The Analyst’s Ear and the Critic’s Eye is the first volume of literary criticism to be co-authored by a practicing psychoanalyst and a literary critic. The result of this unique collaboration is a lively conversation that not only demonstrates what is most fundamental to each discipline, but creates a joint perspective on reading literature that neither discipline alone can achieve.

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• What is psychoanalytic literary criticism?
• Which concepts are most fundamental to psychoanalytic theory?
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This volume provides cutting-edge work that will breathe new life into psychoanalytic ways of reading, free from technical language, yet drawing upon what is most fundamental to psychoanalytic theory and practice. It will be of great interest to mental health professionals, literary scholars and those studying psychoanalysis and literature.

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Rethinking psychoanalysis and literature

Benjamin H. Ogden and Thomas H. Ogden
For Elizabeth Ogden and Sandra Ogden, with our admiration, our gratitude, and our love.
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Introduction

This book is the result of several long talks that we, its two authors, had several years ago about the place of psychoanalysis in contemporary literary studies, and about different ways that psychoanalysts bring their training and experience to bear on their thinking and writing about literature. One of us (Thomas Ogden) has practiced psychoanalysis for thirty years and written articles on literary works for the past fifteen years, while the other (Benjamin Ogden) is a literary scholar who has published essays on the work of Samuel Beckett, J. M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, William Faulkner, and others.

The topic of our discussions was two papers written by Thomas Ogden, one on a poem by Robert Frost and the other on a short story by Franz Kafka (portions of both papers are reprinted in the Appendices). After reading the paper on Kafka for the first time, the co-author who is a literary scholar remarked that the work was quite different from what would be published in an academic literary journal. It seemed to him distinctly psychoanalytic in its approach to literature even though it did not include any psychoanalytic concepts or diagnoses; moreover, it seemed to him that the paper reflected particular qualities of psychoanalytic thinking born of the author's experience as a practicing analyst. The three or four discussions that followed led both of us to the conclusion that this pair of papers presented a conception of the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature that is markedly different from what is usually found in either the work of literary critics attempting to do “psychoanalytic readings” of literature, or in the work of other psychoanalysts writing about literature. In both cases, it is common for the psychoanalyst or the literary critic to use psychoanalytic concepts to “decode” or explain a text in a predictable, stereotypic fashion, thereby reducing psychoanalysis to a set of inflexible applications.

The psychoanalyst author was aware that in these two papers his approach differed from most conventional analytic readings of literature, but he had not thought through the question of what, if anything, was “psychoanalytic” about his writing. The papers were simply his efforts to respond to the works of Frost and Kafka in ways that were adequate to their literary and psychological complexity. Although they were not intended as psychoanalytic readings, as
we discuss in the chapters that follow, they are distinctly psychoanalytic in the
approach they take to reading (for instance, in their treatment of voice; in
their particular sort of awareness of the relationship between tone and
emotional states; and in their use of the concept of the unconscious in their
understanding of literature).

This book is, in part, our effort to explain how these two papers on Frost
and Kafka—which eschew the technical terms and conceptual formulae so
common to psychoanalytic literary studies—are nonetheless distinctively
psychoanalytic. That is, we are trying to describe what we mean by a form of
psychoanalytic literary criticism that is devoid of psychoanalytic terminology,
conceptual structures, and diagnostic categories. Without those “psychoana-
lytic” markers, how then is the writing fundamentally psychoanalytic? What,
we ask, is essential to psychoanalytic thinking apart from the psychological
vocabulary that has come to define it? What, finally, are the qualities of
thinking and feeling that exemplify a richer use of psychoanalysis in writing
about literature, and how are these qualities reflected in the pair of papers
we discuss?

In the first two chapters of this book, we look closely at these papers on
Frost and Kafka in order to examine how a psychoanalyst attends to the effects
of language in his experiences with patients; how this form of receptivity to
language shapes the analyst’s reading and writing about literature; and how a
psychoanalyst may be able to make use of his evolving knowledge of analytic
ideas (such as the concept of the unconscious) in his reading of literature
without reducing critical reading to a predictable and lifeless derivative of
psychoanalysis (“applied psychoanalysis”). In many respects then, we are
interested in what is most essential to psychoanalysis. To this end, in Chapter
2 we state what we believe to be the elements that most fundamentally
constitute what it means to think as a psychoanalyst, to practice psychoanaly-
sis, and to read and write about literature as a psychoanalyst.

This book is also an attempt on our part to make psychoanalysis relevant
once again to literary studies. It seems to us that, over the course of the past
forty years, psychoanalytic literary criticism has become an increasingly
marginal branch of literary studies. We believe that this marginalization has
occurred in large part because most psychoanalytic readings of literature
either continue to apply a discrete set of analytic formulations to a literary
work in order to “solve” it or “decode” it, or to apply psychoanalytic diagnos-
tic criteria to fictional characters, or to use a text as a port of entry into the
psychology of the author, or to use biographical and autobiographical accounts
of the author as ports of entry into the unconscious workings of the mind of a
fictional character (as if fictional entities have minds). These ways of reading
literature psychoanalytically are, of course, based on assumptions that are
formulaic and conjectural (for instance, drawing one-to-one correspondences
between the [presumed] unconscious wishes and fears of the writer and the
themes and characters in his stories).
Our discussions have led us to believe that psychoanalysis, if it can be brought to bear on literature in ways very different from those just mentioned, merits a central place in literary studies. We hope to demonstrate that psychoanalytic concepts are only one part of psychoanalysis, and that where psychoanalytic literary studies have regularly gone astray is in neglecting so much of what actually makes up the experience of the practice of psychoanalysis: its close attention to the effects of language and to other forms of human expression, its interest in the relationship between the use of language and the individual’s attempts to express and understand himself, its therapeutic dimension, its way of understanding the unconscious as both an individual and an intersubjective phenomenon, and its use of the qualities of aliveness and deadness of language as measures of the status of an analysis at any given juncture. These qualities of the actual practice of psychoanalysis seem to us to provide a unique and invaluable experiential and theoretical context for reading and responding to literature. What we mean by psychoanalytic literary criticism is a form of reading and writing that derives as much from these attributes of analytic practice as it does from psychoanalytic theory.

We will illustrate in Chapter 2 how both the conceptual and experiential dimensions of psychoanalysis unobtrusively find their way into the thinking and writing of the psychoanalyst co-author’s discussion of a Frost poem and a Kafka story. Much of this book, then, is devoted to making psychoanalysis once again relevant to literary studies by providing literary scholars with a greater understanding of dimensions of psychoanalysis that are likely to be unfamiliar to them.

In this book, we focus exclusively on psychoanalytic literary criticism written by Thomas Ogden. We do so not because we feel that he is the only psychoanalyst who writes about literature in a richly discerning, yet non-technical way. We recognize that there are other writers who achieve non-technical and lively forms of analytic writing on literature, and that a close look at any of their writing would undoubtedly yield other unique ways in which an analyst’s experience informs and enriches his reading of literature (see for example, A. Jones, 1999; Griffin, 2005; and Poland, 2003, to name only a few). We have chosen to limit ourselves to these two papers only because the project began with our intuitions that they embody a different way of making psychoanalytic thinking significant to literary studies.

In the final chapter of this book we attempt to give to psychoanalysts interested in literature, and to literary critics interested in reimagining their own profession, a fuller understanding of how literary critics think, feel, and write about literature. Having said in the first two chapters what we believe to be essential to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism, in the final chapter we describe particular kinds of thinking that are central to literary criticism, but that are by and large foreign to psychoanalysts. We do this by examining a paper written by Benjamin Ogden (which is reprinted in the Appendices) on Philip Roth’s The Ghost Writer. In examining this paper, we
try to illuminate dimensions of the literary critic’s reading that, we feel, not only reflect those qualities of thinking that are most important to literary critics, but that would be of particular use to a psychoanalyst trying to broaden the ways in which he approaches literature.

We would also like to note that we have decided to write this book with a single narrative voice because, in the course of our discussions, we have come to see psychoanalytic literary criticism as a component of a way of being a literary critic that is informed by many perspectives, including a psychoanalytic dimension, but not dominated by any single perspective.

We have chosen to use the terms *Psychoanalytic Literary Reader* (for which we have invented the acronym PLR) and the *Literary Critic* to refer to the psychoanalyst and the literary scholar co-author, respectively. We have elected to use these designations because they underscore the fact that the narrative “we” is both singular (in the sense that “we” reflects two or more people speaking with a single voice because they more or less share a point of view) and plural (in the sense that “we” is a pronoun that necessarily refers to two or more distinctly separate people with minds of their own, and ideas and sensibilities that are not held in common). The distance between our points of view is in movement throughout the book. In fact, the tension between the voice of the PLR and that of the Literary Critic in the voice of the narrative “we” is a constant presence in this volume, and we believe that that tension constitutes a good deal of what is potentially most alive and interesting about the book. We view this movement in thinking, and the attendant changes in the narrative “we,” as an opportunity for us, and the reader, to reflect on the ways one’s thinking (and the way one uses language to express one’s thinking) can and should change over time, and over the course of reading (or writing) a book such as this one.

We believe that this book is unique among the numerous books and articles that have been written on psychoanalysis and literature. In so far as we have been able to determine, no other book has addressed questions concerning psychoanalytic literary criticism from the dual perspective of a full-time practicing psychoanalyst and a literary scholar. This dual perspective allows us to examine closely the form of psychoanalytic literary criticism of the analyst co-author. That form of psychoanalytic literary criticism is viewed by the authors as bearing the mark of the many years of the analyst’s experience of talking with patients, a mark that at once enriches the way the analyst “listens” to the voices created in a piece of literature, and creates “blind spots” for the analyst regarding the assumptions he is making in his reading. It required a literary scholar to identify those blind spots and offer a critical perspective that is both unexpected by, and of value to, the analyst co-author and other psychoanalytic readers and writers. Similarly, it took a practicing psychoanalyst to demonstrate how what generally passes for psychoanalytic literary criticism scarcely conveys what a psychoanalytic conception of human experience adds to a non-analyst’s thinking.
Ultimately, however, the value of this book is not to be found in its ideas or methodologies, but in the writing itself. The writing must carry the structures of thinking and feeling that are, in fact, the book’s original contribution to literary studies and psychoanalysis. Our book is about how language carries in it thinking and feeling that is not reducible to a set of inflexible terms and applications. Consequently, this book must itself achieve the sort of thinking and writing that is its subject matter. That is to say that this book carries its justification not in particular methodologies that might be lifted from it and applied elsewhere, but in the degree to which every line is representative of the kind of thinking the book extols.
Chapter 1

The analyst's ear

The history of psychoanalytic literary criticism is as old as psychoanalysis, but it has undergone considerable change since Freud's famous readings of *Hamlet* (1900), the novels of Dostoevsky (1928), and the story of Moses (1939). The methodology of psychoanalytic literary criticism introduced by Freud and adopted by most psychoanalysts and non-analysts through the greater part of the twentieth century is founded on the idea that writers create stories and characters that reflect their own unconscious psychology. A text is a mirror of the unconscious mind of the writer, much as dreams are creations of the unconscious mind that are disguised in order to escape repression ("censorship"), thus gaining access to preconscious and conscious awareness (our remembered dreams). Through readings of this sort, psychoanalytic literary criticism brought established analytic formulations to bear on the text, for instance, constellations of feeling understandable in terms of the Oedipus complex, castration anxiety, the incest taboo, oral, anal, and phallic stages of psychosexual development, and the like.

The best known, and most widely studied, early examples of this type of formulaic Freudian reading are Ernest Jones's (1949) reading of *Hamlet* (in which he concludes that Hamlet is unable to fulfill his duty to kill his uncle because that murder is too closely linked in his repressed unconscious to his forbidden oedipal wishes to murder his father and marry his mother); and Marie Bonaparte's (1933/1949) study of Edgar Allan Poe, which owed much to Freud's (1908) "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming."

As psychoanalytic theories of early childhood development grew more nuanced, so did the range of concepts that psychoanalysts used to decode literary texts. This resulted in readings that were no less formulaic in the way they made use of analytic concepts, but they did draw on a wider range of psychoanalytic ideas (for example, Phyllis Greenacre's [1955] "The Mutual Adventures of Jonathan Swift and Lemuel Gulliver: A Study of Pathography" and Ernst Kris's [1948] "Prince Hal's Conflict"). Literary critics with an interest in psychoanalysis, but with little, if any, analytic training, and no experience at all as practicing analysts, followed suit, producing intelligent, but reductive readings (for example, Edmund Wilson's [1948] reading of
Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* as a play that Wilson believed to be a reflection of Jonson’s “anal erotic” personality.

This Freudian model of literary criticism may have peaked (among academic literary critics) with the work of Frederick Crews, who in his 1966 book on Nathaniel Hawthorne, asserts: “All Hawthorne’s serious fiction amounts to a version of the same unconscious challenge; not one of his characters stands apart from the endless and finally suffocating [internal] debate, about the gratification of forbidden wishes … We must admire the art and regret the life” (pp. 270–271) of Hawthorne, who Crews concludes was tormented by the same “forbidden wishes” that plagued his characters.

Despite the fact that these types of readings lost much of their luster after Crews (who himself later renounced the psychoanalytic perspective), contemporary psychoanalytic literary critics continue to produce readings of literature based on the supposition that literary characters behave and think like real human beings; that fictional characters have unconscious psychological problems that the reader may identify and diagnose; and that the author and his characters share the same unconscious dilemmas.

Alongside classic Freudian accounts of author and character psychology, there emerged a set of psychoanalytic theories that addressed different, but closely related, aspects of psychoanalysis and its bearing on literary analysis. In *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1968), Norman Holland moves psychoanalytic literary criticism in the direction of “reader-response theory”—a field of literary theory that focuses on how readers respond to texts and the role readers play in investing texts with meaning. Holland makes use of a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective to understand the interpretive activity of readers. In a 1970 article, “The ‘Unconscious’ of Literature,” Holland reads Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” not as a reflection of the author’s psychology, but as an appeal to the reader’s psychology. He views the poem as activating the unconscious fantasies and wishes of the reader (in this case, the reader’s unconscious fantasy of breaking down the wall between the self and the nursing mother).

Peter Brooks, in *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (1994), brings psychoanalytic concepts to bear on narrative theory, and Harold Bloom, in his seminal work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), links influence and authorial anxiety to the Oedipus complex. In response to Bloom’s theory of psychological influence, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (in *The Madwoman in the Attic* [1979]) develop their own feminist psychoanalytic theory of author psychology, arguing that female writers suffer from an “anxiety of authorship” born of their socially marginal and conflicted status as women writers.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Freudian framework became part of the fields of linguistics, structuralism, and semiotics, most prominently in the work of Jacques Lacan. Lacan’s post-Freudian framework was appropriated by semiology, structuralism, and post-structuralism, for example in Barbara Johnson’s (1977) well-known reading of Derrida’s reading of Lacan’s reading of Edgar.
Allan Poe's story "The Purloined Letter." The result of this interpretive chain was, unfortunately, no less deterministic in its suppositions about the explanatory power of psychoanalytic ideas than the literary criticism derived from Freud's and Ernest Jones's application of psychoanalytic theory to the reading of literary works. Similar use of psychoanalytic concepts can be seen in the literary criticism and prose of several important twentieth-century poets and fiction writers, including Conrad Aiken (1919), Robert Graves (1924), W. H. Auden (1962/1969), and Randall Jarrell (1962/1966, 1969).

Regardless of the particular form they have taken, these types of literary criticism are all held to be psychoanalytic because they either use a psychoanalytic conceptual framework to "understand" literature or they use literature to illustrate, expand upon, or upend established psychoanalytic formulations. In such literary criticism, a discreet set of "answers" to the puzzle of literary texts pre-exist the reading of the text.

In this chapter we focus on a form of psychoanalytic literary criticism that is devoid of psychoanalytic formulations and the psychoanalytic jargon that often accompanies such psychoanalytic readings. The kind of psychoanalytic criticism we will discuss is unusual in that it makes no attempt to find or create a correspondence between literary form or content (for example, Hamlet's tortured soliloquies) and psychological operation (for example, Hamlet's unconscious attempts at resolution of parricidal and incestuous wishes and fears). It is a form of psychoanalytic literary thinking that is not psychologically explanatory, diagnostic, or therapeutic. Rather, it raises the possibility that one of the ways that a piece of literary criticism is psychoanalytic derives from its particular way of hearing and writing about literary voice. *This way of hearing and writing has its origins, we believe, in how practicing psychoanalysts are attuned to the patient's voice, and their own, in a way that is unique to the practice of psychoanalysis.*

In considering a form of psychoanalytic literary criticism divested of all the characteristics that have traditionally been taken as constitutive of psychoanalytic literary criticism, we will focus on a reading of a Robert Frost poem by Thomas Ogden (1998) (see Ogden, T., 1997b, 1997c, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2009a, 2009b for his readings of other literary works). In our discussion of the Psychoanalytic Literary Reader's (the PLR's) essay on Frost's "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same" (1942/1995a), we attempt to continue the ongoing (but unfinished) process of loosening the ties of analytic criticism to reductive psychoanalytic formulae, and to use what we know about psychoanalysis and literary studies to jointly consider how the analyst's lived experience of the practice of psychoanalysis is reflected in how he thinks and writes about literature. In doing so, we hope to bring literary criticism and the practice of psychoanalysis into conversation in such a way that each discipline takes from the other some of its most essential and less evident qualities, rather than limiting this conversation to the most manifest contributions of each discipline. This should give literary critics who are interested in
psychoanalysis (as both a set of ideas and as a therapeutic process) a deeper and more nuanced sense of the forms of thinking that are integral to psychoanalysis; and it should give to psychoanalysts who are interested in literature a better feeling for the ways that academic literary critics attend to the demands of literature in their own unique ways.

We believe that the distinctively psychoanalytic dimension of psychoanalytic literary criticism resides as much in the experience of the practice of psychoanalysis (and the particular form of listening and conversing that are central to it) as it does in psychoanalytic theory. In the analytic setting, analyst and patient are engaged in an effort to speak to one another in a way that is adequate to the task of creating/conveying a sense of what it feels like for the patient to be alive, to the extent that he is capable of being alive, at a given moment. We believe that for this to occur, the analyst must be attuned to what the patient is doing with language, as well as all that he is unable to do. Language is not simply a medium for the expression of the self; it is integral to the creation of the self (which is a continuing, moment-to-moment process). In the analytic setting, with its focus on talking as the principal means of communication, voice and language usage are among the principal ways in which individuals bring themselves into being, “come to life.” Voice, for the patient, is a medium for intended and unintended experimentation with different forms of selfhood, and for the development of a larger, more vital sense of self.

In order not to leave completely open to the imagination of the reader (who may not be a practicing analyst) what we have in mind by the psychoanalyst’s way of being with, listening to, thinking about, and responding to what is happening in the course of an analytic session, we will now present a selection from the analyst co-author’s psychoanalytic writing in which he describes his work with one of his patients. (This description of analytic work is based on a previously published clinical discussion [Ogden, T., 2010].) He writes:

As a child, Mr. C, a patient with cerebral palsy, had been savaged by his mother. In adult life, he became possessed by a “love” for a woman, Ms. Z. Over a period of eight years, Ms. Z twice relocated to a different city; both times the patient followed. Again and again, she tried to make it clear to Mr. C that she liked him as a friend, but did not want a romantic relationship with him. He became increasingly desperate, angry and suicidal. From the outset of the analytic work, and frequently thereafter, the patient told me that he did not know why I “tolerated” him.

In our sessions, Mr. C would howl in pain as he spoke of the “unfairness” of Ms. Z’s rejection of him. When upset, particularly when crying, the patient would lose muscular control of his mouth, which made it very difficult for him to speak. Frothy saliva gathered at the sides of his mouth, and mucus dripped from his nose while tears ran down his cheeks. Being with Mr. C at these times was heartbreaking. I have only rarely felt
in such an immediate, physical way that I was the mother of a baby in distress.

I believe that it was very important to the analytic work that Mr. C experience for himself over a period of years the reality that I was not repulsed by him even when he bellowed in pain and could not control the release of tears, nasal mucus and saliva. It must have been apparent to Mr. C, though I never put it into words, that I loved him as I would one day love my own children in their infancy. For years, the patient had been too ashamed to tell me about some of the ways his mother had humiliated him as a child, for example, by repeatedly calling him “a repulsive, slobbering monster.”

Mr. C only gradually entrusted me with these deeply shamed aspects of himself. “She threw shoes at me from her clothes closet like I was an animal that she was trying to keep at a distance.” I said, “She was treating you like a rabid dog, and over time, you’ve come to experience yourself in that way.” In speaking and thinking these thoughts and feelings, the patient and I were trying out words and images to convey what had been to that point inarticulate emotional pain experienced primarily through feelings encrypted in bodily sensations, such as the sensations associated with his speech and gait. In trying to help Mr. C find words for his inarticulate feelings, I was not trying to help him rid himself of pain; I was trying to help him transform the medium in which he was experiencing his pain (from a bodily medium to a verbal one) in hopes that by doing so, he and I would be better able to think about his experience of himself, as opposed to his “showing it to me” or “dumping it into me” in order that I might experience some of his pain for him.

Several years into the work, Mr. C told me a dream: “Not much happened in the dream. I was myself with my cerebral palsy washing my car and enjoying listening to music on the car radio that I had turned up loud.” The dream was striking in a number of ways. It was the first time, in telling me a dream, that Mr. C specifically mentioned his cerebral palsy. Moreover, the way that he put it—“I was myself with my cerebral palsy”—conveyed a depth of recognition and an acceptance of himself that I had never before heard from him. How better could he have expressed a particular type of change in his relationship to himself—a psychological change that involved a loving self-recognition that contributed to freeing him from the need to perpetually attempt to wring love and acceptance from people disinclined to, or incapable of, loving him? In the dream, he was able to be a mother who took pleasure in bathing her baby (his car) while listening to and enjoying the music that was coming from inside the baby. This was not a dream of triumph; it was an ordinary dream of ordinary love: “nothing much happened.”

I was deeply moved by the patient’s telling me his dream. I said to him, “What a wonderful dream that was.” How different it would have
felt to me, and I think, to Mr. C, had I said, “In the dream, you were the mother you’ve always wished you had, taking great pleasure in giving you—you as you are, a person with cerebral palsy—a bath, while singing beautiful music to you, her beloved child.” To have said this would have been redundant—we had talked a great deal about his wish that he had had a mother who loved him as he was. It would also have had the effect of taking his dream—his experience of being both a loving mother (to himself and other people) and a well-loved baby—and making it something of my own by putting it into explanatory language. Instead, I simply appreciated the love and beauty that he had experienced, not only in dreaming the dream, but also in telling it to me.

Some years later, Mr. C moved to another part of the country to take a high level job in his field. He wrote to me periodically. In the last letter that I received from him (about five years after we stopped working together), he told me that he had married a woman he loved, a woman who had cerebral palsy. They had recently had a healthy baby girl.

We will return to this clinical vignette at various points in this chapter to discuss the analyst’s particular ways of attending to language (both the patient’s and his own), but for now it suffices to say that this vignette reflects a way of listening and responding that is distinctively psychoanalytic (it is immediately recognizable as being different from all other forms of human relatedness).

As we turn now to a discussion of the PLR’s essay on “Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be the Same,” we hope that it becomes clear that the way in which the PLR listened to and spoke with Mr. C is continuous with the way in which he reads and writes about Frost’s poem (the entirety of T. Ogden’s [1998] critical reading of “Birds’ Song” is reprinted in the Appendix to Chapter 1). The vignette and the following discussion represent different expressions of the same psychoanalytic sensibility, a sensibility that gives the PLR’s literary criticism its psychoanalytic identity.

