

Laura and the Lost Cause of Psychoanalysis

Steven Connor

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Washing up at the Strand a couple of years ago has given me the opportunity and, I have also agreeably found, an appetite, to attend meetings of the New Imago Forum, founded in Jesus College, Oxford in 2012 to provide an arena for exchange of ideas between academics interested in psychoanalytic thought and practising psychoanalysts, and given a new lease of life in King's College, London by my colleague Neil Vickers in 2023. I will admit to a certain nostalgic fondness in making through this participation renewed acquaintance with terms and concepts that seem to belong to the dear dead days beyond recall. I am at the stage of life where I find myself using phrases like 'the stage of life', and where it feels more a treat than a threat to find yourself among the youngest people in a room. In gatherings of the New Imago Forum I feel once again not only delinquent, but also positively juvenile, all of the people in the room being much closer to their century than their climacteric.

This sense of lingering participation in something that is, as Terry Wogan said of his friend Barry Cryer at a gathering in his honour, 'forgotten but not gone', combined with the experience of rereading much of Laura Marcus's work since her death, has focussed some questions about what the prospects for psychoanalysis might be in the future. When I deposed Mary Jacobus as Grace 2 Professor of English in Cambridge, routinely eroded by announcers to 'Grade 2 Professor', it marked the fact that the Faculty, despite having a hundred persons or so on the teaching payroll, had pretty much shut up shop as far as psychoanalytic theory and criticism went. My hunch is that something similar is probably true in most departments of English, where it was quite usual at one time to have at least one colleague who was either an exponent of psychoanalytic criticism or sympathetically informed about it. I think the same must be true of history, sociology and philosophy departments. As with aircraft carriers, the number of degree courses devoted to psychoanalysis in the UK is down to single figures.

Sander Gilman's remarks as recently as 2009 indicate the kind of expansion that Freudian and other post-Freudian approaches had previously undergone by the end of the twentieth century:

psychoanalysis has moved from dominating mental health treatment in the 1920s (from Vienna to Topeka, Kansas) to having a major role in the social sciences in the 1950s (from Ruth Benedict on the Japanese to Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*) to attaining a permanent role in the research and teaching of the humanities in the 1980s. (Gilman 2009, 1105)

It is precisely this kind of expansion which seems to me to have stalled, producing calls like that of Stephen Sonnenberg that 'the time has come for psychoanalysts to enter the world of higher education as humanities scholars' (Sonnenberg 2011, 641), as though it were conviction that psychoanalysis had lost rather than credibility. What certainly does seem abruptly to have ceased is the participation of psychoanalysis in a broader field of approaches to literature, culture and society, that some time ago ceased to be referred to, first in awe, then in contemptuous familiarity, as 'Theory'. There has been such a rapid decline of psychoanalysis as something that is, in Lévi-Strauss's phrase, 'good to think with' that suddenly, if also strangely at long last, psychoanalysis is no longer an assumed or eligible interlocutor in such discussions.

I do not know how much credence Laura attached to psychoanalysis as a medical or therapeutic practice, or what experience she herself may have had of it. Though I confess I am curious about this, for the time being it feels like it would be pedantry to probe. One of the most striking features of what might, before its long day's journey into night, have been called 'psychoanalytic culture' is the fact that it seemed to offer so much to so many who saw no need to set any store by its clinical claims. Certainly, in my conversations with Laura, the salience of psychoanalysis, like the existence of the mandative subjunctive, was taken for granted: but taken for granted, I now feel minded to wonder, as what?

One may distinguish two modes of psychoanalytic research, the autonomous and the heteronomous. Autonomous, or insider psychoanalysis, whether conceived as a therapeutic or more philosophical practice, aims at the development, refinement or consolidation of psychoanalysis itself, while heteronomous or outsider psychoanalysis explores the relations and resonances between psychoanalysis and other areas of cultural and philosophical life. Autonomous research usually requires some degree of belief in the truth, or at least the therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalytic principles, while heteronomous research need not. Accordingly, autonomous research will tend to treat psychoanalysis, or particular versions of it, as an integrated whole, while heteronomous research will typically often give itself licence to pull out particular psychoanalytic themes and concepts – the uncanny,

omnipotence, obsession, libido, transference or the fort-da game – and put them into colloquy with other currents of thought. Nowadays, the sensation I have in using a term like ‘cathexis’, which I can tell has the same effect on the uncomprehending young as a word like ‘Bakelite’ or ‘expectorant’, is the sign of how exotically antique psychoanalytic talk has become.

