

Narratives of the Therapeutic Encounter

Narratives of the Therapeutic Encounter:

*Psychoanalysis, Talking
Therapies and Creative Practice*

Edited by

Susan Bainbrigge and Maren Scheurer

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To our families, for their love, encouragement and support,
and to our analytic families, for their insight, understanding
and inspiration.

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INTRODUCTION

SUSAN BAINBRIGGE AND MAREN SCHEURER

I began by noting that it matters crucially to be able to say who we are, why we are here, and where we are going.

Peter Brooks

Paul Ricœur (1983) wrote on storytelling that it is an essential part of our humanity—how the stories we tell about ourselves and others are a fundamental part of what it means to be human (106-07). Our interest in the therapeutic encounter stemmed from a curiosity about the ways in which stories specifically about talking therapies are created and told, whether in autobiography, fiction, poetry or translation—and how these specific stories shape our understanding, in Ricœur’s sense, of human experience as narrative experience.

With these questions in mind, in December 2017, a group of researchers and therapeutic practitioners met at the University of Edinburgh for a conference to explore “Narratives of the Therapeutic Encounter: Psychoanalysis, Talking Therapies and Creative Practice”. This broader gathering, which paired case histories of creative clinical encounters with readings of a wide range of literary and artistic engagements with therapy, shed light on a particularly rich but comparatively neglected tradition of such narratives: explicit and at the same time deeply resonant depictions of therapeutic encounters from the francophone context. These texts did not only seem to call for further study, but they also promised new perspectives on the narrative experience of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. We are grateful to all the speakers and participants at the conference for the lively and broad-ranging interdisciplinary exchange and debates that have led us to the book project we introduce here.

The aim of this collection of essays is to explore the ways in which talking therapies have been depicted in twentieth century and contemporary narratives (life-writings, fiction and poetry) in French. What can these creative outputs tell us about the therapeutic endeavour which finds its roots in Freud in the late nineteenth century and has seen a flourishing of interventions and treatment modes over the last century? What are we to

take from the rising number of autobiographical and fictional depictions of the therapeutic encounter? What do these works tell us about the particular culture and history in which they are written? And what do these acts of storytelling tell us about therapeutic and other human encounters? This interdisciplinary constellation of questions highlights the important role that the creative arts have played in offering representations and explorations of our minds, our relationships, and our mental health, or more pressingly, ill-health.

Freud argued in his essay “The Question of Lay Analysis” ([1926] 2001) that literature would help the practitioner of therapy as much, if not more than, the medical textbook. His own practice bore witness to his use of myth and literature to illustrate psychological processes, and E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story “Der Sandmann” (1816), on which Freud wrote his famous 1919 essay on the Uncanny, remains a well-known reference point. Literature has obviously fuelled psychoanalysis since its inception, but what about literature that is fuelled by the therapeutic encounter? What can we learn from the patient’s experience as depicted in autobiographical and fictional writings? Might such artistic endeavours enable us to trace the history of mental health treatment, via depictions of psychological, psychoanalytical and psychiatric practices? Furthermore, following on from Lacan’s teachings, do we find in literature and the arts the foundations of theories yet to be expressed?

Our volume aims to focus on the patient’s experience as expressed via the creative act and as counterweight to the practitioner’s “case study”, but even more so, we are interested in the experience within the therapeutic relationship. In contrast to studies that deal more generally with the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis¹ or provide readings that concentrate either on the patient’s or therapist’s narrative, we focus specifically on the therapeutic *encounter*, i.e. the relationship between therapist and patient. Our book combines the analysis of psychoanalytic and fictional texts to explore the implications that arise from the space between the participants in therapy: creative and aesthetic inspirations, therapeutic potentials, and ethical dilemmas.

This volume privileges perspectives from psychoanalytically informed researchers and literary scholars, focusing on close readings of texts that consider them as independent artistic engagements with the therapeutic encounter rather than judging them exclusively on their representational value. The focus on texts from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

¹ See, for example, Abel et al. (2015), Bowie (1988, 1991), Charles (2015), Chiantaretto (1995), Kohon (2016) and Sodre (2015).

openly engages with the therapeutic encounter to maintain a dialogue between the two disciplines (as opposed to pursuing direct applications of psychoanalysis to literature, film, or art).

The Therapeutic Encounter

Before we launch into the fictional(ised) therapeutic encounters that are the subject of this volume, it is worth clarifying what we mean when we speak of “therapeutic encounters”. The term may seem overly broad: it may refer to any form of contact, long-term or instantaneous, between two or even more individuals, human or non-human, that has some sort of therapeutic effect, that is, has some curative or beneficial consequences for the body or mind of one or more of the participants. This broad definition allows us to negotiate between a wide range of “talking therapies”, alternative curative approaches such as bibliotherapy, as well as the possibility of therapeutic encounters in one’s own confrontation with the text as a reader or writer.

But when we highlight the moment of “encounter”, or, indeed, of “relationship”, we do so deliberately. As Donald Winnicott (2005) has emphasised, therapy takes place in “potential space”, in “an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute” (3). We are particularly interested in the experiences that arise out of this third space, the area where the participants of the therapeutic encounter meet, interact and change, not only as separate individuals but also as participants in an intersubjective dynamic that determines them at the moment of the encounter. As Thomas Ogden (1994) said of the psychoanalytic dyad, “No thought, feeling, or sensation can be considered the same as it was or will be outside of the context of the specific (and continually shifting) intersubjectivity” (73-74).