Here is the Frost poem that the PLR discusses:

Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be the Same

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds’ song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

(Frost, 1942/1995a, p. 308)

Here is the first section of the psychoanalyst’s response:

The poem opens with the sound of good-natured chiding as the speaker, with mock skepticism, talks of a man who professed a far-fetched notion about birds that he actually seemed to believe. There is a slightly dis-owned intimacy in the speaker’s voice as he fondly, skeptically marvels at the capacity of the man to believe the unbelievable and speak these beliefs from a place in himself where there seemed to be no doubt. There is a feeling that what he believes he “believes … into existence” (Frost, quoted in Lathem, 1966, p. 271). One can hear in the voice the pleasure taken in knowing someone so well over the years that even his old stories and quirky beliefs have become signatures of his being.

(Ogden, T., 1998, pp. 430–431)

What is striking about this kind of psychoanalytic literary reading is the rapidity and intensity with which the PLR is drawn to a personal connection with the voice of the poem. The privileged portal for the PLR’s efforts to get to know a piece of literature is the voice created in the writing. In the broadest sense, the PLR’s relationship to voice is unusually (perhaps excessively) intimate. In his introductory comments, the PLR goes so far as to say of the Frost poem (and of a Wallace Stevens poem that he also discusses), “I have chosen these poems … because I am fond of [them] … and welcome the opportunity to spend considerable time with them in the process of writing about them” (Ogden, T., 1998, p. 429). The language here strongly suggests that the PLR’s experience of reading a poem is a personal one that is very similar to the way he approaches meeting a person, hoping that the visit will be a fulfilling one, both emotionally and intellectually. One has the impression that the PLR believes that if he is sufficiently attentive to what the writer is doing with language, he will get to know the poem at a greater depth in much the same way that he would get to know another person more intimately if he were to listen, with equal sensitivity, to how that person spoke. And, just as is the case with the experience of getting to know another person in a fuller but never complete way, one is changed by the experience.

It is important to point out that although the PLR treats the experience of reading and responding to literature in a way that holds much in common with the experience of getting to know his patient, Mr. C, or anyone else, he is not so naive as to believe that a literary work is the thinking and feeling state of the writer transposed into verbal form. Rather, the PLR treats the
literary work as a creation, in the medium of writing, of a state of mind that the author has experienced in the past or is experiencing (perhaps for the first time) in the very act of writing.

For the PLR, the author is not “dead” (as Roland Barthes [1968/1977] argued in his seminal essay on authorship); he is present in the sense that his own range of human experience is the substrate for the experience he creates in the writing of the work. From what other source, the PLR asks, could the experience of writing (and reading) emerge? He firmly believes (in his discussion of Frost’s poem and in our discussions more than a decade later) that a writer cannot create in his writing what he is incapable of experiencing in his own life—an author, he contends, cannot write effectively about emotional experiences, he must write from them: they must be alive in the author.

The point we are trying to make here about the place of psychoanalysis in literary studies is that the PLR treats voice as a reflection of human psychology. He believes that voice in literature conveys particular feeling states, and that these emotional states of mind can be heard and understood in the same way that feeling states can be heard and understood when they are spoken by a patient, or by any other person. The voice is not treated as entirely the product of rhetorical or structural strategies in form, or as the product of particular historical pressures. (This is not to say that such variables are out of bounds for the PLR, only that they are not the primary way that he thinks about literature.)

The PLR, as an analyst whose life’s work is listening to the patient and himself, considers narrative voice in poetry and fiction in much the same way he would the voice of Mr. C or any of his other patients. He does so not as a means of accessing the author’s psychology. Rather, the analyst limits himself to a consideration of the effects of language, focusing on these effects as reflections of the feelings and ideas of fictional characters—imaginary beings whose origins in the author’s mind is undeniable (where else could they have come from?), but who are not symbolic messengers carrying in them the code for the author’s conscious and unconscious desires, fears, jealousies, and so on. Fictional characters and themes are not repositories for discrete aspects of the author’s unconscious mind, but are nonetheless imbued with certain qualities of thinking and feeling that derive from the psychology of the author. For the PLR, these qualities of thinking and feeling are communicated principally through the effects created in the medium of language.

To put this in other terms, if a psychoanalytic literary critic attempts, for example, to discern Robert Frost’s psychology from a poem, he pointlessly distracts himself and his readers from the text as a literary event. Literature, because of its unique formal (structural) properties, can open up new possibilities for thinking and feeling that could be evoked in no other way but in literary language (Attridge, 2004, 2005). The need to use a text to decode the author’s psychology, it seems, comes from the belief that for a psychoanalyst to learn from literature, or for a literary scholar to be properly psychoanalytic,
he must try to move past the effects of language in the text into the unconscious psychology of the author.

It is not simply that conjecturing about author psychology in the ways we have described is guesswork and therefore ill-advised; worse, it is hostile to the sort of work that analysts can do best in their reading of literature because it is premised on a misunderstanding endemic to psychoanalytic literary criticism, namely, that an author’s psychology can be reduced to a distinct set of psychological concepts. So, if author psychology is for the most part off limits, then what the psychoanalyst, or the literary critic who wishes to be responsibly psychoanalytic, can bring to literature is a particular type of awareness of the relationship between voice, effects of language, and complex emotional states.

Still, it is not enough to say that the PLR pays very close attention to voice and effects of language. After all, we all respond to the effects of language when we read. What marks the PLR’s reading as psychoanalytic is how he writes about voice and language, i.e., his own use of words in discussing his response to a piece of literature. In his discussion of “Birds’ Song,” he makes use of a particular way of writing about voice in which he is unusually brash in his treatment of voice without ever making the reader feel that he is being irresponsible in his attitude toward voice. That is to say, we think that in his reading of Frost the PLR is successful in executing a non-technical form of psychoanalytic reading, in that his reading manages to treat narrative voice as if it were the voice of a real person without ever leading the reader to feel that he has lost his awareness that the voice is not that of a real person. He manages to get deeply into the effects of language in a way that humanizes the narrator without making him exactly human. He has, moreover, created a way of writing about voice that conveys what is most alive for an analyst when working with a patient. We are interested here in looking at what kind of writing is necessary for a psychoanalytic literary reading to be successful, and how such a way of writing reflects what is unique to the experience of a practicing psychoanalyst.

We are, moreover, asking how the PLR’s lived experience as a therapist—as someone who listens and responds to voice in a way that serves a therapeutic role for the patient—is reflected in how he writes about literary voice. In what way is the PLR’s need to help his patients reflected in his writing about literature?

To respond to these questions, we return to the beginning of the PLR’s response to the Frost poem:

The poem opens with the sound of good-natured chiding as the speaker, with mock skepticism, talks of a man who professed a far-fetched notion about birds that he actually seemed to believe. There is a slightly dis-owned intimacy in the speaker’s voice as he fondly, skeptically marvels at the capacity of the man to believe the unbelievable and speak these beliefs
from a place in himself where there seemed to be no doubt. There is a feeling that what he believes he “believes … into existence” (Frost, quoted in Lathem, 1966, p. 271). One can hear in the voice the pleasure taken in knowing someone so well over the years that even his old stories and quirky beliefs have become signatures of his being.

As the poem proceeds, the metaphor of narrator describing a man of strange but deeply held convictions is “turned” in a way that serves to invite the reader gently to take his place in the metaphor as he becomes the person to whom the “argument” is addressed, while the speaker becomes the man holding these odd beliefs.

There is delightful playfulness and wit in the speaker’s voice as he invokes flawed cause-and-effect reasoning to “explain” events occurring in a metaphor: the birds in the garden (of Eden), having listened to Eve’s voice all day long, had incorporated the sound of her voice into their song (as if time played a role in the mythic Garden). The strange “belief” in the creation of an “oversound” (a wonderful neologism) becomes an experience that occurs in the poem itself, that is, in the changes taking place in the sound of the poem’s voice.

(Ogden, T., 1998, pp. 430–431)

This passage is notable in that the PLR is both immediately drawn to voice and comfortable possessing only an incomplete knowledge of it. The phrase “The poem opens with the sound of good-natured chiding” immediately (perhaps prematurely) turns the reader into a listener (to paraphrase E. M. Forster [1927]). So strong is the PLR’s attraction to voice as a way of entering into the poem that the “good-natured chiding” is viewed as an effect of “sound,” not of the words or the syntax. There is no period during which the poem is taken as text; it begins as voice, and is intermittently linked back to its textual features. However, the diction, syntax, and overall voice of the PLR’s writing in these three paragraphs suggest an approach to voice that is comfortable being provisional, incomplete, uncertain, even conjectural. For instance, several sentences begin with the phrase “There is…” (“There is a slightly disowned intimacy…” and “There is a feeling that what he believes….”). Two sentences later, the PLR writes, “There is delightful playfulness….” Clearly, the phrase “There is” holds for the PLR a preferred distance as well as an unresolved quality of his own narration that is for him what he believes to be the best way of couching his understanding of voice. “There is” typically is part of a confident statement, one of assurance. But in this passage, it is always tempered: “There is a slightly...” and “There is a feeling that....”

The grammar of the phrase “there is” reflects a particular orientation and attitude toward voice that we believe derives from what the psychoanalyst does with a patient’s voice and with his own voice in his effort to understand (up to a point) what is happening between them. It is likely that the PLR’s syntax in his literary writing reflects his conception of the effects of voice in
his clinical work, which he treats as communications that can be truthful and also be partial, still in formation. (The PLR’s account of his work with Mr. C is descriptive in its tone and language structure, as opposed to being definitive, deductive, or explanatory: “How different it would have felt to me, and I think to Mr. C, had I said, ‘In the dream, you were the mother you’ve always wished you had, taking great pleasure in giving you—you as you are, a person with cerebral palsy—a bath, while singing beautiful music to you, her beloved child.’”)

If the PLR were simply a literary critic, and not a psychoanalyst as well, he might be perceived as hedging his bets, as being willing to state things as true while protecting himself from being found wrong in the end. As an analyst speaking to a patient (and himself) about voice, it is essential that he speak in a way that conveys sufficient conviction to merit consideration on the part of the patient; sufficient tentativeness to do justice to the complexity and elusiveness of voice; and sufficient humility in the face of all that he does not know about the forms of thinking and feeling that go on in both a psychological and a bodily way outside of his own and the patient’s awareness. These same qualities characterize the PLR’s voice when he writes about a piece of literature.

Of course, a psychoanalyst’s way of responding to and writing about a patient’s voice is shaped by the responsibility he feels to be of use to the patient and to the reader of his clinical writing. It is not simply that the analyst is attuned to human voice and effects of language by virtue of the “ear training” (Pritchard, 1994) he has accrued over the course of decades of listening to, and talking with, his patients, though this no doubt is part of the story. What we are focusing on here is the idea that the analyst’s way of listening to and thinking about voice is inseparable from his therapeutic function. By therapeutic function we mean all of the fundamental components of an analyst’s care of his patient: his facilitating the patient’s development of a sense of self more grounded in himself (as opposed to being primarily reactive); his helping the patient become more capable of sustaining a broader range of feelings and richer forms of relatedness to other people who are experienced as separate from himself; his creating conditions in which the patient may develop ways of thinking that involve simultaneous, multiple perspectives on what is occurring in his internal life and his life in the external world; his helping the patient to be receptive and responsive to the truth of his emotional experience, and so on. What is distinctive about the psychoanalyst’s approach to language in the analytic situation is that, while he must never reduce his understanding of voice to impersonal psychological formulations, he also must never lose sight of the way in which voice reflects the particular, ever-changing, intrapsychic and interpersonal context in which voice is generated.

With this view of the analyst’s way of attending to voice in his clinical work in mind, we return again to the question: what are the ways of going about reading literature that are distinctively psychoanalytic? In responding
to that question we begin with the belief that it is vital to acknowledge that the psychoanalyst’s understanding of voice—both in his work with patients and in his reading of literature—is shaped profoundly by the relationship between the expressions of self generated in language and the psychological and emotional states of the speaker. Without this thread that connects voice and human psychology, it would be impossible for the psychoanalyst to do his work as a psychotherapist. This thread connecting voice and the psychology of the person speaking is a hallmark of psychoanalytic literary reading and criticism.

But this thread connecting voice and psychology is not the only quality that is distinctive to psychoanalytic literary criticism. Voice, for the psychoanalyst working with a patient, is always accompanied by a “therapeutic valence,” that is, a desire to do productive analytic work with a patient during a session. Responding to communications cast to a large extent in the medium of voice requires of the analyst not only a well-trained ear, but as importantly, a way of using language that invents a way of communicating that is absolutely personal to that patient at that moment in the analysis. Saying the same words to two different patients would be useless at best, and would probably undermine both patients’ feeling of being known by the analyst.

In his discussion of his work with Mr. C, the PLR attends closely not only to qualities of voice and shifts in tone, but also to use of metaphor and witty, poignant understatement. For example, the PLR captures in his writing the great joy he takes in Mr. C’s metaphoric comparison in his dream of the songs sung on the car radio and the beautiful music of the sounds made by one’s well-loved baby. He was similarly moved by the endearing understatement in Mr. C’s use of the phrase “not much happened” to refer to the new-found experience of the extraordinariness of the ordinariness of love (including self-love) in his life. (It must be borne in mind that the dreaming of a dream is almost entirely a visual imagistic event, while the telling of a dream is almost entirely a verbal construction, just as telling a friend about a painting one saw is a verbal construction, not a visual one. The metaphor with which the PLR was so taken was a metaphor created not in images, but in words as the patient told his dream to him.)

The PLR responded to the telling of the dream not with interpretation or explanation, but with a simply worded statement of appreciation that he could have said to nobody but Mr. C—“What a wonderful dream that was”—recognizing both the profound psychological changes that were reflected in the dream and the gift of words and feelings that the patient had made to the analyst (and, as importantly, to himself) in his telling of the dream. We have tried to capture in this discussion of the PLR’s clinical writing the importance of the analyst’s speaking in a way that reflects what is unique to a given moment of lived experience with another person.

We will now return to the PLR’s discussion of “Birds’ Song,” this time focusing on the way in which psychoanalytic literary criticism of the sort we
are discussing brings to bear on the reading of a text a “therapeutic urgency” (a need to be of psychological use to the patient) that is inseparable from the analyst’s internal pressure to speak to his patient in a way that is absolutely personal to the experiencing pair.

Holding in mind the clinical experience just discussed, we would like to look at another section of the PLR’s reading of Frost to examine how the therapeutic urgency he feels with his patients is reflected, in a transformed way, in his literary reading and writing. Here is the section of the Frost poem that the PLR is addressing:

Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed  
Had now persisted in the woods so long  
That probably it never would be lost.  
Never again would birds’ song be the same.

Here now is the PLR’s reading of these lines:

The voice here is a more personal voice, filled with the effort to hold onto what is most valued; it is reminiscent of the tone of the words “And what I would not part with I have kept” in Frost’s (1942/1995b, p. 305) “I Could Give All to Time”. In “Birds’ Song,” what is most valued is a belief—a belief which in these lines is no longer a certainty—that poetry, that this poem, can speak with an “eloquence” that reaches so deeply into human feeling and experience that it alters language itself, and has persisted in the woods/words so long that “probably it never would be lost.” The “eloquence,” the ability of poetry to change the sound of language, is only as potent as is the ability of this poem to create the sounds of a unique voice that will never be lost to the reader.

The phrase “probably it never would be lost” quietly and unobtrusively conveys a remarkable depth of sadness. The word “probably” softly suggests a feeling of doubt, never openly acknowledged, about the permanence and immutability over time of the oversounds created in the course of a poem or of a life. Characteristic of Frost’s poetry, the line-ending words “never would be lost,” give the word “lost” the “final word.” In so doing the language undercuts the claim for permanence in the very act of making it.

The voice in the line “Never again would birds’ song be the same” has moved well beyond the wit and charm of the first part of the poem, and beyond the bald assertion “she was in their song.” The line has the sound and feel of a memorial prayer. In these most delicate and unassuming words (that contain not a single hard consonant sound), a sense of the sacred is evoked—a deeply personal sacredness filled with both love and sadness. The strength of the voice in this line keeps the declaration free of sentimentality or nostalgia. The line conveys a sense of the poet’s attempts, in his making of poems, to create and preserve in the sound of his words
something of the sounds of the past voices that have been most important to him: the voices of the people he has loved; the voices of the poems that have mattered most to him; the changing sounds of his own voice in the course of his life (both in speech and in the poems that he has written); and the sounds of ancestral voices that are not attributable to any particular person, but are part of the language with which he speaks and from which he creates his own voice and his own poems.

(Ogden, T., 1998, pp. 433–434)

At the heart of this response is the PLR’s description of the particular sadness created by the language of the poem. In the poem, the narrative voice describes a scene in which one human voice (“the daylong voice of Eve”) is heard so fully and deeply, and for such a long time that it becomes imprinted in the voices of other living creatures. The narrative voice can hear in the voices of these living creatures traces of Eve’s voice. It is impossible not to hear the narrator’s unspoken wish that his own voice could find another living creature (and another “woods”) in which to persist after he dies. But, at the same time, it seems that the narrative voice will not allow itself to wish this fully for fear of having to confront the possibility that neither his voice nor the voice of Eve will survive. For this reason he dashes the purity of the dream by saying, “probably it never would be lost.”

Through the form and voice of his own writing, the PLR “speaks” to the narrator in a way that, to our ear, is a response to the narrator’s anxiety, much as he responded to Mr. C’s emotional pain. The PLR seems to respond to the narrator as if the narrator needed assurance that he is not alone in his uncertainty and pain. He assures the narrator through the form and voice of his written response that their conversation as reader and poet (not unlike the conversation between analyst and patient) is the “woods”/“words” in which the narrator’s voice “never would be lost.” (Perhaps the PLR’s saying to Mr. C “what a wonderful dream that was” added to Mr. C’s voice an oversound that led Mr. C to feel that “probably it never would be lost.”)

The PLR does this not through plain assertion, but by saying back to the narrator a transformed version of what the narrator has already said in language that is both drawn from the tones and rhythms of the narrator’s voice and from a sensibility that is a unique creation of the PLR’s mind and voice. The PLR echoes the word choice of the narrative voice with his own word choice, pairing the narrator’s “woods” with his own “words,” and the narrator’s “birds” with his own “bards.” The PLR, in so doing, echoes the narrator’s voice while also expressing what he alone hears in the narrator’s words. The PLR not only describes the narrator’s words and voice as “delicate and unassuming”; he writes about them in a way that is delicate and unassuming in its own way. A critic and a psychoanalyst must add something to what they hear, and in that way transform it. Otherwise, they are simply making echoes, and not offering “original response” (Frost, 1942/1995c, p. 307).
The PLR never interprets the poem, instead taking the delicate and unpre-
sumptuous approach of simply saying what “sound and feel” the lines have,
what “sense” they convey. In this way, he draws the narrator into conversation,
speaking with the imprimatur (the “oversounds”) of the narrator’s voice. The
poet’s voice and the PLR’s voice are now “voices crossed” (and changed) in the
shared experience (created in the PLR’s writing) of listening to one another.
The PLR’s form of response keeps alive the very real, and finally irresolva-
ble, fear in the narrator’s voice about his own mortality and the mortality of
his living voice—fears that are reflected so devastatingly in the use of the
word “probably,” and in the elegiac but hopeful tones of the phrase, “Never
again would birds’ song be the same.” The PLR keeps this natural human fear
alive in a way that seems to want to try “to help the narrator” learn to live
with the recognition of the finality of death and make something distinctly
his own with this recognition. The PLR does so not by providing the narrator
with unconvincing reassurance (“Don’t worry, I won’t forget you”), but by
briefly allowing the narrator to hear reflections of himself (but not himself) in
the voice of the PLR. Ultimately, the PLR’s writing captures something of the
experience of two people making a lasting, though not eternal, impression on
one another by means of the way they use words in talking together.
We hope that in distilling psychoanalysis to its least technical essence we
not only dispense with the entrenched perception of psychoanalytic literary
criticism as outmoded and inapplicable because it is little more than a bundle
of hackneyed “solutions” to literary texts, but that, in a broader sense, we have
added something to the evidence that the best writing and thinking is that
which is not pledged to any theoretical methodology, but is everywhere draw-
ing on the capacity of language to express dimensions of reality (however
complex and elusive) in clear and lively ways. We believe that in its clearest,
most human, and least formulaic form psychoanalytic thinking holds the
potential to once again become a significant part of how literary critics and
scholars think about how writers go about using language to create the effects
that constitute good literature.
In the previous chapter we described and made use of a form of psychoanalytic literary thinking and writing that reflects the psychoanalyst’s lived experience of his own work as an analyst and that eschews barren psychological terminology. We stated, “What the psychoanalyst, or the literary critic who wishes to be responsibly psychoanalytic, can bring to literature is a particular type of awareness of the relationship between voice, effects of language, and complex emotional states.”

We realize that this way of describing psychoanalytic literary criticism will draw objections of many sorts. Taken to its most radical conclusion, the first chapter of this book might mistakenly be viewed as rendering irrelevant to literary criticism the entire intellectual tradition of psychoanalysis, that is, the concept of the unconscious mind and the psychological work that is done unconsciously; the importance of early infantile and childhood experience in the shaping of the personality; the ways in which we incorporate experiences with other people into the very structure of our mind—the ways we think and construct meaning; the ways we live out derivatives of our early childhood experience in our relationships with other people and with ourselves for the rest of our lives, i.e., transference.

The idea that we reject the use of these foundational concepts in the type of literary criticism that we described would represent a fundamental misunderstanding of our point of view. In the first chapter, we discussed a particular form of psychoanalytic literary criticism which, despite the fact that it did not use psychoanalytic terminology or formulations, was in fact profoundly influenced by psychoanalytic theory and the ways those ideas are put to use in the day-to-day practice of psychoanalysis. How could it be otherwise? The psychoanalytic concepts that are integral to the analyst’s practice of psychoanalysis over time become part of the very structure of the analyst’s thinking and feeling, and are inseparable from the analyst’s unique form of attentiveness to language both in his clinical work and in his reading and writing about literature.

We do believe, however, that psychoanalytic concepts have historically been used in literary criticism (both by analysts and non-analysts) in ways that
drain the life from them and transform them into technical jargon. In the hands of those who have learned about psychoanalysis principally through their reading of Freud, analytic concepts are often used in ways that are outdated, and severely limited by the intellectual climate of the era in which they were generated. (After all, Freud’s psychoanalytic opus, written between 1895 and 1939, is, inevitably and inescapably, the product of its time.) Too often, the term *unconscious*, for example, is used in literary criticism in ways that have little to do with how the concept of the unconscious is conceived of and made use of in contemporary psychoanalysis. It is only the staid and mechanical uses to which psychoanalytic theory has been put, and not the theories themselves, that we forego in this book.

To consider the potential role of psychoanalytic theory in the kind of psychoanalytic literary criticism we have been discussing, we must address how a psychoanalyst’s understanding of such concepts as unconscious thinking—developed in the course of formal analytic training, reading analytic texts, consultations with colleagues, and experience garnered while working with patients—informs his reading and writing about literature in ways that are not explicitly technical. In the current chapter our focus will be on presenting our understanding of the concept of the unconscious and demonstrating the way in which it underlies the type of psychoanalytic literary criticism that we are describing and developing. What, we ask, does psychoanalytic theory have to contribute to a form of psychoanalytic literary criticism that eschews the use of psychoanalytic terminology?

In order to think through the potential role of psychoanalytic theory in the practice of literary criticism, we must address the idea that we believe constitutes the core of psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice: the concept of the unconscious. When we use the term *unconscious*, we are referring to an aspect of mind operating outside of one’s awareness that coexists with an aspect of mind in which we are aware of our thoughts and feelings. The unconscious aspect of mind operates outside of our awareness in a way that is different from the way in which, for instance, our phone number is “in mind” while we are not thinking of it. The latter sort of absence of awareness is easily reversible when we need to remember something; these kinds of unconscious workings of the mind constitute what Freud (1912, p. 262) calls the *descriptive unconscious*. By contrast, Freud uses the term the *dynamic unconscious* (Freud, 1912, p. 261) to refer to that aspect of mind that is devoid of the quality of conscious awareness because sexual and aggressive impulses derived from bodily instincts, and the fantasied and real emotional experiences connected with these impulses, are felt to be too frightening, painful, shameful, overwhelming, or unacceptable in some other way, to be experienced in a state of full awareness (“with one’s eyes open”). The unconscious, from this perspective, consists of unbearable, unacceptable desires and fears that are split off from conscious awareness.

