

Reading Childishly?

*Learning to Read Modernism: Reading the Child Reader in Modernism and
Psychoanalysis*

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Abstract: This article focuses on portraits of childhood reading in writings by Sigmund Freud, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. The figure of the child reader, I suggest, functions as one of what Charles Altieri has described as the ‘projected readers’ of modernism – the ‘ideal’ readers imagined in and constructed by modernist texts, as a way of modelling how we might respond imaginatively and psychologically to this difficult form of writing. But there is, of course, a fundamental disavowal at work in such representations of the child reader in works that are evidently not written for children to read. We, as adult readers, are solicited to identify as a child. What happens, I ask, when we do so? What is it that we are being encouraged to identify with? Tracing the figure of the child reader through debates about difficulty, high and low culture, maturity and infantilism, in criticism and psychoanalysis, I suggest that this child reader is, crucially, an overdetermined figure. Modernism reminds us of a vestigial child in us all, but this is *not* an exclusionary regression imposed upon an implicitly inadequate reader by the highbrow text. Neither is this simply a fantasy of naïve consolation (the child as pure identification). The child reader, I argue, opens up the vexed *psychic* life of reading modernism.

Keywords: Woolf; Freud; Proust; childhood; modernism; psychoanalysis; reading; difficulty; maturity

Though the children were no longer beaten in the higher forms at school, the influence of such occasions was replaced and more than replaced by the effects of reading, of which the importance was soon to be felt. In my patients' *milieu* it was almost always the same books whose contents gave a new stimulus to the beating-phantasies: [...] the so-called '*Bibliothèque rose*', *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, etc. The child began to compete with these works of fiction by producing its own phantasies and by constructing a wealth of situations, and even whole institutions, in which children were beaten or were punished and disciplined in some other way because of their naughtiness and bad behaviour.¹

Sigmund Freud, "A Child is Being Beaten": A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions' (1919)

'Now I will go to the bathroom [...] I will let the Russian Empress's veil flow about my shoulders. The diamonds of the Imperial crown blaze on my forehead. I hear the roar of the hostile mob as I step out on to the balcony. Now I dry my hands, vigorously, so that Miss, whose name I forget, cannot suspect that I am waving my fist at an infuriated mob. "I am your Empress, people." [...]

'But this is a thin dream. This is a papery tree. Miss Lambert blows it down. Even the sight of her vanishing down the corridor blows it to atoms. It is not solid; it gives me no satisfaction – this Empress dream. It leaves me, now that it has fallen, here in the passage rather shivering. Things seem paler. I will go now into the library and take out some book, and read and look; and read again and look. Here is a poem about a hedge. I will wander down it and pick flowers, green cowbind and the moonlight-coloured May, wild roses and ivy serpentine. I will clasp them in my hands and lay them on the desk's shiny surface. I will sit by the river's trembling edge and look at the water-lilies, broad and bright, which lit the oak that overhung the hedge with moonlight beams of their own watery light. I will pick flowers; I will bind flowers in one garland and clasp them and present them – Oh! to whom? There is some check in the flow of my being; a deep stream presses on some obstacle; it jerks; it tugs; some knot in the centre resists. Oh, this is pain, this is anguish! I faint, I fail. Now my body thaws; I am unsealed, I am incandescent. Now the stream pours in a deep tide fertilising, opening the shut, forcing the tight-folded, flooding free. To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them – Oh! to whom?'²

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (1931)

I felt myself unpleasantly struck by an impression [...] a very deeply buried impression [...] in which memories of childhood and family were tenderly intermingled [...]. My first reaction had been to ask myself, angrily, who this stranger was who was coming to trouble me. The stranger was none other than myself, the child I had been at that time, brought to life within me by the book, which knowing nothing of me except this child had instantly summoned him to its presence, wanting to be seen only by his eyes, to be loved only by his heart, to speak only to him.³

Marcel Proust, *Time Regained* (1927)

In I. A. Richards' 1924 study, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, there is a strange moment. Seeking to elaborate a psychological theory of aesthetic value,

Richards pauses to consider the recent hullabaloo surrounding the psychoanalytic description of children:

With the exception of some parents and nursemaids we have lately all been aghast at the value judgements of infants. Their impulses, their desires, their preferences, the things which they esteem, as displayed by the psycho-analysts, strike even those whose attitude towards humanity is not idealistic with some dismay. Even when the stories are duly discounted, enough which is verifiable remains for *infans polypervers* to present a truly impressive figure dominating all future psychological inquiry into value.⁴

The ‘polymorphously perverse’ infant first described in Sigmund Freud’s 1905 text, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, appears as an affront. And yet, Richards reluctantly concedes, it is nonetheless an ambivalently ‘impressive figure’, central to the question of how we – as adults – attribute value to art. This infant, whose unruly ‘impulses’ and ‘desires’ are free to range equally over any number of different objects and aims, obtaining pleasure in all directions, lies at the core of the adult reader’s aesthetic ‘preferences’, threatening to undermine them.

If Richards betrays an unmistakable anxiety concerning the implications of ‘the psycho-analysts’ discoveries, this anxiety would be forthrightly set aside by the Leavisite literary criticism that would put modernism at the heart of institutionalised literary study. For F. R. Leavis ‘maturity’ was key.⁵ Modernist literature, especially, was valorised for the demand it made upon its readers – a demand that they grow up, ‘respond as an adult’, as Q. D. Leavis put it, and join that ‘very small minority’ that F. R. Leavis described as the ‘critically adult public’.⁶ As Ben Knights has argued, throughout the 1920s and 1930s the ‘Scrutineers’ worked hard to establish the study of English literature as a means of warding off ‘Peter Pan-like’ regressive wishes in the reader; they championed a rhetoric of mature masculinity – an idea that by reading difficult texts, especially difficult modernist texts, the reader might attain to a critical maturity, leaving behind their fellow citizens to wallow, childlike, in the infantile satisfactions of popular culture.⁷

Freud's '*infans polypervers*', however, lurking in Richards' foundational text, challenges the notion that childhood can be consigned to an infancy conceived of as a developmental stage, a period of time, to be outgrown and left behind on the onward march to adulthood. Despite Richards' horror at the infant's untamed 'impulses' and 'desires', the importance of this figure for the 'value judgements' of adult readers lies not so much in the scandalous 'perversity' of infantile sexuality as in the challenge that it presents to the developmental, linear account of childhood. An 'aptitude' or 'disposition' to a 'polymorphously perverse' sexuality in childhood, Freud wrote in the *Three Essays*, is a 'general and fundamental human characteristic' an 'original basis' from which we all start out, and which persists unconsciously in spite of (and in conflict with) our painfully and precariously achieved adult identities.⁸ Childhood persists. A vestigial layer in the psyche, it endures as part of an unconscious life that always tugs against linear accounts of identity. The fact of a pervasive 'infantile amnesia, which turns everyone's childhood into something like a prehistoric epoch and conceals from him the beginnings of his own sexual life' was, for Freud, evidence of a split, of an unconscious yet stubbornly persistent part of our minds which another part of the mind, with equal stubbornness, refuses to acknowledge.⁹ In spite of this 'peculiar amnesia', it was clear to Freud that 'the very same impressions that we have forgotten have none the less left the deepest traces on our minds and have had a determining effect upon the whole of our later development.'¹⁰ The child doesn't, as Juliet Mitchell put it, simply 'grow [...] out of' his or her polymorphous sexuality; the culture demands that the child reject their 'multifarious and multitudinous' desires, but at an unconscious level they remain.¹¹ Childhood, as Jacqueline Rose wrote in *The Case of Peter Pan; or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 'is something in which we continue to be implicated and which is never simply left behind.'¹² Childhood returns, thwarting the linear account of modernism as a path towards maturity. A vestigial child, one might argue, remains in every adult reader.

