and affection, lack of love shifts the focus onto desire, onto the “concupiscence for absent things”: lack, absence, abjection.\textsuperscript{111}

The weakness of the third term in contemporary life thrusts the subject, maybe an artist, into a parallel of the pre-oedipal psychic place with its divisible, foldable and catastrophic space that surrounds abjection. From this position the artist is classified as a borderline being or stray “deject” and the object or other is reduced to a non-object or “abject”: “A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines - for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject - constantly question his solidarity and impel him to start afresh.”\textsuperscript{112}

Although it is equivalent to the pre-oedipal, the structure of artistic experience of abjection remains ternary, with the super-ego taking the place of the imaginary father. Accordingly, the Other (1) of the socio-linguistic order, internalised as the super-ego, acts as the keystone position. The deject-artist (2) grounds him/herself on the law of the Other in order “to tear the veil of oblivion” that masks the jouissance and the perversion of the abject (m)other (3) which has been jettisoned into “an abominable real” by the Other.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{109} Kristeva, Abjection, 5.
\textsuperscript{110} Kristeva, Abjection, 5.
\textsuperscript{111} Kristeva, Tales, 159.
\textsuperscript{112} Kristeva, Abjection, 8.
\textsuperscript{113} Kristeva, Abjection, 9.
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The writer is fascinated by the abject, "imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language - style and content." Although inspired to innovation by renewed association with abjection and proximity to the void, the artist is also threatened by, and fearful of, the abject. But the deject-artist is saved from foundering in abjection by, in the first instance, the prudence of the Other (super-ego) which makes it repugnant. Abhorrence for the abject establishes a certain distance or detachment from abjection, thereby enabling the artist-deject to remain at least partially tethered to the symbolic realm. Thereby connected still to the significatory register, the artist can escape from abjection through the very process of writing since "one does not get rid of the impure; one can, however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity." Since phobia cannot be made to disappear, but rather "slides beneath language," the phobic writer "succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs." The metaphoric construction of abjection sees the signifier "want itself" slip below the censor-bar to be substituted by the signifier for the phobic object which is ostensibly feared. The metaphoric signifier "calls attention to a drive economy in want of an object - that conglomerate of fear, deprivation, and nameless frustration, which, properly speaking, belongs to the unnameable."

Céline is the abject writer par excellence and fully one third of Kristeva's book on abjection addresses his fiction. Kristeva specifies that Céline brings defilement, abomination and sin to life because for him "the ideal or prohibiting judging

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114 Kristeva, Abjection, 16.
115 Kristeva, Abjection, 16. This detachment, which will come to be identified as the activity which must follow countertransference, is important not only in literary production but, as I shall explain in Chapters Three, Five and Six, vital to Kristevan literary interpretation.
116 Kristeva, Abjection, 28.
117 Kristeva, Abjection, 38.
118 Kristeva, Abjection, 35.
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agency ... [oedipal father] becomes ambiguous, derisory, grows hollow, decays, and crumbles; it is a fleeting, derisory, and even idiotic illusion, which is yet upheld."

Accordingly, Céline neither offers hope nor parades sceptical doubt, rather he relishes themes that, combined, approach the anarchistic ("horror, death, madness, orgy, outlaws, war, the feminine threat, the horrendous delights of love, disgust, and fright"), swamping these themes in his style. Kristeva suggests that under the sway of abjection, when the boundaries between subject and object and inside and outside are shaken, narrative becomes shattered: "it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompletion, tangles, and cuts ... [using the] language of violence, of obscenity ...." Such a broken, abject narrative "yields to" themes of "suffering-horror" with suffering being the intimate side of abjection and horror its public face.

Melancholia re-experienced and reinscribed

Contemporary borderline beings suffering melancholia and depression mourn the mother's loss (rather than repulse the abject aspects of the mother as the deject-artist does). Kristeva writes that by the "quirks of biology and family life we are all of us melancholy mourners, witness to the death that marks our psychic inception." Melancholia is the dark underside of love. In the shadow of "the bright and fragile amatory idealization" lurks despair and mourning for the loss of the mother as first love object. Normatively, the imaginary father and later the symbolic father and "his" language function, in part, as compensation for the lost

119 Kristeva, Abjection, 135.
120 Kristeva, Abjection, 137.
121 Kristeva, Abjection, 141.
122 Kristeva, Abjection, 141-40.
123 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 41.
124 Kristeva, Black Sun, 5, 9.
mother. However, if the loving father is absent, as for individuals throughout history suffering depressive disorders and more generally in the current epoch with the absence of plausible political and religious idols, depression pervades the psyche.

Whereas abjection entails repulsion of the mother and her associated (pre-) objects by a (relatively) unified ego (unified because it has already identified in some fashion with the father), the absence of the differentiating, separating yet unifying phallus impels the subject to fall back into the real. Here the place of the ideal imaginary father is taken up by the depressive father and his phallic power is now attributed to the mother: “Attractive or seductive, fragile and engaging, such a father holds the subject within suffering but does not allow the possibility of a way out by means of idealizing the symbolic”. Subjects thus afflicted idealise and remain emotionally bonded to the phallic mother rather than the imaginary father (now the depressive father). The melancholic retrospectively indulges in nostalgic sadness dedicated to the ideal mother who has been lost since oedipalisation. Kristeva writes that “[f]or such narcissistic depressed persons, sadness is really the sole object; more precisely it is a substitute object they become attached to, an object they tame and cherish for lack of another.” It is this sadness that enables the depressed subject to function at all, by offering a flimsy support for the narcissistic ego, uniting and cohering it within the framework of the affect.

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125 Kristeva, Black Sun, 45. Refer to Glossary for description of depressive father.
126 Kristeva, Black Sun, 45.
127 Kristeva, Black Sun, 24.
128 Kristeva, Black Sun, 12.
129 Kristeva, Black Sun, 19.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

By refusing to separate from the mother so that in her absence she can be imagined as an other and so be named, the true melancholic sacrifices the referential and signifying components of language as bestowed by the father and his ternary economy. In the most serious cases, the slide towards the "black sun" of the void severs the last ties to the symbolic so that meaning, and ultimately existence itself, utterly collapse. No longer capable of translating or metaphorizing, such subjects accept their linguistic disintegration as evidence of the absurdity and meaninglessness of being. They "become silent and ... die".

[M]elancholy persons are foreigners in their maternal tongue. They have lost the meaning - the value - of their mother tongue for want of losing the mother. The dead language they speak, which foreshadows their suicide conceals a Thing buried alive. The latter, however, will not be translated in order that it not be betrayed; it shall remain walled up within the crypt of the inexpressible affect, anally harnessed, with no way out.

Yet most depressed persons do not forget how to use signs although the signs they do use seem absurd, delayed, "ready to be extinguished". The arbitrary sequence perceived by the depressed as absurd occurs because external reference has been lost: "glued to the Thing (Res), [the depressed] are without objects ... [they] speak of nothing, they have nothing to speak of ..." Mimicking Kristeva's own use of literature to illustrate psychological states, I am impelled at this point to refer to a passage in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* in which suicidal Esther Greenwood narrates:

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130 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 3  
132 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 42.  
133 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 53.  
134 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 47.  
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

My eyes sank through an alphabet soup to the long word in the middle of the page .... I counted the letters. There were exactly a hundred of them. I thought this must be important.

Why should there be a hundred letters?

Haltingly, I tried the word aloud.

It sounded like a heavy wooden object falling downstairs, boomp boomp boomp, step after step. Lifting the pages of the book, I let them fan slowly by my eyes. Words, dimly familiar but twisted awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, fled past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of my brain.

I squinted at the page.

The letters grew barbs and rams' horns. I watched them separate, each from the other, and jiggle up and down in a silly way. Then they associated themselves in fantastic, untranslatable shapes, like Arabic or Chinese.

I decided to junk my thesis.

Kristeva maintains that depressed persons perceive signifiers as meaningless and empty because, for them, signifiers are no longer bound to semiotic imprints, that is, drive-related imprints and affect representations. The depressed live their affect rather than speak it.

More commonly, those who are depressed retain the use of the paternal signifier, albeit a disowned, weakened, ambiguous and devalorised signifier. Artists who consciously or unconsciously engage with the melancholic affect must, like those delving into abjection and love, maintain a degree of detachment from the melancholic hunger for the lost Thing. Having experienced melancholy's loss and having understood subjective relations to the void in their relaxation of the thetic barrier, the artist then struggles against concomitant "symbolic abdication."

Detachment enables the artist to escape the void by integrating the new formals

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137 Kristeva, Black Sun, 9.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

innovations (resulting from the melancholic proliferation of signifiers) with the affect or what Kristeva calls “the unnamed agitations of an omnipotent self that ordinary social and linguistic usage always leave somewhat orphaned or plunged into mourning.” 138

By naming (assigning a sequence of signifiers to) this previously unnamed, unsymbolised melancholic affect (signified) the artist invents new symbols (signifier plus signified) from previously unsymbolised drives. Actually, the process that constitutes literary creation under the influence of melancholia (as for other psychic states) is more than a naming of affect, it is a material transposition of “sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol’s sway” and of “joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol” into the different concrete reality of rhythms, signs and forms. 139

Kristeva observes that melancholia in the mid- and later twentieth century has a more profound impetus than the “quirks of biology and family life ...” and the much-advertised fallibility of political and religious leaders. 140 She maintains that human consciousness on a global scale has been brutalised by massive destructiveness epitomised by the holocausts of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. “We are survivors,” she writes, “living dead, corpses on furlough, sheltering personal Hiroshimas in the bosom of our private worlds”. 141

What those monstrous and painful sights do damage to are our systems of perception and representation. As if overtaxed or destroyed by too powerful a breaker, our symbolic means find themselves hollowed out, nearly wiped out, paralyzed. On the edge of

138 Kristeva, Black Sun, 51.
139 Kristeva, Black Sun, 22.
140 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 41.
141 Kristeva, Black Sun, 236.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

silence the word “nothing” emerges, discreet defense in the face of so much disorder, both internal and external incommensurable.\textsuperscript{142}

So, whereas the pre-war and inter-war modernists had, in the face of the rise of politics and the retreat of religion, “turn[ed] back to language, which is their own mansion ... [to] unfold its resources rather than tackle innocently the representation of an external object,” for writers after the holocausts, “the difficulty in naming no longer opens onto ‘music in literature’ (Mallarmé and Joyce were believers and aesthetes) but onto illogicality and silence.”\textsuperscript{143}

Post-holocaust, melancholic literature has thus retreated to a position closer to psychosis than to art. Melancholic language, riven from reference and loaded with affects, is constructed from empty and so arbitrarily concatenated signifiers that become repetitive, reduplicated, monotonous, ambiguous, alliterative and nonsensical: “Depressed speech, built up with absurd signs, slackened, scattered, checked sequences, conveys the collapse of meaning into the unnameable where it founders, inaccessible and delightful, to the benefit of affective value riveted to the Thing.”\textsuperscript{144} But, “fascinating as it might be on account of its very strangeness, [it] will be of no consequence, will have no effect ....”\textsuperscript{145} So, although the melancholic’s new and strange poetic language is like a “beautiful facade carved out of a ‘foreign language’” and may in fact possess “considerable associative originality,” it will, if it remains at that level, “stand revealed in its falsity - ersatz, imitation, or carbon copy” in terms of writing as art.\textsuperscript{146} Here we see Kristeva focus

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{142} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 223. The character Jim Reilly extends this proposition to the Vietnam War, recalling that “[t]he war was like modernism itself: a tremendous shattering of wonted meanings and perhaps, perhaps irrecoverably, even of meaning \textit{tout court}.” (Tim O’Brien, \textit{The Things They Carried} {London: Collins, 1990} 100).
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 224, 222.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{145} Kristeva, \textit{Strangers}, 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{146} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 42, 55, 59, 50, 51.
\end{itemize}
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

on affective-oriented meaning being the nub of art; contemporary melancholic language, while formally innovative, lacks connection to unconscious affective meaning.

The writings of Marguerite Duras epitomise, for Kristeva, the melancholic leanings of post-holocaust writing. It is clear that Kristeva does not value such literature even while she claims that there is, or was, little alternative in the post-war age. Melancholic fiction, like that of Duras "follows ill-being step by step, almost in clinical fashion, without ever getting the better of it." The resultant literature in its efforts to "remain faithful to the intensity of horror down to the ultimate exactness of words, becomes imperceptible and progressively antisocial, nondemonstrative, and also, by dint of being unspectacular, uninteresting." In reference to Duras’ writing in particular, Kristeva sees it as “confrontation with the silence of horror in oneself and in the world. Such a confrontation leads her to an aesthetics of awkwardness on the one hand, to a noncathartic literature on the other.” The reference to Duras’ literature as non-cathartic is revealing of Kristeva’s literary theory. Kristeva writes that Duras’ books do not point to madness from afar, but rather, “the texts domesticate the malady of death, they fuse with it, are on the same level with it, without either distance or perspective. There is no purification in store for us at the conclusion of those novels written on the brink of illness ... never has art had so little cathartic potential.” Observing that such literature is close to the reverse of clinical discourse, Kristeva equates the role of literature for its readers, as much as for its writers, to be a working...

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147 Postmodern literature is a later manifestation that Kristeva identifies as being “closer to the human comedy than to the abyssal discontent” (Kristeva, Black Sun, 258-59).
148 Kristeva, Black Sun, 224.
149 Kristeva, Black Sun, 224.
150 Kristeva, Black Sun, 225.
151 Kristeva, Black Sun, 227-28.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

through psychological ill-being towards a new beginning, a new thesis that fuses semiotic experience with symbolic stability. For Kristeva, Duras’ writing does not succeed in transposing its affect into the symbolic to renew subjectivity and language.

Art as incest

Writing love, writing abjection and writing depression, I have explored each of these as they are explained in Kristeva’s theory of literary production. These different affective impulses result in writing as varied as that produced by Baudelaire, Céline and Duras. Yet love, abjection and depression have a common thread. Uniting these affects is the central position of the repressed instinctual, maternal element that entails a “devouring fusion” with the mother’s body. Whether the artist’s semiotic experience is fear of the void relived through perception of the mother as abject, or love for the imaginary father-phallic mother, or depression at the loss of the mother as primary love object, words seep in, organised by metaphor or metonymy, to articulate the subject’s pre-oedipal relationship to the mother.

Writers, more than most, focus on the nexus between maternity and language. Kristeva writes that the word has as its counterpart in “the more or less discreet cult of the Mother; it is the ‘artists’ way, those who make up for the vertigo of language weakness with the oversaturation of sign systems.” Artists tear themselves away from “family, language, and country in order to settle down elsewhere [in] a daring action accompanied by sexual frenzy: no more prohibition, everything is possible."

152 Kristeva, Revolution, 153.
153 Kristeva, Tales, 252-53.
154 Kristeva, Strangers, 30.
the same time, the social requisites of language as a communicative code and women as exchange objects, poetic language would be the equivalent of incest for its writer. Freud himself affirmed that “the interest of creative writers centres around the theme of incest ... provides the subject-matter of poetry.” While Kristeva too locates the theme of incest as central to writing (in Céline and Proust, for instance), she is even more interested in the psychic mechanism or linguistic code that is equivalent to incest for the writer. Viewed structurally, it is the writer’s yearning for the loved mother that mobilises the primary processes which in turn transmit and transform desire into language, semiotising of the symbolic:

it is within the economy of signification itself that the questionable subject-in-process appropriates to itself this archaic, instinctual, and maternal territory; thus it simultaneously prevents the word from becoming a mere sign and the mother from becoming an object like any other - forbidden.

Modern writing, by appropriating the maternal territory, becomes a “sublimated celebration of incest ....” Connection with maternal jouissance in the poetic modality is an “oralisation” of language which sees the artist melding with the vocalism of the mother’s body: “throat, voice, and breasts: music, rhythm, prosody, paragrams ... the Oedipus complex of a far-off incest, ‘signifying,’ the real if not reality.” Thus, Kristeva interprets Proust’s writings as the transmutation of his obsessive relationship with his mother (refer to my Chapter Eight).

155 Freud, XIII, 17.
156 Kristeva, Desire, 136.
157 Kristeva, Tales, 253.
158 Kristeva, Revolution, 153.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

Symbolising affect

So far, in this chapter, I have been focusing on the writing subject’s dissolution or desynthesis of the thetic barrier and the writer’s subsequent reconnection with the semiotic space and the mother. However, this re-transgression of the thetic boundary is only one phase in the production of an artwork, since madness, or even suicide, would result if the subject were to remain consumed by the semiotic’s “opaque and unconscious organicity.” Writers and borderline subjects avoid a psychotic fate by resynthesising the thetic barrier and re-insinuating themselves into the symbolic arena for the second time in the act of naming the semiotic experience.

In fact, writers never fully relinquish the symbolic connection, they merely suspend it. Kristeva affirms that the “reinstatement of maternal territory into the very economy of language does not lead its questioned subject-in-process to repudiate its symbolic disposition.” Yet, just because the writer retains a symbolic capacity does not mean that the semiotisation of the symbolic is simply a discharging of psychic experience into a pre-existing symbolic language. Rather, “through melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form ...” the writer “sublimes” semiotic, affective experience into the symbolic modality, thereby transforming both. Accordingly, writing is the “recording,” through the symbolic order, of “the constitution and the movements of the ‘self.’” Such recording constitutes an elaboration, a conscious manipulation, of semiotic affects in relation to the symbolic economy.

159 Kristeva, Revolution, 102.
160 Kristeva, Desire, 137.
161 Kristeva, Desire, 102.
Identification with the imaginary father as mother-father conglomerate is central to the writer’s capacity to sublimate affects into language. It is by way of the imaginary father as maternal metaphor that the artist reconnects with the semiotic realm and its primary processes including, importantly for writing, metaphor. It is through positive identification with the imaginary father as paternal metaphor that the artist reclaims the symbolic in order to transfer, using semiotic primary processes of metaphor and symbolic secondary processes of grammar and syntax, maternally oriented semiotic experience. “Because I [the writer] am separated from my unconscious through a new transference to a new other or a new ideal [the imaginary father] I am able to write the dramatic unfolding of my nevertheless unforgettable violence and despair.”

Kristeva calls the resynthesis of the thetic barrier in poetic language a “second-degree thesis.” It bears much in common with the “first-degree thesis” that occurred at oedipalisation in so far as it is “a completion, a structuration, a kind of totalization of semiotic motility.” Yet, while the first-degree thesis molds the subject into a pre-existing pattern of subjective unity and symbolic language, the second-degree thesis is not so conformist. Poetic language ruptures and renews both subjectivity and language. With the second-degree thesis the writer “sketches out a kind of second birth.”

The second-degree thesis is a synthesis, like the first-degree thesis, but neither is a final synthesis. Just as the first-degree thesis gives way to a dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic to become resynthesised in a new poetic text, so too

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162 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 205-06.
165 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 70.
Poetic Rejection Resurfaces

the psychic and linguistic thesis that is this new poetic text can be challenged, and renewed, again and again. Kristeva writes in this regard that "the path completed by the text is not a simple return, as in the Hegelian dialectic ... from the 'general' to the 'particular' .... Instead it involves both shattering and maintaining position within the heterogeneous process ".\(^{167}\)

Texts which Kristeva identifies as exemplary of such "commotion of practice" are, typically, those from the "high art" core of modernism that are exuberant in their transgressions of the social and linguistic orders. They include the work of Rabelais and Céline with their overt sexual references and obscene politics, of Lautréamont with his vast array of associated and symbolic images, and of Joyce with his mutations of formal language rules and rites.\(^{168}\) Each of these texts carry a "tissue of meanings ... ranging from pre-linguistic emotional traces to linguistic representations ..." and it is the literary analyst's task to interpret these emotional traces through literature's textual representations as I shall explore in subsequent chapters.\(^{169}\)

\(^{167}\) Kristeva, *Revolution*, 56.

\(^{168}\) Kristeva, *Revolution*, 104.

\(^{169}\) Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, 6.
Interpreting is shaping things according to what one decides to eliminate. So it’s closer to writing than is generally supposed.

Julia Kristeva

The object of my thesis is to determine the nature and terms of the literary interpretative theory that Kristeva brings to bear on her analyses of literature and poetry. In preparation, my previous two chapters have reviewed the psycholinguistic processes that operate during the formation of the unified ego and its communicative language, the dissolution of those stases in times of psychic and linguistic instability or crisis, and the reconstitution of both phases in the forms of literature and poetry. Those chapters have not been a diversion; they are essential to the task at hand because all language production, including literary interpretative language, participates in the same processes.

All writing both semiotic and symbolic

All linguistic production is for Kristeva comprised both of consciously constructed sentences conveying socially shared significance and of corruptions of social discourse that convey meanings pertaining to pre-oedipal affects and identifications that are now housed in the unconscious. All linguistic production bears traces of the semiotic and the symbolic because all subjects, not just poets and artists, undergo the same, or at least very similar processes in their psycholinguistic development: fusion with the mother, identification with the

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imaginary father, abjection of the mother, specularisation of the ideal-I at the mirror phase and subjective-linguistic consolidation with the oedipal phase. Subsequent to attainment of speaking subjectivity, all subjects (although some more than others) are prone to lapses in communicational discourse when unconscious impulses or drives infiltrate language. Indeed, some subjects in certain situations undergo a wholesale suspension of the symbolic function rather than, as is the case with normal communication, surreptitious and momentary interruptions to language production. Significant symbolic suspension, and its subsequent reconstitution with semiotic affect, may produce a discourse type distinct from everyday communicational language. Modernist literature is Kristeva's pre- eminent example of symbolic lapse and re-engagement.

Consequently, the degree to which the semiotic is foreclosed from or infiltrates into the symbolic is that which defines, for Kristeva, the discourse type. Mathematical formulas are probably as close as one will get to purely symbolic language. Modernist literature has a high degree of semiotic influence, while modern poetry is paradigmatic of Kristeva's definition of art as the semiotisation of the symbolic.

Where does Kristevan literary interpretative writing fall in this scheme of things? It is not simply a matter of asserting that scientific treatise are typically or ideally 99% symbolic - 1% semiotic, doctoral dissertations 80% symbolic, literary interpretation 75% symbolic, modernist literature 62% symbolic and modernist poetry about 50/50 symbolic/semiotic. After all, Kristeva insists that the literary analyst is not an accountant. 2 Accounting, calibrating, sorting out of the mediocre from the exceptional (a critic in other words), this is not the discipline Kristeva has in mind. 3 And, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the flow of the semiotic into the symbolic is not merely quantitative but is qualitatively shaped by a variety of psychic impetuses.

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2 Kristeva, *Tales*, 373.
3 In any case, as my second chapter demonstrated, within the genres of poetry and literature different psychic impetuses (love, depression, abjection) add a qualitative dimension to the equation, altering the surface texture and semiotic "meaning" of poetic language in varying ways, not only to varying degrees (Kristeva, *New Maladies*, 104).
Kristeva as interpreter has as her subject a quite specific type of literature, that type, as explained at the close of the previous chapter, which displays its crises of confidence and disruptions of consciousness in its style. Some may be inclined to suggest that the literary theorist and/or interpreter produces a type of literature, especially given Kristeva’s focus on modernist literature and the shift in her own style of writing from the academic and scientificist to the more evocative and metaphoric (not to mention her writing of fiction). Not so; Kristeva’s literary interpretation does not seek to emulate its fictional subject and Kristeva resists the poststructuralist tendency to meld all texts into an amorphous Derridean “general text.”

Kristeva confirms that the increasingly personal style of her writings “does not go so far as identifying theoretical discourse with art - causing theory to be written as literary or para-literary fiction ... the choice I have made,” she writes, “is entirely different.” Kristeva literary interpretation rests “on the brink of fiction without ever toppling into it.”

If fiction hovers over the cusp between the semiotic and the symbolic and if literary interpretation rests on the brink of that cusp (rather than on top of it), the latter must favour one side or another, either the semiotic or the symbolic. Without doubt, literary interpretation rests on the symbolic side of the semiotic-symbolic boundary. In this position, the language of literary interpretation incorporates a greater proportion of symbolic logic than does literature (hence its ability to explain the semiotic process) but it also enjoys more jouissance than does the discourse of science.

But what of the literary interpreter? Kristeva is at constant pains to assert that linguistic production is inextricably linked with subjective positioning. So, if literary interpretation is to the right, so to speak, of the semiotic-symbolic divide, so too must be the subject who performs the interpreting. It is a position that is

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5 Kristeva, *Desire*, ix.
6 Kristeva, *Desire*, ix.
Interpretative Clinic

analogous to that of the psychoanalyst in relation to psychoanalytic discourse. While Kristeva does not seem to explicitly label the literary theorist as psychoanalyst, there is in her work a continual slippage from the psychoanalyst’s position to the literary interpreter’s position and back again. For instance, the essay “Extraterrestrials Suffering for Want of Love” in *Tales of Love* opens with the statement that “[t]he analyst is by definition tuned in to the crisis” and rapidly shifts to the symbolisation of crisis in “a new discourse, baroque or Joycian, witness to an ‘internal experiment’ or to the shaping of a ‘theatre of cruelty.’”7 Here, as elsewhere, it is clear that, for Kristeva, the literary analyst is a psychoanalyst; both are “tuned into the crisis ... [of the] speaking being.”8

It may seem odd that while Kristeva has expounded so voluminously on the production of, and distinctions between, psychotic and artistic language and the subject positions associated with these types of discourse production, she has tended to conflate the subject positions, methodologies, roles and skills relating to psychoanalysis and literary analysis. Yet, she does and, as this and subsequent chapters will make apparent, this conflation has signification consequences for her literary interpretative methodology.

The focus of Kristeva’s literary interpretations is, most usually, the crisis at the heart of language, that same point at which the psychoanalyst is, by profession, attuned. Hence the justification for positioning of literary analyst as psychoanalyst.

Meanwhile, Kristeva does not deny the validity of other types of literary interpretation, it is just that she finds psychoanalytic interpretation of literature to be the most profound and so it remains, at least since her turning away from Marxism, the key to her literary theory and interpretations. Freud’s attitude toward psychoanalytic interpretation of literature is similar, that although there can be many ways of reading and interpreting a text, his is the “deepest”: “In what

8 Kristeva, *Tales*, 372.
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I have written I have only attempted to interpret the deepest layer of impulses in the mind of the creative writer.9

Nevertheless, with psychic crisis as her focus and psychoanalysis as the key that best unlocks that crisis, one could well ask where literature fits into this scheme of things. Art and literature are, for Kristeva, the sole available mechanism "in our world of technological rationality, to impel us not toward the absolute but toward a quest for a little more truth, an impossible truth, concerning the meaning of speech, concerning our condition as speaking beings."10 So, while the great gamut of alternative literary interpretative methodologies are not rendered illegitimate by Kristeva, they are largely ignored; they are beside the point, extraneous to her purpose concerning the meaning of speech in relation to being.

Yet while Kristeva approaches literature as a psychoanalyst and treats literature as a privileged site of truth about meaning and subjectivity, she does not address the implications on interpretation of the differences between psychoanalytic and literary discourses. Two of the most obvious of these differences are that psychoanalytic discourse is oral whereas literature is written and that analytic discourse is woven between two protagonists whereas literature is typically produced by an individual.

Spoken versus written language

That psychoanalytic discourse is spoken, while literature is written, is a fact that has significant implications for the semiotic-symbolic tendencies of each. Oral language is typically more spontaneous than written discourse, consequently oral discourse is more likely to be peppered with or shaped by unconscious impulses, meanings and associations.11 In other words, spoken discourse is, it would seem, more conducive to the semiotic disposition.

9 Freud, IV, 266.
10 Kristeva, Desire, ix.
11 Surrealist poetic writing is a notable exception. Heavily influenced by Freud, surrealist writers and artists experimented with "automatic" processes which were designed to couple unrelated objects in surrealist poetic images (Margaret Drabble, ed., The Oxford Companion to English Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 950).
Certainly all bar psychotic discourse (which is foreclosed from the symbolic function) partakes of the symbolic system, however, discourse as it arises under psychoanalytic transference is heavily imbued with the semiotic tendency; it is shaped by the primary processes, punctuated with verbal tics, parapraxes and like, which together erect a defence against analytic intrusion into that place where neurosis takes its pleasure and finds its justification. Psychoanalytic discourse emanates from a position anterior to thesis; either the subject has never achieved full speaking subjectivity or s/he has undergone a symbolic dissolution of some sort. While a resuturing of a thetic speaking position is the goal, or one of the goals, of psychoanalysis, its attainment signals, not the beginning, as for literary interpretation, but the end of psychoanalytic interpretation.

Literary interpretation, by contrast, works upon, or in relation to, a discourse that has already transcended the lapse of the symbolic function and has reconstituted a relationship with the symbolic order. Indeed, literature is, by Kristeva’s definition, the semiotisation of the symbolic. The completed modernist novel or poem marks the retransversal or reconstitution of the thetic barrier in its second-degree thesis by infusing the semiotic into symbolic.

Clearly, on this single ground alone, that literary discourse has already reworked a positive relationship to the symbolic in its second-degree thesis, while psychoanalytic discourse comports itself on the nether side of the symbolic boundary, suggests that the literary analyst must surely be dealing with a quite different discourse type than the psychoanalyst.

**Different theses**

This difference between psychoanalytic and literary discourses in their respective relationships to the symbolic becomes even more pronounced when one takes into account that the thesis attained at the termination of “successful” psychoanalysis is not equivalent to the thesis marked by literature.

Classical psychoanalysis seeks to realign its patients into a relatively stable, socially normative thesis founded on the traditional triangular family structure.
Interpretative Clinic

That is, the patient is to be reconnected with a position identical with the first-degree thesis which the analysand had somehow missed at oedipalisation or had subsequently fallen away from. Meanwhile, Kristeva’s conception of the second-degree thesis that is literature is not the synthesis of normative speaking subjectivity but rather a thesis that is more radically and explicitly temporary, unstable and challenging.

However, it has become apparent since Tales of Love, that when Kristeva discusses psychoanalysis and the task of the psychoanalyst, she is not necessarily working towards the Freudian curative goal. Indeed, as a number of passages in New Maladies of the Soul explain, perhaps, in these times of crisis, it is asking too much and may even be inappropriate to be working towards psychic norms based on stable models that can be readily identified with. As I explained in Chapter Two, Kristeva suggests that since the collapse in western society of monotheistic religion, with its models of the selfless mother and the loving father, and since the holocausts of the Second World War, which have severely damaged humanity’s capacity for faith, individuals have been without credible, desirable psychic footholds and have largely lacked the ability to believe and identify with such models even if they were still a prominent part of the western cultural pantheon.

Kristeva now suggests that the literary second-degree thesis, that is, creative production, is a more appropriate goal for psychoanalysis than a re-cementing of the first-degree thesis. So, rather than thinking of literary analysis as modelled upon psychoanalysis and the literary analyst as taking up the position of the psychoanalyst, the positions are reversed. Literature becomes the goal of psychoanalytic treatment and, presumably, the psychoanalyst models herself to a certain extent, upon the literary analyst. This convergence of psychoanalysis and literature renders somewhat less questionable Kristeva’s modelling of the literary analyst on the psychoanalyst.

While some ground may have been reclaimed with the observation that in Kristeva, literary and psychoanalytic goals are converging, another, inescapable, distinction between literary and psychoanalytic discourses as objects of interpretation must be addressed. Analytic discourse is constructed between two subjects, analysand and analyst, in a dynamic interchange that may take place over
many months or years. The interpreter of such a discourse is also a participant in its construction: probing, guiding and holding back as she sees fit. A work of literature, on the other hand, is written by an individual working alone. The literary interpreter, while able to conduct multiple readings, cannot interrogate the work in the same way as the psychoanalyst who can elicit targeted responses from the analysand. While this difference will always, I believe, remain a factor, its impact is lessened by consideration of the role transference plays in both psychoanalysis and literary analysis.

Clinical transference

In the previous two chapters I have discussed at length the identifications that occur in infancy and early childhood in Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, namely, those that take place with the imaginary father, the mirror image and, lastly, the oedipal father. These models provide increasingly focused and ever more dogmatic models upon which the speaking subject fashions his or her identity. Such identifications are either primary (occurring before the infant has distinguished itself from its objects, pre-oedipal, in other words) or secondary (occurring with a separate object, that is, oedipal and post-oedipal). Normally primary identification and secondary identification are terms reserved to describe the extension, borrowing or fusion of the subject’s identity with a pre-object or object. 

“Identification” is thus to be distinguished from “transference” which describes the transfer onto the analyst of emotions and ideas surrounding earlier identifications.

In relation to transference, Freud writes that during analysis the patient sees in the analyst:

the reincarnation, of some important figure out of his childhood or past, and consequently transfers onto him feelings and reactions which undoubtedly applied to this prototype .... This transference is ambivalent: it comprises positive (affectionate) as well as negative

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12 Ryecroft, 76.
13 Laplanche and Pontalis, 455; Ryecroft, 185.
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(hostile) attitudes towards the analyst, who as a rule is put in the place of one or other of the patient’s parents, his father or mother.  

Positive transference stimulates the patient’s motivation to collaborate in the cure, since the patient is keen to win the analyst’s applause and love. It also enables the patient to remodel her super-ego on the example of the analyst as socially capable parent (although, for Freud, the analyst must resist any inclination to become an ideal model thereby replacing the patient’s earlier dependence with a new one). As an added bonus, under positive transference the patient also acts out, rather than reports, important parts of her life thereby improving the clarity and completeness of her discourse.

On the other hand, “[s]ince the transference reproduces the patient’s relation with his parents, it takes over the ambivalence of that relation as well.” Accordingly, a positive attitude can quickly transform into a hostile attitude which sees the patient feeling that the analyst is his enemy, which may lead to abandonment of analysis. The analyst must handle transference relations carefully, repeatedly pointing out that what is taken to be new real life in analysis is really a reflection of the past. The first step towards extending the self-knowledge of the patient’s ego comes with the patient’s understanding of the mechanisms of transference.

The analyst’s value to the analysand, a value which is made possible by transference, is described by Freud “as an authority and a substitute for his parents, as a teacher and educator; and we have done the best for him if, as

14 Freud, XXIII, 174-75.
15 Freud, XXIII, 175.
16 Freud, XXIII, 176.
17 In Freudian theory, further steps towards enabling the patient’s ego to acquire self-knowledge include the analyst collecting and collating what is shown in transference, the conscious information that is imparted by the patient and, lastly, that which escapes the ego’s resistances by way of free associations, dreams and parapraxes. The analyst uses this material to make constructions about what has happened to the patient in the past and what is happening to him in the present. Carefully timing revelation of the interpretation, until the patient has almost reached the same conclusion, prevents violent outbreaks of resistance against the interpretation that could occur if the patient were confronted with the truth before she was ready for it. Correctly timed, delivery of the analyst’s interpretation can result in the patient confirming the interpretation and recollecting the forgotten internal or external event at the root of neurosis (Freud, XXIII, 172, 182).
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analysts, we raise the mental processes in his ego to a normal level, transform what has become unconscious and repressed into preconscious material and thus return it once more to the possession of his ego."

Freud’s normative definition of transference was initially adopted, although not uncritically, by Kristeva. In Revolution in Poetic Language she writes that “[t]he psychoanalytic device of transference aims to introduce the process of rejection into the molds of intersubjective (interfamilial) relations. It tends to ossify the subject on the basis if this reconstituted unity, even when this unity knows itself to be broken ....” Consequently, Kristeva specifies that textual practice “is not based on personified transference,” that it is “independen[t] from the transference relation” and that analysis of texts should “hamper transference.” My reconstruction of her literary interpretative methodology does not rely upon or incorporate this early attitude of Kristeva’s toward analytical and textual transference.

More recently, Kristeva has assumed a more interactive definition of transference, one that approximates Lacan’s usage of the term as having equal implications for the two protagonists. In part, this shift in attitude would seem to be connected to her theory of the imaginary father. In her reworking of the Freudian prototype into the figure of the imaginary father, Kristeva explicitly draws on Freud’s text, which describes a “direct and immediate transference” onto the “father of individual prehistory.” With the term transference applied to the infant’s fusion of identity with the imaginary father, later transference onto a replica of the imaginary father (rather than the oedipal father) in psychoanalytic clinic, does not seem inappropriate. Kristeva now understands psychoanalytic transference as reduplicating the nascent ego’s primary identification with its imaginary father.

18 Freud, XXIII, 181.
19 Kristeva, Revolution, 205.
20 Kristeva, Revolution, 208-09.
21 Kristeva, New Maladies, 80.
22 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 25, my emphasis. In the standard English-language edition of Freud his translators use the term identification rather than transference. Thus Freud writes of “an individual’s first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory” (Freud, XIX, 31).
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Accordingly, the fusion of identity that takes place between the pre-subject and the imaginary father is now transposed to the analytical situation where analysand “establishes a continuity or fusion” with the analyst. So, rather than each remaining remote in pre-ordained positions in the analytic paradigm, both analysand and analyst become mutually implicated in their shared dialogue.

Analytic countertransference

Thinking of the analyst as imaginary father challenges the Freudian paradigm of analyst as prime authority, educating, guiding and instructing her patient from an aloof position. Certainly, the Kristevan analyst does educate her patient but she does more than that, she also learns from her. Surrendering mastery over the analysand, even temporarily, means the analyst becomes implicated in desire, in *jouissance* - both her patient’s and her own. Meeting the patient’s desire halfway facilitates, it would seem, more perceptive responses to the analysand’s discourse and, by exploring the analyst’s own desires, encourages a rethinking of the preconceptions the analyst comes into each session with. The Kristevan analyst actively colludes in the transference that was instigated by the analysand to the extent that she undergoes her own transference, or countertransference, with the analysand.

Countertransference was to be avoided in the classical psychoanalytic clinic. Freud explicitly warned of the dangers for analysis and for the analysand if the analyst were to respond emotionally (or worse, sexually) to the advances of the patient who, under transference, may think he or she is in love with the analyst. While Kristeva too recoils from taking emotional involvement with her patients outside the clinic, she is more lenient within the confines of the treatment.

Such reciprocated transference is not a tendency peculiar, it should be noted, to contemporary Kristevan theory. A general shift in psychoanalytic practice has taken place in the last few decades, a shift which acknowledges, attempts to

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accommodate and to work with the transference which inevitably takes place when two individuals, both of whom have unconscious capacity, interact.\textsuperscript{25}

The psychoanalyst no longer sits outside the treatment process, always able to observe and interpret it dispassionately. It is no longer expected that the well-analyzed psychoanalyst becomes immune to neurotic reactions to his or her patients. On the contrary, the analyst is now expected to use his affective reactions, neurotic or otherwise, in order to understand what is transpiring, outside his conscious awareness, between himself and his analysand. Countertransference, rather than being primarily a sign of the analyst's deficiency, has become a vehicle through which the analyst has the potential to use himself constructively for the patient's benefit.\textsuperscript{26}

I contend that Kristeva employs countertransference not only to benefit her patients but also to invigorate her literary interpretation. In a statement that could equally be applied to literary interpretation, Kristeva writes that “the object of psychoanalysis is simply the linguistic exchange - and the accidents that are a part of that exchange - between two subjects in a situation of transference and countertransference.”\textsuperscript{27}

Literary analyst as imaginary father

It is my contention that, not only is the psychoanalyst positioned in Kristeva’s theories as the imaginary father, but further, that the literary analyst is also, in relation to the text, the imaginary father. Indeed, so pervasive is the concept of the imaginary father in current Kristevan theory, that the writer, the literary interpreter and the psychoanalyst all, in their own ways, identify with this seminal figure. Taking Kristeva’s conflation of the psychoanalyst’s and literary analyst’s roles as my precedent, I shall proceed by drawing analogies between writer and literary interpreter. In particular, I will focus on their mutual identification with the imaginary father.


\textsuperscript{26} Coen, 1, 2.

\textsuperscript{27} Kristeva, \textit{In the Beginning}, 1.
Identification with the imaginary father "allows for the presence of two brinks," the two brinks being conscious, symbolic "tributary of a universal Law" and unconscious, semiotic "black thrusts of desire." Applied to literary interpretation as much as to literary writing, the imaginary father opens the subject to both semiotic and symbolic fields. In the writer this is manifest as an exploration of the semiotic and subsequent sublimation of that experience in writing. Similarly, the interpreter undergoes a countertransference in order to explore the unconscious and semiotic components of the text, followed by an integration and explanation of that experience in interpretative writing.

Neither writer nor interpreter integrate their experiences of the semiotic into their respective texts by sitting astride the semiotic-symbolic thesis, casually picking and mixing components from each field. Rather, literary interpreters (like writers) become the semiotic-symbolic thesis. Through the acts of transference and countertransference, writers and interpreters become the psyche-body that experiences and integrates the semiotic and the symbolic within their texts.

Yet, while Kristeva offers no distinction between the literary and interpretative practices when she writes of "[w]hoever creates a text or an interpretation ...," I contend that, although writer and the interpreter each participate in the same identification and the same processes, in Kristeva's theory they do so to differing degrees. The texts produced by writer and interpreter are qualitatively different because, while each draws on both loving and authoritative qualities of the imaginary father, the emphasis given to each is different. As I have previously stated, literary interpretation tends to be embedded more firmly in the symbolic than its literary object. By comparing analytic and literary discourses, it is possible to discern a progression from semiotic to symbolic. Closest to the semiotic space is the analysand's free associations. At the semiotic-symbolic thesis is poetic writing. Slightly more symbolically oriented is literature. More symbolic still, but with a significant degree of semiotic influence by virtue of the interpreter's countertransference, is literary analysis and interpretation. Classical

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28 Kristeva, *Desire*, x.
psychoanalytic and literary interpretations which impose meaning upon the analysand or the text are primarily symbolic with very little semiotic content.