A crucial component in establishing the specific intersubjectivity of the therapeutic encounter is the transference/countertransference dynamic. When Freud ([1895] 2001) discovered transference, the patient’s tendency to transfer emotional and behavioural paradigms from earlier relationships to the present therapeutic relationship, he referred to it as a “false connection” that the patient established between the past and the present (303). However, he soon realised that it could serve as a key to the patient’s history—a way of staging the past when obtaining a narrative account had proven difficult (Freud [1914] 2001, 153). In the same way, Paula Heimann ([1949] 1989) would later call the countertransference a “key to the patient’s unconscious” (78). She saw the therapist’s subliminal reactions to the patient’s transference as a direct unconscious reflection of

what the patient was trying to communicate, and thus a tool to be harnessed in analytic practice. Needless to say that the strong emotions that arise in the therapeutic encounter, whether they derive out of the patient's and the therapist's past or are generated in the analytic present, may also be powerful experiences in themselves, useful, but also at times deeply disturbing and detrimental to the process—as highlighted by some of the writers we explore in this volume. The requirement to allow oneself to be emotionally affected by the patient also implicates a necessary ethical, and protective, framework in which the patient is held in the analyst's mind. This analytic attitude underpins the organisation of the setting and the parameters of the treatment: the therapeutic encounter is always to be directed towards the patient's, not the therapist's, needs, and the strong emotions that arise in the therapeutic relationship, whether of an affectionate, sexual, or antagonistic nature, may not be exploited. Transgressions of the frame may do powerful, or even irreparable, damage to the patient.

The contributors to this volume engage with ideas and methodologies within contemporary psychoanalytic thought, including, but not limited to, Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, André Green, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, and Donald Winnicott. These diverse approaches and engagements highlight the dynamic research culture that exists in this interdisciplinary field, but we should not forget that they also come with differing assumptions about the therapeutic encounter, models for the therapeutic relationship, and methodologies for therapeutic practice.

We encounter these differences in terms of the analytic frame (Lacanian holding a more flexible approach to the analytic setting with sessions of potentially variable length), distinct notions on the efficacy of different types of intervention, transference and extra-transference communications, differing views on the central dynamics of psychopathology, whether more focused on developmentally-based ideas (often associated with Anna Freud and contemporary Freudian perspectives) or conflict-oriented paradigms (more commonly associated with the lineage from Freud to Melanie Klein, and the latter's ground-breaking views on paranoid-schizoid and depressive functioning). Further work in British object relations theory opened up subsequent discoveries about not just oedipal but also pre-oedipal early conflicts; Wilfred Bion, Winnicott and others would then extend those findings in their work with more disturbed adult patients, in different ways.²

² For an overview of the trajectory of British psychoanalysis, see Neville Symington's *The Analytic Experience* (1986) and Lavinia Gomez's *An Introduction to Object Relations* (1997). Bruce Fink's *A Clinical Introduction to*

Where Lacanians put their emphasis on desire, British object relations analysts via Winnicott conceptualised unconscious communications in terms of the archaic parents and the facilitating environments. For the latter the concept of play is key. Being able to play is understood as a core aspect of being able to feel alive in an authentic way. Winnicott's "transitional object" has become a familiar term both within and beyond psychoanalytic parlance, as has Bion's conceptualisation of the relationship of "container/contained". Throughout the last 100 years or so, feminist reviews of psychoanalysis by Karen Horney, Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva and many others have provided much needed correctives without dismantling the core fundamentals of the psychoanalytic method itself, and the importance attached to the power of unconscious life. Equally, Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, critical of the Eurocentrism of traditional Freudianism but heavily influenced by psychoanalytic ideas, helped reshape our thinking about ethnic identity and cultural history.³

In the francophone context, the focus of our study, the dominance of Lacan in the literary and philosophical attention to his work has had the tendency to overshadow a richly dynamic and diverse psychoanalytic culture within France and beyond. After all, we may consider French psychiatry as "a vital seedbed for psychoanalysis" through Freud's encounters with Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet (Bateman and Holmes 14). Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's dictionary of psychoanalytic terms, to name just one more example, has become a standard reference in many psychoanalytic cultures. From Marie Bonaparte to Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, from André Green to Guy Rosolato, Didier Anzieu and Danielle and Jean-Michel Quinodoz, French psychoanalysis has continued to produce creative voices beyond the Lacanian school.

However, in highlighting these approaches we want to emphasise the dynamic, interrelated diversity of francophone psychoanalytic culture, rather than dividing it into closed-off spheres of influence. Dana Birksted-Breen and Sara Flanders (2010) make a point of stressing the "original and revolutionary intrusion" of Lacan on this culture, even if not explicitly stated:

Lacanian Psychoanalysis (1997) provides a useful outline of Lacanian approaches to the therapeutic encounter.

³ This has been explored in more depth and applied to readings of French Caribbean literature in Celia Britton's *Race and the Unconscious: Freudianism in French Caribbean Thought* (2002).