For Freud (1900), the goal of psychoanalysis is that of making the unconscious conscious, thereby bringing derivatives of irrational unconscious wishes
and fears into the realm of conscious, realistic, chronological, verbally symbolic thinking processes. These conscious thinking processes (which Freud terms secondary process thinking) allow the individual to reintegrate the formerly segregated unconscious thoughts and feeling states into the main body of one’s conscious mental processes. Freud, in describing the outcome of successful psychoanalysis, wrote, “Where id [the unconscious seat of forbidden impulses and irrational fears] was, there ego [rational, realistic, adaptive, thinking and feeling] shall be” (1933, p. 80).

What we have said thus far about the unconscious was introduced by Freud in 1900 and remains today at the heart of psychoanalytic thinking. Nonetheless, the unconscious is an evolving concept that has undergone, and is undergoing, significant change that is scarcely reflected in the current popular conception of the unconscious and in much of contemporary literary criticism. The changes to the concept of the unconscious that we will describe supplement rather than replace Freud’s thinking.

Wilfred Bion, a British psychoanalyst writing in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, introduced a radical reconceptualization of the unconscious that constitutes a significant part of contemporary psychoanalytic thinking. The unconscious, for Bion (1962a, b), is not the seat of irrational fears and forbidden impulses, but an aspect of mind (operating both while we are asleep and while we are awake) with which, in health, we do our most profound thinking/dreaming (for Bion, dreaming is synonymous with unconscious thinking). Dreaming continues throughout both our waking and sleeping states. Just as the stars remain in the sky even when their light is obscured by the glare of the sun, so too, dreaming (unconscious thinking) is a continuous function of the mind that continues even when obscured from conscious awareness by the glare of waking life. What characterizes the workings of the unconscious mind is the simultaneity of perspectives from which one is able to view one’s lived emotional experience—the actual experiences one has had, and is having, both in one’s internal and external worlds.

In unconscious thinking, from Bion’s (1962a, 1970/1975) perspective, the individual simultaneously views his experience from the standpoint of rational, cause-and-effect reasoning and from the vantage point of omnipotent, magical causation; from the perspective of sequential time and from the perspective of timelessness; from the vertex of primitively signified experience in which thoughts and actions are indistinguishable, and from the vertex of mature symbolization in which an interpreting subject mediates between symbol and symbolized (that is, between a thought and what is being represented in thought); from the perspective of an impatient need to find the safety of closures, conclusions, judgments, and understandings, and from the perspective of an equally forceful need to dissolve closures in order to open up the possibility of fresh understandings, which in turn will be dissolved and opened up once again to new ways of organizing one’s thoughts, feelings, fantasies, dreams, memories, and perceptions, and so on.
Collectively these various simultaneous perspectives that characterize unconscious thinking offer a richness and complexity of thought and feeling not possible in conscious life. If, in one’s waking conscious life, one were to view one’s experience simultaneously from the perspective of logical, cause-and-effect thinking and from the perspective of magical thinking (in which one is able to alter the realities of life simply by wishing it or demanding it), one would live in a state of confusion and would be unable to engage in ordinary human relationships or to engage in productive work.

From the vantage point of this revised conception of the way the unconscious aspect of mind works, the goal of psychoanalysis is no longer that of making the unconscious conscious; rather, the goal is that of making the conscious unconscious, that is, rendering the individual’s lived emotional experience accessible to the richness of a type of thinking characterized by the ability to think one’s experience from the perspective of multiple, simultaneous vantage points. In other words, the conscious is “unconscioused” (Bion, 1992, p. 353).

It is largely the unconscious aspect of mind that accomplishes the “psychological work” that underlies psychological growth—that is, the work of transforming, coming to terms with, making one’s peace with, and developing a layered and nuanced set of understandings of one’s disturbing emotional experiences. The conscious act of “figuring something out” in a linear fashion pales in comparison to the richness of unconscious thinking. This understanding of the work of the unconscious represents a radical departure from Freud’s view, and is little known or studied outside of the psychoanalytic profession.

It is also from this revised vantage point introduced by Bion that dreams take on a different inflection. Dreaming dreams that we remember on waking up is the form of experience in which we have the most direct conscious access to this vital experience of unconscious thinking. Dreaming is at once a chronological experience (one event seems to follow another) and an atemporal experience (how long does a dream last?). In dreams, there are realistically portrayed people and objects, and concurrently, unrealistic, magically altered portrayals of people, things and events. It is the coexistence of, and interplay among, these forms of thinking that contribute to the uniqueness of dream experience. Dreams are not simply the disguised expression of repressed impulses, desires, and fears (as Freud [1900] would have it), but are the expression of multiple forms of thinking in which we struggle and experiment with a plethora of ways of gaining a sense of the truth of our lived experience, of who we are in relation to other people, and of the knowable and the unknowable world. The unconscious, when viewed in this way, is not a place or a structure, but a form of thinking by means of which we most richly create the ever-changing meanings and significances of our individual and interpersonal existence. It is also a form of self-understanding in that the dreamer (the person engaged in unconscious thinking) is both “the dreamer who dreams the dream” and “the dreamer who [unconsciously] understands
the dream” (Grotstein, 2000). In other words, our capacity to interpret, understand, and come to terms with our disturbing experience may occur primarily or entirely unconsciously in the form of dreaming (unconscious thinking).

It is essential to bear in mind, lest we idealize the unconscious, that what we have just described are the workings of the unconscious aspect of mind as it operates in a state of relative psychological health. The idea of complete psychological health is a fiction in the sense that each of us is to one degree or another unable to face the truth of our lived emotional experience. The extent to which we are unable to face that truth varies from hour to hour and from day to day, depending in large part on whether others (perhaps one’s analyst) are helping us to “dream” (unconsciously think) our experience. We hold, in the tradition of Bion (1962a, b), that a fundamental premise of psychoanalysis is the idea that it takes two people to think. By that we mean that each of us on our own bumps up against (cannot transcend) the limits of our personality, the limits of our ability to face the truth, to come to terms with our emotional problems, to make our peace with our failings and those of others, to mourn our losses, and so on. The limits of our ability to dream our experience are limits that have developed as a consequence of the particular self-protective, unconscious psychological efforts we have developed (beginning in infancy and childhood) in order not to be overwhelmed (traumatized) by our experience. The point at which we reach the limits of our capacity to dream our experience is the point at which we, if we have no one else with whom to think and feel our experience, develop psychological symptomatology. At that point, a person may seek the help of a psychoanalyst in an effort to get some help in dreaming his formerly undreamable/unthinkable experience. The outcome of successful analytic work might be thought of as the patient’s becoming able to dream his experience more fully, to dream himself more fully into existence.

Thus, the psychoanalytic setting—with its odd arrangement of the patient lying on the couch and the analyst seated out of sight behind the couch—is a construction designed to facilitate the interpersonal experience in which both patient and analyst may engage in unconscious thinking individually and together in a state of waking dreaming (“reverie”) (Bion, 1962a; Ogden, T., 1997c)—a state of mind in which the two are, to a large degree, free to engage in an unimpeded stream of consciousness, a type of consciousness generated by means of a relatively unencumbered interplay of the conscious and unconscious aspects of their two minds working/dreaming separately and together. The analyst, in the analytic “set-up,” is freer than in ordinary conversation to become aware of his reverie experience (his waking dreaming), thus giving him greater than usual access not only to derivatives of his own unconscious thinking, but as importantly, to a form of thinking that is generated collectively by patient and analyst—the thinking of a co-created third subject, “the analytic third” (Ogden, T., 1994a, 1997c).
In order to ground in actual experience these ideas, which constitute such a large part of the conceptual structure of the analyst’s way of thinking about his work with patients, and that form such a significant role in the Psychoanalytic Literary Reader’s (the PLR’s) approach to reading and writing about literature, we will offer a brief clinical vignette. The analytic experience that we will discuss (which was originally presented in Ogden, T., 1994b), illustrates the way in which the analyst’s understanding of what is occurring between himself and his patient is drawn not from dramatic flashes of insight, but from the most quotidian thoughts, daydreams, preoccupations, worries, fleeting perceptions, tunes and phrases that run through one’s mind, and the like (“such stuff as dreams are made on”). For the analyst to be dismissive of such everyday concerns or “wanderings of his mind” is to lose the opportunity to notice out of the corner of his eye the ways in which he and the patient are engaging in overlapping states of reverie—together engaged in dreaming (unconsciously thinking) what the patient has been unable to dream on his own. The PLR writes:

About half way through an analytic session with Mr. L, I was feeling that my understanding of what was occurring between him and me made intellectual sense, but my ideas felt clichéd and emotionally lacking. My mind drifted to a series of competitive thoughts concerning professional matters that began to take on a ruminative quality. These ruminations were unpleasantly interrupted by the realization that my car, which was in a repair shop, would have to be collected before 6:00 PM when the shop closed. I would have to be careful to end the last analytic hour of the day at 5:50 precisely if there was to be any chance at all of getting to the garage before it closed. I imagined myself standing in front of the dirty glass panes of the garage door and could hear in my mind the relentless noise and acrid smell given off by the traffic behind me. I felt helpless and rageful about the fact that the owner of the garage had shut his garage doors precisely at 6:00 despite the fact that I had been a regular customer for years. The owner must know that I sometimes run a little late, so how could he do this to me?

Rather than treating these thoughts as personal preoccupations that had nothing to do with the patient, I began to try out the idea (in my own mind) that Mr. L may have been experiencing me (behind the couch) as being as disloyal and impersonal as the owner of the garage had been in my reverie, and that the sound of my voice was as unrelenting as the roar of the traffic in the imagined scene. My thoughts and feelings about picking up my car had not occurred with any other patient that day and I could easily have dismissed them as an unwanted interference with my analytic work. Instead, I entertained the idea that my ruminations about “my own stuff” had been in some way connected with what was occurring between Mr. L and me. It occurred to me that these thoughts and feelings
(and the narrative I had constructed around them) was a waking dream—but not a dream that was entirely of my own making. It seemed that “my preoccupation” with the narrative concerning the car was a psychic construction born of the interplay of Mr. L’s and my own unconscious thoughts and feelings at that particular juncture in the analysis.

Eventually in that session and succeeding ones, I was able to make use of the reverie experience to help Mr. L find words and images to talk about what we came to understand as his unthinkable and unspeakable feeling that the analysis had been from the outset a joyless obligatory exercise in which the two of us simply were “going through the motions.” (In making use of my reverie experience, I spoke to Mr. L from my experience of the waking dream, not about it.) Although these feelings of emotional deadness had their roots in the patient’s childhood, he had been unable to experience them, much less give voice to them, until the period of the analysis I have just described.

This intersubjective understanding of the analyst’s reverie reflects a major development in the analytic conception of the unconscious aspect of mind: in analysis (as well as in every other significant interpersonal experience, beginning at birth) the unconscious aspects of mind of two (or more) people contribute to creating a “psychological field” (Ferro, 1999; Baranger and Baranger, 2009) between them that each participant experiences in the form of his dreaming while asleep and his waking dreaming (his reverie experience). Neither party can lay exclusive claim to “his” dreams and reveries because they emerge to a large extent from the unconscious interpersonal psychological field that patient and analyst jointly create.

This description of a reverie experience reflects important qualities of unconscious experience that, to this point in our discussion, have remained implicit. One such quality is that the unconscious is ultimately unknowable. This is so in two senses. The first is trivial: the unconscious is by definition devoid of the quality of conscious awareness, and so any thought or feeling of which we are aware is not an unconscious thought or feeling. But the unconscious is unknowable in a far more important way: it constitutes much of what is most mysterious and most alive about us. The wonder that we feel in relation to it is not necessarily mystical or religious in nature; it is an experience of marveling at the vast, imponderable complexity of being alive to the truth of our experience and the internal and external universe in which we generate our experience.

Before we look closely at a second piece of literary criticism written by the psychoanalyst co-author, we will present a second clinical vignette in order to provide the reader a fuller sense of the dialectical tension generated between conscious and unconscious aspects of mind in the analytic setting. This second clinical experience was chosen not simply for its value in demonstrating the use of personal and intersubjective reverie phenomena in the analytic setting.
It also illustrates the centrality of the experiences of aliveness and deadness to
the analytic process, and demonstrates how the quality of aliveness—an alive-
ness of language, of self-awareness, of waking dreaming, of conscious thinking
and feeling—is, from a certain point of view, a goal of analysis larger than that
of the resolution of unconscious conflict, the diminution of symptoms, or an
enhancement of one’s self-understanding. Qualities of aliveness and deadness
are qualities of self experience that include not only the nature of the interplay
of conscious and unconscious aspects of mind, but also encompass a great
many other facets of an individual’s experience, for example, qualities of
imaginative thinking, dreaming, falling in love, of “getting lost” and “being
found” in the course of conversation with a friend or with one's analyst, as well
as the experience of reading and writing about literature. (This strand of
analytic theory was pioneered by the English analyst and pediatrician, Donald
Winnicott, beginning with his 1945/1958 paper “Primitive Emotional
Development.”)

Here is the PLR’s description of psychoanalytic work with a patient in
which experiences of aliveness and deadness play a central role both in the
spoken dialogue as well as in their more common silent, background forms.
(For a more detailed discussion of this clinical experience see Ogden, T.,
1995/1997a.)

In the analytic relationship with Mrs. S, I was again and again stunned (in
a way that I have rarely experienced with other patients) by the depth of
her unwillingness or inability to evidence or experience any warmth
toward me. Mrs. S felt dependent on me, but insisted that this was an
addiction, not a personal attachment: “A heroin addict doesn’t love
heroin. The fact that she’ll kill to get it doesn’t mean she loves it or feels
any kind of affection for it.” Despite repeated statements of this sort over
the course of years, I clung to the belief that “underneath” her disdainful
insistence that analysis was merely something to which she had become
addicted, I meant a great deal to her as her analyst and as a person.
Perhaps it was Mrs. S's response to my father's death that shook my
belief that the patient secretly felt some form of love or concern for me.
After receiving the unexpected news of my father's death, I telephoned
my patients to tell them that I would be cancelling several of their
sessions. Depending on which form of expression I felt was right for each
of my patients, I said to some that there had been “a death in my family”
and to others that “my father died.” When I spoke with Mrs. S, I used the
phrase “a death in the family.” She received the news quietly, but imme-
diately asked me if I knew approximately when I would be returning to
work. I said that I did not know, but would “let her know” when I did.

In our first meeting after my return, Mrs. S said that she was “sorry
that someone in my family had died.” There was unmistakable anger in
her voice as she underscored the vagueness of the word “someone.”
She fell silent for a few minutes and then said that it made her furious not to know who had died and said that she felt that I had been sadistic in not having given her that information when I phoned her. She added that she was certain that I had told all my other patients who in my family had died.

At this point in the meeting, I began to recall the details of the feelings that I had felt during the telephone call that I had made to Mrs. S soon after I learned of my father’s death. I vividly remembered what it had felt like to attempt to control my voice as I spoke, trying to hold back tears. I wondered whether it was truly possible that she had not heard that. How could she have not experienced that moment (as I had) as one in which there had been a close connection between the two of us? Instead, it seemed that she experienced it as still another occasion on which her need to control me had been frustrated.

As I was sitting with Mrs. S, I could hear the voice with which I was speaking to myself as the voice of a person experiencing a sense of impenetrable alienation from Mrs. S; at the same time, I also recognized something else in that voice for the first time. It was the voice of a spurned lover. It occurred to me that Mrs. S lived in a world in which two different forms of human experience each disguised the other: her coldness disguised her love, and her love (a primitive, controlling love) disguised her coldness (her inability to genuinely care about, much less love, another person who is experienced as a whole and separate person).

At that juncture, I felt that I had arrived at the beginning of an understanding of something about the relationship between Mrs. S and me that I had not previously grasped. This new understanding did not serve to protect me from the chilling inhumaness that I had sensed in Mrs. S and which I knew reflected intense, long-standing fears and ways of protecting herself; neither did it serve to dim the recognition that alongside these powerful fears and ways of protecting herself were the beginnings of a capacity to love a person separate from herself.

I could at this point see, in retrospect, that it was in part my own lack of compassion for, and need to distance myself from, Mrs. S and her wishes to comfort me that had led me not to tell her who had died. I only realized at that juncture in the session that while I had told some of my other patients that there had been “a death in my family,” with Mrs. S, I had put it in a far more impersonal way: “a death in the family.” I had blinded myself to the fact that her seeming lack of compassion represented a complex interplay of two powerful, coexisting aspects of her personality to which I was strongly reacting. She had been concerned about me and felt despondent that I had not recognized her love. At the same time there was an important way in which Mrs. S was unable to come to life as a human being and instead she merely existed in a mechanical, inner world where she ruled omnipotently, “like the Red Queen” (my own unspoken
simile) in *Alice in Wonderland*. I had been unable to live with, formulate, and talk to myself and to Mrs. S about the mutually obscuring interrelationship of the ways in which she (and I) were emotionally alive and emotionally dead.

Later in the session that I am describing, I said to Mrs. S, “I think I have underestimated two things in our relationship: the amount of affection we have for one another and the degree to which we have no relationship at all. When I lose sight of one or the other of these facts, I fail to understand who you are and who we are together.” I added, “I think that the degree to which there’s an absence of a human tie between us has diminished in the time we’ve known one another.” Mrs. S responded by saying, “You know, you’ve never spoken to me in this way before. Until now, I’ve always felt that you’re as cold a person as I am and that I could always hear iciness in your voice. I didn’t hear or feel the coldness in you just now.” Mrs. S went on to say that she did not believe that the iciness was gone, but at least, for the moment, it did not dominate everything that occurred between us.

I understood Mrs. S to be saying that she felt profoundly relieved that she could accept understanding from me, which she never before had been able to do without immediately attacking that understanding, or more often, withdrawing into a state of self-sufficiency. In saying what I said to her, I acknowledged the realness of both her and my own emotional deadness (the deadness of our language) and the realness of our increased capacity to experience a living, human connection to one another.

On the basis of experiences in analysis like the one just described, the analyst co-author has come to believe that perhaps the most important measure of the moment-to-moment status of the analytic process is the quality of aliveness and deadness that he and the patient experience in being with one another.

We have presented this account of an analytic experience in part to illustrate the use of the concepts of aliveness and deadness in psychoanalysis, and the way these concepts serve to expand one’s thinking about language usage within the analytic situation. It would be a mistake simply to equate the unconscious mind with aliveness and the conscious mind with deadness (or vice versa): conscious and unconscious aspects of mind operate in concert in the creation of the quality of aliveness. Aliveness is a quality of the healthy interplay of conscious and unconscious aspects of mind, and deadness is generated by pathological (disconnected) aspects of the unconscious or conscious mind.

We offer this account and discussion of an analytic experience in order to illustrate particular aspects of the theoretical and experiential context within which an analyst works with his patients—a context that he brings to the experience of reading and writing about literature, even when no mention is made of any part of it.
This brings us to the PLR’s reading of Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist,” which we discuss in order to demonstrate how these theoretical and experiential contexts figure into the thinking the PLR does when he writes about literature. Here then is the beginning of the PLR’s reading (his discussion of this story is reprinted in the Appendix to Chapter 2).

Kafka’s (1924/1971) story begins:

During these last decades the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished. It used to pay very well to stage such great performances under one’s own management, but today that is quite impossible. We live in a different world now. (p. 268)

In this opening sentence, a note is sounded that echoes through much of the remainder of the story: psychic time and space are contracting, time is running out, and vitality is in a state of severe decline. The second sentence has a hint of madness to it, as “professional fasting” is linked both with the grandiose phrase “great performances” and the bureaucratic fussiness of the words “quite impossible.” But what is most striking about the opening of the story is the sentence: “We live in a different world now.” This pronouncement creates a we (of narrator, hunger artist, and reader) and a now that have the effect of closing the door behind the reader as he enters the world of the story.

(Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 354)

As in his reading of Robert Frost’s (1942/1995a) “Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be the Same,” the PLR is guided from the outset by sound: a “note is sounded that echoes.” A note of indeterminate origin—loud enough to reverberate through almost the entire story—is instantly tied to a reality characterized by psychological depletion (“psychic time and space are contracting”) and a feeling of deadness in the world of the story and in the lives of the narrator and the protagonist (“time is running out, and vitality is in a severe state of decline”).

Underlying the PLR’s opening is, we believe, a particular kind of logic, one that echoes throughout the remainder of his reading. Fundamentally, what we observe here is the way in which the PLR has made, through the grammar of the sentence, a broad equivalence: “a note is sounded”: “psychic time and space are contracting.” The precise relationship between the note sounded and the contraction is not spelled out for the reader. The sentence is constructed in a way that treats language and psychology as variables on two sides of an equation that equal one another (with a colon serving as an equal sign), but precisely how they equal one another is never stated. Is the relationship causal, tautological, analogical, paradoxical, dialectical? All of these possibilities are kept in play by the syntax. Whatever the exact nature of the relationship, it is carried in the use of the colon. The PLR’s use of the colon leaves it to
the reader to determine the nature of the relationship between these two independent clauses (“a note is sounded” and “psychic time and space are contracting”). Evidently, language and psychology are taken to be inseparable and dependent upon one another, both within Kafka’s story and within the PLR’s reading. But rather than limiting the nature of the relationship between language and psychology by naming it, the PLR expresses it syntactically, so that the relationship is not only established as essential, but is built into the very syntactical structure in which he thinks and works. The result is that the nature of this relationship must be reinvented and rearticulated as the language of the story changes. The sentence has the effect of permanently binding language and psychology in a way that is definitive (can never be severed), but not restrictive (the relationship is free to change according to changes in the story).

The PLR’s logic is: psychological reality is built into language; language (including its sound) gives shape to psychological reality. The precise nature of their relationship is undefined, but each embodies the other in some fashion. Presumably, the PLR hears a note sounded (something going on in the language) and identifies it as the psychological contraction of space and time, and the diminishing of aliveness. Exactly what in Kafka’s writing has sounded this note we are not told: we are given only the PLR’s reading of sound in psychological terms. A direct circuit from sound to psychology has been established.

From the “direct circuit” has come an implicit, highly psychoanalytic position: dead language (dead notes) will equal deadness of psychology. This reading, we learn, will be a process in which psychology in toto (its characteristics, the intrapsychic and interpersonal worlds it creates, unconscious feelings of futility and deadness) will be tracked by hearing it in language. The relationship between language and psychology, however, will be mediated almost entirely by the ear of the PLR. The success of his reading will in large part depend upon how well he can hear psychological states in language.

This is a dangerous business: the PLR opens himself to charges that his reading is highly subjective, almost phenomenological (phenomenology being the study of “phenomena,” of things as they appear to us and as we experience them, not as things may be outside of our conscious experience of them). A stronger reading might have given some clues as to what it is about Kafka’s opening sentences that sound the note of the diminution of psychic time and space and vitality; the reader wants to know more about what in Kafka’s language expresses what the PLR hears. He might, for instance, have demonstrated how particular poetic devices (alliteration, synecdoche, et al.), metrical patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables, variations in syntactical structure, punctuation, and so on, gave rise to the emotional and psychological changes to which he is responding.

It feels to us that the PLR might be hearing into Kafka in a way that stems from his experience as a psychoanalyst. For the PLR, psychology—whether it be the dominant psychic features of reality, or the unconscious expression of
alienation, or an element of madness in the personality—is something that is reflected in the sound of language, and therefore cannot be dissociated from the web of patterns and inflections inherent in literary language (in this case, in Kafka’s story). The PLR’s struggle is to establish a sense of contingency between sound and psychology, while not “solving” the problem of precisely what the nature of this contingency is. Done well, the relationship seems self-evident, inherent to the criticism; done poorly, it feels suppositional. We will leave it to the reader to take the measure of where the PLR falls so far.

