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Scientific Knowledge and the Display Function of Literature: *The White Hotel* (1981) and *Freud's Megalomania* (2000)

Abstract: *Literature may display, work through, and transfigure bodies of scientific knowledge, ideology, and rhetoric. Sociological accounts which distinguish between raw information and processed knowledge (Burke 1–17) support the claim that only subjective mediation of bits and pieces of information may produce relevant meaning. Modern literature as an instrument of subjective mediation therefore assumes significance in the production of the cultural achievements of subjectivity and responsivity. This essay turns to psychoanalysis as a scientific discourse strongly influenced by literary writing and explores two exemplary literary displays of the psychoanalytic processes to show how explicitly literary writing redresses psychoanalytic theory's main weakness, namely its disregard for self-reference. Self-referentiality makes literature a fascinating mode of experimental thinking. This experimental thought reveals contradictions in Freud's theory or between his findings and the findings in other disciplines in Rosenfield's novel *Freud's Megalomania*; and it confronts knowledge and history, academic discourse and real events in D. M. Thomas' novel *The White Hotel* both to stress the importance of psychoanalysis and to mark its boundaries.*

Literature has the capacity to store information and to provide knowledge. When reading *Moby-Dick* (1851) one can learn a lot about sailing and whaling. Nevertheless, it would be quite strange to use this novel as a primal source of information or to reduce its meaning to that of a non-fiction book. Rather, the story adds something to knowledge or even transforms knowledge in a specific way. For example, the 'Etymology' and the 'Extracts' before the first chapter do not only prepare readers for the narration; they also stimulate them in a way that is different from reading a scientific treatise or an encyclopedia. Consequently, the interlacing of fact and fiction differs from the production and compilation of objective information. Readers might learn a lot; however, their attention is drawn to questions that reach far beyond the realm of scientific knowledge. Judging from the 'Epilogue,' the overall impression resembles much more the adventurous

discovery of a personal truth than a demonstration of erudition or, even worse, a moral lesson. It seems that the transformation of knowledge by reading a novel is about readers' immersion: It is about their immersion into the diegetic world and the metamorphosis during the interaction of information and imagination, objective knowledge and subjectivity. One might infer that the self-reference distinguishes the reading of a novel from the way scientific findings are learned. One might also infer that there is something in the text that encourages readers to relate the story to their personal experience and memory in such a way that a new relevance emerges – a relevance that is hard to find in a textbook on sailing or in a historical description of whaling.

1 The Display Function of Literature

Mary Louise Pratt has argued convincingly that narratives are equipped with a “display producing relevance” (136). Apparently, this principle involves the double meaning of the verb ‘to display’: a narration can both show something and run through its implications and consequences. “To show” something often means “to lay out” a structure according to the spatial form of perceiving; and “to run through” implications and consequences often leads to the unfolding of a drama. It is no wonder, then, that the very idea of the Aristotelian ‘myth’ already promotes this understanding of ‘display.’ The ‘myth’ is a course of events that promotes causal knowledge, moral reflection, and pragmatic inferences since one is able to see how the ‘things’ develop and how contingency is reduced by action. Narratology is in line with this understanding of stage drama and ‘myth.’ Both Hayden White’s notion of ‘emplotment’ (cf. 38) and Paul Ricoeur’s concept of ‘configuration’ (cf. 54–135) confirm the Aristotelian idea of ‘myth.’ White argues that there is no meaningful course of events without plot. Therefore, to tell (hi)story someone must re-arrange data according to a plot:

[...] narrative accounts do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story. Among those elements are those generic story patterns we recognize as providing the ‘plots’. (38)

Ricœur, additionally, points at the logic of motivation, intention, action etc. that make up a plot. Instead of ‘plot’ he speaks of ‘configuration.’ The main function of such a configuration is to trigger inferences about the meaning of the story told. Every well told story is not only an arrangement of events but also an arrangement of desires and ambitions, character features and actions. It offers insights into psychology and it contributes to a complex view of the world by displaying a more or less sophisticated ‘grammar of motives’ (cf. Burke).