Attempts at big-picture psychoanalysis, such as Amy Allen’s *Critique on the Couch* (2021), are still occasionally to be met with. Her proposal is that:

Contemporary critical theory needs psychoanalysis for (at least) three reasons: to temper its tendencies toward normative idealism, to rethink its developmental models of self and society, and to theorize the aims and methods of critique beyond utopianism and rationalism. (Allen 2021, 23-4)

Critique on the Couch remains quite an in-house affair, arriving at its arguments through a rather elaborate squaring of Kleinian psychoanalytic themes with the work of the Frankfurt School, itself perhaps a fellow resident in the osseous valley of lost causes. Allen admits in her conclusion that what she is offering are mostly ‘abstract, metatheoretical reasons’ (Allen 2021, 187), which might indeed prompt the query which the Lord proposes to Ezekiel: ‘Can these bones live?’ However timidly, however, Allen does broach at the end of her book the substantial question of how a Kleinian reading of ‘our paranoid-schizoid politics’ might not only help ‘understand the affective energies that fuel authoritarian movements’ (Allen 2021, 191), but also help critical theorists ‘resist the temptation to use psychoanalysis as a tool for diagnosing *them*: their weak egos, their eroded superego, their unsublimated rage and aggression’ (Allen 2021, 192). Acknowledging that persecutory anxiety is likely to operate on both sides of the grand canyon dividing the fabled far-right from those who recoil far enough to keep them at a safely deplorable distance, might in its turn suggest ‘how democratic politics in a depressive mode can change our orientation toward others with whom we deeply and fervently disagree’ (Allen 2021, 196). ‘Depressive’ is here used in the insider Kleinian sense, but the ordinary sense also pipes up in Allen’s concession that ‘to be sure, the depressive position is no picnic’ (Allen 2021, 197). Remembering my own cheerful conviction, cherished over decades, that the people who think what I think of as unthinkable things can only do so because they are mentally ill, certainly imparts a sting.

Another mode of heteronomous psychoanalytic research takes the form of cultural phenomenology, a coinage of Isobel Armstrong’s which I abducted many years ago to

describe a style of work which set aside trying to establish how things are in favour of trying to explain what they are like. Although she devoted considerable attention to areas of psychoanalysis as such, especially of a Freudian cast, Laura's readings of psychoanalytic culture seem to me to be examples of a congruent approach. Such approaches do not require any commitment to the truth of psychoanalysis (even if they need not necessarily rule it out either) beyond the truth of there being a practice known as psychoanalysis. For example, the chapter in Laura's *Dreams of Modernity* on the experiences of psychoanalysis of women like Alix Strachey, HD and Bryher shows that psychoanalysis often functioned in the first half of the twentieth century as a kind of dissenting academy, as demonstrated in the peculiar but persisting convention that every analyst must undergo analysis themselves as part of their training, and much less on the grounds that they had neuroses in need of working through and clearing out than as a process of initiation. Psychoanalysis was more a Wittgensteinian form of life – experienced by HD and Bryher, Laura writes, as what John Forrester called a 'science of gossip' – than a therapeutic undertaking (Forrester 1990; Marcus 2014, 156).

Seeing psychoanalysis as a style rather than a theory, more a 'land', in W.H. Auden's expression (Auden 1991, 183) than a method, seems propitious for the kind of thing that has interested me, on and off, though less and less off, I see, namely the ways in which fantasy, by which I mean the *quasitude*, as I undertake never to call it again, of made-up or acted-out things, operates in the ritual or habitual kinds of behaving that characterise cultures. I could not have developed what I described as a phantasmatics of work in my book *Dreamworks* (2023a) without reference both to the theory of dreaming and the idea of work as they are formulated in psychoanalysis, though readers drawn to the book in the hope of finding a discussion of the Freudian interpretation of dreams will have been disappointed. My current interest is not as a representative of any psychoanalytic project, but as a member of that group of fellow-travelling strangers on the train, who once used to maintain cordial relations with psychoanalysis and felt able to be party to it, without having to be part of it. Such persons used to be thick on the ground and are now thin.

What has brought this about? Perhaps the simplest answer is the rise of neuroscience, which seems to have displaced the claims of psychoanalysis to provide the scientific base for psychology. Some evidence for this might be found in the terms of the limited rapprochement which has been made between certain forms of psychoanalysis and computationally-driven neuroscience, as marked by the establishment of the journal

Neuropsychanalysis. As a clinical practice, psychoanalysis has also been put into retreat by the growing ascendancy of pharmacological psychiatry and the industries that prompt and plumply supply it, along with cognitive-behavioural treatments that seem to offer much quicker fixes for much less outlay of time and money. In the UK National Health Service, the huge growth in demand for healthcare, with which it now seems clear that, like Carroll's Red Queen, funding, though itself ever-increasing, can never keep pace, has contributed to a marked shrinkage of the reach and prestige of psychoanalysis.