The PLR’s second sentence continues the implicit semi-tautology of the effects of language and discernible psychic states and qualities. We are told, “the second sentence has a hint of madness to it,” which the PLR ascribes to the conjunction of the phrases “great performances” and “quite impossible.” Here we get a better, though not entirely satisfactory, sense of what the PLR believes to be the origin of the note of madness that he hears in Kafka’s second sentence. He directs the reader to the particular words/sounds that he believes are responsible for the feeling of psychological madness that creeps into the story in the opening sentences, but goes no further in saying how a faint atmosphere of madness is the result of the combination of two very short, rather prosaic, phrases: “great performances” and “quite impossible.” The PLR draws attention to these particular phrases as an explanation for the feeling of madness, instead of making it clear why this particular combination of sounds and themes should create such a feeling. He says only that the feeling of madness is the result of the juxtaposition of grandiosity and “bureaucratic fussiness.”

But is this where the “hint of madness” comes from? It seems to us that a certain finicky personality and delusions of grandeur together would not produce something so dark as “madness,” but might give rise to comedy and pathos, evoking a mixture of empathy and disgust. If there is indeed madness in the opening lines of “A Hunger Artist,” it may not be in the conjunction of fussiness and grandiosity, but in how Kafka’s language evokes two very important literary genres: the Gothic and the grotesque. What the PLR recognizes as a “hint of madness” may be best understood as a hint of the Gothic or a hint of the grotesque, both of which Kafka has used to powerful effect in the opening lines of his story. That is, Kafka’s opening is able to carry in it a hint of madness despite the prosaic nature of the language only because the hallmarks of those literary traditions that he so subtly evokes (mystery, the supernatural, terror, deviancy, the ominous, decay, doubles, darkness, and certainly madness) can be depended upon to create a particular atmosphere in a work of literature, and to evoke a certain type of response from readers (just as beginning a story “Once upon a time…” or “It was a dark and stormy night…” will reliably evoke a certain response from the reader by alerting the reader to what kind of story he is reading). Kafka creates a mood of madness by utilizing (in ways that most readers will not be aware of, but will nonetheless respond to) certain conventions associated with the Gothic and the
grotesque (which we will spell out shortly). Without the traditions of the
Gothic and the grotesque, we believe that it would have been impossible for
Kafka to have created the traces of madness that the PLR finds so startling;
this is a good example of how an author can use conventions from literary
history to create effects in language (including qualities of voice) that could
otherwise not be produced.

So, Kafka evokes these literary traditions by inventing a grotesque profes-
sion (professional fasting, the art/business of starvation, which is predicated
on a disturbing systematic distortion of the function of living), and then
immediately associating it with a wretched form of decay linked to an immoral
institution (one thinks of the American Southern Gothic novel, with its
rotting, formerly slaveholding, antebellum estates). The hint of madness
seems to us not to be a product of fussiness and opulence, but of the evocation
of well-known literary types: the social outcast whose inner decay mirrors the
external decay of a world (a set of values and beliefs) that is disappearing. “A
Hunger Artist” derives much of its effect from how it defies or satisfies the
reader’s expectations, such as the expectations of the Gothic and grotesque
which have already been evoked by the time the reader reaches the chilling
mention of a profession that could only exist in a certain kind of world
(a world of madness): professional self-starvation.

Lastly, the PLR responds to Kafka’s wonderful sentence, “We live in a
different world now” by writing, “This pronouncement creates a we (of narra-
tor, hunger artist, and reader) and a now that have the effect of closing the door
behind the reader as he enters the world of the story.” It is curious, and we
think relevant, that the PLR responds to this creation of a wholly “different
world” with the metaphor of a door being closed behind someone who has just
entered. It is difficult not to feel that the PLR, in creating the image of “the
door,” has created a door in his own piece of literary criticism, and that he is
calling attention to how the reader, as he passes into the world of Kafka’s
story, is also now passing into the world of psychoanalytic literary analysis
created by the PLR. As Kafka closes the door behind the reader (and thus
behind the PLR, who is also a reader), the PLR closes the door behind the
reader of his own piece of literary criticism. The image is that of someone
entering into a different world—a world characterized by a unique form of
psychic space and time, and by a sense that this “different world” is sealed off
from other forms of reality that preside over the outside world. Moreover, this
world is created and guarded by a single figure who opens and closes this door
between worlds. Clearly, the images created here by the PLR evoke the feeling
of a patient entering the analyst’s office and the analyst’s closing the door
behind the patient and himself.

Beyond the characteristics listed above, it is precisely the we of analysis (the
two individuals engaged in a form of communication that exists nowhere else
in the world, and in which profound and intense personal and intersubjective
forms of living are created) and the now of analysis (the sense of a different
quality of time at work during analysis) that have the effect of making the experience of psychoanalysis feel very much like living in a different world. This is, of course, not to say that the PLR is, consciously or unconsciously, trying to recreate the analytic situation in his own work, or to turn Kafka’s story into an example of psychoanalytic work. It is only to say that his response to Kafka’s story reflects his experience as a psychoanalyst in certain ways, and perhaps this is one of those ways.

Up to this point, we have tried to point out a few features of the PLR’s approach to literature, and to psychology in literature. Principally, we have tried to show that he has responded to Kafka’s story in such a way that the effects of language are heard, and felt, as carriers of information about the state of psychological life in the work; psychological concepts are not used to decode or explain the work, but are used to describe the world that Kafka has created in language. Psychology is not something consolidated in any single character, or uncovered in the author, or explicitly symbolized in the literature; it is rather a feature of language—in particular, the effects of language—that exists above and beyond what is plainly spoken. (The PLR’s receptivity to the effects of language described in Chapter 1 is clearly of great importance here.) Psychology is something that is a component part of the very ether of the story itself, and can in no way be understood as a symbolic element identifiable somewhere in the story, or in any way reducible to a discrete set of impulses, inhibitions, fears, and the like, despite the fact that the story could be used to create or support one or another psychoanalytic understanding of psychological illness (for example, anorexia nervosa).

After his discussion of the story’s opening, the PLR immediately moves into a demonstration not only of how Kafka’s language creates the world into which the reader is being ushered, but also (implicitly) of how such language expresses particular forms of interplay of unconscious and conscious aspects of mind. Here is the sentence from Kafka that he examines:

At one time the whole town took a lively interest in the hunger artist; from day to day of his fast the excitement mounted; everybody wanted to see him at least once a day; there were people who bought season tickets for the last few days and sat from morning till night in front of his small barred cage; even in the nighttime, there were visiting hours, when the whole effect was heightened by torch flares; on fine days the cage was set out in the open air, and then it was the children’s special treat to see the hunger artist; for their elders he was often just a joke that happened to be in fashion, but the children stood openmouthed, holding each other’s hands for greater security, marveling at him as he sat there pallid in black tights, with his ribs sticking out so prominently, not even on a seat but down among the straw on the ground, sometimes giving a courteous nod, answering questions with a constrained smile, or perhaps stretching an arm through the bars so that one might feel how thin it was, and then
again withdrawing deep into himself, paying no attention to anyone or anything, not even to the all-important striking of the clock that was the only piece of furniture in his cage, but merely staring into vacancy with half-shut eyes, now and then taking a sip from a tiny glass of water to moisten his lips.

(Kafka, 1924/1971, p. 268)

And here is the PLR’s response:

The entirety of an internal world is on display in this single sprawling sentence, which moves seamlessly from clause to clause. The passage is a Breughel-like collection of repellant, detailed miniatures. The effect created is that of imprisonment in a continuous, unrelenting present. The phrases are simple, composed mostly of words of one or two syllables: “small barred cage,” “just a joke,” “down among the straw,” “ribs sticking out,” “courteous nod,” “constrained smile,” “merely staring into vacancy.” The horrific is ordinary and the ordinary is horrific. Moreover, while the story is told by the narrator in the past tense—as he presents his memories of the hunger artist—the pounding repetition of present participles further contributes to the transformation of time into an eternal present: “sticking,” “giving,” “answering,” “stretching,” “withdrawing,” “paying,” “striking,” “taking.”

The narrator and the hunger artist are closely tied, perhaps two aspects of a single person. The narrator is intimately familiar with the hunger artist’s circumstances, behavior, and state of mind, and has words at his disposal, while the hunger artist is either mute or uses words (not quoted) as part of the performance. And yet it is not clear that the narrator is any more able to think than is the hunger artist. The narrator uses words to describe, but does so in a mechanical sort of way that is almost entirely devoid of feeling, self-observation, or insight into the hunger artist’s or his own inner life. The hunger artist is less a person than he is a driven “creature” (p. 271). He is not given a name and, in the title of the story, he is not even “The Hunger Artist,” he is merely “A Hunger Artist.” Not only is he not given a name; the substitute name that he is given—hunger artist—constitutes a bitterly ironic misnaming, in that there is no art (i.e., creative expression of a personal aesthetic) in marathon fasting.

(Ogden, T., 2009a, pp. 355–356)

The PLR’s reading here is remarkable and unexpected in several ways. In the first paragraph of his response, he declares that what Kafka is describing is “the entirety of an internal world,” when (as the PLR himself acknowledges) the passage is a noun-heavy cataloguing of everything that makes up the physical world of the hunger artist. In what sense does Kafka’s description of a conspicuously external material world put the internal world of the hunger
artist “on display”? How can the PLR take it for granted that an internal world can be confidently divined from a sentence that is striking in its realism (a way of writing notable for its presentation of the external, physical world and the details of everyday life)? What explanation can the PLR offer for how realism, in this instance, grants the reader access to the internal mental world of the hunger artist (particularly if he never asserts that the passage captures the unique rhythms of the hunger artist’s thought patterns)?

If earlier the PLR wrote in such a way as to create an unbroken circuit between language and psychology, here he creates an unbroken circuit between the external world (the world that the language putatively describes) and the internal life of the hunger artist. The fact that Kafka’s long sentence is followed directly by the PLR’s assertion that “the entirety of an internal world is on display in this single sprawling sentence” has much the same effect as his use of a colon to embody the relationship between language and psychology in Kafka’s opening. If before, the equation was “a note is sounded”: “psychic time and space are contracting,” now the equation is “Kafka’s description of physical reality”: “the entirety of an internal world.” Precisely how we get from one side of the equation to the other, according to the PLR, is through the language. External reality, the PLR explains, is presented in such a way that the “effect created is that of imprisonment in a continuous, unrelenting present.” He further notes the repetition of present participles and its effect on time and space in the story. The PLR is right to ground his thinking in the grammatical choices that Kafka has made; in fact, this is one of the more astute observations in his reading of the story. However, he seems to assume that a description of an external landscape must be a reflection of the internal world of a character or the author. This is not necessarily the case. The landscape may be used to any number of effects, and could stand in stark contrast to the internal lives of the characters or the author. In this instance, it could be argued with equal cogency that the landscape, with its late nineteenth-century vaudevillian tawdriness and pretensions to high culture, is intended to underscore the hunger artist’s austere and primitive inner life.

The relationship between internal and external states is undeniable, but the way in which the internal state is expressed in language changes, and so the PLR’s task is to continually work to sustain the aliveness of this relationship by means of his way of thinking and writing about it. Once the relationship is pinned down, it becomes inflexible, and therefore inaccurate when applied to a different moment in the literary text (or a different moment with a patient in a session). So the PLR’s loose correlation of language and psychology, of the external and the internal world, may provide a flexible and valuable way of talking about the effects of Kafka’s use of language; but he seldom pauses to question either the validity of the correlation of internal and external at any given juncture or the validity of his interpretation of what he hears by means of a study of the specifics of punctuation, syntax, rhythms of alliteration, and so on.
It feels important to note here that the PLR appears to have been unaware of the fact that he has written his analysis in a way that constructs the circuits we describe above. What we may see in retrospect as suppositions about the relationship between language and psychology, or between external reality and internal states, were, for the PLR, so entirely organic to his thinking at the moment of writing that they went unnoticed by him. It seems that they are relationships that go without saying for the PLR; this is likely due to the fact that for a practicing psychoanalyst they must go without saying. The practice of psychoanalysis presupposes a definitive, but nonetheless loosely defined, correspondence of external and internal reality. Practically speaking, the analyst cannot work from a position in which this relationship is taken to be utterly unknowable (a position that might be taken by a philosopher or literary theorist); this position would make psychoanalysis impossible. There must be some correlation between external and internal reality in order for the analyst to do his work.

In the second part of his response, the PLR broaches the role of the unconscious and conscious aspects of mind in Kafka’s story, but does so in such an unobtrusive way that it could easily go unnoticed. The PLR writes:

The narrator and the hunger artist are closely tied, perhaps two aspects of a single person. The narrator is intimately familiar with the hunger artist’s circumstances, behavior, and state of mind, and has words at his disposal, while the hunger artist is either mute or uses words (not quoted) as part of the performance. And yet it is not clear that the narrator is any more able to think than is the hunger artist. The narrator uses words to describe, but does so in a mechanical sort of way that is almost entirely devoid of feeling, self-observation, or insight into the hunger artist’s or his own inner life. The hunger artist is less a person than he is a driven “creature.”

(Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 356)

The PLR’s writing here suggests, and only suggests, without ever using technical terms, that the narrator and hunger artist may be understood together in terms of the relationship between unconscious and conscious life. One could easily miss the fact that he is (it seems) employing a psychoanalytic frame of reference in an effort to think his way through “A Hunger Artist.” The PLR begins by saying that “perhaps” the narrator and the hunger artist are best understood as two aspects of the same person. Even before he expands on the feeling he has about this particular aspect of the short story, it would be natural to suppose that the two aspects of a single person might be the unconscious and conscious aspects of mind. The narrator is a person capable of using language, and of thinking about the hunger artist’s life in a self-conscious (albeit rudimentary) way, while the hunger artist is mute, unself-conscious—a “creature” behaving in response to powerful needs and desires...
that he is seemingly unable to think about at any depth. The narrator, despite being verbal and responsive to the inner states of another person, is still, according to the PLR, unable to think in any real way. He is minimally self-conscious, and unable to understand the state of mind of the hunger artist, a state of mind that is a collusion of impulses, desires, needs, and fears that continually repeat themselves.

It seems that the PLR has drawn on his understanding of the concepts of the unconscious and conscious aspects of mind to organize his thinking regarding the relationship between narrator and hunger artist. The hunger artist is not a symbol of the unconscious in any simple way, nor is the narrator a symbol standing in for the conscious mind. Instead, psychoanalytic concepts make their way into the PLR’s reading as possible ways of understanding a part of the story based on what the PLR hears at a given moment in the text, and on what he knows from his own experience as an analyst about the relationship between language and psychology, between internal and external reality, and between unconscious and conscious life. And, for the third time, there is an implicit colon balancing an equation which might be presented as simply, “the conscious mind: the unconscious mind.” The PLR, interestingly, leaves it to the reader to work out the way in which one dimension of reading/interpreting the story may involve seeing how the unconscious needs and desires of the hunger artist find a form of verbal expression and self-consciousness that will make them endurable for the hunger artist, while another dimension of the reading experience may involve seeing how the lifeless self-consciousness of the narrator may be incorporated into the powerfully alive (though dangerous and tumultuous) elements of unconscious life that give the hunger artist his sense of place and purpose in the world. It would be hard to imagine that the idea of the interplay between the conscious and unconscious aspects of mind played no role in the thinking of the PLR as he wrote the paragraph being discussed. And yet, to view any formulaic understanding of the conscious and unconscious aspects of mind as explanations that would be acceptable to the PLR would fly in the face of everything we have been saying about how he thinks and writes.

It is within this (unspoken) overlapping matrix of circuits connecting language to psychology, externality to internality, consciousness to unconsciousness, that the PLR reads the body of the story. With a very light touch, he moves through the story bringing the interpretive strategies he establishes in the first few pages of reading to bear in ways that are assertive (his argument unfolds purposefully, as the logic of the story unfolds in a particular way), but always adjusting to the changing demands of the story. For the most part, we feel, the PLR’s readings are convincing, and are so because of the forms of analysis that he uses to make sense of Kafka’s story. However, as we have demonstrated, there are moments in the reading where the PLR is less aware than he could be of the literary historical context of Kafka’s writing (notably its Gothic and grotesque elements), where he assumes that the particular
emotions evoked by certain sounds in language can be traced back to feelings experienced by the writer while he wrote. To make such a linkage between author and text (as if the connection is self-evident) is to ignore a tradition of structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory that challenges such psycho-biographical assumptions (see Barthes [1968/1977] and Foucault [1969/1977] on the author function); this is a theoretical perspective that could have been utilized, or at the very least acknowledged, by the PLR.

It is beyond the scope of our project to examine every part of the PLR’s analysis, but we will briefly describe the progression of his line of thinking in order to create a context for our discussion of his analysis of the ending of “A Hunger Artist.” In his reading, the PLR suggests that Kafka’s description of how the hunger artist not only tolerates onlookers, but demands the “closest scrutiny of his fasts” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 356), reflects the hunger artist’s feeling that if his fasts “are not viewed by his audience as credible” (p. 356), then “the hunger artist is no one” (p. 356). The hunger artist’s sense of self (of his realness as a human being in the world) is limited to his identity as a hunger artist, and therefore there can be nothing more important to him than demonstrating that his fasts are genuine.

The hunger artist has no choice but simply to go about his business of fasting; he is “completely unable to take any distance from it, to think about it, to learn from it” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 357). The hunger artist is driven to prove the only thing that gives him any real significance in the world: that he is a genuine marathon faster. But because no one can monitor the hunger artist 24 hours a day, he is, in the narrator’s words, “bound to be the sole completely satisfied spectator of his own fast” (Kafka, 1924/1971, p. 270). Sadly, as the PLR writes, “The proof of the hunger artist’s worth is impossible to demonstrate to anyone but himself, and yet proving his worth to himself is also impossible, as reflected by the fact that he is driven to repeat his performance again and again. He can know the verity of his own fasting, but he has no ability to know the truth of who he is” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 357). The hunger artist lives in a self-created prison; he is a prisoner of his own needs and fears, and unable to think self-reflectively about himself in a way that is nuanced and alive.

At this point, the PLR says, the story “takes an entirely unexpected turn” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 357) as we learn that the most difficult thing for the hunger artist to bear is a fact “he alone knew: how easy it was to fast” (Kafka, 1924/1971, p. 270). Fasting of any duration is easy. What is difficult is living with this awareness. For the PLR, this awareness is “the first indication that the hunger artist is capable of thinking and of self-awareness” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 357). The hunger artist begins to become more human, but this kind of self-awareness is unbearable to him and consequently is sporadic and short-lived.

The sentence following the revelation that fasting is easy is “It was the easiest thing in the world” (Kafka, 1924/1971, p. 270). As the PLR
demonstrates, though the hunger artist does not speak these words, they are best read as free indirect discourse (reporting a character’s thoughts in the third person in such a way that the idiosyncrasies of that character’s personality and way of thinking and speaking are retained). In this instance, the narrator’s language conveys the form of boasting arrogance that is fundamental to the hunger artist’s thinking and behavior. The hunger artist’s inability to tolerate his newfound self-understanding leads him to shatter his dawning self-awareness by turning his self-knowledge into braggartism. This arrogance (a response to his unbearable self-understanding) quickly turns into “insane fits of outrage” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 359). “The hunger artist,” the PLR writes, “seeks relief from this psychic pain by convulsively throwing himself into a state of crazed omnipotence, in which he proclaims that he can fast for longer and longer periods of time …. In response to momentary, unbearable self-recognition, he denies his membership in the human race—a species that requires food to live—and instead claims a place in a nonhuman world (a world ‘beyond human imagination’ [Kafka, 1924/1971, p. 271]) that he governs by means of omnipotent thinking” (2009a, p. 359). Perversely, just as he is reduced to omnipotent thinking, fasting performances in Europe become unpopular, thus denying the hunger artist the external support for his madness. In such a state, the world does not feel real or substantial: “The ground [for him was] … not really solid ground” (Kafka, 1924/1971, p. 271).

This deteriorating state of affairs reaches its climax when fasting goes completely out of fashion, and the hunger artist must join a circus where he is caged like an animal. The board on which the duration of his fasts was once scrupulously recorded falls into disuse. The PLR writes,

Through his engagement with the specific language of the story, the PLR has tracked the process by which a lack of self-awareness of the hunger artist’s needs and desires entraps him, strips him of his freedom, and imprisons him. At the same time, this momentary self-consciousness provides no relief for the hunger artist, as this consciousness is experienced as intolerable. The hunger artist cannot incorporate his newfound conscious self-awareness into a capacity to think about and understand himself and external reality.
This both brings us to the climax of Kafka’s short story and to the climax of the PLR’s reading. We present below the scene from Kafka’s story (in which the circus overseer discovers the weak and emaciated hunger artist buried deep in the straw at the bottom of his cage) and the PLR’s analysis of this scene:

“Are you still fasting?” asked the overseer, “when on earth do you mean to stop?” “Forgive me, everybody,” whispered the hunger artist; only the overseer, who had his ear to the bars, understood him. “I always wanted you to admire my fasting,” said the hunger artist. “We do admire it,” said the overseer, affably. “But you shouldn’t admire it,” said the hunger artist. “Well then we don’t admire it,” said the overseer, “but why shouldn’t we admire it?” “Because I have to fast, I can’t help it,” said the hunger artist. “What a fellow you are,” said the overseer, “and why can’t you help it?” “Because,” said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer’s ear, so that no syllable might be lost, “because I couldn’t find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.” These were his last words, but in his dimming eyes remained the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was still continuing to fast.

(Kafka, 1924/1971, pp. 276–277)

And now, the PLR’s response to this passage:

The ending of this story, in its penultimate paragraph, is, for me, each time I read it, utterly a surprise. For the first time in the story, the hunger artist speaks for himself (i.e., in the form of direct quotations of his words). Also, for the first time, another character is introduced—the overseer, who is a thinking, feeling, observing person—a person who recognizes the hunger artist as a human being (as opposed to a performer or a creature) and feels genuine compassion for him.

The overseer seems to be able to “see” the infantile psychological needs of the hunger artist and is not repelled by them. This compassion is poignantly conveyed by the overseer’s ordinary, but profoundly tender words: “What a fellow you are.” The overseer’s human understanding is a necessary context for the development of the hunger artist’s capacity to become self-aware, and to entrust his self-understanding to another person. The hunger artist recognizes that there is nothing admirable, and certainly nothing magical or superhuman, about his fasting: “I have to fast, I can’t help it.” He explains (in what I find to be the most powerful sentence of the story) why he cannot help fasting:

“Because,” said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer’s ear, so that no syllable might be lost, “because I couldn’t find the food I liked”. (p. 277)
The hunger artist’s self-understanding is conveyed not only by the meanings of the words, but also by the very structure of the sentence. The words spoken by the hunger artist are literally wrapped around the tender words of the narrator. The hunger artist and the narrator, together now for the first time, feel like facets of an integrated, self-observing person who is capable of at once experiencing (being self-aware in the experience) and of thinking and speaking about the experience. After the word because (spoken by the hunger artist), the narrating self speaks of—and in so doing, attends to—the hunger-artist-as-infant in the arms of the overseer-as-mother.

(Ogden, T., 2009a, pp. 361–362)

Perhaps without recognizing it or intending it, the PLR casts the overseer in a role akin to that of the psychoanalyst, with the hunger artist being something of a patient. The overseer is “a thinking, feeling, observing person … who recognizes the hunger artist as a human being,” and who is also able to recognize and respond to the “infantile psychological needs of the hunger artist.” The PLR sees profound humanity in the overseer’s way of being with, listening to, and speaking with the hunger artist, a humanity born of the overseer’s receptivity to the hunger artist’s language and behavior, and of the overseer’s intuitive understanding of psychological matters. These, too, are qualities of psychoanalysis when it is done well.