Bearing this in mind, in this essay I want to focus on three portraits of childhood reading from Sigmund Freud, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. Both Proust and Woolf, authors of some of modernism's most notoriously difficult prose, offer us the childhood scene of reading as a kind of primal scene, invoking maternal bedtime stories with nostalgia, while also charting the pleasures and psychic perils of solitary childhood reading. While Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) describes luscious memories of childhood reading, Woolf, across her writings – from the portrait of Mrs Ramsay reading Grimm's fairy tales to James in *To The Lighthouse* (1927), to Rhoda reading Shelley at boarding school in *The Waves* (1931) – explores both the pleasures and the psychic difficulties of the child's encounters with books. This figure of the child reader in modernist literature, I suggest, functions as one of what Charles Altieri has described as the 'projected readers' of modernism – the 'ideal' readers imagined in and constructed by modernist texts, as a way of modelling how we might respond imaginatively and psychologically to this difficult form of writing.¹³ But there is, of course, a fundamental disavowal at work in such representations of the child reader in works that are evidently not written for children to read. Although there is a little-known history of modernist writing *for* children and of modernist writing *by* children, the child does not read *The Waves* or *À la recherche*.¹⁴ We, as adult readers, are solicited to identify as a child. What happens, when we do so? What is it about the child reader that we are being encouraged to identify with?

On the one hand, the image of the child reader in modernist literature invokes a set of debates concerning difficulty, high and low culture, cultural 'maturity' and readerly 'infantilism'. Difficulty, abstraction and obscurity might be said to infantilise the reader, who is left childlike helpless, in his or her attempts to unravel the modernist text. For the Leavises, modernism served as a kind of initiation into critical 'maturity', an inoculation against the regressive perils of popular culture. Although

modernist difficulty might at first *feel* infantilising, this was a reflection of the true infantilism wrought upon modern readers by the pernicious regressive influence of modernity. Modernism issued its readers with a demand to ‘grow up’, to confront this feeling of infantilism and, crucially, to master it. Modernism, in this account, echoed Q.D. Leavis’s exhortation to ‘respond as an adult’, or it condemned the reader’s failure to do so, consigning that reader to the Neverland of mass culture.¹⁵ It is this aspect of the Leavisite discourse of modernism as a triumph over regression that is carried over into the related, but different, critical account of modernism as an elitist cultural form, written with the sole purpose of infantilising the common reader. Perhaps the most vociferous advocate of this critique is John Carey, who, writing in 1992, denounced modernism as an elitist project of obfuscating exclusion that condemns the common reader to cultural infancy.¹⁶ Modernism may inspire feelings of childishness, but both the Leavises and Carey understand this as a negative form of regression: both insist upon modernism’s conception of itself as a path out of the childhood of popular culture and into cultural maturity. While for the Leavises this road to maturity constitutes the heroic nature of modernist writing, for Carey it signifies modernism’s elitist betrayal of the common reader.

And yet, as I. A Richards’ anxious account suggests, the psychoanalytic description of childhood upsets the very idea of maturity as a pathway out of an infancy that might be left behind, banished safely to the past. And the Scrutineers’ insistence on ‘maturity’ ignored the modernist fascination with the child reader – a fascination which shared with psychoanalysis its non-linear understanding of the relationship between childhood and adulthood. Like Freud, both Woolf and Proust insist upon the stubborn persistence of childhood in the mind of the adult. As Hugh Haughton has noted, Virginia Woolf’s 1939 essay on Lewis Carroll suggested that ‘the two *Alices* are not books for children; they are the only books in which we become children.’¹⁷ ‘President Wilson, Queen Victoria,

the *Times* leader writer, the late Lord Salisbury – it does not matter how old, how important or how insignificant you are, you become a child again.’¹⁸ Echoing Freud, Woolf describes how ‘Wisps of childhood persist when the boy or girl is a grown man or woman.’ ‘Childhood returns sometimes day by day, more often by night’ – it returns in the ‘world of sleep’ and ‘dreams’ that is *Alice in Wonderland*.¹⁹ But to ‘become a child again’ is not to be reconciled with a world of certainty – it is ‘to find everything so strange that nothing is surprising’, to ‘see the world upside down’, to ‘descend’ down ‘groves of pure nonsense’.²⁰ Reading *Alice* sounds like a strange experience – in fact, it sounds like reading a modernist novel.

It is in this sense that, by offering us their portraits of child readers, Woolf and Proust too ask us to ‘become children’ again. Soliciting the adult reader of a self-consciously difficult form of writing to identify as a child, even to ‘become a child again’, this figure puts the brakes on the idea of modernist difficulty as something which can be mastered as part of an onward march to adulthood. Modernist difficulty reminds us of a vestigial child in us all, but this infantilisation of the reader is *not* an exclusionary regression imposed upon an implicitly inadequate reader by an elitist highbrow text – nor is it simply a demand that the reader ‘grow up’ and transcend the regressive tendencies of mass culture.

Another way of reading these depictions of childhood reading might be to attend to the ways in which they invoke a nostalgic longing for a form of respite from precisely these difficulties of modernism. Both the image of mother and child reading, and the scene of the child’s pleasure in solitary reading, invoke forms of pleasure and identification that are usually considered antithetical to modernist forms of estrangement. In this argument the child reader is offered up as a romantic ideal – a figure for the consolatory re-enchantment of the modern world. The child readers in Woolf and Proust *do* gesture towards a consolatory urge in modernist writing; but still, this is no simple fantasy of naïve re-enchantment.