Returning now to Kristeva’s literary analytic scenario. It involves the literary interpreter (as imaginary father) starting from a position which may be likened to a pre-existing thesis. This thesis is the theory and methodology that she brings into analysis, a set of procedures which she sets out to follow even if on the way, after having given way to desire under countertransference, the base theory and the interpretation it might logically have generated are altered. Literary analysis begins with a textual analysis conducted within the terms of the existing literary theory and methodology. Yet, if it were to conclude in the same manner, without the analyst having undergone countertransference, little would distinguish this type of literary interpretation from that of the New Critics (for instance) who, like Monroe Beardsley, did not deviate from applying exacting definitions of what constitutes artistic writing to their literary analyses.\textsuperscript{30} Instead, Kristeva’s integration of transferential and countertransferential activities within the interpretative gesture replicates, to a certain extent, the mid- to late-twentieth-century interest in reader-response and reception theories. In general, the ideas put forward by Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Hans-Georg Gadamer and others signal “a shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader,” as Robert Holub points out.\textsuperscript{31} In particular, Hans Robert Jauss, who “calls upon the experience, not the neutrality of the interpreter” writes of “aesthetic identification” which involves a “back-and-forth movement between the aesthetically freed observer and his inreal object in which the subject in its aesthetic enjoyment can run through an entire scale of attitudes.”\textsuperscript{32} Gadamer too focuses on matters subjective in his reworking of Heidegger’s claim that it is precisely our being-in-the-world with its prejudices and presuppositions that makes understanding possible (a position to be contrasted to Husserl’s conception

\textsuperscript{30} Monroe Beardsley’s thinking of what constitutes art and how aesthetic value may be determined, culminated in his Instrumentalist Theory of art which is painstakingly argued for in his \textit{Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism} (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, 1958).
\textsuperscript{32} Holub, 65, my emphasis; Hans Robert Jauss, \textit{Toward an Aesthetic of Reception}, trans. Timothy Bahti, intro. Paul de Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
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of transcendental, atemporal subject who brackets and then ignores the “life-world”).

In like fashion, Kristeva as literary interpreter foregoes her neutrality by undergoing a process of countertransference with the text. Countertransference, as reciprocated transference, is the mechanism whereby the subject’s ego is displaced onto the other, in this case the text itself. The literary analyst’s ego is held in suspension and her desires are given free reign to meet those of the text and to explore her own desires in relation to that discourse.

Detachment from countertransference

There would be, in such a scenario, a danger of the interpretation becoming subservient to its object of analysis. However, Kristeva is careful to note in relation to the production of literary theoretical discourse that “our only chance to avoid being neither master not slave of meaning lies in our ability to insure our mastery of it (through technique or knowledge) as well as our passage through it (through play or practice).” As with the literary theorist, the literary interpreter’s countertransference with the text sets in motion the fusional qualities of the imaginary father and constitutes playful passage through the text.

To reactivate the law-giving characteristic of the imaginary father, the literary analyst assumes a more distant posture in relation to the text and in doing so recovers a degree of mastery over it. So rather than endangering the analysis by wallowing in unconscious reverie, the literary interpreter:

assumes the necessity of adopting a stance of otherness, distance, even limitation, on the basis of which a structure, a logical discourse is sutured, hence demonstrable - not in a banal sense but by giving serious consideration to the new post-Freudian rationality that takes two stages into account, the conscious and the unconscious ones, and two corresponding types of performances.

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33 Holub, 40.
34 Kristeva, Desire, x.
35 Kristeva, Desire, ix.
By such means the interpreter regains control of her ego and its language by detaching from the object of her analysis. The literary analyst as imaginary father does not allow her discourse to become devolved into expression of unconscious desire, whether that be her own desire or that perceived within the literary text. Rather, having opened her eyes to the possibilities of the text, she distances herself from it once again in order to elaborate comprehensibly upon her experience of the semiotic.

**Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology**

I suggest that the literary interpreter follows a three-fold process in order to integrate unconscious, semiotic meaning as experienced under countertransference and conscious, symbolic meaning as reclaimed through detachment.

My reading of Kristeva divulges that her interpretative procedure comprises, in the first instance, analysis. This first phase is itself divided into three: textual analysis, historical and/or biographical contextual analysis and psychoanalysis. Phase two involves the analyst undergoing countertransference with the text, a letting go of symbolic mastery which allows the influx of the interpreter’s desire into interpretative discourse. The third phase requires the analyst to detach herself from the text and from her own desires which rose to the surface during countertransference. This last phase is necessary for the actual writing of interpretation so that the interpretative text exercises some socially resonant currency and explanatory force.

While I have described this process as three-fold and will go on to explain its components sequentially in the next three chapters, it is important to note that these phases happen, like those in the pre-oedipal and psychoanalytic situations, either simultaneously or in an alternating fashion as the character Joëlle Cabarus, the psychoanalyst in Kristeva’s novel, *The Samurai*, explains in relation to psychoanalysis:
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But really it’s more like a surreal encounter, around a couch, between a bullfighter and a verbal anarchist. The two protagonists occupy all possible positions, simultaneously or alternatively. I am the bullfighter, aiming at my patient’s confused meaning; then suddenly I’m the bull, stung by a banderillo hurled straight at my physical, intellectual, or family weaknesses. I dissect the screen phrases in search of the word or syllable concealing the unsaid; but I can’t find it unless the other person’s phrases become temporarily my own. I’m desired, I love: no, it’s not a game, it’s a wild passion! But there are still two of us - I insist on that. It’s my job to insist that there really are two of us. Or rather, three. It’s a debilitating journey, a round trip between words and the body, with the rare reward of sometimes hitting the spot. What spot? A memory, pleasure, or pain which suddenly makes sense and brings about a change.36

Chapter Four
Textual Analysis

I am the bullfighter, aiming at my patient’s confused meaning ...

Julia Kristeva

Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice seeks “to make manifest the very procedure through which this ‘science,’ its ‘object’ and their relationship are brought about, rather than to apply empirically such and such a technique to an indifferent object.” 1 This procedure is, as I indicated in the previous chapter, a three-fold one involving objective textual analysis, investment of readerly desire in the text and interpretative writing.

Objective investigation and description are undertaken in the first, scholarly and analytic phase or “circulation” of Kristeva’s interpretative practice, a phase which conforms in many ways with her science of semanalysis. John Lechte provides the following gloss on semanalysis:

Kristeva, in Séméiotiké, says that rather than a semiotics, or a semiology of the sign, she is interested in carrying out a semanalysis - namely, ‘the critical analysis of the notion of the sign’, a ‘science constructed as a critique of meaning, of its elements and its laws ....’ Or again, a semanalysis would be a ‘scientific theory of signifying systems’. Only a semanalysis can adequately analyse the text because

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1 The character Joelle Cabarus in Kristeva’s novel The Samurai, 63.
2 Kristeva, Desire, 95.
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it goes beyond the sign in order to analyse ‘what cannot be thought by the whole conceptual system which is currently the foundation of intelligence, because it is exactly the text which designates its limits’. No doubt semanalysis paves the way for ‘la sémiotique’ (semiotics of the sign) to give way to ‘le sémiotique’ (the pre-symbolic).

Kristeva sets out her science of semanalysis principally in *Semeiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969), *Le texte du roman* (1970) and articles collected in *Polylogue* (1977). These works were penned, as Kelly Oliver observes, in protest against contemporary theories of language, particularly structural linguistics, which attempted to “drain” the speaking subject from language.

While semanalysis’ object is the underlying unconscious manifestations of the subject in discourse, its method is unashamedly scientific and analytic. In *Sémeiotiké* Kristeva describes it as a “critique of meaning, of its elements and its laws.” As a science it is, like Barthes’ critical model outlined in his 1970 study of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, *S/Z*, “[d]eductive, prudent, consequent, patient, it proceeds by demonstration, analysis, and synthesis; it explains, proves, elucidates.” At first it may seem odd that Kristeva strives for objective description of the processes that underpin both literary and interpretative writing. Is this the same theorist who subscribes to the view that objective metapositionality is a logical and practical impossibility? Can this be the aim of a thinker for whom desire warps and multiplies meaning? In fact it is.

Kristeva has not renounced her goal of establishing a science of semanalysis. Indeed, she still occasionally uses the term. For instance, in *Tales of Love*, she

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4 Oliver, *Reading Kristeva*, 91.
6 Kristeva, *Desire*, 106.
writes about “a semanalytic interpretation [of] an amorous and/or transference discourse [resulting in] a permanent stabilization-destabilization between the *symbolic* ... and the *semiotic* ...” While it might appear as if Kristeva is applying semanalysis unchanged in this later work, especially because her footnote to semanalysis in this passage directs the reader to her much earlier work of *Revolution in Poetic Language* for fuller explication of the term, this is not the case. For, by writing of semanalysis in relation to transference discourse in *Tales of Love*, Kristeva is updating the concept from its usage in *Revolution in Poetic Language* where transference relations were a reactionary force to be avoided rather than a mechanism to be embraced. In fact, I suggest that, notwithstanding Kristeva’s occasional continued usage of the term “semanalysis,” the impact of transference and countertransference relations in Kristeva’s more recent work has radically altered, if not the goal, then the means of achieving her semanalytic goal. So, while Kristeva’s intention remains to give voice to “the dialectical laws of the signifying process,” her technique is now inclusive not only of the conscious and unconscious stages of the text but also of the conscious and unconscious performances of the interpreter herself. Interpretation is now experienced rather than merely conducted.

Consequently, I suggest that, rather than defining her entire literary theoretical project, the scientific aspirations associated with semanalysis now constitute merely one phase of her literary interpretative theory and practice. It is typical of Kristeva that, while her focus on transference and readerly desire has been added to her theory and practice, her application of semanalytic science has not been abandoned altogether. To the contrary, Kristeva’s entire literary interpretative methodology has acquired a balance now which it lacked when confined to

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7 Kristeva, *Tales*, 16.
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semanalysis. Certainly, textual readings performed under the sway of semanalysis postulated a symmetry between the literary, historical and psychological, but each of these areas was analysed intellectually not practiced, as such. Now, given that the engagement of readerly desire under countertransference puts the analyst’s unconscious into play (as my next chapter will explore) and given that interpretative writing inscribes (rather than merely describes) the dialectic between conscious and unconscious interpretative positions (refer to my Chapter Six), it is clear that something akin to semanalysis retains currency in relation to one of the terms of Kristeva’s literary interpretative dialectic.

To avoid confusing Kristeva’s earlier science of semanalysis with the role of objective analysis in the broader literary interpretative methodology which I am seeking to uncover, I will refer to the conscious, intellectual analysis of literary texts as textual analysis. Textual analysis will be juxtaposed to the experience of literary texts that comes with the interpreter’s countertransference. Both analysis and experience, objective and subjective, conscious and unconscious will later be conjoined in the writing of interpretation.

The metalinguist

Complicity between the subject and object of study that the deployment of countertransference entails does not necessarily preclude the literary interpreter from taking up analytic positions that parade themselves as metalinguistic. This apparent paradox is resolved with the realisation that objectivity, transcendence and metapositionality are falsifiable in the final analysis. It is permissible and

9 Another reason for not using Kristeva’s term semanalysis in relation to my project, is that semanalysis, while often dealing with art and literature, is intratheoretical - it is concerned with “a desire for art and literature on the part of the writer, in order to try to subvert the very theoretical, philosophical or semiological apparatus” (Kristeva, Desire, viii). In distinction, my thesis specifically addresses those aspects of Kristeva’s theory which relate to literature and its interpretation.
advisable, in Kristeva’s schema, to feign objective metapositionality in order to exercise particular points of view and to divulge the epistemologies that flow from those views. These form the intellectual frames and premises that may later be counterpoised and challenged.

Attainment of knowledge is founded upon the subject-object distinction, and suspension of connectedness with the object of analysis is a natural and unavoidable mode of thinking, as Derrida, herald of structural instability, points out. In fact, Derrida calls for the conservation of “all these old concepts,” by which he means bivalent hierarchies that valorise the transcendental signified as being a metapositional centre that is outside the system under investigation, to increase intelligibility. He treats such hierarchical structural systems as tools of empirical discovery while at the same time denouncing their limitations. “No longer is any truth value attributed to them: there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces.” Kristeva would appear to employ this aspect of the Derridean method.

The means by which Kristeva utilises the relative efficacy of scientific paradigms, while at the same time exposing their limitations, is by analysing the text from several different and competing positions. Barthes in S/Z similarly proposes analysis of the text through several different critical lenses. He suggests utilising psychological, psychoanalytical, thematic, historical and structural paradigms; “it will then be up to each kind of criticism (if it should so desire) to come into play.

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to make its voice heard, which is the hearing of one of the voices of the text. What we seek is to sketch the stereographic space of writing ...."\[13\] The gaps in between the many voices of the text are where the reader constructs meaning. As Raman Selden puts it: "[a]s the reader adopts different viewpoints the text's meaning is produced in a multitude of fragments which have no inherent unity."\[14\]

For Kristeva too, comparison of the unavoidably divergent results taken from contradictory analytical frames exposes the ideological underpinnings and fragmentary truth-value of each. The objective truths and meanings which they proffer as final and complete can only, after consideration, be accepted as partial at best. Objectivity may be upheld, but it is incomplete and so no basis for a final theory.

Kristeva’s literary critical methodology begins, then, by retaining the requirement for objective analysis of the text in question yet ensures that such objective knowledge is not reducible to any particular paradigm. The results of such an analysis are relative, pragmatic and contextually contingent. Of course, this approach also conforms to the psychoanalytic pattern and logic of renewal. As particular disciplines establish semantic or interpretative stases, the contradictions of competing disciplinary stases act as forces of rejection. Conflicting meanings are destabilising forces to each other, challenging each other’s professed objectivity.

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Kristeva’s multi-disciplinary textual analysis can be viewed as *bricolage*, a concept promoted by Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind*. Derrida, after Lévi-Strauss, relates that:

> The *bricoleur* ... is someone who uses “the means at hand,” that is the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous ...

Kristeva’s literary critical methodology as a whole, and her textual analysis in particular may be thought of as forms of *bricolage*. In this she follows Gérard Genette’s assertion that *bricolage* is entirely suited to criticism and most especially to literary criticism.

Kristeva creates her textual analytical *bricolage* from three disciplines or sciences: structural linguistics, socio-historical contextual studies and psychoanalysis. These facets of her procedure are described by Kristeva in “How Does One Speak to Literature?”, a paper which takes as its subject the importance of Barthes to contemporary literary theory. There she writes of her triple thesis:

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16 Refer to Gérard Genette, “Structuralism and Literary Criticism, L’Arc 26 (1965). Refer also to Selden (73) and to Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984) for an extension of *bricolage* and Lacan’s notion of “schizophrenic art” resulting in postmodernist artistic pastiche. Refer to Footnote 51 in Chapter Nine for Deleuze and Guattari on “schizoanalysis.”
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(a) the materiality of writing (objective practice within language) insists on confronting the sciences of language (linguistic, logic, semiotics), but also on a differentiation in relation to them;
(b) its immersion in history entails the taking into account of social and historical conditions;
(c) its sexual overdetermination orients it toward psychoanalysis, and through it toward the set of a corporeal, physical, and substantial “order.”

Each of these approaches accomplishes a different task. Linguistic analysis provides information about the text itself. It is from this that subsequent social and biographical contextualisation and psychoanalytic studies will be mounted. Kristeva writes that “[s]emiology could be this discourse if, by recognizing the heteronomy of meaning, it started from linguistics and went to meet with psychoanalysis and history; consequently, its name (“semiology”) matters little.”

The choice of history and psychoanalysis as analytic paradigms reflects not only Kristeva’s early interests in Marxism as much as in psychoanalysis, but also mirrors the forces that go to shape the two sides of the split subject, and therefore shape that subject’s discourse:

The theory of meaning now stands at a crossroad: either it will remain an attempt at formalizing meaning-systems by increasing sophistication of the logico-mathematical tools which enable it to formulate models on the basis of a conception (already rather dated) of meaning as the act of a transcendental ego, cut off from its body, its unconscious and also its history; or else it will attune itself to the theory of the speaking subject as a divided subject (conscious/unconscious) and go on to attempt to specify the types of operation characteristic of the two sides of this split, thereby exposing them to those forces extraneous to the logic of the systematic; exposing them, that is to say, on the one hand, to bio-physiological processes (themselves already inescapably part of the signifying

17 Kristeva, Desire, 100.
18 Kristeva, Desire, 112, my emphasis.
processes, what Freud labelled ‘drives’); and, on the other hand, to social constraints (family structures, modes of production, etc.).

Although history and psychoanalysis are deployed in order to reveal “those forces extraneous to the logic of the systematic ...,” this is done, at this stage, in a manner that panders to the logical and the systematic. It is not until the second and third phases of Kristeva’s literary critical practice, that bio-psychological processes and personal and social constraints are set in motion by the literary analyst’s countertransference to disturb the logic of the systematic (refer to my next chapter).

Having established that Kristeva’s literary interpretative procedure is three-phased, and that the first phase of this procedure is itself constituted of three different ways of conducting an ostensibly objective analysis, it is time to dissect each method of objective analysis in turn. I shall look, firstly, at Kristeva’s textual analysis, secondly, at her historical analysis and the conversion of this phase into biographical analysis, and, thirdly, at psychoanalysis.

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Linguistic analysis

Textual analysis entails, in the first instance, a formalist, linguistic analysis of the text. That this should be the first step is necessary, Kristeva argues, because to do otherwise than to “minutely scrutiniz[e] the devices that the signifying texture offers to the semiotician’s gaze” makes at best naïve, if not impossible, analysis of the dialectic “seesaw motion” that links biography (psychology plus history) and

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19 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 28.
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the text. This is a scholarly as opposed to interpretative activity, one which notes the presence of linguistic differentials within “a transrepresentative and transsubjective homogenous system ...”

Before textual referents are called into the interpretative procedure, the text at hand is initially analysed using the same broad principles sketched out by de Saussure’s semiological science of signs. A static ahistorical or synchronic position is feigned in the light of which la langue is viewed as “a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms.” By analysing the discrete presence of signifiers and signifieds in the parole or text at hand, their underlying structural difference is made explicit. From the arrangement, absences and repetitions of the signifiers, the literary analyst can discern the distinctive style and rhythms of a particular discourse.

Kristeva’s most sustained recent analysis of literary style is her study of Céline in her work Powers of Horror. Céline, for Kristeva, is a writer who “drowns” his narrative in style. In his early work, his stylistic excesses focus on sentence segmentation in which “displacements, syntactical and intonational emphases, repetitions, commas, and the ‘intimate’ linking of the virgule (/), create of

Kristeva, Desire, 106.

Kristeva, Desire, 115.

De Saussure, 80.

Barthes illustrates the making apparent of artistic structure with his example of the always visible narrator and human manipulators of Japanese Banraku puppets. Banraku theatre thereby makes explicit its three separate “writings” - the effected gesture of the marionette, the effective gesture of the manipulator and the vocal gesture of the vociferator (Barthes, Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977) 175-76.


Kristeva, Abjection, 137.
Textual Analysis

Céline's prose a musicated rhythm that is often binary or staccato in longer sentences".26

Le printemps qu’ils/les oiseaux/ne reverront jamais dans leurs cages, auprès des cabinets, qui sont tous groupés/les cabinets, là, dans le fond de l’ombre ....

Spring, which they, the birds I mean, will never see again in their cages, near the toilets, which are all close together, the toilets I mean, there, way back in the shadows ....27

Céline’s later works, From Castle to Castle, North and Rigadoon, feature a heavy proliferation of ellipses and exclamation marks in addition to the earlier style of “spoken” writing. These formal features act as “eternal tokens of a staccato rhythm, of syntactical and logical ellipses.”28 Kristeva cites Céline’s comparison of his own style to that of impressionist painting, agreeing that the bracketing of language segments within a “halo” of three dots makes of them subjective impressions rather than descriptions.29 Céline writes: “You know, three dots, the impressionists made three dots. Take Seurat, he would put three dots everywhere; he thought it let air into his paintings, made it fly about.” Continuing with the metaphor, Kristeva suggests that Céline applies his impressionistic method in the “comic strip” style of Rigadoon in which fragments of sentences fly about, as in the following passage:30

26 Kristeva, Abjection, 194.
27 Céline in Kristeva, Abjection, 195.
28 Kristeva, Abjection, 198.
29 Kristeva, Abjection, 200-01.
30 Céline in Kristeva, Abjection, 201.
Textual Analysis

The whole earth jumps! worse! like it was broken in two! ... and the air ... this is it! Restif hasn’t been lying ... boom! and another! ... further away ... we can see it! the flashes of their cannon! ... red! ... green! no! shorter! howitzers!\textsuperscript{31}

In her linguistic analysis Kristeva notes the textual rhythm and tone and the presence of key, repeated and disparate words. She further attends to the “nonrepresentative spacing of representation” that comes to light when form is “distorted, abstracted, disfigured, hollowed out ....”\textsuperscript{32} It is understood that these formal features are symptoms of a “shattered, pluralized meaning” as “the index of a heteronomous operation,” symptoms which will be approached again under the psychoanalytic analysis yet to be undertaken.\textsuperscript{33} In the meantime Kristeva’s linguistic analysis does not proceed to interpret these symbols, but merely to note their polyvalence. Nevertheless, already one notes the introduction of metaphor to assist in the description of Céline’s linguistic style, analogies to music and to painting and the suggestion that Céline’s sentences are sent “into flight” by his use of points of suspension. Descriptions such as these start to break down the barriers between the textual analytic approaches and to incorporate, within this ostensibly objective analysis, associations which may well signify influxes of the analyst’s subjective impressions.

As described, linguistic analysis, as the first of Kristeva’s three textual analytic strategies, logs the material coordinates of writing. Yet, Kristeva takes umbrage at contemporaneous linguistics which was, in her estimation, “still bathed in the aura of systematics that prevailed at the time of its inception.”\textsuperscript{34} Kristeva condemns linguistics for its interest in preserving “the sterility of theory” and its

\textsuperscript{31} Céline in Kristeva, \textit{Abjection}, 201.
\textsuperscript{32} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 27.
\textsuperscript{33} Kristeva, \textit{Desire}, 115.
\textsuperscript{34} Kristeva, \textit{Desire}, 24.
Textual Analysis

disinterest in the speaking subject. Similarly, formalist literary analysis, constrained by its linguistic foundations, “neither can think the rhythm of Mayakovsky through to his suicide or Khlebnikov’s glossolalies to his disintegration ....”

In order to think through such events, literary analysis needs to view language as a practice that allows “the speaking animal to sense the rhythm of the body as well as the upheavals of history.” In other words, the study of poetic language needs historical analysis as well as psychoanalysis. Yet, it also needs linguistic analysis as a prerequisite because the analyst must work “through and across the signifier to what the symbolic does not make explicit, even if it translates it: instinctual drives, historical contradictions.” The signifier is the material weal that arises from the struggle between internal, that is semiotic and unconscious forces, and external, that is symbolic and conscious forces. Each of these forces, unconscious and conscious, is to be objectively analysed in the second and third phases of textual analysis.

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Kristeva, *Desire*, 34.

Textual Analysis

Biographical and historical contextualisation

The second of the three textual analytic approaches to be applied to the text by Kristeva itself has two periods, one pertinent to her early, Marxist-oriented theories and one more relevant to her later, more individually focused, work. While biographical analysis is more important to my own assembly of her theory of textual analysis, I shall deal with both periods of Kristeva’s contextual analysis in turn.

Barthes’ system

Kristeva’s interest in investigating the social context of textual production bore much in common with some of the contemporary structuralist approaches to literature, such as the practice of Roland Barthes. Barthes’ structuralist criticism is ostensibly sociological in its approach since all manner of social and cultural phenomenon - from fashion and plastic to steaks and striptease - are placed under analysis. Kristeva praises structuralist semiology’s understanding of language (and of all social functions) as immanently causal and working within a socio-symbolic constraint rather than as controlled by a discrete individual. However, by founding itself on language as an extension of sociality, Kristeva argues that semiotics restricts itself to subserving the principle of social cohesion and upholding the social contract. In so doing it only articulates those aspects of

39 Barthes’ structuralist practice occurs within the French structuralist movement which was, as M. H. Abrams explains, “inaugurated in the 1950s by the cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who analyzed, on the model of de Saussure’s structural linguistics, such cultural phenomena as mythology, kinship relations, and modes of preparing food” (M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988) 242).


41 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 27.

42 “Semiotics” and “semiology” are interchangeable terms used to describe the general science of signs. The word “semiotic” was used in this context first by American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce (who distinguished the sign functions pertaining to icon, index and symbol) while Ferdinand de Saussure
signifying practices which are “systematic, systemising, or informational,” those
which operate as tools of social communication rather than those practices or
aspects of practices which transcend, subvert, or escape social convention.\textsuperscript{45}

Since Kristeva’s project is focused as much on the translinguistic semiotic, which
exceeds and undermines symbolicity, as on conventional symbolic structuration,
she finds Barthesian structuralist semiology insufficient to illustrate linguistic
heterogeneity; it can only postulate it. Because poetic language is “the very place
where the social code is destroyed and renewed ....” it needs a more anarchic
model of sociality than that proffered by Barthes’ structuralism.\textsuperscript{46} Rather than
looking for this model in the later, more textually oriented poststructuralist
Barthes, Kristeva finds her preferred model of textual and social interaction in
Bakhtin.

\textbf{Bakhtin and the pregnant bags}

In his translinguistic studies of literature, religion, politics and folk festival,
Bakhtin emphasises the deeply social nature of language.\textsuperscript{45} He writes that “[f]orm
and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a
social phenomenon - social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its
factors, from the sound image to the furtherest reaches of abstract meaning.”\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{45} Kristeva, \textit{Kristeva Reader}, 26. Recall Kristeva’s criticism of Lacan’s structuring of the psyche upon
language - that it was too restrictive, that it refused a place for the semiotic and the transgressional.

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**Textual Analysis**

Despite his interest in the socio-historical, Bakhtin does not deny the importance of proper study of the abstract systems of linguistic laws, of grammar, lexicon, syntax, phonology and so on, since it is through these norms that the all-important individual utterances are shaped. The utterance is the central node of discourse for Bakhtin as for Kristeva. She writes that “[t]he utterance is precisely what seems to me, from the position of an analyst, the only basis for meaning and significance in discourse.”

For Bakhtin, the utterance, as a particular constellation of linguistic rules, must be enacted by an individual for another individual in a particular context because the “word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant .... A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another ... [it] is territory shared by both addresser and addressee ....” Accordingly, the isolated, autotelic “text itself,” so beloved by the Russian Formalists and later by the American New Critics, is now viewed as an impossible and naïve construct of convenience.

In her own effort to move beyond the semiology of systems towards a “translinguistic science,” Kristeva draws on the outpourings of Bakhtin’s “prophetic pen.” She is particularly taken with his conception of dialogue as the convergence between the “horizontal” trajectory between writing subject and addressee and the “vertical” connection between anterior and future literary contexts.

Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure. What allows a dynamic

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47 Kristeva, Tales, 274.
48 Bakhtin, Marxism, 86.
49 Clark and Holquist, 210.
50 Kristeva, Desire, 64.
51 Kristeva, Desire, 66, 69.
Textual Analysis

dimension to structuralism is his conception of the “literary word” as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context. 52

Bakhtin’s dialogism provided Kristeva with the framework for her notion of intertextuality which describes the movement between two or more texts. It demonstrates how texts are not necessarily confined to writings as such, but can be expanded to embrace ideologies and socio-historical contexts.

Bakhtin’s “merry science” of dialogism is not only a precedent for Kristeva’s extension of literary analysis into the socio-historical realm. 53 It also demonstrates how it is that literary texts can prefigure the social action that can in turn reshape history. Destruction of the social order and its subsequent, revolutionary renewal is epitomised by the grotesquity of what Bakhtin calls “the lower stratum of the body.” 54 Signifying degradation, this stratum is the place of urination, defecation and blatant sexual activity. Bakhtin sites the origin of the grotesque, as destruction of State authority and culture, during the Middle Ages when riotous, irreverent laughter erupted at folk carnivals and obscene oaths abounded at the market-place bringing down of heads of state to the bowels of the masses.

In opposition to Anatoly Lunacharsky, who suggests that the carnival as an institution is merely a safety valve used by the ruling classes as a way of allowing the lower orders to let off steam in a harmless, transitory event, Bakhtin maintains

52 Kristeva, Desire, 65.
53 Clark and Holquist, 65.

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that in carnival the lower orders really do deal a blow to megalomaniac official culture. He writes that:

...as opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.

The emancipatory potential of folk carnival reveals the lower bodily principle to be a profoundly ambiguous site that speaks of regeneration and renewal as much as of defecatory abjection. Bakhtin observes that the lower body is not only the site of degradation but is also the site of conception, gestation and birth. Terracotta figurines of laughing senile, pregnant hags symbolise for Bakhtin the ambiguity of the lower bodily stratum. In so far as they illustrate the twin poles of transformation, they “combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of a new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness.”

Kristeva does not carry Bakhtin’s unfortunate, albeit striking, Boschian image of senile, pregnant hags over into our feminist era despite the connections that could be made with her notion of the abject mother. Nevertheless, the figure’s ambiguity is fully convergent with Kristeva’s underlying principle of heterogeneity, which permits the one and the other to co-exist.

While Bakhtin shied away from applying dialogism and the lower bodily principle to the individual psyche, Kristeva combines Bakhtin’s twin notions of degradation

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55 Commissar for Public Enlightenment and Head of Narkompros 1917-1929 in the Soviet Union and an early and virtually lone official advocate of avant-garde art. Clark and Holquist, 313.
56 Bakhtin, Rabelais, 10.
57 Bakhtin, Rabelais, 25.
Textual Analysis

and renewal with her psychoanalytic concepts of stasis and rejection and applies them all to the psyche of the writer and to the text itself.\(^{58}\) In Kristeva’s theory, it is the infusion of semiotic heterogeneity, so grotesque and abhorrent to the “stasis-quo,” that makes artistic practice formally innovative, subjectively regenerative and socially revolutionary.

Kristeva maintains that formal literary innovation is achieved through the refusal to reinvest practice into existing linguistic and literary stases. Subjective regeneration is simultaneously achieved through reinscribing psychical stases elsewhere than with one’s original identity or the identities prescribed by society and the family. Social revolution is similarly brought about by importing into the social order “asocial” drives which have not yet been bound to existing, signified objects and have not been harnessed by existing symbolic theses.\(^{59}\) Literature thereby serves as the triple realisation of writers’ intense struggles (i) with sanctioned norms of writing practice (literary theses), (ii) with their own unitary consciousness (subjective thesis), and (iii) with “all pre-existing natural, social scientific, and political systemacities” (social theses).\(^{60}\)

Kristeva’s rhetoric, her talk of “social and historical conditions” and “modes of production” when describing her semanalytical approach to literature, points immediately to the centrality of Marxism to her early literary analysis. While Kristeva unquestionably draws on Bakhtin in the elaboration of her theory of the text, a more formal Marxist “aesthetics” is utilised in her seminal work, Revolution in Poetic Language, which is devoted to explaining the socially revolutionary potential of poetic language. It is in order to explore and expand

\(^{58}\) Clarke and Holquist, 223.

\(^{59}\) Kristeva, Revolution, 71.

\(^{60}\) Kristeva, Revolution, 204.
Textual Analysis

upon this, revolutionary, end that Kristeva studies the social, historical and ideological context of the text’s production in her literary analyses.

Art as revolution

In her early, marxist-informed writings, Kristeva maintains that the artistic besiegement of the symbolic by the semiotic could, and moreover should, be undertaken for the specific purpose of redefining and reworking the symbolic register and the social order, so transforming society. This is art as revolution.

Under Kristeva’s early materialist schema, the disruptive potential of writing practice is derived only in the first instance from the inscription of rejection into thetic doxa. Certainly, rejection distresses and disintegrates language’s linguistic unity, breaking it down into asyntactical, alogical and alliterative markings (that may be studied in the initial, linguistic analytical phase of literary interpretation). Yet, at this moment of rejection, “a binding, symbolic, ideological, and thus positivizing component intervenes ...” which transforms what has been merely aesthetically innovative discourse into a revolutionary discourse. This interventionist component is “ideologically sound” textual narrative:

The moment of the semantic and ideological binding of drive rejection should be a binding in and through an analytical - and - revolutionary discourse, removing the subject from signifying experience in order to situate him within the revolutionary changes in social relations and close to their various protagonists. Although, to do this, heterogeneous contradiction must accept symbolic theses, they should be rooted in practice and in the analytical - and revolutionary - discourses that shake contemporary society to its foundations ... it should be able to take on the narrative of a revolutionary project.

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61 Kristeva, Revolution, 203.
62 Kristeva, Revolution, 191, my emphasis.
Textual Analysis

So, socially revolutionary art requires the determining structure of a law, or "mastering modality" other than that which it seeks to transgress. Kristeva finds a prototype of a mastering revolutionary social order in Freud's anthropological discussion of bands of outcast brothers killing, devouring, replacing and finally worshiping their violent primal father, who is chief of the patriarchal horde. From this model she speculates that the repeated rejection which produces the textual rifts and ruptures of the poetic modality also produces from such scissions new "mastering" arrangements and unities. The mastering modality is analogous to a homosexual kinship in which brothers, united in body, murder the One Father in order to impose an alternative, critical, combative, revolutionary One logic, One ethics, One signified. This mastering modality is to be found as the "lining" of the poetic modality.

Here Freud's writings are being used simply as a procedural exemplar. More importantly, the Freudian discovery of the subject as heterogeneously and radically divided between the conscious and the unconscious and between unifying gender stases and divisional drives, provides a framework within which Kristeva recasts the marxist subject who has formerly been positioned as either oppressed or oppressing, as exploited worker or exploiting master. Such foreclosure of the other has meant that revolution undertaken by subjectively unified Marxist subjects would merely reinstate the same paranoid subject of speculative thought; of the State, of religion. True social revolution, according to early Kristeva, entails transformation of the subject, since the moment that

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63 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 71.
64 Freud, XIII, 143, 144.
65 Kristeva, Revolution, 153.
dissolves the unity of society also calls into question the unity of the subject. Accordingly, “the proletariat would represent the factor disseminating the unity of the subject and the State, exploding it in a heterogeneity that is irreducible to the agency of consciousness.”

The interaction of Marxism and Freudianism was required because, while Marxism is not cognisant of the split subject, neither Freud, who displaced the Cartesian subject from its presumed centrality, nor Lacan, who refined the theory of the split subject, have, according to Kristeva, gone far enough to appreciate what it is that “rends and renews” the social code. Again, Kristeva’s views on this matter have been prefigured by an older generation of revolutionaries. Bakhtin, along with other leftist artists and thinkers, believed that revolution and art alike were creative and that their art was to provide the stimulus for a “revolution in consciousness” which in turn would instigate social revolution.

Kristeva approached the revolutionary text via aesthetics, Marxism and psychoanalysis. Accordingly, the revolutionary text not only requires innovative form and appropriate narrative but it must also display a capacity for analysis of rejection. By endlessly analysing itself, the self-reflexive text manufactures the requisite revolutionary “knowledge.” The self-analytical capability of a text is provided by an understanding of “the Freudian discovery” of the heterogeneous within the homogeneous, of the unconscious dividing subjective unity, of the notion that drive rejection is both support and threat to subjectivity and

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67 Kristeva, Revolution, 139.
68 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 33.
69 Clark and Holquist, 46, 113.
70 Kristeva, Revolution, 188, 205.
Comprehending rejection’s heterogeneous contradiction, though, does not entail the proliferation of textual meaning, rather heterogeneity is ordered into concepts or structures based on the divided unity of its subject. An analytical and knowing application into discourse of drive rejection as it affects the social subject results, if it is invested into the social domain, in a disruption of the established social order by proposing “different relations to natural objects, social apparatuses, and of the body proper.” As a bonus, the suffusion of rejection, heterogeneity and jouissance into revolutionary critical discourse itself restores the freshness of its ideological “mainsprings.” Here art serves as a tonic to the revolutionary drive.

Kristeva’s revolutionary zeal reaches its zenith in her restriction upon artists who might be tempted to narcissistically relish the jouissance and freedom that they have released in and through their works. Creative pleasure, Kristeva dictates, should only be enjoyed within the constraints of political struggle “through the risk involved in … social conflict.”

So, if the artist succeeds: in releasing drive rejection into the symbolic order to disrupt it; in attaching a mastering revolutionary narrative to this disintegrative force; in maintaining self-reflexive analytic knowledge of this revolutionary practice and in restricting personal pleasure arising from the disruption of the status quo; then, and only then, may the poetic text perform the “the social-anti-social function of art” with the “entire recasting of subjective and social

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71 Kristeva, Revolution, 188, 216.
72 Kristeva, Revolution, 187, 188.
73 Kristeva, Revolution, 126; Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 30, 71.
74 Kristeva, Revolution, 191.
75 Kristeva, Revolution, 190.
structuration, the reconstituting of the knowing unity [the subject] with the new object it discovered within social process.”

**Kristeva’s retreat to the subject**

Given her programmatic insistence upon a socially revolutionary goal for artistic practice as detailed in *Revolution in Poetic Language* and associated works, Kristeva’s subsequent renouncement of Marxist and then Maoist revolutionary ideals as “illusory” and “utopic” seems extraordinary. However, Kristeva’s rejection of a socially revolutionary goal was enacted in concert with the Phillipe Sollers-led *Tel Quel* group of which Kristeva was a prominent member. Drawing on three recent books on the history of *Tel Quel*, Fredric Jameson maps the group’s ideological shift. He reports that, despite the French Communist Party’s (PCF) uncertainties with regard to the *Tel Quel* structuralist intellectuals, the latter endorsed the PCF’s deep suspicions of the student uprising of May 1968 and kept “a prudent silence” on the August invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union. Jameson continues in his review reporting that:

the break, when it came, turned on a mere pretext ... the Party’s refusal to publicise Anna-Maria Macciocchi’s enthusiastic account of the Chinese Cultural Revolution at the *Fête de l’Humanité* in 1971. After that, posters all over the office: ‘Down with dogmatism, empiricism, revisionism, opportunism! Long live Mao Zedong thought!’ ... finally, there was the pilgrimage to revolutionary China itself in spring 1974, from which the group, along with Barthes, return chastened and relatively uncommunicative.

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76 Kristeva, *Revolution*, 189, 205.
Several commentators have noted that Kristeva’s own theory of political revolution was far from coherent anyway, especially in its relation to poetry. Toril Moi explains that she and other members of the Marxist-Feminist Literature Collective found Kristeva’s politics unsatisfactory, anarchistic and subjectivist because of her emphasis on the negativity and disruption of the semiotic that “precludes any analysis of the conscious decision-making processes that must be part of any collective revolutionary project.”

Kelly Oliver takes a different tack, objecting that Kristeva’s early fixation on political revolution can not justify the analogies she draws with poetic revolution because neither effect a complete overthrow of the status quo. Oliver suggests that “Kristeva describes something more akin to political reform than political upheaval” and, by extension, that her poetic revolution too is more of a poetic reform or remodelling.

Also, in regard to Kristeva’s analogy between political and poetic revolution, Moi takes issue with Kristeva’s “rather lame” reliance upon comparison or homology in place of argument to contend that “the disruption of the subject, the sujet en procès ... prefigures or parallels revolutionary disruptions of society.” Focusing on the so-called revolutionary writers themselves, Christopher Norris notes that Kristeva’s claim for certain writers (with anti-Semite Céline foremost among them) “as vanguard figures in the ‘revolution of poetic language’ is ... completely at odds with what is known of their political and sexual orientation.”

It should be observed that books such as Strangers to Ourselves (Étrangers à nous-mêmes, 1988) and Nations Without Nationalism (Lettre ouverte a Harlem

80 Moi, Sexual/Textual, 170.
81 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 10.
82 Moi, Sexual/Textual, 171. Moi’s complaint regarding her use of comparison in place of argument is widely relevant to Kristeva’s articulation of her theories.
83 Norris, Truth and the Ethics of Criticism, 78.
Desir, 1990) are testament to Kristeva’s continued interest in matters external to the literary text. Yet, it is notable that, since her shedding of Marxism, politics and art have become two almost discrete fields of inquiry for her. Art as sweeping social reform has been superseded in Kristeva’s theory by attempts to justify art as transformative of the individual, only modifying history indirectly.\textsuperscript{84} Kristeva writes in the context of feminism that “this ‘we’ is becoming troublesome. There have to be ‘I’s’ ... this perspective will push each one of us to find her own individual language.”\textsuperscript{85} Kristeva’s reply to a question posed by Jacqueline Rose in the early 1980s is informative in regard to her renunciation of a broad social agenda:

> it seems to me that if the artist or the psychoanalyst acts politically they act politically through an intervention on the individual level. And it can be a main political concern to give value to the individual. My reproach to some political discourses with which I am disillusioned is that they don’t consider the individual as value.\textsuperscript{86}

The questions Kristeva asks today are in opposition to those she asked early in her career when she concluded that the problem was one of “introducing the struggle of significance - its process - no longer just into ‘individual experience’ ... but also into the objective process of contemporary science, technology, and social relations.”\textsuperscript{87} Today, she might say that the problem is one of introducing the struggle of significance not into social relations but into individual experience.

