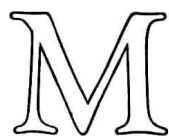


Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis

John Forrester

Fellow of King's College, Cambridge



© John Forrester 1980

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission

First published 1980 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Printed in Great Britain by
Billing and Sons Ltd
Guildford, London, Oxford, Worcester

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Forrester, John

Language and the origins of psychoanalysis

1. Psychoanalysis
2. Psycholinguistics

I. Title

616.8'917

RC606

ISBN 0-333-25946-7

Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis

What I want back is what I was
Before the bed, before the knife,
Before the brooch-pin and the salve .
Fixed me in this parenthesis;
Horses fluent in the wind,
A place, a time gone out of mind.

Sylvia Plath, *The Eye-mote*

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;

wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
– the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids' flutter which says

we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

e. e. cummings

Preface

There is no doubt that this work refers itself to, and refers to, a number of works in a number of genres of psychoanalytic literature. Three works, each of which has proved of invaluable assistance, represent three of these genres: Jones' definitive biography of Freud, Ellenberger's monumental compilation *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, and the exact, methodical and constantly intelligent *The Language of Psychoanalysis* of Laplanche and Pontalis. I have followed the biographical method only in so far as it seemed to me to throw light on the nature or development of the psychoanalytical work that Freud's life represents. The chronological marking and assiduous amassing of historical facts to be found in Ellenberger's work has been of enormous help whenever detailed questions of historical context have seemed to make a significant contribution to the understanding of the conceptual foundations of psychoanalysis: this aspect will be found most prominently displayed in Chapter 1. The working manual that *The Language of Psychoanalysis* embodies has been a continual source of stimulation, as well as putting a brake upon overly speculative interpretations. In so far as the aim of my work is a conceptual reading, rather than a historical account, many of its arguments should be read in parallel with those to be found in Laplanche and Pontalis' book.¹

There also exists a genre of psychoanalytic writings that is unique in character: analyses either of Freud's own dreams, slips etc., or of those case-histories he wrote, undertaken to vindicate, deepen or criticize the exemplification of psychoanalysis that Freud's work represents. While such 'great-man' history is not an isolated phenomenon, in psychoanalytic terms many of these hagiographical works contain arguments of great theoretical interest and importance. The question of the special relationship that every analyst has with Freud, and that every psychoanalytic text bears to those of Freud's, is beyond the scope of this introduction to this thesis. Suffice it to cite the most illuminating discussion of this topic that I know of, that of Wladimir Granoff in *Filiations*, pp. 7–254, who raises the question whether the relation to Freud is not constitutive of psychoanalysis itself.

There are very few accounts of psychoanalysis which take as their starting-point the fact that it is a talking-cure, and that one might expect its theory to deal directly with the importance of language in the course of the cure. The central problem is, as it was for Freud in 1890, to explain 'the power of words'. It will be the set of answers to this question that will interest us; as we shall see, they have implications that permeate all of psychoanalytic theory. But this thesis cannot claim to be without forerunners. There are a number of works that have included a discussion of the exegetical and linguistic character of the science that Freud developed. For example, Suzanne Langer wrote:

The great contribution of Freud to the philosophy of mind has been the realization that human behavior is not only a food-getting strategy, but is also a language; that every *move* is at the same time a *gesture*. Symbolization is both an end and an instrument. (Langer, 1948, p. 41)

Or we may quote Jürgen Habermas:

Initially psychoanalysis appears only as a special form of interpretation. It provides theoretical perspectives and technical rules for the interpretation of symbolic structures. Freud always patterned the interpretation of dreams after the hermeneutic model of philological research. (Habermas, 1968, p. 214)

But this is one of the few works in the English language that takes as its central concern the relations of speech and language with both psychoanalytic theory and therapy, from the metapsychology to the transference.² Indeed, I have sometimes made the decision to expose these linguistic elements in Freud's theory at the expense of other themes that, on the surface, would seem to be of greater importance. At times, then, this book will appear obsessively single-minded in the pursuit of its theme. The extent of this obsession, and the concomitant omission of other elements of psychoanalytic theory, should not lead my reader to the mistaken conclusion that I believe or would have others believe that other themes are of minor importance, that they can always be reinterpreted in the light of a 'linguistic' framework, or that any mention of concepts derived from realms other than the 'linguistic' is of necessity subject to some new linguistic version of a transcendental critique. But I cannot renounce the conviction, many times tested in the course of my attempts to find an 'objective' reading of the texts, that language is the central concern of psychoanalysis.³

