

CHAPTER FIVE

Psychocriticism: Finding the Fault

In the cultural desert created by the prejudices of the liberal intelligentsia of New York or of the Californian cities, the questioning of the scientific pretensions of psychoanalysis is restricted almost entirely to those concerned with the philosophy of science. The therapeutic needs of such aids perhaps makes intelligible the extraordinary situation whereby a theory that is certainly no better confirmed — and perhaps not as well confirmed — as witchcraft or astrology should have gained the credence it has.

Alasdair MacIntyre¹

I suspect that much of the resistance to Freudian interpretations is based on dissatisfaction with Freudian theory itself.

Kendall Walton²

Psychoanalytic theory has become widely dispersed in the last fifty years, the influence of Freud, in particular, having reached the point where many of his concepts seem part of the furniture of the twentieth-century mind, as if they have always existed, and need no further justification. In America the cultural conquest of psychoanalysis is complete: a revised Webster's Dictionary in the 1970s listed 140 words beginning in *psycho*, 'exactly twice as many as in the previous edition twenty-five years earlier' (Barzun 1974, p. 13). America currently recognises no less than eight different schools of psychoanalysis, of which the Freudian is dominant (*ibid.*, p. 31). But of course psychoanalysis — which involves patients either free-associating or recalling their dreams so that the analyst can diagnose whatever past event or unconscious activity created the psychic disturbance for which they are being treated — is only one of many forms of psychotherapy. A little known fact in literary critical circles is that Freudian analysis has been compared with up to two hundred other therapeutic systems, and has been shown to have no better success-rate than its many rivals, and to suffer from two serious disadvantages, the length of time it takes and the consequent expense in analysts' fees.³ Few of these other therapies have so far been used as models by literary critics, for whom Freudianism has long been the single system.

The temptation to seek psychological causes or explanations for the behaviour of characters in literature is not new. Already in the 1830s Hamlet or Ophelia were being classified according to one or more theories

of hysteria.⁴ The Freudian appropriation of literary criticism began in 1910 with Ernest Jones's essay, 'The Oedipus-complex as an explanation of Hamlet's mystery', a topic finally given full-length treatment some forty years later.⁵ While other writers underwent similar treatment — Ben Jonson was classified by Edmund Wilson as an anal erotic⁶ — it has always been Shakespeare who has attracted the most attention. The bibliography of psychoanalytical criticism of Shakespeare is already extensive, and grows exponentially every year.⁷ In 1987, for instance, at least four full-length books appeared analysing Shakespeare's characters — there seems to be a temporary lull in pursuing the dramatist himself — in Freudian and/or Lacanian terms; and most of this chapter will be given to an examination of these works.⁸ For some readers and historians it might seem sufficient to analyse the criticism without bothering about the system of ideas behind it. To me it seems more honest to recognise, as Kendall Walton puts it in the second epigraph above, that my problems with the criticism derive in the first place from my objections to Freud. Furthermore, since Freudians have simply ignored the many critiques that have been appearing with increasing frequency over the last twenty years, it seems important to point out that the whole Freudian edifice has been drastically undermined, with severe consequences for any literary criticism based on it.

I

Alasdair MacIntyre's comment, in my first epigraph, that 'the questioning of the scientific pretensions of psychoanalysis' was virtually restricted to philosophers of science, was certainly true for the late 60s. An essay he wrote in 1968, 'Psychoanalysis: the future of an illusion?' (MacIntyre 1971, pp. 27–37) described the 'intellectual boredom' he felt at the constant respectful recycling of Freud's ideas, and outlined some telling theoretical objections to them. MacIntyre was one of the first critics to object that in Freudianism 'the explanatory theory helps to provide a vocabulary for the description of the very facts which the theory is designed to explain' (*ibid.*, p. 28). If we describe adult behaviour as Oedipal, for instance, a resemblance with childhood behaviour is brought out by using a term 'which already half-commits us to a particular explanation of this resemblance' (*ibid.*). Writing in 1968, MacIntyre could think of

no discipline to compare with psychoanalysis for the way in which the very use of the vocabulary commits the novice — quite unconsciously — to acceptance of a complex theoretical framework. (p. 29)

(Students of the cultural scene in the intervening period know of at least one critical school that rivals Freudianism in this respect, Derridian deconstruction.) MacIntyre also showed that Freud never offered adequate

criteria by which his concept of repression could be tested (p. 30), and that other Freudian hypotheses are unfalsifiable because they contain too many variables. In his 1908 essay on 'Character and Anal Erotism' Freud hypothesised that instinctual drives might manifest themselves in one way, or — by 'the processes of reaction formation' — in precisely the opposite way. 'The same type of background may result in sadistic, aggressive behavior or in gentle, nonviolent behavior. The hypothesis has become a bet that cannot lose', but also cannot win. Either way, 'its unfalsifiability is fatal to its status as a hypothesis' (*ibid.*, p. 31). Judged by our criteria for logic or scientific argument, MacIntyre's assessment of Freudianism as having less demonstrable validity than witchcraft or astrology had in the Middle Ages seems sober rather than provocative. All three were closed systems that defied verification or falsification.

The stagnation that MacIntyre complained of in Freudian studies was soon to change. At this time Henri F. Ellenberger was preparing his substantial book, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York, 1970), which devoted a long chapter to Freud (pp. 418–570), a chronological survey of life and work which dispassionately placed Freud in his historical context. Ellenberger revealed Freud's many unacknowledged debts to his predecessors, and showed how from an early stage Freud gave misleading accounts of the cures he had effected, creating a series of myths about himself and his work. (I shall be returning to Ellenberger for my brief summary of the Freudian system below.) Also in 1970, Frank Cioffi published a shrewd and concise analysis which judged Freudianism to be no more than a pseudo-science.⁹ The actual scientific status of Freud's work was called in question over the next decade in a number of studies by experimental psychologists, including Hans Eysenck and Glenn D. Wilson (eds.), *The Experimental Study of Freudian Theories* (London, 1973); Seymour Fisher and Roger P. Greenberg, *The Scientific Credibility of Freud's Theories and Therapy* (New York, 1977); and B.A. Farrell, *The Standing of Psychoanalysis* (Oxford, 1981). Although some of these writers continued to respect Freud's scientific work, the cumulative effect of their sober enquiries enforces a quite contrary assessment (Gellner 1985, pp. 158–63; 197–9, 204; Crews 1986, pp. 20–4, 37–41).

The most comprehensive study of Freud in English, which placed him in the Lamarckian tradition of biological determinism and revealed many unscientific aspects in his work (although still expressing admiration for him as a scientist), was Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind. Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (London, 1979; rev. ed. 1983). As Sulloway decisively shows, a biographical approach is vital to understanding the genesis of Freud's theories, which stand in no coherent relationship to his so-called clinical work, and to appreciate the quite extraordinary amount of myth-making that Freud indulged in, and which made his system so successful. Sulloway's chapter on 'The Myth of the Hero' (Sulloway 1983, pp. 445–89) is summed up in his 'Catalogue of

Major Freud Myths', presented in tabular form (pp. 489–95), which sets out twenty-six myths put about by or attached to Freud. In each case Sulloway briefly describes the myth, its function (legitimation of one or more facets of Freud's heroic self-image as an isolated man of science, or nihilation of evidence giving credit to others working in the field); the myth's sources (mostly the writings of Freud and his early associates); and its rebuttal (Sulloway's own book, citing the work of some twenty or thirty other writers). These myths include such key ideas as that psychoanalysis is essentially the product of Freud's self-analysis, a 'herculean' and totally 'unprecedented' feat, that this self-analysis led to Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory and his discovery of infantile sexuality and of the unconscious. In fact, Freud drew most of his formative ideas from the contemporary sexology movement, especially the work of Wilhelm Fliess, whom he subsequently tried to both discredit and ignore (Sulloway 1983, pp. 135–237). Freud's claims to originality were illusory, and his professed indifference to questions of priority was mere evasion.

Far from Freud's theories having derived from his self-analysis in 1897 (a dubious episode in any case: *ibid.*, pp. 18–19, 207–10, 447), or from his purely clinico-psychological observation, 'it was Fliessian sexual biology, evolutionary theory, and the biogenetic law' that really animated Freud's work (p. 237). In his conclusion Sulloway writes with some authority that 'Freud's theories reflect the faulty logic of outmoded nineteenth century biological assumptions, particularly those of a psychophysicalist, Lamarckian, and biogenetic nature' (pp. 497–8). The psychophysicalist inheritance was Freud's notion of 'psychical affect' as a 'quantitative measure of . . . excitation or "emotion"', a finite amount that could be 'discharged' (pp. 91, 109 note), while the related conception of neurosis, as he put it in 1894, applied "'in the same sense as physicists apply the hypothesis of a flow of electric fluid"; with hysteria becoming 'equated with a "short circuit"' (pp. 61–2). The 'biogenetic law', propounded by Ernst Haeckel in the 1860s, was that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny', the development of humans from foetus to adulthood (ontogeny) re-enacting the entire history of the race (phylogeny). Freud's 'endorsement of this law', Sulloway judges, was the biggest 'a priori biological influence in all of psychoanalytic theory', for he claimed that the developing child in its progress through erotogenic zones necessarily 'recapitulates the sexual history of the race' (p. 259). This assumption made Freud equate the pleasure that a baby receives suckling at its mother's breast with the pleasure that animals received from sex, a theory widely disputed by his early associates, notably Jung, and opposed by many psychologists since (pp. 258–61). Sulloway points out that the child may recapitulate the history of the race in some aspects, 'but it recapitulates the embryonic, not the adult stages', as Freud mistakenly thought. His biogenetic assumptions were plausible in his day, but they were 'nevertheless wrong; and much that is wrong with orthodox psychoanalysis' derives from them (p. 498).

As for his work with patients, Sulloway respectfully suggests that 'Freud

was not always aware of how much faith he placed in his biodeterminist assumptions, or of 'how much his clinical observations absorbed from them "empirical" meaning'. In other words, Freud constantly 'saw in his patients what psychoanalytic theory led him to look for and then to interpret the way he did; and when the theory changed, so did the clinical findings'. Sulloway cushions the blow, but it is a stunning one, and much of his book bears it out: Freud 'only saw in people what his theories at any one point would allow him to see. His biogenetic assumptions affected all his work, from his 'discovery of spontaneous infantile sexuality (1896/97) to the very end of his life'; they led him to make controversial claims for their universality, and — worst of all — they 'prevented Freud from accepting negative evidence and alternative explanations for his views' (*ibid.*). These objections constitute, *in somma*, a severe charge, and several reviewers, while praising Sulloway's scholarship and historical breadth, criticised him for not having fully faced the devastating implications of his own work for Freud's standing as a scientist, in particular his mendacity and deliberate manipulation of evidence in his case histories.¹⁰ Acknowledging the justice of these criticisms, Sulloway recently returned to the issue, and in an essay called 'Reassessing Freud's Case Histories: The Social Construction of Psychoanalysis', admitted that 'the erroneous and now outmoded assumptions from nineteenth-century biology' on which Freud based his 'essential psychoanalytical concepts' and 'assembled his "empirical" observations' were 'more lethal to his enterprise than I had previously concluded' (Sulloway 1991, pp. 245–6).¹¹ By way of making good, Sulloway synthesises and extends previous studies to show how Freud broke many fundamental principles of scientific research. He manipulated the events described by his patients and changed them to suit his bias (p. 254); his published case histories exhibit 'glaring' omissions of information (typically, over-emphasising the father's role and excluding the mother's), often amounting to deliberate distortion (p. 256); he made 'fictionalized reconstructions' of his patient's histories, vastly exaggerated the therapeutic success of his treatment (p. 257), and constructed 'pervasive but spurious links' to claim that his theories were proved by the patient's symptoms (p. 273). Sulloway's considered judgment is that 'Freud erected his psychoanalytic evidence on a kind of intellectual quicksand, a circumstance that consequently doomed many of his most important theoretical conclusions from the outset' (p. 245). Many other studies of Freud's case histories have exposed his unscientific procedures and mendacity: in addition to those cited by Sulloway, I think of Ellenberger on Anna O,¹² Anthony Wilden and Roy Porter on Schreber,¹³ and a number of feminist critics on Dora.¹⁴

Dissatisfaction with the scientific status of Freud's theories was one of the motivating forces behind a series of essays published from the mid-70s by the literary critic Frederick Crews, first in a collection called *Out of my System: Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Critical Method* (New York, 1975), and

then more powerfully in a second volume, *Skeptical Engagements* (New York, 1986).¹⁵ A single essay by Crews, 'The Freudian Way of Knowledge' (Crews 1986, pp. 43–74), should be enough to give any unaligned reader serious doubts about the scientific or ethical status of Freudian psychoanalysis. Drawing on a dozen or more independent evaluations of Freud's system, Crews finds him guilty of 'enumerative inductivism', the naïve belief that 'a certain number of confirmatory instances will establish a hypothesis without further enquiry' (Crews 1986, p. 80). Instead of a balanced suspension of judgment until adequate testing had been carried out, Freud displayed a 'monomaniacal quality... a tendency to generalize too hastily while slighting any factors, especially organic ones, that might lead to a diagnosis other than his own' (*ibid.*, p. 50). Freud regularly ignored any criticism that might reduce the universality of his claims (p. 51). The key notion of repression, the supposedly 'unconsciously compelled and traumatic forgetting that alters one's mental economy in certain drastic ways', was never confirmed by observation and experiment. Rather, Freud extrapolated other major tenets in his system from his unproven 'premise that repression is the mainspring of neurosis' (*ibid.*, p. 77). As for his case-studies, even pro-Freudian researchers have 'regretfully concluded that nearly all of Freud's substantially described cases were manifest failures' (p. 59). It is doubtful whether Freud actually 'cured' anyone. As Crews puts it, 'the consulting room was never a laboratory for Freud; it was only the area in which he applied his prior deductions to specific cases, reassuring himself that his patients had repressed the kind of material he demanded of them' (p. 69). His interpretive method 'allowed him, if other signs were supportive, to consider irrelevancies as "displacements", and even, if he wished, to claim as "conclusive proof" of reconstructed memories the fact that patients "have no feeling of remembering the scenes"'. It is hard not to agree with Fliess's cutting allegation (in 1901) 'that Freud... "perceives nothing in others but merely projects his own thoughts into them"' (p. 58).

The truth about Freud, as it has gradually emerged over the last twenty years, is profoundly disillusioning. Virtually every part of his system has been challenged, if not utterly destroyed. As Crews says, instead of asking himself whether 'his dubious hypotheses... might be wrong', Freud 'habitually buttressed [them] with ex post facto provisos', such as 'new theoretical entities and catch-all excuses', invoking for instance 'the hereditary factor', or what Freud called "the primaevial times of the human family"' (p. 67), to which he claimed privileged access. Or else he 'coped with potential disconfirmation by brashly redefining his terms and stretching the scope of his concepts', or by simply inventing 'a new mental law to cover the case at hand', even though it contradicted a 'previous law' (p. 104). Crews cites Cioffi's searching study of inconsistencies in Freud, which shows that he maintained at one time or another completely contradictory positions:

childhood trauma both is and is not a necessary condition for neurogenesis . . . ; recall of sexual material from infancy is both necessary and unnecessary to the undoing of a neurosis; a strict superego is produced by the misfortune of having either a hard, cruel father or . . . an indulgent one; explicit castration threats are both required and not required for the generation of castration anxiety . . .

and so on (pp. 104–5). Freudian theory seems increasingly a series of *ad hoc* constructs, lacking all internal coherence, ‘bewilderingly unsystematic’ (p. 24). The conclusion that Crews reaches, to which literary critics should seriously attend, is that ‘psychoanalysis was founded not on observation but on deductions from erroneous dogma, and as a result the entire system can make no claim on our credence’ (p. 97).