In 1980 Kristeva corrals revolution and freedom, which had formally been granted great social and historical scope, into the aesthetic and interpersonal domains,

\textsuperscript{84} Kristeva, “Two Interviews,” 132.
\textsuperscript{85} Kristeva, “Two Interviews,” 123.
\textsuperscript{87} Kristeva, Revolution, 213.
suggesting glumly that a government of “conservative forces in the domain of morality, of sex, of the relations of individuals to each other” is the best that western Europe can hope for in its quest to escape economic doom. Kristeva now renounces “grand theories” and claims for herself an “ambitious modesty”: “leave the meaning of history, production, leave all that and take up instead the minimal components that constitute the speaking being. The little elements that make me speak, the little elements that make me desire.” She suggests that the point is “to go beyond the theater of linguistic representations to make room for pre- or translinguistic modalities of psychic inscription, which we call semiotic ....” Freedom is to be confined to the realm of the affect, to “a place where people could explore the limits of their discourse, of their thought, of their manipulation of sounds and colours, of words, of whatever they like, so they can express themselves as they wish.” The artist, rather than being engaged in politics, “is never more engagé than in his work.”

Whatever the motivations of Kristeva’s shift in thinking, it brings about a greater alignment of her psycholiterate theory with the theories underpinning many of the modernist works she studied. Clive Bloom’s gloss on modernism is apposite in this regard:

[Modernism] emphasized the subordination of parts to whole, the suppression of episode, the conversion of character into psychological study and the ‘textualizing’ of character through stream of consciousness: psyche and text become one. Thus narrative becomes an inner exploration of psychic forces and the denial of outward (social) presence. With a refusal to engage in political issues, the

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89 Kristeva, “Two Interviews,” 131. Kristeva’s renouncement of grand theories does not include, of course, the grand theory of psychoanalysis.
90 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 5.
91 Kristeva, “Two Interviews,” 127.
92 Kristeva, “Two Interviews,” 132.
modernists saw only the domestic and the sexual as relevant (both experienced as inner trauma).

While I agree with Paul Smith that her reorientation has “bemused, disturbed, or disappointed” many of Kristeva’s readers, I would have to disagree with his suggestion that Kristeva’s shift from politics to “the individual as value” also sees her undoing “the mutually constraining dialectic of the semiotic and the symbolic” for the “revindication of a putative priority and primacy of the semiotic ... [which is now] assigned both logical and ontological priority over the oedipal symbolic.”

Rather, I would see the negativity underlying the semiotic-symbolic dialectic still operational, albeit within a more confined sphere of influence. Rather than looking to the big picture of society and politics, Kristeva’s negativity is now played out between the “little elements” that make the writer speak and desire.

Biography in place of social history

With Kristeva’s interest now oriented towards the individual psyche, the nature of her triple thesis underpinning her objective textual analysis is altered. It still addresses the materiality of writing with a linguistic analysis, and it still incorporates a psychoanalytic approach (as I have yet to explain) but, rather than taking into account social and historical conditions that are so pertinent to a socially revolution end for poetic language, it is now mainly the individual’s social and personal history that are taken into account in contextual analysis.

Gone too is any mention of a “mastering modality” which Kristeva had formerly demanded be integrated with innovative language in order to secure a socially

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94 Paul Smith, 86-7, 89.
95 Kristeva, Desire, 100.
revolutionary end. In this post-revolutionary, even post-psychoanalytic age, it is enough to allow individual psyches to "remain floating, empty at times, inauthentic, obviously lying ... [and to] speak and write themselves in unstable, open undecided spaces."

Interestingly, Kristeva provides very little in the way of systematic, theoretical support for her use of biography in literary analysis. Partly, this absence seems to have occurred because, while historical contextualisation was postulated early in Kristeva’s career when her aspirations were unashamedly scientific and political, its supersession by biographical contextualisation took place much later when Kristeva was warming to less direct, more metaphoric means of explaining herself.

I imagine that another reason why Kristeva’s reliance on biographical analysis has not been emphasised in her theory is the disrepute into which biographically based analysis has fallen in recent decades. The reasons for psychobiography’s fall from grace (despite its continued practice) include its impotence in the face of anonymous works, errors in biography leading to mistakes in analysis and elision of the conscious, detached control authors have over their texts. Further, it is

96 Kristeva, Tales, 380.
97 Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism, 43-4. Of course, as W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley strongly argued many decades ago, even if we can really know what an author’s intentions may be (and we can never know for sure, even by asking the author directly), they are irrelevant to both the status of the work as art and to readers’ reception of the work (W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” The Sewanee Review 54 (1946). Elizabeth Wright notes that “[t]he study of an artist’s life to explain his works, or the study of his works to explain his mind, was already an established mode in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when pre-Freudian psychology made various attempts to relate genius to madness. Cesare Lombroso, an Italian professor of legal medicine, argued that creative genius was a by product of psychosis, in that the advance of this condition can turn someone with an average mind into a genius ... . This is the background to what came to be called ‘pathography’: a study of the artist not for the sake of the work or even the man, but for the purpose of classifying a particular pathology.” Freud himself was more interested in throwing light on the psychoanalytic process as such, a shift of concern, which, Wright adds, seems to be reflected in the now more commonly used term ‘psychobiography’” (Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism, 38-9).
frequently unclear if it is the author or the characters who are under analysis, although Freud himself cannot be considered guilty of leaving the author’s role in any doubt. Freud is of the opinion that the psychological integrity of fictional characters accurately reflects the psychology of the author and that the psychoanalyst may interpret the author’s psyche through his reading of the work:

The author ... directs his attention to the unconscious in his own mind, he listens to its possible developments and lends them artistic expression instead of suppressing them by conscious criticism .... Thus he experiences for himself ... the laws which the activities of this unconscious must obey. But he need not state these laws, nor even be clearly aware of them; as a result of the tolerance of his intelligence, they are incorporated within his creations. We discover these laws by analysing his writings just as we find them from cases of real illness.

It may be worthwhile to briefly analyse an example of classical, Freudian psychobiography in order to explore the way in which biography has traditionally been brought to bear upon literature, so that the distance Kristeva has travelled from this practice, and the ties she retains with it, may be gauged.

**Freud’s psychobiography of *Gravida***

Freud himself, father of psychoanalysis and, conveniently, of psycholiterary criticism, supplies several essays of psychobiographical literary analysis, some of which analyse the psyche of the author and others of which psychoanalyse the psyche of the characters. His most sustained and detailed analysis of a piece of literature was of North German playwright and novelist Wilhelm Jensen’s (1837-1911) novella of 1903, *Gravida*. Freud’s “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gravida,*” published in 1906, treats the fictional characters as if they were living

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98 Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, 47.
99 Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gravida,*" IX (1907) 92.
beings capable of being psychoanalysed and treats the main character as a psychic reflection of the author's own unconscious impulses.

Leaving aside Freud's précis of Jensen's story, I will proceed with Freud's psychoanalysis of the chief protagonist Hanold, a young German archaeologist. \(^{100}\) Freud proposes that Hanold's attraction to the carved stone relief sculpture depicting "Gravida," a lovely young woman with a distinctive gait, stems from his unconscious libidinal desire which had been solely directed towards his childhood sweetheart, Zoe Bertang. Hanold's sexual desire and his associated memory of Zoe had been repressed in order to pursue his isolating vocation. During the time frame of the story, Hanold suffered under "a struggle between the power of eroticism and that of the forces that were repressing it; the manifestation of this struggle was a delusion" in which Hanold dreams that Gravida is a real woman whom he sees being buried by the ashes of the erupting mount Vesuvius. \(^{101}\) It falls upon Zoe to cure Hanold of his delusions and restore him to love. She does this by pretending to be Gravida, thereby "taking up the same ground as the delusional structure and then investigating it as completely as possible."\(^{102}\) Mimicking his delusion, Zoe restores Hanold to psychic equilibrium by carefully disentangling the intricate network of delusions he had woven around her and sifting his fantasies from reality. All the riddles are thus solved, Hanold's delusions have vanished and are replaced by love for Zoe.

\(^{100}\) Sarah Kofman writes that, by dislocating the narrative from his interpretation of it, Freud has not only suppressed the charm of Jensen's story, but has reduced and transformed its content (Sarah Kofman, *Freud and Fiction*, trans. Sarah Wykes (Oxford: Polity Press, *Quatre romans analytiques*, 1974) 1991) 86-91. Isbister similarly rails against Freud's censorship, and thus reduction and transformation, of Freud's dream material in *Interpretation of Dreams* saying that without self-disclosure, Freud's interpretations are worthless (J. N. Isbister, *Freud: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985) 102-03.

\(^{101}\) Freud, IX, 49.

\(^{102}\) Freud, IX, 22.
Freud indicates that Zoe takes on the mantle of psychotherapist with Hanold as her patient. Stressing the similarity between her procedure and the analytic method of psychotherapy, Freud suggests that in her cure of Hanold, Zoe shares with psychoanalytic therapeutic techniques “the making conscious of what has been repressed” (Hanold’s sexual desire for Zoe), “the coinciding of explanation with cure” (Hanold’s case is an example of “the talking cure”) and “the awakening of feelings” (Hanold’s love for Zoe). The following line in Hanold’s second dream rings true for Freud as much as for Hanold: “[o]ur lady colleague is right; the method is really a good one and she has made use of it with excellent results.” Zoe’s activities are treated by Freud as if she really were performing the role of a psychoanalyst. But further, Freud embarks upon a psychoanalytic treatment of Hanold by interpreting his dreams, just as if Hanold really were a patient in Freud’s Zurich clinic. Attending to this point, Freud writes:

My readers will no doubt have been puzzled to notice that so far I have treated Norbert Hanold and Zoe Bertang, in all their manifestations and activities, as though they were real people and not the author’s creations, as though the author’s mind were an absolutely transparent medium and not a refractive or obscuring one. And my procedure must seem all the more puzzling since the author has expressly renounced the portrayal of reality by calling his story a “phantasy.”

Despite his closing line of this paper which announces that “we must stop here, or we may really forget that Hanold and Gravida are only creatures of their author’s mind,” Freud justifies his biographical character-analysis with a rather lame suggestion that Jensen has “so faithfully copied from reality that we should not

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103 Freud, IX, 89.  
104 Jensen in Freud, IX, 25.  
105 Freud, IX, 41.
object if *Gravida* were described not as a phantasy but as a psychiatric study." In applying clinical dream-interpretation techniques to that “class of dreams that have never been dreamt at all - dreams created by imaginative writers and ascribed to invented characters in the course of a story,” Freud draws a direct analogy between the dreamer and the author; between the latent dream-thoughts buried in the unconscious of dreamer and writer alike; between “dream work” and the creative writing process; and between the manifest content of the dream and the manifest content of a work of literature. Stories are the fulfilled wishes of the author in the same way that dreams are the fulfilled wishes of both the real (and fictive) dreamer. (As my précis in Chapter Nine of Kristeva’s numerous literary analyses reveals, Kristeva, too, frequently treats the literary text as if it were a dream related in analysis and the writer as if s/he were a dreamer.)

However, as I indicated above, Freud does not shy away from reading real psychological processes into fictional characters. His focus remains psychoanalytical not literary. Hence, he writes that Jensen “has presented us with a perfectly correct psychiatric study, on which we may measure our understanding of the workings of the mind - a case history and the history of a cure which might have been designed to emphasize certain fundamental theories of medical psychology.” Freud’s literary interpretations are geared solely towards supporting and illustrating his psychoanalytic theories which he sought to have legitimised, not in the arts, but in the field of science. As an analyst, Freud considers the treatment of Norbert Hanold to be as exemplary of his therapeutic theories and techniques as those of his medical patients in real life.

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106 Freud, IX, 93, 41.
107 Freud, IX, 7.
108 Freud, IX, 43.
109 Freud, IX, 54.
Kristeva too, in the final analysis, locates in the writer's psyche the source of creative writing. She writes that: "[i]t is, very simply, through the work and play of signs, a crisis of subjectivity which is the basis for all creation." In order to illuminate this crisis of subjectivity, biographical analysis, which after all has much to do with subjectivity, has been elided with, even subordinated to, psychoanalysis in Kristeva's literary interpretative practice. So, just as linguistic analysis is undertaken in order to determine the material evidence of a psyche at work within the text, so too, biographical analysis is employed in order to locate the psychically pertinent features of the writer's world. Witness the following passage as an example of biographical analysis being lured into the service of psychoanalysis in Kristeva's interpretation of Dostoyevsky:

The tormented world of Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) is ruled more by epilepsy than by melancholia in the clinical sense of the term ... Nonetheless, one should keep in mind the despondency that precedes or above all follows, in Dostoyevsky's writings, the attack as he himself describes it; one should also take note of the hypostasis of suffering, which, without having any explicit, immediate relation to epilepsy, compels recognition throughout his work as the essential feature of his outlook on humanity.

Or, Céline's nazism is understood not (just) as a political action, but as "an internal necessity, as an inherent counterweight, as a massive need for identity ... that crystallizes the objective and illusory reconciliation between, on the one

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110 Kristeva, "Two Interviews," 132, my emphasis.
111 Kristeva, Tales of Love, 175. Refer to my Chapter Nine analyses of Dostoyevsky by Kristeva and Freud.
Textual Analysis

hand, an ego ... and, on the other, the identifying prohibitions ....”\textsuperscript{112} Political commitment for Céline and for others “is a [psychological] security blanket”.\textsuperscript{113}

These references show that, at times, Kristeva’s interpretative practice sails dangerously close to the early, crude classical psychobiographic criticism of, say, Marie Bonaparte.\textsuperscript{114} Kristeva appears to start from the text and then to incorporate biography in order to make an observation about the author’s psyche. More frequently, though, Kristeva moves from the text, through biography and back to the text again. For example, in \textit{Powers of Horror} she writes:

Let me recall that Céline devoted his doctoral dissertation (1924) on Ignaz Semmelweis to the infection that develops during childbirth - puerperal fever ... the result of the female genitalia being contaminated by a corpse [and transmitted by her doctor] ... What attracts Céline, of all the old enigmas of science, is the one lying at the way out or the way in for woman, confusing inside and outside, life and death, feminine and masculine ... The Célinian universe remains dichotomous; without a third party, or because of the latter’s failure, two terms rise up, facing each other, Woman and Lover, Sex and Corpse, Woman in childbed and Doctor, Death and Words, Hell and Writer, the Impossible and Style.\textsuperscript{115}

This passage shows how Kristeva uses biography to support her essentially structuralist claims regarding the text, claims that underscore the Lacanian observation that both text and psyche are structured like a language (not forgetting

\textsuperscript{112} Kristeva, \textit{Abjection}, 136.

\textsuperscript{113} Kristeva, \textit{Abjection}, 137.

\textsuperscript{114} In her study of Edgar Allan Poe, Bonaparte takes Poe’s tales as analogous to manifest dreams and seeks in his biography access to Poe’s latent dream-thoughts where true meaning is to be found. Her method is one of psychoanalysing the author using biography and literature in place of dreams related in the clinic with little credit given to the author’s conscious control over the text. Bonaparte writes: “Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creators psychology” (Marie Bonaparte, \textit{The Life and Works of Edgar Allen Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation}, trans. J. Rodker, fwd Sigmund Freud [London: Imago Publications, 1949] 209; see also Wright, \textit{Psychoanalytic Criticism}, 38-45.

\textsuperscript{115} Kristeva, \textit{Abjection}, 159, 160.
the Kristevan caveat that this linguistic structure embraces that which falls outside the conventional system, namely, pre-linguistic traces). Again, like other French structuralists and poststructuralists such as Barthes and Derrida, Kristeva investigates the processes of writing, reading and, obliquely, of interpretation, although as a psychoanalyst she nevertheless retains her primary interest in psychological meanings and unconscious processes embedded in the text. Within the psychoanalytic paradigm, then, bolstered by her linguistic and biographic studies, Kristeva embarks upon her psychoanalysis of literary texts.

Psychoanalysing the text

Psychoanalysis is engaged at this point of Kristeva’s textual analysis because of its ability to draw out and interpret the “nocturnal forms” of the subject’s psyche. It is ideally equipped, in Kristeva’s view, to demonstrate, explore and explain the dark, poetic side of the literary text just as linguistics was equipped to explain the surface features of the text and biography was equipped to explain the broader context. Informal analogues to psychoanalytic criticism, such as those Barthes operates under, while able to demonstrate that the laws of the unconscious exist and are implied in language, are not able to explain these laws of the unconscious nor explore how the “objective-becoming of desire” that is the literary text comes about. By remaining so firmly rooted in the rationalising and formalising tendencies of semiology as a science, the “light” of semiological reason leaves

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117 Recall Freud’s insistence that literary insights need to be recouched in psychoanalytic terms because artists and creative writers lack the rigorous scientific mentality that would enable them to couch psychological truths as reality (Freud, IX, 44).
Textual Analysis

“the loss of the subject into nonsense as well as his loss into what is beyond meaning” in shadow:

Faced with this [textual] form’s night spreading across poetic surplus, faced with this nocturnal form not illuminated by a subject master of language, Barthes’ light fails. Of the subject’s dark appearance within the impersonal, within the maternal “One,” it retains only the classic systematicness, but not the repressed poetic intensity of their struggle; the pluralized domination, but not the pluralizing negative.\textsuperscript{118}

In order to unravel the neglected biological, amorous and unconscious laws of literary production and reception, Kristeva advises that psychoanalysis be an integral component of textual analysis. While the psychoanalytic techniques of countertransference and detachment will be experienced by the psycholiterary analyst in due course, at this stage the psychoanalytic discipline is utilised in an objective fashion, just as linguistic analysis and historical and biographical contextualisation were conducted from an objective standpoint, with the analyst assuming a metaposition.

Still, now that the approach to textual analysis has shifted to psychoanalysis, it would be useful to reframe the literary analyst’s metapositionality (and other aspects of the psychoanalytic phase of Kristeva’s textual analysis) in psychoanalytic terms. Accordingly, the text is assigned to the position of subject (or analysand) and the literary analyst to the position of psychoanalyst. Both psychoanalysis and literary analysis have traditionally sanctioned this arrangement. Until the poststructuralist paradigm gained ascendancy, the entire psycholiterary critical process was usually conducted with the reader-critic firmly seated in the place of the third party and from there confidently assuming the authority traditionally bestowed upon the psychoanalyst. In reference to the

\textsuperscript{118} Kristeva, \textit{Desire}, 106-07.
analytic situation, Freud warns that the psychoanalyst has to battle against “the forces which seek to drag him down from the analytic level.” Psychoanalytic critics who heed Freud’s advice, retain their authority over the text’s meaning.

Although the literary analyst in Kristeva’s methodology does not permanently adopt an objective position, to do so nevertheless constitutes a valid and important conscious phase of her theory of literary analysis. While critical of interpretative systems founded on the transcendental ego for their tendency to dominate the object of analysis, Kristeva does not deny that the desire for knowledge and understanding is a normal and proper part of both literary analysis and psychoanalysis. To start with, the analysand goes into analysis seeking knowledge and self-power through the intervention of the analyst. Kristeva as psychoanalyst tries to meet this expectation, claiming that she wants to “preserve a sort of neutral and more enigmatic personality, because this is the only way to work with a patient’s unconscious.” She states, further, that “objective observation is also part of my role as analyst.”

The analyst’s objectivity stems in part from her detachment and neutrality and in part from her clinical knowledge of psychological development. Objective observation, then, is the position maintained in the first stage or “circulation” of analysis in which the analyst “reads” the analysand’s discourse so as to begin to draw out a viable interpretation of the analysand’s symptoms and fantasies.

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119 Freud, XII, 170.
120 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 7.
122 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 17.
123 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 17, 6.
Textual Analysis

Similarly, Kristeva as textual analyst reads the text as psyche, so as to further the interpretative process.

To retrace the production of the text, that text which is now the object of a literary analysis, for a moment; with the writer in transference to the units of language as symbol of the imaginary father, desire for the other is reoriented towards language and its reader, making "[t]he vast domain of the Freudian unconscious, with its representations of objects and semiotic traces of affects ... real ...."124 The writer gives forth, within an ostensibly consciously written text, symptoms of imaginary identifications and desires harboured for others. The influx of emotion and affect into transferential and written discourse means that:

it cannot be understood in terms of a linguistic model that divides verbal signs into “signifier” and “signified.” Analytical language works with signs that encompass representations of at least three types: representations of words (close to the linguistic signifier), representations of things (close to the linguistic signified), and representations of affects (liable psychic traces subject to the primary processes of displacement and condensation, which I have called semiotic as opposed to the symbolic representations inherent in, or derivative of, the system of language).125

By taking into consideration the tripartite nature of these discursive representations and of the various textual analytic approaches I have identified, I think that it is reasonable to suggest that each of the representations is analysed by Kristeva using a different analytic approach: the representations of words (signifiers) through linguistic analysis; the representations of things (signifieds) through historical and/or biographical contextual analysis; and, the representations of (semiotic) affects through psychoanalysis. Returning to the model of the

124 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 8.
125 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 4.
musical score supplied by Lacan, these associations can be extended further. Linguistic analysis of representations of words defines the top notes. Biographical-social-historical analysis of representations of things supplies the melody that shapes the piece. Psychoanalysis of representations of affects embraces the entire range, offering meaning to words and things, permitting drives to sound through as bass tones and, most importantly, giving voice to the semiotic affects that resonate throughout as tone, mood and emotion.

To describe the interpretative activities of the analyst in somewhat more prosaic terms: the language of the analysand and the writer are peppered with affects. That being so, in Kristeva’s theory, the psychoanalyst and the literary analyst listen to the intonation and rhythm of the voice or text, search for key words that conceal that which remains unsaid, make connections between disparate words in the discourse and attend to the dissociation, distortion and abstraction of linguistic form. This is where the first linguistically directed analytic strategy reaches fruition; it provides the raw linguistic data which a textual psychoanalysis develops.

 Literary analysis conjoined with psychoanalysis interprets linguistic patterning as displaced and condensed symptoms of affects initially formed in infancy or childhood. By delving behind “the veil of representation” of the surface features (the “screen phrases”) of the discourse, the analyst endeavours to read its representations as references to past memories that ultimately signify semiotic or affective experiences. By tracing this path, by observing “the drive investment that occurs in the genesis and exercise of the signifying function produced by

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126 Kristeva, Revolution, 103; Kristeva, In the Beginning, 7. The psychoanalytic term “screen memory” is a trivial childhood memory which, when its manifest content is interpreted, reveals a significant latent content (Ryecroft, 164).
psychoanalytic practice," the psychoanalyst is able to deduce the phobic's particular psychic economy. Kristeva explains the analyst's task:

In the analytic cure, the importance of speech's suprasegmental level (intonation, rhythm) should lead the analyst, on the one hand, to interpret the voice, and on the other to disarticulate the signifying sequence that has become banal and lifeless - the purpose being to extract the infrasignifying meaning of [say] depressive discourse that is hidden in fragments of lexical items, in syllables, or in phonic groups yet strangely semanticized. Kristeva's reference here to extraction of meaning indicates that interpretation, at least in this analytical phase, is not a free interpretation. It is designed to home in upon a pre-existing meaning that has been captured in discourse. Analytic and literary discourses are representations of meaningful psychic states and they bear evidence of the psychic processes which transpose those states into discourse or text. Psychoanalysis and literary textual analysis are deployed in order to recover psychic meaning through the correct unravelling of the suprasegmental level of the discourse:

I consider all fiction (poetic language or narrative) already an interpretation in the broad sense of the speaking subject's implication in a transposition (connection) of a presupposed object. If it is impossible to assign to a literary text a pre-existing 'objective reality', the critic (the interpreter) can nevertheless find the mark of the interpretative function of writing in the transformation which that writing inflicts on the language of everyday communication. In other words, style is the mark of interpretation in literature.

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127 Kristeva, Revolution, 181.
128 Kristeva, Black Sun, 55.
129 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 314.
Textual Analysis

Kristeva draws on Céline's phrase, which she herself uses more than once, to illustrate this point: "You know, in the Scriptures it is written: '[i]n the beginning was the Word.' No! In the beginning was emotion. The Word came afterwards to replace emotion as the trot replaced the gallop." Having seen how Kristeva analyses Céline with regard to semiotics and biography, I will now turn to her psychoanalysis of Céline's texts.

Formal analysis of Céline's texts was conducted in the first instance without necessarily interpreting the findings. His texts' fragmentation, repetitions, ellipses and other syntactical constructions indicate for Kristeva the return of repressed enunciative strategies typical of children's first sentences. Such formal features are understood to be the veneer to the "buried intimacy" of an emotional identity that stems back, ultimately, to biological experience. Céline writes in this regard, "[u]ltimately, at the end of the journey, there stands revealed the complete trajectory of the mutation of language into style under the impulse of an unnamable otherness, which, passional to begin with, then acquires rhythm before becoming empty ...."

It is interesting to note that Kristeva does not define precisely what this "unnamable otherness" is for Céline. Specific decipherment of formal markings is left to the reader. Exclamatory suspensions, for instance, are indeterminate and ambivalent markings of an "intense subjective attitude" whose signification could "easily occupy either or both ends of the drive scale, from acceptance to rejection ...." It is up to the reader to decipher these at rapid speed. However, since

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130 Céline from "Céline vous parle" in Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 317.
131 Kristeva, Abjection, 197.
132 Kristeva, Abjection, 189, 190.
133 Céline in Kristeva, Abjection, 191.
134 Kristeva, Abjection, 204.
Kristeva maintains that no ideology, thesis, interpretation or hope can be maintained in this scripted space, Céline’s writing topples into nothing more than “the effervescence of passion and language we call style .... Music, rhythm, rigadoon, without end, for no reason.”

No end and no reason, these are Céline’s fate because he writes possessed by abjection, that psychological state, forged in infancy and reinforced by the social and political crises of the twentieth century, where identity is “double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.” The ambiguous position of the mother, both desired and abject, lies at the core of Kristeva’s interpretation of Céline. He shows the mother lying on her hospital bed giving birth: “the height of bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual.” Kristeva’s points to Céline’s doctoral thesis on the infection that develops during childbirth (puerperal fever), on the ailing mothers in Céline’s fictions and on his relationship with his own mother.

Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory fully envelops her literary interpretation, in this and other examples, staining it with the figures and relationships which had first marked the pre-oedipal scene. Freud’s application of psychoanalysis to literature is probably equally pertinent to Kristeva:

analysis allows us to suppose that the great, apparently inexhaustible wealth of these problems and situations the imaginative writer treats can be traced back to a small number of primal motifs, which stem for the most part from the repressed experiential material of the child’s

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mental life, so that imaginative productions correspond to disguised, embellished, sublimated new editions of those childhood fantasies.\footnote{Freud quoted in Peter Gay, \textit{Freud: A Life for Our Time}. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1988) 319. Refer to my Chapter Nine for a critique of the reductiveness of psychoanalytic interpretations which, according to Fredric Jameson, reduces the rich variety of realities into the limited terms of the family narrative (Fredric Jameson, \textit{The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act} (London: Methuen, 1981) 22).}

With Kristevan interpretation, however, the new editions of childhood fantasies tend to focus more on the figure of the mother in all her guises - phallic mother, imaginary father and abject mother than on the paternally oriented oedipal experiences which so occupied Freud.

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\subsection*{Which law?}

The very fact that Kristevan three-fold textual analysis comprises several interpretative strategies, and that Kristeva’s literary methodology taken as a whole combines more than one phase (analysis plus countertransference plus writing) points to “the incompleteness of interpretation itself, the incompleteness of all language, sign, discourse. This perception,” Kristeva continues, “prevents the closure of our interpretation as a self-sufficient totality ....”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Kristeva Reader}, 314.}

But, this prevention of closure does not necessarily entail an inverse, unlimited expansion of meanings, either. For instance, in David Lodge’s \textit{A Small World}, poet and junior academic, Persse McGarrigle stuns the speakers at the prestigious MLA conference, who had been expounding eloquently on the topic of “The Function of Criticism,” with his question: “What follows if everybody agrees with you?” The doyen of literary criticism, the sexually and intellectually impotent...
Arthur Kingfisher is, amazingly, roused from his bored lethargy to explain to himself and the audience: “You imply, of course, that what matters in the field of critical practice is not truth but difference. If everybody were convinced by your arguments, they would have to do the same as you and there would be no satisfaction in doing it. To win is to lose the game.” This scene illustrates the effects of poststructuralism’s dissolution of traditional discourse hierarchies. No single theoretical paradigm can claim absolute pre-eminence over the others, nor can they dominate their objects with homogenising overviews given the demonstrable incompleteness of their interpretations.

But this is where Kristeva parts company with poststructuralism for, while setting in train a movement of meaning negotiated by a variety of non-conforming theoretical paradigms, she does allow one paradigm to dominate. Psychoanalysis rises above the rest for the efficacy of its technique in seeking out unconscious meaning which it interprets as truth. However, the pre-eminence of psychoanalysis is not so obvious as an analytic paradigm but rather becomes apparent as a practice which implicates analyst as much as analysand, as I shall discuss in my next chapter.

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Chapter Five
Reading and Desire

Countertransference love is my ability to put myself in their place; looking, dreaming, suffering as if I were she, as if I were he.

Julia Kristeva

Seeking the lawful yet desiring the unlawful

Analysts no less than analysands, interpreters no less than writers, are split subjects. As conscious subjects, analysts employ psychoanalysis in order to hypothesise, theorise and analyse unconscious desire as manifest in the text. Thus Kristeva asserts that “[t]he only modern interpretative theory capable of hypothesising the infinitation of meaning by desire is psychoanalysis .... Furthermore, psychoanalysis gives heterogeneity an operative and analysable status by designating it as sexual desire and/or death wish.” As a part of the first circulation or phase of literary analysis, the intellectual framework of psychoanalysis appeals to the interpreter’s conscious aspiration for knowledge about her object of analysis and is a mechanism for interpreting the myriad meanings generated by desire. This aspiration for finite knowledge about the text may be an unconscious desire as much as a conscious one. After all, as Rose observes, in *Tales of Love* Kristeva self-diagnoses herself as desirous of the Law.

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1 Kristeva, *Tales*, 11.
3 Rose, *Sexuality*, 142.
Yet, Kristeva as literary analyst not only seeks the lawful but also desires the unlawful. Psychoanalysis is suited to the pursuit of both ends since “the knowing subject is also a desiring subject, and the paths of desire ensnarl the paths of knowledge” - “Desire and the desire to know are not strangers to each other, up to a point.” The literary analyst uses psychoanalysis as a knowledge-base and theoretical tool to analyse, describe and interpret texts. But the unconscious is not only theorised, analysed, described and interpreted, the analyst also loses herself in the unconscious, “plays with it, takes pleasure from it, lives it ... it is both knowing and, through language, unfolding.” This second circulation of interpretation is “dependent on the analyst’s desire and operative only with him, [it] departs from interpretative mastery and opens the field to suggestion as well as to projection and indeterminable drifts.” The application of psychoanalysis facilitates conscious objectification while the practice of psychoanalysis encourages unconscious immersion.

In my previous chapter I have already discussed Kristeva’s deployment of psychoanalysis in her quest for objective meaning in, and knowledge about, the literary text. Now it is the turn of the experiential aspects of psychoanalysis and its subjective truth or “mad truth” (folle vérité) that bubbles up along with unconscious desire. In this second phase of interpretation, the literary analyst, like the psychoanalyst, stands aside from her position as surrogate Other to allow herself to become immersed within reciprocal transference relations.

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4 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 307-08.
5 Kristeva, In the Beginning, 61.
6 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 309.
7 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 308.
Reading and Desire

The lure of the text

The analyst, and by extension the literary analyst (refer below), is drawn into countertransference because the emotional tenor of transference discourse implicates her, encourages her affective involvement in it and entices the capitulation of her desire to it. Transferential discourse is amatory language, awash with repressed, drive-affected desire. Its emotional charge speaks directly to the analyst’s own emotions. Kristeva writes in this regard that “the analyst draws upon himself without wanting to do so (?), simply because words are meant for ears rather than for eyes, the arrows of the love called ‘transference love.’”8 It seems as if eyes here are representative of the analyst’s discerning, calculating objective faculties while the ears are those organs into which sweet nothings are whispered: love is blind. The bracketed question mark in this passage draws attention to the degree to which the analyst really wishes to remain aloof from the analysand’s alluring discourse. Perhaps the analyst willing succumbs to the analysand’s attempted seduction, and perhaps, given that transferential discourse is addressed directly to the analyst as surrogate for the analysand’s true love object, it is almost irresistible. Once the analyst’s imagination is stimulated by the analysand’s own imaginative reconstructions of desire, maybe she is less willing to withhold her own desire. And, by giving rein to her own unconscious responses, the analyst is better able to follow the analysand’s speech into the nameless recesses of meaning that are the semiotic or imaginary identifications and introjections upon which identity is constructed.

The application of the psychoanalytic paradigm to literary interpretation is called into question by the obvious disparity between the organs of perception in the quote above. Surely, if words are meant for ears rather than eyes, this would place

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8 Kristeva, Tales, 8.
countertransference of reading in jeopardy. Perhaps, however, the eyes are unofficial substitutes for the ears in reading rather than their formal replacements. Although concrete poetry is a recognised genre, it seems to me that most literature still “speaks” to the mind and, as a psychoanalyst would affirm, to the reader’s emotions. Indeed, Kristeva claims that the text, in effect, undergoes transference by attempting to seduce the reader with its artistry, its language and its emotional charge. She writes that “the designated addressees of the text are often its focus of transference, its objects of attempted seduction and aggression.”

Meeting the text’s desires

So, despite the analysand yearning for stability and reassurance from her analyst, she wishes to lure the analyst into her trauma thereby legitimising her own neurotic experience. The Kristevan analyst’s position also teeters between two extremes of law and lawlessness. Entrenchment in her position as stable source of authority, power and meaning is inappropriate because this strategy dominates the analysand and analytic discourse. Becoming slave to the analysand’s neurotic drama, on the other hand, is also inadvisable since no cure could emanate from capitulation to the terms of a neurosis. Rather, the analyst operates somewhere in between these two extremes or, rather, at both these extremes. So, having abandoned “the shelter of the family, the state, or religion” in an attempt to track the analysand’s desiring discourse, the analyst fleetingly becomes enmeshed in the desires of the analysand and, by living them, understands them. Displacing the “obvious, immediate, realistic meaning from discourse,” the analyst gives way to

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9 Concrete Poetry was a form developed in the 1950s and 60s. Drawing on a long tradition of typographical experiment, concrete poetry molds graphic space as structural agent using different typographical graphics, computer poems, collage, etc. (Drabble, 222-23).

10 Kristeva, Revolution, 209.

11 Kristeva, Revolution, 104.
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delirium, bringing her passion and suffering to meet that of the analysand.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{In the Beginning}, 53.}

Embroyled within the analysand’s mad discourse, the analyst actively searches for “the \textit{crisis} or the \textit{unsettling process} of meaning and subject rather than for the coherence or identity of either \textit{one} or a \textit{multiplicity} of structures.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Desire}, 125, 135.}

The Kristevan analyst is capable of dissolving into delirium, if only for a while, because she does not occupy the position of the Other as oedipal father. She is also capable of producing meaning, albeit of contingent status, because she is not \textit{really} delirious, but only temporarily allows herself to drop into that state from a more stable position in terms of the symbolic order. Such versatility is due to the analyst being, for the purposes of analysis, the imaginary father. Indeed, Kristeva explicitly discusses the benefits of the analyst posed as imaginary father in relation to transference. She writes that it “makes the transference relation dynamic, involves to the utmost the interpretative intervention of the analyst, and calls attention to countertransference as identification, this time of the analyst with the patient, along with the entire aura of imaginary formations germane to the analyst that all this entails.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales}, 30.} In particular, what this entails, is the analyst taking on “the phallic \textit{jouissance} of a subject subsumed in the dyadic, narcissistic construction of a discourse \ldots,” that is, the construction of a discourse that reduplicates the experience of a pre-subject under transference to the imaginary father.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Kristeva Reader}, 309.} Phallic jubilation is derived from “being the author/actor of a connection that leaves room for desire or for death in discourse.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Kristeva Reader}, 309.}
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Posing and de-posing

The literary analyst’s countertransference has until this point been outlined by analogy only, by both Kristeva and myself. Indeed, there are some obvious problems associated with the transposition of psychoanalytic countertransference into the literary interpretative scene (as I explained in Chapter Three). Not the least of these problems is that psychoanalytic transference takes place between two individuals: “prior to and beyond all unification, distantiation, and objectification [analytic language] ... resonates between two subjects, posed or deposed. It opens or closes their bodies to its implicit ideals and offers a possibility (not without risks) of psychic as well as physical life.”

Literary interpretative transference, on the other hand, takes place between an individual (the interpreter) and a text. How can a text have a body and a psychic life?

Perhaps the matter can be clarified by Kristeva’s suggestion that analysand and analyst are “in a sense actors who take up our roles at the beginning of each session” in order to create an unreal and illusory world that is “an amalgam of pretences, games, and masks.” Even more, speaking subjects are both actors and impresarios, acting and observing themselves acting. But actors only temporarily occupy their costumes and roles in order to bring a part to life. So, again, we return to a psychic kernel since it is clear that the participants in psychoanalysis are not really “actors” at all and that the transference between them strikes through artifice and role-playing to the core of their psyches.

Kristeva, In the Beginning, 60, my emphasis.

Kristeva, In the Beginning, 17.

Yet Kristeva states explicitly that: “the text turns out to be the analyst and every reader the analysand.” That it is the text, rather than the author, with which the interpreter undergoes countertransference is made possible, as I have indicated in my second chapter, because the writer transposes his or her bodily drives into the text in the act of writing. Therefore, once the text is complete, it may be read as if it were a subject with whom one is in conversation. In fact, this may be the case even without some sort of transubstantiation of the psyche into the text. Hans-Georg Gadamer’s proposition that “[f]or an historical text to be made the object of interpretation means that it asks a question of the interpreter,” gives a sense of the dynamics involved here. Iain Wright suggests that “Gadamer’s balancing-act would attempt to treat the subject and object of interpretation as equivalent in status ...” Thus it becomes possible to conceive of our relationship to a text of the past as a dialogue ... in which each interlocutor retains his or her identity but is prepared to learn from the other.”

If the literary text, in Kristeva’s account, may be positioned as equivalent in status to its interpreter, as I think it can in terms of reciprocated transference (and according to Gadamer’s model), it may be worthwhile to pose the text itself as the imaginary father. Certainly, in so far as the text is both semiotic and symbolic and in so far as it has taken on the psychic drives of its writer, this is plausible. Further, given that the imaginary father is to be imagined as a form, structure or

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21 Again, it needs to be noted that Kristeva’s position on the issue of transference and texts has altered (refer to Footnote 86 in my Chapter Two). Refer to my Chapters Seven and Eight for ways in which the transposition of the writer’s psyche into the text can take place in Kristeva’s theory.
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agency, rather than as a subject in its own right, such an assignation does not stretch credibility. As imaginary father, then, the text may be thought of as offering the reader guidance to correct interpretation (the paternal aspect) at the same time as enticing innovative, subjective and desirous rebel interpretations (the maternal aspect).

The impact of the imaginary father in literary interpretation dissolves, or at the very least makes porous, the barrier between the subject and object of analysis. Neither, in this situation, is master. Neither is slave. Both subject and text have conscious and unconscious facets, both articulate themselves in a language that is heterogeneous. Recognition of this state reveals the undecidable, dynamic and open nature of the relationship between text and reader. Literary interpretative readings, then, enact the “amorous dynamics of systems that are open to one another ... [and they] manifest the semiotic flow within symbolicity.” Kristeva extrapolates the consequences for her semanalysis of discourses based on transference:

In a semanalytic interpretation, it would amount, for the amorous and/or transference discourse, to a permanent stabilization-destablization between the symbolic (pertaining to referential signs and their syntactic articulation) and the semiotic (the elemental tendency) of libidinal charges toward displacement and condensation, and of their inscription, which depends on the incorporation and introjection of incorporated items; an economy that privileges orality, vocalization, alliteration, rhythmicity, etc.

This “permanent stabilization-destablization” of “the language of love” is, for Kristeva, “a flight of metaphors - it is literature.” To the extent that literary

24 Kristeva, Tales, 16.
25 Kristeva, Tales, 16.
26 Kristeva, Tales, 1.
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interpretation participates in transference, interpretation and the theories that attach to it also become open and renewable. The writing of the interpretative experience and the concomitant remodelling of literary theory are the subject of my next chapter.

Avoiding deconstructive abandonment

As valuable as countertransference is so that desire accompanied by semiotic negativity may pluralise the interpreter's reading of a text, unharnessed, this same release of jouissance may lead to the text proliferating in an unstoppable series of mimetic, fictional, connoted objects. But Kristeva draws the line at deconstruction's "freedom to say everything" because of its consumption and neutralisation of key and radical moments of thought. Specifically criticised in her early, politically oriented work is Derrida's extension of Hegelian dialectical negativity which lies at the root of his notions of différance, the trace, the grammè, and écriture, because in his hands it does not allow for symbolic resynthesis. Rather, the movement of the Derridean trace forecloses the symbolic, allowing for a deluge of meaning to open out only within what she identifies as the semiotic pre-signifying arena. In consequence, the social praxis of subjectivity is spurned for mere contemplation. Kristeva thus agrees with Derrida's many critics who condemn his semantic play as social suicide. Alan Chalmers writes about social change that "[t]he policy of 'anything goes' ... is to be resisted because of its impotence." Citing John Krige in this regard, Chalmers continues, "anything goes ... means that, in practice, everything stays" because no

27 Kristeva, Revolution, 56, 60.
28 Kristeva, Desire, 71.
coherent political force can be mustered under deconstruction’s relativism. Comparable is Kristeva’s sentiment expressed here:

Neutral in the face of all positions, theses, and structures, grammatology is, as consequence, equally restrained when they break, burst, or rupture: demonstrating disinterestedness toward (symbolic and/or social) structure, grammatology remains silent when faced with its destruction or renewal.