Amongst the many people who have helped me, often in silence, detach the ideas that this work expresses, I would like to single out the following for especial thanks: Liz Fee, for the initial stimulus; Karl Figlio, for many interchanges concerning the history of medicine; Mike Gordon, for an initiation into the mysteries of linguistics and artificial languages; André Green, for discussion of and comments on an earlier draft of this work, and for his knowledge of issues in contemporary psychoanalytic theory; Dave Holden, to whose fertile mind I am continually indebted, and for the many stimulating discussions we shared on issues in psychological theory and formal models of the brain; Thomas Kuhn, for his outstanding example as a historian of science and for his critical encouragement; Francis Pettitt, for many reminders of that otherness which his work as an anthropologist focused for me; Denise Riley, for discussions on language, dreams, the ideological function of psychoanalysis and for permission to quote one of her poems; Carl Schorske, for introducing me to the cultural history of Vienna; Martin Thom, with whom I have shared many of the intellectual problems arising out of my attempt to understand the relation between psychoanalysis and language; Nick Totton, who has always opened up for me alternative possibilities; Cathy Urwin, for sharing her insights into language development in children; and Bob Young, for advice and comments on the early stages of this work. The manuscript was impeccably and imperturbably typed by Diane Quarrie.

Finally, I owe a great debt to Jim Hopkins, who read the final drafts with more care, critical attention and sympathy than I could conceivably have expected of him. His thoughtful comments and his attempts to encourage me to formulate many passages more clearly have made the text vastly superior to what it would otherwise have been.

March 1979

JOHN FORRESTER

Acknowledgements

This work has had a long and intricate history, and has been subject to many diverse influences. I would like to thank the following institutions which have made my work possible through their financial support: Princeton University (1970–2); The Department of Education and Science for support in Cambridge (1974–6) and in Vienna (1975); King's College, Cambridge (1976–8); the Leverhulme Trust Fund for awarding me a European Studentship that made it possible for me to work in Paris in 1977–8. I would also like to acknowledge the help I have received from libraries and academic institutions while conducting the research: in Britain, the University Library, Cambridge, and the British Museum; in Vienna, Professor Erna Lesky and the Institut für Geschichte der Medizin, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, the Bibliothek der Universität, Wien; in Paris, the École Normale Supérieure, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bibliothèque de la Musée des Sciences de l'Homme, the Ecole Freudienne, and Professor D. Widlocher and the Bibliothèque de l'Hôpital de la Salpêtrière.

The author and publishers wish to thank the following who have kindly given permission for the use of copyright material: The Hogarth Press Ltd, Sigmund Freud Copyrights Ltd, and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, for quotations from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey; George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd and Liveright Publishing Corporation, for the extracts from *Introductory Lectures in Psycho-Analysis*, and with Basic Books Ltd, for the extracts from *An Interpretation of Dreams*; Ernest Benn Ltd and W. W. Norton and Company Inc, for the extracts from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; The Hogarth Press Ltd and Alfred A. Knopf Inc, for the extract from *Moses and Monotheism*; The Hogarth Press Ltd and Basic Books Inc, for the extracts from *Studies on Hysteria*, *Project* (in *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis*), *Three Essays on Sexuality*, *Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud* (5 vols), and *A Psycho-analytic Dialogue* (not included in the Standard Edition); The Hogarth Press Ltd and Liveright