The child reader is an *overdetermined* figure in literary modernism – a figure that raises questions about both the famous difficulty of modernism, and the idea of modernism as a kind of re-enchantment, redemption or consolation. In *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, T. J. Clark argued that:

Modernism had two great wishes. It wanted its audience to be led toward a recognition of the social reality of the sign (away from the comforts of narrative and illusionism, was the claim); but equally it dreamed of turning the sign back to a bedrock of World/Nature/Sensation/Subjectivity which the to and fro of capitalism had all but destroyed.²¹

Clark bears witness to a ‘fitful imagining [...] a desperate, marvellous shuttling between a fantasy of cold artifice and an answering one of immediacy and being-in-the-world.’²² It is this tension that is captured in the overdetermined image of the child reader. The child reader in Woolf and Proust both gestures to an urge towards re-enchantment, consolation, identification – ‘being-in-the-world’, as Clark puts it – and at the same time founders or gets lost in something like a moment of self-estrangement – something which gestures towards Bertolt Brecht’s ‘alienation effect’ or Theodor Adorno’s idea of the resistant artwork, but which puts the psychic colouring back into what frequently appears in critical theory as a disembodied, disinterested, overly-rationalised process of estrangement.²³

Above all, what is crucial to the modernist depiction of childhood reading is the way that it brings into focus the question of the adult reader’s psychic life – a psychic life that is disavowed, repudiated, in the insistence on the reader’s mature and rational mastery of the text, and which is equally lost in many of the overly-rationalised accounts of modernist estrangement. The child reader in modernism, like Freud’s ‘*infans polypervers*’, troubles the linear narrative of modernism as a path to maturity, foregrounding and staging the complex cyclical psychic temporality – a layered, recursive, retroactive temporality of imbrication, simultaneity and conflict – at work when we are engulfed within these texts.

The British Psycho-Analytical Society and the Child Reader

Modernist writers were famously hostile to psychoanalysis, and, crucially, this hostility was rooted in a debate about reading. ‘Our complaint is rather that the new key is a patent key that opens every door,’ wrote Virginia Woolf; ‘It simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches.’²⁴ In this 1920 review of what – despite not, at this stage, having read any Freud – she called ‘Freudian Fiction’, Woolf complained of ‘the very numerous progeny of Dr Freud’; ‘all the characters have become cases,’ and ‘We,’ the readers ‘cannot help adopting the professional manner of a doctor intent upon his diagnosis.’²⁵ Like James Joyce, who warned the readers of *Finnegans Wake* against becoming ‘yung and easily freudened’ or making ‘freudful mistake[s]’, Woolf anticipates what Shoshana Felman would describe as a master/slave relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, in which literature, ‘considered as a body of *language* to be *interpreted*’ is subordinated to psychoanalysis, which is ‘considered as a body of *knowledge*, whose competence is called upon to interpret.’²⁶ In this ‘vulgar’ form of psychoanalytic reading both literature and psychoanalysis are travestied by the insistence on the reduction of all ambiguity and overdetermination to one, literal meaning.²⁷ Freud, of course, carefully distinguished his method of dream interpretation from what he described as that ‘popular decoding method which translates any given piece of a dream’s content by a fixed key.’²⁸ Freud’s elaboration of the dream work and his method of free association insist upon the overdetermination of meaning, not on its reduction.

Modernist antipathy towards ‘Dr Freud’, however, was based in a misunderstanding of psychoanalysis as a vulgar and symptomatic approach not only to texts, but also to readers. For the art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and for Q. D. Leavis too, psychoanalysis was useful only insofar as it

provided a language for describing the fantasy life of the infantilised and enslaved female readers of bestsellers and romances. For Fry and Bell, ‘Dr Freud’s’ theory of wish-fulfilment provided a perfect account of ‘papers like the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* [...] which supply every day their pittance of imagined romantic love to hungry girl clerks and housemaids.’²⁹ Leavis, on the other hand, suggested that only ‘a psycho-analyst’ could explain the ways in which popular fiction feeds the ‘starved desires of the vast bulk of the public.’³⁰ And yet the debate about literacy, about high and low culture, maturity and infantilism, figured not just within modernist culture and literary criticism, but also inside the British psychoanalytic community of the 1920s and 1930s, where the figure of the child reader was crucial in thinking about the peculiar psychic vicissitudes of reading difficult books.

In March 1930 the British Psycho-Analytical Society gathered to discuss the unconscious life of reading. First to present was James Strachey, Freud’s chief translator for the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press and a key figure in the intellectual cross-pollination between ‘Bloomsbury’ modernism and psychoanalysis; the audience included Ernest Jones, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and Virginia Woolf’s brother and sister-in-law, the psychoanalysts Adrian and Karin Stephen.³¹ Strachey’s paper, published as ‘Some Unconscious Factors in Reading’, traced adult inhibitions in reading back to early childhood.³² Keen to stress the ways in which childhood difficulties in learning to read persist into adult life, Strachey illustrated his paper with examples of the struggles with reading that besieged both his patients and ‘approximately normal people’ (Strachey, p. 323). One patient had ‘the most terrible difficulties’:

He would read with a pencil in his hand, and after going through each page with the utmost care and attention, and after convincing himself that he had understood it, he would put a tick at the bottom. He would then go through it again ‘to confirm it’ and put a cross stroke through the tail of the tick. [...] Sometimes each paragraph had to have its tick, and sometimes each sentence. If things were going badly [...] each separate word was treated in the same way. (Strachey, p. 323)

‘But,’ Strachey insisted, ‘this is only an exaggerated example of a very common phenomenon.’ Offering an example from a ‘special case’ – one perhaps more familiar to Bloomsbury-based writers and translators of psychoanalysis – Strachey described another ‘patient’, ‘whose business it was to read proofs, and who was perpetually haunted by the feeling of having “missed” some misprint of a disastrous sort, and was thus obliged to go through the galleys over and over again’ (Strachey, p. 323). These sketches, of vexed, anxious struggles with literary texts, read like familiar scenes to the reader of modernism.

For Strachey, reading these difficult texts makes children of us – not only by recalling the stumbling blocks of early oral lessons in reading, but also by calling up unconscious childhood fantasies. Following on from Strachey’s paper, Barbara Low (a schoolteacher, psychoanalyst, and friend of D. H. Lawrence), presented a paper in which she too traced inhibitions and difficulties in reading to early childhood.³³ For these Bloomsbury and modernist-linked psychoanalysts, the child was crucial in understanding the psychic vicissitudes of reading. And, for Strachey in particular, the child was also crucial in thinking specifically about the psychic vicissitudes of reading *modernism* in an era of mass consumption.