Another important concept that can enrich the ‘display theory’ has been defined by Roland Barthes in his seminal *Leçon*. According to Barthes, literature conveys a considerable amount of knowledge but is not able to reproduce all the dimensions of reality in the one-dimensional world of a written discourse. Therefore, the ‘trick’ is to suspend the tendency inherent in any language to suppress ambivalence and polysemy. Instead, literature uses the signs that normally restrict meaning and put things in order for a play that transgresses *every* rule. Thus, the semiotic potential of literature lies in a kind of ‘heteronomy’ that subverts scientific taxonomy, ideology, and rhetoric (cf. 40–41). Even if one would not subscribe to Barthes’ ideas and deem them exaggerations, the main argument is intriguing: playing with signs might result in a transfiguration of knowledge. Literature provides knowledge or changes the reader’s attitude which has been established through social construction. There is always a battle of values and convictions, world views and moral judgements, and literature has not only the capacity to reflect this battle – for example in the form of the polyphonic novel, the mock-epic, or the Menippean Satire – it has also the power to break the ruling principles of discursive knowledge and to free up personal imagination from the constraints connected with the demands of social conformity and contemporary mentality. Censorship is a clear proof of literature’s subversive power. If fiction were not critical and transgressive, there would be no reason to prevent people from reading literature.

It is important to realize that the display function of literature is not only a means to subvert or to transfigure knowledge. The display function might also change the notion of knowledge itself. Normally it is held that one gains knowledge by sampling information – a view that has become very popular in the age of the World Wide Web and the culture of Wikipedia. However, reduced to bits of information, knowledge is deprived of exactly

that relevance that depends on self-reference. An apt notion of knowledge therefore must take into account this relation – otherwise the aggregate of information will never become a personal system of beliefs and habits. Such a system develops in a constant process of mediation that goes on during a person's whole life time. School and other institutions of education support this mediation, but the main burden lies on the individual. It is always the subjective mediation of knowledge that produces relevant meaning – a task that no one can delegate to anybody else.

If the significance of literature – besides its public esteem – is grounded in subjective mediation, one could even say that subjectivity is a cultural achievement of art and literature. Indeed, a reflexive novel like *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1768) displays the structure of subjectivity, its implications, and consequences. Wolfgang Iser has explored this reading in depth. Inspired by Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) Iser read Sterne's novel as a playful set-up of subjectivity, and he argues that there is probably no other way to show how information is processed in the human mind. The narrator follows the strange law of association with great humor. His witty display of notorious misunderstandings does not only parody John Locke's epistemology, it also establishes a more realistic view of consciousness. Since this view does not take on the form of a theory, the reader must engage in the novel's specific mode of demonstration to grasp its meaning. Without relating the opinions of the narrator and the flaws of the characters to his/her own experience, he or she would miss the point. (cf. Iser *Laurence*)

Given the fact that the display function is always in need of subjectivity, there is evidence that the reader's imagination must run through what is laid out in the text – both on the level of story or drama and on the level of narration. Taking up the role of the so-called 'implicit reader' the empirical reader is enabled to explore how the plot works: how the diegetic world is constructed and how the characters exemplify different ways of world making – including all the misconceptions and, consequently, the pitfalls of communication that result from misconceptions. Iser (again with reference to Goodman) therefore suggests that a work of art exemplifies a system of relations in such a way that the process of world making becomes evident. Rather than talking about world making in an abstract manner as, for example, philosophy would do, the narration is a very concrete performance

of the very process itself (Iser, *Das Fiktive* 278). Following the traces laid out in the text, the reader participates in this process and, by the same token, reflects on its contingent quality.

Laurence Sterne's novel belongs to a tradition of writing that was strongly influenced by Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). By imitating scientific discourses and their often-digressive structure, this book already employed the technique of exemplification. The full title of Burton's treatise, *An Anatomy of Melancholy*, invites a specific reading. Rather than defining the disease in proper terms, Burton displays its symptoms through the associative, digressive, and elliptic manner in which his book is written. In the same manner, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* provides the reader with the birth of opinions that lead into dead ends instead of the biography announced in the title. The linkage between exemplification and display function, digressive structure and reflection (as to be found in Burton's anatomy and, even more, Sterne's novel) seems to be a common feature of literature that departs from linear storytelling and that arrives at the vast field of phenomenological analysis and psychological sensitivity. Authors like James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922), Thomas Mann in *Der Zauberberg* (1924), Marcel Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), or Virginia Woolf in *The Waves* (1931), to name only a few, scrutinized the stream of consciousness, the 'interior' sense of time and the structure of subjectivity in a similar way as contemporary psychology and philosophy did, especially William James, Edmund Husserl, and Sigmund Freud. These novels show a great interest in the human mind. On the other hand, a skilled researcher like Freud could not overlook the poetic features in his case studies and even considered the theory of the drive as a myth that should be replaced one day by a more appropriate conception of desire and motivation: "[...] es berührt mich selbst noch eigentümlich, daß die Krankengeschichten, die ich schreibe, wie Novellen zu lesen sind und des ernstesten Gepräges der Wissenschaftlichkeit entbehren," wrote Freud in 1895 (Freud and Breuer, *Studien* 180).¹ And in 1933, he admitted: "Die Trieblehre ist zuzusagen unsere Mythologie. Die Triebe sind mythische Wesen, großartig