All the pillars supporting the Freudian system have been examined and condemned as unsuitable for load-bearing. Another critic with a literary background, the Italian classicist Sebastiano Timpanaro, applied the techniques of textual criticism to Freud’s theory of the verbal ‘slip’, showing how many more simple and more likely explanations there were than Freud’s notion of parapraxis.¹⁶ As for the famous *Interpretation of Dreams*, Clark Glymour has revealed Freud tendentiously selecting material to preserve his own hypothesis, violating all scientific procedures, making in the process ‘half a rotation from scientist towards mountebank’.¹⁷ Timpanaro pronounces the book ‘capricious and scientifically dishonest’ (Timpanaro 1976, p. 236). The last two evaluations I shall cite come from philosophical quarters, each in its own way devastating. Adolf Grünbaum, in *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis. A Philosophical Critique* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), evaluated Freudianism from the standpoint of a philosopher of science.¹⁸ This is a demanding book, not easy to summarise without simplification, but repaying study. It includes a patient and thorough demolition of Freud’s repression theory, showing it to be a tissue of assumptions, gratuitous extrapolations, begged questions, contrived selections, and manipulated data (Grünbaum 1984, pp. 174–89, 194, 210, 216–66). Another impressive sequence concerns the innately unscientific nature of the Freudian psychoanalytic situation, an especially important issue for Freudian Shakespeare criticism, where the critic plays the role of analyst. Briefly, Grünbaum shows that the basic analysis situation is contaminated by the selection the analyst must make from the vast amount of recorded material; by his explicit suggestions to his patients, often prompting them to continue free association ‘until they yield *theoretically* appropriate results’ — a technique of planting what Freud called “‘the conscious anticipatory idea’” in the patient’s mind so that he “‘then finds the repressed unconscious idea of himself on the basis of its similarity to the anticipatory one’” (*ibid.*, pp. 127–8, 209–15, 242–3). At every stage we find circular arguments, only self-confirmatory evidence, supposedly reliable ‘clinical’ data that has been tampered with throughout. One point

particularly relevant to literary criticism concerns the absence of external constraints, the result being that data can be selected or constructed to make whatever pattern is needed to confirm the theory. I refer to the often noted phenomenon that, as a practising psychoanalyst put it, ‘the “free” associations of the patient are strongly influenced by the values and expectations of the therapist’, so that

the patients of each school seem to bring up precisely the kinds of phenomenological data which confirm the theories and interpretations of their analysts! . . . Freudians elicit material about the Oedipus complex . . . Jungians about archetypes, Rankians about separation anxiety, . . . Sullivanians about disturbed . . . relationships, etc. (Grünbaum 1984, p. 211; Gellner 1985, p. 92)

In this way, each theory can be self-validating.

The last critic of Freudianism whom I shall cite is Ernest Gellner, sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher, in a refreshingly trenchant and untechnical book, *The Psychoanalytic Movement. Or, The Coming of Unreason* (London, 1985). Gellner also shows how the hierarchical situation in Freudian analysis puts the analysand at a complete disadvantage, having lost his conceptual foundations by the very terms of reference used in the therapy he has agreed to undergo (Gellner 1985, pp. 47–8), all power being vested in an authority figure, member of a self-perpetuating guild which recognises no other form of authority than that descending, like some apostolic succession, from Freud himself.¹⁹ The basic hypothesis, the existence of the unconscious as the location of all that is decisive in the patient’s life and psyche, is ‘not so much a hypothesis’, Gellner writes, as ‘a suspension of all other hypotheses’, producing in turn ‘the suspension of intuitive logical certainties (of what would normally be called reason) . . .’. It carries the related hypothesis, that the analyst alone has access to the patient’s unconscious (pp. 47–8). The patient has to ‘co-operate’ with the therapy, as an analyst might say, which means that he has no ‘stance from which he could attempt a critical evaluation of it’ (p. 49). Should he venture one, he can be judged guilty of resistance, the notorious Freudian belief that ‘the repudiation of an interpretation or of a theory is evidence of its validity, because it shows the desire of the Unconscious of a given person not to be unmasked . . .’ (p. 153). For Gellner resistance is one of several ‘falsification-evading devices’ (pp. 153–4) that allows psychoanalysis to evade the normal post-Popperian criteria for the demarcation of science, notably the demand that theories can be falsified — that is, being sufficiently coherent and independently formulated to be testable. Freudian ideas cannot be tested since they cannot be formulated in an independent language that does not prejudice the issue (pp. 4–5). They are conceptually vague (pp. 53–4), and rather than constituting ‘one optional possibility within a wider world’, they ‘define, constitute, fill out their own world’ (p. 157). In this domain

external criteria are rejected as irrelevant, and observed behaviour is no longer an independent corrective to theory. In a typically circular process, Freudian concepts classify human behaviour 'in terms of the theory which is built into the concepts themselves, and which they then illustrate at will from any data' (p. 156).

The concepts are not difficult to understand, indeed, the basics of Freudianism can be mastered in half a day's reading. But to Gellner this is one more proof of the non-scientific nature of psychoanalysis, its acceptance of a 'naïve realism' which assumes perception to be 'the innocent encounter of a pure mind with a naked object', and thinks that the analyst has only to remove the veil of repression or neurosis to disclose the truth (pp. 90–91, 104–105, 82–3). Psychoanalysis, ignoring the whole development of scepticism and the conjecturalisation of knowledge since Descartes, in effect reverts to the world-view of pre-scientific societies, where reality is comfortably solid (pp. 120, 125–8). Gellner, like other critics of Freud, recognises the existence of an unconscious (pp. 75, 96, 107, 199–200), but rejects as unproven the two major assumptions of analysis, that patients' verbal recollection of their past will necessarily cure them, and that the 'material retrieved' constitutes a liberation of memories originally repressed because of their sexual significance (pp. 149, 182–3, 208–209, 224–5). Psychoanalysis certainly fulfils a need for lonely or disturbed people to find a sympathetic listener, but the analyst is not so much a scientist as a secular priest within a belief-system.²⁰ As for the much-touted phenomenon of transference, Gellner agrees that talking to someone else about your problems can be therapeutic, yet offers nine different, non-Freudian explanations of why this should be (pp. 56–66). For anyone sceptical of the Freudians' claim to be able to decipher the workings of the unconscious it is refreshing to read Gellner's comment that 'Consciousness is in a way much more mysterious than the unconscious' (p. 95). In the Freudian unconscious, I add, there is nothing mysterious: we find the same half-a-dozen main ideas over and over, in one permutation or another.

The appropriate conclusion to this brief survey of some of the critical literature on Freud over the last two decades would be the remark by P.B. Medawar, Nobel prize-winner for medicine, that 'the opinion is gaining ground that doctrinaire psychoanalytic theory is the most stupendous intellectual confidence trick of the twentieth century: and a terminal product as well — something akin to a dinosaur or a zeppelin in the history of ideas, a vast structure of radically unsound design and with no posterity'.²¹

* * *

I have tried to condense as briefly as possible some results of the great amount of scholarship produced over the last twenty years which has

challenged Freudianism. The system that continues to claim scientific status for itself can now *only* be seen as a structure of interlocking theories, none of which has ever been proved, each of which assumes the validity of the others as the basis for its own existence, a self-generating, self-protective construct full of ruses to avoid being called to account. In due time, perhaps, recognition of the devastation that Freudianism has suffered may filter through and cause its general discrediting. But as we well know, published refutations do not necessarily change believers' opinions, and anyone who thinks they do is in the uncomfortable position of Swift's Gulliver, manically convinced that the world consists only of Houyhnhnms (horse-like creatures having reason) and Yahoos (man-like creatures of unreason), and protesting that the publication of his book has not managed to cure human vices:

instead of seeing a full stop put to all Abuses and Corruptions, at least in this little Island, as I had Reason to expect: Behold, after above six months Warning, I cannot learn that my Book hath produced one single Effect according to mine Intentions: . . . And, it must be owned that seven months were a sufficient Time to correct every vice and Folly to which *Yahoos* are subject; if their Natures had been capable of the least Disposition to Virtue or Wisdom.²²

The laugh is on Gulliver there, impatient and simple-minded moralist, but the residual irony affects us all. As for Freudianism, the verdict of two experimental psychologists still stands, that "A theory which fails consistently to predict . . . may nevertheless survive, due to the vagaries of the *Zeitgeist*" (Eysenck and Wilson, *cit.* Gellner 1985, p. 204).

In literary criticism the *Zeitgeist* continues to flourish. The anomaly may eventually become visible, however, that literary critics are still unquestioningly adopting a system that owes its whole prestige to its supposed ability to describe or explain human behaviour in real life. But if the system is bogus, the explanations erroneous, the very concepts and terminology question-begging, what status shall we assign to literary criticism based on it? One issue that literary critics can no longer ignore is the dubious status of Freudian argument, with its ability to control what counts as evidence, self-protectively excluding other criteria. Not many people now believe that a training in English literature makes us better men and women: but at least it should help us to spot what Frederick Crews has described as 'the ambiguous and opportunistic character of the whole Freudian system' (Crews 1986, p. xvi), its 'fatal readiness to corroborate any number of incompatible hunches about a given phenomenon, which can, according to the analyst's whim, be taken to mean either what it seems to mean, or exactly the opposite, or some other idea which it has supposedly "displaced"' (p. 9). Adopted for literature, such opportunism can be convenient. Freudian Shakespeare critics, as we shall see, allow themselves the same liberty, the same 'elasticity of . . . rules', the same

'absence of constraints' on the production of evidence (p. 26). For some post-modernists, who have abandoned the whole notion of evidence, that may not matter. For others the complete liberty of interpretation that it claims is good reason for regarding psychoanalytic criticism with suspicion, at its worst legitimising self-pleasing speculation.

The demonstration of Freudianism's inability to explain real-life behaviour other than with its own question-begging categories might make its exponents defensive, claiming that the system nevertheless provides a usable model for analysing literature. If so, we would have to ask what use a system is that has such a limited range of interpretive possibilities, reproducing the same basic patterns time and again? Any sustained analysis of Freudian-inspired criticism eventually becomes monotonous, a condition that (I fear) the following discussion will not manage to escape. In order to refresh some memories, and to have a common reference-point for the analyses that follow, I now give a brief (but not uncritical) résumé of Freudian theory. This is the basic dogma that we can expect to find reproduced in psychoanalytical Shakespeare criticism.

The fundamental principle is that neurosis is a form of pathological behaviour which always has a sexual cause. Freud defined neurosis as 'a pathologically repressed, or "negative", state of sexual perversion' (Sulloway 1983, p. 277). Every neurosis has a determinant cause, Freud believed, in the repression of sexuality during childhood (*ibid.*, pp. 359, 364). From his first classification of neuroses (1896) to the posthumously published *Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940), Freud never altered his opinion that repression-producing neuroses "arise from the component instincts of sexual life . . . without exception" (*cit. ibid.*, pp. 375–6). Systematising the theories of many psychologists in the late nineteenth century, Freud divided the development of infantile sexuality into a movement through three erogenous zones, oral to anal to genital (*ibid.*, pp. 203, 259–61, 377–81, 383–4). On the truth of this theory "of the sexual component instincts" in childhood, he declared in 1913, "psychoanalysis stands or falls . . ." (*cit. ibid.*, p. 259).

Sexual causes animate dreams, as well as neuroses. Every dream, Freud taught, is "a (disguised) fulfilment of a suppressed or repressed wish", in which "the sexual material [plays] a decisive role", for "the dream represents the fulfilment of disguised sexual wishes", sometimes discernible in what he claimed to be "the fixed symbolism of dreams" (*cit. ibid.*, pp. 320, 329–30, 350). Even anxiety dreams, Freud claimed, could be explained as wish-fulfilment. Freud drew most of his ideas on symbolism from current popularising books such as Karl Scherner's *Das Leben des Traums* (1861), but was more single-minded than other theorists, referring most of the 257 dream symbols mentioned in his writing to 'the human body (and its separate organs, particularly the genitals)' and to 'numerous other aspects of sexual life' (*ibid.*, pp. 325–7, 337–8). Thus boxes or cases meant the womb; walking up or down steps meant coitus; baldness,

decapitation, or hair-cutting meant castration. Freud enlarged interpretive possibilities, as one might put it, with the suggestion that some symbols need to be interpreted in inverted terms, as one of his students recorded, "since dreams often showed the opposite of what they mean" (*ibid.*, pp. 350–1). Among the material surfacing in dreams, or in free association, would be the repressed sexual desires of childhood — especially the famous Oedipus complex, in which, as one commentator reminds us, 'the little boy wants to possess his mother, wishes to get rid of his father, but is frightened of this threatening rival and of castration as a punishment for his incestuous feelings towards his mother' (Ellenberger 1970, p. 492). This theory was initially conceived in terms of the male sex, and Freud 'subsequently admitted that matters were far more complicated in the female sex owing to the little girl's preoedipal attachment to her mother, her lack of castration fears, and the paramount role of penis envy in her Oedipus complex' (Sulloway 1983, p. 374). Castration-anxiety was also taken to be a cause of neurosis, essentially a defence against passive homosexual fantasies (*ibid.*, p. 383). Like so many Freudian concepts, castration was subsequently given a putative historical status, surviving in modern man as 'phylogenetic residues of actual deeds' in the prehistory of the species (*ibid.*, pp. 386, 392). *Totem and taboo* (1912–13) is a kind of mythical fantasy on Darwinian themes, involving the powerful and castrating father, the struggle between males for dominance, and so on (*ibid.*, pp. 372–3, 381).

As these examples show, much of Freud's thinking was based on male experience. In his eyes woman is born incomplete, never achieves the wholeness of man, and is subordinate in other ways. As he said in 1910, "Neurosis always has a 'feminine' character. . . . Whatever is of the libido has a masculine character, and whatever is repression is of a feminine character" (*cit. ibid.*, p. 202 note). In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) Freud gave as an example of the renunciation of instinctual gratification necessary to civilisation, man's taming of fire: "Whenever primitive man came upon fire, he would extinguish it by urination. Owing to the phallic shape of the flames, he experienced an erotic feeling of a homosexual contest. [Did Freud really think that homosexuals went in for phallic competitions?] The first man to renounce this erotic pleasure was able to put fire to practical use'. Woman, meanwhile, 'was constituted keeper of the hearth because she was anatomically incapable of extinguishing fire as a man does. In another place Freud suggested that woman was the inventor of clothing because she wanted to hide her shameful lack of a penis; pubic hair inspired the invention of weaving' (Ellenberger 1970, p. 529). Criticism never made Freud re-think his theory, indeed in 1931 he said that 'women who rejected his own view of penis envy were using psychoanalysis illegitimately, as "a weapon of controversy"' (Grosskurth 1991, p. 26). His disciples loyally supported him, using the crudest forms of exclusion to silence anyone who challenged him from within the fold, as

the sad case of Karen Horney shows.²³ To an increasing number of readers such theorising can only seem ridiculous and offensive, the result of applying male-based nineteenth-century theories of gender. Freud's deliberate ignoring of the breast, together with women's reproductive capabilities, have aroused justifiable anger among feminists.²⁴ Yet a large number of feminist literary critics still use castration fears and penis envy as indispensable tools for the evaluation of male and female behaviour, unable to reject these convenient but demeaning reductivist concepts.

Freudian literary critics, feminists and others, continue to use his master theory of how the personality deals with instinctual desires for either gratification or repression, his division of the psyche into three parts. The id is 'the unconscious, the seat of both the repressed material and the drives' or passions, including unconscious fantasies and feelings, 'notably guilt feelings' (Ellenberger 1970, p. 516). The ego, Freud wrote, is "that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world" (Sulloway 1983, p. 374). The superego, finally, is 'the watchful, judging, punishing agency in the individual, the source of social and religious feelings in mankind'. But since 'the superego receives its energy from the id', it frequently has a 'cruel, sadistic quality', producing 'neurotic guilt feelings' (Ellenberger 1970, p. 516). The superego arises in childhood, Freud taught, as "the heir to the Oedipus complex" — that is, being identified with the authority of the opposite-sex parent and the prohibition of the child's incestuous impulses (Sulloway 1983, p. 374). In this, as in virtually every part of his system, Freud was a psychological determinist, with a lifelong belief that 'all vital phenomena, including psychical ones, are rigidly and lawfully determined by the principle of cause and effect'. As Frank Sulloway shows, Freud 'did not believe that anything at all was truly "free" in the life of the mind' (Sulloway 1983, pp. 94–5; also pp. 138, 170; Ellenberger 1970, pp. 488–9, 494, 498). The diagrams that Freud's expositors provide of his theories of neurosis or dreaming show graphically his belief that everything is 'tied' or 'linked' in 'a chain of unconscious fixed ideas' back to childhood sexuality and its varying forms of repression (Sulloway 1983, p. 342; Ellenberger 1970, pp. 489, 491). Reductivism and determinism are among the more depressing features of Freud's legacy.

Literary critics apply this system to novels and drama, reproducing all its faults. They ignore the richness of the societies depicted, the forces of history, the role of institutions and office, conflicts of love and duty, or anything else except the psycho-sexual nature of the main characters. Freudian literary critics, like Freud himself, are not interested in love, normal sexuality, health, happiness, family-relations that are caring and supportive; friendships; work; the experience of art, music, literature. . . . Disregarding normal behaviour, they concern themselves with what *they* perceive to be the personality-problems of some few characters (those presented in enough detail to justify analysis). Psychocritics are essentially

concerned with individuals, often 'analysing' them in separate character-studies, that most primitive of critical modes. Psychocritics in effect assume that Hamlet or Othello are patients whose 'data' can be collected in isolation from the literary work in which alone they have a meaning and function. Strangest point of all, to my mind, they also assume that the characters to be analysed will manifest a psychopathology, reveal that they are suffering from some pathogenic or traumatic experience either within the play or in their putative earlier existence. That is, the strategies of a disturbed consciousness, unable to deal satisfactorily with reality, having consulted or been referred to a psychoanalyst for treatment, are now taken as the models for a normative literary criticism. The resulting critical focus on a few disordered psyches is not interested in, could not in any case deal with literary history, the demonstrable evidence that each play was written at a certain period in a chosen form, and that each is completely individual. The psychoanalytic critic lays Congreve and Strindberg, Büchner and Feydeau, all on the same couch, applies the same categories to them all, gets the same results. Psychocriticism, not having any aesthetic categories or knowledge of literature, must also ignore questions of genre, authorship, and style, jettison or misread motivation suggested by the writer if it should not fit its system. As loyal as the analysts on whom they model themselves, for psychocritics the Freudian model is to be illustrated, never questioned.