In so neglecting the resymbolising potential projected by initial symbolic rupture, Derrida is accused of following his own “systematic and philosophical movement of metalanguage or theory,” of creating “a mere precious variant within the symbolic enclosure: contemplation adrift.” Marxist literary theorist Terry Eagleton (like the later Christopher Norris) agrees, although he locates deconstruction’s political impotence principally within an American academic context. He maintains that Derrida’s theories have been thoroughly domesticated so as to disengage their inherent “epistemological scepticism and historical relativism” which are “profoundly antithetical to academic orthodoxy, shaking as they do the very foundations of scholarly objectivity.”

Not retaining as firm and longstanding a commitment to Marxism as Eagleton, Kristeva notes that the psychoanalytic endeavour, in contradistinction to the hermeticism posited by the notion of différance, examines the speaking subject’s connection with the psychosomatic dramas of the family, an association which


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reconnects language to an externality.\textsuperscript{34} By reattaching her theory to the psychoanalytic externality, the Kristevan literary interpreter distances herself both from her own desires and from those of the text in order to provide an interpretative middle way between deconstruction and what Kristeva calls Stoic criticism:

The Freudian position on interpretation has the immense advantage of being midway between a classic interpretative attitude - that of providing meaning through the connection of two terms from a stable place and theory - and the questioning of the subjective and theoretical stability of the interpretant which, in the act of interpretation itself, establishes the theory and the interpreter himself as interpretable objects.\textsuperscript{35}

Positioned between these two approaches, psychoanalysis enables desire (of both the analysand and analyst) to generate "interpretative power" (unavailable to classic interpretation) and "transforming power" (unavailable to deconstruction).

That Kristeva's literary interpretative methodology is midway between deconstruction and classical interpretation does not mean, however, that a compromised course is carefully negotiated. Rather than avoiding both extremes, Kristeva's method embraces these extremes simultaneously. It is somewhat like Kristeva's understanding of metaphor as reaching into the void of non-meaning and into excesses of new meanings. In the case of literary interpretation, Kristeva's literary interpretative methodology strives for one true meaning and releases a multiplicity of meanings: "I interpret, the analyst seems to say, because Meaning exists. But my interpretation is infinite because Meaning is made infinite

\textsuperscript{34} Kristeva, Revolution, 49. Paradoxically, in the now primarily psychoanalytic context in which she operates, this externality may be envisaged as an internal, yet psychologically universalist, externality. More on this point in my conclusion.

\textsuperscript{35} Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 306.
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by desire.”

The coupling of Meaning (with a capital indicating its aspiration to
the one true meaning of the symbolic order) and of meaning-multiplying desire,
points to the ambiguity of the interpreter’s position, an ambiguity epitomised in
Kristeva’s theory by the imaginary father.

The interpreter positioned as imaginary father embodies both the other (who is
desired) and the Other (the third party). This second, countertransferential
circulation of interpretation explores the relationship between the text and the
literary interpreter as other. Once detached from countertransference, though,
interpretation allows for “the salvaging of accidents on a higher level of symbolic
organisation: the I/other relationship is reworked into the relationship of the I with
the Other.” In other words, the “accidents” of meaning, desire and metaphoric
connections that arise with the analyst’s descent into semiotic delirium as she
explores her desire for the other in the second circulation of interpretation are
subsequently reworked as they adjust and modify the theory [the Other] that was
initially brought to bear on interpretation. Kristeva advises “the wise interpreter
[to] give way to delirium so that, out of his desire, the imaginary may join
interpretative closure, thus producing a perpetual interpretative creative force.”

This third circulation or phase of interpretation which occurs when the analyst
distances herself again from the analysand and from her own desires will be taken
up in my next chapter.

The combination of absolute and relative meanings that are generated by
Kristeva’s interpretations are indicated in the following passage with regard to the
psychoanalyst who:

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never stops analysing not only his patients' discourse but also his own attitude towards it which is his own counter-transference. This is not to say that analytic theory does not exist but rather that, all things considered, its consistency is rudimentary when compared to the counter-transferential operation which is always specific and which sets the interpretative machine in motion differently every time. If I know that my desire can make me delirious in my interpretative constructions, my return to this delirium allows me to dissolve its meaning, to displace by one or more notches the quest for meaning which I suppose to be one and only but which I can only indefinitely approach. There is meaning, and I am supposed to know it to the extent that it escapes me.\(^{39}\)

While desire released through countertransference makes interpretation relative and multiple since it is contingent upon being performed by this particular time by this particular analyst, rather than at another time by a different analyst. Desire warps attempts to reproduce objective criticism because different interpreters desire differently and because desire, through the secondary processes of metaphor and metonymy, nuances and multiplies meaning.

Yet, despite the suggestion that countertransference results in a proliferation of meaning by desire and a reinvigoration of interpretative theory, these regenerative forces appear to me to be over-ridden by the constraints imposed by the countertransferential method, by its very specificity (as the passage quoted above states: "[t]he counter-transferential operation ... is always specific"\(^{40}\)). While I will be exploring the restabilisation and constraint of interpretative desire in my next chapter, it is already apparent that, while the meanings of a given textual discourse may be made infinite by the associations generated by interpreter under countertransference, that myriad of meanings will always be restricted by their classification as psychoanalytic. In other words, textual meaning is defined as infinite within the psychoanalytic paradigm, which itself has a finite field of

\(^{39}\) Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 310.
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interest. Just as in the objective, textual analytic phase of Kristeva’s literary interpretative method, which appears to oscillate between textual, contextual and psychoanalytic readings, finally comes to rest with the latter dominant, so it is with her entire interpretative methodology. Desire may have been released but it, and the meaning it generated, are subsequently contained beneath the “symbolic shell” of the psychoanalytic paradigm.\textsuperscript{41} This, perhaps, is as it should be for, as I established in my third chapter, literary interpretation rests on the symbolic side of the semiotic-symbolic cusp.

\textsuperscript{40} Kristeva, \textit{Kristeva Reader}, 310.

\textsuperscript{41} Kristeva, \textit{Revolution}, 79.
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a theoretical discourse ... on the brink of fiction without ever completely toppling over into it ...

Julia Kristeva

Countertransference - renewed distancing

I have already discussed countertransference as the analyst’s surrender of interpretative mastery in order to meet both the analysand’s desire and her own. Despite an implied air of abandon, the analyst’s exploration of delirium is, to a certain extent, a calculated strategy. The analyst knows that to become entrenched in a single analytic position where the analysand may locate, specify and possess him, is for the analyst to “offer himself to cathexis like an archaic mother under a hold as loving as it is deadly.” To avoid this mortifying stasis, the more sophisticated analyst plays the game of “changing - tactfully! ... - roles and tones.” So, only a part of the countertransferential strategy involves the analyst releasing her grasp on symbolic mastery in order to get closer to the experience of the analysand. Another equally important aspect of the process is for the analyst to distance herself again from the analysand and the analysand’s trauma. Renewed distancing counteracts the stultifying effect of transference love and

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1 Kristeva, Desire, ix.
2 Kristeva, Tales, 10.
3 Kristeva, Tales, 10.
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gives the analysand the space to negotiate her own interpsychic relations based on her newly evolved intrapsychic model.

Countertransference followed by detachment may be rephrased in maternal and paternal terms:

[I]n analysis any discourse complies with the dynamics of identification, with and beyond resistances, this entails at least two consequences for interpretation. First the analyst situates himself on a ridge where, on the one hand, the “maternal” position - gratifying needs, “holding” (Winnicott)⁴ - and on the other the “paternal” position - the differentiation, distance, and prohibition that produces both meaning and absurdity - are intermingled and severed, infinitely and without end. Analytical tactfulness - ultimate refuge of an interpretation’s relevance is perhaps no more than the capacity to make use of identification and along with it the imaginal resources of the analyst, in order to accompany the patient as far as the limits and accidents of his object relations.⁵

Thus, having accompanied the analysand deep into semiotic territory and having mobilised her own imaginary resources so as to begin to construct interpretations that may help restructure the analysand’s psyche, the analyst retreats from semiotic infusion but remains a kindly presence. This strategy, described above in terms of maternal and paternal positions and below in terms of “pregnant detachment,” is redolent of the imaginary father:

For if I do not really love my patients, what could I understand in them, what could I tell them? Countertransference love is my ability to put myself in their place; looking, dreaming, suffering as if I were she, as if I were he. Fleeting moments of identification. Temporary and yet effective mergings. Fruitful sparks of understanding.

⁴ Adam Phillips writes that “[f]or Winnicott ... psychoanalytic treatment was not exclusively interpretive, but first and foremost the provision of a congenial milieu, a ‘holding environment’ analogous to maternal care” (Adam Phillips, Winnicott {Fontana Press: Hammersmith, 1988} 11).
⁵ Kristeva, Tales, 29.
Provided I move away. They leave me with a feeling not of oblateness, of giving, pity, compassion, or charity; but rather an intense allegiance like that aroused by the appearance, in a dream, of someone one has loved and hated and from whom one is, during the day, detached - that pregnant detachment still capable of love but never of hate. A generous love; somewhat outmoded but never bygone. Always compounded of regression and a certain amount of distance. 

Although now in retreat from intimacy, the analyst as imaginary father remains loving, for love, according to Kristeva, is central to the psychoanalytic experience: it is lack of love that sends the subject into analysis in the first place and it is the restoration of capacity for love (by example, through transference and with the interpretation) that is, in large part, what effects a cure.

The conjoining of the words “pregnant” and “detachment” in the passage quoted above, draws attention to qualities pertaining to maternal and paternal states. While Kristeva is careful to distinguish between maternity as a manifestation of female sexuality and womanhood as a condition of gender, she nevertheless sees her status as a woman to be important to the interpretative/analytic task: “It was perhaps necessary to be a woman to attempt to take up that exorbitant wager of carrying the rational project to the outer borders of the signifying venture of men .... But that is another matter ....”

Even though Kristeva does not expand on this point in her Preface to *Desire in Language*, it is possible to discern why, in Kristevan theory, being a woman is important to the task of interpreting poetic texts written by men. Recall Kristeva’s extrapolation of the oedipal model which results in women grasping tenaciously to

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6 Kristeva, *Tales*, 11.
7 Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, 3.
8 Kristeva, *Desire*, x.
the symbolic order for fear of being swallowed by the symbolic. While this model virtually precludes women from writing literature that may be described as the semiotisation of the symbolic, in Kristeva’s view, these same oedipal foundations work to the advantage of the analyst/interpreter. It would seem as if her strong grip on the symbolic lifeline may restrict the woman interpreter’s countertransference from becoming a wholesale subjugation to semiotic affect and, moreover, assist the subsequent redistancing process.

**Interpreter’s desire constrained, text’s desire inscribed**

The distancing phase of countertransference reinstates a degree of equilibrium in the analyst and demands greater autonomy of the analysand. Detachment cannot, however, ensure that interpretations attain an uncompromised objective status. For, having entered the twilight zone where unconscious desire and conscious resistance press against each other, that which could otherwise be reconstituted unaltered, is displaced and deformed. The “perpetual interpretative creative force” of delirium makes objective interpretation an impossibility since (as I noted in my previous chapter) “the paths of desire ensnarl the paths of knowledge.”

Ensnarl they may, but the paths of desire do not dominate the quest for knowledge. To allow them to do so would be to set off “semantic, logical, phantasmatic and interminable sequences” resulting in “a fiction, an uncentred discourse, a subjective polytopia ... cancelling the metalinguistic status of the discourses currently governing the post-analytic fate of interpretation.” The fate of such poststructuralist interpretation is conveyed by Barthes:

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9 Refer to my Chapters One and Nine.
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the discourse on the Text should itself be nothing other than text, research, textual activity, since the Text is that social space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder. The theory of the Text can only coincide with a practice of writing.\(^\text{13}\)

Kristeva's literary interpretation (like her literary theory itself), by contrast, rests on "the brink of fiction without ever completely toppling over into it ...."\(^\text{14}\) To draw back from the brink, the interpreter reins in her own desire, which her countertransferential reading allowed to flourish for a brief period, and subjugates this "to the desire to know."\(^\text{15}\) Despite its impossibility, then, the analyst still strives for accurate analysis, curbing her desire for the signifier by interpreting this desire through the sanction of a linguistic or semiological code.\(^\text{16}\) This procedure does not entail abandonment of desire but, rather, a shifting of desire. Kristeva draws on Barthes in this regard: "[t]o move from reading to criticism is to change desires; it is no longer to desire the work but to desire one’s own language."\(^\text{17}\)

Although striving for knowledge, accurate interpretation does not equate with an external objective truth, nor is it necessary for it to do so, so long as it is true and effective in relation to the analysand and the text. In the first instance, the analysand’s discourse may be delirious and the events related may be entirely fictitious. From the psychoanalyst’s point of view, "[w]hether or not you have actually experienced what you tell me is of little importance if through your

\(^{13}\) Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 164.

\(^{14}\) Kristeva, *Desire*, ix.

\(^{15}\) Kristeva, *Kristeva Reader*, 308.

\(^{16}\) Kristeva, *Desire*, 94.

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illusion, your lie, or your madness I am able to grasp the impact (for me) and the logic (for all of us) of your symptoms and fantasies.”

By extension, it is of little account if a writer has really experienced what is related in the text since it is the text itself that is the starting point. It is the interpreter’s task to feel the “impact” of the affects embedded in the text through her countertransference, and to extract the “logic” of the text in her relatively detached interpretation. Accordingly, the role of interpretation requires only that it is effective in relation to the object of analysis:

Like the delirious subject, the psychoanalyst builds, by way of interpretation, a construction which is true only if it triggers other associations on the part of the analysand, thus expanding the boundaries of the analysable. In other words, this analytic interpretation is only, in the best of cases, partially true, and its truth, even though it operates with the past, is demonstrable only by its effects in the present.

In like fashion, the Kristevan literary interpretation is only true if it works on the associations within the text thereby expanding the bounds of the analysable. The truth of textual interpretation, even though it operates in relation to a pre-existing text, is demonstrable only by its effects in the present, that is, by its effects on the readers of the interpretation. The successful interpretation is judged by its

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18 Kristeva, _In the Beginning_, 20.

19 The focus here on effectiveness links Kristeva’s theory to philosophical pragmatism (founded by C. S. Pierce (1839-1914)) according to which the meaning of a concept is determined by the experiential or practical consequences of its application (Susan Haack, “Pragmatism,” _The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy_, eds Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tusi-James (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 643). Pertinent also to Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology is John Dewey’s (1859-1952) insistence that knowledge is to be judged by its purposive success rather than by some supposed standard of accuracy of reflection of its objects (Haacke, 652). That neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty anticipates the future of post-philosophy as a genre of literature or literary criticism also has parallel’s in Kristeva’s conception of the future of psychoanalysis as being closer to literature and literary criticism than to science (Haacke, 654). Refer to Kristeva’s essay, “Extraterrestrials Suffering for Want of Love,” in her _Tales of Love_ (372-83) for her suggestion that: “What is at stake is turning a crisis into a work in progress” (380).

20 Kristeva, _Kristeva Reader_, 309.
efficacy in relating to its readers the unconscious affects (regardless of whether they are fictive or real) underpinning the text (and perhaps even allowing those readers to experience the affects themselves) and the code that inscribes those affects.

Kristeva’s literary interpretative strategy protects the text from indulgent interpretation on the part of the literary analyst. For the interpreter to start with linguistic analysis, contextual analysis and psychoanalysis, which together attempt to objectively define and describe the foundations of the text’s production, and to return to a detached, explanatory posture, ensures that the interpreter’s desires and affects do not dominate the interpretative process or outcome. Free interpretations are spurned for interpretations that are grounded in a psychoanalysis of the text.

Hermeneutic and poetic interpretations

Kristeva’s interpretative procedure involves linguistic, contextual and psychoanalytic analyses of the text followed by a countertransferential encounter with it. Throughout, her focus is upon two, quite distinct types of transference each of which have different interpretative consequences. As Cynthia Chase explains, these two types of transference identified by Freud are, firstly, the transference of affect from an unconscious one to a preconscious one and, secondly, the patient’s transference onto the analyst.21 Reading Kristeva, one can observe both of these transference operations at work, firstly, that mysterious operation whereby affect is transferred to text and, secondly, the transference of identity that takes place between the subject and its others (be they pre-oedipal, oedipal, or post-oedipal). Chase observes the effect of these two types of transference on interpretation:

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The transference 'peremptorily demanded' by the hermeneutic enterprise of interpretation, in short, conflicts with the poetics of the enterprise of textual analysis, which would have to trace, by means of displacements or transferences, not the meaning but the devices of meaning, the transferential process, of the text.\(^\text{22}\)

One of the difficulties of Kristeva's interpretation is that it simultaneously attempts to describe the literary text's hermeneutic and poetic enterprises. Thus far I have principally focused on the hermeneutic aspect of Kristeva's literary interpretations. This approach revealed Céline's writing as abject, Dostoyevsky's as depressive and Baudelaire's as epitomising loving fusion. But the Kristevan interpreter also aims to reveal the processes by which those hermeneutic meanings came about, the way in which the specific affects are transposed into the text by the writer's own transference onto the units of language. In her own words, Kristeva writes that "an analytic theory of signifying systems and practices ... would search within the signifying phenomenon for the crisis or the unsettling process of meaning and subject ...."\(^\text{23}\) After Barthes, Kristeva explains that literary interpretation should aim "to capture the law of desire that makes music, that produces writing ... [and] to experience the desire of the one who reads, to find its code and to note it down."\(^\text{24}\)

Chase explains the difficulty of interpreting meaning peculiar to the text under analysis and disclosing the psychic, metaphoric and metonymic processes that underlie textual (and, I suggest, interpretative) production:

[T]he judgement that knowledge is an effect of automatic unconscious mechanisms or tropes - gets propounded in a mode that rejects that

\(^{22}\) Chase, "Transference," 213.
\(^{23}\) Kristeva, Desire, 125.
\(^{24}\) Kristeva, Desire, 120, my emphasis.
judgement in favour of the suggestion that knowledge is a hidden meaning that can be discovered and voiced .... Or to put it another way, the function of transference as persuasion - the text’s rhetorical designs upon the reader - obscures the status of the text as a pattern of signs, its status as transference as trope.  

The affective, intrapsychic meanings may obscure the metonymic and metaphoric code which embedded those meanings in the text, but not so much as to dissuade Kristeva from interpreting such texts, as the following passage indicates (itself in a rather obfuscatory fashion):

The dialectical objectivity of this discourse [literary interpretation] stems from its “truth,” constructing itself in the operation of an inclusion exterior to its “object” [the literary text]. Its truth is to produce the motion of this inclusion (contrary to the excluding procedure of classical science) that posits and goes beyond its subjective center (repudiated by science, hypostasized in ideology) by addressing itself to a difference (writing) recognized and always maintained as external (heterogeneous) to knowing discourse, while revealing the dialectical laws formulated by this discourse.  

“Truth” here has been conceived as both meaning and device of meaning; rather than the hermeneutic and poetic enterprises of interpretation conflicting, in Kristeva, they coincide.

The interpretative layers go still deeper. As we have seen, Kristeva’s literary interpretation attempts to disclose the specific affective impulses which underlie the text under analysis (abject, loving, melancholic, etc.). It also attempts to discern a more general “truth” in the code common to the production of all literature, that which qualifies as the semiotisation of the symbolic (a code patterned on the drive economy and the primary processes). Yet there is still

26 Kristeva, Desire, 120.
Literary Interpretation

another layer of “meaning,” one which Kristeva thinks of as a core of non-meaning underlying the other interpretative meanings. It is indicated in analytical discourse in three ways: by the analyst’s silences which reveal “the ex-centricity of desire with regard to meaning”; by the analyst’s countertransference “which sets the interpretative machine in motion differently every time”; and finally, by that which Freud identified as the unnamable “umbilical” of dreams above which all interpretations float. Kristeva reconstrues this “nameless space” as the archaic mother (or Thing) that is resistant to meaning.

Recalling that repression of desire for the mother at oedipalisation leads to an endless search for metaphoric and metonymic replacements for her, the analyst attempts to show that all phantasms, all texts and all interpretations are sustained by “a desiring indebtedness to the maternal continent.” Indeed, “true analytic work” is defined by Kristeva as the “dissolving [of] obvious, immediate, realistic meaning from discourse so that the meaninglessness/madness of desire may appear and, beyond that, so that very phantasm is revealed as an attempt to return to the unnameable.” Kristeva concludes that, in so far as they are both constructed from language, fiction and analytic discourse expose “our ultimate and inseparable fetish” and are thus ultimately unanalysable.

Despite exposure of a meaningless core underlying the affective meanings, Kristeva maintains that there is an overwhelming desire to give meaning and, what is more, “[i]t is the critic’s task ... to coagulate an island of meaning upon

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27 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 310.
28 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 310-11.
29 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 318.
30 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 312.
31 Kristeva, Abjection, 37.
Kristeva suggests that the urge to locate or impose meaning is "rooted in the speaking subject's need to reassure himself of his image and his identity faced with an object." Certainly it is not difficult to see that striving for psychic-social competency impels the suffering analysand to search for meaning to fill the void. Kristeva as literary interpreter, too, yearns to overlay the lost and unnameable maternal continent, in her "quest for a little more truth, an impossible truth, concerning the meaning of speech, concerning our condition as speaking beings."  

**Interpretative style**

I have been concerned in this central part of my thesis primarily with the processes undergone by the Kristevan literary interpreter - namely with "the double motion of adhesion and of distancing" which gives due weight to the various textual analytic disciplines and to desire in relation to the text. This combination is designed to balance the corresponding performances of conscious and unconscious thought and being. I have also been concerned to explain the different types of meaning sought by the literary analyst: affective meaning, the code by which meaning is transferred into the text and the ultimate meaningless which psychoanalysis posits at the core of all texts and all beings. Now, finally, I come to the way in which Kristeva's literary interpretation is written.

To seek meaning and truth is, in a sense, to reaffirm the symbolic even if interpretation takes in both semiotic and symbolic modalities. So, even while the

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33 Kristeva, *Kristeva Reader*, 304.
34 Kristeva, *Desire*, ix.
35 Kristeva, *Desire*, 94.
36 Kristeva, *Desire*, ix.
literary interpreter is exploring the desires and drives associated with the semiotic, he “remains riveted to his ‘I’ that hoards polyvalences, and signs them ...[;] starting from his opaque ‘I’ and moving towards the writings of an other, he returns to this same ‘I,’ which, in the process, has become language: the critic ‘confronts ... his own language’ ....”\(^{37}\) Although interpretation must be written in language that can communicate, neither Kristeva nor Barthes believe that the literary analyst is obliged to use clear, neutral and jargon-free language.\(^{38}\) Rather, in Barthes’ words, as quoted by Kristeva: “Although we don’t know how the reader \textit{speaks} to a book, the critic himself is obliged to produce a particular ‘tone’; and this tone, in the final analysis cannot be anything but affirmative.”\(^{39}\) While Kristeva agrees with Barthes’ in this regard, her emphasis is slightly different. Barthes’ point is that the literary critic’s language cannot be value-free or linguistically neutral because the critic’s personal, subjective perspective is manifest in an interpretation’s tone. Kristeva’s emphasis is on the critic’s affirmation.

The interpreter’s affirmation is grounded in the logic of the symbolic. Whereas \textit{reading} is at liberty to revel in \textit{jouissance} without closure, literary \textit{interpretation} codifies the semiotic within a text. Interpretation is “a grid [that] lays out jouissance.”\(^{40}\) The task of communicating the textual semiotic in interpretation relies upon “finding a \textit{code}, while allowing what is said and what is not said to float haphazardly.”\(^{41}\) Structured as a grid overlaying \textit{jouissance}, literary interpretation “openly assume[s] its fictional status without, however, abandoning


\(^{38}\) This was the argument of Raymond Picard, as published in his 1956 article “Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle délite.” It was the republished, expanded version of Picard’s article in 1965, that generated Barthes’ response, \textit{Critique et vérité} (\textit{Criticism and Truth}).

\(^{39}\) Barthes in Kristeva’s \textit{Desire}, 108.

\(^{40}\) Kristeva, \textit{Desire}, 119.

\(^{41}\) Kristeva, \textit{Desire}, 120.
[its] goal of stating One Meaning, The True Meaning, of the discourse [it] interpret[s]."

The style of Kristeva's literary interpretation is important. It should not be a logical, linear exposition tracking the desire discerned in the text, nor "a complete or objective history ...." The literary interpreter shades and colours communicative language (the same language that gives rise to semiological understanding) with "selections, insights, symptoms ...." Hence, interpretation "retains from scriptural negativity a weakened, but persistent, effect" and captures within its style (although not to the same extent as poetic language) that "unobjectified, unnameable 'object,'" which may be labelled "emotion" or "drive." Certainly Kristeva's own literary interpretations abide by this stricture; they leap from insight to speculation, from subject to narrative, from psychoanalysis to linguistics to history and from exposition to metaphor. Precisely what Kristeva achieves by employing this literary interpretative technique will be addressed in the following chapters.

Interpretative spirals

It should be clear that Kristeva does not embark on her literary analyses from a neutral position from where her personal, subjective, unconscious affects and desires can run riot, free-associating in response to the text. Rather, Kristeva's starting point is a highly complex and sophisticated psycholiterary theory. Each literary interpretation is conducted in the light of that theory and bears witness to it.


Kristeva, *Tales*, 12.

Kristeva, *Tales*, 12.

But Kristeva’s literary interpretation is not necessarily contained by the pre-existing psycholiterary theory. If the interpretative text were to “succumb to the interpretative intentions of the interpreter, … then we have the whole range of domination from suggestion to propaganda to revolution.”46 This fate is avoided by the deployment of countertransference which not only affects the particular interpretation, but can also affect the underlying theory. The influence of countertransference means that “the analyst risks the dissolution of his own knowledge, that is, of what the patient presumes his knowledge to be and of the knowledge that he has brought to bear in other cases. Each analysis modifies - or should modify - at least some of the beliefs about psychodynamics that I held before hearing what the analysand had to say.”47 So, although transference and countertransference between text and analyst may produce specific interpretations, the transferential process is not closed off because textual interpretation may modify the theory that the interpreter brought to the text:

Whatever the object one selects (a patient’s discourse, a literary or journalistic text or certain socio-political behaviour), its interpretation reaches its full power, so as to tip the object towards the unknown of the interpretative theory or, more simply, toward the theory’s intentions, only when the interpreter confronts the interpretable object.48

The analyst, having been projected into the semiotic other, discerns within that space “the unknown of his theory” and extracts from that place “a few concepts

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46 Kristeva, *Kristeva*, 306. Passages such as this (from “Psychoanalysis and the Polis,” originally delivered as a paper at “The Politics of Interpretation” symposium held at the University of Chicago’s Center for Continuing Education in 1981) point to the distance Kristeva has travelled since *Revolution in Poetic Language* where she explicitly sought to highlight the royal road to social revolution. See my Chapters Two and Four.

47 Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, 51.

necessary for building a new model” of language, of interpretation, of psychic functioning. This new model in turn becomes ripe for further amendment when it is brought to bear upon new texts undergoing analysis: “Discourse in this case is renewed; it can begin again: it forms a new object and a new interpretation in this reciprocal transference.” Here Kristeva summarises her goal:

[...]he task is not to make an interpretative summa in the name of a system of truths - for that attitude has always made interpretation a rather poor cousin of theology. The task is, instead, to record the crisis of modern interpretative systems without smoothing it over, to affirm that this crisis is inherent in the symbolic function itself and to perceive as symptoms all constructions, including totalizing interpretation, which try to deny this crisis: to dissolve, to displace indefinitely, in Kafka's words, ‘temporarily and for a lifetime.'

It would appear, then, that not only does Kristevan interpretation attempt to locate the laws of desire and of affect within the text, to find the code, and to note it down (refer above), but it should also note the effect of that same code on interpretation itself. Interpretative practice, then, may alter the theory of interpretation.

Kristeva imagines such a malleable theory as an interpretative spiral in counterdistinction to an interpretative circle. An interpretative circle harbours its object of analysis within its own logic (notwithstanding the projection of that object onto a distant theoretical place to enable interrogation) as Kristeva explains with reference to German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Interpretative spirals, on the other hand, allow interpretations flowing from the object of analysis to escape the logic of the interpretative theory that was applied

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49 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 306; Kristeva, Desire, 27.
50 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 306.
51 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 319.
to it. Kristeva writes that the interpretative spiral is “a place of dispute and self­questioning, a ‘circle’ that remains open. Its ‘end’ does not rejoin its ‘beginnings’, but, on the contrary, rejects and rocks it, opening up the way to another discourse, that is, another subject and another method ....” Kristeva, by introducing countertransference into the interpretative process, sanctions interpretative spirals over interpretative circles:

The dimension of desire ... confers not only an interpretative power but also a transforming power to these new, unpredictable signifying events which must be called an imaginary. I would suggest that the wise interpreter give way to delirium so that, out of his desire, the imaginary may join interpretative closure, thus producing a perpetual interpretative creative force.

Interpretation then, can never be complete, not only because of the split in language and in being which renders all discourse heterogeneous, but also because psychoanalysis, by preventing the closure of interpretation as a self-sufficient totality, achieves “a discourse on discourse, an interpretation of interpretation [constituting] the true life of interpretations (in the plural).”

The next obvious step would be for me to conduct another interpretation of interpretation, to test my proposed model of Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology against her actual literary interpretations. To do so, however, would be to erect an artificial barrier between Kristeva’s psycholiterary theory, her literary interpretative methodology and her literary interpretative practice. Just as

\[ \text{Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 78.} \]
\[ \text{Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 306-07.} \]
\[ \text{Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 314.} \]
countertransference affects both the literary interpretation and the literary theory that was brought to bear upon it, so too there is no strict demarcation between Kristeva's literary interpretative methodology and practice. As the following three chapters will demonstrate, Kristeva's literary analyses and interpretations are as much vehicles for exploring, articulating and expanding her own psycholiterary theory as they are applications of a particular interpretative model to a particular literary text. Using her own model of interpretative spirals, one can indeed posit Kristeva's literary interpretations as vibrating in dynamic interchange with her literary interpretative theory and methodology. It certainly can be argued that each enhances and expands the other in a spiral which passes through the points of theory, interpretation and the literary text.
Chapter Seven

The Writer as Womanly Man

the artist takes himself ... for the preoedipal father ... 

a coalescence of the two sexes ...

Julia Kristeva

The writer as “imaginary father” is a concept more clearly articulated in Kristeva’s paper “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper’ or the Return of Orpheus” than anywhere else in her writings. In short, Kristeva interprets *Ulysses*’ characters and themes to uncover the mechanics of the identification Joyce underwent with the imaginary father in his production of the text.

Yet, despite the imaginary father’s gender ambiguity (the imaginary father is for the infant an aspect of the mother, being her psychic introjection of the phallus) and despite Joyce’s own description of every artist as a womanly man or a manly woman, Kristeva does not focus particularly on the issue of the imaginary father’s gender ambiguity in “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper.’” That she does not do so is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the gender ambiguity of the imaginary father is vital to his usefulness as a model for literary writers. Situated on the cusp of the paternal and maternal spheres, the imaginary father is emissary to the symbolic law and language of the father but is still closely integrated within the semiotic *chora* of the mother. Writers who have undergone an identification with the imaginary father take on “his” pivotal position, becoming the semiotic-symbolic

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thesis. From this position the writer imports pre- and trans-verbal marks into linguistic representation thereby semiotising the symbolic.

The second reason why the imaginary father's gender ambiguity is important with regard to writing in general, and Joyce in particular, is that literature has long been imagined as resulting from either paternal or maternal creative forces. While writers have frequently favoured either one or the other of the maternal and paternal metaphors, in Joyce they are deployed equally. While Kristeva herself does not draw out this theme in "Joyce 'The Gracehoper,'" doing so will illuminate Kristeva's theory of the writer identified with the imaginary father. I will begin by exploring to what extent the gender ambiguity of Kristeva's imaginary father is prefigured in the writing of Joyce and others.

**Paternity as metaphor for authoring**

The ideas of the author possessing a god-like, paternal authority over the work, and of the author performing a gestating, nurturing, maternal role in relation to the work, each have a strong lineage in the literary imagination. One pervasive model of literary parenting has been fatherhood, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar memorably hypothesise in their opening line of *The Madwoman in the Attic*: "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?"2 The answer is, from their perspective, a resounding "yes," and they go on to elaborate:

the patriarchal notion that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization ...[;] the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power

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like his penis. More, his pen’s power, like his penis’s power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim ....

Literary examples which underpin these claims include, courtesy of Gilbert and Gubar’s researches, Gerard Manley Hopkins’ assertion that the artist’s “most essential quality [is] mastery execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one’s thought on paper, on verse, or whatever the matter is .... The male quality is the creative gift.”

That women are exempted from literary potency is an idea that is also expounded by nineteenth-century editor and critic Rufus Griswold:

It is less easy to be assured of the genuineness of literary ability in women than in men .... The most exquisite susceptibility of the spirit, and the capacity to mirror in dazzling variety the effects which circumstances or surrounding minds work upon it, may be accompanied [in women] by no power to originate, nor even, in any proper sense, to reproduce.

Not all such misogynistic statements regarding creativity have come from the penis-pens of men, however. Women writers, even feminist women writers, have made statements which are complicit with the notion that artistic creative energy is the preserve of men. Simone de Beauvoir is notorious in this regard. Having posited The Second Sex upon an existentialist ethics, de Beauvoir underscores in argument and in rhetoric existentialism’s gendering of transcendence (“being-for itself” or pour-soi ) as masculine, and immanence (“being-in-itself” or en-soi) as feminine. For de Beauvoir the female body, and particularly the bloated, fluid-

3 Gilbert and Gubar, 4, 6.
5 Rufus Wilmot Griswold, The Female Poets of America (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1849) 3.
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leaking, maternal body, is a gross, material, immanent thing which obstructs women from achieving literary greatness as an expression of human transcendence. In a summation worthy of the above-quoted Rufus Griswold, de Beauvoir states:

The writer of originality, unless dead, is always shocking, scandalous; novelty disturbs and repels. Woman is still astonished and flattered at being admitted to the world of thought, of art - a masculine world. She is on her best behaviour; she is afraid to disarrange, to investigate, to explode; she feels she should seek pardon for her literary pretensions through her modesty and good taste.7

Kristeva arrives at essentially the same conclusion as de Beauvoir regarding writing by women writing that: “the beyond of the couple is the beyond of the mother. Those who believe they have reached it do not cease violating her in the language: they are creators of style, of music... As to the woman, she reaches that beyond as mother-woman, through the community of her children that neutralizes the pregnancy of the couple.”8 However, while for de Beauvoir women’s alleged inability to produce novel writing is due to their immanence, a handicap embodied in pregnancy, for Kristeva women are held back by patterns of psychological development. She maintains that, at oedipalisation women are not as firmly secured to the symbolic order because they have to reject the mother as link to the pre-oedipal, pre-subjective state and identify with her as a gender model, as I have mentioned before.9 The outcome of this psychological dilemma is that a woman is “more vulnerable within the symbolic order, more fragile when she suffers within it, more virulent when she protects herself from it.”10 Accordingly, “[o]nce the

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7 De Beauvoir, 717.
8 Kristeva, Tales of Love, 228, Kristeva’s italics.
9 Kristeva, About Chinese Women, 34-38; Kristeva, The Kristeva Reader, 204.
10 Kristeva, Kristeva Reader, 204-05.
moorings of the ego begin to slip, life itself cannot hang on: slowly, gently, death settles in.\textsuperscript{11} Consequently, women writers include, in one camp, Virginia Woolf, “who sank wordlessly into the river, her pockets weighted with stones. Haunted by voices, by waves, by lights, in love with colours - blue, green ...” and Sylvia Plath, “yet another woman disillusioned with words and meanings [who] fled to the refuge of lights, rhythms, sounds ....”\textsuperscript{12} In another camp are those who hold too firmly to the symbolic anchor of linguistic representation and subjective unity to enable literary innovation or, like Marguerite Duras, to enable the importation of semiotic emotional traces into the text.

**Childbirth metaphor**

Despite her views on women writers however, *pregnancy*, in so far as it is associated with the linguistic and psychological manifestations of the semiotic *chora* remains, for Kristeva, a generative and regenerative force, albeit one that can only, paradoxically, be fully realised by male writers: “*Those who believe they have reached it* [reached beyond attachment to the mother] *do not cease violating her in language: they are the creators of style, of music .... As to the woman, she reaches that beyond as mother-woman, through the community of her children ....*”\textsuperscript{13} Notwithstanding Kristeva’s view that the creative forces founded in maternity are only available to men (because only they are sufficiently secured to the symbolic to enable exploration of the semiotic *chora* without risking collapse of the ego), pregnancy and childbirth metaphors have frequently been used by women to describe their own literary creative processes.

\textsuperscript{12} Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, 39, 40.
\textsuperscript{13} Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 228, italics are Kristeva’s own.
In a comprehensive paper on the childbirth metaphor, Susan Stanford Friedman writes that women writers who use the childbirth metaphor tend to make "deeply personal statements about how they try to resolve their conflict with [the] cultural prescription ... that conceives of woman and writer, motherhood and authorhood, babies and books, as mutually exclusive." Friedman analyses the different ways in which women writers utilise the childbirth metaphor, ranging from confirmation of the patriarchal separation of creativities to advocacy of a feminine form of writing. Two examples include Sylvia Plath's "Stillborn," in which the union of creation and procreation presage death:

These poems do not live: it's a sad diagnosis.
They grew their toes and fingers well enough
....
They sit so nicely in the pickling fluid!
They smile and smile and smile and smile at me.
....
But they are dead, and their mother near dead with distraction,
And they stupidly stare, and do not speak of her.

And from Ntozake Shange:

this baby wants to jump out of my mouth
at a reading someplace/
the baby's refusing to come out/down
she wants to come out a spoken word
and I have no way to reach her/she is
no mere choice of words/how can I convince her
to drop her head and take on the world like the
rest of us

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15 Friedman, 86-93.
Male writers’ use of the childbirth metaphor, by contrast, tends to reflect the ethos of their time, according to Freidman. For instance, in the Enlightenment period, Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Alexander Pope (1688-1744) alike presupposed that their readers would automatically connect natal functioning with corrupt intellectual functioning, as Terry Castle observes. The Romantic period, on the other hand, which praised “the organic nature of poetic genius,” likened the production of literature to the birthing process in an entirely positive fashion.

One of the most famous modernist examples of the artistic process mimicking the natural process of reproduction is Joyce’s “Oxen of the Sun” episode in Ulysses in which the writer draws a powerful analogy between the organic development of language and the development of the child in the womb. I will return to “Oxen of the Sun” presently.

Paternity as a legal fiction

Neither Joyce nor Kristeva, though, perceive the creative process as being confined to either one or the other of the reproductive metaphors. Rather, both view literary creativity as being a product of both maternal and paternal forces; neither is sufficient in isolation. It may be surmised from Kristeva’s and Joyce’s

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19 Fusion of maternal procreatrix and paternal creator in literary metaphors and, as Freud points out, in various ancient deity figures (Egyptian goddess Mut, in Isis and Hathor, and in the Greek gods associated with Dionysus), is common enough. But Freud looks to early childhood sexual experiences to explain “the puzzling psychological fact that the human imagination does not boggle at endowing a figure which is intended to embody the essence of the mother with the mark of male potency which is the opposite of everything maternal” (Freud, “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood,” XI (1910) 94). Men find the attribution of male organs to female figures unextraordinary because male children initially assume that all humans have a penis. Even upon discovery of the female “lack,” the boy child believes that girls have a small penis that will grow later, and finally, that girls did have one that has since been chopped off to leave only a “wound” in its place (Freud, XI, 94). Freud reports that prior to the castration complex, "at
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writings, that the paternal metaphor is insufficient to describe the creative process because of its overtly symbolic status, a status that must remain on a symbolic level because of the uncertainty concerning paternity in the reproductive process. Consequently, once legitimacy is defined as stemming from the paternal rather than the maternal association, the maternal metaphor is insufficiency symbolic to describe the whole creative process. This proposition ties in neatly with Kristeva’s own theory concerning the necessity for art to be composed of both semiotic and symbolic forces and with their confluence as embodied by the imaginary father. It also reflects structuralist thinking on the matter.

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss writes: “The woman is never more than the symbol of her lineage. Matrilineal descent is the authority of the woman’s father or brother.” Continuing, after Lévi-Strauss, de Beauvoir affirms: “She is only the intermediary of authority, not the one who holds it.”

The physical discontinuity that is the father’s lot in biological reproduction, and which instils the father’s desire for a legitimising fiction, also holds true for literary production where the read work is divorced in time and space from its creator. Hence, existentialist Sartre suggests that the role of the written text “is something like the transmissions of titles and powers in the matriarchate where the mother does not possess the names, but is the indispensable intermediary between uncle and

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20 Such uncertainties have undoubtedly been mitigated by DNA testing but even this aid to establishing paternity does not alter the remoteness of fathers to the gestation process.


22 De Beauvoir, 103.
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nephew." These ideas have also been woven into poststructuralist discourses on language and the text. Derrida uses the idea to elaborate upon the absence of a central origin or a transcendent signified to any discourse, an absence that opens the way onto endless plays of signification. Re-entering the psychoanalytic realm, Lacan shows that the Name of the Father is a legal and symbolic, rather than a natural or physical, claim to authority. All claims to legitimacy under the Law of the Father are, consequently, founded upon lack of certitude and the desire to fill that lack. Signifiers metonymically shift, and shift again, in order to fill the gap left by the mother.

Yet, it is Joyce himself who has most memorably related the notion that paternity is "a legal fiction." Apparently this idea occurred to Joyce a couple of months after the birth of his first child, Giorgio, in July 1905. At that time Joyce declared: "I think a child should be allowed to take his father's or mother's name at will on the coming of age. Paternity is a legal fiction." Stephen Dedalus elaborates further upon this idea in Ulysses: "Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten .... Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?"