His direct influence appears to have been underplayed by French psychoanalysts belonging to the IPA, but we see his influence surviving in many areas of contemporary French psychoanalysis: Lacan's focus on unconscious processes, [...] the importance of language, and the specific non-linear temporality of *après-coup* inform some of the most creative contributions in French psychoanalysis. (2-3)

They note the existence of other contemporary French psychoanalytic practitioners whose more ambivalent stance distances them from Lacan's theory and practice, but they go on to state nonetheless:

In recent years we have noticed a greater and more positive citation of his work, as if, with time, it has become possible to give him a more balanced place and overcome the "trauma" of the role he played personally, theoretically and institutionally in French psychoanalysis. (Birksted-Breen and Flanders 2010, 5)

We also find that, at the interface of literary analysis inspired by psychoanalysis in French studies, Lacan's work has played a significant part in bringing together research in philosophy and literature, and energising debates. Malcolm Bowie's writings on Lacan have brought a particular strand of French psychoanalysis to wider audiences within humanities research. André Green, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Elisabeth Roudinesco's writings have also broadened out more multidisciplinary perspectives and are increasingly cited in humanities research on literature, philosophy, desire, trauma, and creativity. French psychoanalysis and literary life frequently have gone hand-in-hand throughout the twentieth century and beyond. For example, Antoinette Fouque, who founded the group "Psych et po", was a practising psychoanalyst involved in the Women's Liberation Movement who helped set up the publishing house, the Éditions des femmes. And we need only mention French psychoanalytically inspired works such as Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), Jacques Derrida's *La Carte postale* (1980) or Hélène Cixous' *Portrait de Dora* (1976) to see the extent to which psychoanalysis has informed post-war political, cultural and philosophical francophone landscapes.

Despite their differences then, what all these approaches have in common is a belief in the power and reach of unconscious life, an understanding of the curative potential of the transference relationship, and a commitment to the importance of striving to reach psychic truths for healthier mental functioning—for a more satisfying and enriching experience for the individual of being alive.

Narratives of the Therapeutic Encounter

Almost as soon as Josef Breuer and Freud had established the “talking cure”, narratives of the therapeutic encounter proliferated. In fact, it was a series of narratives, their *Studies of Hysteria* (1895), which contained detailed accounts of Breuer’s and Freud’s encounters with hysterical patients, that brought psychoanalysis to the attention of many readers at the turn of the twentieth century. We cannot here give a full history of their transition into literature and other media, a history which might begin with Italo Svevo’s *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923), Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg* (1924), and Georg Wilhelm Pabst’s *Geheimnisse einer Seele* (1926). Let it suffice to point to the more recent production of narratives of the therapeutic encounter in literature (where we might think of Robertson Davies, Jenny Diski, Jonathan Franzen, Siri Hustvedt, Hanif Kureishi, David Lodge, and Philip Roth), film (with notable examples like *Girl, Interrupted* [1999], *A Dangerous Method* [2011], and *Mad to Be Normal* [2017]), television (starting with *The Sopranos* [1999-2007], and followed by countless other TV series like *Mad Men* [2007-2015], *In Treatment* [2008-2010], *Lucifer* [2016-], *Gypsy* [2017], and *Wanderlust* [2018]), autobiography (by notable intellectuals like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick or Barbara Taylor), and graphic memoir (by comics artists such as Alison Bechdel or Katie Green). Analysts themselves, including Marie Adams, Thomas Ogden, Bev Thomas, Salley Vickers, and Irvin Yalom, have written fictional accounts of the therapeutic encounter or have published narrative or dialogic accounts of their work for a wider readership. It is immediately apparent that the bulk of associations stems from the anglophone world, and indeed, existing studies of the therapeutic encounter have focused primarily on anglophone texts.⁴

Our collection engages with ideas first developed in these readings, but it offers a different range of case studies. We want to highlight different voices and different connections, and a surprisingly large corpus of narrative engagements with the therapeutic encounter, given its relative neglect in critical readings.⁵ Countless French artists have used the therapeutic encounter as the basis for creative expression, including such

⁴ Such studies include Berman (1985), Furst (1999), Hotz-Davies and Kirchhofer (2000), Brandell (2004), Sabbadini (2003), and Scheurer (2019). Furst also presents detailed readings of Marie Cardinal and Italo Svevo.

⁵ While our volume focuses on narratives of the therapeutic encounter in French, other such neglected corpuses include writings in German, Italian, or Spanish, especially from the psychoanalytic strongholds in Latin America, and beyond—which calls for further comparative study.

well-known writers as Simone de Beauvoir, Marie Cardinal, Hélène Cixous, Serge Doubrovsky, Michel Leiris, Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau and Emma Santos, as well as more recently Christine Angot, Sophie Calle, Marie Darrieussecq, Chloé Delaume, Philippe Grimbert, Michel Houellebecq, Julia Kristeva, Camille Laurens and Linda Lê. The appeal of the therapeutic encounter reaches beyond French borders, to a notable range of Belgian writers including Henry Bauchau, Lydia Flem, Jacqueline Harpman, Jean-Pierre Lebrun, Nicole Malinconi, Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, Liliane Schraûwen, and François Weyergans; and francophone writers from Canada, the Caribbean and Africa, such as Julien Bigras, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Assia Djebar, Tobie Nathan, Gisèle Pineau, and Karim Sarroub.⁶ Filmmakers Chantal Akerman, Patrice Leconte and Arnaud Desplechin all choose the therapeutic encounter to be the focus of their films respectively, in *Un Divan à New York* (1996), *Confidences trop intimes* (2004), and *Jimmy P: Psychothérapie d'un Indien des plaines* (2013). French television series with therapeutic encounters include *HP* (standing for *Hôpital psychiatrique*, where the series is set [OCS, 2018]); *Marjorie*, another comedy drama featuring a therapist cum life coach (France 2, 2014); and the francophone Belgian crime drama series, *La Trêve* (RTBF, 2016-2018). And finally, there are a growing number of *bandes dessinées* that rely on therapeutic narratives, such as Élodie Durand's *La Parenthèse* (2010), the works by Manu Larcenet, or Hubert and Marie Caillou's *La Chair de l'araignée* (2010). In this volume, we set out to engage in depth with this vibrant but as yet widely unexplored tradition in French literature and psychoanalysis.