Beginning, in typically modernist fashion, with the idea of literacy as a characteristic that distinguishes ‘the more advanced forms of civilization from the primitive’, Strachey remarked on the practice of measuring the ‘relative degree of civilization in different countries from the percentage of illiterates among their inhabitants’ (Strachey, p. 322). But he nonetheless also underscored the peculiarly modern nature of the mass-literacy ideal: ‘Indeed,’ Strachey commented, injecting a satirical note, ‘until the last fifty years, even in the most civilized communities these accomplishments have been restricted to an extremely limited number of individuals’ (Strachey, p. 322). Gesturing to the boom in literacy in the aftermath of the 1870 Elementary Education Act, Strachey may also have been understood to be referring to subsequent education developments, including the 1918

Education Act's raise in the minimum school-leaving age from ten to fourteen, the rise of extramural study in working men's (and women's) colleges such as the London Working Men's College and Morley College, the institution of the Worker's Educational Association, and the proliferation of the University Extension Movement.³⁴ While a number of the British Psycho-Analytical Society were directly involved in children's education (Susan Isaacs, Barbara Low, Nina Searl, Ella Sharpe, to name just a few), Adrian Stephen had taught at both the London Working Men's College and Morley College (his sister, Virginia Woolf, also taught at Morley from 1905 to 1907).³⁵ Gesturing to this context, then — one of radical upheaval in mass literacy — Strachey proposed to trace the psychic importance of reading in the 'economics of the mind of modern man' (Strachey, p. 322). Setting his essay up as a pointedly *modern* intervention into debates concerning mass literacy in relationship to high cultural ideals of 'civilization', Strachey insists on the infantile unconscious roots of the modern reading experience.

It would be easy to read this paper, with its opening references to the 'primitive' and 'semi-educated,' as a typical and straightforward repetition of a snobbish highbrow attitude to the childish reader of mass culture, which insists upon the mature and civilising virtues of modernist difficulty in the face of the infantilising forces of popular culture. (Strachey, p. 322). And yet, another reading suggests that Strachey is satirising this binary approach to culture and therefore rendering it unstable. Mary Jacobus has written of Strachey's essay as a satirical send-up of the 'gullible psychoanalytic reader'.³⁶ It is also, I want to argue, a send-up of, and a riposte to, some of Strachey's highbrow modernist friends — those who, overly anxious to insist upon a distinction between the infantile consumer and the mature reader of high modernism, rejected psychoanalysis precisely on account of its interest in the unconscious infantile roots of the reading experience. What is of significance here is that, by intertwining a distinctly modernist anxiety about 'civilization' and primitivism, maturity and infantilism, with contemporary

psychoanalytic debates about the unconscious life of reading, Strachey offers a distinctive refiguration of modernist difficulty as a form of *psychic* difficulty.

Summoning the metaphors that we use to describe reading, Strachey emphasises our tendency to ‘speak of a “voracious reader” or of “an omnivorous reader”; of “an unwholesome book” or of “a stodgy book” [...] of finding a book “indigestible”, or of “devouring” its pages’ (Strachey, p. 324). The ‘peculiar appearance of intense and continuous absorption in a person immersed in a book,’ he adds, ‘definitely remind one of the behaviour of an infant enjoying its meal’ (Strachey, p. 325). This form of infantile oral satiation is characteristic of our relationships to popular forms of culture:

The blissful absorption, the smooth, uninterrupted enjoyment, that characterize the mental states of the novel-reader, the cinema-goer, the wireless-listener and the rest, suggest, of course, that their nourishment is liquid and that they are sucking it in. (Strachey, p. 325)

‘But’, Strachey continues, ‘all reading, alas, is not of this nature’: ‘There are the other books – the ones that we have to get our teeth into and chew up before we can digest them’ (Strachey, pp. 325-6).

Distinguishing between forms of popular culture that we can ‘suck down’ contentedly like baby milk (novels, the cinema and the wireless) and those ‘other books’ (read: high modernism) that are harder to digest, Strachey proposes a division between two attitudes corresponding to two infantile oral phases: a pre-ambivalent phase where everything goes ‘smoothly and easily, and an ambivalent one where difficulties arise at every step’ (Strachey, p. 326). For Strachey here, interest in popular culture is driven by pre-ambivalent (loving, feeding, consuming) infantile oral fantasies, while difficult highbrow books (one of his examples is Bertrand Russell) tend to push us back into the ambivalent (destructive, cannibalistic, paranoid) infantile oral fantasies. When, as adults, we struggle with a difficult text we are returned to a vexed scene of infantile struggle in which we laboured to mouth the words on the page out loud.

Describing this ambivalent childish relationship to difficult highbrow texts, Strachey stresses the fraught material and physiological struggle with language, and roots it in the child's struggle with words. This early struggle to articulate – with its necessary 'movements of the lips, tongue, throat, jaw-muscles and teeth' – also has an intimate psychological connection to childish fantasies of devouring:

Each word is then felt as an enemy that is being bitten up, and, further, for that very reason, as an enemy that may in its turn become threatening and dangerous to the reader. It seems to be an uneasy doubt as to whether this enemy has *really* been disposed of, or whether he is not lurking somewhere, overlooked between the lines perhaps, or missed by some other mistake, that causes the obsessional reader to turn back, to read and re-read, to read each word aloud, to fix each word with a tick, and yet never to be reassured. (Strachey, p. 327)

Besieged by the projection of his own destructive impulses into fantasies of the vengeance of the body of the text, this paranoid infantilised reader becomes an intriguing model for the reader of literary modernism. This description of the vexed, fraught, ambivalent, and yet nonetheless intimate relationship to those 'other books' does sound a great deal like many a reader's experiences with the most difficult of modernist texts. And yet, in an important way, Strachey troubles the too easy polar distinction between the infantilised consumer of popular culture, and the mature reader of high modernism. This distinction breaks down. Strachey reaches his satirical crescendo when, evoking Leopold Bloom's reading of *Titbits* on the toilet in *Ulysses*, he proposes that all reading, *high or low*, is, symbolically, a form of coprophagy – eating the author's excrement (Strachey, pp. 328-9). It is not only the consumer of popular culture that is infantilised here – while the consumer of detective novels and romances sucks down their material like an infant enjoying its meal, the reader of those 'other books' is returned to a troubled scene of childhood difficulty. Modernism here – not simply popular culture – becomes, quite literally, infantilising. But, rather than appearing merely as a castigation of an implicitly inadequate reader, the idea of 'infantilisation' here opens up a more interesting way of thinking about

the child reader in modernism. By insisting on the fraught unconscious life of the child reader and, crucially, on the unconscious persistence of that child in the mind of the adult reader, Strachey opens up the question of the psychic difficulty of reading modernism. It is this question of the unconscious life of reading, all too frequently occluded in the vision of the mature masterful modernist reader, that we find in Freud's, Woolf's and Proust's child readers.