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23 Sartre, 47.


26 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1990) 207. The idea that the incertitude concerning paternity encourages the legalising of a fiction is so pervasive in Joyce that it was the theme of an entire selection of papers at the Ninth Joyce Symposium in 1984 in Frankfurt. Kristeva's paper "Joyce 'The Grasshoper' or the Return of Orpheus" was one of several with a deconstructivist or a psychoanalytic bent collectively titled "The Mystical Estate or the Legal Fiction: Paternity in *Ulysses."

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The author as father-mother

Joyce may have understood that the legal framework supporting paternity is founded upon incertitude, but traditionally those writers who have used paternity as a metaphor for the processes of authorship have tended to overlook the uncertainty surrounding paternity. This oversight has been supported, it seems to me, by the importation of the biological maternal aspect of procreation into the paternal metaphor. 27 Janusko confirms that the theme of male pregnancy occurs often in Ulysses. 28 Buck Mulligan makes fun of this idea: "Himself his own father, Sonmulligan told himself. Wait. I am big with child. I have an unborn child in my brain. Palla Athena! A play! The play's the thing! Let me parturate!" 29 In spite of Mulligan’s sarcastic tone in this passage, Joyce did think of authorship as an act of maternity as much as paternity. Although Maria Jolas is a notoriously unreliable witness to events in Paris between the wars, 30 her remark that "Joyce talked of fatherhood as if it were motherhood" does fit the pattern of his own assertions. 31 Indeed, there is ample evidence that Joyce perceived artistic creation as a male version of childbearing. 32 Joyce draws the two together in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, in which Stephen thinks: "O! In the virgin womb of...

27 I am not saying here that maternity may be reduced to this role, but only that the physicality of the mother’s relationship to her offspring affords a certainty of parenthood that cannot be enjoyed with the same degree of confidence by the father whose contribution may be merely an “instant of blind rut” divorced both in time and space from the birth (Joyce, Ulysses, 208).
29 Joyce, Ulysses, 208.
30 Deirdre Bair talking on the topic of “Biography” at the Adelaide Festival Writer’s Week 1994. Bair has written biographies of Samuel Beckett, Simone de Beauvoir and Anaïs Nin.
31 Richard Ellman, Joyce, 303.
32 Janusko, 24.
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the imagination the word was made flesh.” More explicitly, Joyce wrote in 1912 to Nora Barnacle of Dubliners: “sitting at the table, thinking of the book I have written, the child which I have carried for years and years in the womb of the imagination as you carried in your womb the children you love, and of how I had fed it day after day out of my brain and memory ...” Freidman is undoubtedly correct in her assertion that Joyce’s comparison of his and Nora’s mental and reproductive labours “replicates the sexual division of labor and reinforces the mind-body split permeating the patristic tradition that influenced his own Jesuit background.” Yet, it is the very thoroughness with which Joyce explores what is for him an affirmative association, that elevates Joyce into a class of his own in the use of the childbirth metaphor to illuminate the literary process.

The analogy was taken to new heights in the “Oxen of the Sun” episode of Ulysses. This scene takes place in a maternity hospital where Mina Purefoy has been in labour for three days. Here Stephen and Bloom meet for the first time. The episode is structured around the stages of development of the human embryo, each stage of which is marked by a different phase of the development of English literature. In 1920 Joyce described his plan for the chapter to Frank Budgen:

Scene, lying-in hospital. Technique: a nine-parted episode without divisions introduced by a Sallustian-Tacitean prelude (the unfertilised ovum), then by way of English alliterative and monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon (“Before born the babe had bliss. Within the womb he own worship ...”) then by way of Mandeville ... then Mallory’s Morte d’Arthur ... then the Elizabethan chronicle style ... then a passage solemn, as of Milton, Taylor, Hooker, followed by a choppy Latin-

34 Richard Ellman, Joyce, 342.
35 Freidman, 79.
gossipy bit, style of Burton-Browne, then a passage Bunyanesque ... after a diarystyle bit Pepys-Evelyn ... and so on through Defoe-Swift and Steele-Addison-Sterne and Landor-Pater-Newman until it ends in a frightful jumble of Pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowry slang and broken doggerel. This progression is also linked back at each part subtly with some foregoing episode of the day and, besides this, with the natural stages of development in the embryo ... Bloom is the spermatozoon, the hospital the womb, the nurse the ovum, Stephen the embryo.

How's that for high?37

Robert Janusko observes that “Oxen of the Sun” has certainly been too “high” for some readers who feel that it is a most difficult episode to interpret and, he writes, they “seem almost ready to execute Joyce for having violated their aesthetic standards by writing it.”38 Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of its interpretability, the “Oxen of the Sun” chapter demonstrates, beyond question, the importance of the maternal metaphor to Joyce.39

The point is though, and this draws closer to Kristeva regarding writers’ identification with the imaginary father, that Joyce did not rely solely upon the maternal metaphor. For instance, Joyce has Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist*, who is “striving to forge out an esthetic philosophy,” talk not only of “artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction,” but also say that the writer is like the patriarchal God of creation, the “old father, old artificer” who remains “within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.”40

37 Joyce quoted in Janusko, 2, 3.
38 Janusko, 3.
39 Janusko affirms that, while the embryological terminology and references in “Oxen of the Sun” are only a point of departure for Joyce, he “did consult a gestation chart while writing the chapter and took copious notes on the characteristics of the developing embryo which he evidently felt were reflected in his writing” (41).
40 Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, 190, 163, 228, 194-95.
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Joyce further explores the notion of the male artist fathering his work in the library scene of *Ulysses*, in which Stephen argues that something of Shakespeare himself is transmuted into the character of the King of Denmark and that his dead son Hamnet lives on in the character of Hamlet. Clearly, the notion of fatherhood as "an instant of blind rut" that renders paternity a legal fiction, is not what Joyce, or Kristeva in her interpretation of Joyce, have in mind.41 Quite the opposite, in fact. Now fatherhood becomes "a mystical estate" which Kristeva interprets as "true filiation."42 It will unfold that fatherhood, as discussed by Stephen in *Ulysses*, seems to function in a manner akin to Kristevan semiotic maternal fusion, thus escaping the restrictions of biological paternal detachment.

**Joyce's reading of Hamlet**

Both Joyce and Kristeva present the view that historically real biographical events lived by the writer may be discovered and decoded in that writer's fiction. Not only are conscious, biographical events translated into literature, but so too are unconscious events and activities. Joyce himself suggests that their unconscious processes can be traced in his characters' words. In 1922 he spoke of "the great talkers" he had put into *Ulysses*, "[t]hey are all there, the great talkers, they and the things they forgot. In *Ulysses* I have recorded, simultaneously, what a man says, sees, thinks, and what such seeing, thinking and saying does, to what you Freidians call the subconscious ...."43 Joyce indicates here that language carries both conscious and unconscious meanings, a similar, if not identical proposition to Kristeva's. Further, Kristeva and Joyce alike maintain that the writer not only

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41 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 208.
42 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 207; Kristeva, "Joyce 'The Gracehoper,'” 174 (my emphasis).
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psychically lives in his own works, but that “he physically survives through his works, which are his true ‘begetting.”’

Joyce’s interest in Shakespeare’s embodiment within his play *Hamlet* predates *Ulysses* by several years. In June 1904 (around “Bloomsday,” the 16th) Joyce began to formulate his theory that Shakespeare should not be associated with *Hamlet*, as *Ulysses*’ Mr. Best conjectured, but with Hamlet’s father. First presented by Joyce in a guest lecture at the university in Trieste and supplemented by much further reading, this idea provided the basis of Stephen’s argument in the library scene of *Ulysses.* Although Stephen finally disclaims belief in the theory, his biographer Richard Ellman maintains that it nevertheless “suits” Stephen and, moreover, that it was a theory which Joyce himself took seriously.

Joyce sought evidence for his theory in the plays themselves, asserting that certain characters and events reveal dramas in Shakespeare’s life. *Venus and Adonis* is presented as a mirror of Shakespeare’s own seduction by Anne, a woman eight years his senior, as Stephen argues: “He was chosen, it seems to me. If others have their will Ann hath a way ... The grey eyed goddess who bends over the boy Adonis, stooping to conquer, as prologue to the swelling act, is a boldfaced Stratford wench who tumbles in a cornfield a lover younger than herself.” Joyce is convinced that this “hot in the blood” Anne, who had had-her-way with the young Shakespeare, later betrayed her husband. The theme of cuckoldry is

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47 Freud’s study of *Hamlet*, in which he writes that “it can of course only be the poet’s own mind which confronts us in Hamlet,” is thoroughly psychobiographic in its approach (Freud, IV, 265). Freud maintains that the death of Shakespeare’s father immediately prior to the writing of the play and the earlier death in 1596 of his son named Hamnet (at age eleven) promoted the remembrance of childhood feelings about his own father, feelings which have been translated into drama.
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sustained, according to Stephen, in *Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like it, The Tempest, Measure for Measure and Hamlet.* 49 *Richard III and King Lear* are, for Joyce, evidence that Anne took as her lovers her two brothers-in-law, Richard and Edmund, whose names are borne by the villains of those plays. And, returning to *Hamlet,* just as the Danish queen betrayed her husband by marrying his brother, so too Shakespeare was cuckolded by Anne. So he appears in *Ulysses,* as if decked out with the traditional horns of the cuckold, in the fleeting glimpse Stephen and Bloom catch of him in Bella’s brothel mirror. 50 Ellman fleshes out Joyce’s argument, suggesting that in the construction of Hamlet as his angry swordsman son, Shakespeare exacts a literary revenge against his wife and her lovers. 51

That the ghost of the King of Denmark is, in a way, Shakespeare embodied, is proposed by Stephen in *Ulysses:

- A father, Stephen said, battling against hopelessness, is a necessary evil. He wrote the play in the months that followed his father’s death. If you hold that he, a graying man with two marriageable daughters, with thirtyfive years of life, *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,* with fifty years experience, is the beardless undergraduate from Wittenberg than you must hold that his seventyyear old mother is the lustful queen. No. The corpse of John Shakespeare does not walk the night. From hour to hour it rots and rots. He rests, disarmed of fatherhood, having devised that mystical estate upon his son. 52

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49 Joyce, *Ulysses,* 212.
50 Joyce, *Ulysses,* 567. Francois Laroque writes that: “the horns of the stag-man, an avatar of the ancient Celtic god Zeus-Cernunnos, were more likely to be seen by Elizabethans simply as the ridiculous emblem of the cuckold, rather than as a symbol of strength and potency” (Francois Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 48.
52 Joyce, *Ulysses,* 207.
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Having taken on the mantle of his dead father, Shakespeare plays the dead king in the productions of the play and Hamlet, the son to whom he speaks, is envisaged as Hamnet, the playwright’s own and only son who died aged eleven:

- The play begins. A player comes on under the shadow, made up in the castoff mail of a court buck, a wellset man with a bass voice. It is the ghost, the king, a king and no king, and the player is Shakespeare who has studied Hamlet all the years of his life which were not vanity in order to play the part of the spectre. He speaks the words to Burbage, the young player who stands before him beyond the rack of cerecloth, calling him by a name:

  Hamlet, I am thy father’s spirit.

bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince, young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live forever.

- Is it possible that the player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son’s name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been prince Hamlet’s twin) is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen. Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway?

**Kristeva’s response to the Hamlet theory**

In her reading of *Ulysses*, Kristeva underscores Joyce’s humanising of the father figure: “far from being a ‘lofty impersonal power,’ the author is, on the one hand, dependent upon his biography for the life of his works ... and, on the other hand, lives on physically in his works, which form his true filiation.”

This statement offers a parallel view on authorship to the one articulated by Joyce but, in the next sentence, Kristeva introduces psychoanalytic concepts such as “real” and

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53 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 188-89.
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“symbolic,” and terms associated with intrapsychic identification, like “loved” and “beloved.” She writes: “[t]he idea of an osmosis imposes itself upon Joyce, an osmosis not only symbolic but real, between creator and created, father and son, loved and beloved.” Kristeva’s psychoanalysing of Joyce’s theory continues in the following passage in which she proposes that literary style:

derives perhaps from this transfusion between two entities (father-son). Certainly at first phantasmatic, this transfusion assures the real and infinite suppleness of the writing subject, his incredible theatricalism, his perversion inspired by the adored suffering (“expires”) of the father, his almost unlimited capacity for imaginary resurrections in the place of the father put to death (like Christ, but also like the King of Denmark) ....

While here Kristeva launches into psychoanalytic explanations which differ markedly from Joyce’s more soberly plotted thesis, in other passages she appears to echo Joyce’s style of argument quite closely. For example, Stephen maintains that Shakespeare, having recently lost his own father, John, becomes the father of his family line, not only of his biological children but also of the fictional characters whom he begets: “When Rultandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote Hamlet he was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson ....” Kristeva writes in response that “[t]he father dies in order that the son may live; the son dies in order that the father be incarnated in his oeuvre and become his own son,” consequently, “the dramatist’s entire corpus [must be] considered as real filiation.”

57 Joyce, Ulysses, 208.
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Joyce’s atomic transformation

Joyce and Kristeva agree that the author really is present in his writing. It is interesting to compare, therefore, how each describes the way in which flesh and blood authors beget their fictional families.

Ellman notes that among the pamphlets that Joyce had in his possession prior to the writing of *Ulysses* was Freud’s *A Childhood Memory of Leonardo da Vinci*, with its tracking of childhood memories to the painter’s later artistic production. He also owned Ernest Jones’ *The Problem of Hamlet and the Oedipus-Complex* which details, in extension of Freud, that the writing of *Hamlet* was a direct product of Shakespeare’s own oedipal feelings heightened by the recent death of his father. While Joyce was well known for his caustic disdain of psychoanalysis as a therapy and his outright dismissal of the oedipus complex and the Freudian family romance, Ellman makes the general point (in *The Consciousness of Joyce* to which Kristeva makes reference) that:

> The relevance to Joyce of this new way of thinking about the mind can hardly be overstressed. The three essays [Freud’s, Jones’s, and one by Jung] “burst in upon his porcelain revery [sic]” with their transformations, combinations, and divisions of the self, their picture of its abasements and suppressed appetites and ambivalences, which were as yet largely untapped for conscious literature .... The psychoanalytic pamphlets helped Joyce also to envisage a more

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59 Richard Ellman, *Consciousness*; 54. The Ernest Jones essay consists of a thirty-five page introduction to a publication of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (London: Vision, 1947). In this introduction, Jones writes: “It has been found that with poetic creations the critical procedure cannot halt at the work of art itself; to isolate this from its creator is to impose artificial limits to our understanding of it” (7). Also by Ernest Jones on the topic are: “The Oedipus Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet’s Mystery: A Study in Motive,” *The American Journal of Psychology* XXI (January 1910) 2-113; “A Psychoanalytic Study of Hamlet,” *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1923) and *Hamlet and Oedipus* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1954. This latter work orginally appeared as the first essay in the first edition of Jones’ *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*).
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precise genetic account of two forms of action, one the act as externally lived, the other the act of writing about it. 60

Although not articulated in specifically psychoanalytic terms, Joyce does approach, in his own fashion, the psychologism of Kristeva. Indeed, when he insists in the first draft of A Portrait of an Artist that "the features of infancy" belong to a portrait as much as the features of adolescence and that the past has no "iron memorial aspect," but implies "a fluid succession of presents," and when he says that one must look for in literature, not for a fixed character, but for an "individuating rhythm [and] the curve of an emotion," he comes very close to Kristeva’s portrayal of literature as a medium for the drive rhythms and emotional affects that were experienced firstly and most intensely in earliest infancy. 61

We have seen, then, how Joyce uses maternal and paternal metaphors to illuminate the process of literary production and his suggestion that the real life of the writer is transmuted into the text. Clear parallels can be drawn between Joyce’s texts and Kristeva’s theory of the writer who is identified with the dual-gendered imaginary father and of the infiltration of material drives into the symbolic coda of the text. Through Kristeva’s interpretation of Joyce, it becomes clear that the two propositions - that the writer utilises both maternal and paternal positions (not to mention metaphors) and that the writer’s life is transformed into the writer’s text - are not unconnected. In fact, the writer positioned as imaginary father is the very thing which enables the writer as “priest of eternal imagination” to, in Joyce’s words, transmute “the daily bread of experience” into the text. 62 In Kristeva’s terms, this is equivalent to the process whereby the symbolic becomes semiotised.

60 Richard Ellman, Consciousness, 54-5.
61 Richard Ellman, Joyce, 150.
62 Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist, 200.
Kristeva’s principal purpose in highlighting the transmutation of life into literature that is the semiotisation of the symbolic, is to highlight the underlying code. She wants to make known “the details of identification’s mechanism, one that presides over the Imaginary’s genesis, and consequently over its realization - which is what all fiction is.” It is to this end that Kristeva continues in her interpretation of *Ulysses* by analysing the text in terms of eros and agape. These “two variants of the amorous experience” are, in Kristeva’s estimation, “the most pertinent and analytically fitting attempt undertaken by Joyce to shed light upon the identificatory movement proper to artistic experience.”

**The mechanics of love**

Relevantly, love itself has maternal and paternal aspects in the Kristevan schema: “Love’s two forms - which are two variants of identification, the one paternal and symbolic, the other maternal, having to do with the drive - are united in the artist’s experience, leading him to transmute ‘consubstantially’ his psychic life into his characters and their adventure.”

The two forms of love are, firstly, the Greek-derived eros which is maternal, having to do with the drive that aggressively seeks out assimilation or amorous fusion with the other. Kristeva interprets Bloom’s governing affect as erotic love. Bloom’s behaviour is erotic in so far as he desires union with Stephen as his son and with regard to his orality (“that avid sampler of livers, gizzards, and other

66 Refer to the section entitled “Eros, agape and primary narcissism” in my Chapter One.
animal entrails”). Robert Janusko also suggests that, since his son Rudy died, “[t]he paternal principle is what Bloom is lacking ....”

The experience of erotic love, which is another manifestation of primary, narcissistic identification, dislodges the subject’s being, drives, and ideals onto the other, thereby creating an open and connected psychic system. Kristeva writes that love “indissolubly ties together the symbolic (what is forbidden, distinguishable, thinkable), the imaginary (what the Self imagines in order to sustain and expand itself), and the real (that impossible domain where affects aspire to everything and where there is no one to take account of the fact that I am only a part).”

When it is a writer identifying with the intrapsychic position of the imaginary father, language is paramount. On the one hand, the symbolic, paternal aspect of language is accessed through loving identification: “When the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other ... I become like him: One. A subject of enunciation.” But since the imaginary father spans the paternal and maternal spheres, loving identification with the third party does not foreclose the semiotic register. Rather, evidence of the semiotic’s drive-induced affects and effects are carried into symbolic representation, thereby creating that which Kristeva identifies as literature.

On the other hand, Kristeva reads Stephen’s benevolent but uncommitted friendship with the older man and his “vertiginous assimilation of knowledge,” as indices of his agape. Christian agapic love is paternal and symbolic, inspiring

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68 Janusko, 11.
identification by dispersing unqualified, benevolent love onto the desiring subject.\textsuperscript{71} Agapic love defines the response of the imaginary father to the desiring subject. As loving, benevolent Other, the imaginary father calls a halt to desiring fusion, detaches the subject from the maternal continent and channels the semiotic into the symbolic (rather than an outpouring of unchecked semiotic impulses into the symbolic).

For the writer to adopt the pivotal position of the imaginary father through the identificatory movement inscribed by erotic and agapic love, then, replicates the pre-oedipal identification with the imaginary father. In the literary context, this identification also enables the infusion of the real (bodily drives) into the imaginary activity that is articulated in the symbolic act of writing. The text then becomes the realisation of “the Imaginary’s genesis.”\textsuperscript{72}

Kristeva analyses the realisation of the imaginary in \textit{Ulysses} by asserting that Bloom operates principally on an erotic level and Stephen on an agapic level. But Kristeva is careful to “scrambl[e] the tracks of Stephen-agape and Bloom-eros in a manner that no one personage ever becomes the symbol of the sole passion ....”\textsuperscript{73} It is interesting that she does not “scramble” \textit{Ulysses’} erotic and agapic “tracks” by pointing to the confused sexual identity of Bloom. After all, Bloom is not only Gerty’s lecherous voyeur but also, now attired in feminine clothing, is whipped by the madam Bella, who is transformed by the act into the masculine Bello. In his trial he is described by Dr Dixon as “a finished example of the new womanly man.”\textsuperscript{74} This womanly man declares, “O, I do so want to be a mother” and

\textsuperscript{71} Kristeva, “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper,’” 168, 178.
\textsuperscript{72} Kristeva, “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper,’” 168, my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{73} Kristeva, “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper,’” 177.
\textsuperscript{74} Joyce, \textit{Ulysses}, 493.
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immediately bears eight male yellow and white children. Later reflecting upon his solitary mirrored image, Bloom observes that “from infancy to maturity he had resembled his maternal procreatrix. From maturity to senility he would increasingly resemble his paternal creator.”

Nor, in her further exploration of eros and agape as identification’s mechanism, does Kristeva turn towards the textual surface of *Ulysses* (although Molly’s monologue is the endpoint of her interpretation, as I shall discuss below). After all, given that stylistic features such as rhythms, alliterations and ellipses are evidence of the return of the semiotic, one might imagine that Kristeva’s reading of Joyce would focus on the formal, stylistic texture of his fiction, on the “intertwining [of] music and letters,” which has been the basis of many of her other literary studies. The obvious candidacy of *Ulysses* - “monk words, marybeads jabber on their girdles: rouge words, tough nuggets patter in their pockets” - is all but ignored.

Kristeva undertakes, initially at least, an analysis of those other symptoms, the “problematic, proliferative, and unstable” identificatory themes and narratives. Hence, the entire episode of “Oxen of the Sun” is viewed as an extension of the erotic movement which attempts to fuse the subject with its other. Kristeva writes in this regard that “[i]nsofar as the creator’s phantasm is concerned, the mirroring - let’s call it narcissistic - of the fecund maternal power is undeniable.” Nevertheless, “this passional reduplication is not ... realizable except by its

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75 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 494.
76 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 708.
77 Kristeva, “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper,’” 167. Kristeva’s stylistic analyses include, most notably, those of Mallarmé and Lautréamont in *La révolution du langage poétique* and to Céline in *Powers of Horror*.
displacement through the intervention of a paternal identification (in the sense
given here to ‘agape’). Kristeva suggests that this agape is “subtly indicated in
the scene in which Bloom and Stephen, looking at each other in a mirror, see
Shakespeare’s beardless face ‘rigid in paralysis.” Referring obliquely to
Shakespeare’s cuckolded status in the mirror image, Kristeva writes:

Derisory of the father’s phantom, the image of his ambivalence
(simultaneously sublime and impotent), this scene indicates how
necessary the idealization of a paternal figure is for the artist, on
condition that it be both unstable (necessitating the ceaseless
refashioning of an identity) and rigid (so as to complete the identity by
bringing to it - through mimesis - the maternal body’s life). A circuit
from Eros to Agape must continuously be wrought, guaranteeing on
the surface a certain androgyny and, as well, the belief in the life of
signs as the reduction of life to the text.

Having thus undergone a loving identification with the imaginary father, an
identification which is recreated in Bloom’s and Stephen’s individual erotic and
agapic experiences, the narrator situates himself in a liminal position on the cusp
of the semiotic and the symbolic as a composite figure, Dedalus-Bloom. From
there he draws the semiotic into the symbolic. Kristeva describes the process as
follows: “the narrator looks directly at her, his Eurydice-Molly, insolent,
aggressive, and obscene, and without an ounce of fear he draws her out of
passion’s inferno through his song-monologue ... having achieved the plenitude of

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84 Although Kristeva does not make the point, it is worth noting, in the context of her theory, that Bloom
and Stephen meet in the “Oxen of the Sun” episode which is structured according to the development of the
embryo. The “Oxen of the Sun,” as Janusko points out, is the eleventh chapter of the “Odyssey” portion of
Ulysses and “it is well known,” he continues, “that the number eleven for Joyce signified rebirth, the
renewal after completion of a decade” (54).
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his text-body, [the narrator] can at last release his text to us as though it were his body, his transubstantiation.85

This description has Molly’s monologue interpreted, not as Molly’s at all, but, counter-intuitively, as the ultimate realisation of the male narrator’s identification with the imaginary father. This identification leads to the “consubstantial” transference of the narrator’s “psychic life into his characters and their adventure. That the text ends with Molly’s monologue,” Kristeva emphasises, “best represents this transfusion, simultaneously impassioned (through identification-reduplication with the woman loved) and symbolic (by assimilation of her word) that characterizes the genesis of each and every literary personage, as already suggested by Flaubert’s ‘Madame Bovary, c’est moi.’86

Religious metaphors

Drawing on still further analogies, Kristeva reinterprets Molly’s monologue with reference to classical mythology (apposite in terms of Joyce’s own use of Homer’s Odyssey as a basis for Ulysses). Kristeva writes that the narrator of the monologue (unlike the mythical Orpheus) is able to look directly at his Eurydice-Molly (without her dissolving to a shade) and to draw her out of “passion’s inferno [Hades] through his song-monologue.”87 This is Orpheus’ “return” referred to in the tile of the essay (“Joyce ‘The Gracehoper’ or the Return of Orpheus”). Joyce as writer is able, in other words, unlike the mythological Greek musician Orpheus, to take possession of both the semiotic underworld and the symbolic overworld. This feat is achievable by virtue of the male-artist’s “final appropriation-identification” with the imaginary father, an event which

transubstantiates semiotic body of the artist-subject onto the symbolic order and its register.

Despite their appearance in the title of Kristeva’s interpretation of Joyce, these mythological references enhance our understanding of the machinations of literary production less than the religious references. It is important to note, in this regard, that two of Kristeva’s explanations concerning the significance of Molly’s monologue (quoted above) introduce the religious terms “transubstantiation” and “consubstantial.” If erotic and agapic love jointly articulate the mechanism of identification and if the imaginary father is the intrapsychic figure who is identified with, for Kristeva transubstantiation best describes the process which enables the inscription of the writer’s psychic life within the text, once loving identification with the imaginary father has taken place.

Again, as with the maternal and paternal analogies, religious metaphors are extensively used by both Joyce and Kristeva (although both had renounced Catholicism, see below). Throughout his writing career Joyce made full use of his Catholic education as a source of concepts and terms for his aesthetic projects. At times, particularly since the early 1980s, Kristeva too finds in monotheism, and particularly in Catholicism, a rich source of ideas and analogies. Kristeva’s interest in monotheism as a structure which impacts not only upon social machinations but also upon linguistic and, specifically, literary products is evident in some of her earlier publications such as About Chinese Women. Even so, it was not until the publication of Tales of Love and contemporaneous essays such as

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88 The idea of God as the ultimate signified, His Word as the ultimate signifier and the role these have taken in maintaining the phallogocentric hierarchy of patriarchal culture has been pursued by a number of seminal poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and feminist thinkers including Cixous, Derrida, Irigaray and Lacan.
"Joyce 'The Gracehoper,'' that religious themes became bonded with Kristeva's psychoanalytic investigations.

Joyce's own extensive contact with Catholicism underpins Kristeva's use of religious metaphors to describe artistic processes in "Joyce 'The Gracehoper." It is true that Joyce railed against its hegemony over the lives and thoughts of his country people, but he speaks from intimate knowledge and experience of the Catholic faith having been educated by Jesuit priests at Clongowes Wood and Belvedere Colleges and at University College in Dublin. Yet, renunciation of Catholicism as a guide to life did not prevent Joyce's continued fascination and identification with the life of Christ; on occasions he even called himself "Melancholy Jesus" and "Crooked Jesus." Joyce's primary use of Catholicism was the re-employment of many of its principles and terms as a basis for his own aesthetic credo, as his autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* attests. Ellman reports that during Joyce's time at University College his motives in relation to the Church became aesthetic not pious: "Christianity had subtly evolved in his mind from a religion into a system of metaphors, which as metaphors could claim his fierce allegiance." Robert Boyle (whom Kristeva cites in "Joyce 'The Gracehoper'”) affirms that Joyce:

> was not much concerned if he ignored or damaged theological principle. If he could find some basis for advancing the cause of divine Imagination, he would accept and manipulate any theological term which served him. He is not, like a theologian, interested in

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89 Specifically, Kristeva draws on Robert Boyle's *James Joyce's Pauline Vision: A Catholic Exposition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978) which gives a detailed account of the effects of Catholicism on Joyce's aesthetic theories and his use of religious metaphors such as transubstantiation to describe artistic processes. It is probably not beside the point that Kristeva herself, while claiming never to have been a believer, was "born into a family of believers who tried, without excessive enthusiasm perhaps, to transmit their faith to [her]" (Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, 23).


91 Richard Ellman, *Joyce*, 68.
dealing with the truth outside his own being. He is exclusively interested, like an artist, in expressing the true which he finds flowing through his own being.\footnote{Boyle, 55.}

Joyce’s most famous use of religious metaphor is the term “epiphany,” which traditionally refers to the manifestation of Christ to the Magi. In Joyce, it denotes an artist’s sudden “revelation of the whatness of a thing,” the moment in which “the soul of the commonest object ... seems to us radiant.”\footnote{Richard Ellman, \textit{Joyce}, 87; Joyce, \textit{Portrait of the Artist}, 193.} Epiphanies which are particularly full of passion Joyce refers to as “eucharistic.” The Eucharist rite is based upon the words attributed to Christ at the last supper:

> During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: “Take this and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: “Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant ....”\footnote{Matthew, 26: 26-8.}

The word \textit{epicleti}, an error for \textit{epicleses} (Latin) or \textit{epicleseis} (Greek), referred to an invocation still found in the mass of the Eastern Church but dropped from the Roman ritual in which the Holy Ghost is besought to transform the host into the body and blood of Christ. What Joyce meant by this term, adapted like \textit{epiphany} and \textit{eucharistic moment} from ritual, he explained to his brother Stanislaus:

> Don’t you think there is a certain resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what I am trying to do? I mean that I am trying ... to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own ... for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift.\footnote{Richard Ellman, \textit{Joyce}, 169.}
The ritual consecrating and consuming the bread and wine is the Eucharist. The conversion of these Eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ is the "transubstantiation." Transubstantiation, which became dogma with the Council of Trent (1545-1563), was formulated as a positive action "by which an actual being, without being destroyed or annihilated, is changed according to its whole substance into another actual being."

It is this sixteenth-century definition of transubstantiation that is analogous to the infiltration of the writer’s psyche into the literary text, as understood by Kristeva.

That transubstantiation takes place during the Eucharist rite is still accepted by many believers today, if not by theologians. Not surprisingly, the standard definition of transubstantiation as accepted by the Council of Trent has not stood firm against the advances of modern science. In attempting to accommodate atomic physics, theologians in the 1920s attempted to explain the Eucharist miracle in terms of an incalculable numbers of transubstantiations all taking place at the atomic level. Joyce’s suggestion that “[m]olecules all change. I am other I now,” would appear, as does the following passage, to reflect this particular phase of transubstantiation theology:

- As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I as born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the living son looks forth. In the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be.


97 Joyce, Ulysses, 189.

98 Joyce, Ulysses, 194.
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Although atomic explanations for the transfusion of the artist’s life into fiction served Joyce well, for theological purposes, it was a failure. Contemporary theologians now prefer to describe the concept as “transignification,” wherein the meaning of the Eucharist elements have been changed through consecration while their material substance and essence remain unchanged.99 This sounds much closer to what a non-psychoanalyst might imagine is accomplished in literature. However, by reclaiming the medieval usage of the term transubstantiation, Kristeva imports into her theory a sense of the real, material transposition from one medium to another.

Transubstantiation, psychic transference and literature

Just as bread and wine become transformed in Eucharistic ritual into the body and blood of Christ so too, Kristeva argues, does the proto-subject’s psyche become transformed into the imaginary father during the pre-oedipal identificatory phases. While the writer later goes on to identify with the symbolic father, this oedipal identification does not obliterate the imaginary father. Rather, the writer retains connection to maternity, to drives, and to their pre-structural semiotic representations, by taking refuge in the loving aspect of the father.

Kristeva maintains that, while artists in general take up the position of the imaginary father in order to write, Joyce is “superior” in this regard since he understands, through his familiarity with Catholicism, the transubstantiatory processes at work in psychic identification.100 Joyce’s “intense experience of Trinitarian religion” and particularly of its central ritual, the Eucharist, “met with”

99 Rahner, 1753-54.
The Writer as Womanly Man

the Imaginary’s mechanism of intrapsychic identification which is, in Kristeva’s schema, “the motor of his fictional experience.”\(^{101}\) The co-presence of Catholicism and artistry in Joyce’s work enabled him to “concentrate his efforts of representation and elucidation upon the identificatory substratum of psychic functioning, so masterfully placed at the centre of the ultimate religions.”\(^{102}\) Kristeva seems to be saying that Joyce’s redoubled (through artistic identification with the imaginary father and through assimilation of Catholic ritual), and so intensified, experience of identificatory relations gave him the impetus and the ability to find a parallel for these relationships in his writings. She suggests that Joyce is possibly not aware of the convergence of his infantile psychic experience and his adolescent religious experience but that it operates within him nonetheless: “Joyce knows, with a knowledge perhaps unconscious, or, in any case one irradiated by theological nescience,” that problematic, proliferative, and unstable identificatory themes and narratives are a symptom of the underlying intrapsychic identification with the imaginary father that is “proper to artistic experience.”\(^{103}\) Joyce is exemplary, for Kristeva, in his articulation of this knowledge of identification. He is the author who possesses the advantage of having mirrored, experienced, and revealed the inner workings of identification which governs the evolution of the imaginary, that is, of fiction.

Joyce, as I have discussed above, lays out his argument that the real life of authors are manifest in their literary texts in the *Hamlet* debate. But he too, like Kristeva, argues for the presence of the artist in his work using transubstantiation as a metaphor, although this is made more explicit in *Finnegans Wake* than in *Ulysses*, as Robert Boyle’s analysis suggests:

\(^{103}\) Kristeva, “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper’,” 169.
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In the Trinity, as especially the Gospel of John reveals, the Son finds his completion in the Father, and in the perfection of their unity they breathe forth a Third Person, the Spirit properly named Love.

Everyone sees this Trinitarian doctrine operative in the relationships of Bloom, Stephen, and Molly, but less obvious is the esthetic principle that as the fulfilment of divine being is found in God’s contemplation and expression of himself, so the fulfilment of the literary artist’s being is found in his contemplation and expression of himself....".

It seems strange that the following passage from *Finnegan’s Wake* was not drawn upon by Kristeva, so aptly does it describe the process of artistic transubstantiation:

the first till last alshemist wrote over every square inch of the only foolscape available, his own body, till by corrosive sublimation on continuous present time integument slowly unfolded all marryvoising moodmoulded cyclewheeling history (thereby, he said, reflecting from his own individual person life unlivable, transaccidented through the slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos, perilous, potent, common to allflesh, human only, mortal) but with each word that would not pass away the squid-self which he had squirtscreened from the crystalline worldwaned chagreenold and doriangrayer in its dudhud.

Boyle comments that here “Joyce builds the profoundest and most beautiful image of the literary artist ... our literature has known”:

He pictures the artist, the descendant of the “old artificer” of *Portrait* ... making his caustic ink in a Grecian Urn from the waste materials of his own body, and writing on his own skin the dynamic experience of his exiled self ... Joyce pictures the artist gradually shrinking and fading in his physical being ... until his body disappears altogether into nothingness ... and his soul remains, like Dorian’s operative in paint, operative in the ink he had, like a squid, shot out of himself to screen himself from the universe outside himself. That ink (and, presumably,

104 Boyle, 44.
The Writer as Womanly Man

the skin, the foolscap in which it was etched) remains with its colors, beauty, and cosmic meaning ..., and in that ink, like Christ in the Eucharist, the artist continues in a dynamic present to unfold the cycles of his and all human history. ¹⁰⁶

Despite its closeness to her own theory of literary production, Kristeva does not incorporate Finnegans Wake within the scope of her study of Joyce. In this, “Joyce 'The Gracehoper' or the Return of Orpheus” is a little different from most of Kristeva’s other literary analyses in that it ostensibly assesses one text only, that of Ulysses. Rather than fanning out to embrace the writer’s entire oeuvre in her usual fashion, Kristeva augments her analysis by drawing on traditional scholarly studies on Joyce. Her reliance upon Richard Ellman’s standard biography of Joyce indicates the degree to which it is the real life of the author that is under analysis here as much as his literary products.

Kristeva’s study of Joyce, then, demonstrates the degree to which Kristeva’s literary interpretations intersect with her literary theory. Each informs and enhances the other. From “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper’ of the Return of Orpheus” one learns a great deal about Kristeva’s conception of the mechanism of identification which governs the production of literature, as her theory stipulates. To Joyce, Kristeva brings a wealth of psychoanalytic associations and explanations which augment the literary interpretative work surrounding his oeuvre.

¹⁰⁶ Boyle, 46.
Chapter Eight

Proust's Mothers and Metaphors

the delightful interlacing of Proustian sentences ... unfold my memory and that of my language's signs down to the silent, glowing recesses of an odyssey of desire ...

Julia Kristeva

real books should be the offspring not of daylight and casual talk but of darkness and silence. And as art exactly reconstitutes life, around the truths to which we have attained inside ourselves there will always float an atmosphere of poetry ...

Marcel Proust

*Proust and the Sense of Time* is Kristeva's most recent substantial textual analysis. Like her study of Joyce (the subject of my seventh chapter), Kristeva's interpretation of Proust displays strong ties to her theory of psycholiterary development. For instance, Chapter One of *Proust*, after beginning with a brief consideration of psychic time, focuses on the figure of the mother. In many ways this chapter is an extension of issues developed in *Black Sun*. There, Kristeva elaborated her theory that the early psycho-sexual loss of the mother upon which

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1 Kristeva, *Abjection*, 134.
3 It is unusual in being published in English prior to French, having begun as a series of four lectures delivered at the University of Kent in May 1992 (*Women: A Cultural Review* 3.3 {1992} 233).
4 Specifically, how time is experienced by contemporary readers, time's cathartic potential and how Proust deals with time in his fiction.
entry into the symbolic order is contingent brings about a state of mourning for the lost mother. Here, as in her literary analyses of Nerval, Dostoyevsky and Duras in *Black Sun*, Kristeva looks at the way in which the writer transcends maternal mourning by transforming loss into words, a process which in a sense rematerialises the lost love object.

Chapter Two of *Proust and the Sense of Time* constitutes a detailed response to Marcel’s “madeleine” experience. Following the pattern already laid out by the narrator, Kristeva breaks the passage down into eight sections starting with the experience of gross sensation and finishing with recovery of unconscious memory. Whereas “Joyce ‘The Gracehoper’” explores the ways in which unconscious memory is transubstantiated into literature, this chapter of *Proust* looks at how the writer discovers unconscious affects, prior to the infusion of these into the text. Chapter Three focuses on the role of the metaphor in expressing and reconstituting the essence of recovered memories, an area covered extensively in Kristeva’s book *Tales of Love*. Chapter Four is a literary and historical study which aims to determine the intellectual and scholarly origin of the Proustian “essence” (which, as I shall explain below, appears to correspond to the psychoanalytic definition of the unconscious).

I observed in the previous chapter that Kristeva’s literary theories mirror those of Joyce. This conformance is also a factor in Kristeva’s study of Proust, as I shall explore. I also observed, at the close of my sixth chapter, that Kristeva’s literary analyses are treated by her as vehicles for articulating her own psycholiterary theory. This tendency, too, is in evidence in Kristeva’s analysis of Proust. Hence the four key subjects Kristeva attends to in *Proust and the Sense of Time* - transformation of maternal loss into literature, recovery of unconscious memory, the role of the metaphor, and the place of the unconscious - are all topics of long-standing significance to Kristeva. Their reappraisal in the light of Proust’s work
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throws into question whether Kristeva in fact fashions open interpretative spirals with her literary analyses, or whether she merely incises ever-more tightly controlled interpretative circles that reinforce her pre-existing psycholiterary theory. I shall return to this question near the end of this chapter and again in the next.

The suffering artist

The literary work and the artist: the nature of their relationship has long been debated by philosophers and it is of central concern to both Kristeva and Proust. Many views have had their day in the sun: art as pure form; art as defined by its perciipients; and, art as expression theories. With regard to this last category, eighteenth and nineteenth-century Romantics in particular thought that art fundamentally expresses its creators’ emotions. Wordsworth’s proposal in the 1800 Preface to his and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads* epitomises this view: “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”

One of the main exponents and apologists for the Romantic aesthetic was Victor Hugo who proposed that the artist must suffer greatly in order to produce

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1 Formalist aesthetics (which was highly influential on the development of structuralism) draws in the Russian Formalists such as Victor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson (who also helped found the Prague Linguistic Circle), American New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks and theorists like Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, Austrian Eduard Hanslick on music and Britons Clive Bell and Roger Fry on the visual arts. For a survey of aesthetic theories refer to Anne Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

2 Theories attending to the reception of art were formulated in part as a reaction against the narrowness of much formalist criticism. Reader-response theorists include Stanley Fish (affective stylistics) and Jonathan Culler (structuralist poetics). The more collective, West German project known as reception theory whose chief exponents include Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser (the latter is also frequently regarded as a reader-response theorist). Refer to Robert Holub, *Reception Theory*, for a comparison of reader-response and reception theories (xii, xiii).

worthwhile art.\textsuperscript{8} It is from Proust’s response to Hugo that Kristeva launches her discussion of the importance of the mother in relation to the writing of \textit{Remembrance of Things Past}. She quotes from \textit{Time Regained}, the last book of Proust’s monumental novel, where the narrator, Marcel, muses:

> the cruel law of art is that people die and we ourselves die after exhausting every form of suffering, so that over our heads may grow the grass not of oblivion but of eternal life, the vigorous, and luxuriant growth of a true work of art, so that thither, gaily and without a thought for those who are sleeping beneath them, future generations may come to enjoy their \textit{déjeuner sur l’herbe}.\textsuperscript{9}

Each death, in Marcel’s understanding, is that of the “I” who has ceased to exist once love for a particular person withers. Thus, Marcel has died many times since his childhood. Once shed, these selves are painlessly annihilated but not before their death throes themselves cause great suffering. For Marcel such unhappiness is the spur of literary production: “it almost seems as though a writer’s works, like water in an artesian well, mount to a height which is in proportion to the depth to which suffering has penetrated his heart.”\textsuperscript{10} Proust’s extensive commentary on the relationship between suffering and art, spurs Kristeva to rephrase her own theories regarding the grief-stricken artist:

> Let us submit to the disintegration of our body, since each new fragment which breaks away from it returns in a luminous and significant form to add itself to our work, to complete it at the price of sufferings of which others more richly endowed have no need, to make our work at least more solid as our life crumbles away beneath the corrosive action of our emotions. Ideas come to us as the


\textsuperscript{9} Kristeva, \textit{Proust}, 10; Proust, III, 1095.