We enter this rich and varied corpus in 1937, with what is perhaps the first autobiographical account of a psychoanalytic encounter in French literature: Raymond Queneau's *Chêne et chien*. This "novel in verse" offers a portrait of Queneau's psychoanalytic treatment in the 1930s and a poetic and quasi-psychoanalytic exploration of psychoanalytic themes in childhood memories. Maren Scheurer's chapter puts Queneau in dialogue with American poet Gladys Schmitt, whose 1973 *Sonnets for an Analyst* are similarly interested in delving into and scrutinizing the therapeutic encounter through poetic means. Scheurer reads these poetic accounts in contrast and comparison to a longstanding psychoanalytic discourse that seeks to establish connections between psychoanalysis and poetry as

⁶ A recent collection by Olivia Elkaim (2016) brings together writings about psychoanalysis by well-known authors, with contributions by herself, Philippe Forest, Emilie Frèche, Camille Laurens, Laurence Nobécourt, Véronique Olmi, Anne Plantagenet, Gilles Rozier and Isabelle Spaak.

related disciplines, aligned through their common focus on the powers of language and the unconscious.

Though Queneau would become one of the major proponents of the Oulipo group, he was also briefly aligned with the Surrealist movement. The Surrealists, headed by André Breton, were fascinated by psychoanalysis, its emphasis on unconscious levels of experience that challenged conventional notions of reality. Trained in medicine and particularly interested in mental illness, Breton sought to access the unconscious through literature and to apply psychoanalytic methods to literary production, as in the Surrealist technique of *écriture automatique*. His novel *Nadja* (1928) focuses on a mentally ill young woman, but in its characteristic fascination with madness, it is not interested in healing and may instead be read as an exploitation of female madness in the service of the Surrealist re-envisioning of reality. A wholly different approach towards Surrealism, female madness, and the therapeutic encounter can be found in Leonora Carrington's *En bas* (1946), a madness memoir that acts as a counterpoint to Breton's *Nadja*, as Nathalie Ségeral argues in her chapter in this volume. Ségeral reads Carrington's narrative as a subversion of traditional psychiatric discourses and cultural representations, both of which have tended to rob female madness of its historical significance, deprive madwomen of their agency and classify their narratives as less important than their male counterparts. Through a focus on re-embodiment and gendered violence in the therapeutic encounter, Ségeral locates Carrington's narrative firmly in the gender politics of its time as well as the traumatic history of World War II and the Holocaust.

The troubled, but potentially beneficial relationship of psychoanalysis to feminist thought and the reworking of historical trauma is also explored in Simone de Beauvoir's work. In the 1950s, she created the character of Anne, a psychoanalyst, in her Goncourt prize-winning novel *Les Mandarins* (1954). In the wake of the Second World War, Anne doubts her capacities to heal her traumatised patients. In her chapter in this volume, Ursula Tidd explores Simone de Beauvoir's questioning encounters with psychoanalysis in the context of her feminist and existentialist positionings. Through the character of Anne, the challenges posed to psychoanalysis and the psychoanalyst are explored, specifically in the face of the traumatic personal and collective wartime past. Anne exposes her scepticism about the psychoanalytic cure whilst also revealing the ways in which the painful new realities after the Shoah carry both personal and political implications and responsibilities. Beauvoir's novel, and her work more generally, would become a milestone for other writers and thinkers who were eager to interrogate the role of psychoanalysis in society and for the women's

movement in particular. Kristeva's novel *Les Samourais* (1990), for instance, was inspired by Beauvoir's examination of a post-war generation coming to terms with its losses, and Jöelle Cabarus, the novel's central character, is also a psychoanalyst and part of the May '68 generation looking within France and beyond (to China, for example) for signs of new ways to live, especially as these dynamics affect women intellectuals: a reassessment of existing structures as well as of the relationship of public to private, and private to public.

Another classic text that draws on the heritage of Beauvoir and establishes a link between psychoanalysis and the 1960s is Marie Cardinal's *Les Mots pour le dire* (1975). The book ends with the line: "Quelques jours plus tard, c'était mai 68" (345). Cardinal's exploration of this era, on the eve of May '68, serves as a reminder for that moment when psychoanalysis and feminism, politics and identity, came to the fore in a more visible way. Cardinal's text is the focus of Abdelhadi Elfakir's analysis. He highlights the particularly fruitful dialogue which has endured in French-speaking contexts between literature and psychoanalysis, from the appeal of Freud's writings to more recent engagements via Elfakir's translation projects of key texts from French to Arabic. These texts include the classic *Les Mots pour le dire*. Elfakir situates the text in relation to the interest of literary writers in psychoanalysis: firstly, as an applicable psychological science, and secondly, as a mode of discourse all of its own, in relation to, and on the same level as, a literary work. The form of Cardinal's text is shown to reflect the dynamics of the analysis itself. Elfakir traces the beginning, middle and end of an analysis in terms of therapeutic and literary trajectories, with the focus on the importance of the analysand to be enabled, and not hindered, to seize their own psychic, embodied truths.

