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The past, present and future of psychoanalytical literary studies in Germany

Essay on a personal example
The Past, Present and Future of Psychoanalytical Literary Studies in Germany: Essay on a Personal Example

In 1936, when I was born into national socialist Germany, the country no longer had anything worthy of the name psychoanalysis. After the war, in the late forties and early fifties, when my intellectual life began, the name Freud was not among those—Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Vergil, Kant, Schiller and Rilke—mentioned in secondary school. It was *L'être et le néant*, which I read outside of school, that provided my first introduction. In the early nineteen-fifties, as a fascinated reader of Sartre, I started contemplating psychoanalytic ideas, though hardly aware of it myself at the time, and of course only in a Sartrean context. During my studies at three German universities, I encountered Freud only once, in one single session of a psychology lecture: his *Strukturmodell* was referred to as a mechanistic raping of the soul, with the footnote that this was a psychological model that highly overestimated sexuality. In my literature studies, Freud was mentioned only briefly, in connection with the *Zeitgeist* in Fin-de-siècle Vienna. Not one of my university teachers proposed that it might be possible, let alone fruitful, to use psychoanalysis as an instrument of insight in literary studies. But beneath the surface, that Sartrean Freud continued to influence me. I once made a suicide attempt, and I couldn’t find the dagger I intended to use—though it lay in full view—until my bout of desperation had passed. In this, I found confirmation within myself of the existence and the power of the unconscious. Another time, in a Kierkegaard seminar, I was frustrated at his overstylization of anxiety and I had already begun looking at his life; coming across the problems involving his marriage engagement, I interpreted his philosophically ontologized fear as stemming from his sexual anxiety. But that was as far as I went.
In the nineteen-sixties, with the beginning erosion of social traditions, psychoanalytic ways of thinking began to seep into public discourse, particularly due to Alexander Mitscherlich’s books; German literary studies, however, remained immune to it at that time, while I completed my doctorate and then became an assistant. Psychoanalytic writing by emigrants either went unnoticed or was devalued in the properly scientific method, as was the case with Eissler’s 1963 work on Goethe that had no influence on the study of German literature at the time. The Nazis had rendered Germany not only free of Jews, but also free of psychoanalysis, and the effects of their crimes are still felt today. Within the field of German literary studies, up until the student revolts of the late sixties, there was no revival of the meagre, pre-1933 attempts at a psychoanalytical approach to literary texts. Even then the institutionalized type of literary study practiced in universities, whose main justification lay in its practical use as a philosophy of life, took no notice of psychoanalysis, or alternatively, reduced it to a materialistic process which corroded and psychopathologized those higher values of art and genius, by analyzing them; a process unsuitable for literary form and aesthetic qualities. Although the earliest great works of psychoanalysis were written in German (by Freud, Rank, Sachs, Reik), the psychoanalytic interpretation of literature was almost completely excluded from the universities. Only a few academics, among them Leo Spitzer, Kurt Wais and the Swiss Walter Muschü, looked at style or motifs from a psychoanalytic perspective, weighing out its possible uses. After 1945, foreign, mainly Anglo-Saxon analysts, helped establish psychoanalysis in West Germany, though at first only very slowly and against much resistance, and it did not gain admittance to the literary field.

After the brutality of the war, this field had opened up problematical alternatives in the apolitical world of high literature, retreating in guilty fear before its past of ethno-nationalistic German studies onto the safe ground of the text-based method (Emil Staiger, Wolfgang Kayser), and under the politically correct, protecting wing of New Criticism (Wellek-Warren). Psychoanalysis, at that time, would have meant
confronting one's own past, in terms of our society, literature, and literary studies—a frightening prospect. So, the taboo that was tightly clamped on Germany's past crimes and present guilt also weighed heavily on the field of literary studies.