1 Translation by Nicola Luckhurst: "[...] and I myself find it strange that the case histories that I write read like novellas and lack, so to speak, the serious stamp of science" (Freud and Breuer, *Studies* 164).

in ihrer Unbestimmtheit. Wir können in unserer Arbeit keinen Augenblick von ihnen absehen und sind dabei nie sicher, sie scharf zu sehen” (Freud, *Vorlesung* 94).²

2 *Freud’s Megalomania: An Anatomy of Self-deception*

The myth of the drives, the novelistic style of the case studies, and the frequent fusion of narration and argumentation in Freud’s writing have caused harsh comments and debates about the scientific value of psychoanalysis. However, the same features have invited artists to take up Freud’s style and to imitate his case studies in novels. Consequently, the specific knowledge provided by psychoanalysis is displayed in works of literature, ranging from books like Nicholas Meyer’s *The Seven-Per-Cent-Solution* (1974) up to Carol de Chellis Hill’s *Henry James’ Midnight Song* (1993) and from D. M. Thomas’ *The White Hotel* (1981) up to Israel Rosenfield’s *Freud’s Megalomania* (2000). Interestingly, most authors either exploit the narrative formula of the detective story that attracted Freud himself – among them Meyer and Hill –, or follow the traits of the anatomy like D. M. Thomas and Israel Rosenfield. If a detective story imitates the logic of deduction, induction, and abduction, an anatomy is more concerned with the critique of rival interpretations. Even more interesting is the fact that Rosenfield has not only written *Freud’s Megalomania* but has studied medicine and undertaken *An Anatomy of Consciousness* entitled *The Strange, Familiar, and Forgotten* (1992). In this book, he presents harsh critique of those theories that compare the human mind to a computer. According to Rosenfield, the weakness of these theories lies in their ignorance of self-reference. The following paragraphs deal with Rosenfield’s anatomy and Thomas’s novel.

Rosenfield’s argument is based on a pragmatic conception of knowledge: knowledge, he argues, is something comprehensible. To communicate knowledge, therefore, means to convey information. But to receive information is different from the feeling that one has a consciousness. This sensation arises from the sequential development of perceptions and from the

2 Translation by James Strachey: “The theory of the instincts is so to say our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness. In our work we cannot for a moment disregard them, yet we are never sure that we are seeing them clearly” (Freud, *New Introductory* 118).

temporal-spatial relationships that converge on the unique viewpoint which sustains every personal experience. Since it cannot be reduced to bits of information, consciousness must be more than just a storehouse of knowledge. It develops constantly and thereby changes. It is dynamic whereas knowledge is static (13–15). In contrast to mere information and unmediated perception, consciousness cannot be separated from the memory of its own development. And memory always involves a self-reference. It is bound to a personal viewpoint. Finally, this viewpoint is connected with a body scheme, a representation that works as a prime frame of reference for every sensation and perception, piece of information and experience (16–17).

Clearly, this prime frame of reference is ignored when the brain is compared to a computer. A computer can store and copy information, but this is not what human memory does. The specific processing of human memory involves the body scheme and the notion of time. Neither the body scheme nor the notion of time is activated in the computer. Consequently, the computer's capacity to store and to copy information is very different both from the way human memory contributes to a stream of consciousness and from the awareness of this stream that is characteristic of human experience. Consciousness is always the consciousness of a dynamic interplay, of a development with reference to the body scheme and a person's actual situation. Since all memory and feeling is embodied (Rosenfield 54), a computer does neither feel itself nor engage in knowledge production. Its indifference to the personal meaning of information makes the computer a perfect machine of manipulation but a very inappropriate model of the brain and of the conscious development of human beings. Since the body scheme is the prime frame of reference, or the central knot in the dynamic web of relationships that make up consciousness, every diagram that represents knowledge without self-reference and without connection to body and time can only be a misconception (81). Of course, such a deficient diagram can convey information in quite an objective way, but it misses the subjective meaning that depends on the personal reaction to every bit of information.

In this respect, subjectivity is "responsitivity." Like Bernhard Waldenfels, who has coined this term, Rosenfield relies on the research of Kurt Goldstein (cf. Rosenfield 37–39; Waldenfels; Goldstein). Responsitivity is important for every realm of consciousness and is not bound to language.