There is, to be sure, still plenty of psychoanalysis knocking about, if you know where to look, but less and less, as it were, in public. Some writing from within the culture of psychoanalysis have regretted this withdrawal. Alexander Stein charges psychoanalysis with

rigidity and a general failure to adequately develop and adapt to changes to and in the world. On the whole it remains too distant and asocial. Too timid or deliberative to assert positions and act decisively. And it has passively, anhedonically, allowed itself to be considered and declared nearly irrelevant without a whimper of distress or a bark of outrage, let alone a vociferous defense. (Stein 2020, 155)

Stein believes that 'Freud, like [Henry] Ford, intuitively embodied some key characteristics of history's successful inventor-entrepreneurs' and that the model of 'Freud as agile entrepreneur', dear God, shows the way for psychoanalysis 'to be much more inventive and attentive to the needs and challenges of contemporary society' (Stein 2020, 156).

At the same time, psychoanalysis might also be said, in a phrase of Freud's for which I remember Laura having a mischievous fondness, to have been 'wrecked by success' (Freud 1953-74, 14.315-30). As Otto Kernberg observed in a review of 2011 of the reputation and prospects of psychoanalysis, a number of leading concepts like attachment theory and disorders such as narcissism and borderline personality have been absorbed into broader psychiatric practices even as their provenance in psychoanalytic theory is less and less acknowledged or even, one fears, suspected (Kernberg 2011, 610). Even more decisive in this respect has been the incontinent expansion, well beyond the practices and discourses of professional psychiatry, of the idea of 'trauma', which it would scarcely be respectable any more to dignify with the name of a theory, and which hardly anybody feels the need to connect with the

agonies of scruple to which it gave rise in the writing of Freud and his psychoanalytic successors.

Collegiality

The question of whether or why psychoanalysis should have relinquished its place on High Table also concerns the relation of psychoanalysis to academic life and institutions, especially universities. Psychoanalysis was always a kind of parapsychology, in the sense that it constituted a kind of imaginary academy, willing into being the 'college of psycho-analysis' looked forward to by Freud in his 1926 essay 'The Question of Lay Analysis'. Here is the programme of study that Freud sketches out for such an institution:

If – which may sound fantastic to-day – one had to found a college of psycho-analysis, much would have to be taught in it which is also taught by the medical faculty: alongside of depth-psychology, which would always remain the principal subject, there would be an introduction to biology, as much as possible of the science of sexual life, and familiarity with the symptomatology of psychiatry. On the other hand, analytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion and the science of literature. Unless he is well at home in these subjects, an analyst can make nothing of a large amount of his material. By way of compensation, the great mass of what is taught in medical schools is of no use to him for his purposes. (Freud 1953-74, 20. 245)

Freud's conspectus includes a great number of the areas on which psychoanalysis has drawn and on which it has exerted an influence – though it is surprising, in the light of later developments, that he does not mention linguistics, unless he quaintly takes that to be wrapped up in 'the science of literature'. Yet, as Freud's curricular conjuration suggests, psychoanalysis was from the beginning a kind of phantasmal college, at once a rival to and an idealised mirror of academic life. Of course, Freud's concern in 'The Question of Lay Analysis' is specifically with the relations between psychoanalysis and medicine, and medicine has always been, like law, something of a separate kingdom within the university.

However, Freud himself had some uncertainty as to the kind of thing that psychoanalysis was, or was meant to become. On the one hand, and despite the many general areas of philosophical speculation on which he brought psychoanalysis to bear, he remained resolutely of the view that therapy was central to psychoanalysis. And yet, at the same time, and sometimes, as in his 1926 essay, 'The Question of Lay Analysis', almost in the same breath, he argues against medical accreditation precisely on the grounds that psychoanalysis is not, or not only, a branch of medicine. In his 1927 Postscript to the essay, Freud makes it quite clear that his own personal motivation in developing psychoanalysis was not a medical one:

After forty-one years of medical activity, my self-knowledge tells me that I have never really been a doctor in the proper sense. I became a doctor through being compelled to deviate from my original purpose; and the triumph of my life lies in my having, after a long and roundabout journey, found my way back to my earliest path. I have no knowledge of having had any craving in my early childhood to help suffering humanity. (Freud 1953-74, 20.252)

That last sentence is one of the many in Freud that you can hold up to the light for a long time. Although in Freud's words 'there has existed from the very first an inseparable bond between cure and research' in psychoanalysis, even this does not make psychoanalysis primarily a medical enterprise, and he maintains that the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis is in the interest of scientific research and not vice versa:

Psycho-analysis is a part of psychology; not of medical psychology in the old sense, not of the psychology of morbid processes, but simply of psychology. It is certainly not the whole of psychology, but its substructure and perhaps even its entire foundation. The possibility of its application to medical purposes must not lead us astray. (Freud 1953-74, 20.251)