Modernism's Child Reader

Traditionally, the image of the child reader invokes pure, uninhibited identification, utter suspension of disbelief – which is why the image seems so out of place within these difficult modernist texts. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the short essay 'On Dreams', Freud described his eight-year-old son, 'deep in a book of legends about the Greek heroes'; that night he dreamt 'he was driving in a chariot with Achilles and that Diomedes was the charioteer.' 'It was easy to see,' concludes Freud, 'that he had taken the heroes as his models and was sorry not to be living in their days.'³⁷ In his 1908 essay 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', Freud suggested that reading might offer us a shortcut back to childhood. Subscribing to an initial 'distinction' between two types of culture, Freud put aside 'the writers [*Dichter*] most highly esteemed by the critics', choosing instead to stick with the 'less pretentious authors' (in the German, *anspruchloseren*, 'undemanding' or 'simple', *Erzähler*, 'storytellers') 'of novels, romances and short stories, who nevertheless have the widest and most eager circle of readers of both sexes.'³⁸ Put very simply, Freud suggested that, by identifying with the hero of such stories, the reader is able to find a route back to childish indulgence in a wish-fulfilment that bolsters the ego and satisfies desires thwarted in the real world. Reading becomes a means of

bolstering ‘His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story.’³⁹

Such a form of childish identification seems at odds with most readers’ experiences of modernism – which tends to block traditional forms of identification. Writing on the figure of the child in modernism, Daniela Caselli has drawn attention to the ways in which ‘*the*’ child is summoned as an idealised figure of pure identification, unperturbed by the ‘estranging project of literary modernism.’⁴⁰ Caselli describes the modernist child as a figure in whom we imagine a fleeting ‘respite’ from the linguistic instabilities of modernism.⁴¹ In the child we find a momentary ‘shift from modernism’ – ‘understood here as a theory and practice of the split self’, as the foregrounding of linguistic and ontological uncertainty, as a literary form which, through formal difficulty, startles and resists its readers – to an idealised realism in which language is imagined as a transparent window onto the objects of the real world.⁴² In *The Case of Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose described the realist ideal of children’s fiction, which aims at ‘reduc[ing] to an absolute minimum our awareness of the language in which a story is written in order that we will take it for real’; ‘the child,’ writes Caselli, drawing on this point, ‘*is* identification’.⁴³ ‘The child’, in this sense, is always also a figure for the reader. And yet, romanticised as a figure of authenticity, immediacy and affectivity, the child is paradoxically also frequently a figure of illegibility and inaccessibility – a marker of the limits of our knowledge about both ourselves and others.⁴⁴ A figure of authenticity and immediacy, the child simultaneously traces the prickly outlines of a block against our own capacity to re-experience this immediacy, signifying an impossible nostalgia for an (equally impossible) originary state of pre-lapsarian (pre-linguistic) knowing.

This projective idealisation of the child as a figure of pure identification, unimpeded by the problematic mediations of language, is, of course, itself a fantasy. The child is an overdetermined figure, whose apparent innocence, simplicity, and immediate affective access to the ‘real’,

masks a series of evasions concerning our vexed relationships to our mastery and control (or lack thereof) of sexuality, language, and material and historical reality. As Rose pointed out, we use this fantasy of the child to ‘hold off a panic, a threat to our assumption that language is something which can simply be organised and cohered, and that sexuality [...] will eventually take on the forms in which we prefer to recognise and acknowledge each other.’⁴⁵ I. A. Richards’ response to the *‘infans polypervers’* testifies to such a ‘panic’ – he is ‘aghast’, struck with ‘dismay’ at the implications of this figure for adult aesthetic judgement. The figure of the innocent child is used as a means not only of assuaging this disturbance to our ideas about childhood, but also as a means of keeping at bay the challenge to our ideas about adulthood – the challenge to the idea that childhood can be left behind for a stable and coherent adult identity. Most importantly for my argument, the child reader serves as a means of warding off the threat that modernist form poses to the idea that language offers a transparent window onto reality. Tracing the re-emergence of this fantasy of ‘the child’ in recent affect theory, Caselli explores the problematic ways in which this child is deployed as a healing figure – leading to a suspect politics that privileges affect and identification over estrangement and analysis.⁴⁶

In the descriptions of reading quoted at the beginning of this essay, Woolf, Proust, and Freud do all appeal to the child reader’s indulgence in a rich fantasy life. And yet, we are offered no portrait of the child reader as a naïve fantasist. Returning to these depictions of the child reader, I want to suggest, firstly: that Freud offers us a far more complex and disorientating model of childish identification than my superficial reading of his earlier essays would suggest. Secondly: that, far from simply offering us the child reader as an evasive fantasy of redemption, of escape from the difficulties of modernism, Woolf’s and Proust’s child readers in fact ask us to recognise the disorientating psychic and temporal vicissitudes of reading.

Sensitive to the potentially coercive or evasive perils of identification Rhoda is, after all, daydreaming about empire – Woolf and Proust are,

nonetheless, insistent on the complex and ambivalent centrality of identification within psychic, aesthetic and political life. They invoke a form of reading that insists upon the non-redemptive, ambivalent and anxious aspects of identification. Even as they hint at the allures of a redemptive aesthetic, these child readers do not finally offer the modernist reader a form of respite by allowing them to fantasise about a form of reading that would be easier, more immediate, gratifying, and more consoling than the experience of the instabilities and resistances of the modernist text. Rather, their descriptions of self-estrangement through identification dovetail with the modernist reader's own anxieties about their experience of the absorbing yet disorientating convolutions of the text. What these portraits describe is a form of identification that is in fact *part of* 'the estranging project of literary modernism'.⁴⁷ Although identification in the traditional sense of empathising with a character can be a means of bolstering the ego, identification can also reveal itself as a deeply estranging and, as Diana Fuss describes in her *Identification Papers*, a 'profoundly defamiliarizing affair'.⁴⁸ To identify with an object (a person, or perhaps a poetic space, or perspective) can be less about making that object the same as yourself, and more about experiencing yourself as 'other' – becoming estranged from yourself.

In 'A Child is Being Beaten', Freud represents the reading of books as a stimulus for daydreams, both of which are a kind of re-awakening or dialogue with an original, unconscious, childhood fantasy in which 'a child is being beaten'. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was a phenomenally successful abolitionist novel that portrays scenes in which a slave is viciously beaten. The *Bibliothèque rose* is glossed by the *Standard Edition* as, 'A well-know series of books by Mme. de Ségur, of which *Les Malheurs de Sophie* was perhaps the most popular' ('A Child', p. 180). *Les Malheurs de Sophie* formed part of a trilogy, in which Sophie, the naughty protagonist with a penchant for torturing small animals, commits a series of

transgressions for which she is repeatedly and, as Penelope Brown puts it, ‘most severely’ punished and beaten.⁴⁹

A typical interpretation of such children’s stories might emphasise the pedagogic, didactic quality of these severe guides to morality. In Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen has to ‘endure... long, foolish dictés from the edifying Bibliothèque Rose,’ which her governess deploys as a ‘last trench of authority.’⁵⁰ *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was heralded as having had a direct impact on the abolition of slavery through its solicitation of the child reader’s pity.⁵¹ Freud, however, suggests that these tales present his patients with a stimulus for competitive fantasies in which the child takes pleasure in beating. Entirely at odds with a didactic concept of children’s reading, this is also far from the form of ego-bolstering that Freud outlines in those earlier essays ‘On Dreams’ and ‘Creative Writers’.