Our focus on the patient's (and the therapist's) words and experience in narratives of psychotherapy, which are of paramount importance to Cardinal's experiments in life writing, follows up a suggestion by French author Serge Doubrovsky, who wrote in a seminal article on autobiography and psychoanalysis in 1993 that this could be a worthwhile investigation:

[T]he narration of analysis, detailed log-book, or posthumous reconstitution by the patient has become almost a literary genre, which, incidentally, it would be interesting to study in parallel with the clinical narratives that originate from the other side of the couch. (33)⁷

⁷ Some such work is collected in Michèle Costa Magna's ([1995] 2007) collection of patients' stories of their analytic experiences. Another prominent example is

Doubrovsky's oeuvre as a whole holds in a creative tension both his psychoanalytic relationship (with the fictionalised "Akeret") and his relationship to psychoanalysis, catalysed within his writings through his autofictional theories and practice.⁸ Katharine Swarbrick engages with this literary genre outlined by Doubrovsky and takes a broader view of the therapeutic encounter as it appears in a selection of texts including works by Cardinal, Doubrovsky, Duras and Perec. Her Lacanian-inspired reading involves scrutinising narrative in terms of its close relationship to fantasy. Defining literary encounters with psychoanalysis (via Duras and Doubrovsky) are signposted and explicated. These set the scene for Swarbrick's readings of the fantasy trope in a selection of autofictional texts spanning the 1960s-80s. She illustrates Lacanian theories on language, desire and creativity through pertinent examples presented within a guiding framework of narrative therapeutic encounters.

Beyond the metropole, francophone Belgian and Canadian developments offer points of contrast and comparison. Susan Bainbrigg discusses a corpus of francophone Belgian authors writing about the therapeutic encounter over the last sixty years. She considers the particular cultures of literature and psychoanalysis in Belgium and their "porosity" to external influence and exchange, whether French or anglophone. In her analysis she uses extracts from selected texts by psychoanalyst authors Bauchau and Harman, and analysand authors Malinconi and Weyergans. In these francophone Belgian depictions of the therapeutic encounter it is possible to trace the fundamentals of the psychoanalytic method through the vivid descriptions of the analytic relationship—the analytic frame, the role of childhood, and the essential dynamics between patient and analyst. And, what is more, they point to important links between therapeutic experience, creativity and literary production. The dynamic interplay of identity and creativity is revealed via the attachment and separation process inherent in the therapeutic encounter; the transformations of relationships; portraits of change with the possibility of liberation towards creativity; and the search for an authentic self. The selected authors reveal art and psychoanalysis's relation to chaos, and they probe the "third space" of therapy and writing (the text)—in which the narrator, in finding "the words to say it", creates the text as object and may engage in an experience of self-exploration.

Across the Atlantic in Quebec, the psychiatrist and writer Julien Bigras was an active participant in the lively debates which reverberated between francophone Canada and the metropole. Another fluid realm of exchange

Pierre Rey's ([1989] 2016) account of his analysis with Lacan, *Une saison chez Lacan*.

⁸ See also *Fils* (1977) and *Le Livre brisé* (1989).

between psychoanalytic cultures, Canada highlights and reflects many of the crucial disagreements that split apart traditions in Europe. Analysed by Conrad Stein, Bigras's professional trajectory was a controversial one, which Louis-Daniel Godin explores in his chapter. Godin provides an overview of psychoanalysis in Quebec before focusing on the psychoanalytic case study, its literary elements, and the case of Julien Bigras. His *Ma vie, ma folie* (1983) is the story of his countertransference; controversial with regard to its treatment, ethical responsibilities, not least that of confidentiality. For Bigras, essential research was the work which delved into one's own desires. His earlier novel *L'Enfant dans le grenier* (1976) also engaged with his life history in its interweaving of the trauma of a stillborn brother and exploring the place of the imaginary child. The ongoing search for recognition via the significant other also opened up transformations of the creative act via the work itself as imaginary child. Bigras's publications overstepped boundaries, revealing more about the patient and more about himself than was considered appropriate, especially because Bigras seemed to give in to strong countertransference fantasies. As such, they are themselves an expression of psychoanalytic controversy, between "overcoming" and engaging in countertransference, and they highlight crucial ethical and professional dilemmas: for if psychoanalysis is a profession that depends on intimacy with the patient and teaches by the example of the case study, it can only do so by partially relinquishing the confidentiality on which this intimacy is based.