\textsuperscript{10} Proust, III, 946.
successors to griefs, and griefs, at the moment when they change into ideas, lose some part of their power to injure our heart; the transformation itself, even, for an instant, releases suddenly a little joy.\textsuperscript{11}

These sentiments are compatible with those postulated elsewhere by Kristeva. As readers of \textit{Black Sun} will recall, all separation, and thus all suffering, is grounded upon the emphatic and profound separation from the mother at oedipalisation. The abandonment or “death” of the mother that accompanies oedipalisation is the grounds for mourning which is in turn a prerequisite for the production of language and more specifically of literature. Accordingly, “[i]f I did not agree to lose mother, I could neither imagine nor name her.”\textsuperscript{12} Kristeva’s Proust study reiterates this proposition: “So the mother is dead, I have killed her, my grief turns to remorse, I speak of it before another, I speak to myself, I speak - and all is regained, eternity.”\textsuperscript{13}

For Proust the lost love that instigates poetry is an amorous lover (Albertine is mentioned in this regard), whereas for Kristeva it is, ultimately, the mother. It is she who lies at the root of all later separations, losses and deaths. And, it is she from whom one must be separated in order to regain the lost time of childhood, as Kristeva explains by referring to Proust’s discussion of “the cruel law of art” (cited above):\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{[T]he mother would have to die in order for the child to break with his childhood, for him to turn it into a memory, a time regained. Were he finally to regain all his time, then the book would indeed be a ‘déjeuner sur l’herbé: it would transform the graveyard of the dead children into a pleasure garden, dedicated to the ambiguous, loving}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} Proust, III, 944.
\bibitem{12} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 41.
\bibitem{13} Kristeva, \textit{Proust}, 20.
\bibitem{14} Proust, III, 1095.
\end{thebibliography}
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and vengeful memory of a mother who always loved excessively and not enough - and made you into a child who is still dying, perhaps, but who has the chance of ultimate resurrection and maturity in the luxuriant grass of the book. ¹⁵

Having begun with the aesthetic theories of Proust’s narrator, concentrating specifically on the role he outlines for loss, Kristeva subtly shifts the emphasis - firstly, on to the figure of the mother and, secondly, onto the pre-oedipal mother-son relationship. Shifts from female lovers to the mother, and from adulthood to infancy, are strategies continually deployed by Kristeva. They demonstrate the degree to which her literary interpretations are truly psycholiterary interpretations. Given the continual return of Kristeva’s literary analysis to her psychoanalytic theory, it is little surprise that biographical subjects also make a strong appearance. ¹⁶

Biography and the author

Loss of the mother and subsequent mastery of language take on added poignancy in the case of Proust partly because of his peculiarly strong and persistent attachment to his mother, Mme Jeanne-Clemence Proust. His housekeeper Céleste Albaret recalls that “[e]verything affecting mothers and their experiences reminded him of his own and affected him deeply.” ¹⁷ Stephen Bann in his forward to Proust and the Sense of Time observes that, like Deleuze before her, Kristeva suspends the crucial issue of whether it is Marcel Proust the biographical subject or Marcel the narrator who undergoes the experiences which shape his quest for wisdom through art. ¹⁸ Deleuze “unquestionably implies” that it is Proust, not his

¹⁵ Kristeva, Proust, 11.
¹⁶ Refer to my Chapter Four for a discussion of the role of biographical analysis in Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology.
¹⁷ Albaret in Kristeva, Proust, 17.
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persona Marcel, who is the object of his own Proustian analysis. So too, in Kristeva’s work of nearly thirty years later, Bann sees an undoubted return to the biographical subject.

This return occurs despite Proust’s attack on the highly influential mid-nineteenth century literary critic and historian Charles Sainte-Beuve for his reading of literature to locate biographical truths. Proust’s article, “The Method of Sainte-Beuve” (1909), states categorically that “Sainte-Beuve’s ... famous method ... which consists of not separating the man from the work, ... to surround oneself with all the possible facts about a writer ... such a method fails to recognize what any more than merely superficial acquaintance with ourselves teaches us: that a book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices.” Philip Thody makes the point that the reappearance of this article had “a very happy effect” on Proust’s posthumous reputation, as an eminent predecessor for the structuralist view articulated by Barthes, that the author as individual is not relevant to reception of the text. In his famous paper “The Death of the Author” (1968), Barthes acknowledges Proust’s contribution to “modern writing,” stating that, despite the apparently psychological character of his analyses, Proust was “visibly concerned with the task of inexorably blurring, by an extreme subtilization, the relation between the writer and his characters ....” Following Proust’s example, Barthes too, in his 1967 reading of Remembrance, “Proust and Names,” approaches the work in terms of “acts

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19 Bann, ix.
20 Bann, ix, xi.
22 Philip Thody, Marcel Proust (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987) 8.
23 Barthes, Image, Music, Text, 144.
internal to the discourse itself (consequently, poetic and not biographical acts), whether this discourse be the narrator’s or Marcel Proust’s.24

However, whereas Barthes explicitly (although perhaps not implicitly) dismisses as irrelevant to literature the biographical subject, Kristeva brings about the capitulation of the biographical subject to the writing subject in support of her abiding psychoanalytic interest in illustrating how drives translate to literary language. So, whereas for Proust literature is produced by a self other than “the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices,” for Kristeva it is precisely the author’s habitual modes of behaviour, the way the author interacts with others and the author’s vices which are the reality that permeate the text.25

Technically, Kristeva accomplishes this end by “inexorably blurring” (as does Proust) the distinctions between narrator and author, a blurring that is particularly prominent in her discussion of the role of maternity in Proust, as I will go on to discuss.

From infant ambivalence to adult inversion

The deep attachment that Proust felt for his mother, as related by Céleste Albaret (above), was followed by a powerful sense of guilt on her sudden death in 1905. Kristeva has already explained elsewhere (principally in Black Sun) the seeds of such powerful and ambiguous emotions that attach to the mother. The mother is repeatedly identified with and rejected until the resolution of the oedipal conflict when, with the opening up of the unconscious, she is both surreptitiously loved without condition and openly rejected without question. Kristeva discloses an instance of simultaneous love for, and abjection of, the mother in the bedtime

25 Proust, Against Sainte-Beuve, 12.
scene in *Swann’s Way*.

There, Marcel, who had previously recorded how he was washed over by his mother’s calm and serenity as she “bent her loving face over my bed, and held it out to me like a host for an act of peace-giving communion in which my lips might imbibe her real presence and with it the power to go to sleep,” reacted quite differently on a later occasion.

On a night when guests had stayed for dinner, the bestowal of the desperately longed for, and long withheld, maternal kiss and the paternal granting of permission for Mamma to stay the night with Marcel, brought not the triumph of desire fulfilled, but bitter regret and suffering with the realisation that his yearning for his mother was now considered, by his parents no less than by himself, not as a childish whim, but as an “involuntary ailment which had been officially recognised ....” He continues, “I ought to have been happy; I was not .... [T]his evening opened a new era [and] would remain a black date in the calendar.”

Randolph Splitter, like Kristeva, understands Marcel’s regret psychoanalytically. He explains: “When she gives in to his demands, he has won a ‘victory’ over her which is defeat for himself in so far as he cannot master his own needs. His feeling that he would be better off alone reflects a desire for self-control but also for control of his mother, whom he would like to summon and dismiss as he pleases. He is pretending to himself that he does not need her.”

Kristeva claims that such desire for, and simultaneous dismissive denigration of, the mother is an affect grounded in infant pre-oedipal identifications and abjections - it is reinforced with numerous partings from mother during her life.

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27 Proust, I, 14.
28 Proust, I, 41.
29 Proust, I, 41.
30 Splitter, 37-8.
and is cemented with the shocking separation that accompanies her death. Proust, however, continued to experience losses of his mother even after her death in the form of sexualised performances. Specifically, the ambivalence experienced towards the mother in infancy was re-experienced in adult sado-masochistic sexuality. Such sexuality, in so far as it relives and reflects the ambivalent pre-oedipal love-hate for the mother, allows the writer to re-experience, time and again, the maternal loss deemed necessary for literary production. That it is in *Sodom and Gomorrah* that Proust has his narrator allude to his own guilt over his mother’s death is highly significant for Kristeva. She suggests that this “novel of sexual inversion [is] no less distinct from the childhood memories of *Swann’s Way* than it is from the aesthetic theory of *Time Regained.*”  

Proust’s sado-masochistic activities involved the maternal being so idealised (identified with), that to escape from it, it must be profaned (rejected) by dragging it into the “the bestial world of pleasure.” In his quest for complicity between “the requirements of an ideal tenderness and the depths of transgression,” Proust witnessed and staged scenes of sado-masochistic debauchery featuring rats pierced with hatpins, photographs of his mother profaned in front of gigolos, and the lodgement of family furniture at the brothel Le Cuziat. Denigrative acts such as these are countered by elevation of the desired object. Subsequent to the death of his mother, Proust finds in Céleste Albaret, whom he takes into his service in 1913, the personification of the ideal “good mother.” She is “vestal virgin” and

34 Kristeva, *Proust*, 22; Splitter, 36
the cork-lined room is womb-like sanctuary and together they function, Kristeva suggests, as antithesis to his sexual debauchery.\textsuperscript{35} Sado-masochism and idealisation operate in tandem. While sadism is rooted in the enforced and violent rupture from the archaic mother and masochism is founded in the enduring, although impossible, desire for this same lost loved object, idealisation, which takes the form of writing for Proust, sublimes maternal profanation into literature.

Kristeva observes that it is only after a period marked by grief and guilt that Proust interns himself within his newly cork-lined room in order to write. It is only then that he transforms “the activity of mourning into literature.”\textsuperscript{36} Of course, as Kristeva observes, the novel had been “maturing for ages” so it was not as if Madame Proust’s death was the singular genesis of Proust’s major literary work. However, mourning for his mother marked, according to Kristeva, “the start of a new time-scale and a new way of life” that finally resulted in the production of the book.\textsuperscript{37} This “book itself is the direct replacement for the loved person.”\textsuperscript{38} Yet it is a replacement generated according “the logic of profanation,” specifically, by the “interweaving of the two themes - inversion on the one hand, and on the other ambivalence towards the mother ....”\textsuperscript{39}

**Unravelling the madeleine experience**

While the narrator “searches for lost time in the innermost signs of experience, infusing the singularity of his own grief into the universal pattern of an

\textsuperscript{35} Kristeva, *Proust*, 19.
\textsuperscript{36} Kristeva, *Proust*, 15.
\textsuperscript{37} Kristeva, *Proust*, 12.
\textsuperscript{38} Kristeva, *Proust*, 25.
\textsuperscript{39} Kristeva, *Proust*, 41.
intelligence which is accessible to all," Kristeva expands her analysis beyond the thematic structure that bespeaks desire for the mother. Kristeva concludes that the very materiality of the text harbours subjective, unconscious, sensory experience of desire for the mother. The question is, how does unconscious desire become caught within the material structure of the text? Kristeva’s second chapter, “In Search of Madeleine,” explores this question. It shows how memory bears the imprint of colour, taste, touch and other forms of experience and, concomitantly, how densely metaphoric writing brings about the imaginative reconstruction of unconscious experience.

The way in which Kristeva goes about her investigation in this chapter is instructive of her general approach to literary interpretation. Rather than etching a linear argument, Kristeva tends to approach the unconscious experiences inscribed in writing from its two poles: the unconscious and the text. In her Proust analysis, the continuum is further complicated by an additional trajectory which situates itself between conscious thought and unconscious memory. Accordingly, one may observe how Kristeva, in this instance following Proust’s lead, leaps from one point in the process to another: isolation of conscious memory (stage one), speculation as to how unconscious memory becomes available to us through contact with common sensations (stage two), analysis of the textual signifiers (stage three) and so on, leaping from one perspective to another, building up an impression, but not a logical progression, of the entire picture. The result is that certain issues, thought to be fundamental when observed from a distance, are found, when observed from a closer vantage point, to be elusive. (For instance, just what is the relationship between Proust’s “essence” and Kristeva’s “unconscious”? Kristeva is far from clear on the subject, as I shall discuss below.)

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Proust’s Mothers and Metaphors

It is as if the trajectory that appears to be homing in upon a particular point in Kristeva’s theory becomes subtly redirected as it nears its goal, or that the goal itself changes. Bearing this in mind, I shall now undertake a close reading of Kristeva’s own close reading of the few pages in *Swann’s Way* in which the famous “madeleine” incident is described.

Kristeva divides Proust’s “madeleine” narrative into eight stages. Some of these stages replicate Marcel’s experience and argument exactly, others subtly recast the narrative in psycho-linguistic terms, while others still diverge significantly from the original text to explore the psycho-linguistic manifestations of Proust’s experience. Throughout, echoes of Gérard Genette’s “Proust Palimpsest” and “Proust and Indirect Language” and of Gilles Deleuze’s *Proust and Signs* (the latter described by Kristeva as a “magnificent reading”) may be glimpsed.

**Stage 1: meaningless luminous consciousness**

The first stage in the recovery of memory through sensory experience is isolation and identification of the type of memory it is not. It is not intellectual, conscious and voluntary memory. Clearly recalled early childhood memories stand out as a “sort of luminous panel, sharply defined against a vague and shadowy background.” The shadowy realm identified in this quote is equivalent to obscure unconscious memories. Marcel places normative values upon these “luminous” and “shadowy” memories, determining that, “since the facts which I should then have recalled would have been prompted only by voluntary memory, the memory of the intellect, and since the pictures which that kind of memory

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42 I have retained Kristeva’s numbered stages but renamed each one more descriptively.


44 Proust, I, 46.
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shows us preserves nothing of the past itself I should never had any wish to ponder over this residue of Combray. To me it was in reality all dead." While the narrator confines his assessment to one of relative vitality, Kristeva, true to her psychoanalytic heritage (which maintains the unconscious as the principal locus of meaning) slightly recasts Proust's words to suggest that bright, consciously recoverable memories are not only dead, but are "without meaning," presumably because they are largely untouched by unconscious memories, affects and identifications. This move does not do violence to the ideas expressed in Remembrance of Things Past since, as Marcel makes clear in Time Regained, he too locates reality in the essences contained in past experience, contrasting these to the phenomenological and social realities which are inscribed in the present.

Stage 2: transubstantiation rises again

If bright, conscious memories are dead to meaning, can the same be said of all the everyday phenomena which surround us during our waking hours? In the second stage identified by Kristeva, Proust's narrator ponders upon the Celtic belief that animals, plants and inanimate objects may capture within them "dead souls." Such souls survive unrecognised and, the narrator suggests, the same may be true of our own past: "The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of the intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling."

Kristeva here discusses Proust's narrative segment without alteration or elaboration. However, it gathers resonance if one recalls that Kristeva's analysis

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45 Proust, I, 47.
46 Kristeva, Proust, 30.
47 Kristeva, Proust, 31.
48 Proust, I, 47, 48.
of Joyce’s *Ulysses* highlights the not dissimilar theory of transubstantiation. In “Joyce ‘the Gracehoper,’” Catholic transubstantiation is taken to be analogous to the process in which past, particularly unconscious, experience is transformed into literature. Although Kristeva does not make the link between Proust and Joyce in this section of her study, the bridging of these concepts is made apparent in her next section (see “Stage 3” below). In a later chapter, Kristeva also draws attention to the religious parallel to transmigration, with reference to a letter of Proust’s in which he raises the prospect of a writing in which “the supreme miracle would be accomplished, the transubstantiation of the irrational qualities of matter and life into human words.”

It is interesting to note that, yet again, Kristeva (in line with the writers under her analysis) has recourse to mysterious aspects of ritual and faith to account for processes of literary production. That she chooses her metaphors from the world of spirituality and religion rather than, say, using the tools of science or mathematics, gives some indication of the direction Kristeva’s psycholiterary enterprise has taken in recent years.

### Stage 3: unconscious motivation in the art of naming

The analytic technique which Kristeva calls “textual genetics” features heavily in her classification of the third stage of the Proustian remembrance quest: his mother’s offering him “one of those squat, plump little cakes called ‘petites madeleines,’ which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted valved of a scallop shell.” Whereas the novel’s narrator immediately begins to describe the amazing things that happened to his consciousness when he tasted the

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50 For instance, Kristeva’s *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* draws out the psychological structure of religion. Religion had a significant impact upon Kristeva’s psychoanalysis, both as a source of metaphors and in providing parallels for its intrapsychic structures.

confectionery dipped in lime-blossom tea, Kristeva lingers on the object and its name, asking: "But why these madeleines in the first place? And why do we have to start by writing the word with a capital letter?" It is important to diverge from the narrative here, she insists, so that Proust's motives for naming the confectionery "madeleine" may be discovered. Kristeva argues that his motive was unconscious, that an unconscious transubstantiation of meanings associated with the name Madeleine necessarily preceded the conscious transcription of the naming of the biscuit.

Kristeva supplies no evidence in Proust and the Sense of Time to show why Proust's own mental processes in writing his novel should have been any less conscious and calculated than her own careful unravelling of the etymology of "madeleine." After all, in concert with Proust and even with that arch-Romantic Wordsworth, she does not deny that conscious, symbolic processes have a role in poetic production. Yet, Kristeva does not even explore the grounds for Marcel's own belief that "the transgression of norms, the aesthetic invention, are most often ... involuntary and sometimes unconscious," as Genette does. This is another instance where Kristeva's psychoanalysis of the text over-rides other considerations and it demonstrates the fact that one can only approach Kristeva's literary interpretative theory from within the psychoanalytic world-view.

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52 Kristeva, Proust, 32.
53 Kristeva, Proust, 44.
54 Wordsworth maintains that while poems must "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature," they must nevertheless be produced by a writer who has also "thought long and deeply" since feelings are "modified and directed by our thoughts" (William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and Other Poems, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805) 22-3). Proust concurs, insisting that although the writer is not free to choose his or her material and, indeed, that its unconscious origin is the mark of its authenticity, nevertheless, the writer must apply his or her intellect to the raw material provided by unconscious recollection: "The impression is for the writer what experiment is for the scientist, with the difference that in the scientist the work of intelligence precedes the experiment and in the writer it comes after the impression" (Proust, III, 913-14).
Leaving aside her speculation on the motivation for naming of the biscuit, Kristeva discovers in Proust’s notebooks that the madeleine’s name was assigned after its narrative role had already been decided.\textsuperscript{56} Noting with what meticulous care Proust took to choose the names of his characters, Kristeva proceeds with her inquiry into “what lurks behind the transformation of the prosaic biscuit into a name possessed by a female sinner [Magdalena], then by a saint [St. Mary Magdalene], and finally by a common sweetmeat [named in the nineteenth century as tribute to cook Madeleine Paulmier].”\textsuperscript{57}

Undoubtedly names were of great significance to Proust, yet what is interesting in the context of Kristeva’s psycholiterary theory is the way in which “sensations and pleasures which are capable of exciting our imagination and magnetizing our desires” gravitate into the syllables of names.\textsuperscript{58} Other interpreters before Kristeva have also noted that assonance plays a special role in cementing particular memories to particular names.\textsuperscript{59} Barthes, for instance, notes that the Proustian name is “the equivalent of an entire dictionary column ... cover[ing] everything that memory, usage, culture can put into it ... [thus relating it to] the poetic word.”\textsuperscript{60} Marcel himself describes the word “Guermantes” as being like “one of

\textsuperscript{56} Having scoured Proust’s notebooks, Kristeva determines that in its first version (notebook 8, 1909 manuscript) the text refers only to a dry “rusk.” The word “madeleine” first appears in draft fourteen (although Kristeva admits that the nine pages of fair copy from the fourteenth draft were found within the leaves of the 1909 notebook, so that it is not possible to say whether or not they may have been penned and placed there by the author at a latter date - Kristeva, \textit{Proust}, 32-3).

\textsuperscript{57} Kristeva, \textit{Proust}, 33.

\textsuperscript{58} Kristeva, \textit{Proust}, 33-4. Genette reports that in 1913 in a letter to Louis de Robert, Proust reveals that he considered calling the three parts of the \textit{Recherche} “The Age of Names,” “The Age of Words” and “The Age of Things” (Genette, \textit{Figures of Literary Discourse}, 248).

\textsuperscript{59} Genette notes, as an example, the presence of the sound \textit{an} in the name Guermantes and in the names of the colours “orange” and “amaranthine” (Genette, \textit{Figures of Literary Discourse}, 241). Refer also to Deleuze (108).

\textsuperscript{60} Barthes, \textit{New Critical Essays}, 60.
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those little balloons which have been filled with oxygen or some other gas; when I come to prick it, to extract its contents from it, I breathe the air of Combray of that year, of that day ...." Kristen wonders whether the “oxygen” of lost memories would also be released in the case of the etymologically rich biscuit name. The answer lies, she writes:

in using the same sounds once again, and in manipulating them even to the point of destroying, or bursting, the proper name so that it loses its uncommon nature, but at the same time releases, through the oxygen of memory, a plethora of sensations, impressions and delights, “in which we suddenly feel the original entity quiver and resume its form, carve itself out of the syllables now dead.”

Kristeva concludes that “madeleine,” verbally or graphically repeated in reference to the confection, retains the series of associations that had previously attached to it as a proper noun. Her next section is devoted to determining whether such associations contributed to the confection becoming a trigger in the recovery of lost memory.

Stage 4: orality and linguistics facilitate transference of meaning

In order to define the type of impressions that congeal around the name “madeleine” in relation to the Proust novel, Kristeva seeks “Madeleines” within the landscape of the novel itself, within previous novel drafts and within stories appearing in Proust’s fiction. One connection in particular stands out: Georges Sand’s François le champi. Kristeva outlines the plot of a foundling child who

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61 Proust, II, 6; see also III, 888.
62 Kristeva, Proust, 35.
63 Kristeva, Proust, 35.
64 In early drafts of the bedtime episode that immediately precedes the madeleine scenario, Proust had the narrator’s mother select Sand’s La Mare au diable, later she chose La Mare au diable and François le champi. Finally, in the published work, she reads to young Marcel only from François le champi.
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becomes the love object for Madeleine Blanchet, the miller's wife, who takes him in. Upon returning to the village as an adult, he becomes her lover and husband. Noting Proust's declared aversion to Sand's style, Kristeva insists that it was the theme of incest in François le champi that must have secured Proust's interest. Leslie Hill, too, claims that in this bedtime scene "something logically scandalous occurs. The mother is invited to spend the night in the boy's room; the night is concluded with a favour; the mother reads from George Sand's François le Champi, which, itself, is the disguised enactment, in literary form, of an Oedipal wish on the part of the foundling who, finally, marries his adoptive mother." Kristeva concurs, suggesting that the degree of Proust's interest in the incest theme is confirmed by the fact that it is precisely this text that provokes the fourth of his reminiscences, leading in turn, to his formulation of aesthetic revolution in Time Regained:

François le Champi ... that name, like the name Guermantes, was for me unlike the names which I had heard for the first time only in later life. The memory of what seemed to me too deep for understanding in the subject of François le Champi when my mother long ago had read the book aloud to me, had been reawakened by the title, and just as the name of Guermantes, after a long period during which I had not seen the Guermantes, contained for me the essence of the feudal age, so François le Champi contained the essence of the novel ....

"The essence of the novel," in as much as it is signified by François le Champi, is bound up with the mother, the mother desired as bedtime reader of the novel and the mother as incestuous love object within the novel. Specifically, the role of Madeleine Blanchet, the miller's wife, in Sand's work, "would be one of communicating," Kristeva writes, "through her floury whiteness, the taste of the

65 Kristeva, Proust, 35-6.
67 Proust, III, 919.
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forbidden love that will find its way into the narrator’s main aesthetic credo - a taste which has been metamorphosed into an apparently anodyne object: the little madeleine.”

Kristeva continues her inquiry into the transposition of forbidden love into the name of the biscuit, by drawing into play another intertext, Proust’s *L’Indifférent* (1896). This novella features the aristocratic Madeleine de Gouvres whose love for a young man is met only with an indifference that masks his obsession for prostitutes. Kristeva argues that, through “a process of transference,” aspects of the character of Madeleine de Gouvres are incorporated into *Remembrance of Things Past* in the character Odette de Crécy from whom Swann maintains a calculated distance. Kristeva concludes that Remembrance’s narrator must have unconsciously associated the latter Madeleine with the ambiguities of his desires and replaced the rusk with the madeleine in 1909. Consequently, on tasting the madeleine cake, the narrator easily rediscovers both the incestuous nature of his desire (from the resonances of Madeleine Blanchet) and the ambiguity that is the forbidden pleasure of his mother’s kiss (from the resonances of Madeleine de Gouvres).

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68 Kristeva, *Proust*, 36. That a metamorphosis had taken place from the incestuous associations of the name to the incestuous associations of the confection is underscored by Kristeva in her observation that Madeleine Blanchet’s name appeared in the drafts of the text, only to be omitted later. She goes on to question why “this devastating elimination” took place: “Is it simply going too far to speak of an incestuous mother before dealing with sweetmeats? Or did the peasant love story no longer seem quite up to the level of Proust’s aesthetic and sensual ambitions, being ‘as unwholesome as sweets and cakes’? What was the reason for Madeleine Blanchet’s disappearance, and at what stage, precisely, did it take place?” (Kristeva, *Proust*, 37).


70 Kristeva’s attribution to the narrator Marcel of the author Proust’s replacement of the word “rusk” with the word “madeleine” demonstrates the degree to which Kristeva confounds the two in this and, I suggest, in the majority of her literary analyses.

71 Kristeva, *Proust*, 44.
Drawing still closer to her psychoanalytic base, Kristeva suggests that her resurrection of Madeleine Blanchet and Madeleine de Gouvres "serves as a special invitation to us to reinstate the oral link which holds the narrator to the woman he loves, who is yet incapable of remaining indifferent to him." Introduction here of "the oral link" brings to mind, firstly, the psychical bond that is established between infant and mother in the oral phase of psychological development. It also recalls dyadic reunion with the mother, symbolised by the goodnight kiss, that men seek through the compensatory medium of a symbolic language which has been slatted, nonetheless, with the sonorities of an earlier, oral semiotic phase. Finally, it also refers to the oral consuming of the madeleine cake in order to access its literary associations with, on the one hand, the maternal object in the form of Sand’s Madeleine Blanchet or, on the other, to the cool indifference of Swann for Odette and through them of Proust’s young Lepré to Madeleine de Gorvres. Leslie Hill, too, notes that the madeleine sequence “condenses in one affective bundle a whole range of elements coiled around the figure of oral eroticism ...”

One of Kristeva’s touchstones in her reading of Proust, then, is the psychoanalytic theory featuring pre-oedipal oral orientation towards the mother. Her other, not disassociated, touchstone, is psychoanalytic linguistics. Specifically, she writes of a “metaphorical and metamorphic series of madeleines and Marie-Madeleines.” Orality and metonymic figuration are connected by way of the primary processes of condensation and displacement. It is these processes that enable the transposal of meanings from one madeleine to another. In fact, the series may be extended even further. To Madeleine Blanchet and Madeleine de Gorvres may be added Maria (an early version of Albertine) whose name is linked

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72 Kristeva, Proust, 40.
73 Hill, 182.
74 Kristeva, Proust, 43.
to Madeleine by her role as a female sinner, which is the meaning of "Marie-Madeleine," and the Princesse Marie-Gilberte de Guermantes. All these madeleines and Madeleines, Marias and Marie-Madeleines converge upon the little cake, the consumption of which Kristeva returns to in her next section.

**Stage 5: the narrator turns psychoanalyst**

Kristeva now rejoins the narrator (whom she had abandoned after stage two) as he takes a sip of the tea in which a morsel of the madeleine has been soaked. The "exquisite pleasure" which instantly invades Marcel represents the fifth stage of the process in Kristeva’s directory. Having already demonstrated to her readers the investment of maternal qualities within the name of the confection, the task in stage five is to show how these qualities are recovered by the narrator. At first the pleasurable sensation appears to him as "something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin" since, Kristeva adds, "[t]he origin has become infused in the madeleine, without anyone being the wiser." However, Marcel does become a little wiser, discerning that the source of this precious essence, here experienced through sensation, is equivalent to that which he experiences when in love: "And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me ... this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal." By imposing italics upon "indifferent" and "essence" in this passage, Kristeva is emphasising the two poles of Marcel's experience that bracket the recovery of lost memory, the indifferent superficiality of the world of the senses and the essence of the reality that underlies it. This

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dichotomy underscores the psychoanalytic hierarchy that finds conscious acts less meaningful than unconscious ones.

Although associated with the taste of the combined tea and cake, the narrator now begins to understand that the joyful essence nevertheless transcends the nature of common sensation. Subsequent mouthfuls of the potion, which merely serve to dilute the magic of the first sensation, lead him to realise that “the truth I am seeking lies not in the cup but in myself.” Kristeva rather rushes through the rest of Proust’s paragraph, merely noting that, although retreating from sensation to address himself to the mind, his mind feels as if it is being “overtaken” because it must create, not merely recover, experience. Proust himself gives a much clearer explication than does Kristeva of the ambiguous and troublesome process of negotiating a passage through consciousness (the mind’s “equipment”) to gain access to the unconscious (the “dark region”):

I put down my cup and examine my own mind. It alone can discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not yet exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day. 

Such obvious psychological references in the original text provide fertile ground for Kristeva’s analysis. In fact, Kristeva acknowledges Proust’s psychoanalytic skills observing that, at times, the “narrator turns into psychoanalyst without warning.” Actually, the narration of the whole of the madeleine episode and, in

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77 Kristeva, Proust, 45; Proust, I, 48.
78 Proust, I, 49.
79 Kristeva, Proust, 80.
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particularly, of the parts that are given commentary in Kristeva's sections six to eight, display masterly self-analysis, so masterly, in fact, that Kristeva's investigation of it seems somewhat superfluous at times.

Stage 6: Proust's abyss and Kristeva's void

Kristeva follows the narrator's efforts to insulate himself from present sensations in order to clarify his experience. Only after several efforts does he feel something more specific rise within him, echoing through the great spaces of his mind as it travels through to consciousness. Kristeva suggests that the "lively, erotic impulse" of the unnamable feeling is "what we must really call desire ...." Proust's narrator, on the other hand, thinks of this "confused and chaotic ... whirling medley of stirred-up colours" as the still undefined visual image of a past circumstance in his life. That desire and love do play a part in the recovery of lost memory for Proust, as they do for Kristeva, is however suggested by the narrator's grouping of the elusive image along with "its inseparable paramour, the taste ...." Kristeva observes how taste sensation and past representation, having arisen as "inseparable paramours," come unstuck the instant immediate perceptual experience is transcended by concern to illuminate its meaning. Exposed is a "fundamental lack of fit between what is perceived and what is signified ....," in other words, between the senses and the intellect, and between conscious thought and unconscious feeling.

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80 Proust, I, 49.
81 Kristeva, Proust, 46.
82 Proust, I, 49.
83 Proust, I, 50; Kristeva, Proust, 46, my emphasis.
84 Kristeva, Proust, 47.
It is Proust himself who thoroughly explores the psychological "fundamental lack of fit" between conscious perception and unconscious signification in giving us his impression of the great depths that must be spanned to rejoin the two:

Will it ultimately reach the clear surface of my consciousness, this memory, this old, dead moment which the magnetism of an identical moment has travelled so far to importune, to disturb, to raise up out of the very depth of my being? I cannot tell. Now I feel nothing; it has stopped, has perhaps sunk back into darkness, from which who can say whether it will ever rise again? Ten times over I must essay the task, must lean down over the abyss.

My emphases point to the scale of the narrator's perception of his mind which reaches from a clear surface consciousness through to the dark depths of the unconscious overlying a dark abyss, and to this image's connection with Kristeva's understanding of consciousness, repressed unconscious meaning and the ever-present, underlying void.

Stage 7: metonymy and the madeleine

Yet the memory to which the narrator refers in the passage quoted above does reveal itself - all of a sudden - and it is the metonymically transformed nature of this memory that defines for Kristeva the seventh stage in the process of remembrance. The narrator recalls: "The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane." To Kristeva, the fact that the mother’s madeleine in the present recalls the aunt’s madeleine in the past is of paramount importance because (I presume)

85 Proust, I, 50, my emphases.
86 Proust, I, 50.
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this “metonymic shift” is one of the primary processes that structure the unconscious and, when the metonymy is unravelled, it points to the unconscious signified (aunt’s madeleine) of the conscious signifier (mother’s madeleine). Insisting that we take note of the process, Kristeva writes:

actual experience (the mother’s madeleine) is imbued with a disabling intensity and gives rise to states of emptiness and confusion which would be ungovernable, if the narrator were not able to stabilize his pleasure through a displacement. The distance in time and space (Sunday before mass, with his aunt) affords a perception and an image which are analogous to what is experienced now, and without them the present experience would fall to pieces. This process of metonymic transfer which opens up the domain of the past is the construction of a metaphor: Proust’s madeleine is thus the condensation which embraces two components in time and two different spaces within the “vast structure of recollection.”

Kristeva is here underscoring the psycholinguistic principles that I discussed in my first and second chapters, that metonymic shifts along the chain of signifiers cause certain of these to drop “below the line” into the unconscious, there melding with replacement signifiers. In the case of Proust’s narrative, aunt Léonie’s madeleine has been displaced by many other such “little scallop-shell[s] of pastry, so richly sensuous under [their] severe, religious folds” seen on trays in countless pastry-cooks’ windows: “their image had dissociated itself from those Combray days to take its place among others more recent ....” Accordingly the image of the aunt’s madeleine falls into the unconscious to become a below the line signifier (signified), metaphorically linked to the signifier of madeleine-dipped tea offered to the narrator by his mother.

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88 Proust, I, 50.
Stage 8: true self located in unconscious essence

If stage seven deals primarily with metonymic displacement of the aunt’s madeleine by the mother’s, stage eight deals with the metaphoric impressions that congeal to the aunt’s madeleine. Specifically, Kristeva refers to the “cascade of spatial metaphors” that are the narrator’s recovered images of his cherished childhood Combray:

And as soon as I had recognised the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me ... immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden ... and with the house the town ..., the streets ..., the country roads ..., and the whole of Combray and its surroundings, taking shape and solidarity, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

It is as if, starting from the luminous patch of conscious memory and the fleeting sensation of the tasted madeleine and tea, the narrator has negotiated an imaginary channel through condensed and displaced mental images to find himself in the “solid and recognisable” world of his childhood. He describes this process of accessing the very distant from the immediate “telescopic” in the way it “observes things which were indeed very small to the naked eye, but only because they were situated at a great [temporal] distance ....”

Proust, like Kristeva, seems to find this remembrance of things past to be more solid and more real than the time of the present. For Kristeva it is a specifically

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89 Kristeva, Proust, 48.
90 Proust, I, 51.
91 Proust in Kristeva, Proust, 56; Proust, III, 1098. In a much earlier work that her Proust study, Kristeva writes of the pluralisation of signification brought about by “telescoping of the symbolic and the semiotic ....” (Kristeva, Revolution, 60).
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psychic reality that is recounted, a reality whose foreignness is symbolised by Proust’s image of little pieces of Japanese paper that take on colour and distinctive shape when steeped in water. Even while noting their “maximum distance [as] a foreign country ...,” Kristeva insists that memories dredged up from the unconscious have a vitality that maintains our interest as the phenomenal world does not: “Mamma was a starting mechanism, and she is from now on a source of indifference to us, as is Madeleine de Gouvres. Now we are inside the imaginary world of the madeleines. And are we now indifferent to this, in turn? No.”

For Marcel, the imaginary world of the madeleines opens onto his treasured childhood memories. For Kristeva, on the other hand, what is important about the madeleine episode “is the definitive stabilization of the loss and transference of meaning and representation ....” Kristeva is self-consciously emphasising not so much the events and sensations remembered but the form of the processes of remembrance, that is, the transference of meaning analogous to the primary processes of metaphor and metonymy.

Kristeva’s closing sentiments in stage eight are that recovered unconscious memories, and the processes which lead both to their repression and to their subsequent uncovering, are immediate and real in a way that the consciously perceived world can never be. With Proust, Kristeva contends that the unconscious world of the past is “the essence of things” and is the locus of the “true self.” I will be returning again below to the issue of essence, its relation to the unconscious, and to the role the unconscious plays in the production of literature and in the orientation of Kristeva’s literary interpretations.

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92 Kristeva, Proust, 49.
93 Kristeva, Proust, 48.
94 Kristeva, Proust, 56, 54.
I have already noted the conformity between Kristeva's psychoanalytic and literary theories and the aesthetic theories of her chosen authors. This can be seen as an agreement of content. In her analysis of Proust's madeleine experience, though, Kristeva mimics the form of the narrator's own, already classified and stratified, analysis of his madeleine experience. Marcel not only undergoes the madeleine experience but he also establishes the order and structure of its telling, both for his readers and for his commentator, Kristeva. It is he, in a discrete section at the close of the first book “Overture,” who discusses the luminous panel as distinct from its shadowy background (Kristeva's “Stage 1: just a 'luminous patch'”) and then proceeds to speculate, in relation to the Celtic belief in transmigration of souls, upon the past being embodied in some material object (Kristeva's “Stage 2: the metamorphosis of the dead”). It is Marcel who, after tasting the madeleine-dipped tea offered him by his mother, begins to dissect and analyse the various phases of the experience that overcame him: “Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? .... What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?”

It would appear as if Kristeva acknowledges the primacy of the Proustian text in her headings, several of which make direct use of Proust's own turns of phrase. Yet, as I have noted above, in the face of such a self-analytic subject, indeed, a subject who is at times conducts masterly self-analysis, Kristeva's own analysis appears in places to be somewhat unnecessary. Certain of her sections (one, two, and eight in particular) add little if anything to the types of questions asked, and the responses disclosed, in the narrator's own relating and analysis of his experience.

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95 Proust, 1, 48.
Where Kristeva’s analysis becomes interesting in relation to the madeleine experience is where it diverges from the path laid out in Proust’s novel. In this respect, Kristeva’s less original stages, those in which she does little more than reiterate the thoughts of Proust’s narrator, contribute to her analysis by establishing a context for her own digressions. These digressions occur in stages three and four, which focus upon the role and naming of the mother in remembrance, in stage five, which concentrates on associations between the tasting of the madeleine and the maternally dominated psychoanalytic oral phase, and in stages six and seven, where the structuring role of the primary processes and their linguistic permutations attract commentary. Basically, then, Kristeva’s close reading features two themes distinct from those pursued by Proust himself (at this juncture anyway): the impact of maternity on expression and the role of linguistic primary processes. These are also the main subjects of the chapters immediately preceding and succeeding Kristeva’s madeleine chapter.

**Analogies within and between Proust and Kristeva: double selves**

Not only does the form of Kristeva’s interpretation very closely follow the form of Proust’s own text, but the views contained within the whole of their respective texts also coincide. For Kristeva, the psyche has both conscious and unconscious facets. Proust presents a similar structure, although in different terms. He makes a distinction between “the world of the present and the historical self ...” and draws attention to the two faces of being: “one who senses and one who meditates ....” Proustian sensation exists, Kristeva writes, “at the interface of the world and

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96 As I have already discussed, much of Kristeva’s Chapter One, “Proust and Time Embodied,” explores the relationship between the author and his mother and the ambiguity common both to maternity and to sado-masochism. “Apologia for Metaphor,” Kristeva’s third chapter (succeeding the madeleine study) explores the role of metaphor and metonymy in the recovery and literary recreation of lost experiences. 97 Kristeva, *Proust*, 54-5.
Sensation is made up of a series of doublets with conscious and unconscious aspects. It is both “the actual shock to my senses” and “imagination,” both “representation” and “the essence of things,” both present and past. Simply, sensation opens out onto the phenomenal world and refracts onto the inner self.

The inner self is an irreducible essence, common to all living beings. Here, at this deepest level, the Proustian historical self is located. This inner, essential, historical self sounds very similar to psychoanalysis’ unconscious. Interestingly, neither Proust himself, nor Kristeva, formally make a connection between the two. That Proust did not draw explicitly on Freudian theory is not surprising since, as Philip Thody determines, there is no evidence that Proust ever read Freud, either in the original or in translation, despite his having studied German for four years at the Lycée Condorcet. Nonetheless, Thody proposes that “when you read A la recherche du temps perdu, it is the Freudian parallels that strike you first. The author who writes in Du côté de chez Swann about ‘the vast, unfathomed and forbidding night of the soul which we take to be an impenetrable void’ ... seems to have hit upon a very important Freudian concept, even if he has never read a word by Freud himself.”