It was the student revolt, in 1967-68, that reintroduced psychoanalytic ideas to West German universities. Reconstruction efforts and the growing consumerism of the fifties and early sixties had helped repress the national socialist past and legitimize the present, yet in 1966 the first overproduction crisis after 1945 saw faith in economic progress, and thus in social progress, severely shaken. Increasing production since the fifties had demanded more consumption, and so socialization for the younger generation, unlike that of their parents and grandparents, involved not only sacrificing one's wishes in the name of productivity; it also involved pleasure. Thus sexual taboos were also loosened, a phenomenon that was clearly reflected in advertising, for example. Personal desires began to compete with the norms that the older generations had imposed in the name of performance, order, and tradition. The political attitudes supported by the pre-war generations, which included the rejection of third-world freedom movements, clearly contradicted the ideals of the imported democracy in which the post-war generation had been socialized, as did the disproportionate hierarchy of elders at the university. To put it in psychoanalytical terms: after having done away with the old Nazi father, the USA, which was then quickly taken on as a new father, then showed its hypocritical, imperialistic, cruel side. The new father was a terrible disappointment, but to some extent also a justification for the old one. And as it turned out, the old and the new father steered the same boat. That boat was called fascism, and it could hold a lot of cargo; enough to include the West German politicians who defended America's position on the Vietnam War and who, like Chancellor Kiesinger, had previously been national socialists. That cargo also included professors, most of whom had held their posts since that time, and who wanted to keep their institutional privileges. At the same time, the international student movement in the US and France provided a good opportunity to break out of the guilt-laden confinement of the German
nation and gain membership in an international movement that was fighting for freedom. In this situation the generational conflict came to light as a social conflict in West Germany. The contention with our parents broadened into a contention with their societal past, with nazism, but also with the societal present which they supported, namely, capitalism. It was under these circumstances that psychoanalysis, long overlooked or pushed aside by established academic institutions, was adopted in the philosophically abstracted form in which it had been salvaged by the Frankfurt School’s critical theory. For the rebelling students, this was an instrument with which they could comprehend past and present, go up against their elders’ authority, reflect on their own actions, and change themselves, for the sake of their own desires but also for the sake of the next generation. Soon unauthorized copies of Herbert Marcuse, Freud, and Wilhelm Reich’s early writings were being distributed and discussed fervently in university courses, communal houses, and anti-authoritarian Kinderläden. In the name of radical social change, in the name of combating the authorities that through their nazism had discredited themselves, in the name of freedom for sexuality and for the individual, and often enough in the service of a longed-for loss of inhibitions, the results of psychoanalytical research, as yet lacking therapeutic practice, were carried over into everyday life and politics, more often than not in the reduced form of theoretical generalizations. This step intensified the confrontation with Germany’s past, indeed with the German identity, which is still not completed today and which, even in its popularized forms, fosters those processes of individualization that have been helping to civilize German society.

I myself became acquainted with psychoanalysis in a student-organized course in 1968. One of the students, Fritz Erik Hoevels, gave an introduction to the psychoanalytic interpretation of literary texts. At the time, I was an assistant in the German department of the University of Freiburg, working on my habilitation on the poetry of the young Bertold Brecht, and I could not understand how Brecht could have written both emperor-loving and patriotic poems and delectably grotesque poems in the space of just a few years; there were
provoking poems that aimed to destroy bourgeois morality and despairing poems of reproach toward the Christian God. They seemed to me to have been written by different authors. I began to approach one of the poems from a psychoanalytical angle; gradually its structure became clear to me, and I was able to find corresponding structures in other poems, until finally the relationship between all these poems became explicable by their author's psychological disposition and its development. With the help of psychoanalysis, I was able to solve a philological problem. As it had proven to be fruitful in literary analysis, I went back to it again and again; with each philological question that came up, I progressed farther into psychoanalysis. So I didn't come to literature from psychoanalysis, to find psychoanalytical insights in literary texts; instead I found psychoanalysis through literature, as a way of understanding those texts.

Of course, this was not an isolated, purely academic discovery process. At the university, students as well as people of my generation were trying to free themselves of the constraints of the no longer productive text-based interpretation and to see literature, and the study of literature, in a broader, especially sociological context.

This was an attack on our academic fathers, one of many factors in society's general offensive against its fathers' generation with its mark of Cain, national socialism, and against the strict order that generation stood for; in short, an Oedipal attack on an already weary father. We all acted out this Oedipal conflict, and some of us, the fraction that emphasized the "subjective factor," used the analytic theory of this Oedipal conflict in their struggle against "authority and family." Psychoanalysis, with the internalized compulsion—which was also, of course, represented by the institution of higher education—to make accurate observations and to double check results conscientiously, and with the reference back to the analyst that was a natural consequence of analysis, all these things quickly brought us insights into our academic subjects, but also ourselves—a euphoric experience, considering the decades-long psychoanalytical illiteracy that had gone before it.

In optimistic discussions, Wolf Wucherpfennig and I
worked our way into psychoanalysis and possible ways of using it in literary analysis; he in his dissertation on a Baroque novel, and I in my habilitation project on Brecht. We broke new ground and were astonished at all the things the old school had missed seeing. The discovery of psychoanalysis, the attempt to apply it, and the controversy surrounding it continued in the curriculum, in the endeavor to develop freer forms of teaching and learning, in long discussions about group dynamics; in communes, the discussions were about relationships; and in the anti-authoritarian kindergartens, about child raising. This had an effect on my academic work. Historical circumstances had led me not only to my method of treating literature, psychoanalysis, but also to my object of analysis: the Oedipal conflict and how it is dealt with. Further, while I was learning about Brecht's poetry, about university teaching, and about myself, and at the time seeking knowledge about the nature of society, I identified with and formulated Brecht's successful learning process: the path "from anarchist nihilism to Marxism."