More recently, since the turn of the millennium, autofiction has become increasingly dominant on the French literary scene, and within this frame, psychoanalysis has played a significant role, as prior mention of Doubrovsky's contribution confirms. This may be due, at least in part, to the self-expository tendency in psychoanalytic practice that was highlighted in Bigras's work. Anne-Marie Picard further contextualises the way in which Doubrovsky's experimentation with genre and self-representation paved the way for a new generation of writers committed to testing the limits of truth-telling and its relationship to aesthetic practice. Such boundary-testing autofictional depictions of psychotherapy can be found in the writings of authors such as Christine Angot, Nina Bouraoui and Camille Laurens.⁹ Angot's *L'Inceste* (1999), for example, staked out an important marker at the edges of the genre as she engaged in a lively but challenging way with reader expectation and genre conventions. Her long-standing experiences of psychoanalysis also inform her writings

⁹ For more information on autofictional writing by women, but not specifically on psychotherapy, see Jordan (2013).

about trauma. Picard explores in particular the relationship between writing and Angot's experiences of psychoanalysis in *Une semaine de vacances* (2012), and in doing so, highlights Angot's recent engagement with psychoanalysts in interviews and conference presentations as an important aspect of her relationship with the public. Informed by Lacanian theory, Picard demonstrates how the author's writing in fact takes the place of analysis in a text in which the words come out of trauma, not in a description of the latter, but in the very form and dynamics of language. Through Angot, she explores the realm of the presymbolic and the ways in which the unsayable comes to be expressed.

Varied types of therapeutic encounter characterise the contemporary scene, and, as we have seen, the texts in this corpus draw upon the thinking of Freud and Lacan, but also include other psychoanalytic thinkers such as André Green. His theory of the "mère morte" has had wide-ranging clinical and critical impact. Jutta Fortin in her analysis of Camille Laurens's oeuvre has found his work to open up productive lines of enquiry. In her chapter here, she takes Laurens's *Dans ces bras-là* (2000) and contextualises the novel with related narratives of the therapeutic encounter in her oeuvre. As in other works analysed in this volume, the themes of suffering, desire, loss and mourning loom large. However, Fortin is particularly interested in the possibility of desire in the analytic dyad, between the narrator and her psychoanalyst. In this aspect, *Dans ces bras-là* is related to a number of other fictional explorations of transference love, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1946), Pat Conroy's *Prince of Tides* (1986), adapted to film by Barbra Streisand, or Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996). Crucially, however, the female patient is here depicted as a strong desiring subject, rather than a victim or transgressing professional. Fortin, in a similar vein to Godin, picks up on the centrality and the contradictions of the ethical framework within the depicted transference and countertransference dynamics. Here, the fictional encounter between psychoanalyst and narrator intertwines with a consideration of the haunting father figure, as well as broader analysis of family constellations which highlight the impact of early loss: whether the dead sister/child, the depressed mother, or the absent father wishing for a son. In the therapeutic encounter/narrative, the transference love relationship between therapist and patient is analysed with the significance of the fictional framing and repetitions kept in mind. Fortin signals in her analysis the ways in which a therapeutic encounter intersects with literary practice as it plays out the family drama.

These family dramas are another connecting thread throughout our chapters. Where in Godin and Bainbrigg's chapters the emphasis tends to

fall on the place of the child in this constellation, Picard highlights the child-parent dynamic as a key concern, as does Fortin, with a particular interest in the daughter-father dynamic. For Enda McCaffrey in the penultimate chapter in this volume, the relationship between son and mother is one of the starting points of his analysis. McCaffrey considers the works of Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, who worked as a psychotherapist in Paris before becoming a celebrated novelist (Guppy 1999). McCaffrey identifies a turn towards death in Ben Jelloun's later work through analysis of three texts: *Sur ma mère* (2008), *Le Bonheur conjugal* (2012) and *L'Ablation* (2014). After presenting contemporary debates on "the way we die now", McCaffrey demonstrates an important function of literature and talking in demedicalizing death. His analysis is a Barthesian (inter-)cultural thanatology set in a comparative Arab/European context, which not only highlights the importance of francophone voices in literary engagements with the therapeutic encounter but also provides an important corrective to models of the encounter that are predominantly Western and Eurocentric in theory and method. This seems all the more pressing as it also serves as a reminder that some of the major voices of francophone psychoanalytic culture have transcultural histories of their own.¹⁰ Caring for the dying (whether through Alzheimer's, disability or prostate cancer) is set in a context in which compassionate acts are often deemed as, or even more, relevant than medical intervention. Ben Jelloun's novels insist on the importance of listening and opening a space for subjective experience. In this sense, literature emerges as an important counterpoint to diagnostic medicine.

The inevitability of human encounters with loss looms large in the final contributions to this volume. McCaffrey's reading of thanatographical texts interlinks with Rebecca Rosenberg's attention to the autopathographies of Céline Curiol and Mademoiselle Caroline in their engagement with illness and depression. For the authors in Rosenberg's study, the writing cure becomes a broad artistic endeavour in which research, reading, diary writing, and drawing enter into the memoir and the graphic novel. Rosenberg considers Curiol's and Caroline's publications on depression as simultaneous reading and writing cures within contemporary therapeutic debates regarding bibliotherapy. Thus, Rosenberg's chapter is placed in a much wider context in which the analogy between literature and therapy has been a controversial subject of

¹⁰ We may think here of Michel de M'Uzan or Hélène Cixous, with their respective family connections to Tunisia and Algeria, Moustafa Safouan from Egypt, André Green, who was born in Cairo, or Guy Rosolato, who was born in Istanbul.

debate. Perhaps as early as Aristotle's concept of catharsis, art has been seen to produce beneficial effects for artists and audience, but many critics have warned against reducing art to such utilitarian purposes. At the same time, the specificity of the therapeutic encounter—as a dialogue between two people—has proven both a highly productive metaphor for the imaginative dialogicity inherent in art and a hindrance against the too easy conflation of the therapeutic and the aesthetic encounter. Rosenberg confronts this debate by focusing explicitly on the artistic practices of Curial and Caroline and their own experience of these practices as therapeutic. She considers the desire for comfort and consolation in therapy and explores the ways in which her two authors explore the pains and frustrations of therapeutic encounters, as well as the possible liberations. Rosenberg's discussion of their explorations of alternative creative therapies highlights the importance they stress of shared knowledge and experience, and a sense of community for those who experience depression. Rosenberg's analysis thus holds a space open for encounters with the therapeutic Other in its various guises, including the written and the blank page, and she turns our attention not only to the author's but also the reader's creative encounter with therapy and art.