The PLR not only responds to the psychoanalytic quality of the overseer’s deeply human response to the hunger artist’s needs. He also responds to changes in the language itself, for in Kafka’s hands this moment is rendered as a compressed passage in which the overseer’s words and the hunger artist’s words are embedded into one another (lines are not skipped on the printed page as they usually are when dialogue is presented). The “words spoken by the hunger artist are literally wrapped around the tender words of the narrator” in the sentence: “‘Because,’ said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer’s ear, so that no syllable might be lost, ‘because I couldn’t find the food I liked’” (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 277). Certainly, this reflects the newly attained (albeit ephemeral) capacity for self-awareness of the hunger artist. But perhaps more pertinent is the way in which the language embodies the intersubjective experience of overseer and hunger artist.

Considered as a description of an intersubjective experience, Kafka’s passage is magnificent. It presents the conversation not as dialogue, but as the mutual creation of a psychological field—a place and time seemingly set off from the world wherein a different kind of human relatedness becomes momentarily possible. The scene dissolves the standard boundaries of individual human psychology, and presents instead a sense of overseer and hunger artist thinking and feeling together in a way that makes it impossible to say with any certainty who contributes what to the thinking being done. All one
can say is that the overseer's humanity “oversees” the emergence of the beginnings of the hunger artist's capacity for self-awareness.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the form and structure of Kafka's story have a subtle effect on the way the PLR presents his thoughts about this scene. He writes, “The ending of the story, in its penultimate paragraph, is, for me, each time I read it, utterly a surprise. For the first time in the story, the hunger artist speaks for himself (i.e., in the form of direct quotations of his words).” It almost escaped our attention that this is also the first time that the PLR speaks for himself, using the pronoun “I” for the first and only time in the entire paper. The PLR takes off the mask of the neutral observer and 'fesses up to his own highly personal response to the moment in the story when the hunger artist first speaks for himself. It is impossible to say whether this is simply a coincidence, or a rare moment when an unconscious response is on full display in no uncertain terms, or whether this constitutes a form of intersubjective experience between literary critic and literary text. We cannot know, and do not wish to insist on a direct connection when a mere mention is enough to allow the reader to draw his own conclusions. However, it does seem to support our general feeling that the relationship between a critic and the work he is writing about may, at moments, reflect qualities of an intersubjective experience.

What we have tried to do in this chapter is to demonstrate how a practicing psychoanalyst has made use of what is most fundamental to psychoanalytic theory and practice in his reading and writing about literature. We began by offering a succinct statement of what we believe to be the most fundamental elements of psychoanalytic theory: the evolving concept of the unconscious, the idea of reverie as an experience at the frontier of dreaming, the notion that unconscious experience is generated both individually and as a co-creation of two or more people (which may include reader and author), and the idea that experiences of aliveness and deadness of language constitute a critical measure of the status of an experience in analysis and in reading literature.

We then used the PLR’s discussion of “A Hunger Artist” to illustrate the way in which psychoanalytic theory and practice unobtrusively inform his writing about literature. We have described the ways in which the analyst's conscious and unconscious thinking is structured by decades of clinical work of the sort we have illustrated. It is our hope that the PLR’s reading of Kafka’s work, and our reading of the PLR’s, will suggest to both analytic readers and writers, and to literary critics, ways of making use of psychoanalytic thinking, psychoanalytic theory, and the practice of psychoanalysis to add an additional perspective to the ways they read literature.
Our goals for this book appear in its first chapter: “we hope to bring literary criticism and the practice of psychoanalysis into conversation in such a way that each discipline takes from the other some of its most essential and less evident qualities, rather than limiting this conversation to most manifest contributions of each discipline. This should give literary critics who are interested in psychoanalysis (as both a set of ideas and as a therapeutic process) a deeper and more nuanced sense of the forms of thinking that are integral to psychoanalysis; and it should give to psychoanalysts who are interested in literature a better feeling for the ways that academic literary critics attend to the demands of literature in their own unique ways.” We hope that the first two chapters of this book have fulfilled these aims, and that the reader now has a better understanding of the forms of thinking that are fundamental to psychoanalysis.

Principally, the previous chapters were devoted to showing what psychoanalysis—as we understand it and make use of it in reading a text—may contribute to literary criticism. We discussed what we believed to be a uniquely psychoanalytic type of attentiveness to language that analytic readers and writers, as well as literary critics, may bring to their reading of literature. Chapter 1 focused on some of the ways in which the experience of practicing psychoanalysis over a span of years or decades shapes and enriches the psychoanalyst’s ear for voice both in working with patients and in reading literature. In Chapter 2 we took up the question of the place of psychoanalytic theory in psychoanalytic literary criticism. We argued that for literary criticism to be properly psychoanalytic it must reflect an understanding of contemporary psychoanalytic theoretical thinking (not simply the rudimentary Freudian ideas that dominate psychoanalytic literary criticism), and must be aware of the ways in which the unconscious aspect of mind is reflected in literature. As an example of this kind of thinking, we looked at how an understanding of current theories of the unconscious informed and shaped the PLR’s reading of Franz Kafka’s short story “A Hunger Artist.”

However, we have only begun to follow through on our stated goal of giving to psychoanalysts who are interested in literature a better understanding
of the distinctive ways in which literary critics think and write about literature. To follow through on this part of our project, we will now look closely at the work of an academically trained literary critic and scholar (Ogden, B., 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012) in an effort to offer a psychoanalytic literary reader a fuller appreciation of some of the forms of thinking that are central to literary criticism. In this way the psychoanalytic reader may develop a better understanding of the structures of thinking and feeling that lie at the core of the discipline of literary criticism.

The goal of the third and final chapter of this book is, moreover, to explore how psychoanalytic literary readers and literary critics might bring to their work a perspective that is informed by both the psychoanalyst’s well-developed “ear” for voice and the literary critic’s use of various methods of textual analysis, which we will call the critic’s “eye.” This dual perspective is not a methodology comprised exclusively of a combination of psychoanalytic and non-psychoanalytic literary criticism. It is simply our effort to think through some of the ways in which a literary critic may draw upon or put to use (in concert with many other forms of thinking) the psychoanalytic ways of thinking that we have been discussing in this book, and will continue to elaborate on in this chapter.

Literary critics (who are not practicing psychoanalysts), it seems to us, have little sense of the way in which the experience of a practicing psychoanalyst generates a particular type of sensitivity to the way language communicates meaning, and how the analyst’s way of thinking about and responding to language may be incorporated into the multiplicity of ways that literary critics experience and understand literature. We find that this sort of responsiveness to language is one of the richest and most interesting aspects of the psychoanalytic literary criticism written by the psychoanalyst co-author of this book.

However, the Psychoanalytic Literary Reader’s (the PLR’s) way of reading—his ear for voice, and for the connection that voice has to the (imaginary) inner life of the characters developed in a text—is so natural to him as to make him minimally aware of the way he privileges voice. His understanding of voice derives (at least in part) from the psychoanalytic concepts that shape his thinking, and from years of experience listening to the voices of his patients (and to his own voice). Moreover, the PLR’s acute reliance on voice and psychoanalytic experience in his reading of literature sometimes diminishes his sensitivity to other ways in which emotional and psychological effects are created through language in literature and in his own writing. Consequently he is prone to miss other things that are happening in the language of a text (including structures of sentences, paragraphs, and dialogue; syntax, grammar, and punctuation; as well as genre, literary and historical context, and the history of formal analysis itself). Close formal analysis of precisely this kind lies at the core of much of literary studies.

In our effort to illustrate some of what the PLR might learn from the co-author who is a literary scholar (the “Literary Critic”), we have chosen to
look at a piece of literary criticism that is highly sensitive to nuances of language, and that is founded on assumptions about how language, syntax, and punctuation create meaning in literature that are little used by the PLR in his discussions of the Frost poem and the Kafka story. We use as our example of literary criticism a paper written by the Literary Critic on Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer* (1979). (This article is re-printed in its entirety in the Appendix to Chapter 3. This may provide the reader the opportunity, perhaps for the first time, to read and consider a piece of academic literary criticism.) It is a paper that takes as its focus the opening sentence of Roth’s novel in an effort to explore how the effects that are created in the opening of the novel (namely, the narrative voice of Nathan Zuckerman and the overall tone of the novel) have their origin not in the sounds of individual words or groups of words, but in particular sentence structures and punctuation (which collectively create these effects). That is, the paper explores how tone, sound, atmosphere, and voice (those things that the PLR “hears” in Frost and Kafka, but often does not explicitly tie to particular aspects of the text) may in fact be accounted for in literary terms if one understands that they have their origin in syntax, grammar, and punctuation. The Literary Critic insists that any inferences about the effects created in a piece of writing be grounded in the language of the text itself.

We chose to take the Literary Critic’s *Ghost Writer* article as representative of academic literary criticism not because it is typical (it is, in fact, unusual in its strenuous commitment to close textual analysis and stylistics), but because its conception of language and literature is in many respects so different from the conceptions held by the PLR. Where the PLR works with a broad brush, the Literary Critic works at the smallest scale to demonstrate how language creates the effects that the PLR responds to in his work. We are also aware that the example of literary criticism we have chosen is only one of many different kinds of criticism, and that had we used other examples—perhaps a more historically or politically minded example—the PLR’s way of reading would have been enriched in other ways.

In this chapter, then, we look more closely at the ways in which the PLR, in his work on Kafka and Frost, oftentimes makes statements about literature with which many literary critics would be quick to take issue. In the previous two chapters we demonstrated how literary critics who rigidly apply psychoanalytic ideas and terminology, and who use antiquated, stereotypic analytic concepts, undervalue and misrepresent the field they are attempting to draw on. In the present chapter, we intend to show how the PLR’s entrance into a field of study not his own risks undervaluing and misrepresenting literary studies in much the same way. In doing so, we are not trying to discredit the PLR; rather, we are calling attention to particular ways of writing about literature that might be of use to him in broadening the spectrum of conceptual structures that he brings to bear on his reading and writing about literary texts.
Once we have surveyed a few of the PLR’s “blind spots” (reflected not only in what the PLR says about a piece of literature, but also in the way he says it), we will look at the Literary Critic’s reading of the opening of Philip Roth’s novel in order to examine a markedly different way of attending to language in literature. As we go through the Roth paper, we will highlight ways of reading that are paramount to the thinking of the Literary Critic but are underdeveloped in, or absent from, the writing of the PLR. Our goal is to examine divergent ways of reading in such a way that they bring into generative conversation with one another the sensitivities to language that are alive in the work of the PLR, and the linguistically grounded approach to the workings of language demonstrated in the work of the Literary Critic.

We begin our comparison with an example of how the Literary Critic works. What follows is a reading from the perspective of the Literary Critic of the first sentence of the PLR’s reading of Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist”:

In this opening sentence [of “A Hunger Artist”], a note is sounded that echoes through much of the remainder of the story: psychic time and space are contracting, time is running out, and vitality is in a state of severe decline. (Ogden, T., 2009a, p. 354)

As we discussed in the previous chapter, this sentence can effectively be reduced to a simple correlation: “a note is sounded”: “psychic time and space are contracting.” The PLR’s sentence is constructed in such a way that it posits a correlation between language and internal psychic states, but without making the nature of that correlation explicit—with, for instance, saying whether the two stand in dialectical, causal, tautological, or some other relationship to one another. Moreover, it neglects delineating which particular “notes,” in what specific configuration, give rise to which psychic states. This correlation is made by means of punctuation and syntax. By constructing the sentence in a way that is organized around the colon, the PLR keeps open the possibility of rethinking and rewriting the nature of this correlation as it changes over the course of his thinking, and over the course of Kafka’s story. The PLR is wise not to draw up a formula (to “theorize”) the relationship between language and psychology, but to keep matters at the level of an undefined equivalency. This has the advantage of not fixing a relationship between language and psychology, a relationship that is continually in flux in the story. The PLR’s use of grammar and syntax to embody an indissoluble, but fluid, relationship integral to his thinking is similar to the way in which, in the discussion below, Philip Roth uses syntax and punctuation to build the theme of his novel at the level of form.

However, it may be that the PLR’s use of a colon belies his inability to put into words precisely how the form of the particular language used gives rise to the contraction of psychic time and space (the semantic content) in the opening of Kafka’s story. Certainly, the colon is meant to keep open for
re-articulation a correlation that should not be permanently set. But, isn’t the
colon also meant to give the PLR the opportunity to develop a way of writing
about the nature of this correlation at any particular point in the story? The
PLR uses the colon simply to direct the reader to the indissoluble connection
between the effects of language and the feeling states pervading Kafka’s story,
when in fact the colon, as a syntactical structure in the PLR’s sentence, signifies
an absence that needs to be filled by means of a kind of incisive writing that
is attentive to the form the correlation is taking at a particular moment.

The PLR has noticed something important. But there is then the question
of how Kafka’s “notes” create a change in feeling. What is it in the story, or
about the language or syntax or punctuation of the story, that does the work of
creating the kind of psychological atmosphere that the PLR is responding to at
various points in the story? When, to use an example from the previous chapter,
the PLR claims that there is a “hint of madness” in Kafka’s opening, what is it
exactly about Kafka’s writing that creates this “hint of madness”? As we have
said before, the reader wants to know more about what it is in Kafka’s language
(beyond a basic thematic reading) that expresses what the PLR hears. The cir-
cuit is not, in this sense, from Kafka’s language directly to psychology, but from
the sound that the PLR hears to what he takes to be the effect of that sound on
the psychological dimension of the work. To account for how Kafka’s writing
creates the feeling that psychological vitality is fading precipitously requires
accounting for how his use of language creates a feeling of psychic deadness.
Without that additional step, the reader might well object that there is too
much subjectivity at play, in that the PLR’s ear is taken to be the final arbiter
(by raw assertion) connecting language to psychology in a particular way.

The PLR’s way of “listening” to a text could be enriched if, when a reading
calls for it, it were counterbalanced with a more strenuous engagement with
the syntactical and formal strategies that, from a stylistic point of view,
constitute the most elemental substrate of literary language. This is not to say
that every psychoanalytic reading will require this form of engagement with
literature; as often as not, it won’t. But it is to say that an understanding of
the value of rigorous stylistic analysis could lend the PLR a much-needed
“scientific” rigor (that is, a systematic methodology for approaching the way
a text works) to his way of thinking. Our discussion of the Literary Critic’s
discussion of Philip Roth’s work is meant to describe at greater length how a
psychoanalytic reader might better ground what he “hears” in the aesthetic
machinery of the text through an analysis of formal and syntactical patterns
and permutations.

Still, it must be said that a linguistically or stylistically minded methodol-
ogy may be no more objective or scientific than the PLR’s method of deducing
meaning and feeling from sound. Within literary studies, linguistics has
traditionally been devoted to understanding how “a world-view is represented
at the level of the structure of language itself” (Coetzee, 1982, p. 43). Stylistics,
to put it broadly, is concerned with literature as language, as something that
is made up of, and thus open to being understood by means of, linguistic elements, structures, and patterns. The goal of stylistics, in the most general sense, is to relate particular properties of language to meaning. Within many schools of literary criticism (Practical Criticism, New Criticism, a large part of Russian Formalism, and the Prague School), this movement from language to meaning is accomplished by paying close attention to sentence structure, syntax, and rhetorical figures; close attention is also paid to the way in which literary language deviates from conventional language in such a way as to self-reflexively call attention to its own formal structure.

Within other fields of literary studies (involving quantitative stylistics, generative grammar, and transformational grammar), the move from form to meaning is accomplished through explicitly linguistic means. That is, as Stanley Fish (1980) put it, stylisticians begin with “precise and rigorous linguistic descriptions [descriptions of the grammatical and syntactical structures of language—anything that can be broken down into the fundamental units of which language is built],” and then “proceed from those descriptions to interpretations for which they can claim a measure of objectivity” (pp. 69–70). Regardless of the specific field of literary studies in which they work, all “stylistic” critics share the belief that, “The novelist’s medium is language: whatever he does, qua novelist, he does in and through language” (Lodge, 1966, p. ix). However, within stylistics a general distinction can be drawn between, on the one hand, the formalism of what is generally called “close reading” and, on the other hand, the “functionalism” of those linguistically minded schools of criticism that seek to establish the function of linguistic elements in the creation of a particular effect within the text, or of some part of the author’s personal vision. They might do so, for example, by demonstrating that the transformations from surface structure to deep structure in a work reflect the author’s way of conceiving of reality, in so much as different transformations reflect different ways in which language can be used to structure the presentation of reality. It is in the context of this strain of linguistic criticism that one must understand Bernard Bloch’s (1953) famous definition of style as “the message carried by the frequency-distribution and the transitional probabilities of its linguistic features, especially as they differ from those of the same features in the language as a whole” (p. 43). This way of conceiving of literature led to readings that try to link the style of certain writers to the frequency with which they use particular syntactical forms. For instance, the literary critic Richard Ohmann (1970) attempted to distinguish between the styles of Faulkner and Hemingway by demonstrating that Faulkner’s style becomes unrecognizable when a few sentence structures (grammatical transformations) are undone, whereas, after having undergone the same changes, Hemingway’s style is still recognizable, “proving” that Faulkner’s style can be traced back to a particular set of grammatical structures.

However, despite a great deal of very promising work by prominent linguists and stylisticians in the 1950s and 1960s (most notably by
transformational grammarians such as Noam Chomsky [1957, 1965, 1968] and Richard Ohmann [1970] and by structuralists and comparative linguists such as Leo Spitzer [1948], Roman Jakobson [1960, 1971], and Claude Levi-Strauss [1963]), very little progress has been made in generating reliable ways of linking syntactical forms to meanings or to linking frequency of use of a discrete set of syntactical structures to the writing of a particular author. Linguistics (the overall study of language structure and its connection with meaning) and stylistics (the study of literary style using methodologies drawn from linguistics) have never provided a stable set of propositions about language and meaning on which to base literary interpretation. As J. M. Coetzee has written,

One may finally have to accept the position that a scientific stylistics is unattainable, that the step from stylistic description to stylistic interpretation always takes one beyond the limits of linguistics into criticism. (1982, p. 43)

We raise this brief history of stylistics only to note that while, to some extent, we treat the Literary Critic’s reading as less subjective than the PLR’s because it is grounded in stylistic structures rather than immaterial sounds, we are well aware that the Literary Critic’s methodology neither aspires to, nor has the backing of, a valid scientific tradition of stylistic literary analysis. We, along with Coetzee, believe that “the step from stylistic description to stylistic interpretation always takes one beyond the limits of linguistics into criticism.” The Literary Critic’s work on Roth is a work of literary criticism that selectively uses stylistics, not a work of stylistics that draws conclusions that are of interest exclusively to literary scholars. One of the contributions of this chapter is to think about what stylistics has to offer literary critics and psychoanalytic literary readers.

We now turn to a discussion of an article written by the Literary Critic (Ogden, B., 2012). His piece on The Ghost Writer begins by focusing on the opening sentence of Philip Roth’s novel, quoted here:

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago—I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman—when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man.

(Roth, 1979, p. 3, quoted by Ogden, B., 2012, p. 87)

The Literary Critic comments:

In this first sentence of what would become the first of nine volumes about his life, Zuckerman cuts himself off mid-sentence and starts again,
from the beginning this time. Roth embeds one independent clause inside another; bold em dashes off-set a trailing independent clause nested within an opening clause. The syntax that this maneuver creates is not only intricate, it’s cunning—and is integral to how Roth writes Nathan Zuckerman at the level of form …

The tone of the opening clause is nearly that of a fairy tale. “It was the last daylight hour” announces that a story is going to be told every bit as much as “Once upon a time…” or “In a land far, far away…” Through tone—as cozy as a bedtime story—the reader settles in for a yarn. Before the story can take off, however, an interjecting clause cuts the story short. This does not simply carry the reader away from the story momentarily, it interrupts the telling of the story from the outset by braking so abruptly to make room for the interpolated clause. The fact that the embedded clause is set off by unspaced em dashes, as opposed to less halting and disruptive en dashes or commas or parentheses, suggests that Nathan’s autobiographical and metafictional gloss is every bit as important as the “story” itself, which had already gathered momentum in the very first words. This interjecting clause is not an aside. It is a second beginning, equal to the first in every way.

The em dashes, then, are not brief pauses that allow for a momentary digression from the story. They are the opposite; they are shards of punctuation that hold up the continuation of the story so as to clear room, literally, for a new thought. The result is that the story (the first clause) is not just temporarily waylaid or decelerated by life and art (the intruding independent clause). It is brought to a standstill, interjected upon, brought down a peg. Grammatically and metaphorically, neither clause is dependent. Form is so inseparable from content in Roth that syntax operates metaphorically—a dependent clause can be read as a metaphor for a dependent relationship.

(Ogden, B., 2012, pp. 87–88)

The Literary Critic approaches the opening to Roth’s novel in a way that is considerably different from the way the PLR approaches the opening to Kafka’s story. There is demonstrativeness in the Literary Critic’s writing: it has none of the qualifiers that appear again and again in the writing of the PLR. The Critic gets right down to work: what stands out for him is the structure of the opening sentence of the novel. Roth, he writes, “cuts himself off mid-sentence and starts again. … Roth embeds one independent clause inside another.” The brilliance of the opening of the novel lies, for the Literary Critic, in syntax. It is primarily in connection with syntax that tone takes on significance; or, perhaps more accurately, tone in this sentence is a matter of syntax and grammar more than it is a matter of sound.

It seems that the Literary Critic believes that in order to understand Roth’s writing, one must not simply imagine that Roth is “sounding notes” that
create a certain feeling state. Rather, these feeling states are best understood as having their origins in particular sentence structures, and in the selective use of punctuation within and around these structures. According to this line of thinking, Roth makes the distinctive voice of Nathan Zuckerman by deftly using syntax and grammar to arrange those elements most central to Nathan (the relationship between storytelling and life) so that they are both formally and thematically embedded into one another in the opening sentence.

Nathan’s voice is those vying forces of art (fiction writing) and life (the writer’s life, and its relationship to his art) that are both Nathan’s main concern and the novel’s concern. They are also, naturally, Roth’s concern, as the similarities between Nathan and Roth raise the question of Roth’s relationship to his own art. Nathan’s narrative voice is in fact the sound produced by the strategic use of punctuation to create an interjection within a sentence that has a particular grammar. As we have shown, the PLR often fails to show how Kafka uses language in a way that creates the effects to which the PLR is responding. By contrast, the Literary Critic preemptively addresses this question by demonstrating how tone and sound are generated by means of concrete syntactical structures. He does this by very loosely employing a particular stylistic methodology, that of calling attention to the way particular sentence structures correspond to particular types of content (whether explicitly stated themes or concerns only addressed metaphorically).

As we explained above, however, drawing parallels between syntax and semantic content or feeling states is tricky, and is less an exact science than an occasionally useful heuristic. It may be that the PLR’s equation of “notes sounded” (the music of language) to states of mind is no more subjective than the Literary Critic’s linking of syntax with sound or content. They both may ultimately be ways that critics describe and account for the singular effects of literary language in a way that gives the illusion of being objectively and empirically verifiable; literary critics do this, seemingly, not only in order to legitimate their ways of interpreting literature, but also in an effort to transform literary criticism from an art (of subjective interpretation) into a science (with a legitimate hermeneutical foundation). If the correlation between syntax and content, or between sound and states of mind, cannot be predicted or convincingly established, then drawing such a correlation may be a matter of the Literary Critic and the PLR relying on their own intuitions and powers of description to discern the correlations that they believe to be operative in the work. In this respect, has the Literary Critic offered the PLR a more objective type of literary analysis, or simply a different way of hearing and writing about the text? Either way, the Literary Critic is offering him something that would lead him to think about literature in more structural terms and to more explicitly ground his thinking and writing about literature in the sorts of textual analysis we have been describing in this chapter. In so doing, the PLR would provide his reader more of the structural and grammatical basis for his interpretations (for his hearing what he hears).
So the Critic finds in the syntax of the opening sentence of Roth's novel not merely a quirk of style, but the very heart of the novel: an unruly tension between storytelling and life (both Nathan's life and Roth's life). Each of the two independent clauses that comprise the opening sentence has a different tone: one reflects the story-telling quality of the opening sentence ("It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon"); the other reflects the intruding, self-conscious voice of Nathan Zuckerman—("I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories...").