Writing on the case of the Wolf Man, whose childhood phobia and dream of ‘six or seven white wolves [...] sitting on a walnut tree’ also hinged on the childhood reading of fairy tales, Peter Brooks has explored the similarities between Freud’s famous case study and the modernist novel.⁵²

That the Wolfman’s narrative and his very identity are bound up with the fictions he was told and read and dreamed as a child suggests a classic trope of the novelistic genre [...]. What is radically modernist in Freud’s narrative is that there is not and cannot be any disillusion: the self is bound in illusory relations, and the most one can hope for is some understanding of the order of relation itself, its uses as symbolic code. Freud’s suggestion that the individual life history may open backward onto a phylogenetic masterplot is a further modernist gesture, an example of how we try to account for the insertion of the individual subject within political, biological, and cosmic history.⁵³

In ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ things get stranger. This is not Freud as a writer of modernism, but, as I am arguing, Freud telling us what it might be like to read modernism. Describing the psychic life of child readers of nineteenth-century classics, not adult readers of modernist texts, Freud produces a vexed temporality and a fragmented form of memory and identification. In different ways, therefore, both Freud and the modernist writers I am

discussing foreground the complex psychic mechanisms at work in the reading process, and, in doing so, describe and, in the case of the literary texts, solicit, a form of peculiarly modernist psychic disorientation.

Reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or *Les Malheurs de Sophie* plunges the child backwards into the muddled arena of early childhood. But this is not simply a return to the events of a lost past. Reading these books, the child enters a fantasy scene which is neither reducible to pure illusion nor rooted solely in the material reality and linear teleology of historical event; instead the child is caught up in a strangely disorientating and unsettling psychic space. Questioned as to their relationship to the characters within the fantasy, Freud's patients respond hesitantly, 'I know nothing more about it: a child is being beaten' ('A Child', p. 181). Upon further analysis, Freud establishes three phases in which the subject darts around, identifying variously with author of the fantasy, victim and spectator, moving inside and outside of the scene.⁵⁴ In the first phase, 'The child being beaten is never the one producing the phantasy, but is invariably another child.' The 'person who does the beating remains obscure at first', but later becomes recognisable as the child's father. In the second, unconscious, phase the child that produces the fantasy is now inside the scene, being beaten by their father ('A Child', pp. 184-5). In the third phase, 'the person beating is never the father, but is either left undetermined [...] or turns [...] into a representative of the father, such as a teacher.' There are now a number of children being beaten, while the 'figure of the child who is producing the beating-phantasy' seems to disappear. In response to 'pressing enquiries', the patients state with uncertainty that they *might* be in the position of a spectator. Only adding to the sense of disorientation, Freud acknowledges that 'the interrelations and sequence of the three phases of the beating-phantasy' remain 'quite unintelligible' ('A Child', pp. 185-6).

All this leads to a strange uncertainty about the relationship between the subject and their fantasy, or thinking about those child readers of *Les*

Malheurs de Sophie that between reader and book: is the subject inside or outside of the fantasy, active or passive, subject or object?⁹ To put it at its most basic, fantasy is not simple, neither in what it stages, nor, more crucially for my argument, in how the subject is positioned in relation to it. In Freud's scene of reading the child's pleasure in scenes of violence signifies the persistence in the psyche of infantile fantasies, which do revolve around the child's acts of identification, but in which the subject struggles to locate, or to fix, himself or herself. This fleeting portrait of the middle-class children of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Europe, who read apparently pedagogical tomes only to delight in fantasies of being beaten, describes a form of reading that puts the reader in touch with their unconscious. But, in doing so, it puts them in touch with a part of themselves of which they were entirely unaware. Reading sets up a dialogue with the unconscious, but it remains nonetheless self-estranging; this is by no means a reparative unification of the self in art.

What all three of these writers, Sigmund Freud, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust, are equally interested in, is the potential disorientation of readerly identification – the movement towards what Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis refer to as the 'desubjectivized' form of fantasy. In their essay 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', Laplanche and Pontalis write:

In [a] daydream, the scenario is basically in the first person, and the subject's place clear and invariable. The organization is stabilized by the secondary process, weighted by the ego: the subject [...] lives out his reverie. But the original fantasy, [...] is characterized by the absence of subjectivization, and the subject is present *in* the scene [...].⁵⁵

Fantasy slides between the two poles of ego-weighted reverie and a form of unconscious fantasy into which the subject seems to disappear. The first person reverie of the child reader (the ego-bolstering identification of 'Creative Writers') might easily slide towards the 'desubjectivized form' of original fantasy (the dislocation of 'A Child is Being Beaten'):

Fantasy is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of

images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it [...]. As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question.⁵⁶

Like Freud's child readers, both Rhoda and Proust's narrator could be said to slip their moorings in the process of readerly identification; in the opening scenes of *Swann's Way*, Proust describes a mind 'striving for hours on end to break away from its moorings.'⁵⁷ As readers of these child readers, we too find ourselves 'represented as participating in the scene', solicited to identify with an estranged image of ourselves within the text; but, like these child readers, in this moment of self-reflexivity we too lose our bearings. Unable to find 'any fixed place', we find ourselves lost in the 'very syntax' of the modernist sentence.

In Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*, a boarding school bathroom is transformed into an imperial balcony, as Rhoda daydreams that she is a Russian Empress, waving her fist at an infuriated mob. This imperialist form of first person identification is, however, blown to atoms, and Rhoda turns instead to Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem, 'The Question'. Turning from her 'thin dream', now blown to atoms, to Shelley's poem, Rhoda might seem to demonstrate what Elaine Scarry has called 'The Difference between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial-Instruction'.⁵⁸ For Scarry this is the difference, in sensory and perceptual terms, between the frailty of mere daydream and the comparatively rich, solid and vivid experience of imagining within a poem or a novel. Discussing the sensory impoverishment of daydream, Scarry argues that authors create a 'perceptual mimesis', which, by an evocation of solidity within the literary work, allows the reading experience to approach the perceptual experience of solidity in the sensory world.⁵⁹ Fictional walls, such as those of Proust's bedroom at Combray, provide a solid base for the reader's imagination: 'The idea of the solid wall [...] prevents our further *sinking inward*. It provides the *vertical*

floor of all subsequent imaginings that lets us perform, without vertigo or alarm, the projective act, and thereby lifts the inhibitions on mental vivacity ordinarily in place as protections.’⁶⁰

Reading Shelley, Rhoda describes a dramatic form of self-projection into the landscape of the poem. In ‘The Question’, the speaker describes a dream in which he walks by a stream and a hedge with ‘Green cowbind’ and ‘moonlight-coloured may,’ ‘wild roses, and ivy serpentine’; Rhoda anticipates ‘pick[ing]’ these flowers out of the poem, ‘clasp[ing]’ them in her hands – just as she incorporates the lines seamlessly into her description of reading the poem – and laying them on her desk, before moving back inside the poem to sit by the ‘river’s trembling edge.’⁶¹ But this is no simple form of consolatory, first person identification. And Rhoda’s reading of Shelley is at odds with Scarry’s claim that ‘a fiction’s *vertical floor* [...], by promising to stop our inward fall, permits us to enter capaciously into the projective space with fearlessness and with the lifting of inhibitions on vivacity that permits.’⁶² Projection is both a perceptual and a psychic act – while Scarry writes of the perceptual projection of visual images that coalesce into a mimesis of solidity, her language also hints at the projection of a psyche liberated from mental inhibition. Rhoda’s reading experience involves a dramatic projective act in both of these senses, but the projective space is by no means entered into with ‘fearlessness’.