Instead, any spoken or written response must be grounded in a relation of the self to the instance or experience, situation or person demanding an answer. The specific performance of the human brain lies in the abstraction and generalization of concrete instances and situations and in the continuity of personal experience and memory. (cf. Rosenfield 123, 126) Because of this, human beings are able to understand the present in contrast to the past and to infer what might happen in the future (154), even though the present is not a copy of the past and the future does not replicate the present. The mediation of continuity and contingency rather promotes a dynamic understanding of the world and of the self, of history and society.

With this in mind it comes as no surprise that self-reference is also the crucial point in the critique of self-deception which has been the main concern of Freud's psychoanalysis. People tend to misunderstand themselves, their actions, and their reactions towards others, because they are trapped in a loop of false memories: those that cover traumatic experiences and disturb or even destroy the body scheme that invokes sexual desire. In his novel, Rosenfield tries to deconstruct this theory. However, this deconstruction is not his main ambition. Instead, as in *Anatomy of Consciousness*, Rosenfield attacks the misconception of the human mind that is provoked by its comparison with artificial intelligence.

Freud's Megalomania starts and ends "With an Introduction and Notes by PROFESSOR ALBERT J. STEWART" who tells the reader at the beginning that he never liked Freud (11) since he was "a man who *invented* the psychiatric syndromes, the patients and the patients' stories to 'prove' his theories" (12). Funny enough, Stewart presents the reader with exactly such a story to prove another theory ascribed to Freud. "One day a woman of medium height with an uncommonly beautiful face came to my office. She introduced herself to me as Bernadette Schilder and handed me a manuscript that she said was by Sigmund Freud" (14–15). A reader of Rosenfield's *Anatomy* is immediately alarmed by Bernadette's family name, since it was a certain Paul Schilder from Vienna who was one of the first neurologists and psychiatrists who promoted the concept of the body scheme. In line with Rosenfield's *Anatomy*, Stewart, despite his skepticism about Freud, rejects the physiological reduction of human consciousness to neuro-chemistry: "[...] knowing that there is more of a particular neurotransmitter when we are depressed does not explain depression any better

than Freudian theory; nor does an analysis of neurotransmitter levels help us understand our feelings” (16). The gap between the sub-symbolic and the symbolic, between scientific explanation and personal meaning is a crucial point in Rosenfield’s novel, and, of course, a point of differentiation between computer simulation and literature.

Another gap separates knowledge from action. Freud’s manuscript is concerned with the question how to bridge that gap. “Since the limits of knowledge make it impossible for reason to tell us what to do, our emotions deceive us into believing in the ‘rightness’ of our actions” (19), Stewart informs the reader. In this respect, self-deception is a prerequisite for action. Stewart contrasts Freud’s ideas about the relationship of emotion, self-deception, and action with the so-called ‘Loop Theory’ that enabled his scientific and personal rival Norman Dicke to construct his Marilyn Machine. “Loops describe the intricate and subtle ways the brain communicates with itself, with other brains, with our surroundings and ultimately with the universe as a whole” (24). The Machine captures the real Marilyn Monroe’s thoughts and “thinks of herself as having ‘looks’” (27). Stewart is quick to mention the rumor that Dicke was only able to have sex with a flesh-and-blood woman when the Machine was watching him (28). He also arouses the reader’s suspicion that his rival is a mean, narcissistic person (28).

Be that as it may, Stewart is eager to point out: “Freud would have had trouble grasping the elementary scientific truths that made Marilyn possible, truths such as the widely accepted view that beliefs and desires are *physical* symbols in our brains [...]” (29). Obviously, it is exactly in this widely accepted view that Stewart and Rosenfield are opposed since the latter is very skeptical about any naturalistic reduction. If one accepts this view, Freud’s failure is evident. As Stewart claims, Freud “failed to understand that it’s not the *idea* that the symbol represents that makes us think and act as we do, but the *shape*, the *form* of the symbol that *causes* thought and action” (30). So, if Dicke stands for the neurological science that grew out of the discovery of the DNA and the invention of the computer (35) and has reduced the grammar of motives to physical parts in the brain, Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, on the contrary, represents the idea that not the form or shape but the *content* directs a person’s beliefs and the actions he or she performs according to these beliefs.

Consequently, one can read the inner-textual manuscript as a pre-emptory comment on the theory that is implemented in the Marilyn Machine. In Rosenfield's novel, this reading is discredited by the preface Bernadette Schilder has written. Though Bernadette does not doubt the authenticity of the manuscript she informs the reader that it might have been "doctored, altered or somehow tampered with by the Gestapo" (52). Even more important than this reservation is her confession that the manuscript is more than a new theory, because it is the story of Freud's long affair with her grandmother (49). In a spontaneous reaction to this confession the reader is likely to infer that Bernadette does not judge objectively and probably has doctored or altered the manuscript to make her genealogical claims sound profound and authentic. However, in the context of Rosenfield's *Anatomy* a different reading gains plausibility: the personal subjective relevance of the manuscript underlines the principle of self-reference. Since this principle marks the difference between the Marilyn Machine and a human being – whether a real one or a fictitious person like Bernadette – the reader is challenged to keep this difference in mind when he or she comes to the manuscript itself.