One pole of this tension between third-person narration and first-person intrusion is driven by the need to tell a story; the other pole is driven by an equally intense need to tell the whole story, which must include Roth's and Nathan's own interrelated stories as artists. The latter pressure to tell the whole story, including the biographical and meta-fictional elements (fiction commenting on its own status as fiction) of the story, bursts through the former pressure (the wish to tell a story in a conventionally realist manner) in a way that feels inevitable. This sense of inevitability derives from the way that Roth uses em dashes (one of the most disruptive forms of punctuation) to create such a forceful and intrusive enjambment. It also derives from the fact that the whole story—not only the story of Nathan's meeting with Lonoff (an established author revered by Nathan), but also the story of Nathan's life and writing—can only be presented if life is made to intrude upon storytelling formally in a way that is analogous to (just as disruptive as) the way in which life intrudes upon storytelling in the novel, and in Roth's own life.

The text cannot accomplish this simply by announcing this idea as a theme. Rather, it has to be built into the syntax of the opening sentence because Roth's experience of the interdependence of life and art is that life is built into storytelling, even as life and storytelling are at once distinct, but for better or for worse, are knit together for all time, like conjoined twins.

Not only is it remarkable that the Literary Critic utilizes grammar and structure to such a degree in his readings, it is particularly striking that he goes about communicating his point to the reader by rearranging the clauses in Roth's opening so that the importance of its structure is visible to the reader. The reader is allowed to see (as a visual event) what the Literary Critic has discovered about the structure of the opening sentence. This is not a visualization of imagistic metaphors created by Roth or the critic, but a visualization of sentence structure:

Were the em dashes to be replaced by parentheses or commas, the embedded clause would become secondary to the foremost clause, the enclosed clause becoming a digression or the piping-up of an intrusive narrator. Here is how it would read with parentheses instead of em dashes:

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago (I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first
short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman) when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man.

[And here is how it would appear without the interjecting clause:]

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man. I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman.

(Ogden, B., 2012, pp. 88–89)

Part of what is of interest about these alternative forms of Roth’s opening sentence is that the sentence in which parentheses are used sounds identical to the original in which em dashes are used. There is no audible difference between em dashes and parentheses. One can only see the differences between them—this visual aspect of the Literary Critic’s thinking regarding how a text is built led us to contrast the analyst’s “ear” with “the critic’s eye” in the title of this book.

The Literary Critic, by analyzing two different ways that Roth’s sentence might look on the page, is able to see that the disruptive effect of the em dashes is indispensable to creating Nathan’s voice in this sentence. The use of parentheses is too “soft,” not sufficiently assertive to convey the force of Nathan’s insistence on telling his own story. (It is also interesting to note that in spoken discourse, including the psychoanalytic dialogue, punctuation is not used—that is, one cannot reliably designate a given interruption of a spoken line of thought as an “em dash disruption” as opposed to “a parenthetical interruption.”)

In sum, what we see here is a situation in which the effects of a sentence cannot be traced back to its sound, or to the feelings that the tone of the sentence seems to evoke (as the PLR likely would have done), but to its formal and grammatical structure. There is no way to hear what the Literary Critic is noticing; it can only be traced back to how the sentence is put together. These types of effects are precisely the types that the PLR would be most likely to overlook, or to attribute to the general sound of the sentence. The Literary Critic has in some respects remedied one of the PLR’s blind spots, in as much as he has managed to locate the objective syntactical root of the PLR’s subjective intuitions. This is not to say that the Literary Critic’s contention that literary effects can be reliably traced back to linguistic elements is not questionable (it is), only that the PLR’s reading would be enriched if he were better able to think grammatically and syntactically when a text lends itself to such an approach, as Roth’s opening sentence (and the structure of the novel as a whole) does.

We will now move on to a second example of the distinctive way in which the Literary Critic approaches a text. When the Literary Critic reads a text he
attends to an aspect of language to which the PLR does not attend, and of which he may not even be aware. What we have in mind is the role of meta-fiction and other literary conventions in literature. The term *meta-fiction* refers to a type of fiction that self-consciously draws attention to its own status as fiction in order to comment on the relationship between reality and fantasy. While the PLR is listening for the state of mind conveyed by the voice created in the first sentence of *The Ghost Writer*, the Literary Critic is reading quite differently: he believes that to read the opening sentence properly, one must understand the sentence in the context of a familiar meta-fictional convention, a convention of blurring the seemingly absolute distinction between fiction and real life. The difference between the PLR’s listening for the state of mind of the character (and the author since characters don’t have minds) and the Literary Critic’s attending to the effects of meta-fictional convention reflects a significant difference between the way the PLR and the Literary Critic read and write about literature.

For the Literary Critic, Nathan’s voice, one of the great voices in modern American literature, is produced when “realist” narration of the sort one gets in the first clause of the book is interjected with a higher order of self-awareness about the status of the work as a literary text and of the story’s relationship to “real life” (to Roth’s life as a writer). One cannot speak properly of “hearing” Nathan’s voice without also being aware that what one is hearing is two swords clashing: the sword of realism and the sword of “anti-realism” (by anti-realism we mean any text that does not subscribe to the conventions of realism, for example, the magical realism of Marquez). For the Literary Critic, the reader is, to a large degree, “seeing” the radical juxtaposition of two divergent literary traditions: the liberal-humanist tradition of realism (stories written in a linear fashion that take place in a recognizable reality that is described objectively) and the contemporary tradition of meta-fictional postmodernism (all those forms of storytelling that disturb or challenge the conventions of traditional storytelling). Here, the “note sounded” is the different literary genres and traditions (and the conventions that define them) arranged syntactically so as to constitute the voice of the novel. By contrast, the PLR seems to have little interest in determining the place of his essay on Frost’s “Birds’ Song” and Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist” in the history of their respective genres or to situate what is new about his own essay in the genre of psychoanalytic writing (although the PLR, in a sense, carries out the latter simply by the fact that his writing strikes the reader as very different from conventional analytic literary criticism).

A third way in which the Literary Critic approaches a text seems to stand in particularly stark contrast to the PLR’s way of reading. For the Literary Critic, “all characters in literature … are combinations of sound and grammar.” The idea that characters are “combinations of sound and grammar” is, for the PLR, too narrow a definition of the “life” of characters. While the PLR views characters as fictions, he nevertheless sees them, at least in part, as
reflections of states of mind experienced by the writer, and, in that sense, “real”—more real than “combinations of sound and grammar,” more real than mere manipulations of language.

But the differences between the PLR and the Literary Critic on this matter may not be as great as they first appear. The Literary Critic is not saying that characters are mere manipulations of words; rather, he is saying that all that any literary work consists of is the sound and structures of language, and that is all that any writer has at his disposal to create fiction. The Critic traces the origins of feeling states to language itself, with the author’s psychology manifesting itself in the conscious and unconscious uses to which he puts language in his work. The manipulation of language is not an arid practice, but a form of expression that is itself emotive (every bit as emotive as the PLR’s psychological model of writing in which the source of all feeling is human beings—the author, the reader, or both). Why, the Literary Critic might ask, can’t an author express the feelings that he is experiencing or has experienced exclusively by means of stylistic manipulation and experimentation, or find such a method to be the medium best suited for expressing his thoughts and feelings? And, perhaps more to the point, why can’t the feeling that motivates writing be a feeling of trying to write as well as one can at any given moment using all the resources of language and literary convention, or the feeling of trying to solve the problem of how to make some aspect of reality effective as an aspect of fiction, or the feeling of trying to arrange different elements of writing into a combination in which they will produce particular emotional and psychological responses in the reader? Must the feeling evoked by the writing be the same feeling as the author experiences while trying to evoke that emotion in his writing?

The PLR might agree that “combinations of sound and grammar” are all that constitute any piece of writing, but he would say that the source of, and ways of working psychologically with, those “combinations of sound and grammar” can only be a human being, who is not sufficiently acknowledged in the Literary Critic’s methodology. What is missing, for the PLR, is an acknowledgment by the Literary Critic of the relationship between the writer’s conscious and unconscious psychology and the psychology the reader hears and feels in the writer’s use of language and in the themes and characters that configure and populate his work. Where, in other words, is the author in this conception of the relationship between reality and fiction? Isn’t the author the only real person involved in creating the fiction? Isn’t the emotional reality of the author (what he is capable of feeling, if only in the act of writing) the source of the reality of emotion in fiction? Wouldn’t it be impossible for a writer to write a story of betrayal (for example, Othello) if he had never felt betrayed?

And the Literary Critic might respond: Why can’t thinking linguistically and stylistically be the principal way in which writers find the proper expression for their conscious and unconscious life? Even when a writer attempts to “copy down” his emotion (create a copy of his emotion in writing),
he never simply transcribes his emotion; rather, he struggles with language until he has solved the problem of how to make that emotion work as literature (using the various structures of language and conventions of literature). While an author may sit down to write with the intention of writing a sad story because he is sad (to put it in childishly simple terms), isn’t he just as likely to try to solve the problem of writing a sad story by using language in such a way that it becomes sad in the particular way he wants it to be sad? To paraphrase Roth, writers do not write to solve emotional problems, they write to solve literary problems (interview with H. Lee, 2007). The writer may write a sad story not out of sadness, but out of an interest in sadness, or out of a sense in which in order for him to write the sort of work that he wants to write, some part of his writing must be sad. Writing is not always a direct response to the author’s immediate or past psychological experiences; often it is the author’s immediate response to his desire to write a piece of literature that is the impetus for writing. The writing that the author feels impelled to write may require a use of language that the work itself demands at a given juncture—effects that are necessary at that moment for the story to “work” as literature.

This, we believe, is what T. S. Eliot has in mind when he writes:

A poet has, not a “personality” to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

(1919/1932, p. 9)

As this statement by Eliot suggests, the Literary Critic’s position is not simply idiosyncratic, but is rooted in long-standing literary debates concerning the relationship of author and text. His position is attributable to some extent to his background and training in literary studies. From the Literary Critic’s perspective, the PLR’s limited knowledge of the history of literary theory has led him, in his own literary criticism, to violate or challenge unwittingly certain widely held beliefs in literary theory without acknowledging the existence of these debates and without positioning his argument in relation to them.

The Literary Critic’s response to the PLR’s questions about the relationship between the writer and his writing should not suggest that the Literary Critic be grouped with the post-structural camp of literary studies, which holds that literature is an arrangement of rhetorical forms and discourses (which are themselves made up of the entirely arbitrary set of symbols that constitute language); a work of literature, being no more than language itself, is not causally related to anything outside its own codes and conventions, and thus
The critic’s eye

is not causally connected to the author’s emotional state or any intentions that the author had when he wrote the work. In fact, as his discussion of The Ghost Writer demonstrates, he is anything but a hard-line post-structuralist. The Literary Critic, in fact, would not wish to dissuade the PLR from making the kinds of arguments the PLR is making because of potential theoretical pitfalls.

The differences between the ways the PLR and the Literary Critic think and write about literature derive in part from the divergent ways in which they conceive of the transformation of life into language. For the Literary Critic, language seems to have a systemic quality, one tied to linguistics and structuralism; it functions as a system with a set of norms to some extent dictated by the history of literary form, and manipulations of those conventions (and innovations within the restrictions set up by those conventions). For the PLR, it seems that language is closer to the spoken voice, closer to something affective and expressive, tied to the body, tied to unconscious impulses, fantasies and internalized healthy and pathological relationships with one’s parents, linked with primitive needs to feel loved and to have one’s love accepted and valued, and so on. In short, for the PLR, language in ordinary spoken form, or as it is used in literature, is derived from a combination of the author’s life experience, his imaginative capacities, and his ability to bring emotional states to life through use of language (which is impacted by the writer’s conscious and unconscious life experience and what he has done with that experience psychologically). It is inconceivable that the psychoanalyst’s experience with patients does not play an important role in forming these beliefs; similarly, the Literary Critic’s engagement with texts (which are not spoken) and their historical contexts shapes his more acutely stylistic methodology.

The central theme that we have been developing in this chapter is the idea that, even when psychoanalytic literary criticism dispenses with technical jargon and antiquated analytic theory, psychoanalytic thinkers and readers, when approaching literature, may benefit from exposure to the theoretical advances in the field of literary criticism and the literary historical contexts in which texts can be read and understood. Those psychoanalysts who are writing literary criticism and wish to also write as literary scholars need to be aware of what actually constitutes contemporary literary studies, and be able to make use of the best and most pertinent parts of its methodologies in their work.
It seems inevitable that, before this book ends, we turn our attention to ourselves—to the nature of our collaboration, and to the nature of what we have written. To this point, we have taken the “we” through which we have presented ourselves in this book practically for granted. It is time now for us to take that “we” (who we were for the year and a half during which we wrote this book) and, for two or three pages, treat it as a different entity, as something that we can speak about, and so take it as an object of study. Of course, already a new “we” has been created—the “we” that is writing right now. And, we realize, if we are to be thorough, this new “we” will need its own two or three pages, and so on.

We will attempt here only one round of self-examination. What we would like to note is simply this: that this book works best when the “we” of the writing manages to contain within it a tension, a conversation, a spirited dialogue between the two authors who are included under the umbrella of “we.” The “we,” it seems to us, does not eliminate or even necessarily harmonize differences between the two authors, but in fact keeps the argument alive: in one voice we hear an argument.

The voice of the book is a voice generated by the lively clash of two sets of ideas held by two people with their own minds, their own ideas derived from different disciplines, each with its own intellectual traditions. It is then altogether appropriate that each chapter of this book is devoted to moments in literature when two voices clash or overlap, and leave marks on one another: the imprinting of one voice onto another in Frost’s poem; the moment of aliveness generated for a brief moment in the conversation between the Hunger Artist and the Overseer in Kafka’s story; the inimitable voice of Nathan Zuckerman born of the formal embedding of the voice of self-conscious artistry into the voice of storytelling in Roth’s novel. These clashes do not lead to neat resolutions, or even to compromise, but reveal what is true of most clashes: they do not resolve themselves by someone becoming convinced of the truth of the other’s argument; they do not resolve themselves at all, in fact. What happens, rather, is that the pressure of the confrontation creates a new event, an event utterly unique to those two people because they
have not budged. And in that new event, the two who are on either side of the clash (whether they be real people or characters) are changed: they are each now a person or voice who, with the help of the other, has had a thought or feeling that neither has ever had before. Remarkably, they have learned something without being convinced. Books convince us without making us feel that we have lost an argument.

This book’s basic premise is that the fields of literary criticism and psychoanalysis can only be understood when one understands the forms of thinking that are unique to each of them, and that once the differences between these forms of thinking are recognized, they can productively and creatively enter into conversation with one another. However, we see now, this book has another fundamental premise: that collaborative writing may be one of the most productive paths toward innovation and discovery. It generates what we observed happening in Frost’s, Kafka’s, and Roth’s writing, and in this book: the creation of a “we” different from any other, saying more than either “I” could say, without losing what is distinctive to each of the individuals creating the “we.”
Appendix to Chapter 1

Thomas Ogden’s (1998) Reading of Frost’s “Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be the Same”

An Eloquence So Soft

“Never Again would Birds’ Song be the Same” (1942/1995a), a poem first published when Frost was nearing seventy, is for me one of Frost’s most beautifully crafted and subtly evocative lyrics. This sonnet creates a voice that encompasses a very wide range of human experience: a voice that is unique to itself, while at the same time being unmistakably Frost.

Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be The Same
He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds’ song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

(Frost, 1942/1995a, p. 308)

The poem opens with the sound of good-natured chiding as the speaker, with mock skepticism, talks of a man who professed a far-fetched notion about

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birds that he actually seemed to believe. There is a slightly disowned intimacy in the speaker's voice as he fondly, skeptically marvels at the capacity of the man to believe the unbelievable and speak these beliefs from a place in himself where there seemed to be no doubt. There is a feeling that what he believes he "believes ... into existence" (Frost, quoted in Lathem, 1966, p. 271). One can hear in the voice the pleasure taken in knowing someone so well over the years that even his old stories and quirky beliefs have become signatures of his being.

As the poem proceeds, the metaphor of narrator describing a man of strange but deeply held convictions is "turned" in a way that serves to invite the reader gently to take his own place in the metaphor as he becomes the person to whom the "argument" is addressed, while the speaker becomes the man holding these odd beliefs.

There is delightful playfulness and wit in the speaker's voice as he invokes flawed cause-and-effect reasoning to "explain" events occurring in a metaphor: the birds in the garden (of Eden), having listened to Eve's voice all day long, had incorporated the sound of her voice into their song (as if time played a role in the mythic Garden). The strange "belief" in the creation of an "oversound" (a wonderful neologism) becomes an experience that occurs in the poem itself, that is, in the changes taking place in the sound of the poem's voice. The oversound developing in the voice is a softer sound, "crossed" upon the more witty and ironic voice of the first five lines. In the lines that follow, we hear and feel the interplay of sound and oversound:

Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.

The phrase "an eloquence so soft," with its delicate, repeated "s" sounds, speaks with such tenderness and respectfulness and grace that it seems to float above the hard "c" sounds of the words "could" and "call" and "carried" in the lines spatially below it on the page. The experience created in the language of the poem—of softer sounds suspended above harder ones—anticipates the image of sounds of "call of laughter" being carried "aloft."

The poem is in constant motion, continually creating unexpected oversounds. The words "Could only have had an influence on birds" brings the poem back to earth (back from the mythic metaphor) with a humorous thud. The extra unstressed syllable in this line creates a rather awkward cadence that causes the voice to stumble a bit and finally fall into the final stressed syllable "birds." The effect is to playfully, mischievously transform these airy, mythic birds into poultry (for the moment). At the same time, the play on the words birds/bards conveys quite a different "tone of meaning." There is a suggestion in this wordplay that the eloquence of the music of spoken language (both present-day and ancestral) could only have had an influence on
**bards**, people who incorporate the sounds they hear with their “deep ear” (Heaney 1988, p. 109) into their own songs/poems as oversounds—more in their “tone of meaning” than in their words/messages.

There is a surprising turn in the final six lines of the sonnet, which open on a subtly dissonant note:

Be that as may be, she was in their song.

In this starkly assertive single-line sentence, the open-ended conditionality of “would declare” (when? to whom? under what circumstances?) and “could himself believe” (how? why? if what?) are replaced by the conclusive tones of “Be that as may be.” This phrase, in conjunction with the forced, flat certainty of the words “she was in their song,” represents a marked shift in voice and introduces an unsettling awareness of a yet-to-be-defined source of emotional pain or danger that had been almost entirely absent in the playfulness of the voice up to this point. This anxious insistence is woven into more complex sounds in the succeeding lines:

Moreover her voice upon the voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.

Never again would birds’ song be the same.

The voice here is a more personal voice, filled with the effort to hold onto what is most valued; it is reminiscent of the tone of the words “And what I would not part with I have kept” in Frost’s (1942/1995b, p. 305) “I Could Give All to Time.” In “Birds’ Song,” what is most valued is a belief—a belief which in these lines is no longer a certainty—that poetry, that this poem, can speak with an “eloquence” that reaches so deeply into human feeling and experience that it alters language itself, and has persisted in the woods/words so long that “probably it never would be lost.” The “eloquence,” the ability of poetry to change the sound of language, is only as potent as is the ability of this poem to create the sounds of a unique voice that will never be lost to the reader.

The phrase “probably it never would be lost” quietly and unobtrusively conveys a remarkable depth of sadness. The word “probably” softly suggests a feeling of doubt, never openly acknowledged, about the permanence and immutability over time of the oversounds created in the course of a poem or of a life. Characteristic of Frost’s poetry, the line-ending words “never would be lost,” give the word “lost” the “final word.” In so doing the language undercuts the claim for permanence in the very act of making it.

The voice in the line “Never again would birds’ song be the same” has moved well beyond the wit and charm of the first part of the poem, and beyond the bald assertion “she was in their song.” The line has the sound and
feel of a memorial prayer. In these most delicate and unassuming of words (that contain not a single hard consonant sound), a sense of the sacred is evoked—a deeply personal sacredness filled with both love and sadness. The strength of the voice in this line keeps the declaration free of sentimentality or nostalgia. The line conveys a sense of the poet’s attempts, in his making of poems, to create and preserve in the sound of his words something of the sounds of the past voices that have been most important to him: the voices of the people he has loved; the voices of the poems that have mattered most to him; the changing sounds of his own voice in the course of his life (both in speech and in the poems that he has written); and the sounds of ancestral voices that are not attributable to any particular person, but are part of the language with which he speaks and from which he creates his own voice and his own poems.

Something else is happening in the sounds of the words in this line that is as disturbing as the feeling of doubt regarding the permanence of “oversounds.” The sentence begins with the phrase “Never again,” which serves to underscore that past voices will never again be heard, will never again be directly experienced. Those people and the sounds of their voices are gone. What we have as consolation for that loss is a remembrance of the sound of their voices “crossed” on our own and on the voice of the poet. The oversounds are reminders of what has been lost, but they are not the past voices themselves. Those voices will never again be heard.

The sound of the voice in this line, as it repeats the title of the poem, seems to make a place for the poem to end. But no, there is one more line, with the feeling of a hastily added postscript, that captures what William James (1890/1950) might describe as “a feeling of and” (p. 245):

And to do that to birds was why she came.

The voice in this final line is wonderfully unexpected. Seemingly tossed off as an afterthought, it insists on being read quickly and more loudly than the previous line. It is filled with hard “t” and “c” sounds that seem to make an awful racket after the quiet elegiac sounds that precede. But the effect of the final line is anything but incidental to the process of creating the delicately textured sound of the voice in this part of the poem. The simultaneity of irony and wit and compassion and grief in the voice here carries enormous emotional force. The power of the line is in part attributable to masterful timing. It is positioned as the second half of a final couplet in the first line of which sadness and muted consolation and a sense of the sacredness of past voices have been tenderly and respectfully brought to life. The last line of the poem creates a voice that somehow encompasses the full distance that the poem has come. There is a feeling of pleasure in playing with the sounds and meanings of words that does not diminish the oversound of grief and loss that has accrued in the course of the poem. In these final ten monosyllabic words, the poem is
pulled forcefully, but in a generously humorous way, back into the immediacy and informality of the sounds of everyday spoken words. The phrase “And to do that to birds” feels better suited to a description of ten-year-old boys startling pigeons in a park than to a depiction of the effects of poetry on the sound of language and of the sound of language on poetry. The final words “was why she came” compounds the effect by invoking a tenderly comic tautology in which Eve arrives on the scene in order to do a job (as a plumber might arrive at a house to clean out a drain).

The voice in “Birds’ Song” succeeds in making the poem itself an experience, and not a description of an experience. We can hear and feel in the action of the voice the delight taken by the poet in using language inventively. There is a constant movement in the voice as humor invades sadness and sadness invades humor. In its insistence on being “always on the wing … and not to be viewed except in flight” (James 1890/1950, p. 253), the voice manages to be a great many things. It seems to find solace and even joy in hearing and making oversounds at the same time as it is filled with the sadness of its recognition that the voices of the people who have mattered most to the poet (as well as his own earlier voices and eventually this one) will persist only as oversounds. “But isn’t that quite a lot?” the sound of the voice of the poem asks equivocally.
Appendix to Chapter 2

Thomas Ogden’s (2009a) Reading of Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist”

“A Hunger Artist”

Kafka’s (1924/1971) story begins:

During these last decades the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished. It used to pay very well to stage such great performances under one’s own management, but today that is quite impossible. We live in a different world now. (p. 268)

In this opening sentence, a note is sounded that echoes through much of the remainder of the story: psychic time and space are contracting, time is running out, and vitality is in a state of severe decline. The second sentence has a hint of madness to it, as “professional fasting” is linked both with the grandiose phrase “great performances” and the bureaucratic fussiness of the words “quite impossible.” But what is most striking about the opening of the story is the sentence: “We live in a different world now.” This pronouncement creates a we (of narrator, hunger artist, and reader) and a now that have the effect of closing the door behind the reader as he enters the world of the story.