Therapeutic and Creative Encounters

In almost all fictional and autofictional works analysed in this volume, therapeutic and creative encounters are intimately linked: patients and psychoanalysts turn to writing and other creative practices; writers and artists enter into therapy; and the therapeutic potential of writing and reading is explored. Psychoanalysts have been drawn to such links between therapy and art, their common reliance on language, creativity, and play. Within the British psychoanalytic tradition, analysts such as Melanie Klein, Hanna Segal, Marion Milner, Juliet Miller, and Donald Winnicott, amongst others, have written about the relationship between talking therapies and the creative process. For Winnicott (2005), in particular, psychotherapy “*has to do with two people playing together*” (51), and it takes place in a shared creative space between fantasy and reality:

The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is being found to be reliable. (64)

In playing together, psychoanalyst and analysand seek to open up their creative responses to themselves, each other, and the world around them.

This sense of the particular creative potential of psychoanalysis is often coupled with a keen awareness of the decisive role of language in the therapeutic endeavour. Adam Phillips (2000) has argued that the common attraction to literature in psychoanalysis is linked to the psychoanalyst's crucial relationship to language—language being the central medium of all talking therapies, but an unreliable one (5). When silence and unspeakability predominate in the face of trauma, when meanings shift through therapeutic action, and knowledge of the past is revealed to be created rather than revealed, how can therapist and patient *encounter* each other? Ogden (1997) suggests that language should not be seen “simply as a ‘package’ for carrying ideas and feelings” in psychoanalysis, but as a “a medium in which thoughts and feelings are created” (1). He asks us to turn our attention not to the content but to the effects of language, which places a new focus on “capturing/creating the experience of ‘what it feels like’ for the analyst to be with the patient and for the patient to be with the analyst at a particular juncture” (19). In other words, however much psychoanalysis deals in language, it does so, first and foremost, within the therapeutic encounter, where its performative and dialogic creation of meaning plays out.

When we turn here to “narratives” of the therapeutic encounter, the psychoanalytic concern with creativity, play, and language is multiply refracted. These literary encounters allow us to explore the relationship between therapy, the imagination and creative practice. This includes the role that language plays in our understanding of ourselves and others. What do fictional and autofictional texts about the therapeutic encounter reveal about the role of language in the therapeutic setting, the process of self-discovery, the writing cure, creativity, play, form, ideology, and/or ethics?

As we begin to read texts as various as Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins* or Laurens's *Dans ces bras-là*, we might initially wonder to what extent the therapeutic encounter can be depicted in words: precisely how can the emotional quality of the experience be conveyed, with its transference dimensions, its unknowns, its silences, its traumas, its truths and its discoveries? The therapeutic encounter encompasses the exploration of desire, its discontents, and the ubiquitous experiences of loss and grief. Within the safety of a reliable and predictable setting, experiences of all kinds may be thought about and difficulties potentially worked through. The experience of feeling listened to by another opens up a space in which new possibilities might emerge, where difficult experiences might become

more tolerable. The writers we focus on here find their own means to harness that potential, and by that we think of both the potential of therapy to transform literary language, but also the potential of literature to provide inroads into the therapeutic experience, to stage, reflect and refract trauma, transference, and working through. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub (1995) argued that the putting into words of traumatic experience has a vital healing function (63). Such therapeutic encounters with talking, and with reading and writing, are a frequent source of solace within the texts we discuss, but they also expose presymbolic forms of communication, the unspeakable, and the limitations of therapy and art.

It is our hope that this collection of essays will be the springboard for further collaborations and explorations of the therapeutic encounter, across diverse multimedia and language communities. The process of discovering new works and authors through this project has been immensely satisfying—a process to which we now invite our readers. Our experience of collaborative and collective endeavour, as editors and in a community with our contributors (and with speakers and participants at the December 2017 conference), has been both therapeutic and creative. Together, we have shared a co-created space, which is of course also at the heart of the analytic endeavour.

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CHAPTER 1

RHYMES TO SAY IT: POETIC APPROACHES TO THE THERAPEUTIC ENCOUNTER IN RAYMOND QUENEAU'S *CHÊNE ET CHIEN* AND GLADYS SCHMITT'S *SONNETS FOR AN ANALYST*

MAREN SCHEURER

Introduction

Although most psychotherapies proceed by what Josef Breuer's famous patient Anna O. first called the "talking cure", talking *about* the therapeutic encounter has always been deemed extremely difficult. Sigmund Freud ([1925] 1959) believed that the dialogue arising between patient and therapist would be entirely incomprehensible to an outside observer (41), and Marie Cardinal is not the only writer who has subsequently searched for "*les mots pour le dire*" to describe what happens in the analytic space. The difficulty involved in expressing what exactly happens in one's mind during analysis, or what transpires in the intersubjective relationship between therapist and patient, has led some writers to narrate their experiences not in novelistic or autobiographic prose but in poetry. Anne Sexton, Henry Bauchau, Jack Spicer, or Diane Ackerman, among others, have written poems about their experiences with psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. This chapter is concerned with two such poetic approaches to the therapeutic encounter: Raymond Queneau's *Chêne et chien* (1937) and Gladys Schmitt's *Sonnets for an Analyst* (1973).