Rosenfield has cleverly embedded the *Megalomania*-script in the personal history of its alleged author. The text refers to a major problem Freud was concerned with, as a theorist and as a politician of science who had to claim his authority as founder of the movement of psychoanalysis. His efforts are reflected in the legendary narrative of primitive society and the myth of killing the great-grandfather. The structure of Rosenfield's novel establishes a non-arbitrary relationship between Bernadette's supposed grandfather and Freud's position among the first generation of his followers. Another important relationship exists between the problem of authority and the universal trait of self-deception. Though Stewart notes that "Freud never used the term 'self-deception' before writing the Manuscript" (60), it is Freud himself who admits in the novel that he had never asked himself, "[...] if self-deception does not have the status of a primary characteristic of human psychology, if it is not the bedrock on which all else, including civilization, is founded" (60). He arrives at the conclusion that Stewart already came up with in the *Introduction*: "If we were completely rational we would never be able to ever decide what to do. We would never know enough. Thus, our emotions create the illusion in us of what we want or

desire. In deceiving us our emotions make us act.” (66) Stewart adds that this conclusion might be a generalization of Freud’s conviction that love is a subjective ‘overevaluation’ that drives parents and lovers to do things that, objectively considered, lack rationality (66).

A large part of the inner-fictional manuscript is devoted to Julius Wagner-Jauregg. His treatment of traumatized soldiers came near to torture. Wagner assumed his patients were simulating their symptoms. Freud hesitated to doubt Wagner’s authority and argued in line with his own theory “that the sons’ desires, real or imagined, to kill the father, had given rise to a pervasive sense of guilt from which the sons could not liberate themselves” (89). Freud’s hesitation foreshadows the moral reservation of his follower’s followers to doubt his own authority. The text exhibits Freud’s failure and runs through the implications and consequences of its correction. Accordingly, Rosenfield’s Freud confesses: “In my clinic I saw patients who were deeply troubled by authority figures; but I never saw the authorities themselves. This was a failing that I can only now begin to overcome” (99). The reader is requested to process this overcoming in his or her own imagination by following a narration that, in the manner of an anatomy, distinguishes the neurotic victims of a pretended authority from the psychotic authorities themselves. They become psychotic as soon as they claim to understand everything and refuse any criticism so that violence becomes the *ultima ratio* of their social behavior. Consequently, the authoritarian explanation of the world becomes totalitarian (100–101).

The political implication of this authoritarian view does not need further exemplification. But in the *Megalomania*-script Rosenfield’s Freud is also concerned with the consequences that arise when a moral authority’s psychology is different from those subject to its impact (112–113). If, for example, a political leader is in constant fear of manipulation and therefore rejects any advice, he becomes alienated from his people and probably even paranoid: “[...] if the paranoid personality is frightened by foreign voices, Moses, on the contrary, uses those voices to frighten others” (121). And Freud continues:

Of course, no human being can claim to have total knowledge and therefore that knowledge must come from somewhere else, if it exists at all. Hence Moses had to attribute his knowledge to information passed on to him by God. The source of this knowledge is then a hallucination and we should make a distinction between the

superego postulated by psychoanalytic theory and what I will call this all-knowing superego, or hallucinatory superego. (122)

It is well known that the ‘real’ Freud was preoccupied with Moses and eager to identify himself with the mythic figure. However, Rosenfield’s Freud does not miss the self-referentiality of his critique. He argues that a hallucinatory superego might gain power and maintain authority by creating a theory no one else can fully understand: “And thus it is that psychoanalysis, my creation, is doomed” (126). Crucial to his creation was the act of self-analysis that nobody can repeat in the same manner (128–129). His followers can only distribute the legend, but never claim that their own self-analysis is as authentic, as original, and as relevant in terms of theory and authority as Freud’s own self-analysis.