Kafka does not simply tell the reader about the world he is in the process of entering; he shows that world to the reader through the action of the language:

At one time the whole town took a lively interest in the hunger artist; from day to day of his fast the excitement mounted; everybody wanted to see him at least once a day; there were people who bought season tickets for the last few days and sat from morning till night in front of his small barred cage; even in the nighttime, there were visiting hours, when the

whole effect was heightened by torch flares; on fine days the cage was set out in the open air, and then it was the children’s special treat to see the hunger artist; for their elders he was often just a joke that happened to be in fashion, but the children stood openmouthed, holding each other’s hands for greater security, marveling at him as he sat there pallid in black tights, with his ribs sticking out so prominently, not even on a seat but down among the straw on the ground, sometimes giving a courteous nod, answering questions with a constrained smile, or perhaps stretching an arm through the bars so that one might feel how thin it was, and then again withdrawing deep into himself, paying no attention to anyone or anything, not even to the all-important striking of the clock that was the only piece of furniture in his cage, but merely staring into vacancy with half-shut eyes, now and then taking a sip from a tiny glass of water to moisten his lips. (p. 268)

The entirety of an internal world is on display in this single sprawling sentence, which moves seamlessly from clause to clause. The passage is a Breughel-like collection of repellent, detailed miniatures. The effect created is that of imprisonment in a continuous, unrelenting present. The phrases are simple, composed mostly of words of one or two syllables: “small barred cage,” “just a joke,” “down among the straw,” “ribs sticking out,” “courteous nod,” “constrained smile,” “merely staring into vacancy.” The horrific is ordinary and the ordinary is horrific. Moreover, while the story is told by the narrator in the past tense—as he presents his memories of the hunger artist—the pounding repetition of present participles further contributes to the transformation of time into an eternal present: “sticking,” “giving,” “answering,” “stretching,” “withdrawing,” “paying,” “striking,” “taking.”

The narrator and the hunger artist are closely tied, perhaps two aspects of a single person. The narrator is intimately familiar with the hunger artist’s circumstances, behavior, and state of mind, and has words at his disposal, while the hunger artist is either mute or uses words (not quoted) as part of the performance. And yet it is not clear that the narrator is any more able to think than is the hunger artist. The narrator uses words to describe, but does so in a mechanical sort of way that is almost entirely devoid of feeling, self-observation, or insight into the hunger artist’s or his own inner life. The hunger artist is less a person than he is a driven “creature” (p. 271). He is not given a name and, in the title of the story, he is not even “The Hunger Artist,” he is merely “A Hunger Artist.” Not only is he not given a name; the substitute name that he is given—hunger artist—constitutes a bitterly ironic misnaming, in that there is no art (i.e., creative expression of a personal aesthetic) in marathon fasting.

If his fasts are not viewed by his audience as credible, that is, genuine feats of self-starvation, the hunger artist is no one. Consequently, nothing is more important to him than demonstrating beyond doubt that he is a
genuine hunger artist and not a trickster. He welcomes the closest scrutiny of his fasts:

Besides casual onlookers there were also relays of permanent watchers ... to watch the hunger artist day and night, three of them at a time, in case he should have some secret recourse to nourishment .... [Some watchers] were very lax in carrying out their duties ... intending to give the hunger artist the chance of a little refreshment .... Nothing annoyed the artist more than such watchers; they made him miserable; they made his fast seem unendurable; sometimes he mastered his feebleness sufficiently to sing during their watch for as long as he could keep going, to show them how unjust their suspicions were. But that was of little use; they only wondered at his cleverness in being able to fill his mouth even while singing. (pp. 268–269)

The hunger artist's fear of being seen as a fraud is reminiscent of Kafka's incessant self-doubt regarding his capacities as a writer and as a man. The extremes to which the hunger artist goes in defending the truth of his "art" are at once impressive in their ingenuity and sadly pathetic in their blindness to the fact that his efforts are so evidently doomed to failure.

The hunger artist methodically goes about his business, but is completely unable to take any distance from it, to think about it, to learn from it:

He was quite happy at the prospect of spending a sleepless night with ... watchers [who took their jobs seriously]; he was ready to exchange jokes with them, to tell them stories out of his nomadic life, anything at all to keep them awake and demonstrate to them again that he had no eatables in his cage and that he was fasting as not one of them could fast. (p. 269)

The language of this sentence, to my ear, combines a reference to Don Quixote ("stories out of his nomadic life") that serves to underscore (by contrast) the complete absence of charm, innocence, or humor in the character of the hunger artist. In place of the naive faith of Don Quixote is the desperate obsession of the hunger artist. Moreover, the appended clause "that he was fasting as not one of them could" stands out because it affords a first glimpse into the grandiosity of the hunger artist: he feels superior to those who are unable to fast as long as he can.

Since no single person can monitor the hunger artist twenty-four hours a day for the full forty days of his performance, the hunger artist himself is therefore "bound to be the sole completely satisfied spectator of his own fast" (p. 270). In other words, the proof of the hunger artist's worth is impossible to demonstrate to anyone but himself, and yet proving his worth to himself is also impossible, as reflected by the fact that he is driven to repeat his performance again and again. He can know the verity of his fasting, but he has
no ability to know the truth of who he is. That the hunger artist’s bizarre existence (his living in isolation from others and himself) is self-created makes it all the more horrific and inescapable. The hunger artist’s (and Kafka’s) imprisonment are complete and inescapable because the universe has shrunk to the size of the tiny cage in which they both spend their lives.

The story at this point takes an entirely unexpected turn. The narrator observes that it is not the difficulty of convincing the public of the authenticity of his fast that most troubles the hunger artist. What is far more difficult for him to bear is a fact that “he alone knew: how easy it was to fast” (p. 270). The 40-day fasts (that would bring the hunger artist “to such skeleton thinness” [p. 270]) are not at all difficult for the hunger artist to achieve. What is difficult for him is living with this awareness. This recognition—that fasting is easy for him—is the first indication that the hunger artist is capable of thinking and of self-awareness.

At this moment in the story, the hunger artist begins to become human in the mind of the reader (and, it seems, in his own mind). It is in the very act of telling the story that the narrator (who is barely distinguishable psychically from the hunger artist) achieves a form of consciousness that he has not previously been capable of. But the experience of becoming human in this way is momentary and unbearable for the hunger artist. Directly on the heels of his act of self-awareness and nascent self-recognition, the hunger artist (and the narrator) descend, once again, into mindlessness, this time in the form of bitterness and outrage. The sentence immediately following the revelation of his awareness that fasting is easy for him is the bold assertion: “It was the easiest thing in the world” (p. 270).

The language here is startling. Though not the spoken (i.e., quoted) words of the hunger artist, the reader can hear in the words “It was the easiest thing in the world” something of the boasting, taunting, arrogant voice of the hunger artist himself. The narrator is much too formal and dispassionate a character to use the vernacular in which this sentence is “spoken.” The dawning self-awareness of the previous sentence is shattered by this arrogant claim. The reader can feel the hunger artist again losing himself in his all-consuming obsession. The hunger artist deplores the fact that:

The longest period of fasting was fixed by his impresario [his manager and fellow actor in “the performance”] at forty days .... Why should he be cheated of the fame he would get for fasting longer, for being not only the record hunger artist of all time, which presumably he was already, but for beating his own record by a performance beyond human imagination, since he felt that there were no limits to his capacity for fasting? (pp. 270–271)

It seems that the hunger artist’s awareness that fasting is easy for him renders his life pointless and futile; this self-understanding is unbearable, sending
him into insane fits of outrage. Why should he endlessly demonstrate something (in the 40-day fasting performances) that is not worth demonstrating even once? The hunger artist seeks relief from this psychic pain by convulsively throwing himself into a state of crazed omnipotence, in which he proclaims that he can fast for longer and longer periods of time with each performance, and ultimately can fast with “no limits” (p. 271)—i.e., forever.

In other words, the hunger artist, unable to tolerate his moment of self-awareness, is “reduced to omnipotence” (Bion quoted by James Grotstein, 2003, personal communication). In response to momentary, unbearable self-recognition, he denies his membership in the human race—a species that requires food to live—and instead claims a place in a nonhuman world (a world “beyond human imagination” [p. 271]) that he governs by means of omnipotent thinking.

The hunger artist’s descent into the imploding psychic space of omnipotence is mirrored by the declining popularity of fasting performances in Europe. For the hunger artist, this means the collapse of the external support for his madness. The narrator’s descriptions of the hunger artist’s physical and emotional state become even more horrifying than they have been to this point. At the end of one of the last 40-day fasting performances,

… his head lolled on his breast as if it had landed there by chance; his body was hollowed out; his legs in a spasm of self-preservation clung close to each other at the knees, yet scraped on the ground as if it were not really solid ground, as if they were only trying to find solid ground. (p. 271)

The repetition, three times, of the words “as if” underscores the way in which the hunger artist is at this point “not really” a person, but only a “spasm of self-preservation” that superficially resembles a human life. The hunger artist’s emergent awareness (consciousness) that fasting is easy for him has rendered his fasting performances and his very existence pointless. Self-awareness is intolerable; consciousness itself has been destroyed and replaced by omnipotent thinking. In such a state, nothing feels real or substantial (including oneself): “The ground [for him was] … not really solid ground.” Instead, his feet scraped the ground “as if they were only trying to find solid ground,” trying in vain to experience the ground as real, that is, as a solid, palpable world that has an existence outside of his mind. The hunger artist feels contempt for, and alienated from, all other people because they fail to understand what he alone knows. “To fight against … a whole world of non-understanding [other people’s disbelief in his capacity for ever-greater feats of fasting] was impossible” (p. 273).

Once the fasting performances have gone completely out of fashion, the hunger artist joins a circus, where he occupies a cage among the animals. As time passes, people walk by his cage without giving him so much as a glance.
He might fast as much as he could, and he did so .... The little notice board telling the number of fast days achieved, which at first was changed carefully every day, had long stayed at the same figure, ... and so the artist simply fasted on and on, as he had once dreamed of doing, and it was no trouble to him, just as he had always foretold, but no one counted the days, no one, not even the artist himself, knew what records he was already breaking. (pp. 276–277)

The hunger artist is now completely immersed in the world of the abject: nothing holds significance. What once completely consumed him—the quest to demonstrate to the world his capacity for longer and longer fasting performances—no longer serves to connect him to the external world. Even the number system becomes drained of meaning: forty days, sixty days, eighty days—all have become indistinguishable from one another. The hunger artist is at this point floating in timelessness and meaninglessness.

Eventually, the circus overseer notices the seemingly empty cage, and discovers the weak and emaciated hunger artist buried deep in the straw at the bottom of the cage.

“Are you still fasting?” asked the overseer, “when on earth do you mean to stop?” “Forgive me, everybody,” whispered the hunger artist; only the overseer, who had his ear to the bars, understood him .... “I always wanted you to admire my fasting,” said the hunger artist. “We do admire it,” said the overseer, affably. “But you shouldn’t admire it,” said the hunger artist. “Well then we don’t admire it,” said the overseer, “but why shouldn’t we admire it?” “Because I have to fast, I can’t help it,” said the hunger artist. “What a fellow you are,” said the overseer, “and why can’t you help it?” “Because,” said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer’s ear, so that no syllable might be lost, “because I couldn’t find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.” These were his last words, but in his dimming eyes remained the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was still continuing to fast. (pp. 276–277)

This ending of the story, in its penultimate paragraph, is, for me, each time I read it, utterly a surprise. For the first time in the story, the hunger artist speaks for himself (i.e., in the form of direct quotation of his words). Also, for the first time, another character is introduced—the overseer, who is a thinking, feeling, observing person—a person who recognizes the hunger artist as a human being (as opposed to a performer or a creature) and feels genuine compassion for him.

The overseer seems to be able to “see” the infantile psychological needs of the hunger artist and is not repelled by them. This compassion is poignantly
conveyed by the overseer's ordinary, but profoundly tender words: "What a fellow you are." The overseer's human understanding is a necessary context for the development of the hunger artist's capacity to become self-aware, and to entrust his self-understanding to another person. The hunger artist recognizes that there is nothing admirable, and certainly nothing magical or superhuman, about his fasting: "I have to fast, I can't help it." He explains (in what I find to be the most powerful sentence of the story) why he cannot help fasting:

"Because," said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and speaking, with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss, right into the overseer's ear, so that no syllable might be lost, "because I couldn't find the food I liked." (p. 277)

The hunger artist's self-understanding is conveyed not only by the meanings of the words, but also by the very structure of the sentence. The words spoken by the hunger artist are literally wrapped around the tender words of the narrator. The hunger artist and the narrator, together now for the first time, feel like facets of an integrated, self-observing person who is capable of at once experiencing (being self-aware in the experience) and of thinking and speaking about the experience. After the word because (spoken by the hunger artist), the narrating self speaks of—and in so doing, attends to—the hunger-artist-as-infant in the arms of the overseer-as-mother.

The narrator's words are delivered in seven small pieces: "Lifting his head a little/and speaking/with his lips pursed/as if for a kiss/right into the overseer's ear/so that no syllable/might be lost." This careful portioning out of the words, to my ear, elicits the feeling of a mother feeding a baby in small spoonfuls, waiting after each portion for the infant to taste and feel and swallow the food, and then to ready himself for the next spoonful. Moreover, the sound and rhythm of the words "his lips pursed, as if for a kiss," when read aloud, create in the mouth and ear of the reader the sound and feel of a kiss. Consciousness, in these sentences, is as much a sensory event as it is a verbally symbolized cognitive event, as much an interpersonal event as it is an intra-psychic event.

The closing clause of this sentence—"Because I couldn't find the food I liked"—completes, structurally, the wrapping of the hunger artist's words around the tender words of the narrator (now the narrating/observing self). The self-awareness conveyed in this last part of the sentence is remarkable and fully unexpected. A complex sense of "I-ness" is conveyed in, and created by, the layered self-understanding that can be heard in these words. The hunger artist has desisted from eating, not as a consequence of the conquest of the body by the mind, but as a consequence of the fact that he has no appetite for the food he has found to this point in his life. What is suggested—and only suggested—is the hunger artist's emerging awareness of far sadder truths: he did not find the food he liked because such food does not exist, or—perhaps even worse—because he had no appetite for any food, for any person, for
life itself. One cannot help but think of Kafka, throughout his life, feeling haunted by these unspoken possibilities.

And at the same time, quietly, unobtrusively, quite a different emotional experience is being created in these same sentences: even as the hunger artist recognizes and says to the overseer that he has never found the food he liked, the reader can hear and feel in the language that the hunger artist is, in fact, drinking up that very food that he says he has never found—the “food” consisting of the feeling of loving and being loved, the experience of seeing and being seen (by the “over-seer”). The sentences create an experience in reading in which the feeling of an appetite for life lived with other people is unmistakably present. There is in this moment, at once the imminence of death and of new (never-before-experienced) life.

The intimacy of the spoken and unspoken conversation between the hunger artist and the overseer is shattered by the sentence that immediately follows: “If I had found it [the food I liked], believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else” (p. 277). Each time I read these words, I find myself wincing. Something sacred is defiled by them. Gone is the delicate portioning out of phrases, the elegance of the holding function performed by the sentence structure, and the music of a kiss. Instead, there is the heavy-handed (“believe me”) and the vulgar (“stuffed myself”). The overseer is reduced to the generic (“like you or anyone else”). It is as if all that preceded never occurred. These mindless, vulgar, dismissive words “were his last words, but in his dimming eyes remained the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was still continuing to fast.” He continued to fast, though no longer doing so arrogantly and omnipotently; he fasted because he believed that he had not found the food he liked.

The grim irony here is that he had found the food he liked in the experience of giving and receiving love, and of recognizing and being recognized. The tragedy of the hunger artist’s life was not that he could not find the food he liked; rather, the tragedy lay in the fact that having found it (and found himself), he rejected it and himself (as well as the awareness of both). Why he had to savagely assault that state of mind in which he was aware of having found the food he liked—the experience of being lovingly seen and of seeing lovingly—is left undefined. Perhaps the hunger artist could not bear to recognize how little of the experience of lovingly seeing and being seen he had had in his life; or perhaps it was intolerable for him to recognize how little able he had been to recognize the love that had been there all along for him. Or maybe it is simply part of being human, of being self-aware, that some experiences—even the ones for which we most long—are “too much for the senses,/Too crowding, too confusing—/Too present to imagine” (Frost 1942, p. 305). And so we turn away.

The story seems to end there, but a short paragraph remains:

They buried the hunger artist, straw and all. Into the cage they put a young panther …. The panther was all right. The food he liked was
brought him without hesitation by the attendants; he seemed not even to miss his freedom; his noble body, furnished almost to the bursting point with all that it needed, seemed to carry freedom around with it too. The joy of life streamed with such ardent passion from his throat that for the onlookers it was not easy to stand the shock of it. But they braced themselves, crowded around the cage, and did not want ever to move away. (p. 277)

The panther, in his hunger for life, seems at first to be an incarnation of the hunger artist’s dream of one day finding “the food he liked” and of being able to recognize it and allow it to fill him with “the joy of life.” But on further reflection, the panther, though full of animal life and animal appetites, is not human and not self-aware. That he does not seem to notice his confinement to a circus cage—“he seemed not even to miss his freedom”—is a blessing not available to us as human beings who are condemned to experience the pain of knowing we are in pain unless we relinquish our sanity. To become human while remaining sane is to be alive to the distinctively human pain that is born of the “gift” of consciousness.
Appendix to Chapter 3

Benjamin Ogden’s (2012) Reading of Roth’s The Ghost Writer

Philip Roth’s alter-ego Nathan Zuckerman utters his first words in the opening lines of The Ghost Writer (1979):

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago—I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman—when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man. (p. 3)

In the first sentence of what would become the first of nine volumes about his life, Zuckerman cuts himself off mid-sentence and starts again, from the beginning this time. Roth embeds one independent clause inside another; bold em dashes off-set a trailing independent clause nested within an opening clause. The syntax that this maneuver creates is not only intricate, it’s cunning—and is integral to how Roth writes Nathan Zuckerman at the level of form. Together, these concentrically arranged clauses supply the time frame, the snowy Massachusetts setting, the matter at hand (the literary life as material for story writing), and the narrative voice for the story and the central character that are to follow: Nathan Zuckerman’s account of an evening spent with the famed Jewish author E. I. Lonoff in 1956, its effect on his then-budding literary career, and the events that lead him to imagine that Amy Bellette, one of Lonoff’s beautiful paramours, is in fact Anne Frank.

The tone of the opening clause is nearly that of a fairy tale. “It was the last daylight hour” announces that a story is going to be told every bit as much as “Once upon a time…” or “In a land far, far away…” Through tone—as cozy as a bedtime story—the reader is settled-in for a yarn. Before the story can

take off, however, an interjecting clause cuts the story short. This does not simply carry the reader away from the story momentarily, it interrupts the telling of the story from the outset by braking so abruptly to make room for the interpolated phrase. The fact that the embedded clause is set off by unspaced em dashes, as opposed to less halting and disruptive en dashes or commas or parentheses, suggests that Nathan’s autobiographical and metafictional gloss is every bit as important as the “story” itself, which had already gathered momentum in the very first words. This interjecting clause is not an aside. It is a second beginning, equal to the first in every way.

The em dashes, then, are not brief pauses that allow for a momentary digression from the story. They are the opposite; they are shards of punctuation that hold up the continuation of the story so as to clear room, literally, for a new thought. The result is that the story (the first clause) is not just temporarily waylaid or decelerated by life and art (the intruding independent clause). It is brought to a standstill, interjected upon, brought down a peg. Grammatically and metaphorically, neither clause is dependent. Form is so inseparable from content in Roth that syntax operates metaphorically—a dependent clause can be read as a metaphor for a dependent relationship. Moreover, Roth has built this sentence so as to put the two clauses on equal footing. Were the em dashes to be replaced by parentheses or commas, the embedded clause would become secondary to the foremost clause, the enclosed clause becoming a digression or the piping-up of an intrusive narrator. Here is how it would read with parentheses instead of em dashes:

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago (I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman) when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man.

More than the language even, Roth’s strong choice of punctuation (em dashes) begins to develop an implicit point, one that is worked out over the course of the novel, and over the complete term of the Zuckerman saga: Life cannot be absorbed into fiction, as if one is contained within the other. Their relationship is characterized by some kind of antagonism. The novel suggests that bringing real life and fiction into harmony, or even into some kind of proportional relation, is not so easily done, perhaps can never be done without caving in to one side or the other. The voice and character of Nathan Zuckerman, which are established in the first sentence, are themselves assembled by reproducing this particular thematic antagonism at the level of form and syntax.

Much of the mood and meaning that begin to establish themselves from the first sentence onward are inseparable from Roth’s language and grammar. From an understanding of this inseparability (mostly, how Roth manages it and the extent to which it becomes a dominant organizing feature in his
writing) may come a way to articulate how Roth uses fiction to depict a reality-in-fiction that is as real as any external reality. It is also a starting point for understanding what is true of all characters in literature: They are combinations of sound and grammar. What this means for language’s relationship to reality comes through quite forcefully in something Roth said in an interview with Hermione Lee (2007): “To begin with, Zuckerman is a novelist,” Roth said, “and it is the way of the novelist to take the raw material of life and transform it into something that is no longer life, but language, language in the service of a surmise” (p. 59). How and why life must become language for it to become a surmise, and why a surmise in language is different from, if not preferable to or truer than or more real than, life, bears upon how one might think through the portrayal of reality in Roth’s fiction.

One way to examine how Roth builds the character of Nathan Zuckerman in the syntax of the opening sentence is to take the liberty of reorganizing Roth’s opening so as to omit the embedded clause. Selectively altering Roth’s writing will, I hope, serve as an editorial experiment, and will test the hypothesis of Alain Robbe-Grillet (1965/1989) in “On Several Obsolete Notions”: that it “suffices to change” the style of “any important work of our literature … for there to be nothing left” of the writer or his work. It is enough to change the verb tense in *The Stranger*, as Robbe-Grillet puts it, “for Camus’ universe to disappear at once and all the interest of the book with it” (p. 44).

Here, then, is how *The Ghost Writer* could have begun,

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man. I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman.

The problem of the book’s immediate interruption by artifice is gone, but not solved. This opening is no more problematic than the first-person narrations in *The Great Gatsby*, or *Heart of Darkness*, or *Jane Eyre* (less so, actually). We’ve seen this type of cleverness before, and done better. In my revised opening, with the first sentence of the conventional novel still intact, and life then following upon narration, and art bringing up the rear, the quintessence of *The Ghost Writer* disappears. It becomes hackneyed; so much of what literature can do is ruled out.

The *Ghost Writer* disappears because the narrative voice of Nathan Zuckerman disappears. In the spurious opening, the speaking voice is flat. Nathan’s brief biography is no longer a headstrong intrusion. As a result, Nathan’s voice is neither headstrong nor intrusive. The tension between life and art no longer determines how the narrative voice relays the story. Nathan’s narrative voice fades without this antagonism because the voice and the formal presentation of the antagonism are one and the same.
In Roth’s opening, it should be clear, the interposing clause, which divides life and art, both creates the voice and is the voice itself. Zuckerman is—grammatically, formally, and thematically—the result of putting into language the schisms between life and art, narration and memoir, invention and literary history. The schisms only exist in the form Roth gives to them, which is the voice of Nathan Zuckerman. Nathan puts his life into language, and the form in which he does so creates him. If he put his life into any other form he would not create himself; he would create another, different Nathan Zuckerman, one that would be him only in name (as is the case in the altered opening, where the rifts and the voice effectively vanish because the form changes). In a different form we would have a different Nathan Zuckerman, and Roth’s universe, like Camus’s, would “disappear at once.” Nathan’s voice vanishes in the spurious opening because, formally, language has made life in a different way. And it is in Nathan’s creation of himself that the tensions that are most at the core of him are themselves created—the imperatives of storytelling and life, the material for literary inspiration, tremendous professional ambition.