During this time, the late sixties and early seventies, I began to promote this newly worked-out literary method in public talks, which put me right between two fronts: and the representatives of humanistic and text-based schools of literary theory on the one side, who saw literature as art and demanded detail- and form-oriented interpretations that did not neglect literary and intellectual traditions, were the ones in power positions at the university, who could determine the progress of my academic career. For all my psychoanalytical orientation, then, I was obliged to comply with their expectations. This led to intense conflicts, and yet these were also expectations I set for myself, having internalized them while sitting through the text-based and humanistic curriculum in my studies. On the other side were my socio-historically, for the most part also Marxist oriented friends and colleagues with whom I was working on a model of Marxist literary theory in which psychoanalysis was to have the two-sided task of examining psychical processes that were recognized as being sociological, and contributing to the analysis of sociological pro-
cesses, to the extent that they proved to be psychologically
determined.

Psychoanalysis, in functioning as a critical theory of the
subject, was to make conscious the power structures embedded
in the individual, to scrutinize psychological mechanisms that
play a role in the individual’s integration into an authoritarian
society, especially in the subordination caused by societal
anxiety, and to make us more capable of social criticism. It was
important to contemplate concrete psychological actualities
along historical lines and to avoid hypostatizing them as an
anthropological given, which had been Freud’s mistake in
reconstructing human prehistory from the psyches of his
Viennese secret councilwomen. As literary scholars, we had to
keep in mind that an author’s psyche is defined by society and
so reacts to society with works of art—and what’s more, that
literature is a social, psychological phenomenon, just like the
psychoanalytical study of literature, whose methods, objects
and outcomes must be seen as being historicized. To the
extent that I considered myself a Marxist, these were also my
own personal demands and reservations. Time and again I had
come up against the Stalinist claim, common also in the
German Democratic Republic at the time, that psychoanalysis
as a science was individualistic and bourgeois. On this front as
well, there were strong clashes, especially when it came to
turning an analytical eye on ourselves and our behavior. The
Marxist splinter group, which emphasized the “objective fac-
tor,” tended to leave out, to devalue or to instrumentalize
psychoanalysis. So not only at the university but also in the
scenarios of my consciousness, I was torn between a literary
science that was interested in literary detail and literary form
and one that was oriented toward society and its history.
Psychoanalysis was a third and separate entity. We had ac-
quired our understanding of it through reading and discus-
sion, and by applying it to literature, but I didn’t learn about it
from actual psychoanalysts, or on the couch. I occasionally sat
in on classes held by Walter Schraml, a critically ill analyst who
regarded our efforts with benevolent scepticism. We bom-
barded him with questions as to the value to society of his
practice; and at the time, I passed up the opportunity to learn from him.

My further development as a psychoanalytically oriented literary scholar took place between these three reference points—literature as art anchored in tradition, social history, and psychoanalysis. This triad shaped my identity through each change. There were oscillations, when the pendulum swung closer to one side or another, but the two momentarily backgrounded elements never stopped questioning whichever one was in the foreground at the moment. This preserved me from dogmatic Marxist or psychoanalytical positions and from a retreat into the self-contained area of literature or even the domain of a self-sufficient literary theory. This tension prompted new questions, and through them, new processes of recognition. And often enough, it left me insecure; I did not know where I belonged and was called into question on all sides. I didn’t conform to any one position, which was an uncomfortable situation, but a good one, one that, I find in retrospect, encouraged insight.

After the stormy beginnings in the late sixties, the first goal in the seventies was to take up the academic discussion where it had left off; with the German publications of the twenties and those few psychoanalytical works that appeared in the sixties. Here Peter Dettmering deserves special mention, but the field was dominated by American research: Norman Holland, Simon O. Lesser, and Ernst Kris; British research, mainly Winnicott; and the French researchers Mauron and Chasseguet-Smirgel. In this formative period, Swiss literary theorists, whose work gained special significance, were Jean Starobinski and Adolf Muschg, but especially Peter von Matt, whose *Literaturwissenschaft und Psychoanalyse* provided an introduction to the topic as early as 1972. Austrian literary theory, however, was astonishingly—or, considering the repression of national socialism in the region, not so astonishingly—reticent in the area of psychoanalytical literary studies in the seventies, and even up to today. The seventies was a decade of anthologies, tools for gathering and securing what had been possible up to then, and for helping us to find models. There were anthologies of early works—the “Imago” itself had to be
reintroduced into literary consciousness—and of current international research. And in 1974, Johannes Cremerius edited a collection of works by German-speaking contemporaries, including essays on the theory of psychoanalytical interpretation as well as such interpretations themselves. This was the first evidence of the burgeoning collaboration of psychoanalysts and literary theorists in the Federal Republic of Germany. In the same decade, Alfred Lorenzer, a psychoanalyst from the school of critical theory, developed his psychoanalytically, linguistically, and socio-historically based cultural analysis. More and more, those in the literary and sociological fields began to refer to his theoretical approach, especially to his theory of scenic comprehension. And yet, in this and other cases, one was painfully aware of the lack of a major city that could act as a lively cultural center for the whole German-speaking area and where all the fundamental discussions could be held, such as Paris, New York, or London. This is why, even today, something that seems long-established in one place remains unknown for quite a while in another, and often won’t reach a discussion forum until much later.