In addition to the manuscript, Stewart publishes another work of Freud, apparently an appendix that illustrates the manuscript’s argument by another example. Without going into detail, the relevance of this example can be summed up briefly in one sentence: “If we don’t challenge authority, it is because we have nothing to replace it with [...]” (148). So in the end, readers are left with a dilemma: if they are able to see through the bluff of authority, they have to ask themselves how the social function of authority can be fulfilled. But since there is no answer to this question, it seems that at least the illusion of authority is indispensable. Consequently, the self-deception of those who accept authority (though they know that no one ever has total knowledge) is one of the emotions that enables them to take action. And since it might be better to be deceived than to be paralyzed, authority will, even in the age of enlightenment, remain an imperative of civilization. For those readers who feel unsatisfied with a dilemma like this, it might be helpful to recall the rationality of the display function. To show and to run through problems is something else than to solve them. But if the alternative lies in either presenting false solutions or in exhibiting the implications of the problems and the consequences of the false solutions, a sincere person can only opt for the dilemma.

To complete the display function of his novel, Rosenfield has invented another fake document: Anna Freud’s “Notes on a Conversation with Johnny von Neumann” (154–162). Neumann, an ingenious mathematician, has inspired computer science and brain modelling in ways that allowed

researchers like Dicke to construct machines with artificial intelligence. During his conversation with Freud's daughter, Neumann expresses his conviction that her father's theory of deception and distrust "was critical to our understanding of *all* forms of human behaviour and *how the mind works*" (156, emphasis in the original). The words in italics indicate that Neumann claims authority in understanding everything, so that the reader – in the context of Rosenfield's novel – may infer that he bluffs and that, consequently, the claim of people like Dicke, that they can simulate the processing of the human mind with machines, is also a bluff. Anna Freud's comment on Neumann is quite illustrative. She compares him with her father and notes in parenthesis: "If there was a difference between Freud and von Neumann it was that Johnny was more interested in how we bluff and deceive *each other*, while Freud wanted to know about how we deceive *ourselves*" (158, emphasis in the original) Stewart links this difference to the difference of human beings and machines: "[...] a man who tells lies without thinking of himself as a liar, 'thinks' like a machine. He is not aware of himself. Lying requires an ability to think about oneself" (158). Thus, it would be pointless to judge machines with recourse to the moral standards of authenticity. Instead one should suspect their creators to be bluffers or liars if they claim that their machines can simulate human consciousness. They eventually cannot, because their machines lack self-reference or awareness of themselves, respectively.

Now, what can be learned by reading Rosenfield's novel in connection with his *Anatomy of Consciousness? Freud's Megalomania* is a 'thought experiment.' It sets up a discourse on self-deception and illusion, authority and bluff that runs through the implications and consequences of the psychoanalytic legend and the neurological myth of artificial intelligence. Both 'theories' miss the criteria of science as far as science is always specific and restrictive in its claims of relevance. But whereas people like Dicke fall victim to their own misconceptions, Freud's fictitious script provides the reader both with a better theory of consciousness and with a more realistic view of how scientific explanation works appropriately. Finally, the reader may understand through the novel's display of psychoanalysis and neuroscience how theory and knowledge about the history of science are transformed into a novel that is neither a work of science nor of historiography. Following the discourses in Rosenfield's book one is intrigued

by the relevance of the self-referentiality which makes literature such a fascinating mode of experimental thinking. By processing the information, the reader's conjecture reveals meaning according to a specific configuration (or emplotment). In the case of *Freud's Megalomania* this processing has the capacity to dissolve self-deception, especially the deception that fiction can only produce illusionary knowledge.

3 *The White Hotel: A Narrative of Supplements*

To double-check these findings, another fictitious case history might be helpful. D. M. Thomas' novel *The White Hotel* (1981) is structured in a similar manner, but operates differently. The "Author's Note" is a kind of apology: "Freud becomes one of the dramatis personae, in fact, as discoverer of the great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis. By myth, I mean a poetic, dramatic expression of a hidden truth; and in placing this emphasis, I do not intend to put into question the scientific validity of psychoanalysis" (vii). Whereas Rosenfield tried to deconstruct the Freud legend, Thomas takes the myth of psychoanalysis as a blueprint. His novel displays less the problems inherent in the theory but rather emphasizes the literary practice that one can find in Freud's case studies. The "Prologue" is composed of fictitious letters from Sándor Ferenczi, Hanns Sachs, and Freud that were addressed to the Commission investigating Wagner-Jauregg's ill-treatment of war neurotics (7) and to "Frau Anna G.," "a young woman suffering from a severe hysteria" (8). She undergoes a 'talking cure' during which she "has just 'given birth' to some writings which seem to lend support to my [= Freud's] theory" (8).

The young woman's writings consist of a large poem and a journal. In the poem, the patient accuses herself of having started an affair with one of Freud's sons (15) and immerses herself, as the narrator puts it, in "an extreme of libidinous phantasy combined with an extreme of morbidity" (8). The first paragraph of the journal is devoted to a dream-scene and then recounts in a less fantastic manner a stay at the so-called 'white hotel' that is supposed to be the inspiration of the poem. While a young couple makes love, various people are killed during a boat trip or by a fire. There is smoke on the water, but the spirit of the white hotel, set up on a lake in the mountains, points at a non-realistic understanding of the journal.