Publishing Corporation, for the extracts from *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, and *Group Psychology*; The Hogarth Press Ltd and W. W. Norton & Company Inc, for the extracts from *Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, *The Ego and the Id*, and *The Question of Lay Analysis*; The Hogarth Press Ltd and Routledge & Kegan Paul, in conjunction with Princeton University Press, for the excerpts from *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung*, edited by William McGuire, translated by Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull (American Bollingen Series XCIV), copyright © 1974 by Sigmund Freud Copyrights Ltd and Erbenngemeinschaft Professor Dr C. G. Jung; Routledge & Kegan Paul and W. W. Norton & Company Inc, for the extracts from *Leonardo da Vinci*; the British Psychological Society, for the extracts from the article 'The Theory of Symbolism' by Ernest Jones published in *British Journal of Psychology* (1916); Granada Publishing Ltd and Liveright Publishing Corporation, for the poem 'since feeling is first' by e. e. cummings; The Hogarth Press Ltd, on behalf of Katherine Jones, for the extracts from *Free Associations* by Ernest Jones; Olwyn Hughes on behalf of Ted Hughes, and Alfred A. Knopf Inc, for the extract from 'The Eye-mote' in *The Colossus and Other Poems* by Sylvia Plath; International Universities Press Inc, for the quotations from the Minutes of Vienna Psycho-analytic Society, vols I–IV, translated by N. Nunberg and edited by Herman N. Nunberg and Ernst Federn; and Warner Bros Music Ltd, for the extract from the song 'Gates of Eden' by Bob Dylan.

Notes on Texts and Translations

1. The English text of Freud that I have cited is, of course, the exemplary and extraordinary *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (1953–74). My debt to the erudition, exactitude and uniform care displayed on every page of its twenty four volumes is as incalculable as every other reader of Freud's now is, whether he is read in English, French or German. In a work of the sort I have written, I can safely say that any fidelity to Freud's thought owes as much to the Editors of the *Standard Edition* as to my own attempts to maintain standards of rigour and scholarship.

2. Where translations of works cited in this book exist – and I am aware of their existence – I have given references to the translated works, rather than to the original, except where the reference in question explicitly cites the original text. If no translation exists, the translation that I give is my own. I have checked the translations of all passages cited from the *Standard Edition*, using both the *Gesammelte Werke* and the *Studienausgabe* edition, which benefits from the accurate readings of Freud's text established by the *Standard Edition*. Where I have modified the translation, a corresponding note will be found. Perhaps I should make clear that, where I have modified the translation, I do not necessarily believe that my modified text is a more accurate or better translation than that to be found in the *Standard Edition*, although there are instances where I believe this to be so. In many passages my modifications are alternative translations, which are hoped to give at least as faithful or as treacherous a reading in SE, but which attempt to bring out a certain nuance that was not quite captured by the editors. In modifications such as these, I have almost certainly lost another nuance, this latter often being the reason why the SE translation was chosen. My modified translations are thus in the service of a particular reading of Freud to be found in this work. I hope that my

reader will judge that the gain in one dimension of meaning will compensate for the inevitable loss in another. In self-defence, I can only reflect that to be conscious of the choice of readings that translation always involves is perhaps a protection against too high an importance being attached to any given word or words.

List of Abbreviations

<i>SE</i>	<i>The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud</i>
<i>Origins</i>	Freud, <i>The Origins of Psychoanalysis. Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887–1902</i> (The reference is given to SE only, when the passage in question is reproduced there.)
<i>Minutes</i>	<i>Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society</i> , vols I–IV, M. Nunberg (trans.), Herman Nunberg and Ernst Federn (eds) (New York: International Universities Press, 1962–76).
<i>Jones</i>	Ernest Jones, <i>Sigmund Freud Life and Work</i> , 3 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953–7). (I have employed the second edition of vol. I, published in 1954; references to the second and third volumes are to the first editions).
<i>SP</i>	Abraham, <i>Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis</i> .
<i>CP</i>	Abraham, <i>Clinical Papers and Essays on Psychoanalysis</i> .
<i>C.</i>	Ferenczi, <i>First Contributions to Psychoanalysis</i> .
<i>F.C.</i>	Ferenczi, <i>Further Contributions to Psychoanalysis</i> .
<i>Fin.</i>	Ferenczi, <i>Final Contributions to Psychoanalysis</i> .
<i>CW</i>	Jung, <i>The Collected Works of C. G. Jung</i> .
<i>E</i>	Lacan, <i>Ecrits</i> (The first number following E gives page numbers in the French edition, the second in the English translation, <i>Ecrits: A Selection</i> .)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>Notes on Texts and Translations</i>	xiv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvi
1 Aphasia, Hysteria and the Talking Cure	1
Hysteria	8
Aphasia	14
The Theory of the Talking-Cure	29
2 The Metapsychology of Speech	40
Constructing the Machine	40
The Machine Speaks	49
3 Symbolism	63
Symbolism in Hysteria	66
Symbolism in <i>The Interpretation of Dreams</i> (1900)	70
Universal Symbolism: Approaches to the Problem (1905–10)	76
The History of the Oedipus Complex, 1897–1910	84
Myth and Dream, 1910–11	96
Jung's Approach to the Symbol	102
Freud's Theory of Symbolism	111
The Debate Closes: Jones' Theory of Symbolism	122
4 Grammar	131
Symptom as Talk: Talk as Symptom::Symptom as Symptom: Talk as Talk	131
The Propositional Structure of Neurosis	141
5 Philology	166
Philology in the Nineteenth Century	168
A Question of Nerve: Leonardo, Moses and the Problem of Tradition	180
The Specimen Theme of Psychoanalysis	188
Who were the Philologists?	193
Conclusion	211