The socio-political situation in the nineteen-seventies accommodated the move toward psychoanalysis and psychoanalytical literary theory. The intellectuals whom 1968 had made politically aware were now turning away from large-scale political projects and from the abstracting conceptualization of sociological theory after the disappointment of their hopes, and were turning their attention to themselves, to their behavior, their past, their relationships with others, and thus to their psyche. In the meantime, however, they had learned to conceive of the individual as something general and the psychological as something social, as something historicized, whose source should be investigated and changed for the sake of a better future. In German intellectual life, as we can make out in literary texts from that time, it was a time of new subjectivity, of autobiographies that investigated personal hardships, and also of what was called “Väterbücher,” or “fathers’ books,” which now tackled the problem of the Nazi past inside the family unit, whereas up until then it had only been dealt with on the level of society as a whole. They tracked down one’s own
father's conduct during the Third Reich, facing the unavoidable question of whether and how this national socialist father shows up again in his sons and daughters.

In this climate, psychoanalytical thought spread. The climate also favored the slow expansion of the psychoanalytical treatment of literature into a serious academic discipline. This development spanned the seventies and continued into the eighties—is even continuing today. And it was a matter of making the great works available, like for example Eissler's monograph on Goethe that Rüdiger Scholz published from 1983 to 1985; it was a matter of recording what had been published up to that time in a bibliography, as Joachim Pfeiffer did in 1989 with advice and inspiration from Wolfram Mauser, in his Bibliographie der Literaturpsychologie 1945 bis 1987, which he still maintains in the Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche. Also necessary was a historical and systematic summary of the progress made that would provide a quick overview of the field and help the reader find impulses and perhaps tools that could be of importance for his own work. This came to us from the Netherlands in 1991, in Walter Schönaus Einführung in die psychoanalytische Literaturwissenschaft. In the last several decades, the psychoanalytical study of literature has produced a vast number of publications in the German-speaking parts of Europe; these have helped to intensify the appreciation of the difficulties in the field and to refine its methods and its teachability. German psychoanalytical literary study has meanwhile, I believe, reached international standards and has gained a certain, though skeptical, recognition even within the academic, non-psychoanalytical literary field that had rejected it for so long. This kind of skepticism and sometimes even rejection can be an indication that we are on the right psychoanalytic track; a science that confronts readers with their own unconscious, analyzing elements that they probably identify with in an idealizing way, will inevitably give rise to defensive rejection. But skepticism in the literary world must also be taken seriously; it is not as if the majority of the literature critics who make use of psychoanalysis had experience with it, were at the height of methodological awareness or gave a thought to the possibility that they are defending
themselves against their own desires, which surface in reading certain texts, by interpreting those texts. Unfortunately, there are still interpretations that pay little or no attention to literary form and its tradition and that aim purely at its latent content; there are still analyses of literary figures that treat them as if they were living people, and often enough literary scholars will follow a fashion, extracting and hypostatizing single conclusions from psychoanalysis. Certainly, genuinely literary criticism is called for, and there is always something new to learn from it. It is not as if the standards set by one generation could simply be taken over by the next; not even as individuals can we think of our acquired knowledge as a lasting possession. If you subject yourself to the unconscious, each new step forward tends to put you back at the starting block.

A crucial factor in my development as a literary scholar working psychoanalytically was, from the seventies until now, the “Freiburger Arbeitsgruppe Literatur und Psychoanalyse,” a team brought together by a string of coincidences. In 1972, Johannes Cremerius was offered the position of department chair for psychotherapy in Freiburg, a small university town near the French and Swiss borders which at the time already boasted the highest number of analysts in Germany. My habilitation was then up for review, being picked apart by literary scholars who, despite their lack of expertise in the field, claimed that it was psychoanalytically unsound. So it happened that the newly arrived psychoanalyst was called on for an expert opinion. Later he invited me and some others who were interested in psychoanalytical interpretation of literature to a discussion. Cremerius, an active friend of literature and the arts, had never separated his interest for psychoanalysis from his interest for literature. In 1971 he had published a volume on neurosis and genius, and now he was writing, collecting, and encouraging others to write psychoanalytical texts on literature. Since he was not unsympathetic toward the young rebels of the time, we had quickly established contact. Frederick Wyatt came to Freiburg in 1974 as a practicing analyst, one who was enthusiastic about literature, and who, having had to emigrate from Vienna in 1938, had finished his psychoanalytical training in America and then
worked in a clinic and as a professor before coming to Germany. Wyatt held courses at the psychological institute and then, together with Wolfram Mauser, a graduate seminar, "Literaturpsychologische Interpretationen" (psychological interpretations of literature), which over the years became a firmly rooted institution. Wolfram Mauser, a literary historian of Austrian background at the German studies department in Freiburg, where I was working as a private instructor at the time, had long since shown his openness toward all things new, and held a protective hand over us younger academics in a skeptical but benevolent gesture of liberalness. At the time he was working out a psycho-sociological approach to literature. After a first conference in 1975, the four of us began to work more intensively together, especially in organizing conferences. In the nineteen-eighties, Ortrud Gutjahr, still an assistant at the time, joined our group, bringing into it not only her organizational talent, but also, and most important, stimuli from feminist literary studies. In 1993, after the death of Frederick Wyatt, came his successor, the psychoanalyst Gottfried Fischer, whose areas of interest were philosophy, methodology, and trauma research. And just recently the group has gained a further member, the literary scholar Astrid Lange-Kirchheim, a reinforcement of the feminist position.