There is a movement in Woolf’s writing from the description of the phenomenological, sensory and perceptual qualities of reading (reading as hallucination, almost) to the evocation of psychic, emotional and ontological engagement and disturbance. Overcoming inhibition – the internal ‘obstacle’, that which ‘resists’ – is an experience of ‘pain’ and ‘anguish’. As, painfully, these inhibitions are lifted, Rhoda describes a form of intimate bodily and psychical communion with the poem. The tense shifts from the prospective ‘I *will* pick flowers’ to the present tense: ‘There *is* some check’, ‘this *is* pain’, ‘I *am* unsealed’. This is an intimacy with the poem that achieves a kind of impersonal mimetic identity as Rhoda moves from an

imaginary identification with the speaker of the poem, who sits by a stream, to a description of her own body as a kind of vessel for the flooding waters. This exhilarating description of uninhibited projective intimacy is, however, shot through with a deep ambivalence, an anxiety and alarm concerning a potentially abyssal projection into the absent other marked by the exclamation, ‘Oh! to whom?’ Reading here hinges upon a form of self-projection into the poetic landscape; and yet it is a profoundly self-estranging and anxiety-inducing experience.

One might, immediately, expect a more idealised depiction of childhood reading from Marcel Proust, whose epiphanic moment, the tasting of the warm moist madeleine, is intimately connected to his mother’s bedtime stories. Amongst the multitude of figures that Julia Kristeva discovers lurking behind Proust’s madeleine (mothers, lovers, the sacred and the sweet, patisseries and books), lies one Madeleine Blanchet, the miller’s wife who becomes adoptive mother, lover and then wife of François, hero of George Sand’s *François le champi* – the novel that his beloved mother reads to the narrator as a child.⁶³ For the narrator the sweet, dulcet tones of his mother’s narration make up for the painful denial of the bedtime kiss, that longed-for moment in which she would hold out her face ‘like a host for an act of peace-giving communion in which my lips might imbibe her real presence’ (*SW*, p. 13). The mother’s recitation is figured as a consoling rhythm, her words a liquid current soothing the fractious child. From the maternal kiss as communion, to the mother reading as sweet nourishment for the aching soul, to a scene in adulthood where the mother proffers a pastry which will recapture lost time – Proust evokes an idyllic scene of reading as a form of maternal nourishment.

And yet, despite this lusciously seductive account, there is something darker that underlies Proust’s evocations of unbridled communion. In the opening paragraph of *À la recherche*, Proust’s narrator describes his bedtime reading:

I would make as if to put away the book which I imagined was still in my hands [...]; I had not stopped, while sleeping, from reflecting upon that which I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This belief would persist for some moments after I awoke; it did not shock my reason, but weighed like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as, after metempsychosis, the thoughts of a previous existence must seem; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to apply myself to it or not; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness, pleasant and restful enough for my eyes, but even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, something dark indeed.⁶⁴

The narrator dreams not, like Freud's eight-year-old son, that he becomes the hero of his book – François I or Charles V, say – but that he becomes a building, a piece of music, a rivalry between ancient monarchs. This is reading as a form of estranging, impersonal identification. As, upon waking, this dream becomes unintelligible, it is compared to a form of previous existence – dreamy readerly identifications are pushed back into the earlier migrations of the soul in metempsychosis, while the narrator is thrust forward into a realm of obscurity and self-alienation. It is, in fact, almost impossible to be certain whether this passage describes the narrator as an adult or a child. Reading and falling in and out of sleep conspire here to send the narrator back 'to an earlier stage in my life' (*SW*, p. 2). Writing on the borderlands of sleep, Proust unsettles our sense of temporal certainty, insisting, as in this opening paragraph, on the mind's capacity to become dislocated from itself, to travel backwards in both individual and historical time.

In the final volume, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this essay, the adult narrator undergoes a similarly strange experience. Opening *François le champi*, he feels himself troubled by a 'stranger' (*TR*, p. 240). Although he comes to recognise that the 'stranger' was 'none other than myself,' 'myself' is still described in the past tense and the third person as

‘the child I had been at that time’ (*TR*, p. 240). The book ‘summoned *him* [...] wanting to be seen only by *his* eyes, to be loved only by *his* heart, to speak only to *him*’ (*TR*, p. 240). There’s something in this stress on the child as a third person – a stranger from the past – that conveys a sense of self-estrangement. There is something dark and disquieting inscribed within the psychic and temporal leaps of reading for Proust – an experience with which we too are encouraged to identify as we navigate the absorbing convolutions of the Proustian sentence. Solicited to identify as the child reader inscribed within the modernist text, the reader undergoes a similar feeling of temporal and psychic self-estrangement. Reading, here, I suggest, might make children of us all.

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¹ Sigmund Freud, “‘A Child is Being Beaten’: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions” (1919), in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1956-74), Vol. 17, pp. 175-204 (p. 180). Hereafter referred to parenthetically as ‘A Child’.

² Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (1931), ed. Michael Herbert and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 43-4. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *TW*.

³ Marcel Proust, *Time Regained* (1927), trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 239-40. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *TR*.

⁴ I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 40. On Richards and Freud see Lyndsey Stonebridge, *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 23-4.

⁵ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 48-57.

⁶ F. R. Leavis, ‘Mass Civilization and Minority Culture’ (1930), in *Education and the University: A Sketch for an ‘English School’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 141-71 (p. 159); Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), pp. 35-6.

⁷ Ben Knights, ‘Reading as a Man: Women and the Rise of English Studies in England’, in Miriam Kauko, Sylvia Mieszkowski, and Alexandra Tischel (eds.), *Gendered Academia: Wissenschaft und Geschlechterdifferenz 1890-1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), pp. 65-81 (pp. 78-9).

⁸ ‘Psycho-analysis considers that a choice of an object independently of its sex – freedom to range equally over male and female objects – as it is found in childhood, in primitive states

of society and early periods of history, is the original basis from which, as a result of restriction in one direction or the other, both the normal and the inverted types develop.' For Freud the achievement of a 'normal' masculine or feminine identity is only ever precarious and fragile; the infant's polymorphously perverse sexuality persists as an unconscious layer underlying, and always in conflict with, any adult identity. It is for this reason that Freud was able to insist on the 'normality' of the supposedly 'perverse' sexual desires articulated in the symptoms of his neurotic patients and hidden in their dreams; these symptoms and dreams merely spoke of a 'perverse' sexuality that is present in all of us in childhood, repressed or forced into certain pathways with greater and lesser degrees of success. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *SE*, Vol. 7, pp. 123-245 (pp. 145-6, p. 191, p. 160, pp. 171-2).