II

Literary criticism that takes over Freudian ideas can hardly hope to escape their monocausal reductivism. In her book on *Shakespeare's Other Language*, Ruth Nevo affirms that Freud produced the three 'most seminal important books for the study of language and literature . . . in this century' (Nevo 1987, p. 9). As a model specimen of Freudian interpretation she cites an account of 'Three Blind Mice', by Robert Rogers, which she judges 'an exemplary instance of the primary and secondary processes in poetry'.²⁵ In this nursery rhyme — ' . . . see how they run. / They all run after the farmer's wife, / Who cut off their tails with a carving-knife' — Rogers 'discovers a precipitate of a fantasy rooted in deep-seated castration anxiety which the song "succeeds . . . in generating, controlling, and dispelling"'. What Rogers finds, Nevo writes approvingly, is a 'theme of vision and blindness as symbolic lust and castration'. That is, I imagine, the mice were not — as everyone has always assumed — born blind, but have been blinded as punishment for their scopophilia, their gazing lustfully at the farmer's wife. (What these little creatures thought they could get up to with her is difficult to imagine; just as one wonders how a rodent, lacking reason, can be guilty of lust; and how we, the readers or listeners, being

ordered or invited to 'see', can avoid committing the same sin.) *Ergo*, the cut-off tails must 'figure' as penises. Nevo announces that in this 'rhyme, exceptionally, crime follows punishment', which allows her to claim that 'blind' and 'tails' are related. This completely arbitrary handling of narrative sequence is a liberty that psychocritics frequently allow themselves. Nevo endorses Rogers's conclusion that "the stress on seeing . . . reassur[es] the detached listener that since he can see . . . he is himself whole and hale" — then the listener must be a man! — thus validating Freud's observation that fear of the loss of the phallus is often represented by a multiplication of the object which represents it' (*ibid.*, pp. 14–15). This 'exemplary' account of poetry (some might have thought it a spoof) already reveals the major (and unsolved, because unconsidered) problem for Freudian critics, that of evaluating evidence, the absence of criteria which could tell them when references to cutting are *not* castration-fears, when blindness is *not* the result of scopophilia. But their ignoring of negative instances could be seen as a loyal tribute to Freud.

Nevo's own approach, inevitably so for a Freudian, is resolutely ahistorical, sweeping aside the charges of 'anthropomorphism and anachronism' often applied to psychoanalytic readings of Shakespeare in these terms:

If we do not wish older works to become fossilized, simply archaeological, we *must* employ our contemporary conceptions in interpreting them. Both present and past are thus more fully understood. (p. 30)

The 'present', may be — or rather, some current trends within psychoanalysis and linguistics — but the past is not simply 'understood' in this way, for in an ahistorical reading the present simply reproduces itself, using the past as a vehicle. To overcome this dilemma the reader, and especially someone who sets up as a critic, needs to develop the historical imagination in order to reconstruct those attitudes to life and literature — social, moral, and aesthetic (involving critical theories, notions of genre, the arts of language) — which influenced the writing and reading of literature at some past time.

Nevo, who has written some valuable historical criticism,²⁶ knows all this, of course. She equally knowingly adopts as her critical model

present-day post-psychoanalytic semiotics, which finds in *riffs* at the realist-rationalist level of plot, character and diction evidence of *unconscious signification*, of the language of dream and fantasy. It is the interplay of *that other language* with the manifest events and dialogue which may yield the new insights we seek. (p. 8; my italics)

She invokes as exemplar Lacan's theory of 'the importance of "the unsaid . . . that lies in the *holes* of the discourse"', and his related belief that 'the unconscious speaks as *something other* from within the speech of consciousness, which it undercuts or subverts', existing at a 'chaotic, preverbal' stage beneath the externally 'regularized, rational order' (pp. 10, 24; my italics).

In psychoanalysis, apparently, what the patient doesn't tell you is the real give-away. As a follower of Lacan puts it, the psychoanalyst is only interested in the text's 'brutal silences, . . . blemishes, incongruities and neglected details' (p. 26).

Ignoring historical criticism, theatrical convention, genre, rhetoric, and Renaissance theories of literature, the Neo-Freudian critic approaches a non-realist literary form with expectations derived from realism and finds — incoherences. This is supposedly just like the psychoanalyst, who deduces what is really bothering the patient from omissions in the narrative of his or her inner life. (In any case the injunction to create an interpretation out of the silences — *ex lacunis, ex Lacanis* — gives the analyst a freedom of invention that raises major questions of relevance to the patient's case-history. That thought might well trouble doctors; to literary critics it merely offers more freedom.) It seems very dubious to apply this analogy to Elizabethan drama. The analyst's notes of extended conversations with the patient (or of the patient's monologues, rather), are not at all like the plays of Shakespeare, constructed in relative leisure over a long period (a total of 37 plays in a writing career of about 20 years), and with considerable planning. As I briefly showed in Chapter 2, Shakespeare's inventive treatment of his sources reveals a concern to create dramatic structures that will fulfil the criteria of genre and meet self-imposed demands of coherence (subject to theatrical conventions) in plot and motivation. Those are the dramatist's primary goals; secondary, though not easily separable, is his need to involve the spectators in the events represented, tragic or comic, arousing a complex range of feelings in response to character and issue. Nevo brusquely dismisses the notion of genre early on, listing the remarkable ingredients of the Romances in order to prove 'their defiance of common sense' (p. 3); their 'ungrammatical' nature compared to tragedy, with its 'masculine irresolvable either/or/and', and comedy, with its 'harmonizing feminine both/and' (p. 6). But it is very obvious that the remarkable ingredients listed by Nevo — shipwreck, separation, disguise, questing, reunion — are the basic narrative motifs of Greek romance, a genre that survived in unlikely places (such as medieval saints' lives and chivalric literature), and was rediscovered in the Renaissance. The influence of this genre on Elizabethan fiction has been long demonstrated, as has Shakespeare's frequent use of these structural motifs, from *Comedy of Errors* to *Twelfth Night* to *The Winter's Tale*.²⁷ Nevo praises 'the firm architectonic of most of the plays', saying that Shakespeare evolved forms 'based upon classical precept and example' (p. 4), which is perfectly true. But she conveniently fails to see that the Romances are equally 'classical', only deriving from a later period of antiquity, the Hellenistic adoption of patterns from the New Comedy for prose fiction.

It is regrettable that this historical dimension is ignored, but my argument against the kind of criticism that Nevo writes here is in any case not that it is non-historical, but nonsensical — taking the sense of the play to

be the declared motives of action and reaction that Shakespeare gives his characters, and which are clearly accessible to the ordinary reader and theatregoer. Set against the manifest coherence of action and plot — all presented through largely recoverable theatrical conventions — the intention to discover ‘rifts’ seems like a game played without rules. The psychocritic, a specially enlightened Freudian or Lacanian, diagnoses a whole series of psychic disturbances in the play’s characters as if revealed in ‘dream and fantasy’. In order to deduce significance *ex silentiis* the critic must ignore the dramatist’s explicit design and carefully-constructed settings of social and political conflict so as to focus, as Nevo puts it, on ‘the overlooked detail, the marginal, the trifling or the trivial’ (p. 22). The margin becomes the centre, and the centre is dispensed with, leaving a blank sheet on which the critic can invent a new play, with strikingly different emphases. Having put together the holes, the unspoken — which has to be seen as somehow ‘subverting’ the spoken, for the order of the day is not complementarity but radical opposition between the two levels (the usual simple binary model) — the critic must then interpret these discrepancies according to the Freudian-Lacanian paradigms. Ignoring the question of genre, Nevo treats Shakespeare’s final Romances as four separate plays — indeed, any four plays would have served her turn equally well. Her goal is to find the ‘informing or generating fantasy, or ensemble of fantasies, in each play’ (p. 29).

It is worth noting at the outset that the essential stuff of Freudian literary critics is fantasy — presumably because patients referred to analysts have difficulty in dealing with reality — but that, in consequence, these critics regularly confuse the reality of the plays with the codified Freudian ‘fantasy’ plots. In *Pericles* (only partly by Shakespeare, of course, a point Nevo dismisses: p. 34), the terms of the competition to win Antiochus’ daughter bind the suitors to solve a riddle correctly, or else be decapitated. Nevo is confident that ‘Freudian symbolologists will immediately identify a castration fantasy’ in this plot (p. 37): but the rest of us see that unsuccessful suitors will have their *heads* chopped off, not their testes. The Freudian reading of texts in the terms of its own categories regularly substitutes fantasy for reality, lesser for greater. The recovery of Thaisa, wife to Pericles and mother to Marina, is said to be ‘a compensatory birth or rebirth fantasy: out of the chest / coffin emerges a sweet-smelling “corse”’ (p. 55). But as every reader or spectator of *Pericles* knows, the corpse moves, and speaks: it is alive! In the play’s brothel scenes, Nevo writes, ‘the metaphors are fantasies of injury, force, mutilation’ (p. 57): but alas for poor Marina, they are neither metaphors nor fantasies but all too real, and imminent. *Cymbeline* is ‘inundated by fantasies of dispersed and reassembled families’ (p. 92): but no, these events actually happen to those families. Polixenes’ remark about his nine-month visit at the outset of *The Winter’s Tale* involves the number ‘9’, which according to Freud *always* indicates “‘the phantasy of pregnancy”’ (p. 103): but no, Hermione is truly pregnant.

Prospero, similarly, is said to suffer from a ‘fantasy of omnipotence’ or domination (pp. 138, 150): but unless one is to reject the plot *donnée* of magic on which the whole play is built, he really *can* dominate man and nature with his art. As for Prospero disarming Ferdinand of his sword and setting him to chop logs, to the Freudian these are ‘metaphorical castrations’ expressing ‘a possessive father’s hostility to his usurper rival’ (p. 135), for by the familiar Freudian licence in interpretation (that ‘elasticity of interpretive rules’, as Crews put it) ‘in dreams, as we know, opposites obtain: Going is coming . . . log-chopping displaces a threat of castration’ (p. 136). Since Prospero imposes ‘log-bearing slavery’ on Caliban, too, we may conclude that Prospero makes people chop firewood to allay his fears that they wish to castrate him — rather clever of him, since he can thereby kill two birds with (or, instead of) two stones, dispelling anxieties and warming his cave at the same time! As for the ‘sunburn’d sicklemen’ in the masque, they give ‘intimations of mortality, and of castration’ (p. 148) — to men only, one assumes, noting again the phallogocentrism in so many of Freud’s theories.

Each of the four Romances is distorted to fit Nevo’s neo-Freudian template. The fact that Pericles twice refers to himself as ‘son’ to Antiochus reveals to Nevo that he is ‘in the grip of the oedipal guilt which Freud . . . characterizes as “the pure culture of the death instinct”’ (p. 42). (Freud’s pessimistic-determinist belief in a human ‘death instinct’ is of course the most dubious of his later theories: Sulloway 1983, pp. 393, 404–14.) *Pericles*, like so many Romances, involves journeys by sea, storms, shipwrecks, separations, reunions, so it is no surprise that the hero should address the storm which has just cast him ashore:

Yet cease your ire, you angry stars of heaven!

Wind, rain, and thunder. . . .

Alas, the seas hath cast me on the rocks. . . .

(2.1.1ff)

Nevo ingeniously Freudianises the speech as an allegory of family conflicts. The ‘wrathfully punitive sky elements’ are paternal, the ocean maternal, and Pericles is ‘a son whose rebellious urge against a parental couple — sky-father and sea-mother — has turned inward against himself’ (pp. 45–6). It is Nevo, of course, who imports the parental symbols and adds the further idea of self-hatred, a projection or imposition onto the text which the psychocritic regularly performs. The fact that in a twelve-line speech by Pericles we find ‘sun’ in one line and ‘son’ three lines later prompts her to this critical flight: ‘If we reverse the son/sun homonym, moreover, the tempting/frightening possibility of usurping the father figure comes again into view’ (p. 51). But what possible warrant do we have for doing such a thing? Either texts have an integrity constructed by a writer with definite aims in mind, or they are truly random collections of signifiers which critics are free to arrange in any pattern that serves their own

obsession. According to Lacan, Freud discovered “that the displacement of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts” (p. 52) — but who displaces the signifier here? And why? These ‘phonemic ambiguities (son/sun)’, Nevo goes on, ‘may serve as cover for a considerable urge to self-assertion’ (p. 52), that is, a ‘cover’ or ‘screen’ for what Pericles is incapable of stating directly. He would really like to be able to usurp his father: so the challenge to the diagnostician is to discover why the main protagonist should be *concealing* such urges. (Incidentally, Pericles’ father never appears: either he is dead, or his son has usurped him — which, to the Freudian, may be the same: at all events, he now needs no ‘screen’.)

Nevo’s intense, if fruitless scrutiny of Pericles is typical of the psychocritic’s interest in one character at a time, for ‘just as dreams are always about the dreamer, so there is always a central ego for a play to be about’ (p. 67). But if a play is the dream of one of its characters, how are we to account for the presence of other people, each apparently acting with freedom of will and autonomy? Psychoanalytic criticism cannot deal with all the characters in a play (not all of them fit its templates); but it can relate a surprising number of them to the main figure (surprising since nobody else so far has related them), by a process known as ‘splitting’. In the words of André Green, a follower of Lacan, “in the dream, when the dreamer’s representation becomes overloaded, the dreamer splits it into two and sets up another character to represent, separately, one or more of his characteristics or affects” (*cit. Nevo*, p. 56). The analyst must then discover what caused the representation to become ‘overloaded’ (a metaphor from electricity? If so, echoing Freud’s notion of hysteria as a ‘short circuit’). This seems to me (no believer in psychoanalysis) a bizarre theory, but I can see that it gives the psychocritic still more freedom of manoeuvre. In Pericles’ case, Nevo confidently states,

the classic recourse, in psychoanalytic theory, of the maternally fixated libido is a debased sexual object — prostitute or courtesan. The transformation of Marina into such a figure liberates sexual fantasy, the brothel scenes providing a screen through which the deeply repressed sensuality of Pericles can find release. (p. 57)

But the desire to fulfil a Freudian paradigm makes the critic take her eye off the play. Marina is precisely *not* transformed into ‘a debased sexual object’: she is sold to a brothel-keeper, yet her remarkable combination of virtue and eloquence preserves her chastity (4.2, 4.6). And, of course, Pericles goes nowhere near the brothel, has no idea that his daughter is there. The psychocritic’s ‘description’ is pure invention, an eagerness to apply the Freudian template blinding her to the play itself.

Nevo does pay occasional attention to the plot, saying that ‘Pericles, himself absent from the stage, . . . is replaced by these fantasized figures . . .’ (p. 57). But what sense does ‘replaced’ have in that sentence? Replaced not by Shakespeare but by the critic, in order to make up the neo-Freudian

formula. Nevo believes it essential ‘for both Marina’s parents to be sexually in abeyance . . . while the screen fantasies of the brothel scenes are taking place. The psychic burden is shifted, so to speak, to the shoulders of the surrogate figure’ (p. 58). But if Marina is a ‘depersonalized sex object’ on which Pericles’ ‘deeply repressed and traumatized libido’ can release itself, why is it that *the man who visits the brothel is actually Lysimachus, governor of Mytilene*? Nevo tendentiously describes Lysimachus as ‘a split character, indeterminately ravisher and protector’ (p. 59), but the indeterminacy is hers. The play is quite clear: Lysimachus is a customer of the brothel who is converted to virtue by Marina, whom he subsequently marries. But having diagnosed a ‘split’, Nevo exploits it:

this split, or anomaly, is our clue. For if the dream burden has been displaced to other figures in the way Green describes [*assuming that Green’s approach is at all suitable to drama*], and we can read Lysimachus as a representation, or extension of Pericles, then the split in Lysimachus is the unconscious split in Pericles. (*ibid.*)

But what would this hypothesis achieve? It would be reductive, and tautologous, for Lysimachus would then be suffering from the same ‘deeply repressed and traumatic libido’ as Pericles, the only difference being that Pericles retreats, monk-like, into ‘his mourning and his melancholy’ (p. 57), while Lysimachus goes out to get a whore. His reality is to find a princess and a wife; Pericles’ reality is to be reunited with both wife and daughter: what fantasies might be represented by these events in the play?