What has held the group together from the beginning was: the interest that all share for literature and, in the same degree, for psychoanalysis; each one's willingness to learn from the others; the mixture of young and old, of analysts and literary scholars; and the awareness that, in the field of psychoanalytical literary study, competence must be brought in from both sides, that only by taking up the discussion again and again can both sides find sufficient access to literary texts, but also, that only by working together with the knowledge of our various academic milieus can we find appropriate speakers who share an interest in our work. When we started the yearly series of working conferences called "Literatur und Psychoanalyse" (literature and psychoanalysis), we encountered psychoanalysts looking at literary texts, usually without consulting literary scholars, from a psychoanalytical angle, and on the other hand, literary critics working psychoanalytically,
usually young people, again, often without psychoanalytical experience or consultation with psychoanalysts, and who often saw their academic progress endangered by applying this method. Our goal was to bring them all together, to open a discussion, to form networks and connect the areas of competence, to bring more psychoanalytical thought into literary theory and, by adding solid, methodically sound, convincing interpretations, to raise awareness of it in academic circles to such a degree that it could not be avoided in the future. Those working at various universities with psychoanalytical approaches should no longer find themselves being laughed off as capricious oddballs and removed from the institution. It was also important, especially for the psychoanalysts among us, to remain aware of the significance of literature in the therapeutic process and in developing analytic skills, something which for Freud had been self-evident, as opposed to the increasing medicalization of psychoanalysis. Both groups essentially wanted to work against this trend of medicalization and expand psychoanalysis to the level of cultural science.

Then, yet another task presented itself to us: with the strengthening of the second German women's movement in the nineteen-seventies and with the French psychoanalytical literature that had made it a subject of discussion (L. Irigaray), we could no longer be blind to the fact that the reappraisal of psychoanalysis since 1968 had been a very male thing—that it had repeated the patriarchal factors of the Freudian approach and placed the father-son conflict in the foreground. It was necessary to criticize the patriarchal motives of psychoanalysis and to turn to literature with a fresh perspective. The insistent, motivating force for this in our group was Ortrud Gutjahr. We were also lucky enough to have Irmgard Roebing join the faculty of our German department, where she built up an area of emphasis in feminist literary studies.

Our group was quite successful, at least in terms of organization; Freiburg became a gathering place for central European psychoanalytical literary scholars. Our conferences drew many visitors; from year to year we had to reserve larger meeting rooms. Analysts and literary scholars came into conversation with one another, and the pool of possible speakers
grew. Soon we were able to structure the conferences so that the single talks could refer to one another, and so that a comparison of them generated a discussion of methods. Where in the beginning we had scheduled speeches with rather unrelated topics together, ever more often we organized conferences under specific headings, like narcissism, reception, aggression, or doomsday fantasies. In the eighties, the number of participants at our conferences increased so much that it was difficult to have sensible, compact discussion sessions that could include everyone. We could hardly overlook the risks of spontaneous speaking, especially since it was no longer a matter of course that all the participants had read the texts that such a discussion calls for. Besides this, the group of people working continuously and with research interests in the area of "literature and psychoanalysis" had steadily grown, so we decided to change the organization of our conferences. We kept to the previous type of conference, which remained open to everyone interested and served as a place to meet and network with people, to get a first impression of the talk of the trade, or to add to one's expertise. But now these large conferences alternated with smaller ones, where intimate groups included recognized experts in the field, in which we hoped to clear up central issues that our work had meanwhile unearthed: for example, psychoanalysis of literary form, literary models of feminine sexuality, or the relationship between psychoanalysis and historicity. Here we discussed texts that the speakers had chosen far enough in advance that all the participants could read them. In this way, the discussions were more closely connected with the texts, with a greater awareness of theory, and thus more fruitful. We intend to continue with both these conference types. In the meantime, we, that is to say, primarily Wolfram Mauser, also organized the "International Conference on Literature and Psychoanalysis" in Freiburg in 1995.