In the next section, the writings are given the status of hallucinations. Imitating Freud's narrative style, Thomas invents an analysis of "Frau Anna G." (87):

She was the second child and only daughter of moderately wealthy parents. Her father came from a Russian Jewish family of the merchant class, and her mother from a cultivated Polish Catholic family which had settled in the Ukraine. In marrying across racial and religious barriers, Frau Anna's parents proved their own liberated ideals but suffered the consequences of being cut off from their families. The only relative who did not turn against the couple was the patient's aunt (with whom she was now living), her mother's twin sister. (91)

It turns out that Anna's disease is grounded in a disturbing experience during her childhood: she witnessed a couple's sexual intercourse but could not bear the fact that she saw her mother and her aunt's husband. Both died shortly afterwards in a hotel that burned down. Encapsulated in the camouflage story of her father and his sister-in-law she was told, Anna could neither identify with her mother and mourn her death nor detect the truth in her mislead memories. Her symptoms persuade Thomas' Freud that in the 'white hotel' – poem and journal – "the autoerotic paradise, the map of our first country of love" (116), e.g. the aim of Anna's pervasive desire, is laid out. He regards most of the poem's content as "purest wish-fulfilment" (115). Thus, it seems likely that Anna's writings allow for an imaginary regression beyond the painful experience of losing her mother, her parents love, and the ideal of faithful marriage. Nevertheless, some parts of the content remain mysterious until the reading of Thomas's novel is completed. "The flood, and the hotel fire, could be related to her mother's death; the other two hallucinations, of falling from a great height and of mourners being buried by a landslide, were inexplicable to her; the last was the most frequent, and also the most horrifying, because she suffered from claustrophobia" (123). To excuse his inability to solve all riddles, Freud states: "No analysis is ever complete; the hysterics have more roots than a tree" (140).

Despite this statement, Thomas's Freud is far from doubting his interpretation of Anna's dreams and writings. Instead he reveals that his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (published in 1920) took shape during his analysis of Anna G. (128). In line with his pre-fabricated theory he suggests that she felt guilty because the sudden death of her mother fulfilled her unconfessed desire to get rid of the person who forbid the love she felt for her

father (138). Suggestions like these have produced skepticism among many readers of Freud's writing. Since all his case studies are bound up with his interest in proposing a specific theory and method, they should be looked at as narratives that serve rhetorical purposes. Due to these purposes the voices of the patients undergo a transformation that may end up in destruction. Consequently, Freud's narratives are elliptic. Like the authentic *Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse* (1905) the fictitious case study devoted to Anna G. is a fragment in need of supplements. As Jacques Derrida has shown, a supplement has always the potential to subvert the logic it is supposed to complete. If the silenced voice of a patient suddenly speaks out, it is very likely that a re-configuration of the plot takes place that alters its meaning, sometimes fundamentally.

In Thomas' novel the same is true for the supplements that follow the fictitious case study. First, in 'The Health Resort' the reader is confronted with Elisabeth Erdmann, the 'real' Anna in the year 1929. Elisabeth is invited to substitute the famous singer Vera Serebryakova who is pregnant. Vera's husband Victor becomes her stage-partner. The women like each other, but in a flash of second sight, Lisa, as Elisabeth is called cordially, imagines Vera's naked body through the glass top of a coffin (163). Victor is torn between Lisa and Vera but remains faithful until his wife dies giving birth to a boy named Kolya. "Lisa wept for days" (175). "She wondered if she was partly grieving for herself. She associated Vera with the single day in her life when she had been treated, however absurdly and undeservedly, as important" (176). Shortly after Vera's death Lisa receives a letter in which Freud asks for permission to publish his case study 'Anna G.' Lisa reads the manuscript as if it were "the life story of a young sister who is dead" (182), begs Freud's pardon for some lies and omissions in what she told him during their talks and rejects his notion of a homosexual drive in her behavior. Referring back to the crisis of her marriage that made her consult Freud she reveals a hidden problem: her husband and his family were "horribly anti-Semitic" (190), so that she always felt hated rather than loved. Her supplementary post-script sheds new light on her suspicion that she was not her father's daughter but a misfortune of her mother's affair with her uncle. If that were true, she herself would not be a Jew. That, however, would also mean that the reason of her divorce had nothing to

do with sexual problems. Freud's analysis has apparently been based on a false hypothesis.