If the ‘splitting’ manoeuvre seems oddly redundant in *Pericles*, Nevo makes more of it in the other Romances. In *Cymbeline* she follows Murray Schwarz in diagnosing a “tense and precarious balance” in the psyche of Posthumus between ‘alternative sexual modes’. So, ‘by following Posthumus carefully through the play’ — a rationale for old-fashioned one-at-a-time character criticism — we will find in him “the tyranny of the superego which would split the psyche into diametric opposites, one part that worships and another that defiles” (p. 74). If we do follow him through the play, though, we find that Posthumus appears in only 8 of the 26 scenes into which *Cymbeline* is conventionally divided, and — a remarkable plot-feature that shows all too clearly the influence of Greek romance — is separated from his newly-married wife, Imogen, between the first scene and the last. But the psychocritic can easily overcome this deficiency by diagnosing ‘an inhibition of desire on Posthumus’ part’ which *splits itself*, note well, into ‘two proxy suitors, the fastidious Iachimo and the unspeakable Cloten’, who are both “aspects or projections of Posthumus’ psyche”, as Schwarz put it, ‘for whom they substitute’ (pp. 74–5). But, as with ‘replaced’ in *Pericles*, they only ‘substitute’ within the formulae of neo-Freudian criticism, always striving to reproduce and so validate its own limited plots. Cloten is said to represent ‘pure sexual drive’ (surely he is never as admirable as that?), while Iachimo stands for ‘aim-

inhibited fantasy', a 'lust of the eyes' (pp. 75, 77). However, reference to the scene (2.2) where Iachimo creeps out of the trunk in which he has hidden in order to observe some intimate details of Imogen which will enable him to win his wager with Posthumus, shows little, if any lust (he is more concerned to record every detail of the room, to make his story of having slept with her more plausible), and the critic who describes Posthumus as 'being sexually aroused' by Iachimo's story in 2.4 (p. 78) is similarly adding a sexuality that is not in the text. Posthumus is indignant, hurt, but not lubricious. Later Cloten is said to represent 'the repressed libido' in Posthumus, Iachimo his 'repressive superego' (p. 87), a typically Freudian fragmentation of character into abstractions and allegories. But although she emulates Freud by always pursuing the sexual element, Nevo has forgotten Freud's theory that the role of the super-ego is to check and control the ego. Here she attributes to the super-ego a voyeuristic desire, trying not to quell but to arouse the sexuality of the ego: 'Posthumus . . . is precipitated into his Cloten self, his unreconstructed . . . demeaning sensuality' by Iachimo (p. 78). If I were Posthumus I would go and see an analyst, happy in the knowledge that I would thereby be helping, as André Green puts it, not the text's author "but the analyst-interpreter, who helps himself through seeking to comprehend the emotions the text awakens in him. Thus the patient, the potential analysand, is . . . the analyst himself" (cit. Nevo, p. 26). Thus psychoanalytical criticism becomes a mode of self-therapy. (The critic, Nevo adds, as if unhappy about the implications of this role-reversal, is 'analyst too, and the text analysand'.)

Never mind who is analysing whom, wherever the Freudian looks in *Cymbeline*, characters have sexual problems. Imogen is struggling 'to resolve the ambivalence of untried sexuality' (p. 82). Since we know that, 'in the symbology of dreams, crowns and wreaths, metamorphoses of that most fertile of all figures, the circle, are genital displacements upwards' (p. 50) — as it were, translating the groin to the head — then Imogen's declared preference for even Posthumus' 'meanest garment' over Cloten and 'all the hairs' on his head (2.3.129ff) now 'becomes explicable' (after four centuries, for the first time) as a 'displacement upwards of the body-image' (here, his underpants), which is 'a protection from the recognition, which it also divulges, of a lively desire' (p. 81). But why should Imogen wish to protect herself from this recognition? Everything she says about Posthumus manifests her constant desire for him:

I would have broke mine eye-strings, cracked them, but
To look upon him. . . .

Ere I could tell him
How I would think on him at certain hours
Such thoughts and such . . . (1.3.17ff)

— they were parted. Imogen has no need to hide, nor we to seek, anything other than her freely-expressed sexuality.

Nevo at one point mocks an older style of Freudian criticism, 'the well-known parlour game of Hunting the Phallic symbol' (p. 18): but she plays it herself.²⁸ Not only are all circles 'upward displacements' of a genital instinct, but as Iachimo creeps out of his trunk in Imogen's bedroom 'the phallic flame of the taper is itself a voyeur as it "Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids"' (p. 77). (Have you ever seen a phallus behave like that?) As for Cloten, he is beheaded, 'his "clotpole" sent down the stream "in embassy to his mother" (4.2.185), in a strange parody', Nevo informs us, 'of pagan fertility rituals. As a consequence, the Queen [his mother], bereft, so to speak, of her male organ, declines and dies' (p. 86). Readers who missed the incest motif must be kicking themselves! It is all too obvious to Professor Nevo, who now promotes 'Posthumus as a proxy [psychocritics may 'substitute' or 'replace' any character, *ad libitum*] for *Cymbeline* — the father of Imogen — 'in the latter's absence', thus making this a play about 'a father's deeply repressed desire for his daughter' (p. 94). Since Posthumus is Imogen's husband, and they were involuntarily separated, the reference to incest is wholly fictitious. It would be hard to find a better example of the critic dragging a Freudian concept, willynilly, into a literary work. Pursuing her interpretation, Nevo rebukes Murray Schwarz for declaring the play a failure because Shakespeare lacks "the psychic courage to admit that the fears and aggressions he invokes in *Cymbeline* reside in a father, and that their object is an unconsciously harbored mother imago". This, she comments, 'is absurd since either it postulates a Shakespeare who could only know what he knew by having undergone a course in the psychoanalytic theory of the Oedipus complex', or else it forgets that Shakespeare had written *Hamlet* ten years earlier (p. 92). One welcomes these lines as proof that Nevo has broken with the tradition of psychoanalysing the author; but on the next page we find her speculating on the fact that 'Shakespeare's mother died the year before *Cymbeline* was written, that a grand-daughter was born to him at this time, and that he returned to Stratford after a 'twenty-year absence in London' (p. 93: a misleading description of his links with Stratford, to which he regularly returned.) So, behind the play, she detects 'a troubled author whose preoccupations the foreground stories screen, and while screening reveal . . .' (p. 94). Not revealing enough for Nevo to say what they were, but incestuous preoccupations, it seems, somehow involving his mother / daughter / grand-daughter in some unspecified way. Lucky the critic who has access to the author's psyche, and one who lived four hundred years ago, too.

The Winter's Tale needs no such critical exertions: Leontes is evidently suffering from 'infantile fears of isolation . . . for which the accusation of adultery is a cover', motivated by 'the archaic rage of a sibling rivalry for an undivided mother' (p. 105). In other words (theory A), Leontes casts his wife Hermione in the role of mother, with himself as the rival to his son Mamillius. 'There is', Nevo writes, 'in every delusion a grain of truth'

(which grain? we wonder, and who can find it?). So, she goes on, Hermione does indeed 'betray Leontes, with her children' (p. 106) — that is, by loving them more than she loves her husband. But two pages later we are told (theory B) that Leontes loves Mamillius and identifies with him, since 'they are both ousted rivals for the mother's love' (p. 108). But either Leontes hates his son or he loves him; and either Hermione loves her children or she hates them. Which is it? To the Freudians, plot is some kind of flexible material which can be bent in any direction they please, with readers supposedly unable to remember what they have just been told.

Prospero, too, has infantile fantasies, only in his case (deluded fellow!) he believes that his magic gives him power over the people on the island, and over nature. 'Such grandiose omnipotence, psychoanalytic theory tells us, is a defense against its obverse, the infantile terror of total dependency, therefore it requires the fantasied destruction of maternal power' (p. 138). But there is, unfortunately for this theory, 'a notable absence, or repression of mothers in *The Tempest*' (p. 139 — a good example of finding meaning in the 'gaps' of a text), so the critic has to invent some. Nevo actually suggests that we see 'both Ariel and Miranda as fantasied beneficent surrogate feminine presences' (pp. 138–9): that is, Prospero, like Lear, makes his daughter(s) his mother(s). Whatever *personae* the dramatist has carelessly failed to supply for the Freudian plot, the critic can provide by substitution, inversion, or splitting. But any one identification may be limiting, so Nevo promptly adds that Ariel also represents 'the urge towards sublimation, and Caliban the drift towards regression — a Shakespearean Eros and Thanatos respectively — and it is the struggle between these two cardinal impulses that structures' the play (p. 139). Besides the deadening reification and abstraction involved here, which would reduce the play to allegory, we must protest that there is nothing of Eros in Ariel, and little of Thanatos (elsewhere associated with Oedipal conflicts) in Caliban — whom Nevo subsequently sees as the libido (pp. 140–1). Jacques Barzun has said that 'nothing is more impalpable than the Id', and Frederick Crews has described it as 'that amorphous and ambiguous concept'²⁹ — in any case, to Freud the id was before language. Caliban is such a superb creation, a natural savage, marvellously malevolent, marvellously eloquent, stupidly impressed by the drunken butler and his mate — who that cares about drama would wish to reduce him to the id? But Nevo goes on to see Antonio as 'Prospero's *alter ego*' (they are brothers, of course), who, 'like other sibling rivals in Shakespeare, . . . are split, antithetical, decomposed parts of a psychic whole' (p. 144). But in what sense is Prospero lacking in qualities that Antonio could give him? And what kind of creature would the composite Prospero-Antonio be? Nevo's confident pronouncements do not screen the fact that her imposition of Freudianism on the plays fatally distorts their structure and meaning.

III

The liberty of interpretation that Freudian critics appropriate to themselves can only result in a deformation of Shakespeare. Relationships between characters, political conflict, social discord, the clash between ambition and legitimacy — all these are swept by the board to make way for the stereotypes of psychoanalytic theory. In a book with the ominous title *Dream Works. Lovers and Families in Shakespeare's Plays*, Kay Stockholder sets out a thorough-going application of the method used several times by Ruth Nevo, a theory 'that permits one to assume that the protagonist of a literary work is analogous to the figure that we identify as ourselves' — let us hope with good reason! — 'when we awaken from dreaming' (p. ix). D.G. James, in *The Dream of Learning* (1937), thought that *The Tempest* was dreamt by Prospero, an idiosyncratic theory in an otherwise illuminating book. Without any justification, theoretical or textual, Stockholder systematically sees all the plays as having been *dreamt by the protagonists*. The play, then, is a dream that tells us what the protagonist is suffering from — by any criteria, an amazing idea. In general, she writes, 'any figure may be regarded as the protagonist' (p. 19). If we make Claudius the protagonist of *Hamlet*, 'Hamlet then becomes a distanced representation of Claudius' incomplete filial drama, through whom he expresses his fearful desire to be punished' for his evil ambition (pp. 19–20). This manoeuvre illustrates Freud's principle that dreams are 'the imaginary gratification of unconscious wishes' (p. 6), and it is loyally Freudian in ascribing an inverted Oedipal complex to Claudius. But unfortunately it makes complete nonsense of the play, since Hamlet is not a figment of Claudius' dream, but a real character. If a critic's 'organising principle' consists of abandoning the whole design of action and motive, then it is a principle that destroys what it — presumably — set out to illuminate.

Stockholder believes that any situation, or any character, can have been 'dreamt' by the designated 'protagonist', however tenuous their role in the play. In *The Comedy of Errors*, 'though absent from most of the action' — he appears in the first and last scenes — *non obstante*, 'Aegeon is the figure around whom the action turns and for whom it has most consequence' (p. 27). What of the brothers Antipholus, their servants Dromio, assorted wives, mistresses, money-lenders, constables, and all the confusions of mistaken identity? They are surely central — if the word is to have any meaning — and Aegeon is truly marginal, the long-lost father whose reappearance in the final scene (the Greek romance, again) permits the multiple recognitions that resolve all the plot's crises. For *The Merchant of Venice* Stockholder elevates to the central position a character who does not appear in the play at all. The 'underlying connections' — that is, within the psychoanalytical template — 'are best revealed by taking Portia's father as dreamer, since his power initiates the plot configuration' of the three caskets. The fact that he is dead might deter another critic, but not

one in possession of this 'organising principle': 'By dreaming himself dead [her father] has removed himself from the immediate experience of conflicting desires and fears, and has idealised his own image' (p. 33). But, we want to know, 'how can anyone *dream* himself dead? Does that mean he actually committed suicide? Or is he just dreaming and will wake up at the end of the play?' Both questions would be fatuous, but Stockholder actually answers the first of them, ascribing to Portia's father repressed incestuous desires, from which he 'withdrew into death', so escaping the conflict, but trying to control his daughter's sexuality from beyond the grave. The ordinary reader might protest that the caskets are designed to make sure that the man who wins Portia won't be motivated by desire for her money; and that in any case Portia is perfectly able to manipulate this condition to her own advantage — indeed, few characters seem less likely to be under anyone's control than Portia.

It is as if psychocritics have been issued with an instruction sheet alerting them to some standard issues:

Indicate the main neuroses represented in this play; identify repressed traumas, displacement mechanisms, Oedipal complexes and their inversion, references to the primal scene, anal-oral-phallic fixations, and the patients' fear of their own sexuality. Remember that the unspoken is usually more significant than the spoken, for, as one of our colleagues has observed, out of the succession of linked signifiers which constitute the literary text, 'the unconscious signified rises . . . from the gulf or absence in which it resides . . . in order to indicate, by veiling it, what needs to be hidden.'³⁰

Stockholder diligently obeys these injunctions to the letter, finding the same patterns recurring over and over (so the theory must be correct). When a dream becomes overloaded, as we know, 'the dreamer splits into two and sets up another character to represent, separately, one or more of his characteristics or affects.'³¹ So Stockholder finds that Edgar divides from his 'sadistically moral' self the 'devil-ridden Poor Tom' (p. 18), presumably since the pressure of being 'a sanctimonious, self-righteous person' (p. 125) is too great. Later, though, 'Lear in Kent's disguise' becomes 'a semi-split dream figure' — we cannot admit this term: a figure is either split or not! — embodying moral authority and wilfulness, while Lear 'also partially splits the moral Edgar. In his own person Edgar betrays an underlying association of moral authority with a cruelty that participates in Goneril's and Regan's sexual sadism, while in the disguise as Poor Tom Lear associates moral authority with a sexualized masochism' (*ibid.*). That is, Edgar represents the sadism of the id which, according to Freud's ad hoc and flexible argumentation, sometimes surfaces in the super-ego (Ellenberger 1970, p. 516). The pattern is neat, we must admit, in its balancing of sado-masochist tendencies, but how can Lear 'dream' himself into the roles of Kent and Edgar, when they are simultaneously on stage

with him? This begins to sound like a play in which one man plays many parts. (Perhaps Peter Greenaway got the idea for *Prospero's Books* here?) Anyone with ordinary access to the text will have difficulty in finding either sexual sadism in Edgar or sexualised masochism (a tautology?) in Poor Tom — or is it Lear who is dreaming the disguise of Poor Tom?

All the 'dreamer-protagonists', we discover, are sexually disturbed, and devise elaborate strategies for evading the consequences of their psychopathology. Take the incestuous (would-be, would-be-not) fathers, for instance: what extraordinary lengths they go to! Portia's father has not only dreamed himself dead to avoid his incestuous feelings for Portia, but he 'reveals in the two figures into which he splits himself, each of whom becomes the other's *alter ego*, his reason for obliterating his own figure'. So great is his 'negative sense of himself' — he must have a truly vicious super-ego — that he divides himself on the one hand into Shylock, to embody 'his desire for power and wealth with murderous hatred, greed, and . . . the reification of values', and on the other into Antonio, thus substituting 'a homo-erotic love choice for an incestuous one, a strategy to avoid the frightening feelings associated with heterosexual love' (pp. 33–4). Yet this attempted concealment was unavailing before the psychoanalyst's penetrating gaze.

If fathers have problems with their daughters, sons have even greater difficulties with their begetters. The first questions to ask of a dreamer-protagonist are 'who's his father?' and 'what has he done to his father?' — or, 'what has his father done to him?' This is not always easy to answer, since Shakespeare neglected to fit everyone out with parents, yet, with a bit of ingenuity, substitutes can be found. Othello has provided himself with one 'by means of splitting and distancing the paternal image into the abstract authority of the Venetian State' (p. 84). *King Lear* seems, to begin with, the kind of play that some feminists complain about, being rather short on mothers. (The three boy-actors playing the daughters might well have exhausted the stock of female performers in Shakespeare's company, one objects, before realising that to reason thus is to fall into the error of assuming that all plays *ought* to include mothers!) This play, we are told, disguises its contents 'by eliminating an actual mother', and shows Lear struggling with 'the world of infantile strife itself' (p. 146) — having made, as the Fool puts it, his daughters his mothers. But at the same time — a vertiginous effect, opening up glimpses into an unexplored realm of personality-transformation — Lear, 'by casting himself as father to all women figures . . . renders all sexuality incestuous' (p. 118). To be at the same time father *and* son. . . 'To take't again, perforce'.