The French writer Raymond Queneau (1903-1976), who is probably best known for his novel *Zazie dans le metro* (1959) and the experimental prose of *Exercices de style* (1947), became fascinated with psychology in his youth, and he had read Freud and other psychoanalytic writers long before he briefly joined the Surrealist movement in 1924. He experimented

with dream analysis, attended lectures on psychiatry by Claude, Borel, and Lacan, and started seeing a psychoanalyst in 1933 to deal with his inability to work (Clancier 1994, 15, 21; Velguth 2003, 63). During the treatment, he wrote the six novels of his “autobiographical cycle” and *Chêne et chien* (Velguth 1995, 3). Queneau’s “novel in verse” (Velguth 1995, 4) deals with this therapeutic encounter, and it contains not only a reflection on the relationship with his therapist but also an autobiographical account of his early life and a celebration of his recovery.

In a similar, quasi-psychoanalytic vein, Schmitt’s *Sonnets for an Analyst* work through the author’s life and her relationship with her therapist. Although she is now virtually unknown, the American writer Gladys Schmitt (1909-1972) published short stories and eleven novels alongside devoting her time to setting up the Creative Writing Department at Carnegie Mellon and teaching there for many years (Kelley 2007). *Sonnets for an Analyst* is a collection of 69 poems, addressed to Schmitt’s psychoanalyst Dr. James McLaughlin¹ and reflecting their therapeutic encounters between 1962 and 1971 (Knapp 1983, 338). She had started seeing her therapist after an emotional breakdown (Kelley 2007), having struggled for a long time with major depression and suicidal thoughts over “deep disappointments in love”:

Schmitt’s dark period robbed her of her ability to write, her belief that any man had ever loved her, and her faith in God. Despair, grief, and a wish for suicide animate many of these sonnets, as well as the recognition that she has no one to console her but the analyst who’s helping her—for a fee. (Balée 2015, 171)

She did not publish the poems at the time they were written since she felt “they would not fit in with literature at the time, which centered around free verse”, but her husband released them for publication not long after her death (Kelley 2007).

These two collections of poetry contain highly elaborate and fragmented “narratives” of the patient’s experience in therapy, but, in addition, both Queneau and Schmitt emphasise the creative and, indeed, poetic reconstruction of this experience. While psychoanalysts have frequently voiced their suspicion that the therapeutic dialogue might be more akin to poetry than to straightforward speech, they have seldom inquired why

¹ James McLaughlin (1918-2006) was the first director of the Staunton Clinic for mental health services and helped develop the Pittsburgh Psychoanalytic Institute at Pitt Medical Center (Cleary 2006). His writings were collected in the volume *The Healer’s Bent: Solitude and Dialogue in the Clinical Encounter* (2005).

writers turn to poetry to reflect therapy. Through a comparative reading of Queneau, Schmitt, and psychoanalytic assessments of poetic language in the therapeutic encounter, the aim of this chapter is to explore the theoretical and aesthetic surplus created by poetic form in accounts of psychotherapy. I will begin with a brief survey of some of the links psychoanalysts have identified between poetry and their own work in order to shed light on the pervasive analogy between psychoanalysis and poetry. With these links in mind, I will then turn to Queneau's and Schmitt's texts about the therapeutic process. Through their playful verse, they offer a formal exploration of the therapeutic process, which does not so much suggest an identity between psychoanalysis and poetry but poses their respective instruments as entry points into what lies at the heart of the poetic and the psychoanalytic endeavour.

Psychoanalysis and Poetry

Psychoanalysts have always been fascinated with poetry. For Freud, the poets were fellow psychologists, a source of inspiration and envy. Their access to "profound psychological truth" turned them into the allies of the psychoanalyst, pursuing similar aims albeit with different methods (Phillips 2000, 3-4). Crucially, however, in at least one respect, poetry and psychoanalysis share a method or a medium: language. Both endeavours depend on the powers of language and it can be assumed that they are plagued by similar anxieties about the fallibility of their medium. In analysing psychoanalysts' continued fascination with poetry, Adam Phillips (2000) has poignantly argued that what they seek in poetry is "a counter-force to the fear that language and meaning don't work" (6). In other words, poetry displays linguistic powers that psychoanalysis would gladly appropriate for its own practice.

In much the same hope, presumably, Phillips (1994) himself has described psychoanalysis as "a kind of practical poetry" (xi). Salman Akhtar (2012) has similarly labelled psychotherapy as "two-person poetry" (106). These surprising designations are meant to suggest that psychoanalysis is not just interested or even envious of poetry's powers but that it shares some essential qualities with literary practice and somehow explores them in a more "practical" and dialogic fashion. This analogy between psychoanalysis and poetry pervades psychoanalytic discourse. As we will see, poetry is indeed called up as an ally. "There are many similarities between poetry and psychoanalysis", argue Hamish Canham and Carole Satyamurti (2006):