During the eighties there were also attempts at founding centers for the psychoanalytical treatment of literature in other places. The most successful of these were the conferences held by the Lacan-oriented group in Kassel with its journal *fragmente*. Yearly since 1981 we have been printing the
Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche, in which we publish papers read at our conferences. With it, we hope to provide a forum for those who psychoanalytically investigate literature and approaches to it and are concerned with suitable ways of going about it. By now the seventeenth volume has appeared. Since 1997 we have started publishing the Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche as an annual; we want to supplement the papers and essays with bibliographic references, information on conferences and specific areas of research, reviews, and announcements and tips on activities in the field of psychoanalytical literary study, and we provide the opportunity to submit contributions on the subject. In this way, we have created the grounds on which the psychoanalytical approach to literary processes, from the structures, motifs, and strategies of a text to its production and reception, can come to fruition in a sound scientific manner, and can, in contemplation, make sure of its traditions and of its present position.

I now turn to my personal path since the nineteen-seventies. The euphoria of the stormy sixties was followed in my case as well by disappointment in politics, the beginnings of resignation, the retreat into the controllable confines of my own university teaching and my own writing, and concentration on private relationships, raising children, and analyzing my own past. The greater degree of subjectivity was combined with more calm and more openness for personal experiences and contemplation of them. As soon as my academic career was secured, I went to lie on Hans Morgenstern’s couch, as if, out of purely scientific interest, and only as a confirmation of what I already knew, I now had to experience in person what I had already presented to the public in a nice, polished book. It soon became clear, however, that the journey I had begun behind the protective shield of academics led to a different place, and the first leg of the journey led away from academia. Those two or three years with Hans Morgenstern did not fundamentally change my life or my studies, but they did transform the process that had already begun into a living process of encountering myself and the world, in which I kept learning to overcome inhibitions, to get involved in new things with trust and confidence, and basically to constantly replenish
the pleasure in my life, be it in relation to others or in teaching and writing. Before then, certain individual experiences had convinced me of the existence of an unconscious, and as a philologist I had let the fruitfulness of psychoanalytical text interpretation pull me farther into psychoanalysis and so I had fallen into a pattern of alternation between text analysis and self-analysis. I had sharpened my psychoanalytical perception while we reflected on the processes of group dynamics that were at work in university teaching, observed children, and debated in communes. The same thing had also happened in observing and reflecting on collective processes, for example the time that some students gathered at a teach-in had the paranoid suspicion that a stranger there was a government agent from the office for defense of the constitution, when in fact he turned out to be a janitor. Now, though, I was learning about myself.

As is often the case, my analysis did not end with the end of my sessions. It has continued into the present in my contact with those who are close to me, in the way in which I try to teach at the university, in my writing, in conversations with the analyzed and with the analysts, of whom there is no lack in Freiburg. It continued with Johannes Cremerius in weekly head physician conferences and then, in the eighties, on long walks with the analyst Tilmann Moser. My curiosity aroused, I also continued to seek out new experiences with myself and my unconscious, generally on one weekend each year. I attended workshops, usually along with psychotherapists who were here for additional training. With them I was then able to reflect on the procedures I had subjected myself to. These were things like bioenergetics, rebirthing, theme-centered interaction, and the "drama of the unconscious," a procedure devised by Albert Pesso that works by one member of a group acting out a part of his or her unconscious. These workshops loosened up my psyche, which had grown rusty and stiff from everyday life, and brought me new experiences, which I tried to comprehend from a psychoanalytic perspective. With Pesso I learned to appreciate the precision with which the unconscious enacts itself—for me, a decisive impulse toward the scenic understanding of literature. In his
groups, I gained a clearer insight into the psyche of others: of women, of people who had been molested, of the children of Jewish Holocaust victims and of the children of Nazi perpetrators, of whom I consider myself one, at least to some small extent.

This theme touches on a still painful wound, that won’t allow my identity as a German who practices psychoanalytical literary interpretation of German literature to be pinned down reassuringly. It is the identity of someone who was socialized to antisemitism, who later tried to deny his German identity, attacking the national socialist German fathers, and yet who had constant contact with German literature and its traditions, oscillating between admiration, a longing for identification, and the search for literary and psycho-structural harbingers of Nazi crimes. It is the identity of someone who followed academically in the footsteps of the Jews Marx and Freud, who tried to construct an alternative identity for himself, who sidestepped the issue, joining the international and cosmopolitan set, who saw himself confronted, in analysis, with his own antisemitism, and who continually examined national socialist texts in his teaching, as well as texts in which members of his generation confronted their national socialist parents. It is also the identity of one who was classified as an “Aryan German” by the Nazis but who inevitably associated with Jews of German and other nationalities in psychoanalytical circles. This tension that I learned to endure is, below the surface, a determining factor in my identity and surely the identity of many other Germans working in psychoanalysis. That I am speaking to you now in English, and not German, means a certain accommodation, as I assume that today, not everyone here can speak the German language; accommodation mixed with regret that German has taken its leave from the ranks of international academic languages. I would rather have spoken German here, a token of my identity, which I have learned to stand up for; after all, didn’t Lessing, Marx, and Freud write in German?