<i>Notes</i>	213
<i>Bibliography</i>	256
<i>Index</i>	282

1 Aphasia, Hysteria and the Talking Cure

At dawn my lover
Comes to me
And tells me of her dreams
With no attempts
To shovel the glimpse
Into the ditch of what each one means
At times I think
There are no words
But these to tell what's true
And there are
No truths outside
The gates of Eden

Bob Dylan

Psychoanalysis is the theory of a therapy. The therapy, in its purest and most 'original' form, consists of a 'talking cure'.¹ What, we may start by asking, could comprise a therapy in the interchange of words? The cure Freud devised was more than a replacement for the unsatisfactory methods of electrotherapy and hydrotherapy, or the sanatorium cures of turn of the century novels. (Cf. Steiner, 1964.) He unseated physicalism² from its pride of place in the treatment of nervous illness and located all therapeutic power in the doctor–patient couple. In order to understand the relation between therapeutic and theoretical discourse, we must find out how it became clear to Freud that the therapeutic situation created the conditions for a cure of a major disease, and hence how Freud located all the necessary conditions for this cure in the necessary conditions of language.

In order to construct the theory, Freud located all his explanatory entities in the psyche; he described a mental apparatus, which we will examine in Chapter 2, for which the 'world' is represented by a series of varying displacements of quantity. Even the transference is the transfer

from what is peripheral to what is central in that apparatus.³ But it would be a mistake to localize the psyche in a body, to materialize it too readily. If we take Freud's favourite science of archaeology as the model through which the psyche can be understood, we see very clearly the way in which a science of the psyche can be practised independently of definite relations to the body. What is required in archaeology is not a theory of the relation of mind to matter – though we would not deny that this would be very useful – but rather a theory of the productions of signs, a theory of representation. It is of great moment both for a philosophy of the human sciences and for a theory of man that the signs of man's death – in particular tumuli and burial mounds – are amongst the first signs to engage the archaeologist. Signs are first and foremost signs of absence and death. If psychoanalysis is an archaeology of the living, it is no less true that its central preoccupation is absence and its signs, now complicated by the dimension of time, so that not only do signs witness absence, but also witness the change of such absence over time – dialectics. The effects of talk – such is the cure – and the theory of talk – such might be expected of the theory of psychoanalysis.

When we speak of language we may be taken in many different senses; here I wish to follow Freud and start with the immediate language of psychoanalysis: the monologue of the patient. The first such monologue was that of Anna O., Josef Breuer's patient of 1881, who insisted on his hearing her out. Breuer, as family physician and personal friend, followed her lead and began to build a set of appropriate structures for understanding her talk. He began collaborating with his young friend Freud and together they came to certain conclusions as to the nature of the cure which Anna O. had created:

each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words. (Breuer and Freud (1893a) SE II 6)

To the two positivistic physicians, well schooled in the fervent reductionism of the Vienna Medical School⁴, both master-physiologists and pathologists⁵, such a phenomenon as the talking-cure was a great surprise. They met its mystery with the theory-construction of their academic masters: the neurophysiology of the brain was never far from their minds as they contemplated the miracles their patients were