If this seems a rare and difficult transformation, other characters reveal a straightforward Oedipal fixation, despite occasional complications. By the end of his play Hamlet 'finally succeeds in eliminating paternal figures that bar his way to both his mother and Ophelia' (p. 40). To make a boringly obvious comment, Polonius is not a father-figure but a father (of someone

else); Hamlet kills him by accident (hoping it's the King), and not to gain access to Ophelia (whom he has already rejected), and who of course, by the end of the play, is already 'eliminated'. The corollary of this whole extraordinary shuffling-around of character and motive is that it is 'Hamlet's fear of assuming his maturity' that 'has placed Claudius on the throne' (p. 40).³² So there would have been no need to murder Old Hamlet at all! Macbeth wears his Oedipal kit with a difference:

Having defined his desires for becoming father and King as illegitimate, Macbeth has reversed the classical Oedipal paradigm in which the son in order to marry the mother wishes to kill the father. Rather, he has married the mother, and included the implied sexuality in the project of killing his father. (p. 103)

This would make Lady Macbeth his mother, Duncan his father, an odd couple indeed. Truly, nothing is what it seems. But one mother is not enough for Stockholder, who also evokes the witches, and Hecate (if these scenes are indeed Shakespeare's) as 'a diabolically defined version of an offended mother' (p. 104). Now we know what makes Macbeth so murderous!

And so the book continues, to its own satisfaction, interpreting everything in terms of the same limited series of motives and goals. 'Ridicule is the test of truth', Shaftesbury wrote, and I have occasionally used ridicule as a way of exposing the absurd assumptions of this critical method, and its grotesque results. In its dedication to the Freudian location of sexuality as the motive force of human action Stockholder's book sees everything in Shakespeare as one form or another of malfunctioning — guilt, repression, fear, self-loathing. In this obsessive pathological probing, simple truths about plot and character become distorted, the language of the plays misinterpreted, often perversely. In one chapter, called "Blanket of the Dark": *Stealthy Lovers in Macbeth*, Stockholder somehow associates that couple with guilty or furtive love-making, ruining one of Shakespeare's most original metaphors in the process: 'neither our eyes nor Macbeth's peep through the blanketed dark to the invisible bedroom in which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth consummate their love' (p. 111). But why should we, and why should it be 'stealthy' if they are legally married? We can only conclude that Stockholder has misunderstood Shakespeare's bold metaphor for Lady Macbeth's invocation of night to conceal her murderous act, seeing it in terms of another form of concealment much more interesting to Freudians. So she writes of Antony that he, 'in contrast to Hamlet or Macbeth, . . . is not in pursuit of furtive pleasures while dodging parental spying eyes or hiding beneath a blanket of the dark' (pp. 148–9). (Since when was Hamlet chasing 'furtive pleasures'?) Evidently Freudians can take metaphors literally, if it suits them, at whatever cost to the imagination.

As for symbolism, phallicism is everywhere. A reference to a child's 'muzzled dagger' in *The Winter's Tale* suggests to Stockholder 'the erotically

violent passions' hidden in childhood (p. 189). Seeing himself as Tarquin, Macbeth 'interprets his dagger as a bloody phallus, with which he violently penetrates the equivocating and seductive woman' (p. 111). (Who is he killing, Duncan or Lucrece?) Lear's "'bare, forked animal" . . . calls oblique attention to his phallus' (p. 126) — Poor Tom's, presumably (yet the Fool says he has 'reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed'); while Hamlet's reference to the "'act' can only be to Gertrude's sexual act. . . . That act is associated with the day of judgment, on which, like a phallus, "foul deeds will rise"' (p. 55). To the Freudians, anything that rises, stands, falls, or is kept confined, must be a phallic symbol. As in *The Tempest*, for instance:

The image of Prospero's 'princely trunk' depleted by Antonio's ivy and of Ariel's imprisonment in Sycorax's cloven pine both carry phallic suggestions. The first one associates a homosexual encounter with evil, depletion, and impotence. . . . In the second image Ariel becomes as Prospero's phallus, or more precisely his phallic potency, refusing to yield to woman's pleasure and refusing to release the seed that will propagate more Calibans. She 'in her most unmitigable rage' imprisons the phallus, which will neither yield to orgasm nor lose its erection. . . . (p. 205)

— a remarkably uncomfortable state. But it explains why Ariel, having embodied Prospero's 'phallic potency', is invisible to everyone but Prospero. Yet Prospero's 'separated' organ sometimes wants 'premature release', thus threatening his self-control (p. 206) — with *ejaculatio praecox*, evidently!

Such distortions of the text to their own preoccupations are commonplace in Freudian Shakespearians. What continues to surprise, though, is their unawareness of the repetitiveness of their project, how it reduces so many diverse characters to the same lowest common denominator, sexuality and its disorders. In the process it ignores essential elements of plot, characterisation, and theatrical convention. Portia must be a sadist, for 'from the very beginning she could have saved Antonio with the legal argument she later uses, but instead manipulates Shylock into showing his worst side'. Being one of those 'avenging and punitive women who enjoy humiliating men' she next turns 'the sadistic edge of her displeasure towards Bassanio', and enjoys watching him 'suffer in the impossible moral dilemma she has created through the strategy of the exchanged rings' (p. 32). Of course, the issues of contracts and reciprocity have a much more serious function in the play than Stockholder imagines. As *You Like It*, she complains, 'provides no explanation' for Rosalind's 'continued disguise. There is no apparent reason for her to conceal her identity from Orlando, except for her pleasure' in her own superiority (p. 37). This is to write as if one could judge any character, at any point in the action, simply in terms of modern interpersonal relationships, as if to say, 'I wouldn't behave like that!' The most banal twentieth-century motivations are ascribed to

characters in Elizabethan drama, ignoring the author's design, conventions of genre or staging, and a whole range of relevant social attitudes. Instead of seeing Hamlet's outrage at his mother's speedy marriage to his uncle as sign of the normal contemporary definition of such relationships as incestuous, Stockholder ascribes to Hamlet the view that 'sexuality in itself' is 'the source of pollution' in the play (pp. 40, 55). Troilus manages better, 'concealing his sexual disgust beneath his anticipation of sensual delight' (p. 71). Only the Freudian can spot the disgust.

And so they line up, these poor people, to have their deficiencies exposed and diagnosed. Angelo's 'hatred and fear of sexuality' has made him avoid Mariana (p. 77). Isabella, too, 'has denied her sexuality' (p. 79). Othello, also, 'struggles with the fears and anxieties around heterosexuality' (p. 85), but in vain. Out of his 'eroticized self-hatred' Othello 'generates the "ocular proof" of Cassio and Desdemona copulating which in turn leads him to release his violent patterns' (p. 89). He is not the only guilty party, for 'Desdemona's unconscious desire for Othello's potential violence generates his suspicion' (p. 92: as if he should think, 'Ha! She wants me to be violent to her! What might that mean?').³³ In the event Othello attaches 'homosexual eroticism' to Iago, economically fusing his 'homosexual drives into the heterosexual love-death drama' by casting Iago as the destructive power (p. 94), representing as he does 'Othello's fulfilment of the homosexual desires that he morally condemns' (p. 97). Not surprisingly, perhaps, Iago, too, suffers from self-hatred (p. 95), while Edgar, split as he is into sadistic and masochistic halves, indulges in 'self-laceration' (p. 126) — both characters have hyperactive super-egos, it would seem. Cleopatra, too, being generated by Antony as a 'deadly serpentine power' (p. 157), and representing 'the slime of sexuality' which Antony, by his suicide, prefers to 'the paternal ghost' of Caesar (p. 162) — so avoiding an Oedipal conflict — has her own problems with sex. She loves Antony, but in order to draw him closer 'she betrays him, and finally evades her fear of her own deadly sexuality by having him *die into her language*' (p. 163; my italics) — whatever that might mean. Leontes has 'incestuous feelings for mothers and daughters' (p. 194 — presumably she means 'his mothers and daughters'), while Prospero manages 'to repress his own passions for Miranda' by a 'definition of himself as magus' (p. 202).

IV

If a critical method produces, in an oeuvre as rich and varied as Shakespeare's, so many repetitive, reductive readings, then it declares its own deficiencies. This is not a matter of the intelligence of the critic who uses it, since the method levels out not only the plays but the critics. Stockholder is thorough, not deviating from the given paradigms into any

more unusual fields. In *Shakespeare's Ghost-Writers* Marjorie Garber is much sharper, more widely-read, but the total effect of her knowledge, when applied along Freudian templates, is just as reductive as Stockholder's. The psychocritical parts of this book are devoted to *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. For the first, her starting-point is Macduff's remark on having discovered Duncan's corpse:

Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight
With a new Gorgon. (2.3.71f)

The Variorum edition notes that Shakespeare probably got his knowledge of the Gorgon from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 5.189–210. Professor Garber gets hers from Freud's 1922 essay on 'Medusa's Head', where he states that 'The proliferation of swarming snakes compensates for and covers over the fear of castration', namely by 'a doubling or multiplication of the genital symbol' (Garber 1987, p. 15). (The same argument was used for 'Three Blind Mice'.)

Ordinary readers might be forgiven for thinking that Macduff's words mean 'the horror of this sight will turn you to stone', and others might be surprised to think that these one-and-a-half lines carry any substantial import for the play. But Garber unites feminism and psychoanalysis to assert that 'gender undecidability and anxiety about gender identification and gender roles are at the center of *Macbeth* — and of *Macbeth*' (*ibid.*, p. 97). The passages she has in mind — apart from the fact that the three witches have beards (1.3.45ff) — occur in the scene where Lady Macbeth tries to shame her husband into murdering Duncan by accusing him of cowardice (1.7.39ff). His reply is to assert

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none. (46f)

— which means, 'beyond a certain point acts of daring may become inhuman'. This is the sense in which Lady Macbeth takes it in her scornful reply:

What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. (47ff)

Her riddling and specious reply also takes 'man' in the sense of 'virile, courageous', and neither he nor she uses the word as a comment on gender as such. The issue is not one of biology, nor of socio-cultural conditioning, but of ethics. In the Renaissance 'courage', in the sense of being able to perform violent acts, was thought to be a male prerogative. So again, at the banquet when Macbeth alone can see Banquo's ghost, his wife rebukes him for his apparent cowardice with the taunt: 'Are you a man?', and he

answers: 'Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that / Which might appall the devil' (3.4.57-9). But to her his 'flaws and starts' are more suitable for 'A woman's story at a winter's fire, / Authoriz'd by her grandam' (62ff) 'What? quite unmann'd in folly?' (72) she sneers. To Macbeth the opposition man/no-man distinguishes between humanity and inhumanity; to Lady Macbeth it opposes courage and cowardice: Garber's references to 'gender undecidability' and 'anxiety' are wholly beside the point.

Interestingly enough, several feminist critics emphasise this fact. Joan Klein writes that Lady Macbeth epitomises 'the sixteenth-century belief that women are passive, men active: "nature made man more strong and couragious, the woman more weake fearefull and scrupulouse" . . .' (Klein 1980, p. 244). Sir Thomas Elyot's words, in *The Defence of Good Women* (1540), show the common idea that acts of violence can only be performed by men. Yet, as Klein puts it, despite her wishes, 'Lady Macbeth is never unsexed in the only way she wanted to be unsexed — able to act with the cruelty she ignorantly and perversely identified with male strength' (*ibid.*, p. 250). Linda Woodbridge also takes Macbeth's 'Who dares do more is none' to show that he sees 'pity and compassion as human rather than feminine attributes; pitilessness is not masculine but subhuman' (Woodbridge 1984, p. 170). As she perceptively notes,

When Shakespeare's female characters express a wish to be men, it is almost always to shame some man into taking action; and they usually pervert the meaning of manhood to exclude pity and compassion, on the illogical principle that if women are compassionate, men cannot be.

As Woodbridge shows, the desire to suppress women's natural pity usually figures in the argument that if a tenderhearted woman can abandon pity, then a man, having a 'less developed' sense, ought to find it easier to suspend compassion.

This is Lady Macbeth's line; its context in *Macbeth* establishes it as a villain's argument. Shakespeare usually sees something monstrous about a woman who wishes she were a man. (p. 200)

Those of his women who permanently abandon the feminine model of 'weak, tender, pitying vulnerability' are seen as 'dehumanized, warped, monstrous, "fiend-like"' (*ibid.*, p. 216).

These comments valuably remind us that the issue here is ethical, not psychosexual. Yet Marjorie Garber, ruthlessly Freudian — ruthless in ignoring the sense of the text — insists that what Macbeth's lines really express is his 'fear of castration' (Garber 1987, p. 108). She bases her argument on Freud's 'reading of the Medusa head', now said to refer to 'a fearful sighting of the female genitals' (p. 97). This contradicts her earlier linking of it with 'fears of castration', but in Freudian interpretation penises may be multiplied to compensate either for the presence of one, or the absence of any in the dreamer. (I still find it hard to imagine how a woman

might experience castration fears.) For Freud, notoriously enough, women are seriously disadvantaged by lacking a penis, indeed he even speculated that nature's oversight as regards women could have disastrous effects on men, too. So he 'connected', as Garber puts it, Leonardo da Vinci's supposed 'homosexuality to his desire to see his mother's penis, and his "disgust" at the appalling discovery that she lacks one' (p. 121).³⁴ This is all fictive, needless to say, another instance of a Freudian obsession cloning itself on to otherwise intelligent followers. But in any case, we might ask, what has all this to do with *Macbeth*? Well, another Freud theory was that dislocated body parts in dreams, such as severed heads, also show 'the castration complex', and this play, Garber notes, includes the severed heads of Macdonwald and Macbeth (p. 105). But now she falls into the trap that always faces Freudians, of reducing everything to fantasy. What the ordinary theatregoer can tell her is that these are real heads, not imaginary ones, and for most people decapitation is more horrible — or at least, more terminal — than castration. According to Garber, and Freud, the representation of Medusa's hair by snakes in fact serves 'as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror' (*ibid.*). Some people might find this more horrible, but to Freud, aspiring towards producing a scientific discipline, it was what he portentously affirmed to be a 'technical rule' that 'a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration'. Who can argue with that?

The question of whether Freud was writing about men, or women, or both, seems to be settled by the following quotations that Garber makes from his 1922 essay: "The sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him into stone", which to Freud constituted a striking "transformation of affect! For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of the penis and the stiffening reassures him of the fact" (p. 106). By this token Macduff, if he has truly seen a Gorgon or a Medusa's head, should have an erection, which an enterprising neo-Freudian director could easily represent (or simulate). Now at least it is clear that Freud is writing about men, with his typical phallocentrism, and pursuing a puerile association of ideas. (Although it is not clear who 'the spectator' is at this point: not of the drama, presumably; and not of a dream, since dreams can't be witnessed from the outside — unless of course one can deduce from the subject's erection that he is dreaming about Medusa; or unless the dreamer is simultaneously a spectator of his own dream. . . .) But to Garber the question remains resolutely open, undecided, indeed — best of all — undecidable:

With its gaping mouth, its snaky locks and its association with femininity, *castration*, and *erection* [my italics: a truly polyvalent symbol!] Medusa's head ends up being the displacement upward neither of the female nor of the male genitals but of gender undecidability as such. (p. 110)

At this point the reader is entitled to ask, 'but whose problem is this, anyway?' The discourse of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is about virility in the sense of courage, gender as the conventional distinction (in those days) between woman as the weaker sex unsuited to acts of violence, and men as the performers of such deeds — but never about undecidability. Lady Macbeth's invocation 'unsex me here' lies in the realm of ethics, not gender, expressing her wish to overcome what she calls the 'compunctious visitings of nature', so that 'direst cruelty' and a 'fell purpose' can sweep aside 'remorse' (1.5.40ff); her sleep-walking shows that she failed to destroy nature. One cannot seriously take these, or any other lines in the play, as referring to 'gender undecidability'.

It must be obvious by now that Professor Garber has long ago lost contact with Shakespeare's text, and is performing a kind of fantasy on Freudian-Lacanian themes. Perhaps all this talk about real penises has been mistaken, a reification of what is actually meant allegorically, or metaphorically. At this point she invokes Lacanian theory, with its mangling of Saussurian linguistics, and the resulting orthodoxy in some current theoretical circles that language refers only to itself, and that signifiers now 'float', cut free from their erstwhile position as an integral part of the linguistic sign. Garber, having first accused Freud of enacting 'the repression of gender undecidability' by locating Medusa's head in the male world; and having then rejected 'the present-day tendency' to see *Macbeth* in terms of 'male homosocial bonding or anxiety about female power', finally comes down on both sides of the fence:

Power in *Macbeth* is a function of neither the male nor the female but of the suspicion of the undecidable. The phallus as floating signifier is more powerful than when definitely assigned to either gender. (p. 110)

This incongruous, almost comic mingling of metaphors ('the phallus as floating signifier') may be 'more powerful' for her argument, but it will leave many readers uneasy as to how to take it — is 'floating' to be visualised, like those floating figures in Chagall? If the phallus is a 'signifier', is it a word or a thing? How can it be 'assigned' to both sexes? Is this a belated reparation of the Freudian-Lacanian 'lack'?