But back to my path to psychoanalytical literary studies. It has remained a path of lifelong learning, even in teaching. As an example: in the seventies, there was no textbook to introduce students to the psychoanalytical interpretation of
texts and its presuppositions, so I wrote one. But strictly speaking, the main thing I was doing was making the procedure clear for myself, giving order to my jumbled ideas. Just as I have never actually written what I already know, but often what I only learned through writing. In everyday university teaching as well, I have not so much taught a fixed body of knowledge or even tried to force an authoritative opinion onto students; instead, I have tried to use methods I internalized on the analyst’s couch: helping students along on their individual path to learning, listening to them, confronting them with what they have said, and, in concerted reflection, finding out the next step to take. So psychoanalytical literary study was not only a method of interpreting an object; for me, it was a didactic method, even a lifestyle. This contact with students often made me insecure; in the eyes of the institution and of the students, and also in my own eyes, I was in the position of the all-knowing university teacher, and I saw myself confronted with the unknown often enough. Yet I learned through this, and changed. I couldn’t have done anything else, for it would have been too great a challenge for me only to teach what I knew. I simply knew too little that I considered worth communicating academically. So I made a virtue of necessity: my psychoanalytical orientation helped me to live up to the demands of academic teaching and by doing so even to continue learning.

Suspended attention was a mental posture that I had taken over from therapy into research. With it, I also turned to those theories and methods which up to now I hadn’t noticed or had rejected with theoretical argumentation. Thus I learned from those whom I could not follow, or only until then had not been able to follow. One example is the narcissism research that Balint, Kohut, and Kernberg pursued in various ways. In the beginning, amid the student revolts, stimulated by students in Freiburg and supported by reading Freud and early writings of Wilhelm Reich, I had understood the Oedipal conflict to be a shibboleth of psychoanalysis. I had established evidence of it in literary texts and showed how it is used to fortify or to attack power structures. I had dismissed references to those theories of narcissism as scientifically untenable, as an affirmation of
the existing power structures, and, in the end, as not psychoanalytical. And yet I had listened and read, though reluctantly, until finally I began to discover fantasies of unity or greatness, idealized parental images, and narcissistic rage in texts I was interpreting. The dismissed method, which suspended attention had simultaneously admitted, had proven to be philologically fruitful. But I learned not only by listening and reading; the social situation, the scenes in which I played a part had changed. In place of the Oedipal conflict that we had fought out with father-figures and authorities of all kinds there was now, after the failure of the student revolts, resignation and retreat into ourselves. In my analysis I was able to free myself from Oedipal scenes; now, the narcissistic problem that those scenes had helped me to ward off took their place in my consciousness. In my family, I had to take on the father role, giving up the role of the rebellious son; with my professorship, my role at the university took a similar turn. In society, in academia, in the way students acted, I became more and more aware of patterns of behavior that narcissism theory made comprehensible to me: withdrawal of objects, withdrawal from commitments, withdrawal from conflicts, fantasies of unity, keeping arrangements vague and imprecise. So I began—and I am not finished yet—a process of tracking down more pointedly the underlying narcissistic fantasies in our culture and thus in our literature. This research process was also a learning process; it was inseparable from my life’s process, from my confrontation with myself and my world.

Since I had written down my thoughts and my results in books and essays, I could recognize by rereading them the changes I and my research had gone through, could inquire into their causes and reflect on them. Writing and the contemplation of writing belonged together in this kind of psychoanalytical literary study. Time and again, the development of a theoretical position would stretch out over several books in a process in which new writings responded to the old. Take for example my progression toward a concept of literary counter-transference analysis. From the beginning it was clear to me that by working my way into psychoanalysis through literary interpretation, I was working out a procedure that could also
give me insight into myself. And yet, initially, for example in 1974 in my book on Brecht, I saw psychoanalysis as an instrument that allowed me, an unaffected, discerning subject, to grasp the object of my study, the text and its author, with objectivity.

When, in the early eighties, after having worked on an introduction to psychoanalytical literary interpretation for more than ten years, I noticed how much my interest in recognition, my conception, and thus also my interpretation of one and the same text had changed in that time span, I also realized that my method had changed along with me: psychoanalytical literary interpretation proved to be individually and socio-historically determined.