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

¹¹ Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (London: Penguin, 1974), pp. 52-3.

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¹³ Charles Altieri, 'Modernist Innovations: A Legacy of the Constructed Reader', in Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (eds.), *Modernism* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007), Vol. 1, pp. 67-86 (pp. 67-9).

¹⁴ See Dana Cairns Watson, 'Building a Better Reader: *The Gertrude Stein First Reader and Three Plays*', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 35 (2011), pp. 245-66, and Emily James, 'Virginia Woolf and the Child Poet', *Modernist Cultures*, 7.2 (2012), pp. 279-305.

¹⁵ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 235.

¹⁶ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. vii.

¹⁷ Hugh Haughton, 'Introduction', in Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. ix-lxv (p. xiii).

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, 'Lewis Carroll' (1939), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie and Stuart N. Clarke, 6 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1986-2011), Vol. 6, pp. 210-12 (p. 211).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

²¹ T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 9-10.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²³ On Adorno, the 'resistant' artwork, and Viktor Shklovsky's idea of 'estrangement', see Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 44-5; on Brecht's 'alienation effect' see Stanley Mitchell, 'From Shklovsky to Brecht: Some Preliminary remarks towards a history of the politicisation of Russian Formalism', *Screen*, 15.2 (1974), pp. 74-81 (p. 76).

²⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'Freudian Fiction' (1920), *Essays*, Vol. 3, pp. 195-8 (p. 197).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ James Joyce, *The Restored Finnegans Wake* (1923-39), ed. by Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 91-2, p. 320; Shoshana Felman, 'To Open the Question', *Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1977), pp. 5-10 (p. 5).

²⁷ Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', *Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1977), pp. 94-207 (p. 107).

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *SE*, Vol. 4, p. 105.

²⁹ Roger Fry, *The Artist and Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 18; see also Clive Bell, 'Dr. Freud on Art', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 35 (1924), pp. 690-1.

³⁰ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), pp. 167-8.

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- ³³ Anna Freud, 'British Psycho-Analytical Society: First Quarter, 1930', *Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytical Association*, 11 (1930), pp. 352-3; *Minute Book of the British Psycho-Analytical Society*, 19 March 1930.
- ³⁴ See Alexandra Lawrie, *The Beginnings of University English: Extramural Study, 1885-1910* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), and Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, The Intellectual, and The Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
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- ³⁷ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *SE*, Vol. 4, p. 129; Freud, 'On Dreams' (1901), *SE*, Vol. 5, pp. 629-86 (p. 645).
- ³⁸ Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (1908), *SE*, Vol. 9, pp. 141-53 (p. 150); Freud, 'Der Dichter Und Das Phantasieren', *Gesammelte Werke, Chronologisch Geordnet*, 18 vols (London: Imago, 1991), Vol. 7, pp. 213-23 (p. 219); *Oxford German Dictionary*, ed. by W. Schloze-Stubenrecht and others, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 175, p. 47, p. 240.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ⁴⁰ Daniela Caselli, 'Kindergarten Theory: Childhood, Affect, Critical Thought', *Feminist Theory*, 11 (2010), pp. 241-54 (pp. 242-3).
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- ⁴³ Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, p. 65, cited by Caselli, 'Kindergarten Theory', p. 242.
- ⁴⁴ On the 'contradictory co-existence of a perfectly knowable and romantically inaccessible child,' see Daniela Caselli, 'Eerie Changelings', *New Formations*, 74.1 (2012), pp. 122-9 (p. 122).
- ⁴⁵ Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, pp. 1-11.
- ⁴⁶ Caselli cites Walter Benjamin describing Brecht's appeal to childhood as a healing power against Nazism; Benjamin then describes feeling 'a power being exercised over me which was equal in strength to the power of fascism.' For Caselli, 'falling back on the power of childhood marks the dropping of dialectical thought: the rhetoric of fascism and that of its resistance coincide in the child.' Walter Benjamin, 'Conversations with Brecht', in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 105-21 (p. 120), cited by Caselli, 'Kindergarten Theory', pp. 245-6, p. 250.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- ⁴⁸ Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.
- ⁴⁹ Comtesse de Ségur [Sophie Rostopchine], *Les petites filles modèles* (Paris: Hachette, 1858), p. 60, p. 105; Comtesse de Ségur [Sophie Rostopchine], *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (Paris: Hachette, 1859), pp. 164-70; Comtesse de Ségur [Sophie Rostopchine], *Les Vacances* (Paris: Hachette, 1859), pp. 168-9; Penelope Brown, *A Critical History of French Children's Literature, Volume Two: 1830-Present* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 41-2, p. 52.
- ⁵⁰ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Virago, 2002), pp. 52-3.
- ⁵¹ See Barbara Hochman, 'Devouring *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Antebellum Readers', in Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens (eds.), *The History of Reading, Volume 1: International Perspectives, c. 1500-1990* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 87-100.
- ⁵² Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918), *SE*, Vol. 17, pp. 1-123 (p. 29, p. 39).
- ⁵³ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 279. For Steven Marcus, similarly, Freud's account of Dora, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), resembles a modernist novel: 'The general form, then, of

what Freud has written bears certain suggestive resemblances to a modern experimental novel. Its narrative and expository course, for example, is neither linear nor rectilinear; instead, its organization is plastic, involuted and heterogeneous, and follows spontaneously an inner logic that seems frequently to be at odds with itself; it often loops back around itself and is multi-dimensional in its representation of both its material and itself. Its continuous innovations in formal structure seem unavoidably to be dictated by its substance, by the dangerous, audacious, disreputable, and problematical character of the experiences being represented and dealt with, and by the equally scandalous intentions of the author and the outrageous character of the role he has had the presumption to assume.’ Steven Marcus, ‘Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History’, in *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Random House, 1976), pp. 247-310 (pp. 263-4).

⁵⁴ For an exhaustive reading of the dizzying transformations between the three phases of the beating fantasy (active/passive, subject/object, sadism/masochism, pleasure/shame, spectator/victim), see Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Discourse Figure: The Utopia behind the Scenes of the Phantasy’, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. by Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 327-55 (p. 338, p. 348).

⁵⁵ Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, ‘Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality’, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 49 (1968), pp. 1-18 (p. 11, p. 13).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way* (1913), trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 7. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *SW*.

⁵⁸ Elaine Scarry, ‘On Vivacity: The Difference between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial-Instruction’, *Representations*, 52 (Autumn 1995), pp. 1-26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6; also cited by Jacobus, pp. 41-3, p. 21.

⁶¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Isabel Quigly (London: Penguin, 1956), pp. 217-18.

⁶² Scarry, ‘On Vivacity’, p. 8.

⁶³ Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 5-9.

⁶⁴ *SW*, p. 1; translation modified with reference to *À la recherche du temps perdu: Du côté de chez Swann* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 11.