Garber's discovery of a 'floating signifier' in *Macbeth* comes from a short passage in the second witches' scene (1.3.4–29). The witches, she says, 'are in a sense pluralized, replicative dream-figures for Lady Macbeth', and therefore speak 'Medusa language, the language of gender undecidability and castration fear' (p. 110). She has three pieces of evidence: in order to plague a shipman, the first witch plans to take on the shape of 'a rat without a tail' and slip aboard his ship. This alludes to the ancient belief that although a female witch could assume the form of a (two- or four-legged) animal there was no part of her anatomy which could double up as the tail. What this obviously means is, 'since women do not possess a penis'. But in Garber's discourse, I presume (since she is not explicit), the

female-witch once *had* a tail/penis but it was cut off (as in 'Three Blind Mice'). Once again, a psychocritical theory involves reading a great deal of its own 'affect' into Shakespeare's text. Garber's second piece of evidence is the witch's threat to punish the shipman and 'drain him dry as hay', deprive him of sleep so that he will 'dwindle, peak, and pine' (1.3.21–3). Many readers have taken 'drain' here to refer either to the witch's sucking blood or to her 'sleep torture'. Dr. Johnson noted on this passage that 'the common Afflictions which the Malice of Witches produced was Melancholy, Fits, and Loss of Flesh, which are threatned' here. Reginald Scot, in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, recorded among the 'lies' of Bodin and other demonologists the tradition that witches daily offered the devil 'bloude of their owne' to drink; but he sturdily rejected the idea that melancholy persons, suffering the delusion of being witches, 'can hurt and infeeble other mens bodies' as false. Yet, as Peter Burke has recorded, sixteenth-century theologians believed that witches drank blood, especially that of children, and Shakespeare seems to make Hamlet allude to the myth in his 'Now could I drink hot blood'.³⁵ To Garber, however, it can only refer to 'a man exhausted . . . by sexual demands made upon him . . . the drained husband will not, unlike the weird sisters, be capable of "doing"' (p. 111). To the Freudian all things are sexual: yet the witch's triple 'I'll do' (which is usually taken to mean 'I'll create havoc') can hardly be taken as a description of copulation since — although Garber describes her as 'androgynous' — she now explicitly has the form of 'a rat *without* a tail'. Thirdly, the witch says 'Look what I have . . . a pilot's thumb', and for Garber, inevitably enough, this reference to a 'dismembered' bodily part 'culminates the implicit narrative of sexual disabling and castration', since 'the morphological similarity between thumb and phallus needs no elaboration, and the possession by the witches of a thumb/phallus as a fetishistic object would emphasize their ambiguous, androgynous character . . .' (p. 111).

But no, 'morphological' implies the study of the relation between form and function, and in the human body the thumb and phallus have anything but the same function. In the morphology of Freudian narrative they may have, but that merely shows again the self-confirming nature of Freudian criticism. 'These are our concepts; look, I locate them in the text; ergo, the author/text must be read in this way in order to make sense' — Freudian sense, though. So Garber returns to Medusa again to gloss the witch's 'look what I have' in terms of a 'childlike announcement of sexual display', that is, 'look at my genitals'. Now she adds a new explanation for Medusa: 'Just as the Medusa head incorporates the elements of sexual gazing (scopophilia) and its concomitant punishment, castration, so the First Witch's exhibition of a prize . . . invites a similar transgressive sight' (p. 111). But this is the first we have heard of scopophilia in this context, and it is also news that the castration fear is not just an — ungrounded — anxiety but punishment for actual misbehaviour. Freud's text, we see, is

also flexible. Yet the connection between the witch and the shipwrecked pilot is, for the moment at least, obscure. Who is transgressing? Did he say 'look what I have'? Or was the First Witch guilty of scopophilia? And, if she is saying it, is she saying 'look at my thumb, i.e., penis'? And will she be punished for that? Or will the others be if they look at her? But if she/he is already androgynous why should she/he need another thumb/penis? Ah, of course, since we know that doubling of the genital symbol represents a fear of castration, it is the witch's problem, then, not Macbeth's; nor the shipman's; nor mine now.

Freudian criticism opens up a vast indeterminate space for its activity. The witches are androgynous, gender is undecidable, the penises that might be lost might be either male or female, the discourse is either concrete or abstract, either literal or metaphorical, or both (or neither?). As we move from Freud to Lacan the possibilities for abstraction multiply exponentially. Lacan's essay, 'Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*', has moved psychoanalytical semiotics on to an altogether more rarified plane, starting from yet another invocation of 'the castration complex', this time to associate the ghost in *Hamlet* with what Lacan calls the 'veiled phallus'.³⁶ Garber quotes Lacan's explanation of the ghost:

'The hole in the real that results from loss, sets the signifier in motion. This hole provides the place for the projection of the missing signifier, which is essential to the structure of the Other. This is the signifier whose absence leaves the Other incapable of responding to your question, the signifier that can be purchased only with your own flesh and blood, the signifier that is essentially the veiled phallus. . . .' (p. 135)

The problem, again, is that Lacan sometimes seems to be using words literally, sometimes metaphorically: 'hole', 'place', 'structure', 'flesh and blood', all imply some dimension of physical reality. Yet reality is at once undercut: "the very source of what makes Hamlet's arm waver at every moment" — we see that Lacan is still following the Romantic conception of Hamlet's delay, although he unfortunately translates to the whole of the action ('every moment') the single time when Hamlet raises his sword over the praying Claudius — the source of his delay is what Freud described as a 'narcissistic connection': "one cannot strike the phallus, because the phallus, even the real phallus, is a *ghost*". That is, as Garber explains, 'not only is the ghost the veiled phallus, but the phallus is also a ghost' (p. 130). No wonder you can't strike it, then.

So many levels of discourse — symbolic, metaphoric, literal, Freudian, Shakespearian — have become fused together here that it seems impossible to separate out a clear statement on any level. Since my aim is to write, and to find criticism which illuminates Shakespeare's plays with some fidelity to text and context, I would have to say here that Hamlet's arm was once raised to strike not a ghost, nor therefore a veiled phallus, not even a real phallus, but his usurping incestuous uncle. That statement

reads baldly, I know, and gets no marks for originality, modishness, or wit. But I make it in order to underline the degree to which neo-Freudian discourse on Shakespeare has become a discourse about itself, to itself, with the play text providing occasional 'confirmatory' instances.

As one follows Garber's dense involvement with Lacan on Freud on the Oedipus complex, occasionally a remark seems to refer directly to Shakespeare's play, but often in a way which gives us pause. Garber subsequently invokes Lacan's argument that 'the Name-of-the-Father is the dead father' in these terms: 'This father — the Ghost — isn't dead enough. The injunction to "Remember me" suggests that he is not quite dead' (p. 131).³⁷ But ancient tradition held that ghosts may rise from the dead, for certain times, with their vocal chords intact. In what way is the Ghost of old Hamlet not dead enough? Garber glosses another of Lacan's arcane pronouncements on doubt, 'the gap in certainty that instates paternal undecidability', with the explanation that 'psychoanalytic readers all comment on the splitting of the father into Claudius, Polonius, even old Fortinbras and old Norway'. In which case, we must add, the 'splitting' has been 'instated' by the Freudians, for to Hamlet there is only one father, and he is dead. But Garber, unable to stop elaborating her points, states that 'Hamlet finds both too many fathers and too few' — having it both ways, again — and concludes that, just 'as in the case of the Medusa, where a multiplicity of penises is imagined to cover the unimaginable horror of no penis, . . . so here the multiplicity of fathers covers the fact of lack' (p. 134) — that is, it is a state of mind in Hamlet, not an event in the play. Once again, Freudian discourse is seen to be self-confirming, as loyal epigoni strive to validate the theories which a few founding fathers have enunciated, re-casting the text in their own image.

Lacan has a still more extraordinary argument, that the anamorphic shape of a skull in Holbein's 'The Ambassadors' is a phallic symbol representing 'the subject as annihilated . . . the imagined embodiment . . . of castration'. He goes on to connect this truly original idea ('How is it that nobody has ever thought of connecting this?', he asks, not staying for the obvious answer) with 'the effect of an erection'. Not just any erection, however, but one in which 'a tattoo [has been] traced on the sexual organ *ad hoc* in the state of repose and assuming its . . . developed form in another state', thus symbolising 'the function of the lack, . . . the appearance of the phallic ghost' (pp. 134–6). Any doubts that have been expressed over Lacanians' slippery shifting between symbolic (phallus) and real (penis) seem all too justified.³⁸ Placing herself in the role of dutiful hermeneut, ignoring the element of clowning so frequent in Lacan, Garber attempts to explicate this Lacanian fantasy, citing passages from Shakespeare at every turn in his argument. So here she makes an awful pun on Hamlet's recognition of 'My father's spirit — in arms!', writing 'The anamorphic ghost of old Hamlet, erected to full form by the gaze, contrasts sharply with the same figure in the "state of repose", recumbent,

passive, "sleeping within my orchard" (my italics). That is, to explicate the explicator (and to play a little), *just as* the skull in Holbein's painting seems from one viewing position to be a white oblique pencil-like shape, but seen from the correct point grows into the full circle of a skull; so a penis tattooed in its recumbent shape (although of course this would be an extremely difficult operation, not to mention painful, since it would offer an awkwardly small surface for the tattooist's needles to work on: the erect state would be much easier — always assuming the erection could be maintained for several hours) would look different when erect; *just so* does the ghost of Hamlet's father look different when seen walking in full armour — that is, 'erected to full form by his son's gaze' (might he not be guilty of scopophilia? But if the phallus is veiled then all may be well . . .). Is this not, at every stage, a fantastic argument, especially as purporting to be Shakespeare criticism? Psychocritics habitually construct a self-contained, self-confirming discourse, in which, once again, a reference to an actual, real death — the Ghost's account of how he was 'sleeping, by a brother's hand / Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd, / Cut off' — is confidently interpreted as a 'fantasy-nightmare of his own castration' (p. 136). That rather seems to miss the point.

Marjorie Garber, widely-read and intelligent though she is, seems to have been Lacanned / trepanned (no apologies for punning: everyone's doing it) into reading the same limited series of significances into very varied and powerful texts by Shakespeare. *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are reduced in the process, for whether the discourse is about Medusa's head, anamorphic ghosts, or tattooed penises, the critic always comes back to the same *points de repère*, fear of castration in particular. There is a strange disproportion between the erudition and energy with which the critical model is erected and the actual insight that it yields. The journey is long and arduous, the fruits sparse, and always the same. When Freud aired his Oedipal theories once again, in connection with Schreber, he offered 'a characteristic explanation: "I must disclaim all responsibility for the monotony of the solutions provided by psychoanalysis"' (Porter 1987, p. 156). But he was responsible, and the literary criticism produced in his image reproduces the repetitiveness of his theories.

V

Despite great differences in tone, style, and intellectual preoccupations, the monotony experienced in reading Garber is also felt — although in a more tortuous form — with the Shakespeare criticism of Stanley Cavell, a philosopher who came to psychoanalysis in mid-career. His collection of essays, *Disowning Knowledge In Six Plays of Shakespeare*, has a philosophical orientation at the outset, at least, namely the concept of scepticism.

Cavell is convinced that Shakespeare engaged 'the depth of the philosophical preoccupations of his culture' (p. 2), a flattering but misguided eulogy which confuses the work of an alert and reasonably well-educated writer for the public theatre with the activities of professional philosophers during the Renaissance.³⁹ Cavell suggests that 'the advent of skepticism as manifested in Descartes's *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare from the time of the great tragedies', specifically the Cartesian 'way of raising the question of God's existence and of the immortality of the soul' (p. 3). One may reasonably doubt whether Shakespeare ever concerned himself with either issue (at any rate in the plays), and the invocation of Descartes is anachronistic for the obvious reason that he gave scepticism a quite different orientation than it had in the Renaissance, as Cavell could have discovered from the excellent studies by Richard Popkin and the late Charles Schmitt.⁴⁰ Luckily Cavell, no historian, prefers to leave the issue in the conditional (or counter-factual) form: 'If Shakespeare's plays . . . reinterpret the skeptical problematic — the question whether I know with certainty of the existence of the eternal world and of myself and others in it', then it follows that 'the plays find no stable solution to skepticism' (p. 3). But where is the evidence that Shakespeare ever thought in those terms, or addressed such a problematic? In the event Cavell takes scepticism in a much more personal sense, linking it to a bewildering range of factors, including the rise of science, the displacement of God, the romantic concept of marriage, narcissism, cannibalism, fanaticism, and nihilism.⁴¹ The abstractionism implicit in such a discourse seems to move away from drama to allegory. (*Othello* 'allegorizes' his sceptical doubt 'as some form of jealousy': p. 7 — the word 'allegory' is repeated several times), and to its own version of reductivism: Leontes is 'a portrait of the skeptic as fanatic' (p. 17), or 'as nihilist' (p. 208).

When we look at the evidence cited from the plays to justify these propositions we find a curious distortion of the evident sense of the text towards the philosophical abstractions. On Leontes' remarkable speech itemising to Camillo all the evidence he claims to have seen that his wife has betrayed him with Polixenes: 'Is whispering nothing? / Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses? / Kissing with inside lip?' (1.2.286ff), Cavell writes that, as a 'punishment' of Leontes for disowning his child — but Leontes never disowns Mamillius, still acknowledging that 'he does bear some signs of me' (2.1.58), in any case a reaction that happens *after* this scene (another Freudian inversion of sequence?) — Leontes 'loses the ability to . . . account for the order and size and pace of his experiences. . . . I take the surface of the speech as asking whether anything counts: Does whispering count, does it matter, is it a criterion for what the world is, is anything?' (p. 206). But this is to misread as a metaphysical issue what is merely a deluded claim to have ocular proof of adultery, a mistake further compounded when Cavell says that 'Leontes' wish for there to be nothing' shows 'the skeptic as nihilist' (p. 208). However, Leontes is using the word

'nothing' not in this sense but as an ellipsis for 'evidence of adultery'. Nor does he 'wish' there to be nothing — in his delusion, indeed, he wishes there to be something, since it would justify his suspicions. Leontes' folly is to take a series of rhetorical questions as if they were evidence admissible in court; Cavell's folly is to treat them as metaphysics.

Competence, even distinction in philosophy is obviously no guarantee of sensitivity, tact, or inwardness with literary texts. If not controlled by a sense of the integrity of the play and its mode of existence as drama, not as disjointed verbal material open to any selective interpretation, the philosophical model can simply blot out the literary work it is intended to illuminate. This obliteration of the text is particularly noticeable when Cavell moves on from philosophy to psychoanalysis. In *The Winter's Tale*, he writes, Leontes interrupts Mamillius' tale 'Of sprites and goblins', revealing, Cavell claims, a competition between father and son; on which he remarks confidently (placing the point in a parenthesis, as if there were no need to argue it): 'while evidently I expect considerable agreement that in Leontes' intrusion we have an Oedipal conflict put before us . . .' (p. 199). But reference to the text at this point (2.1.32ff) will show that Leontes has come in great anger to his wife after receiving the news that Polixenes and Camillo have left in haste. He cannot know that Mamillius is telling his mother a tale, appears not even to have noticed it, since he enters impatiently questioning one of his attendants about Polixenes' hasty departure — 'Was he met here? His train? Camillo with him?' (2.1.33). Leontes in fact takes no notice of the child for 24 lines, until he orders him to be carried off lest Hermione corrupt him further. Leontes' jealousy may be manic, but he is in no sense a rival to his son for Hermione's love, so the 'conflict' here cannot be Oedipal.

The Freudian drive to give every form of human behaviour a psychosexual explanation comes out even in Cavell's brief account of *Hamlet*, where he interprets the dumb-show that the players mount as representing the 'primal scene — enciphering young Hamlet's delayed sense of Gertrude's power to annihilate all Hamlets' (p. 187). But in Freudian terms the 'primal scene' refers to the child unwittingly seeing its parents making love, whereas in the players' dumb show the Queen mimes a protestation of love to the King and then poisons him: 'annihilate' is here literally true, not in Cavell's metaphorical sense (I imagine) of 'overcome sexually, cause to "die"'. The imposition of a sexual interpretation is seen again in Cavell's account of the catastrophe in *Hamlet*, where Hamlet kills the King with his own poison: 'I can imagine that some will wish to speculate about the fact that Hamlet inseminates Claudius; and with Leartes' [sic] foil. And further; I guess, that he does so only after he has himself been inseminated by it' (p. 190). Where does Cavell, with his 'inseminate', get the idea of semen from? Ordinary people would say 'poisons', but to the Freudian evidently all activity must be sexual.