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98 Kristeva, Proust, 53.
99 Kristeva, Proust, 53; Proust, III, 905.
100 Thody, Marcel Proust, 36, 46.
101 Thody, Marcel Proust, 37. Despite these observations, Thody goes on, in a transparently faulty piece of reasoning, to deny the correlation between Freudian unconscious and Proustian experience. He argues that even though the narrator’s ability to write seems to rely upon the physical accidents - like tasting the madeleine, stepping on the uneven paving stone, and feeling the starched napkin - which “brought back to life a set of memories which were buried deep in the ‘vast, unfathomed and forbidding night’ of his unconscious mind,” the fact that the bedtime drama (at the start of Swann’s Way) could be recalled in detail without any help from his subconscious or conscious mind means that “[i]t is all there, seething away in his conscious mind” (Thody, Marcel Proust, 41, 43, my emphasis). Consequently, for Thody, “Proust’s psychology is ultimately so un-Freudian” since “everything which happens takes place on the level of the conscious and not the unconscious mind” (Thody, Marcel Proust, 38, 43, my emphasis). That remembrance only functions on the conscious level is asserted even though Thody himself had just...
For her part, instead of an explicit statement of concurrence between essence and the unconscious, Kristeva seeks the philosophical origin of Proust’s essence. In her fourth and last chapter, “Proust as Philosopher,” she alights upon the thought of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) as expounded in his _The World as Will and Idea_ (1819) (with which Proust would certainly have come into contact during his literary studies in the 1890s). Kristeva selects the following passage from Schopenhauer to illustrate the notion of an omnipresent, essential, universal Will - present in the cosmos and the in individual - which is accessed by intuitive ideas (rather than by intellect). Intuitive ideas are the eternal form and objectification of Will:

I consider every force of nature as a will .... The concept of will is the only one, among all the possible concepts, which does not have its origin in the phenomenon, in a simple intuitive representation, but comes from the very foundation, from the immediate awareness of the individual, in which he recognizes himself, in essence, immediately, without any form, even that of subject and object, it being expected that here the knower and the known coincide.

Similarities between the Schopenhauerian essence and the Freudian unconscious are plain and they also extend to the Kristevan semiotically driven pre-subject whose experience cannot distinguish between subject and object and whose psyche is only gradually moulded from an initial state of amorphous formlessness. Further, in so tracing the origin of the “essence” in Schopenhauer, Kristeva claims observed that the madeleine, paving stone, and napkin incidents appeared to point to quite another plane altogether.

Schopenhauer in Kristeva, _Proust_, 86; Kristeva is quoting from the _Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation_ (Paris: PUF, 1966), the French translation of Schopenhauer’s _Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung_ of 1819 (The World as Will and Idea). A passage from _The World as Will and Idea_ is reprinted in Freud’s _Complete Psychological Works_. Schopenhauer’s suggestion that “sexual passion is the most perfect manifestation of the will to live” is alluded to by Freud in relation to the powerfulness of sexual desire in comparison with other forms of desire (Schopenhauer in Freud, XIX, 224).
to mark Proust’s distinctiveness from the romantic tendency of placing art in alignment with the eternal and immutable essences or forms of Plato (although Proust’s art has universal and absolute attributes), and crediting him instead with having rooted art “in the dramas of eroticism, giving it a completely human face.”

In so far as it is modelled upon the German philosopher’s ideas, then, the Proustian essence is a bundle of irreducible yet active, restless, and mutable qualities: spirit, truth, and beauty. The Freudian unconscious is similarly irreducible and constantly activated by the dynamism of its drives; what is more, the unconscious is the locus of truth and reality for psychoanalysis.

But, despite the philosophical precedent for Proust’s essence, which she does highlight, nowhere does Kristeva write in her own words that the Proustian essence is equivalent to, or even similar to, the Freudian unconscious. Instead, her readers have to rely upon not infrequent semantic slippages that occur between the essence and the unconscious in Kristeva’s text. Why are these obvious parallels merely suggested and not stated? Perhaps it is just too obvious, yet surely that is no excuse for failing to mention such an important point, at least in passing. It certainly cannot be a question of insufficient clues from Proust from which to launch another study of textual genetics, as Kristeva had done with the madeleine incident. The only reason I can fathom for her almost pointed avoidance of the connection between essence and unconscious is a stylistic one. Time and again Kristeva sets up parallels between concepts (that which occurs between

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104 Nevertheless, the memories at the core of Proust’s lost experience are temporally distinct from those recalled in Kristeva’s brand of psychoanalysis. While the “laws” of the unconscious begin to be forged even in nascency and have been (ineffectively) banned from consciousness, the laws of Proust’s essence appear to have been grounded in post-oedipal childhood, to have been consciously experienced then and to have been subsequently lost to consciousness. Yet, even if the Proustian being’s spirit or essence does not partake of the same preoedipal psychic dramas as does the Kristeva’s protosubject, the Kristevan unconscious and the Proustian essence occupy corresponding locales in relation to surface consciousness: Proust writes, “[f]rom ourselves comes only that which we drag forth from the obscurity which lies within us, that which to others is unknown” (Proust, III, 914).
transubstantiation and writing practice is another example) and leaves them hanging. Perhaps this to force the reader to “construct” or “write” her text, or perhaps it is to ensure her text operates according to the literary equivalents of the primary processes, in particular, that of metaphor (which I will come to again, below). I suspect that both of these tactics are in operation here.

**Doubled subjects, double signs**

Appropriately, given that the Proustian being and this being’s experience are binary (the self in the sensory present and the historical, essential, inner self) and that these dualities sit well with the two aspects of the psychoanalytic subject (conscious and unconscious), the Proustian written sign is also dual faceted: “we must take into account that the minimal unit in the Proustian text is not the word-sign but a doublet: sensation and idea, perception represented or image made incarnate.”

The Proustian “doublet” is, specifically, the metaphor. Proust’s “assemblage” of two words (which may signify “a perception soldered to an idea,” two perceptions, two ideas, or two representations with “common essences”) is “none other than the fusion of analogy, the very stuff of metaphor.”

In asserting the double nature of both psyche and sign in Proust, Kristeva is applying the Lacanian psychoanalytic paradigm that perceives the unconscious’ primary processes to be functionally identical to the literary figures of metaphor and metonymy. Kristeva endorses this view in relation to Proust with her assertion that “the analogical is the ontological.” She reiterates and expands on

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105 Kristeva, *Proust*, 56
107 Kristeva, *Proust*, 65. Kristeva’s equation is to be distinguished from Genette’s. The latter writes of Proust’s shift from “the ontological to the analogical ....” (Genette, *Figures in Literary Discourse*, 207-08, my emphasis).
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this point a few pages later: “the ontological has no need to become analogical, since analogy is there from the start, as a necessary equivalent to ontology, having unquestioned sway and establishing the necessity of art. Once there is ‘imagination’ ... there is analogy. Being is doubtless there before us, but we can enjoy it only by imagining it in metaphors.”

It is a happy occurrence that the metaphor doublet is structurally identical to unconscious primary processes because this makes it appropriate, so it is implied, for expression of the split being’s doubled reality. But, given that literary metaphor and unconscious primary processes are, in some important way, not only compatible and mutually illustrative but also partake of the same continuum (since the analogical is the ontological), it becomes possible to achieve more than the retrospective juxtaposition of structurally identical phenomenon and it becomes possible to arrange for more than a conformity of their “logics.”

For Proust, the metaphor is also a tool allowing one to “perceiv[e] things metaphorically” so as to reveal “the profundity of being,” that is, unconscious reality. The metaphoric tool operates by superimposition of its two terms, eradication of their differences, and bolstering of the links between them. These links, which constantly feed back to both terms, incise a spiral that probes the depths of being where the spiritual essence that is common to everyone resides. Proust himself describes this “metaphorical apprehension of depths” metaphorically, firstly in terms of a geometrician and secondly in terms of an X-ray surgeon. Kristeva quotes from Proust to illustrate this idea of “the metaphorical imagination as a kind of surgical incision, which passes beyond

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108 Kristeva, Proust, 68.
109 Kristeva, Proust, 65.
110 Kristeva, Proust, 65.
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"sensible qualities" to expose the point which was "common to one being and another," that is, to expose the essence:

So the apparent, copiable charm of things and people escaped me, because I had not the ability to stop short there - I was like a surgeon who beneath the smooth surface of a woman's belly sees the internal disease which is devouring it. If I went to a dinner-party I did not see the guests: when I thought I was looking at them, I was in fact examining them with X-rays.

So, once the depths have been plumbed, "it is the task of art," according to Proust (and endorsed by Kristeva), "to ... mak[e] us travel back in the direction from which we have come to the depths where what has really existed lies unknown within us." Art is shown by Proust to have a dual nature, participating in superficial appearances with its "trompe-l'oeil effects of clever technique," while simultaneously registering a deeper and more subtle reality. Expressed in the concrete reality of words which overtly signify readily appreciated sensations, the allegorical or metaphorical quality of these words also reach into another reality buried within memory.

The power of metaphor, then, does not stop in the unconscious, or in the past either. Metaphor is not only compatible to unconscious reality, and so analogously illustrative of it, it is not only a tool that may be employed to apperceive essential reality, but further, it "achieves the feat of transsubstantiation

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111 Kristeva, Proust, 66.
112 Proust, III, 738; Kristeva, Proust, 65-6. Kristeva and Proust both employ metaphors of corporeal internalisation to describe the essence or unconscious. Nevertheless, while for both the "same" or consciousness is the woman's body, Proust conceives of the other within as a parasitic disease, Kristeva sees it as a foetus. Interestingly, Kristeva reinterprets the Proustian disease (internal reality) as endowed with "the pregnant, poetic quality of synaesthesia" (Kristeva, Proust 64, my emphasis).
113 Kristeva, Proust, 65; Proust, III, 932.
114 Kristeva, Proust, 93.
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dreamed of by the novelist.” The essence or unconscious reality that is perceived and is signified by the metaphor is also transformed into its words. Kristeva is assisted in applying this theory (outlined in my second chapter) to Proust, by Marcel’s own conviction as expressed in Remembrance:

[T]ruth will be attained [by the writer] only when he takes two different objects, states the connection between them - a connection analogous in the world of art to the unique connection which in the world of science is provided by the law of causality - and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style; truth - and life too - can be attained by us only when, by comparing a quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them to each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a metaphor.

Kristeva is not alone in highlighting this passage from Proust. It is widely recognised as being central to his aesthetic theory. Deleuze, for instance, in questioning “precisely how ... essence [is] incarnated in the work of art” maintains that the transmutation of unconscious themes (which he identifies as involuntary archetypes) into words is a matter of “style” and that “style is essentially metaphor.”

Precedents

By now, Kristeva’s interpretation of Proust’s use of metaphor must be familiar to readers of Tales of Love, especially her study of the metaphor set out in “Throes of love: the field of the metaphor,” and her application of this theory to Baudelaire in “Baudelaire, or Infinity, Perfume, and Punk.” This familiarity is not restricted

115 Kristeva, Proust, 58.
116 Proust, III, 924-25.
117 Deleuze, 46-7.
118 Refer to my Chapter Two.
to Kristeva’s theory of metaphor, though. Among the other ideas discussed in *Proust and the Sense of Time* with which Kristeva’s readers are already acquainted, is the notion, outlined in *Black Sun*, that linguistic utterances take the place of mourning and act as compensation for the lost mother; the theory, propounded in *Powers of Horror* and *Tales of Love*, that the relationship with the now-lost mother is profoundly ambivalent, embracing the emotional affects of both love and disgust; the idea, addressed expansively in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, that material language extends in a continuum through the body to articulate unconscious events and that these unconscious events reveal a truth of greater reality and integrity than those proffered by the world of appearances and consciousness.

There is little that is radically new in Kristeva’s Proust book to suggest that there may occur an intertextual exchange of ideas between Kristeva’s pre-existing theories and those located in the Proustian oeuvre. Not only have most of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic observations been made before by the likes of Barthes, Deleuze, Genette, Hill and Splitter but Proust’s works serve to illustrate and reinforce Kristeva’s established theoretical propositions rather than to modify them significantly. Certainly, Kristeva’s theories may have been extended by their dialogue with Proust but only along the same trajectories that she had previously navigated. The agreement between her own theory and the literary expression of her chosen subjects sets out a comfortable circularity that starts with unconscious affects, embraces their metaphoric expression in literature and returns to the unconscious again.

Returning to the unconscious again and again and again. Despite the presence of objective and subjective, conscious and unconscious, intellectual and spiritual modes in literature, it is clear that Kristeva sites the really important activities of Proust’s literary production far within his depth model of being, closer to the

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essential spirit than to surface phenomena and sensation. Accordingly, Kristeva writes of Proust’s narrator establishing links by way of metaphor in “a continuous joining of circular elements, analogy has the effect of opening up the surface of signs in the direction of depth ....”\(^\text{119}\) The depth referred to here is not only an overdetermination or abundance of meaning that is created by the metaphoric juxtaposition of nonidentical terms, but it is also a psychographical extension from current surface conscious sensation to past underlying unconscious experience. Further, Kristeva does not merely record Proust’s valorisation of truth, essence and spirit over intellect and the designatory properties of the sign. Attention to the subtext of her Proust book, not to mention her other works, indicates that she too holds the hidden meaning to be of greater significance than the overt, intellectual or consciously available meaning. In short, the unconscious/essence is at the core of art for both Kristeva and for Proust. To emphasise this point Kristeva, by way of summary, offers a passage from German idealist philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854): “The fundamental character of the work of art is \textit{unconscious} and infinite.”\(^\text{120}\)

One quality belonging to both the unconscious and the essence which is particularly valued in itself and in art is universality. Proust considers it the task of the novelist to scratch the surface of appearance and sensation in order to illuminate the universal laws of the unconscious/essence discovered deep in the psyche.\(^\text{121}\) The novel then becomes the medium by which the individual reader, in turn, is prompted to discover within her or his own psyche the universal laws of


\(^{120}\) Kristeva, \textit{Proust}, 93-4, my emphasis. Kristeva borrows this passage from Anne Henry’s \textit{Marcel Proust, théorie pour une esthétique}. Schelling is generally regarded as the principal philosopher of romanticism particularly influencing the English romantics through literary theorist, poet, philosopher, theologian and social theorist, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Schelling argued that it is through art alone that the mind can become fully aware of itself and therefore art should become that to which true philosophical reflection should aspire (Anthony Flew, ed., \textit{A Dictionary of Philosophy} (London: Pan, 1984) 314-15).

\(^{121}\) Proust, III, 738.
the unconscious/essence. Thus Kristeva writes of Proust: “He searches for lost
time in the innermost signs of his experience, infusing the singularity of his own
grief into the universal pattern of an intelligence which is accessible to all.”¹²² By
“all,” Kristeva means not only those of Proust’s own era and milieu, but present
day readers as well. In fact, she credits Proust with having devised in his novel a
“new form of temporality” that gives “an X-ray image” of the “polarized and
discontinuous logic” according to which memory is governed.¹²³ She argues that
the contemporary western postmodern experience is similarly structured around
the reintegration of unconsciously and subconsciously retained events into
conscious thought, so making Proust’s fiction particularly pertinent to our lives.¹²⁴

Splitter, thinking along similar lines, announces that Proust’s narrator “is kind of
proto-structuralist who discovers the underlying (synchronic) structure of
recurrence in the (diachronic) series of impressions which make up his life,
discovering, in fact, that time itself is discontinuous, composed of discrete,
separate moments that are finally (in the ‘extra-temporal’ realm of the
imagination) identical.”¹²⁵

Proust himself writes of an internal universal and absolute base at the core of
being and of art: “I had arrived then at the conclusion that in fashioning a work of
art we are by no means free, that we do not choose how we shall make it but that it
pre-exists us and therefore we are obliged, since it is both necessary and hidden, to

¹²⁴ Kristeva, *Proust*, 4. In this regard Kristeva refers to the Gulf War as a medieval Inquisition, the
American Republican presidents in the 1980s as combining “stiff, puritanical attitudes belong[ing] to the
great age of Protestant conquest of the New World... [and] an eighteenth-century regard for human rights”
and the Los Angeles riots as a demonstration of regression to infancy (Kristeva, *Proust*, 4).
¹²⁵ Splitter, 80.
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do what we should have to do if it were a law of nature, that is to say to discover it.” Kristeva writes of Proust's work that:

within this network of interminable social events, of endless plot, plots and more plots, he situates a person, I, a subject whose memory cannot be impugned, who is there to bring out the convulsive truth of this seeming history, to “tear off its hundred masks”. I invites you to do as I does. Read me, and you will be part of the world but without being taken in by it. I can give you the Divine Comedy of the life of the psyche, not just mine, but yours as well, ours, that is, absolute.

Again and again Proust writes of “the essential, the only true book” as being not, particularly, the invention of the writer: “for it exists already in each one of us.” Consequently, “[t]he function and the task of a writer are those of a translator,” who, “with the aid of that sort of sympathetic ink which is thought,” retraces onto the page the “secret life” “common to one being and another.” In so capturing, converting, and communicating the deep, essential being that has been released from lost time in the language of his fiction, Proust reveals “fundamental features of the human psyche.”

This, too, is Kristeva’s aim as a literary interpreter. She is no poststructuralist, frivolously generating endless interpretations. Her interpretations have a centre,

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126 Proust, III, 915.
127 Kristeva, Proust, 7.
128 Proust, III, 926.
129 Proust, III, 738; Kristeva, Proust, 90.
they have a deep structure. That structure is the psyche, at the centre of which are unconscious affects formulated prior to oedipalisation, and these are set in motion by the unconscious primary processes which encode affect into literature.
Chapter Nine

An Alternating Theory

Does not the wonderment of psychic life after all stem from those alternations of protections and downfalls, smiles and tears, sunshine and melancholia?

Julia Kristeva

My thesis thus far has viewed Kristeva’s work from three perspectives. In the first instance I surveyed Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory of subjective and linguistic development with special emphasis on its impact upon literary production and poetic language. Secondly, I extrapolated from Kristeva’s psycholinguistic theory to explain what I perceive to be her current literary interpretative theory and methodology which has hitherto remained uninterpreted within her oeuvre. Thirdly, I analysed two of Kristeva literary interpretations in some detail.

What I did not do, in these last two chapters on Kristeva’s interpretations of Joyce and Proust, was to undertake a critical comparison of the theory of Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology (as I have identified it) and her literary interpretative practice. So the question remains, does Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice bear out the theoretical approach I have discerned in her work? While in this final chapter I will be addressing this issue, although not directly, it should be made clear that the conformance or nonconformance of Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory and her literary interpretative practice is a secondary issue. It is secondary for two reasons.

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1 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 259.
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One: Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory and method as articulated in my Chapters Four through Six is supported by Kristeva’s own psychoanalytic and psycholiterary theories. My proposition that Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory, which posits a literary interpretative practice based on the same psycholinguistic processes as literary production (with the interpreter taking up the position of the imaginary father, albeit with greater emphasis upon “his” symbolic rather than semiotic attributes), does not require conformity with Kristeva’s own literary interpretative practice to be upheld. Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory can be (and, I believe, has been) shown to be present and valid within the parameters of her own wider theory.

Two: if Kristeva’s literary theoretical practice was shown to deviate considerably from her literary interpretative theory, that would not prove that the theory is unfounded but simply that she did not put her own theory of literary interpretation into practice.

Another reason why I have not tested Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory against her literary interpretative practice is that it is largely untestable. A thorough assessment of Kristeva’s literary readings would address the presence and success of the objective linguistic, contextual and psychoanalytical textual analyses, whether there is evidence of subjective countertransference at play, and how Kristeva negotiates the nexus between these two phases in her literary interpretative writing. But only the first of these categories is actually testable. One cannot objectively test the subjective component of Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory because of the part played by countertransference. Only the individual who is undergoing countertransference (and maybe her analyst) can discern the event and outcome of the countertransference.
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By the same token, this issue of countertransference, which is the focus of Kristeva's second phase of interpretation, while preventing any thoroughgoing analysis of her interpretative theory compared to her interpretative practice, may nevertheless expose Kristeva's own interests and biases in a way that a cooler, more conceptual extrapolation of her theory does not. Such an exposure is not gained by direct analysis or comparison of Kristeva's theory and practice, but obliquely, by taking note of the predominance of certain issues in Kristeva's literary interpretative practice. It must be noted that this would be an entirely speculative exercise. The resultant observations may be connected to Kristeva's supposed countertransference, but then again, they may not.

The third phase of Kristeva's interpretative theory does not completely escape attention either. While it is impossible for a non-psychoanalyst to determine whether Kristeva has in fact incorporated her semiotic experience of literary texts into her interpretations, it is possible to ascertain whether Kristeva has at least attempted to find and explain the semiotic code underlying literary production. For instance, we have seen in Kristeva's Joyce study, that her interpretation aims to "shed light upon the identificatory movement proper to artistic experience" by analysing love's two forms (eros and agape), Catholic transubstantiation and the role of the imaginary father. And in her Proust interpretation, Kristeva locates in metaphor's structure and function "the feat of transubstantiation dreamed of by the novelist."

It is also possible to assess whether the end of Kristeva's literary interpretative practice meets up with its beginning to form an interpretative circle or whether it extends the underlying literary interpretative theory by forming an interpretative

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2 Kristeva, Desire, 120, my emphasis.
3 Kristeva, "Joyce 'The Gracehoper,'" 169.
4 Kristeva, Proust, 58.
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spiral. I have already given some indication in my previous chapters that I believe the former to be the prevalent pattern, although I will go on to suggest that, at another level, Kristeva’s literary interpretations do impact upon and change her psycholiterary theory.

While a comprehensive comparison of Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory and her literary interpretative practice is not feasible, then, a study of Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice is worthwhile in order to ascertain, firstly, whether Kristeva does in fact incorporate linguistic, contextual and psychoanalytic analyses in each of her interpretations. Secondly, to identify the dominant themes in Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice (which may or may not be evidence of her countertransference at work). Thirdly, to inquire to what degree she elaborates upon the code she perceives to be underlying literary production. And, fourthly, to find out whether Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice inscribes interpretative spirals (as she would wish) or interpretative circles.

In my brief readings of a wider range of Kristeva’s literary interpretations, I will be attending only to those published in Tales of Love, Black Sun and Powers of Horror. I do so because the literary interpretative theory and methodology that I have teased out in Chapters Three to Six relates specifically to this later period of Kristeva’s work and not to the socially revolutionary-oriented interpretations in Revolution in Poetic Language.

Linguistic analysis

It is interesting to find among Kristeva’s literary analyses examples which appear, at least initially, to be quite traditional. Her “Gérard de Nerval, The Disinherited Poet,” published in Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia, is a case in point. The piece opens with two very similar versions of Nerval’s El Dedichado (The
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Disinherited) in both French and English. Sufficient for my purposes is to supply the English translation of the second version only:

_I am saturnine - bereft - disconsolate._

The Prince of Aquitaine whose tower has crumbled;  
My lone star is dead - and my bespangled lute  
Bears the Black Sun of Melancholia.

In the night of the grave, you who brought me solace,  
Give me back Posilipo and the sea of Italy,  
The flower that so pleased my distressed heart,  
And the arbor where grapevine and rose combine.

Am I Cupid or Phebus? ... Lusignana or Byron?  
My brow is still red from the kiss of the queen;  
I have dreamt in the cave where the siren swims ...

I’ve twice, as a conqueror, been across the Acheron;  
Modulating by turns on Orpheus’ lyre  
The sighs of the saint and the screams of the fay.  

Kristeva’s interpretation of “The Disinherited” is performed with the express purpose of ascertaining precisely what the poet feels disinherited from. After outlining the publication details of the poem and commenting upon Nerval’s fit of madness which occurred in May 1853, Kristeva rapidly surmises that “This ‘something’ would be previous to the detectable ‘object’: the secret and unreachable horizon of our loves and desires, it assumes for the imagination, the consistency of an archaic mother, which, however, no precise image manages to encompass.”

This central, psychoanalytic, hypothesis is then reinforced by an extended close analysis of the poem in both its versions. A passage or two from Kristeva’s essay will suffice to illuminate her interpretative technique:

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5 The first version was published in _Le Mousquetaire_ on December 10, 1853, introduced by an essay written by Nerval. The second version appeared in _Les Filles du feu_ in 1854.

6 English translation of the 1854 version; Kristeva, _Black Sun_, 141.

7 Kristeva, _Black Sun_, 145.
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The qualifier "saturnine" [Nerval's word: ténébreux] is consonant with the Prince of Darkness already suggested by the tarot pack as well as with night deprived of light. It conjures up the melancholy person's complicity with the world of darkness and despair.

The "black sun" (line 4) again takes up the semantic field of "saturnine," but pulls it inside out, like a glow: darkness flashes as a solar light, which nevertheless remains dazzling with black invisibility.

"Bereft" [Nerval's word: veuf = widower] is the first sign pointing to mourning. Would the saturnine mood then be the consequence of his having lost a wife? ...

Using the word "disconsolate" [inconsolé] as opposed to "inconsolable" suggests a paradoxical temporality: the one who speaks has not been solaced in the past, an the effect of that frustration lasts up to the present.8

Linguistic analysis, conducted in detail not seen since Kristeva's studies of Lautréamont and Mallarmé in La révolution du langage poétique, locates in Nerval's poem evidence of "the very first alliterations, rhythms, melodies, the transposition of the speaking body asserting itself through a glottic and oral presence":9

T: ténébreux (saturnine), Aquitaine, tour(tower), étoil (star), morte (dead), luth (lute), constellé (bespangled), porte (bears); BR-PT-TR: Ténébreux (saturnine), prince, tour (tower), morte (dead), porte (bears); S: suis (am), inconsolé (disconsolate), prince, seule (lone), constellé (bespangled), soleil (sun); ON: inconsolé (disconsolate), mon (my), constellé (bespangled) ....10

Kristeva suggests that "ordinary" readers may experience the same "glottic and oral presence" of the maternal body "if they will simply allow themselves to be

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8 Kristeva, Black Sun, 147-48.
9 Kristeva, Black Sun, 161.
10 Kristeva, Black Sun, 162.
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cought up in the sole phonic and rhythmic coherence . . . ,” as displayed above. But Kristeva herself, who possesses the requisite “precise knowledge of mythology or esoterics . . . ,” has in addition been able to provide a close reading of the word signs as referents. The end result of Kristeva’s linguistic analyses is always a psychoanalytical diagnosis, regardless of whether she reads to access the signified or to address phonetics. In Nerval’s case, “because of its key position in the organization and disorganization of psychic space, at the limits of affect and meaning, of biology and language, of asymbolia and breathtakingly rapid or eclipsed significance,” Kristeva determines that Nerval’s governing psychological condition is melancholia.

**A countertransferential instance**

To attend to the linguistic features of a literary text is to attend to its style. In another of Kristeva’s literary analyses, “Bataille and the Sun, or the Guilt Text,” the relationship between a text’s surface features and its psychic impetus is made clear: “Those explorers of the psyche, whom we call writers, travel to the end of the night where our loves fear to tread. We remain merely perturbed by the style’s intensity, for the unconscious has its obligations . . . . A style - witness to the loss of meaning, watchman of death.” But does Kristeva’s herself fear to travel to the end of the night? Another way to ask this question is to inquire whether Kristeva does, or does not, undergo a countertransference with the text.

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14 I stated in my introduction to this chapter, that one of the principal obstacles to a thoroughgoing comparison of Kristeva’s literary interpretative theory and practice was the difficulty, if not impossibility, for an outsider to determine instances of countertransference.
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Although countertransference has been introduced by Kristeva to explain certain aspects of the analysand-analyst, text-reader relationship, there is little explicit evidence of its activity. So, despite countertransferential reading being one important phase of Kristeva’s literary interpretative procedure, Kristeva does really not focus on the reader’s response or reception of the work either in her theory or in her own literary interpretative practice. In both her literary interpretations and her theories of textual production, attention is focused upon the author-text relationship rather than the text-reader relationship.

As it happens, though, “Romeo and Juliet: Love-Hatred in the Couple” provides a rare case whereby Kristeva actually identifies an occasion of her own countertransference. It is alluded to by Kristeva as support for her proposition that a traumatic event in Shakespeare’s life led to the writing of Romeo and Juliet:

I might also advance the hypothesis, with no other evidence than possibly cross-checking the unconscious paths of the reader with those of the writer (text and biography), that Hamnet’s death triggered within Shakespeare the nostalgia for a couple that would have been in love ... as precisely William and Anne were not able to be ....

Kristeva as reader is asserting that, having entered countertransference with the writer through the medium of his text and known biographical details, she is able to understand Shakespeare’s unconscious. Having delved into the mind of the author, Kristeva learns that his son Hamnet’s death initiated a yearning for a perfect love such as that between Romeo and Juliet, a love that stands in stark contrast to the relationship between Shakespeare and his wife. Kristeva’s reference to this “countertransferential” insight is notable, not only for its rarity in her oeuvre, but also for the fact that in it she explains that biography and text together give insight into the writer’s psyche. So, while the unconscious of the

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15 Kristeva, Tales of Love, 218, my emphasis. Refer to my Chapter Seven for Kristeva’s discussion of Hamnet and Hamlet in relation to James Joyce.
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writer is apparent within the fabric of the text, in its “flaws of the texture (language, discourse, or narrative) that represents,” it is also available through biography.  

Biographical analysis

One consequence of Kristeva’s reliance upon biography as much as on the text for interpretation is that the author’s psychology become entangled with the characters’ psychology. For instance, just as she had with Marcel and Proust in *Proust and the Sense of Time*, Kristeva conflates the writer and his characters in “Stendhal and the Politics of the Gaze: An Egoist’s Love.” Having just discussed male lovers being positioned between two women in Stendhal’s fiction, of Julien Sorel between Madame de Rênal and Mathilde; Lucien Leuwen between Madame de Chateller or Madame d’Hocquincourt or Madame Grandet [and] Fabrice del Dongo between Sanseverina and Clelia ...,” Stendhal appears to have become a character in his own text:

With Stendhal, being ‘between-two-women’ ... suggests a safeguarding strategy. In order not to be swallowed by any one of them, the egoist grants himself as least two. An eternal stratagem of masculine sexuality obsessed with castration, maintaining two poles of crystallization doubtless satisfies Stendhal the voyeur.

Little wonder, then, that one of Stendhal’s posthumously published autobiographical works, *La Vie de Henri Brulard* (1890), is cited extensively by Kristeva. Nor should it come as a surprise, given Kristeva’s tendency to seek out

16 Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 368.
17 Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 359.
18 Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 359.
19 Stendhal is the pseudonym of Henri Beyle (1783-1842). Aside from *La vie de Henri Brulard* (1890), Stendhal’s other autobiographical works include the *Journal* (1888) and *Souvenirs d’égotisme* (1892). All were published after Beyle’s death (Drabble, 935).
writers whose literary theory is complementary with her own, that Stendhal, too, wrote of love in relation to psychological, historical and social conditions in his *De l'amour* (1822).

Kristeva's study of Marguerite Duras' writings (to which I referred in my second chapter) also strongly evokes the biographical. Kristeva rapidly condenses modern political and military history into its impact upon western humanity's psychology, in which "[p]rivate suffering absorbs political horror into the subject's psychic microcosm."^20^ Having interiorised history, Kristeva chooses to "defer examination of political matters and scrutinize only the spectrum of suffering ...."^21^ Soon, however, this generalised suffering is particularised to the experiences of Duras as an individual. Delving into Duras' "childhood on the Asian continent, the stress of a difficult existence next to her courageous, harsh mother ... the precocious encounter with her brother's mental illness and prevailing poverty ..., a childhood where love ... and hope were displayed only in the depths of misfortune," Kristeva claims that these real life events "may have led her personal sensitivity to suffering to espouse with such eagerness the drama of our times, a drama that imprints the malady of death at the heart of the psychic experience of most of us."^22^ While, later in the essay, it is suggested that the psychosexual machinations of the three primary characters in Duras' *The Vice-Consul* "provide the narrator with a rich soil for her psychological search," references to the real life author, such as that quoted above, give the distinct impression that, for Kristeva, narrators are disguised mouthpieces for deeply seated psychological conditions endured or enjoyed by the writer. ^23^

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^20^ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 234.

^21^ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 236.

^22^ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 238.

^23^ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 249.
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One of the most striking of Kristeva's uses of biography is in relation to Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Following Freud in his 1928 essay "Dostoyevsky and Parricide," Kristeva launches into a clinical case history of the writer: "The tormented world of Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) is ruled," she writes, "more by epilepsy than by melancholia in the clinical sense of the term." While Dostoyevsky might have been primarily afflicted with epilepsy, Kristeva, in contrast to Freud, focuses primarily upon the suffering as opposed to the epilepsy - and she is well advised to do so, for Freud interpreted Dostoyevsky's "alleged" epilepsy as a purely psychological affliction. It was, according to Freud, a symptom pertaining to his neurosis concerning his oedipal fear of his father, a fear which became internalised as the sadistic super-ego, while his ego, under sway of a bisexual submissiveness, took on a masochistic role. Upon the murder of his father, Dostoyevsky's childhood bouts of melancholy become epileptic attacks signifying internally directed punishment of his masochistic (bisexual, feminine) ego by his sadistic (paternal) super-ego. Freud proposed this scenario as the cause of Dostoyevsky's "affective" epilepsy in preference to an organic explanation despite the writer's classic epileptic symptoms such as "loss of consciousness, muscular convulsions and subsequent depression" and despite Freud's own admission that the veracity of his interpretation "cannot, strictly speaking, be proved." In proposing such a phenomenon, Freud was perpetuating the errors of his mentor of half a century earlier, the famed Parisian neurologist Dr Jean Martin Charcot, with regard to the origins of "hystero-epilepsy." Yet, while Kristeva explains that

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24 Kristeva, Black Sun, 175.
26 Freud, XXI, 181.
27 Refer to Chapters Two and Three of Richard Webster's Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis (Harper Collins: London, 1996) for a detailed critique of Charcot's research and theories and Freud's response to them. In 1870 Charcot took responsibility for all the patients in La Salpêtrière, a medical pauper house for thousands of old women. Two wards had previously been established to separate epileptic patients from those suffering 'hystero-epilepsy'. Charcot, who treated hysteria as a clinical, organic reality, set about to differentiate the two aspects of the illness (Webster, 55-6). Around 1885 he
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“present clinical practice views them [hysteria and epilepsy] as basically separate entities,” she nevertheless arrives at a position that is considerably closer to Freud’s (and Charcot’s) than one might reasonably expect from a late twentieth-century writer.28

While Freud argues that Dostoyevsky’s melancholic suffering was, after his father’s death, escalated into “hystero-epilepsy,” Kristeva perceives that a “noneroticized suffering” (which may be termed “primary masochism” or “melancholia”) underlies all experience including physiological illness and writing and that it signals the primordial psychic inscription of a break.29 In the face of contemporary clinical practice (as she herself acknowledges), Kristeva considers “the epileptic symptom as another variation on the subject’s withdrawal when, threatened with a lapse into the paranoid-schizoid position, it effects by means of motor discharge a silent acting out of the ‘death drive’ (break in neural transmissibility, interruption of symbolic bonds, preventing homeostasis of the living structure).”30 By focusing on psychological affect, Kristeva then goes on to propose that “[e]pileptic fits and writing are in the same way the high points of a paroxysmal sadness that reverses into a mystical jubilation outside time” without, as Freud had done, necessarily relegating Dostoyevsky’s epilepsy to a mere symptom of neurosis.31 Although I am not in a position to debate the plausibility of a psychological foundation to epilepsy, the distinction between Freud and Kristeva’s positions may be little more than a matter of semantics. It is suffice to say that, like Freud, Kristeva calls upon biographical details of Dostoyevsky’s life to support her thesis and again, like Freud, she goes on to read the characters’

abandoned his purely organic explanations to study hysteria as combining organic and psychogenic origin (Webster, 95).

28 Kristeva, Black Sun, 175.

29 Kristeva, Black Sun, 176. Refer to my Chapter Two on the thetic break.

30 Kristeva, Black Sun, 183.

31 Kristeva, Black Sun, 176.
interactions in Dostoyevsky’s fiction as illustrative of literature’s “staging of affects.”

That literature is a “staging of affects,” for Kristeva, indicates the degree to which literature is in the service of psychoanalysis. Accordingly, Kristeva’s literary interpretations, particularly her study of Dostoyevsky which relies so heavily upon biography, are frequently psychobiographical. Psychobiographers interpret literature in order to reach conclusions about the author’s psyche and gut the author’s biography in order to interpret the literature (as I discussed in Chapter Four).

**Psychoanalysing literature**

That Kristeva is as interested in real lives as she is in fictional characters is graphically portrayed in *Tales of Love* by the clinical case studies which punctuate both the literary analyses and the psychoanalytic theories. For example, differentiated by italic typeface in the Baudelaire interpretation, is the case study of Justine who participates in unbounded sexual orgies as an erotic over-reaction to her mother’s own sexual adventures and as compensation for a father who did not exist in her mother’s eyes. Justine, who exhausts her body and soul in sexual fury because of the wretchedness of her tie to her fallen father, finds her discourse empty of meaning. Justine’s discourse is contrasted to that of Baudelaire who, throughout his writing, strains towards the place of the imaginary father, a place which “allows the narcissistic structure to unfold and speak itself.”

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32 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 179.

33 Justine is the name (pseudonym?) of Kristeva’s patient, although her behaviour is evocative of the Marquis de Sade’s character, Justine.

texts, by reaching for the imaginary father, are thereby filled with *jouissance* and operate on a multiplicity of levels.\(^{35}\)

The mother is also an imposing figure in the psychoanalytic case study which interpolates Kristeva’s study of *Romeo and Juliet*. In this instance, Genny is under analysis. The figure of her mother (“an impeccable and disgusting cook, a fat and dirty body that dominates the slender father”) underlies the real life drama of Genny, who married her weak but well-bred psychoanalyst husband to escape her mother. Recognising that there are no more dissimilar persons than the sturdy, blonde Genny and the beautiful, young Italian Juliet, Kristeva nevertheless finds their psychic conditions analogous. Kristeva suggests that Genny’s indecisive husband was a kind of good mother for her and that his “clan brought the image of an elegant mother-in-law, self confident, able to impress other women” as opposed to her own mother who was a source of shame.\(^{36}\) Once she gained confidence in herself as a mother and as an independent woman, she had no further need for her husband and so sought to kill him. By applying the same psychoanalytic theory to *Romeo and Juliet*, Kristeva insists that “hatred is the keynote in the couple’s passionate melody” because “[a]s soon as an other appears different from myself, it becomes alien, repelled, repugnant, abject - hated.”\(^{37}\) As Juliet states: “My only love sprung from my only hate!”\(^{38}\) The pre-oedipal figure to whom both love and hatred are directed is, as one might expect, the mother in the twin guise of the imaginary father and the abject mother. Indeed, Kristeva maintains that the heterosexual adolescent love of Romeo and Juliet entails marriage, for both parties, with the mother. The young wife finds restoring support in her mother-husband while the husband also finds in his wife a

\(^{35}\) Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 319-20.

\(^{36}\) Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 229. The italics are Kristeva’s own. All the clinical case studies in *Tales of Love* are printed in italic typeface.

\(^{37}\) Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 222.

\(^{38}\) Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, l.v.139; Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 221.
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continuation of his mother.\textsuperscript{39} In this essay, literature serves as a “ready analogy,” as Kristeva herself suggests, for her discussion of her own psychoanalytic theory.

It is obvious by now that Kristeva’s psychoanalysing of literary texts (and patients) have the figure of the pre-oedipal mother returning, time and again. The mother is featured in the Baudelaire and Shakespeare studies (just outlined) and again in Kristeva’s Stendhal study. There, the character Julien in \textit{The Red and the Black} lacked a mother, a space that was to be later filled by Madame de Rênal. \textit{The Charterhouse of Parma} featured Fabrice whose subdued mother delegated her function to the paternal aunt. Henri Beyle (Stendhal himself) lost his mother in 1790 when he was seven. The mother is also central from the very first paragraph of Kristeva’s analysis of Bataille, indeed, the primary reference for Kristeva in this brief piece on the French surrealist poet is his book \textit{Ma Mère} (1966). Proust’s sadomasochistic compensation for his deeply mourned, dead mother is detailed by Kristeva in \textit{Proust and the Sense of Time} (as we have seen in Chapter Eight). In her Nerval interpretation, Kristeva nominates the archaic mother as the “you” who appears for the first time in the second stanza:

\begin{quote}
Scholars have asked the question and provided many answers - it is Aurélia, the saint, Artemisia/Arémis, Jenny Colon, the dead mother .... \textsuperscript{40} The undecidable concatenation of these real and imagined figures recedes once more toward the position of the archaic “Thing” - the elusive preobject of a mourning that is endemic with all speaking beings and a suicidal attraction for the depressive person.
\end{quote}

While Kristeva reads in Nerval’s poem and its previous interpretations that all real and imagined figures recede toward the position of the archaic “Thing.” One could say that almost all of Kristeva’s literary interpretations also recede toward

\textsuperscript{39} Kristeva, \textit{Tales of Love}, 223.