My point is that Nathan Zuckerman is entirely a product of form; he is built up from scratch, from the raw materials of language. Nathan could never be created through mere description: no catalogue of his physical attributes would ever paint such a clear picture of him, or say so much about him as a character, as this opening sentence does. That Nathan creates himself in the language he does tells us exactly who he is, and will be in the novel. When Flaubert (as quoted by Jehlen, 1853/2009, p. 8) proclaims, “Style is life! It’s the very blood of thought!” he means it, and this is what he means by it. Form creates life, and says more about life than any mimetic description or recording ever could.

For this reason, Roth can’t finish the first sentence of *The Ghost Writer* without interrupting himself. The book depends upon it. Nathan Zuckerman positively hangs upon it. Without an interjection that creates the narrative voice by formally placing life and storytelling adjacent to one another, Nathan Zuckerman as we get him in *The Ghost Writer* vanishes. The novel lives in the grammar of the opening sentence; it is how *The Ghost Writer* becomes more than a novel or a faux-autobiography, becomes more than a clever and trenchant manipulation of life and genre. It is where Roth becomes Roth, so much better and far more than all of these things. The grammar extends beyond the simple narration of what would be a traditional novel (of how “it was” and how “I was”)—it gets us to what the work *does* but doesn’t say. It makes the Zuckerman books more than the sum total of their parts and concerns (Judaism, father figures, sex, the relationship between life and art). It makes Philip Roth’s effects, and the techniques that produce them, transcend the elements of which they are composed. We know it when we see it and it’s something all its own—the Philip Roth Novel.

And yet, this signature effect that Roth builds into his writing is not only a result of syntax or a few strategically placed em dashes. What is not clear,
The specious opening offers a fairly conventional first-person singular narrator. The voice is the same all the way through, and the second sentence follows naturally from the first. They do not, as Roth has them, compete with one another for top billing, or for a majority share of the “real.” The formerly embedded clause is no longer an interruption or a digression or a distinctly external interjection of “the real” into the fictitious, but is a simple description of an author making no bones about what he is presently up to in writing his own life story. What was once an adamant interposition—one that punctured the veil of fiction—is now a follow-up sentence entirely in the service of the story.

While in Roth’s opening the syntax splits the narrative voice into two distinct but equally formidable voices, in the altered opening there is only one unbroken narrative voice. The two sentences are knit together as a seamless narrative voice spoken by a cohesive character. Even if one argues that there are still two distinct voices, one would have to concede that, as opposed to Roth’s opening, both voices belong to the story equally. The drift of the story incorporates both voices. The “I” with swelling literary ambitions speaks without hesitation or self-consciousness about himself. That this nascent protagonist is aware of his own status as a Bildungsroman hero doesn’t bother us, doesn’t make the book any more difficult to figure out, mostly because one can comfortably proceed with the book as if this were the story of how “I was” and “It was” in a fictional world. Art and life have made room for one another on a single narrative plane. In Roth’s opening, Zuckerman speaks about an “I” that is just as much a fictional character as he is a young Zuckerman.

In my altered opening, without the syntax creating an internal schism in theme and voice, life and literary form bear upon storytelling in a way that Roth would never have them do. The content and the forces in tension are the
same, but the vying of inseparable but distinct entities has been cooked away. No longer is life a thing that is external to but not apart from art; nor is life something decidedly within art, but not assimilated to it. Life is brought into the narration in a way that neutralizes it. Conflict still exists, but it exists within a narrative framework that accommodates both sides.

Roth did not have in mind this comfortable cohabitation of life and art. He wrote life and art as unwanted but unavoidable interruptions of each other. Art and life are distinct, but for better or worse are knit together. Each side shoulders its way into the book. As a result, the clause “when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man” has to be understood as an attempt to continue with the telling of the story before the mid-sentence interruption. It is an attempt to carry on in the same vein and voice as the first clause of the book. An implied “as I was saying” precedes “when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man.” The tone of the first clause of the book, broken up by the very different tone of the interrupting clause, is picked up as the sentence closes out. The “I”—the narrator of a winter novel—wants to proceed with the story he was telling before he was interrupted, but it isn’t possible. There are traces:

It was the last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man.

Without the interrupting clause, this is the voice of someone trying to tell a good story, maybe even a scary story, but one earnestly told. Whoever is writing this story isn’t concerned with anything other than gripping the reader. This is not the case with the other sentence,

I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a Bildungsroman hero before me, already contemplating my own massive Bildungsroman.

This is the voice of someone more interested in his own life, in his own cleverness and successes and hero-status, than he is in storytelling. If he is going to tell any story, it will be his own. If games will be played with literary form, they will be played because he finds them interesting, they are the material of his life, his experiences. This is the voice of a narrator who will not allow the hero of the story to be anyone other than himself. And, in so far as Nathan’s career aspirations are recognizably Roth’s own, this interjection also brings traces of Roth’s own life into the text, suggesting another frame of reference in which Roth’s life (as distinct from Nathan’s life) forces itself into art. In this sense, Roth both is and is not Nathan. The interjecting clause carries in it the tension between two sorts of autobiographical reality: Roth’s life experience as it is creatively transformed into material for fiction through the character of Nathan Zuckerman, and Roth’s life experience as it enters into the text in ways distinct from Nathan, in which case he ceases to be
Roth’s fictional alter-ego and becomes a mask, a more transparent vehicle for communicating Roth’s life and ideas in fiction.  
Whereas in the specious opening conflict achieves a level of equipoise within a single narrative tone operating on a single plane, in Roth’s opening the narrative tone comes about because both sides (the story and the life) are made to assert themselves with complete conviction. This is neither dialogue nor rapprochement. These sentences independently plead their cases. They speak over one another. Neither clause budges. Roth grants each side the total authority of its argument and its claim to be the dominant voice. As a result, the novel treats both life and art objectively, as concretely true. These are not subjective states of mind or fleeting aesthetic impressions. They are incontrovertible facts. Roth’s style accommodates both the novel in itself and his own life as the material for the novel by accommodating neither. In earnestly speaking on their own behalf, each side achieves a level of sincerity that otherwise would not be possible. A war is all the more heated and believable and dramatic for having no punches pulled on either side.

Roth predicates his style on letting each side proclaim its own truth without any thought of compromise or negotiation. What tells us that each side speaks the “truth” is form itself. The writing gives the reader no choice but to contend with two full-throated, objective representations of the real. The opening sentence of *The Ghost Writer* cannot be improved upon. It has been written to its completion. We know this because it is true all the way through. As Myra Jehlen (2009) has written, “literature happens when writers try to figure things out as objectively, as truly as they can” (p. 5). Form has figured this conflict out as objectively as form can.

The scene that follows the novel’s first sentence develops out of the same techniques:

The clapboard farmhouse was at the end of an unpaved road twelve hundred feet up in the Berkshires, yet the figure who emerged from the study to bestow a ceremonious greeting wore a gabardine suit, a knitted blue tie clipped to a white shirt by an unadorned silver clasp, and well-brushed ministerial black shoes that made me think of him stepping down from a shoeshine stand rather than from the high altar of art. Before I had composure enough to notice the commanding, autocratic angle at which he held his chin, or the regal, meticulous, rather dainty care he took to arrange his clothes before sitting—to notice anything, really, other than that I had miraculously made it from my unliterary origins to here, to him—my impression was that E. I. Lonoff looked more like the local superintendent of schools than the regions’ most original storyteller since Melville and Hawthorne. (Roth, 1979, p. 3)

After the intruding clause, the story carries on as before. The second sentence resumes the tone of storytelling after an interjecting author derailed it. If
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anything, the second sentence resumes the tone a bit too well, with the writing becoming more laden with novelistic tropes: “Figures” are now “emerging” and “bestowing” while clothed in “gabardine.”

However, the third sentence slows down the momentum of the narrative, tempering without grounding it. This is still a story, and E. I. Lonoff is still a character. He doesn’t sit; he arranges his clothes, remaining silent so that we can take him in. Except now E. I. Lonoff, the fake great story writer, is being compared to actual great writers in history. Now we understand that the world we are in is not entirely invented. The story does not buckle with the mention of Melville and Hawthorne, but it places the story in the stream of history. There are reference points now. The past—the literary past—is real, and it leads to Lonoff. Of course, Lonoff does not mention any real or living writers in relation to himself. He is fiction, and must remain so. But Roth is not shy about tracing an historical arc that leads right up to the present—when it reaches the present, the names become fiction. James, Flaubert, Joyce (through the guise of Dedalus), Mann, Thomas Wolfe, Anne Frank, Babel—then, when it comes to this being a story, we get the charlatan Felix Abravanel. The river of history coming in under the door.

The third sentence returns to the voice of the first sentence, “—to notice anything, really, other than that I had miraculously made it from my unliterary origins to here, to him—.” Once again, the voice wedges uncomfortably between two slivers of punctuation. It has no natural place in the story, so the em dashes act like dam walls, allowing a pool of autobiography to collect in the middle of a narrative rapid—a man-made phenomenon within a natural narrative force. The narrative river doesn’t want to be held up by this captive pool of autobiography, so the narrative continues on after the interjecting clause as it had before.

But the dam is there, forcing the narrative to rebuild from scratch. And between the em dashes we again encounter something that could not be part of the storytelling. The reader discovers that what the story’s narrator “notices” (namely “the commanding, autocratic angle at which he held his chin”) goes unnoticed by Nathan. All he noticed was his own self. All he noticed was that E. I. Lonoff looked like he stepped off a shoe shine stand.

For long stretches the book alternates between storytelling and authorial interjections. Each side gets its footing from the friction, and thus the traction, that the other side supplies. The syntax makes room for the narrator to speak of the limits of the characters’ knowledge, and to speak in a voice distinct from the story’s tone (which is richer with descriptive flourishes). At this point real life impinges upon the story. In comparing Lonoff to Melville and Hawthorne, Lonoff becomes a fictional writer who is nonetheless the product of a real, canonized past. Nathan describes Lonoff’s place in literary history in such terms:

“Well, ‘connected’ of course isn’t the right word. Neither is ‘influence.’ It’s family resemblance that I’m talking about. It’s as though, as I see it,
you are Babel’s American cousin—and Felix Abravanel is the other. You through ‘The Sin of Jesus’ and something in Red Cavalry, through the ironical dreaming and the blunt reporting, and, of course, through the writing itself. Do you see what I mean? There’s a sentence in one of his war stories: ‘Voroshilov combed his horse’s mane with his Mauser.’ Well, that’s just the kind of thing that you do, a stunning little picture in every line. Babel said that if he ever wrote his autobiography he’d call it The Story of an Adjective. Well, if it were possible to imagine you writing your autobiography—if such a thing were even imaginable—you might come up with that title too. No?” (Roth, 1979, p. 47)

Literary history, understood as equivalent to literary form (to “writing itself”), becomes blood-lines. Babel and Lonoff’s autobiographies become stories of adjectives, accounts of descriptive language. For a writer, a life story is a record of form used across a lifetime.

The opening’s formal construction—art and life playing chicken—also fuels the novel’s entertaining verbal brawls. Lonoff and his wife Hope are outspoken, unbudging representatives of contrary views on the nature of the writer’s life in relation to “real” life. Here is one of their marital spats:

Hope tried her luck with a self-effacing smile, but the wattage was awfully dim. “I think I can talk about this without help. I’m only relating the facts, and calmly enough, I had thought. Because the story was in a magazine, and not in an anthology, doesn’t mean that I have lost control of myself. Furthermore, Amy is not the subject, not by any means. The subject is your extraordinary kindness and charity. Your concern for anyone in need—anyone except yourself, and your needs.”

“Only my ‘self,’ as you like to call it, happens not to exist in the everyday sense of the word. Consequently, you may stop lavishing praise upon it. And worrying about its ‘needs.’”

“But your self does exist. It has a perfect right to exist—and in the everyday sense!”

“Enough,” he suggested again.
With that, she rose to begin to clear the dishes for dessert, and all at once a wineglass struck the wall. Hope had thrown it. “Chuck me out,” she cried, “I want you to chuck me out. Don’t tell me you can’t, because you must! I beg of you—I’d rather live and die alone, I’d rather endure that than another moment of your bravery! I cannot take any more moral fiber in the face of life’s disappointments! Not yours and not mine! I cannot bear having a loyal, dignified husband who has no illusions about himself one second more!” (Roth, 1979, p. 41)

Hope demands that Lonoff admit he is generous, but this is only a ploy to get him to acknowledge that he has a self that exists apart from his work (for who
else has Hope been living with all these years?), and that some part of him has responsibilities to the world and to his wife. Lonoff disagrees. His autobiography is the story of an adjective, nothing more. His calm logic belies his sense of his own intellectual superiority, his immovable certainty that writing comes before family. Hope strikes back, at first verbally. Lonoff won’t budge. Glass flies, but Lonoff is unperturbed; his artistic shell is uncrackable. “She can glue it” he remarks of a cracked saucer that Hope had “inadvertently knocked to the floor when she rushed from the table” (Roth, 1979, p. 45).

One comes away from this argument with the feeling that both sides are right. Both Lonoff and Hope have bolstered their arguments by pleading their respective cases in ways most befitting their characters, but to no avail. Despite Lonoff’s acumen as a writer, he holds no rhetorical advantage over Hope. Though it may appear that he has an edge because she resorts to yelling (he only to self-satisfied condescension), Hope’s point can only be made through screaming. Calm needling won’t do. Neither will insisting on his “right” to have a self. This gets her nowhere. The advantage that Lonoff has is that he believes, wrongly, that Hope will never leave him. He is confident her tantrum will subside. Because both Lonoff and Hope have validated their sides of the argument, the only way to “solve” the problem is to break up the marriage. Hope comes to this conclusion at the end of the novel, though whether she will ultimately return to Lonoff is left up in the air. At the very least her departure gets Lonoff to chase her down an icy street.

This brings us to something essential. In their interview, Hermione Lee (2007) asked Roth to speak about the animosity that Nathan Zuckerman feels for the young, ardent biographer Kliman in Exit Ghost, the final installment in the Zuckerman series. Roth says,

Perhaps the question to answer first is, What is the source of his animus against Kliman? And that source is obvious in the very characterization of Kliman that you offer. The clash between the two is inevitable, given Zuckerman’s appraisal of Kliman’s character, methods and goals. But the terms of the clash, the vehemence of the clash, the outcome of the clash are something else, and they are at the heart of the drama of the book. The antagonism between the two, how each responds to it, how each enacts it, is of no less interest than the antagonism itself—indeed, the nature of the clash is what interests Zuckerman most, since it reveals to him yet another instance of his powerlessness and ineffectiveness as a man. (p. 59)

For Roth, the “clash between the two” is different from “the terms of the clash,” the “antagonism between the two” is different from “the antagonism itself.” What does Roth mean? How can the “antagonism between the two” be different from the “antagonism itself”? Perhaps, because this is an interview and not a work of literature, Roth makes what seems like an unwarranted distinction between form and content. However, based on what we know of
Roth’s reasoning and his work, it can be inferred that he has not said precisely what he means to say, though he may have come as close as non-literary language will allow. Here Roth works through a problem that he has worked on in *The Ghost Writer*, *Exit Ghost*, and elsewhere, but he is without recourse to literary form to say just what he means.

How does Roth’s fiction allow its readers to know exactly what he means when he distinguishes between different antagonisms, when his commentary leaves us grasping? How, in other words, does Roth register in fiction something that he is absolutely certain of but can find no words for outside of fiction? Though Roth was speaking of *Exit Ghost*, his comments apply to *The Ghost Writer*.

Perhaps the best example in *The Ghost Writer* of the clash between life and art occurs in the scene where Doctor Zuckerman accompanies his son to the bus stop, before he leaves for a writer’s retreat in Quashay. In that scene it is clear that the outcomes of a clash between life and art is less important, and far less interesting, than the nature of such clashes, i.e. what happens during them, and what we learn by having them and writing them. Doctor Zuckerman wants to discuss a story Nathan wrote called “Higher Education.” The story recounts a nasty dispute over money between Nathan’s great-aunt Meema Chaya and his boorish uncle Sidney.

“Well, Nathan,” began my father, “you certainly didn’t leave anything out, did you?”

…At four that afternoon, in our coats and scarves, the two of us set out for the park. Every half hour a New York bus stopped just by the park gateway on Elizabeth Avenue, and my plan was to catch one after he’d had his say.

“I left a lot of things out” … “Things had to be left out—it’s only fifty pages.”

“I mean,” he said sadly, “you didn’t leave anything disgusting out.”

“Did I? Didn’t I? I wasn’t thinking along those lines, exactly.”

“You make everybody seem awfully greedy, Nathan.”

“But everybody was.”

“That’s one way of looking at it, of course.”

“That’s the way you looked at it yourself. That’s why you were so upset that they wouldn’t compromise.”

“The point is, there is far more to our family than this. And you know that. I hope that today reminded you of the kind of people we are. In case in New York you’ve forgotten.”

“Dad, I had a good time seeing everybody. But you didn’t have to give me a refresher course in the family’s charms.”

But on he went. “And people who are crazy about you. Is there anybody who came into the house today whose face didn’t light up when they laid eyes on you? And you couldn’t have been kinder, you couldn’t have
been a sweeter boy. I watched you with your family and with all our old dear friends, and I thought to myself, Then what is this story all about? Why is he going on like this about ancient history?"

"It wasn’t ancient history when it happened.”

“No, then it was nonsense.”

“But the story is not about them.”

“But they are part of the story. They are the whole story as far as I’m concerned. Without them there would be no story at all! Who the hell was Sidney? Does anybody in his right mind even think about him any longer?” (Roth, 1979, p. 85)

Everything that Nathan and his father think and say to one another in this conversation is informed by a past that they share and tacitly acknowledge. Roth always seems in wonder at how little needs to be said directly for mutual comprehension to occur between people who know each other well. It is the reason he writes families and marriages so well.

Doctor Zuckerman wants Nathan to see his point. He wants Nathan to know that in New York he may be a writer, but in New Jersey he is still a member of a family. “‘Well, Nathan,’ began my father, ‘you certainly didn’t leave anything out, did you?’” Doctor Zuckerman is not speaking to Nathan as a writer, but as his son. This is carried very well in the fatherly tone, with the “well” and “certainly” modulating his anger and disappointment. Doctor Zuckerman poses a question that Nathan cannot possibly answer to his father’s satisfaction. This is a disapproving father administering a guilt-trip on a boy who, though he may rebel and fancy himself a serious artist, is still his father’s son. Nathan no doubt recognizes this tone, as any child does, and it has an effect on him. Each one knows as well as the other that important matters are delicately coming to a head. The father–son power dynamic is achieved formally, the bulk of it in tone, and it is through this dynamic that the entire argument can be grasped at its full depth. This may be one of the “terms of the clash,” apart from the clash itself, that Roth had been getting at in the interview.

This power differential—carried through the sage, deeply disappointed, provident tone of a father—becomes ominous. This is not a friendly spat. This is a warning. Certain wrongs cannot be undone, and the consequences must be made clear before the actions are carried out. Doctor Zuckerman wants it made clear—but without resorting to threats—that he is not Meema Chaya. He will not be trampled as she was.

“Well, I do. I remember plenty. I remember it all. To Meema Chaya, Sidney was never anything but heartache. Little children don’t realize that underneath the big blowhard who rolls on the floor and makes them laugh there can be somebody who makes other people cry. And he made your great-aunt cry plenty, and from the time he was old enough to go
into the street, looking for grief to give her. And still, still, that woman left him that chunk of her hard-earned dough, and prayed that somehow it would help.” (Roth, 1979, p. 87)

What Doctor Zuckerman says is far less charged than what he is driving at; what he is suggesting is menacing. He will never forget the shame that Nathan’s writing has brought to the family. “I remember it all” extends out of “ancient history” and in to everything that will transpire between them on account of this story. Doctor Zuckerman compares Sidney to his larger-than-life son, Nathan, who believes his work makes people laugh when in fact it makes his family cry. From Doctor Zuckerman’s paternal point of view, Nathan is dangerously close to becoming a version of Sidney: one of the “little children” who only sees the charms in front of him, blind to the larger picture.

Though Nathan and his father do argue a while longer, there is a moment midway through their argument when Nathan becomes, suddenly, able to see something that he had not previously been able to see. This paragraph demonstrates much of what I have tried to convey in this article about Roth’s writing style.

We had by now descended the long incline of our street and reached Elizabeth Avenue. No lawn we passed, no driveway, no lamppost, no little brick stoop was without its power over me. Here I had practiced my sidearm curve, here on my sled I’d broken a tooth, here I had copped my first feel, here for teasing a friend I had been slapped by my mother, here I had learned that my grandfather was dead. There was no end to all I could remember happening to me on this street of one-family brick houses more or less like ours, owned by Jews more or less like us, to whom six rooms with a “finished” basement and a screened-in porch on a street with shade trees was something never to be taken for granted, given the side of the city where they’d started out. (Roth, 1979, p. 87)

Here, for the first time, Nathan is able to see the old neighborhood in light of all that his father has said to him. He sees all that had happened there as if for the first time, and in so doing sees the way his father sees. This newfound sense of place sends Nathan back to formative moments in his past. Doctor Zuckerman had remembered it all, and now Nathan does too.

Nathan marvels that there could be “no end to all I could remember happening to me.” This fullness of memory, and endless supply of stories to be written, runs head-long in the very same sentence into a sense of shared identity with “Jews more or less like us” living in houses “more or less like ours.” The sentence brings the plenty of fiction face to face with the accusation of having “taken for granted” the very people to whom he owes such bountiful fiction. To write of them without diminishing them, or his own unexceptional place among them, is Nathan’s injunction, the recognition of which he owes
entirely to his father. Doctor Zuckerman’s point has landed, but it will not result in the sort of writing he would like from his son. The best Roth can do is to offer the story of the fight itself, which we get in full detail beginning with the caveat “The facts I had begun my story with were these,” alongside an argument that challenges the merit, truth, and integrity of Nathan’s presentation of the facts in his story (Roth, 1979, p. 81). Part of the story is the facts, part is Nathan’s story of those facts, and part of it is the clash between Nathan and his father over the facts. The passage hinges on a formal logic, operating through Nathan’s reverie, prompted by an excruciating candor. Roth ties the concrete to the subjective to personal history to shared experience. What ties it all together is how Roth puts it into language.

It is not only the interconnectedness of reality and language that Roth brings to life so movingly in his writing. Roth also manages to register how people learn, and are influenced, in the most true-to-life, most honest of ways. In Philip Roth’s writing, something is no less learned for not being acted upon. Nathan Zuckerman has been changed by his father’s words, but we know that they will not compel him to do what his father would like him to do. He will never change; he will always draw inspiration from family in ways that anger and embarrass. What he will write is non-negotiable. All arguments begin with the presumption that both parties are beyond change. This is as true for Hope and Lonoff as it is for Nathan and his father. In a Roth novel, nobody is in a position to be persuaded. Where the persuasion is registered is in the novel itself. Though Nathan brusquely leaves his father standing in the cold at a bus stop, and will go on no doubt to publish the offending story against his father’s wishes, the language in which the argument is presented leaves no doubt that Nathan realizes that he has some serious thinking to do before he can contend with his father’s formidable case. Though no one can change what Nathan writes, they can change the way he thinks about what he writes, and in so doing change how he writes.
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