The problem over literal and metaphorical readings, as with 'annihilate',

is one that besets Cavell several times. Writing of Cleopatra's death-speech, with its marvellous affirmation of mutuality, finally dedicating herself to Antony — 'Husband, I come' (5.2.286), Cavell refers to it as 'Cleopatra's presentation of orgasm' (p. 31; 'declaring of orgasm', p. 32). Of course, sex can be represented as death, but the reverse does not always hold, and certainly not here. To spell out the embarrassingly obvious, Cleopatra means: 'I am coming to join you in death', not 'I am having an orgasm'. Cavell falls into the same trap with *Othello*, declaring that 'the whole scene of the murder is built on the concept of sexual intercourse or orgasm as a dying. There is a dangerously explicit quibble to this effect in the exchange

OTH. Thou art on thy death bed.
 DESD. Ay, but not yet to die. (5.2.74f)

— 'The possible quibble', he goes on, as if to modify his assertion, but the bawdy sense is irrelevant here. In the terms of Cavell's sexual discourse about marriage, and the question whether a man can be sure that he has given satisfaction to the woman, Desdemona's words would have to mean (however absurdly in a play performed in public) 'I am not ready for my orgasm yet'. What she actually means is, 'this may indeed be the bed in which I shall die' — a comforting image of an assured relationship extending over time (some people do indeed die in their marriage beds) — 'but surely not yet!' This much is clear from their earlier exchange, which Cavell does not quote:

OTH. I would not kill thy unprepared spirit;
 No — heaven forbid! — I would not kill thy soul.
 DESD. Talk you of killing?
 OTH. Ay, I do.
 DESD. Then heaven have mercy on me!
 OTH. Amen, with all my heart!
 DESD. If you say so, I hope you will not kill me. (5.2.32ff)

And it is in allusion to this established meaning that Othello says — in another part of the scene omitted by Cavell — 'Sweet soul, take heed, / Take heed of perjury: thou art on thy death-bed.' (Truly, from the passages left out by psychocritics one can really discover the burden of the text!)

Critics, like all readers, must know where to screen out irrelevant associations, else they cannot understand metaphor, which by a process of mental translation makes a temporary alliance between two concepts that resemble each other in some ways but not in others. ('My love is like a red, red rose' demands that we see some but also delimit other ways in which the woman resembles the flower.) When Othello approaches the sleeping Desdemona he reflects that he can extinguish a candle and re-light it, but no 'Promethean heat' could 'relume' her light.

When I have plucked thy rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again,
It needs must wither. I'll smell it on the tree. [Kisses her.]

Plucking the rose here, obviously enough, is a metaphor for the irreversible process of extinguishing life. Yet to Cavell, Othello's 'private dream' of killing Desdemona 'is of contamination. The fact the dream works upon is the act of deflowering' (p. 134) — that is, the other metaphor of 'plucking the rose' as taking a woman's maidenhead (are we to take 'I'll smell it' literally, too?). After that literalist reading Cavell's comments on Othello's admiration for her beauty — 'Be thus, when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, / And love thee after' — come with an awful predictability:

Necrophilia is an apt fate for a mind whose reason is suffocating in its sumptuous capacity for figuration, and which takes the dying into love literally to entail killing . . . or that turns its object to live stone. . . . (p. 135)

But it's the philosopher, rather, who takes things literally. To imagine an Othello actually contemplating necrophilia might be, in a previous generation, the effect of having dabbled too much in 'psychopathia sexualis'. The figure behind Cavell here, however, is not Krafft-Ebing but Lacan (or perhaps de Man), with the anachronistic notion of 'figuration'.

His puzzling account of Othello's reason 'suffocating in its sumptuous capacity for figuration' — that is, I presume, ability to make rhetorical figures and tropes — is clarified by his later remark that

It is an unstable frame of mind that compounds figurative with literal dying in love; and Othello unstably projects upon her, as he blames her:

O perjur'd woman, thou dost stone thy [Q1; F1 reads 'my'] heart.

As he is the one who gives out lies about her, so he is the one who will give her a stone heart for her stone body [that is,] his words of stone . . . confound the figurative and the literal. (pp. 136–7)

True, an ability to distinguish literal from metaphorical is occasionally invoked as a test of sanity, but Othello at least would pass it, since his words are entirely figurative, have no literal dimension. Othello means that Desdemona's denial of ever having given Cassio a token is an act of perjury that hardens his heart (it can hardly be hers), an ancient metaphor for the absence of pity, and that he will be unrelenting in punishing her. Where is the literal sense involving 'stone' here? — and, above all, where is the confusion between literal and figurative?

Cavell's essays in linguistic criticism are not disinterested, of course, but serve to buttress his psychoanalytical interpretation of the play. Unsurprisingly by now, this Freudian, too, sees the crucial issues as concerning the characters' sex lives. So Cavell urges that we must 'think in this play not merely generally of marriage but specifically of the wedding night', for 'the whole beginning scene takes place while Othello and

Desdemona are in their bridal bed' (p. 131). Since Cavell's whole interpretation is based on the parallel he sees between their wedding night and the night in which Othello kills her — since, as he will claim, the murder scene is a 'fatal reenactment of their wedding night' — we must see what evidence the play offers. Cavell has obviously taken at face value (a fatal error with this character) Iago's slanderous words, designed to upset Brabantio: 'Even now, very now, an old black ram / Is tugging your white ewe' (1.1.89f). What Roderigo tells Brabantio is that Desdemona, 'At this odd-even and dull watch o'th'night' — that is, between midnight and one o'clock — has been transported by 'a gondolier/ To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor' (1.1.123ff). Brabantio searches the house, finds that she has gone, and asks 'Are they married, think you?', to which Roderigo replies 'Truly, I think they are' (160f). Brabantio gets armed men together, and Roderigo leads them to the Sagittary — as Iago has previously arranged ('there will I be with him': 158ff). The second scene (only 23 lines later) finds Othello, who is normally dressed, having been joined by Iago, recounting some imaginary slanders on Othello (by Roderigo?), and asking 'Are you fast married?' (1.2.11). There has been no time to consummate anything, even granted the flexible conventions of the Elizabethan stage. Iago then warns Othello that Brabantio's power in Venice is such that 'He will divorce you' (14), and a few minutes later — that same night — Brabantio appears before the Venetian Council to accuse Othello of having 'charmed' her (1.3.59ff, 102ff). Othello affirms his innocence, describes how he and Desdemona came to fall in love, and she confirms in public that her choice was freely made, 'preferring [him] before her father' as her mother had preferred her husband (1.3.180ff, 248ff). Their marriage is legitimate, a *matrimonium initiatum*, in Gratian's distinction, but not yet *ratum*, consummated.⁴²

The pressure of state business will send Othello off to Cyprus at once — in effect, on their wedding night — for which the Duke seems to apologise: 'you must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition' (226ff). Othello counters by asking that Desdemona be allowed to accompany him, and she protests that 'if I be left behind, . . . and he go to the war, / The rights for which I love him are bereft me' (255ff), 'rights' meaning the privilege of sharing his life and dangers, but also the rites of marriage. When they are finally reunited on Cyprus, the storm having destroyed the Turkish fleet, Othello issues a proclamation of a general 'triumph', with feasting and dancing, with the added justification: 'for, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial' (2.2.6f). Immediately afterwards we see Othello setting the guard, and retiring for the night:

Come, my dear love,
The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue;
That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you. (2.3.8ff)

Readers of Shakespeare have long noted the parallel with Juliet, similarly poised between a *matrimonium initiatum* and *ratum*:

O, I have bought the mansion of a love,
But not possess'd it; and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd. (3.2.26ff)

As we follow through this carefully constructed sequence, every detail of which was invented by Shakespeare, we are left in no doubt that Othello and Desdemona consummate their marriage on Cyprus. Iago's plot against Cassio succeeds in rousing them both from their marriage bed, to which they return — 'Come away to bed . . . Come Desdemona. 'Tis the soldiers' life / To have their balmy slumbers wak'd with strife' (2.3.159ff, 246ff).

Since it is the vocation of psychoanalytic critics to identify a neurosis and its sexual cause ('My vocation, Hal! 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation'), Cavell needs to be able to attach some trauma to Othello's sexual relations with Desdemona in order to motivate his killing of her. To argue such a case, of course, means ignoring Iago's evil slanders and Shakespeare's elaborately constructed account of the triple relationship Desdemona-Othello-Iago, with all its overtones, personal (the slighted subordinate wishing revenge) and social (the noble Moor needed by Venice but still treated as a foreigner). Willing to abandon the play's whole 'overt' motivation, Cavell wishes to attach to Othello a trauma that derives from his own (Cavell's own) idiosyncratic concept of scepticism. His essay is called 'Othello and the Stake of the Other', and perfunctorily explains Othello's jealousy as a form of scepticism by a passing reference to the *Meditations* of Descartes, and the problem of how one can know the existence of another (pp. 125ff). But Cavell's metamorphosis from Cartesian to Freudian causes him at once to collapse that abstract question into one considerably more specific, and intimate, namely how do you know if your wife was a virgin when you married her? He begins, unfortunately accepting as literal truth Iago's words designed to horrify Brabantio ('tupping') by stating 'We know — do we not? — that Desdemona has lost her virginity . . . by the time she appears to us. And surely [surely?] Othello knows this!' (p. 130). But he then begins to raise doubts, suggesting that the 'conjunction of the bridal chamber with a scene of emergency' in Cyprus is but a repetition of what happened on their first night in Venice. Perhaps, he goes on, the 'conjunction' between love-making and emergency that he has detected is meant to imply that 'their "hour of love" (1.3.298-9), or their two hours, have each been interrupted' (p. 131).⁴³ However, Cavell's quotation is only a partial one, as will be seen by restoring Othello's whole sentence:

Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matter and direction,
To spend with thee: we must obey the time. (1.3.298ff)

Does Cavell seriously imply that, with so much else to do, Othello and Desdemona go off and make love at this point? That is what his insinuation amounts to. Yet such a degree of certainty would not fit his 'scepticism' hypothesis, so he withdraws it, although at the cost of making Othello seem an idiot: 'There is reason to believe that the marriage has not been consummated, anyway reason to believe that Othello does not know whether it has' (p. 131). But what sort of a 'lunkhead', as he subsequently calls Othello, would not know whether he has consummated the marriage or not, especially since Cavell has declared that we know that Desdemona is no longer a virgin?

But Cavell is contradicting one phase of his argument here in order to enable another phase, namely the suggestion that Desdemona may not have been a virgin when Othello 'tupped' her in Venice, on their 'one shortened night [sic!] together' (p. 132). Referring to Othello's speech just before they actually consummate their marriage on Cyprus, Cavell picks out the 'purchase . . . fruit' metaphor and asks

Is the purchase their (public) marriage? Then the fruits and profit are their conjugal love. Then he is saying that this is yet to come.

— which most people would see as the correct interpretation of the lines. But, unsatisfied, Cavell goes on:

It seems to me possible that the purchase, or price, was her virginity, and the fruits or profit their pleasure.

Cavell seems to be reducing loving mutuality to the 'price' of a maidenhead, an attitude which might be appropriate to the brothel scenes in *Pericles*, but which seems horribly out of place here. I must honestly say that I am not sure what Cavell is arguing at this point, whether premarital sex is wrong, or whether Desdemona cheated Othello about her virginity. . . . What he is certainly aiming at, though, is to arouse doubt. He initially takes Othello's metaphor for Desdemona's sleeping beauty —

Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow
And smooth as monumental alabaster — (5.2.3ff)

as implying 'a piece of cold and carved marble' (pp. 125f; overlooking the purity and smoothness in order to insinuate the cold), but he subsequently reifies the metaphor, now seeing it as somehow describing 'Othello's turning of Desdemona to stone' (perhaps Othello is the Gorgon now!). Further, Cavell then manages to link it to the issue of virginity: 'His image denies that he has scarred her and shed her blood. It is a denial at once that he has taken her virginity and that she has died of him' (p. 134; my italics for the insinuation of a point to be developed later). Desdemona is still alive at this point, so 'died' must be meant metaphorically. But why should Othello want to deny that he has taken her virginity? That is surely the

normal and natural consequence of marital consummation. As we have seen, Cavell — thanks to taking the metaphor of 'plucking the rose' literally — believes that Othello's plan to kill Desdemona is a dream of 'contamination' based on 'the act of deflowering' (p. 134). So perhaps he hasn't consummated it after all? And who contaminated whom?

Here the wedding sheets may be called in as evidence (*Exhibit two*). After Othello in his dementia has accused her in public of being a whore Desdemona, stunned and broken, asks Emilia: 'Prithee, tonight / Lay on my bed my wedding sheets' (4.2.105ff). This refers, most readers and theatregoers have thought, to a more richly embroidered set of linen that, she hopes, will remind Othello of the love that brought them together. To Cavell, however, this can mean 'only' one thing: 'The exhibition of wedding sheets in this romantic, superstitious, conventional environment can only refer to the practice of proving purity by staining' (p. 135). To which we might want to ask, was this practice common in Shakespeare's England, or Renaissance Venice — were it not for a far more important question, namely, why would Desdemona want to put on her bed a pair of sheets already dirty with hymenal blood? (It is just as well that Thomas Rymer did not know of Cavell's interpretation, which would have given greater force to the notorious moral he deduced from the play: 'this may be a warning to all good Wives that they look well to their Linnen'.)⁴⁴ Furthermore, to follow out the logic of Cavell's suggestion, it would have to have been a copious discharge indeed to be visible as Desdemona lies asleep, her sheets, presumably, tucked under her chin. These are unpleasant speculations, I know, but the questions Cavell asks are not concerned with tact or sensibility. He is after proof, sounding like an attorney in court:

Well, were the sheets stained or not? Was she a virgin or not? The answers seem as ambiguous as to our [*that is, Iago's*] earlier question whether they are fast married. Is the final, fatal reenactment of their wedding night [*sc. Othello's suffocating Desdemona*] a clear denial of what really happened, so that we can just read off, by negation [*a psycho-analytical practice*], what really happened? Or is it a straight reenactment, without negation, and the flower was still on the tree, as far as he knew? In that case, who was reluctant to see it plucked, he or she? On such issues, farce and tragedy are separated by the thickness of a membrane. (p. 135)

Before attending to those questions, a word on Cavell's use of the word 'farce'. He has just claimed that his theory of blood-stained wedding sheets 'provides a satisfactory weight for the importance Othello attaches to his charmed (or farcical) handkerchief, the fact that it is spotted, spotted with strawberries' (p. 135). Why should the fact that Othello believes it to be charmed make it 'farcical'? Such a plot-donnée had better be accepted, if we are to be able to read literature at all. Earlier Cavell wrote that 'It has

been felt from Thomas Rymer to G.B. Shaw that the play obeys the rhythm of farce, not of tragedy' (p. 132). But Rymer had no aesthetic interest in 'rhythm', merely wanting to dismiss the play as brutally as possible: 'There is in this Play some burlesk, some humour, and ramble of Comical Wit; . . . but the tragical part is, plainly, none other than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour'.⁴⁵ As for the handkerchief with its embroidered strawberries, are we seriously to believe that Othello values it for being in some way proleptic of his (according to Cavell, blood-stained) wedding sheets? And can anyone seriously accept the grand Freudian assumption behind all this insistent prying, namely that the murder scene is 'the final, fatal reenactment of their wedding night', and that whatever went wrong then causes all the destruction now?

Cavell's questions, to return to them, imply, first of all, that the issue whether Desdemona was a virgin on her wedding night in Cyprus is still open. Earlier, of course, he proclaimed that she was no longer a virgin on her first appearance in the play. Clearly, his scepticism cannot abide certainty. Secondly, he asks which of the two, Othello or Desdemona, 'was reluctant to see it [*sc. Desdemona's 'flower'*] plucked, he or she?' I note in passing that the verb 'see' is inappropriate to the activity that Othello and Desdemona were involved in (though it does of course fit the critic poring over the play) but this question insinuates the further possibility, that Othello might have been reluctant — whatever that might mean — for Desdemona to lose her virginity. Well, the reader of this page might now irascibly enquire, did they or didn't they? Cavell cannot, or will not, tell us:

We of course have no answer to such questions. But what matters is that Othello has no answer [*where is the evidence that he ever asked them?*]; or rather he can give none, for any answer to the questions, granted that I am right in taking the questions to be his, is intolerable. The torture of the logic in his mind we might represent as follows: Either I shed her blood and scarred her or I did not. If I did not then she was not a virgin and this is a stain upon me. If I did then she is no longer a virgin and this is a stain upon me. Either way I am contaminated. (I do not say that the sides of this dilemma are of equal significance for Othello.)

But this much logic anyone but a lunkhead might have mastered apart from actually getting married. (pp. 135–6)

But the 'torture of the logic' here is in the mind of the critic, not the character, for Cavell's dilemma is based on a grotesque misreading of Othello's lines 'I'll not shed her blood, / Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow'. Here Othello obediently mouths the idea that Iago put in his head, revising his own plan to poison her: 'Do it not with poison: strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated' (4.1.203ff). But Cavell, brooding on this issue, has conflated Othello's words over the sleeping Desdemona, which we can all see and hear, with what may have

taken place on their wedding night (which even this critic fails to reconstruct, despite his efforts), or what may be going on in Othello's mind. True, Othello may have 'shed her blood' in making love for the first time, but he has certainly not 'scarred' her, since — as I imagine Cavell knows, and I apologise to the reader who might be offended by this observation, but it is he, after all, who has pitched the discussion at this level — the perforation of the hymen does not leave a scar but opens a natural orifice. The 'dilemma', like the scar, is of the critic's making, then, and can be discarded. It is cleverly constructed, to leave no exit — 'if I did not shed her blood', Othello thinks, 'this is a stain on me' — where Cavell means 'stain' in the metaphorical sense of 'reproach', or dishonour (if Desdemona wasn't a virgin); but 'if I did shed her blood' then this, too, is 'a stain on me' — where Cavell presumably invokes the literal sense of 'pollution that can be washed off' (if people did wash in those days). Spelling it out like this allows us to see that Cavell's 'dilemma' is a spurious verbal construct, collapsing the difference between literal and metaphorical senses, and revealing (to me, at least) a truly contorted form of reasoning in the critic's mind. Cavell patronisingly excuses Othello for not seeing both sides of the dilemma as 'of equal significance': but the problem is Cavell's, not Othello's.