\textsuperscript{40} Kristeva, \textit{Black Sun}, 152, my emphasis.
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the archaic “Thing,” locating “her” in all manner of real and imagined figures in various writers’ worlds and works.41

One could view Kristeva’s insistent return to the mother as evidence of countertransference desire, as does Kelly Oliver.42 Oliver questions Kristeva’s unconscious motivation for so persistently relying upon religious tropes: “Could Kristeva’s attachment to biblical metaphors, then, be nostalgia for her childhood attachment to her family, especially her mother, forever associated with the icon of the Virgin, which she presumably hung above the bed? Could these metaphors be Kristeva’s melancholy mournings for her lost mother/land?”43

Interpreting the code underlying literature

While Kristeva may, or may not, be in unconscious mourning for “her lost mother/land,” it is more helpful for my project to view Kristeva’s return to the mother in her literary interpretations as part of her search for the code of desire which enacts the subject’s simultaneous desire for and rejection of the mother. Indeed, Kristeva’s entire psycholiterary theory may be recast in terms of the mother: heterogeneity is embodied in the pregnant body split between self and other; the maternal chora is constructed as a foil by mother and infant to mask the ever-present, inescapable threat of the void; the Thing is the maternal body; the archaic mother is the longed for maternal continent (the Thing that is desired); the phallic mother is the all-powerful mother; the imaginary father is the mother plus her desire for the phallus; the abject mother is the mother reviled; the father is symbolic substitute for the mother; symbolic language is that which compensates

41 John Lechte’s observation that, “whereas prior to 1980, semiotics and psychoanalysis were brought to bear on works of art (cf. poetic language), now the tendency is to invoke works of art in order to illuminate, or even explain, concepts such as abjection,” is correct in this instance (Lechte, Julia Kristeva, 6).

42 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 14.

43 Oliver, Reading Kristeva, 133.
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for the lost, unconsciously desired mother; poetic language is dialectically constructed between symbolic language and maternally derived semiotic pre-linguistic marks - with its reference being, ultimately, the loved and lost mother.

With the writer and the interpreter both positioned (as my extrapolation of Kristeva’s literary theory would have it) as the imaginary father, continued correspondence with the mother, in all her manifestations, is assured. Positioned as the imaginary father, the interpreter can not only gain access to the maternal semiotic field, but is also able to return to the symbolic. From there, having re-embraced a logical framework, the interpreter is able to analyse the dialectic between the mother and her poetic replacement in the signification to discover the code that underlies literary (and, to a lesser extent, interpretative) production.

The search for the code of desire in literature is made explicit in Kristeva’s “The Troubadours: from ‘Great Courtly Romance’ to Allegorical Narrative.” There, Kristeva locates in fin amor, twelfth-century troubadour courtliness, a love that is a code. The woman and the man each have their roles, “suzerain and vassal respectively, the lady levying a ‘distress,’ the man offering a ‘service’” which is rewarded, not necessarily platonically, by the lady. The courtly message which conveys this code is double, according to Kristeva. On the one hand, it is a literal signification with the Lady as its object. On the other hand, it refers “to joy alone and whose sign is the song but also the excess of meaning, the ‘more-than-meaning’ brought in by indefinite syntax, paradox, or metaphoricalness in the very vocabulary.” In support of this thesis, Kristeva notes that the square notation system used to transcribe troubadour melodies defines pitch, but not duration or rhythm. Rather than a poverty of inscription, Kristeva argues that the resultant tempo rubato is:

44 Kristeva, Tales of Love, 280.
45 Kristeva, Tales of Love, 287-88.
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complex, opulent, sensual mingling, made up of meanderings, pleasureful incantations, expressive vocalisations, spasmodic windings, or, on the contrary, bearing on supple groups of words, constitute in fact the first encoding of the singer’s amorous transports, the tokens of his joy or joi .... The song is not a metaphor but, as the most direct inscription of jouissance, it is already a transference, a longing of affect for the absolute meaning that shies away.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales of Love}, 281.}

While the song is not a metaphor in itself (because it already embodies the jouissance of meaning’s imprecision to which metaphor aspires), it uses metaphor to span meaning and non-meaning, the symbolic and the semiotic. Kristeva writes that “the very vocabulary of courtliness was the consequence of an unstable metaphoricalness, playing on the tension between the erotic and elevated semantic universes ....”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales of Love}, 294.} By making explicit desire, jouissance and unconscious affect, the troubadour melodies bear much in common with the work of modernists such as Lautréamont, Mallarmé and Joyce, in Kristeva’s estimation.

By contrast, the transition during the fourteenth century from song to narrative, from joy to psychological realism and from the use of metaphor to that of allegory, damaged the delicate balance between the semiotic and symbolic.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales of Love}, 289.} Kristeva writes that “Song and poetry split up in the fourteenth century following a complex process out of which narrative emerged, in verse to begin with, finally in prose ... [becoming] didactic, explanatory, moralizing; it aims not at jouissance but at communication and education.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales of Love}, 289, 291.} In so doing, literature no longer conveyed the psychological code of its production within itself. With the onset of the great romance narrative “metaphor becomes stabilized in its elevated, literal meaning.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Tales of Love}, 294.}
The code of literary production which Kristeva seeks within literary texts is not peculiar to each text. Rather it is a predetermined code, one discovered (or established, depending on your point of view) by psychoanalysis. While this code may have some variations depending upon whether it is love or melancholy or some other affect which animates the writer, it is, in the final analysis, one code. It is the same code that governed our development as speaking beings and features the same intrapsychic characters, with the imaginary father being central in function, if not in name.

Viewed from this perspective, Kristeva conducts not many, but only one literary interpretation, an interpretation with a single outcome, even while it addresses numerous texts. Different analyses emphasise different aspects of Kristeva's literary code. For instance, her essay on Duras addresses the modern melancholic psychic state which make subjects prone to slipping away from the symbolic register and into the semiotic. Her book on Proust explains the processes by which artists reconnect with the semiotic. Kristeva's interpretation of Joyce speaks of transubstantiation, that is, the transposition of the semiotic material over the thetic border thus reconstituting symbolic signification. Her study of Céline pays great attention to his style, to the surface features of his texts, as symptomatic of the semiotic.

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51 Psychoanalysis has a long history of reducing all manner of experiences to manifestations of one paradigm, most particularly, to the oedipal crisis. Fredric Jameson sees the dominance of the oedipal structure in psychoanalytic interpretations as linked to "the autonomization of the family as a private space within the nascent public space of bourgeois society..." and to the corresponding "specialisation" of childhood as being distinct from other biographical experiences (Jameson, Political Unconscious, 64). Railing similarly against the preponderance of the oedipal complex in psychoanalytic interpretation, Deleuze and Guattari propose their alternative model of schizoanalysis. It attempts "De-oedipalizing, undoing the daddy-mommy spider web, undoing beliefs so as to attain the production of desire, and to reach the level of economic and social investments where militant analysis comes into play" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane {New York: Viking Press, 1977} 112).
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In fact, in some of these interpretations, it seems less that Kristeva is drawing out the code of literary production and more that the code is transferred onto the text. Kristeva’s Dostoyevsky analysis is a case in point. There, we are offered some of Kristeva’s most clearly written insights describing the role of the writer’s psyche in relation to literary production and to literary interpretation. In the following important passage we are told, for instance, that literary style, which may be studied in terms of linguistics, is only one way in which affects are manifest in the text. Characters and their actions are just as informative, giving rein to the type of literary analysis offered in this essay:

Irreducible to feelings, the affect in its twofold aspect of energy flow and psychic inscription - lucid, clear, harmonious, even though outside language - is translated here with extraordinary faithfulness. The affect does not go through language, and when referring to it language is not bound to it as to an idea. The verbalization of affects (unconscious or not) does not use the same economy as the verbalization of ideas (unconscious or not). One may suppose that the verbalization of unconscious affects does not make them conscious (the subject knows no more than before wherefrom and how joy or sadness emerges and modifies neither one), but causes them to work differently. On the one hand, affects redistribute the order to language and gives birth to a style. On the other, they display the unconscious through characters and actions that represent the most forbidden and transgressive drive motions. Literature, like hysteria, which Freud saw as a “distorted work of art,” is a staging of affects both on the intersubjective level (characters) and on the intralinguistic level (style).52

Kristeva does not renounce Freud’s proposition that hysteria is a distorted work of art, indeed, her pronouncement that literature is a staging of affects reinforces the conflation of literature and the psyche. Similarly, Kristeva’s literary interpretations are only nominally so. They could just as readily be classified as literary theory, linguistics, psychoanalytic theory, psychoanalytic case studies or

52 Kristeva, Black Sun, 178-79.
biography. In reality, they encompass all of these fields and more. But Kristeva’s ambition for interpretation to inscribe spirals that challenge the theory which was brought to bear upon the literary work is rather undermined by the mutually supportive roles of psychoanalytic theory and literary text in her interpretations. It seems to be the case, initially at least, that Kristeva’s literary interpretations typically confirm her psycholiterary theory and, therefore, are circular.

**Self-maintaining psychoanalysis**

Before investigating further the proposition that Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice is circular, it is important to note that psychoanalysis itself as a paradigm has been forcefully accused of being circular and self-confirming. Psychoanalysis’ capacity to comment meaningfully on the human world is assessed by Austrian-born philosopher Sir Karl Popper (1902-94) in terms of its conformity to received scientific method. Popper argues that the theories of psychoanalysis are not falsifiable because any future observations arising from clinical tests will be consistent with the predictions of the theory. Psychoanalysis is, therefore, a circular, self-maintaining and self-containing theory that can be true only by default.53

More recently, Adolf Grünbaum has shown how two central doctrines of clinical psychoanalysis - that only psychoanalysis is capable of interpreting the real and that only psychoanalysis can provide a path to cure - are not only testable but, once tested, may be shown to be false. Under Grünbaum’s analysis, contrary to Popper’s, the fact that alternative therapies and sometimes no therapy at all can

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effect cures for neuroses means that psychoanalysis is falsifiable and, therefore, scientific.54

Replying in defence of Popper, Ernest Gellner asserts that Grünbaum has achieved his conclusion only by tearing psychoanalysis out of context, treating “cure” as a word with public meaning, and overlooking the fact that, for psychoanalysis, only the psychoanalytic guild can determine whether a “real cure” has been effected.55

I am not in a position to enter into this debate nor do I feel it necessary to do so. It is sufficient merely to raise a few of the most important objections to psychoanalysis as a methodology in order to place Kristeva’s project in a wider critical context. Certainly, looking at her theory from a more panoramic, metapositional vantage point (the Popper perspective), Kristeva’s literary interpretative methodology, in so far as it is psychoanalytic, does appear to be self-confirming.

From psyche to text

This impression is reinforced when one refers to specific examples from Kristeva’s own interpretative practice. Kristeva defines the literary work as the semiotisation of the symbolic. This assertion rests on the psychoanalytic axiom that unconscious affects may be transferred to the qualitatively other field of linguistic (or dream or visual or behavioural) representation. Kristeva goes to considerable lengths to explain and justify the transition from psyche to text that literature supposedly bears witness to. She supplies what little scientific evidence there is for such a transition but she also relies upon analogies such as the


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Proustian metaphor of transmigration, the Joycean metaphor of transubstantiation and even the linguistic metaphor of metaphor itself. All these are intended to illustrate the conceptually complex transition from psyche to text. Yet analogy, while attractive, may not necessarily persuade the uninitiated. Maybe Kristeva finds in Freud’s own works precedent for her method of argument. Richard Webster writes: “Perhaps the most interesting and most characteristic feature of Freud’s arguments is the manner in which he assumes that since he is able to perceive or construct a link between two discrete phenomena, then this link has some kind of operative reality ....”\(^{56}\) Kristeva would seem to proceed under the same assumption.

The textual object

Given that neither psychoanalysis nor science can demonstrate just how unconscious affects and their drives (at home in semiotic territory) become embodied in representations (the symbolic), and given that metaphors are only capable of hinting at the process, the onus is thrown onto the empirical evidence that Kristeva provides to demonstrate that such transitions do take place. Kristeva’s task is made easier because her empirical evidence has been carefully sifted to select only those examples of literature and poetry which display the requisite formal (shattered, rhythmic) or thematic (sexual, maternal, abject, depressive) features that are really quite simple to interpret in terms of such a generalised model as the semiotisation of the symbolic. What is more, the authors whose work Kristeva has selected to interpret have very often also engaged in theoretical speculation that dovetails neatly with Kristeva’s own theories. Especially prominent are variations of Kristeva’s insistence that unconscious processes infiltrate the literary text. The fact that Kristeva selects only literary texts and writers that are formally, thematically and theoretically convergent and

\(^{56}\) Webster, 165-66.
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supportive of her literary theory, leaves Kristeva’s literary interpretations open to charges of self-confirming circularity.

From text to psyche

Charges of circularity are still further underscored because, having supplied her argument for the translation of affect to linguistic representation largely in terms of metaphor, the legitimacy of the reverse procedure, whereby literary texts are interpreted in terms of their underlying psychic meaning and productive processes, does not identify the same gap in knowledge that had at least been acknowledged in the original process. Interpreting textual themes, narratives, formal markings and tropes as psychic symptoms, Kristeva makes no mention of the unknowns and potential problematics that hover in the gap between the two qualitatively different fields of text and psyche. Interestingly, it is psychoanalysis, self-confirming in itself and in the manner in which it is deployed by Kristeva, which she invokes in order to support her interpretations of literature in terms of semiotic traces:

I now am in a better position [since having been in analysis while in training as a psychoanalyst] to understand the writer’s motivations in changing religious, ideological or sexual languages, forms and themes. I can also surmise what happens to the personality of the writer, and his impact on the reader. Psychoanalysis helps me to understand both reception and creation.57

Ernest Gellner, for one, would consider this explanation to be far from sufficient to justify Kristeva’s confidence in her ability to analyse literary (or clinical) texts. He points out that since all practitioners of psychoanalysis must have undergone

57 Julia Kristeva, “An Interview with Julia Kristeva,” interview by Edith Kurtzweil, 220.
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psychoanalysis themselves, they are, if you like, converts to a faith which sees itself in all manner of phenomena.\textsuperscript{58}

The psychoanalytic object

So, Kristeva constructs her psychoanalytic theory (albeit one in which the literary is always present), then selects for her literary analyses objects whose features are readily interpreted as resulting from the processes her theory espouses. Then she interprets those texts without reference to the leaps in argument that the original theory had at least acknowledged. That her literary interpretations finally return to the psychoanalytic foundations from which Kristeva began her interpretative practice surely completes the circle of self-referentiality.\textsuperscript{59} Perhaps Kristeva replicates Freud's attitude toward literature as subservient to the psychoanalytic model. Freud's approach is summarised by Gay: "What mattered to [Freud] was less what he could learn from art history, linguistics and the rest than what they could learn from him; he entered alien terrain as a conquistador rather than as a supplicant."\textsuperscript{60} It seems as if Kristeva, like Freud, views writers as gifted amateur psychologists whom, in Freud's words, "we are accustomed to honour as the deepest observers of the human mind."\textsuperscript{61} Approvingly, Freud writes that:

creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven

\textsuperscript{58} Gellner, 92, 174.

\textsuperscript{59} The fact that Kristeva only interprets literary texts in terms of their semiotic components is not problematic because she is not claiming for herself a universal literary procedure nor is she precluding other types of interpretation to take place. It is simply that for her purposes, that is, pursuing the psychological processes that inform and construct literary texts, interpreting literary texts as the semiotization of the symbolic is the most pertinent. Consequently, Kristeva would presumably be untroubled by Stanley J. Coen's observation that: "Identifying an organizing fantasy may or may not provide the most persuasive reading of a text. Other readings may be more satisfying and persuasive" (Coen, 23).

\textsuperscript{60} Gay, 312-13.

\textsuperscript{61} Freud, IX, 9; Gay, 167.
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and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their
knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people,
for they draw upon sources which have not yet been opened up for
science.62

In his own literary analyses, Freud restates literature’s insights because he feels
that artists and writers lack the rigorous scientific mentality that would enable
them to couch psychological truths as reality. Accordingly, after summarising the
story of Jensen’s *Gravida*, Freud informs his readers that “we shall now reproduce
it with the technical terminology of our science ....”63 And again, “We must repeat
the author’s accurate account in correct psychological technical terms.”64 While it
is not Kristeva’s style to make known her intentions quite so baldly, she
nevertheless does tend to restate and interpret literature in terms convergent with
her psychoanalytic theory.

It would seem as if a strong case can be mounted to demonstrate the mutuality of
theory and practice in Kristeva literary interpretations. Viewed from this
perspective, Kristeva’s literary interpretative practice does not resemble an open­
ended, theory-challenging spiral. Rather, it is cosily circular, a trajectory that
results in a diminishing, not growth, of text-theory cross-fertilisation.

From psychoanalysis to literature

One could, of course, dispel such a conclusion by staying within the confines of
psychoanalysis itself. From that position, the charge that Kristeva’s literary
interpretative theory and practice is circular and unfalsifiable is not relevant.
Taking a vantage point internal to psychoanalysis also dispenses with some of the

62 Freud, IX, 8.
63 Freud, IX, 44.
64 Freud, IX, 47.
more repellent of Kristeva’s propositions, for example, that women are not in a position to produce literature that qualifies as semiotisation of the symbolic. This proposal may be shown to be true within the terms and structures that psychoanalysis maps out for itself, although it is blatantly untrue from outside psychoanalysis when one takes note of the many perfectly sane female writers and of the many quite mad male writers.

However, it is not necessary to retreat to a closed psychoanalytic paradigm in order to resurrect faith in Kristeva’s literary interpretative model. Despite the methodological shortcuts taken by Kristeva, outlined above, there is evidence that the end-point of her literary theory and interpretative practice does progressively open out and does not meet its own beginnings.

There is a discernible shift in psychoanalysis’ relationship to literature in Kristeva’s oeuvre. Early books such as Semeiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse and Revolution in Poetic Language were mightily concerned with scientific and philosophical precedent and support. Kristeva’s middle period saw her focus bifurcate into, on the one hand, psychoanalytic theory exploring the pre-egotic phase of development and, on the other, a disparate group of concerns including literary interpretation, monotheism and politics in relation to psychoanalytic theory. In her more recent work, Kristeva is moving even further away from symbolic aspirations. She is increasingly closing in on the notion that psychoanalysis should model itself on literature rather than literature being in the service of psychoanalysis. As I outlined in Chapter Four, the demise of monotheism in the west, having robbed us of the ideals formerly personified by the Father, Son and the Virgin Mother, thereby undermines the stability of the oedipal family positions with which psychoanalysis had previously attempted to realign its ailing patients. Now, Kristeva suggests, we are all “borderline” beings and perhaps, in consequence, the role of psychoanalysis should be, rather than to attempt cures that are defined in terms of normative psychological states, to
An Alternating Theory

encourage creative inscription of our malcondition, to help patients “to speak and write themselves in unstable, open, undecidable spaces,” in other words, to produce literature.65

If writing literature has become the revised goal of psychoanalysis, has the goal of literary interpretation also been revised? If the psychoanalyst now guides the analysand toward literature, does the literary analyst orient the text toward psychoanalysis? Certainly in Kristeva’s theory and practice this is the case. In her work, psychoanalysis and literature pulsate in a rhythmic dialectic, spiralling towards one unstable synthesis after another.

65 Kristeva, Tales of Love, 380. One can see a similar reorientation in the broader field of psychoanalysis. As psychoanalysis loses credibility at an ever increasing pace in the wake of advances in medicine, chemistry, neurophysics and psychology which, together, are becoming ever more accurate at diagnosing and successfully treating a wide range of conditions that used to be embraced by psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis is shifting its focus. It is less and less seeing itself as science and is more and more aligning itself with cultural and artistic communities of thought. The uncharitable might say that psychoanalysis is setting out to colonise the arts in the wake of its loss of territory in the scientific domain. Such folk might also suggest that the arts have been all too readily indoctrinated by another ideology following the slow deaths of both formalism and Marxism. Richard Webster, otherwise so critical of Freud, suggests, however, that “psychoanalysis is, with the increasingly fragile exception of literary criticism, the only branch of the human sciences which even begins to recognise the existence of the human imagination in all its emotional complexity” (Webster, 8, 9).
Glossary of Psychoanalytic Terms

Abjection  Abjection is a Kristevan concept founded on Freud’s notion of the uncanny. The abject is that which falls outside the systematic taxonomy of the symbolic and which is subsequently spurned and marginalised as unclean wastage. In its effort to achieve subjective unity, the infant psychologically and physically separates itself from its abject faeces and abject mother although Kristeva insists that complete separation from abject parts of oneself is an impossibility. Abjection, therefore, always remains a psychological part of us.

Affect  Any affective state, whether painful or pleasant, vague or well defined, conscious or unconscious and whether manifest in the form of a massive discharge or in the form of a general mood. According to Freud, each instinct expresses itself in terms of affect and in terms of ideas. The affect is the qualitative expression of the quantity of instinctual energy and its fluctuations. Kristeva maintains that affects are comprised both of energy flow and of psychic inscription and that literature is a “staging of affects” on the intrasubjective level (characters) and on the intralinguistic level (style).

Agape  Developed from the Christian Gospels, agape is a detached, non-judgemental, disinterested form of love. In Kristeva’s theory it is the imaginary father who bestows agapic love upon the fledgling narcissistic subject. The imaginary is love in the same way as God is love. Agape is distinguished from the sensuous, fusional love of eros.

Anaclitic attachment  Freud distinguished two types of object choice, the narcissistic and the anaclitic. Narcissistic object choice occurs when a person chooses an object on the basis of some real or imagined similarity with himself, while anaclitic object-choice occurs when the choice is based on the pattern of childhood dependence on someone unlike her or himself. The anaclitic type of object-choice follows a path laid down by the self-preservation instinct, selecting the model of parental figures in so far as they guarantee the child nourishment, care and protection.

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1 Laplanache and Pontalis, 13.
2 Kristeva, Black Sun, 178-79.
Glossary

Anal Stage  Freud's second state of libidinal development, occurring approximately between the ages of two and four, which sees the organisation of the libido under the primacy of the anal erotogenic zone. As a contribution to ego development and socialisation, the anal stage sees the child master its sphincters.

Analysand  The person being psychoanalysed.

Archaic Mother  Also referred to as the "Thing" and the "maternal container," the archaic mother is the mother's body as support for the newborn, a support which it perceives to be an inseparable part of itself.

Borderline  A patient who is on the border between neurosis and psychosis. "The usage arises from the fact that diagnostic systems . . . assume that neurosis and psychosis are mutually exclusive while clinical observation shows they are not." Kristeva seems to describe a psychic state similar to that in clinical usage. However, she applies the term borderline to the abjection scenario, using it interchangeably with the term "deject."

Castration Complex  The boy fears castration, which he sees as the carrying out of the paternal threat made in rely to his sexual activities; the result for him is an intense castration anxiety. In the girl, the absence of a penis is experienced as a wrong suffered which she attempts to deny, to compensate for, or to remedy.

Catharsis  Therapeutic effect of abreaction, which is the discharge of emotion attaching to a previously repressed experience.

Cathexis  The fact that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or to a group of ideas, to a part of the body, to an object, etc.

Censorship  Function tending to prohibit unconscious wishes and the formations deriving from them from gaining access to the preconscious-conscious system.

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4 Ryecroft, 16.
5 Laplanache and Pontalis, 56.
6 Ryecroft, 1, 19.
7 Laplanache and Pontalis, 62.
8 Laplanache and Pontalis, 65.
Glossary

**Chora**  The *chora*, which is taken from the Greek word for “enclosed space” or “womb.” Used by Kristeva in conjunction with her term “semiotic” to denote a psycho-physical environment perceived by the newborn as existing between it and the maternal body which nurtures it.

**Condensation**  The process by which two or more images combine to form a composite image which is invested with meaning and energy derived from both. It is one of the primary processes characteristic of unconscious thinking and exemplified in dreams and symptom formation. Lacan and Kristeva equate condensation with the linguistic process of metaphor.

**Conscious**  The conscious is the system or structure in which conscious mental activity obeys the secondary processes. In the 1920s, Freud changed his terminology so that the conscious became ego.

**Countertransference**  The whole of the analyst’s unconscious reactions to the individual analysand - especially to the analysand’s own transference.

**Death Instincts**  Death instincts, which are opposed to life instincts, strive towards the reduction of tensions to zero point in order to bring the individual back to the inorganic state. Initially, death instincts are directed inwards and tend towards self-destruction, but they are subsequently turned towards the outside world in the form of the aggressive or destructive instinct. Freud occasionally used the Greek god of death, Thanatos, to personify the death instinct.

**Deject**  Kristeva’s term for the proto-subject who attempts to separate itself from the abject non-object. Kristeva uses the term in relation to borderline subjects (refer Abjection and Borderline).

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11. Laplanache and Pontalis, 92.
12. Laplanache and Pontalis, 97; Ryecroft, 183.
Glossary

**Depressive father**  The depressive father occupies the position of the imaginary father, except that “his” phallic power is now attributed to the mother, the “phallic mother.” The depressive father “holds the subject within suffering but does not allow the possibility of a way out by means of idealizing the symbolic.” Kristeva’s “depressive father” would appear to be an extension of Melanie Klein’s “depressive position” which is passed through by the infant on the realisation that both its love and its hate are directed toward the same object - its mother.14

**Displacement**  The process by which energy (cathexis) is transferred from one mental image to another. Displacement is one of the primary processes and is responsible for the fact that, for instance, in dreams one image can symbolise another. Lacan and Kristeva equate displacement with the linguistic process of metonymy.15

**Drive**  Equivalent to instinct. An innate biologically determined drive to action.

**Ego**  Psychical agency distinguished from the id and the super-ego. Assumes the role of mediator, responsible for the interests of the person as a whole.16

**Ego-ideal**  An agency of the personality resulting from the coming together of narcissism (idealisation of the ego) and identification with the parents, with their substitutes or with collective ideals. As a distinct agency, the ego-ideal constitutes a model to which the subject attempts to conform.17

**Eros**  The combined force of life instincts that subsumes, in Freud’s later writings, all the other instincts including sexual instinct, instincts of self-preservation and ego-instincts. Kristeva, like Freud, emphasised the fusional, binding qualities of eros (which the death instinct attempts to destroy). Kristeva uses eros in opposition to agape.18

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14 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 45; Ryecroft, 36.
15 Ryecroft, 39.
16 Laplanache and Pontalis, 130.
17 Laplanache and Pontalis, 44, 153.
18 Laplanache and Pontalis, 98, 103.
Glossary

**Foreclosure** (Repudiation)  
Lacanian term denoting a specific mechanism that lies at the origin of the psychical phenomenon and to consist in a primordial expulsion of a fundamental signifier (e.g. the phallus as signifier of the castration complex) from the subject's symbolic universe.

**Genital Stage**  
Stage of psychosexual development characterised by the organisation of the component instincts under the primacy of the genital zones. Occurs during the phallic phase and at puberty.

**Genotext**  
A text which displays semiotic tendencies.

**Id**  
The id constitutes the instinctual pole of the personality; its contents, as an expression of the instincts, are unconscious, a portion of them being hereditary and innate, a portion repressed and acquired. The id, for Freud, is the prime reservoir of psychical energy. It conflicts with the ego and the super-ego which, genitally speaking, are diversifications of the id.

**Ideal Ego/ Ideal-I**  
Intrapsychic formation which may be distinguished from the ego-ideal and is defined as an idea or narcissistic omnipotence on the model of infantile narcissism.

**Identification**  
Psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified.

**Imaginary**  
Used since Lacan to describe one of the three essential orders of the psychoanalytic field: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The imaginary psychological space, as theorised by Lacan, is composed of conscious, unconscious, perceived and imagined images and identifications occurring between the ego and its others.
Glossary

Imago  Unconscious prototypical figure which orientates the subject’s way of apprehending others; it is built up on the basis of the first real and phantasised relationships within the family environment. For Lacan, the imago is the infant’s unified image in the mirror.

Incorporation  Process whereby the subject, more or less on the level of fantasy has an object penetrate his body and keeps it ‘inside’ his body. Although it has a special relationship with the mouth and with the ingestion of food, it may also occur in relation to other erotogenic zones and other functions. Incorporation provides the corporeal model for introjection and identification.

Instinct  (Drive) Dynamic process consisting in a pressure (charge of energy, motoricity factor) which directs the organism towards an aim. According to Freud, an instinct has its source in a bodily stimulus; its aim is to eliminate the state of tension obtaining at the instinctual source; and it is in the object, or thanks to it, that instinct may achieve its aim.

Interpretation  Procedure which, by means of analytic investigation, brings out the latent meaning in what the subject says and does. Interpretation reveals the modes of the defensive conflict and its ultimate aim is to identify that which is expressed by every product of the unconscious.

Intertextuality  A term introduced by Kristeva for “the transposition of one or more systems of signs (systems that may include ideologies and socio-historical contexts) into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position.”

Introjection  Introjection is close in meaning to incorporation but it does not necessarily imply any reference to the body’s real boundaries. It is also akin to identification.

Jouissance  For Kristeva “jouissance” refers to total joy or ecstasy.
Glossary

**Latent Content**  Group of meanings revealed upon the completion of an analysis of a product of the unconscious - particularly a dream. Once decoded, the dream no longer appears as a narrative in images but rather as an organisation of thought, or a discourse, expressing one or more wishes. 32

**Life instinct**  A later construction by Freud which includes both sexual and self-preservation instincts and is opposed to the death instinct. 33

**Manifest Content**  The dream, phantasies or literary work before it receives any analytic investigation. 34

**Maternal Container**  See Archaic Mother.

**Mirror Phase**  According to Lacan, a phase in the constitution of the human individual located between the ages of six and eighteen months. Though still in a state of powerlessness and motor incoordination, the infant anticipates, on an imaginary plane, its apprehension (in a mirror) and mastery of its bodily unity. The mirror phases constitutes (for Lacan) the matrix and first outline of what is to become the ego. 35

**Narcissism**  By reference to the myth of Narcissus, love directed towards the image of oneself. Kristeva considers primary identification to be an innate narcissistic structure which is first articulated upon identification with the imaginary father (prior to Lacan’s mirror stage). 36

**Negativity**  Kristeva draws on this Hegelian concept to characterise the motion of heterogeneous matter, particularly of the drives. In her psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva renames negativity “rejection.” 37

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31 Roudiez, 16.
32 Laplanache and Pontalis, 235.
33 Ryecroft, 96.
34 Laplanache and Pontalis, 243.
35 Laplanache and Pontalis, 250-51.
36 Laplanache and Pontalis, 255.
37 Roudiez, 17.
Neurosis    A psychogenic affection in which the symptoms are the symbolic expression of a psychical conflict whose origins lie in the subject’s childhood history. A state of anxiety, which can take a number of forms, and lies somewhere between normal psychic functioning and psychosis. 38

Neutrality    One of the defining characteristics of the traditional attitude of the analyst during treatment. The analyst must be neutral in terms of values, that is, must not direct the treatment according to some ideal, must be neutral as regards the manifestations of transference (“Do not play the patient’s game”) and be neutral towards the discourse of the patient. In recent decades, acceptance of countertransference has challenged the former ideal of neutrality. 39

Object-cathexis / Object Choice    The act of selecting a person or type of person as a love-object. 40

Oedipus Complex    In its positive form the complex appears as in the story of Oedipus Rex: a desire for the death of the rival - the parent of the same sex - and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex. The negative form sees love for the parent of the same sex and jealous hatred for the parent of the opposite sex. The two versions are to be found in varying degrees in what is known as the complete form of the complex. The Oedipus complex surfaces between the ages of three and five years during the phallic stage. After a latency period, the complex is revived at puberty and is then surmounted with a varying degree of success by means of a particular sort of object-choice. The Oedipus complex pays a fundamental part in the structuring of the personality and in the orientation of human desire. 41

Oral Stage    The first stage of libidinal development: sexual pleasure in this period is bound predominantly to that excitation of the oral cavity and lips which accompanies feeding. 42

other/Other    Leon Roudiez writes that “[t]he distinction between the capitalized and the noncapitalized ‘other’ is about the same in Kristeva as in Lacan. The ‘other’ has either commonplace or philosophical meaning (e.g., what

38 Laplanache and Pontalis, 266.
39 Laplanache and Pontalis, 271.
40 Laplanache and Pontalis, 277.
41 Laplanache and Pontalis, 282-83.
42 Laplanache and Pontalis, 287.
Glossary

exists as an opposite of, or excluded by, something else). When capitalized, the “Other” refers to a hypothetical place or space, that of the pure signifier, rather than to a physical entity or moral category.\(^{43}\)

**Over-determination**  The fact that formations of the unconscious (symptoms, dreams, etc) can be attributed to a plurality of determining factors. Generally, it is understood that the formation is related to a multiplicity of unconscious elements which may be organised in different meaningful sequences, each having its own specific coherence at a particular level of interpretation.\(^{44}\)

**Parapraxis**  Act whose explicit goal is not attained; instead the goal is replaced by another one. Parapraxes, like symptoms, are compromise- formations resulting from the antagonism between the subject’s conscious intentions and what has been repressed.\(^{45}\)

**Phallic Stage**  Stage of childhood libidinal organisation succeeding the oral and anal stages and characterised by a unification of the component instincts under the primacy of the genital organs. The child at this stage, whether boy or girl, knows but one genital organ - the male one - and the opposition of the sexes is equivalent to that of phallic and castrated.\(^{46}\)

**Phallic Mother**  In Kristeva, the phallic mother is the infant’s fantasy of a whole, unified mother who is its omnipotent origin and its focus of being and who is the receptacle and guarantor of all its demands.

**Phallus**  The symbolic function taken on by the penis in the intra- and inter-subjective dialectic. Symbolic law and language of the father.\(^{47}\)

**Phenotext**  A text that displays principally symbolic tendencies.

**Pleasure Principle**  The pleasure principle, and the reality principle, are the two principles which govern mental functioning. The pleasure principle, which is innate and primitive, relieves instinctual tension by hallucinatory wish-fulfilment.

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\(^{43}\) Roudiez, 17.
\(^{44}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 292.
\(^{45}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 300.
\(^{46}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 309.
\(^{47}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 312.
The reality principle, which is acquired and learned, leads to instinctual gratification by accommodation to the facts and objects existing in the external world.  

**Preconscious** What escapes immediate consciousness without being unconscious in the strict sense of the word. The term qualifies contents and processes associated with the ego but also, to some extent, with the super-ego.

**Primary Identification** Primitive mode of the constitution of the subject on the model of the other person. Kristeva stipulates that primary identification is a narcissistic affair that takes place intrapsychically with the imaginary father.

**Primary Narcissism / Secondary Narcissism** Primary narcissism denotes an early state in which the child cathects its own self with the whole of its libido. Secondary narcissism denotes a turning round upon the ego of libido withdrawn from the objects which it has cathected hitherto. The transference of the proto-subject’s identity onto the imaginary father and rejection of the abject mother mobilises primary narcissism, for Kristeva.

**Primary Process** The primary process is characterised by the unconscious system and corresponds to the pleasure principle. In the case of the primary process, psychical energy flows freely, passing unhindered, by means of the mechanisms of condensation and displacement. Condensation accounts for the fact that “[d]reams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts.” Displacement “constitute[s] a connection, often a forced and far-fetched one, between the dream-content and the dream-thoughts ....” Freud writes that “the primary processes are present in the mental apparatus from the first, while it is only during the course of life that the secondary processes unfold, and come to inhibit and overlay the primary ones ....” Lacan associated the primary processes of condensation and displacement with metaphor and metonymy. Also refer to Secondary Processes.

**Psychosis** Includes paranoia, schizophrenia, melancholia and mania.

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48 Laplanache and Pontalis, 322; Ryecroft, 153.
49 Laplanache and Pontalis, 326.
50 Laplanache and Pontalis, 337.
51 Freud, IV, 279, 307, 642.
52 Laplanache and Pontalis, 369-70.
Glossary

Real  A concept developed by Lacan in relation to the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The real are those “raw” aspects of the organism and its biological needs which exist prior to the assumption of the symbolic and thus are foreclosed from analytic experience.53

Reality principle  The reality principle is coupled with the pleasure principle which it modifies: in so far as it succeeds in establishing its dominance as a regulatory principle, the search for satisfaction does not take the most direct routes but instead makes detours and postpones the attainment of its goal according to the conditions imposed by the outside world.54

Reality-testing  The capacity to distinguish between mental images and external percepts and the failure to correct subjective impressions by reference to external facts. Classical psychoanalysis determines that infants lack the capacity for reality-testing.55

Repetition Compulsion  Terms used by Freud to describe what he believed to be an innate tendency to revert to earlier conditions.56

Representability, Considerations of...  Requirement imposed on dream-thoughts that they undergo selection and transformation such as to make them capable of being represented by images - particularly visual images.57

Repression  An operation whereby the subject attempts to repel, or to consign to the unconscious, representations (thoughts, images, memories) which are bound to an instinct. Repression occurs when to satisfy an instinct - though likely to be pleasurable in itself - would incur the risk of provoking unpleasure because of other requirements.58

Resistance  Everything in the words and actions of the analysand that constructs his gaining access to his unconscious.59

54 Laplanache and Pontalis, 379.
55 Ryecroft, 153.
56 Ryecroft, 156.
57 Laplanache and Pontalis, 389.
58 Laplanache and Pontalis, 390.
59 Laplanache and Pontalis, 394.
Glossary

**Return of the Repressed**  Process whereby what has been repressed tends to reappear and succeed in doing so in a distorted fashion in the form of a compromise.\(^{60}\)

**Screen memory/screen phrases**  A screen memory is a trivial childhood memory which, when its manifest content is interpreted, reveals a significant latent content.\(^{61}\)

**Secondary Processes**  The secondary process typifies the preconscious-conscious system and corresponds to the reality principle. In the case of the secondary process, the energy is bound at first and then it flows in a controlled manner: ideas are cathected in a more stable fashion while satisfaction is postponed, so allowing for mental experiments which test out the various possible paths leading to satisfaction. Extending the linguistic analogy established by Lacan in relation to the primary processes, the secondary processes are equated to syntax and grammar.\(^{62}\) Also refer to Primary Processes.

**Secondary Revision** (or Elaboration)  Rearrangement of a dream so as to present it in the form of a relatively consistent and comprehensible scenario. It operates upon, simultaneously, the results of a first revision by the other mechanisms of the dream-work (condensation, displacement and considerations of representability).\(^{63}\)

**Semanalysis**  Kristeva’s science of “semanalysis” was articulated principally in early works such as *Semeiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (1969), *Le texte du roman* (1970) and articles collected in *Polylogue* (1977). The term carries the meanings of both semiotics and analysis. It is my contention that semanalysis has been radically transformed by the introduction of transference and countertransference in Kristeva’s psycholiterary theory but that it still retains currency as the first, objective and analytical phase of her interpretative method.

**Semiotic (la sémiotique)**  Kristeva describes the “semiotic” as consisting of “drive-related and affective meaning organised according to primary processes whose sensory aspects are often nonverbal (sound and melody, rhythm, color,
Glossary

odors, and so forth).” The semiotic modality is differentiated from linguistic signification which is manifest in linguistic signs and their logico-syntactic organisation.⁶⁴

Semiotics (le sémiotique) “Semiotics” is the general science of signs. The word “semiotic” was used in this context first by American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce (who distinguished the sign functions pertaining to icon, index and symbol) while Ferdinand de Saussure proposed his science as “semiology.”⁶⁵ Kristeva formulated her own version of semiotics, namely “semanalysis.”

Subject in process (sujet en procès) The subject in process or “on trial” is someone whose identity is forever challenged, of someone who never achieves the certain stasis of the phenomenological transcendental ego but rather experiences itself as a product of heterogeneous drives as much as a construct of its unified ego and as unconscious impulses as much as conscious decisions.

Super ego The super ego’s role in relation to the ego may be compared to that of a judge or a censor. Conscience, self-observation and the formation of ideals are functions of the super ego. In classical theory the super ego is described as the heir of the Oedipus complex in that it is constituted through the internalisation of parental prohibitions and demands.⁶⁶

Symbolic Term introduced by Lacan in contradistinction to the Real and the Imaginary. The Symbolic covers those phenomena with which psychoanalysis deals in so far as they are structured like a language. In addition to the Lacanian definition of the Symbolic order as the order of signification, the social realm, Kristeva also refers to static symbolic elements within the Symbolic order that she opposes to the rejecting semiotic element. Thus, for Kristeva, the Symbolic order is composed of both semiotic and symbolic elements.⁶⁷

Thetic The identificatory break that separates semiotic from symbolic and so enables the positing of signification.

The Thing Refer to Archaic Mother.

⁶⁴ Kristeva, New Maladies of the Soul, 104.
⁶⁶ Laplanache and Pontalis, 436.
⁶⁷ Laplanache and Pontalis, 439; Oliver, 10.
Glossary

**Thing-presentation / Word-presentation**  The preconscious-conscious system is characterised by the fact that thing-presentations therein are bound to the corresponding word-presentations - a situation which does not exist in the unconscious system where only thing-presentations are found.\(^{68}\)

**Transference**  A process of actualisation of unconscious wishes. Its context *par excellence* is the analytic situation. The establishment, modalities, interpretation and resolution of the transference are what define the cure. In the transference, infantile prototypes re-emerge and are experienced with a strong sense of immediacy. The establishment, modalities, interpretation and resolution of the transference are what define the cure.\(^{69}\)

**Unary subject**  The unary subject is one who achieves a momentary stasis or damming up of the instinctual drives so as to approximate a homogeneous, consistent whole rather than a split subject or subject in process.\(^{70}\)

**Uncanny**  Freudian term which literally means "unhomely." Kristeva uses uncanny as the basis of her notion of abjection.

**Unconscious**  Comprises the repressed contents of the psychical apparatus which have been denied access to the preconscious-conscious system by the operation of repression. Its contents are representatives of the instincts which are governed by the mechanisms specific to the primary process, especially condensation and displacement. Strongly cathected by instinctual energy, they seek to re-enter consciousness and resume activity (the return of the repressed) but they can only gain access to the preconscious-conscious system in compromise-formations after having undergone the distortions of censorship. It is mostly childhood wishes that become fixated in the unconscious.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{68}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 447-48.

\(^{69}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 455.

\(^{70}\) Roudiez, 19.

\(^{71}\) Laplanache and Pontalis, 474.
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