By now, counter-transference analysis had become more and more prominent in therapy, and some analysts, primarily Alfred Lorenzer, called for it to be used in literary studies as well. Hartmut Kraft even demonstrated it at one of our conferences. I was doubtful and rejected its use in literary studies with the argument that it reduced text interpretation to arbitrary subjectivity and that besides, it robbed psychoanalysis of the truth value of its statements. But then I was forced to discover a truth within myself: I had been asked for a contribution to a Festschrift and I chose a poem by Bertolt Brecht about which I had written many times before. I got into a hard-to-break writer’s block, and, glad to be able to escape my desk, I took part in one of the yearly workshops. While there, I started having intense heart pains that I had never experienced before; I was also nauseous and unable to express my feelings, and in a therapeutic confrontation I realized that I was going through an ambivalent encounter with an early mother-image. On the drive home I remembered that I had once written about Brecht’s heart neurosis, after learning of it. Through this experience with my own heart, I now understood that I had chosen my text according to my psychological disposition at the time, and that working with it now was pushing these scenes more clearly into the foreground. This was surely that play of transference and counter-transference that I had heard and read about. Reading Brecht, I looked into this reaction that his texts had triggered in me, analyzed it,
attempted to pin it down theoretically and to check the theory against the texts; and I was able to recognize Brecht's contraphobic handling of his anxieties as a key to his life and his work; in its details, but also in its central motivating elements, like epic theater. This genesis of my book on Brecht is described in its afterword. When a few psychoanalysts read this and invited me to give a talk on counter-transference methods in literary studies, I first read up on counter-transference and on literary hermeneutics and then I tackled the task of summarizing and systematizing my experiences. My need for the talk to be coherent, which is to say, to preserve the inherent logic of the topic, led me even further: first, to a conceptual-systematic and historical representation of the procedure, and second, because I hoped to convince readers and win students, to a methodical and didactic formulation of it, with demonstrations using model interpretations. Examining and contemplating my previous psychoanalytical work, myself, and the changes in my psychical disposition, and paying close attention both to the specifically psychical kinds of problems I encountered in my work and to the academic discussion, had at long last led me to this conceptualization. Certainly, it was in the air. How else could Hartmut Raguse, a Swiss analyst and theologian, and I have reached virtually the same conclusions at the same time from different starting points?

Looking at my example, psychoanalytical literary study has been a process of learning, of change, and of research under the influence of all these not necessarily scientific factors. There are three other influences I want to mention, taking my latest book as an example: political events, experiences that repeat themselves during a lifetime, and discussions from completely different fields. The collapse of the pragmatic-socialistic system that exposed its catastrophic and inhumane structures had conclusively destroyed my belief that we were in the middle of an historical movement that would lead to fundamental societal improvements, after increased environmental threats had already shaken this belief in the seventies and eighties. It became clear to me that I had been living in a psychically anchored pattern of interpreting the world around me, and that I had before taken on other such
patterns: that of national socialism, and then that of bourgeois democracy, using each in its turn to secure psychically and intellectually my place in the world. The term Wiedervereinigung, or reunification, as I learned, implied another interpretational pattern, involving a whole entity, this time the German people, followed by a painful separation and then a reunification—clearly fantasies that we know from the narcissism model. Based on them—and here I thought of a concept from a theory that was widely discussed at the time in other areas, especially in physics, the theory of constructivism: based on these fantasies were patterns of interpretation that not only I myself, but many societies had used to construct their world. My next step was to apply this insight to the history of Western thought and to work out how the fantasy pattern of unity, separation, and reunification had left its mark on Western religions and, since the 18th century, on the philosophies of history, how it became an important formal pattern in literature, and how since then it has begun to crumble.

That rounds off my look back at my literary-psychoanalytical journey. What made it what it was is the fact that it was no purely scientific, academic journey, and that I constantly moved back and forth between different elements, remained pragmatic throughout all the theorizing, seldom took part in strictly scientific theoretical discussions, but instead looked to the texts and into myself to find out what was fruitful, and then took that up and continued with it. This course of action was significantly shaped by what I had experienced on the analyst’s couch. That had included the liberating, gratifying, and civilizing effects of the analytical process that, for me, are inseparably connected to psychoanalytical literary study.

If you ask how I will continue my journey, I must say, I don’t know. I have at times wanted to stop and turn solely to literature; but then, what I had to say about literature was for the most part psychoanalytic in nature. When we subject ourselves to our own unconscious, we do not know what will come next. Perhaps it will lead me away from literature and from analysis. But I suspect that I will continue in that vein; institutionally, I am involved in the Freiburger work group “Literature and Psychoanalysis” and in collaboration with
Frederico Pereira and Robert Silhol on *Gradiva*, and I am often asked whether I could give a paper on literary psychoanalysis here or there—proposals that I sometimes do and sometimes do not pursue. Besides, I have tasted of the apple of psychoanalytic knowledge. So surely I will continue with literary psychoanalysis. But where this will lead me, I cannot say. Just so much: as long as what comes is psychoanalytical, it will be shaped by suspended attention, counter-transference analysis, and the oscillation between all those elements I have talked about here.

But how will psychoanalytic literary study in Germany further develop? The foundation is laid, there are publishing institutions, bibliographies, and a great enough number of literary scholars working with psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts working with literature. And yet, what they will work on, and most important, how they work on it, if it is, as I hope, more and different than what is going on today, I cannot say: not even whether the standards now being set here and there will be upheld, for everyone must begin at the beginning. Hopefully their work will remain psychoanalytic, that is to say, that it will contribute to individual and cultural self-knowledge; to a process of self-contemplative enlightenment that becomes a cultural process. I admit I do have one utopian vision: a German Psychoanalytic Academy for Cultural Studies, where graduates congregate, gain experience on the couch, and come together in fruitful, critical discussion over their dissertations and habilitations in cultural and literary studies—and that, if possible, in Freiburg.

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