Readers need stamina: Cavell has not yet finished reconstructing the sexual relationship between Othello and his wife. He states that Othello 'fails twice at the end to kill Iago, knowing he cannot kill him' (p. 136). Reference to the text reveals one moment when Othello '*runs at Iago, but Montano disarms him*' (stage-direction in the New Cambridge edition, at 5.2.238), and another when Othello *wounds Iago* with his sword, saying 'If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee' (5.2.287f). It is, I imagine most people would agree, deliberate design on Shakespeare's part that keeps Iago alive throughout this final scene, and a remarkable dramatic stroke to show him, the man who has poisoned human society with his lies, now, found out, refusing language: 'Demand me nothing; what you know, you know; / From this time forth I never will speak word' (305f).⁴⁶ To Cavell the half-hearted Cartesian this should make Iago the sceptic, not Othello; but to Cavell the fully-convinced Freudian Othello's failing to kill 'this nobody' is 'the point of his impotence, and the meaning of it'. Here is a new argument, adumbrated by the earlier hint of Othello being 'reluctant' to pluck Desdemona's 'flower', namely that Othello may be impotent. But let Cavell present his own case, in his best Jamesian style:

In speaking of the point and meaning of Othello's impotence, I do not think of Othello as having been in an everyday sense impotent with Desdemona. I think of him, rather, as having been surprised by her, at what he has elicited from her; at, so to speak, a success rather than a failure. . . . Surprised, let me say, to find that she is flesh and blood. . . . It is the dimension of her that shows itself in that difficult and dirty banter between her and Iago as they await Othello on Cyprus. (p. 136)

(I have altered the order of the last two sentences quoted, to bring out more clearly what Cavell means by 'surprised': that is, Othello is surprised at Desdemona's sexuality; and I leave out a repetitive and circling, indeed tortured continuation of this argument over the next page.) Two points need to be made here: first, despite Cavell's disclaimer that he does not think of Othello as having been 'in an everyday sense impotent with Desdemona' that is certainly what he implies later on (and one wonders what other sense the word might have — 'well,' as Cavell might put it, 'could he get it up or couldn't he?'). Secondly, he imputes to Desdemona a female sexuality as revealed in the 'dirty banter' she has with Iago while awaiting Othello's arrival. Reference to that scene, however (2.1.109–162), which moves from Iago's attack on women ('you are pictures out of doors . . . hussies in your beds') to his insinuation that women would never 'change the cod's head for the salmon's tail', will show that all the bawdy in it (and there is not much) comes from Iago, not Desdemona, who remains as chaste as ever, amused but shocked at his insinuations. 'Dirty banter' has such a Puritanical disapproval about it⁴⁷ that we turn to Rymer wondering if Cavell took it from there, but Rymer only dismisses the dialogue as 'a long rabble of Jack-pudden farce . . . that runs on with all the little plays, jingle, and trash'.⁴⁸ Cavell seems in two minds about Desdemona's 'flesh and blood'; welcoming but disapproving, too.

Returning to that wedding-night, wherever it took place, and whatever happened — not to mention whatever relevance such a non-represented, non-reported event could possibly have for the interpretation of a play — Cavell now decides that Desdemona *was* a virgin, but that Othello somehow could not 'accept' her chastity (a further level of confusion, for to judge by his account they certainly made love). He writes of Desdemona:

Her virginity, her intactness, her perfection, had been gladly forgone by her for him, for the sake of their union, for the seaming of it. It is the sacrifice he could not accept, for then he was not himself perfect. It must be displaced. The scar [*sic*] is the mark of finitude. . . . (p. 137)

(Cavell's discourse, I should add, takes place on several levels simultaneously, from speculation about the wedding-night to the higher, more abstract thesis that Othello 'cannot forgive Desdemona for existing, for being separate from him'.) Here, as with other sore points in Cavell's argument, the question of chastity is simultaneously resolved and left open. Desdemona sacrificed her 'intactness' to Othello, but he could not accept it, although there still seems to have been a 'scar' on one of them, however produced. Cavell's argument, which is developed in the shadows of his other speculations, is — to put it very baldly, with a directness that Cavell fastidiously shuns — that Othello's impotence is the clue to it all. His inability to accept Desdemona's gift of her virginity ('It must be displaced') results in an obsession with 'defloration' that causes him to murder Desdemona, since he is powerless to deal with a sexuality that he has

himself released. He should never have made love to her in the first place, for he let loose forces that he was powerless to control. And there are warnings in this for the rest of us:

If such a man as Othello is rendered impotent and murderous by aroused, or by having aroused, female sexuality — or let us say, if this man is horrified by human sexuality, in himself and in others — then no human being is free of this possibility. (p. 137)

It seems to me that every suggestion or conclusion in that sentence is fictitious. Cavell's remarkable torturing of logic pulls the play into a private nexus of interests, from philosophy to psychoanalysis, and finally to a spurious form of etymology, for in conclusion he calls 'attention — I cannot think I am the first to say it out loud — to the hell and the demon staring out of the names of Othello and Desdemona' (p. 140) — staring, that is, for English readers not Italian (in his linguocentrism, Cavell resembles Freud, who thought that the Egyptian hieroglyph *Mut* indubitably suggested *Mutter*). This remark recalls the comic denouement in *Cymbeline*, that parody of Renaissance etymology, where Philharmonus, a soothsayer, interprets the oracle's reference to 'tender air' as being the same as 'mollis aer; and mollis aer / We term it mulier' (5.5.448f). That Cavell should reduce Shakespearian characters to word-games, to accidental (non-phonemic) similarities which suggest to him deep symbolic significance (a game that has been called 'the impotent remarking of particulars'),⁴⁹ is the last of many proofs that Freudians lack any sense of self-criticism, have no criteria by which to question either the model or their application of it. Here, too, a form of determinism seems to have taken over.

VI

I have attempted to give sustained critical analyses of four recent psychoanalytic studies, readings of their misreadings, as it seems to me (to them, no doubt, the opposite). This may have placed a strain on the reader's patience, but it seemed to me an exercise worth performing once with the kind of close scrutiny that those critics, presumably, gave to the plays. Monotonous it certainly was, but that merely reflects the monotony of their interpretive model. At any rate, I think we can now fairly conclude that the damage that Freudian Shakespeare criticism does to the plays consists of both omission and distortion. Those elements are omitted that do not fit — not even with the super-flexible method of 'splitting' characters into constituent mini-selves to be identified with whatever other character one pleases. Despite this useful device, major parts of the play, involving plot and motivation, still have to be ignored, social and political aspects passed over (the pressures of class and party politics in *Coriolanus*, for instance, disappear altogether in Freudian readings),⁵⁰ many scenes

and characters discarded altogether. The playwright's carefully organised dramatic structure, unifying several plots, focussing the issues that unite and divide the people in the play, is either ignored or rearranged to privilege Freudian narrative models, the primal scene, Oedipal hatred, the workings-out of repressed homosexuality, anxiety, or whatever. Analytical interest is focussed on the personality of one or two main characters, in the usual search to identify pathological neuroses, the assumption always being that the causes of unhappiness (no psychocritic is interested in happiness) are internal. As Ernest Gellner has said of Freudian theory in general,

The real obstacles and impediments in life are generally *inside*. . . . The whole system is pervaded by the assumption that tragic predicaments are indeed self-imposed. Presumably by definition, neurotic unhappiness can originate only inside the psyche. (Gellner 1985, p. 71)

Uncritically accepting that principle, in all its circularity, Freudians look 'inside' Othello to find the 'neurotic unhappiness' they have been trained to identify. In the process they leave out Iago as engine and motive, oddly enough, perhaps because his deeds seem less spectacular, or perhaps because he always acts with such apparent rationality. Under further scrutiny, of course, Iago can also be shown to be an anal erotic (withholding language), a frustrated homosexual, and much else. But so far, at least, Freudians have simply ignored the 'overt' motivation (my inverted commas mock their assumptions) of Iago, which for other readers massively dominates the drama.

What remains after the omissions is then distorted by the very process of Freudian reading. In the work of Cavell, Garber, Nevo, and many, many more, the critical enterprise consists of applying an interpretative model (A) to the literary text (B). But instead of a genuine illumination by the A/B comparison the literary work is made to conform to the model, and in effect reproduces it: A-A₁-A₂ (Freud to Lacan to whoever's next). The pre-selected parts of the play are subjected to what is currently known as a 'strong' or 'powerful' reading, which distorts them so much that they are no longer recognisable as the *Macbeth* or *Othello* we have always lived with. This process of fragmentation and distortion reduces the literary work to a loose conglomerate of signifiers on to which the psychocritic can impose his or her interpretive model. The psychoanalytic paradigms, in other words, are too strong, too individual to serve as critical tools without just rewriting literary works in their own image.

This conclusion, unwelcome though it will be in those places where psychoanalysis has become not so much a technique for therapy as a way of life, seems unavoidable. Literary critics may have something to learn here from historians, in their sceptical response to a subsection of Freudianism called 'psychohistory', a genre which finds that world-historical events, too, exemplify what Freud might describe as certain 'technical rules'.⁵¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb has noted how in this approach, as in Freudian

literary criticism, the centre of gravity shifts. Psychohistory 'derives its "facts" not from history but from psychoanalysis, and deduces its theories not from this or that instance but from a view of human nature that transcends history' (Himmelfarb 1987, p. 35). One of its leading American practitioners claims that psychoanalysis is actually superior to history in that it possesses "a scientific system of concepts, based on clinical data" (*cit. ibid.*, p. 114), which is true for all ages, inherent in human nature itself. The resulting application of this system, however, can only be ahistorical, as Erik Erikson candidly admitted in his *Young Man Luther* (1958), willingly accepting "half-legend as half-history", and invoking his "clinician's training" as the authority permitting "him to recognize major trends even where the facts are not all available" (*cit. ibid.*, pp. 38-9). In this way the psychohistorian gives himself *carte blanche* to rewrite biography or even political history in Freudian terms.

Undeterred by the unavailability of the subjects for analysis, hailing Freud for positing the Oedipus complex as 'a "constant" of human nature (a "biological given")', the psychohistorian assumes that President Nixon, too, must have gone through the Oedipal phase, and proceeds retrospectively to explain his adult behaviour from this phase, so crucial for the 'identification with a model of a mature man' (*ibid.*, pp. 114, 117). (Does this also explain Nixon's many faults as a president?) As with the patient on the couch, psychohistory ignores 'the conscious, manifest level of behaviour' (p. 46), and takes any 'utterance or action . . . as an involuntary symptom which, when properly interpreted, discloses a meaning hidden from the agent and from common observers' (p. 35). In Shakespeare criticism, as we have abundantly seen, manifest and declared motives are dispensed with; actual dreams (those by Bottom; Clarence, Duke Humphrey and Eleanor) are ignored, presumably because Shakespeare has made their meaning crystal-clear. Psychohistory, deterministic and mechanistic, 'reduces history to the status of "epiphenomena", the superficial expression or manifestation of reality' (p. 43). When confronted with the deeper level excavated by the psychohistorian, however, we may be appalled by the vast disparity between the complexity of the character or issue under discussion and the triviality of the explanation. Hitler's hatred of the Jews and advocacy of gas-chambers to destroy them have been said by psychohistorians to derive from an unsuccessful cancer operation on his mother by a Jewish doctor, and his own gas poisoning in 1918 (the *tertium quid* being an iodine compound called iodoform). His desire for more *Lebensraum* reflects his mother's maternal trauma (three infants died before he was born), which resulted in 'her compensatory overfeeding of him', producing an 'oral-aggressive fixation' as he relived his mother's trauma: *ergo*, 'Germany could not feed her children adequately' (pp. 37-8).

I take it that the trivialisation effected there is far more damaging than anything that Freudian critics do to Shakespeare. Yet the difference is one of degree only. The accounts that Nevo or Garber give of Prospero or

Macbeth are similarly said to 'correspond' to a Freudian or Lacanian model, are subsumed under favourite explanatory schemes. In the process, as in psychohistory, another historian has objected, 'events and agents lose their individuality and become illustrations of certain automatisms' (Barzun 1974, p. 23). Both schools seek to 'diagnose' specific instances by reference back to a limited set of explanatory models, whereas, Barzun insists, true 'understanding in human affairs means imagining, visualizing, reliving, and above all *individualizing*, not reducing to type and kind, as diagnosis is meant to do' (p. 64). The mechanistic approach of psychohistory is a legacy still of Freud's ambition to found a science, his hope to discover universal laws governing human behaviour. Freud believed that 'man's evolutionary past . . . had originally decreed the psychoanalytic laws of human behaviour', endowing 'these laws with a universal, transcultural validity' (Sulloway 1983, p. 367). Had he succeeded, psychoanalysis might have achieved the status of the empirical sciences, with the law-giving power which nineteenth-century historians of ideas defined as *nomothetic* (as opposed to the procedures of the humanities, which they saw as *idiographic*, concerned with individual writers and artists, individual works of art). Psychoanalysis, we now know, achieved no more than the status of a pseudo-science, but in making an alliance with it both history and literary criticism are being false to their true natures. As Michael Baxandall has recently commented, the idiographic model 'demands that we attend formally to the actor's purposes: we identify the ends of actions and reconstruct purpose on the basis of particular rather than general facts'. As 'historians and critics' of the arts, Baxandall writes, our interest is 'more often idiographic, towards locating and understanding the peculiarities of particulars. We seek differentiating tools . . .'⁵² — whereas, I add, the psychoanalyst seeks 'general laws' about human action under which he can subsume, and so treat, individual cases. For a literary critic, then, to handle in a nomothetic way material demanding an idiographic approach is to commit a grave category error, which can only distort the work of art in question. The schematism and repetitiveness that results can best be described in the terms of Coleridge's familiar distinction — borrowed from Schelling — between mechanical regularity and organic form. As he wrote in 1808, much damage can be caused by confusing

mechanical regularity with organic form. The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily rising out of the properties of the material. . . . The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. . . .

Nature is inexhaustible, Coleridge writes, in powers as in forms, each exterior being 'the physiognomy of the being within'. And so, to return to drama,

even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet, of our own Shakespeare, himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.⁵³

Setting aside (if one can) the bardolatry there, I would underline two of Coleridge's remarks, although apparently contradictory: the sense that a play 'shapes as it develops from within', with at the same time Shakespeare's 'understanding directing self-consciously'. The 'pre-determined forms' of psychoanalysis offer no help in understanding either process.

Feminist Stereotypes: Misogyny, Patriarchy, Bombast

We know well that habits and institutions which are now reasonably criticized as grossly unfair and unjust — for example, in the relations between rich and poor — were not criticized by our ancestors in this way, partly because, embedded in a different way of life, our ancestors had different targets for criticism from the standpoint of justice, and needed to imagine, or to anticipate, a different way of life, if they were to see the then prevailing relations between rich and poor as grossly unjust.

Stuart Hampshire¹

Feminist Shakespeare criticism is a relatively recent genre. The first courses in Women's Studies were set up in America in 1966, leading to the foundation of the National Women's Studies Association in 1977; the first feminist book explicitly devoted to Shakespeare, Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, appeared in 1975; while 1976 saw the formation of the Modern Language Association sections on 'Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare', and on 'Marriage and the Family' in Shakespeare (Greer 1988, pp. 616, 629). Thereafter national and regional meetings spread across America at such a rate that by 1988 an editor of a journal's special issue concerned with 'Women in the Renaissance' could write that it is now 'difficult to imagine a Renaissance conference that would not include a wide range of papers devoted to women writing and / or representations of women in works by male authors'.² The success in the universities has been astonishing, with '250,000 students at present reading Women's Studies of one sort or another' in America alone (Greer 1988, p. 616). A veritable explosion of publications — book-length studies, collections of writing by Renaissance women, anthologies of modern criticism — have transformed the subject in a remarkably short time.³

At this point I feel the need to distinguish between feminism as a political movement intended to correct unjust discriminations that go back, in Western society, to Aristotle and beyond (I need hardly mention Islam), and feminist literary criticism. On the political issue, it is surely right that here, as with other marginalised groups — the elderly, the handicapped, blacks, people of minority religions or lower castes, ethnic groups, political prisoners — our feelings of concern and compassion ought to issue into whatever forms of action are available to us as agents in a free