Ironically, Thomas does not tear down Freud's interpretation. When Lisa and Victor meet again, they make love "with little Kolya sleeping near them" (211). Lisa takes up Vera's role as spouse and mother and starts to live like a family with Victor and Kolya. This arrangement supports the theory that Freud had applied to Lisa's childish desire of her father's love and her secret wishing of her own mother's death. Victor is an elderly man and in that resembles Lisa's father. One could add that desire often implies a triangular relationship. The more A is loved by B, the more attractive is A to C. It is very likely that a love communion that depends on the elimination of one person arouses the feeling of guilt in the surviving lovers.

However, despite the relevance of Lisa's post-script to her analysis and the importance of Freud's theory – this is a main feature of any deconstruction that is not reduced to destruction –, the novel transgresses psychoanalytic theory and practice. The second supplement, 'The Sleeping Carriage,' is designed to give the fictitious case study a political meaning by following the historical course of events. As Jews, Victor, Lisa, and Kolya cannot escape the holocaust. After being separated from her husband and unable to save Vera's son, Lisa is killed in Babi Yar. Here, the unsolved riddles of her hallucinations gain a sinister, tragic meaning. This meaning is not conveyed directly. Instead of Lisa and Kolya another woman and another boy experience what Freud's patient had dreamt of in the carriage where she met the soldier and imaginatively identified him with Freud's son. The significant shift from Lisa and Kolya to another woman and to another boy stresses the horrifying truth of history and lends empathy to the narration.

The text's strong concern for empathy becomes even more evident in the third supplement, apparently a utopian appendix. Somewhere, in a place called 'The Camp,' Lisa meets her mother. In a symbolic action, they suckle each other's breasts. This image does not really assume a primarily homosexual meaning. Rather, the notions of nursing and motherhood are brought up as a counter-image, or even a counter-plot against the dehumanization of all the men who killed women and children in Babi Yar or in one of the many Concentrations Camps erected during World War II. This reading invokes the myth of Demeter, Kore, and their reunion in the Underworld.

In terms of 'aesthetic bravery,' *The White Hotel* is much more daring than *Freud's Megalomania*. Incorporating lyrics, history, and far-reaching ethical considerations, Thomas's novel takes poetry to its extremes. It is intended as a thought experiment that displays the implications inherent in psychoanalytical theory. These implications are linked to contemporary history, especially to the cruel politics of 'othering' that paved the way for the holocaust. This is not to say that Rosenfield's anatomy-like narration lacks political relevance. In fact, megalomania is not only present in the scientific world but also in the arena of politics. Nevertheless, the primary focus of Rosenfield is the weakness of any attempt to conceptualize human behavior without taking into account the self-referentiality of human consciousness. By using fiction to deconstruct the myths of both the Freud legend and computer driven neuroscience, his book is concerned with theory (in the broadest sense of the word).

In contrast, Thomas' novel is concerned with problems that cannot be resolved by theory. Neither Freud's theory of desire nor the mythological concept of a death drive make comprehensible what has happened to people like Lisa Erdmann. The cruelty Jewish people had to experience during Freud's lifetime and the years that followed his death in 1939 exceeds any available explanation. Recalling the Shoa and mourning the deaths of millions of innocent people is a task that demands a different attitude and, of course, a verbal practice that transgresses scientific discourse. Whether *The White Hotel* is considered to be a convincing example of such a practice or not, this novel evidently marks the limits of modern rationality. However, when comparing Thomas' narrative with *Freud's Megalomania*, one should not underestimate Rosenfield's display. Of course, there is a connection between the misuse of intelligence and the vulnerability of civilization, between the aggressive drive in man and the political will to overcome cruelty. In this respect, Freud's *Discomfort of Culture* (1930), still, seems to be a work worth reading.

Though psychoanalysis might be a particular case, the way this method is treated in novels like *The White Hotel* and *Freud's Megalomania* shows how literature displays scientific knowledge. If this knowledge is already a configuration of information, the plot of these novels can be seen as a re-configuration or transformation. Of course, some bits of information are only used to set up a frame of reference. However, the plot's main function

is to question the scientific ordering of information and to run through its implications. So, by the same token, the structure of a scientific theory becomes transparent and contingent, dubious or problematic. To display knowledge, therefore, transgresses the status of information and triggers far-reaching reflections that either might subvert scientific authorities or add alternative readings to their theories. Whereas Israel Rosenfield, himself a skilled researcher, is mainly concerned with the contradictions in Freud's theory or between his findings and the findings in other disciplines, D. M. Thomas confronts knowledge and history, academic discourse, and real events both to stress the importance of psychoanalysis and to mark its boundaries.

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