Freud accepts that, since therapy is the provisional wing of psychoanalysis, there must be some framework for its application, but it is a grudging acceptance:

The real point at issue, it will be said, is a different one, namely the application of analysis to the treatment of patients; in so far as it claims to do this it must be content, the argument will run, to be accepted as a specialized branch of medicine, like radiology, for instance, and to submit to them rules laid down for all therapeutic methods. I recognize that that is so; I admit it. I only want to

feel assured that the therapy will not destroy the science. (Freud 1953-74, 20.253)

One might say that Freud's apprehensions on this score have been borne out. After half a century in which the status of psychoanalysis as a psychosocial philosophy has expanded well beyond its clinical practice, it is showing every sign of retreating to the therapeutic domain, biting back its philosophical aspirations. Otto Kernberg's response is to urge psychoanalytic institutes to resist the defensive retreat into insularity and create new rapprochements with other fields of academic research, but a decade or so on this ambition does not seem to have taken root very widely or to have much prospect of success. When I was a doctoral student and new academic, my contemporaries were interested in the implications of psychoanalysis for areas beyond clinical practice: nowadays, the young academics I know with serious interests in a psychoanalysis (a very select few), are overwhelmingly likely to see them as a prelude to psychoanalytic training.

Freud was at pains both to limit and to enlarge the scope of psychoanalysis. While 'The Question of Lay Analysis' makes large claims as to largeness of scope of psychoanalysis, beyond the sphere of medicine proper, Freud's struggle against Jung in particular represents the effort to protect psychoanalysis from what he saw as the illegitimate generalisation into questions of mythology, religion and the occult (the 'black tide of mud'). The fact that Hilda Doolittle could have spent some years in analysis with Freud and written a whole book documenting it, without it ever dawning on her that she had not in fact been analysed by Jung, is a sign that Freud was right to be apprehensive. And yet, Freud ends his essay on lay analysis with the affirmation that 'the things that really matter – the possibilities in psycho-analysis for internal development – can never be affected by regulations and prohibitions' (Freud 1953-74, 20.249).

Interpretation

When I mentioned the possibility of a talk of this kind on the decline of psychoanalysis in literary and allied subjects, Helen Small, approving, as I took it, my premise, shot back a two-word explanation: 'too difficult'. I have never knowingly had an intuition, but I did feel an instinctive assent to this. There might be some reinforcement for this view in the desuetude of other modes of theoretical discourse, like the rhetorical

acrobatics of deconstructive analysis, or the circus arts of certain styles of postmodern philosophy. If Marxist analysis lives on in the nursing home, it subsists on a thin theoretical gruel that contrasts with its hearty former appetite for the gristle and thistles of abstract high talk. Slavoj Žižek is the figure who perhaps keeps this kind of engine turning over, though with reassuring references to films and jokes.

This amounts to more, I think, than the senior academic's sempiternal grouse about the half-learn'd wittlings in their seminars. It may perhaps be that the passion for the abstract now cuts its teeth elsewhere, for example on the crusty technicism of data studies. What psychoanalytic readings in literature and allied subjects used to embody was a particular kind of romance of difficulty as such – a kind of *libido mysterii*, or erogenous esotericism. In *The Madness of Knowledge* (2019) I had a go at reading psychoanalytic ideas about knowledge and curiosity back into the phenomenon of psychoanalytic epistemophilia. This Yeatsian fascination of what's difficult (Yeats 1979, 104) does seem to be in abeyance. There is assuredly no shortage of academic romance, but as for example in the romance of slavery, it tends now to be fuelled by the moral ardours of pathos and offence rather than the passionate exactions of epistemic ordeal.

It seems to me that the retreat of psychoanalysis may also for a related reason have something to do with the languishing reputation of interpretation, as allied to esoteric matters and motives in the sacred history of the word *hermeneutics*. One symptom of this may be the replacement of enigmas with problems needing to be 'tackled' or provided with 'solutions', and 'challenges' in need of being 'overcome'. A recent article about the public role of psychoanalysis sings a contemporary song in asking 'How can psychoanalysts contribute to thinking through the challenges that we face now? If we think that in principle this might be possible, how can these contributions be communicated effectively? How can we judge whether our efforts have had an impact?' (Allison 2024, 373-4). Psychoanalysis seems to have the choice either of withdrawal from the public world, or emigrating, like so much else in academic life and beyond, to the dream kingdom of PR, psyops and pathways-to-impact.

Palpably, I hope, I propose no project of retrieval like that urged by Slavoj Žižek in his own *In Defense of Lost Causes*, which begins by defiantly declaring 'the profound solidarity of Marxism and psychoanalysis' in the very fact that 'in liberal consciousness, the two now emerge as the main "partners in crime" of the twentieth century' (Žižek 2008, 4, 3). Urging one more effort of fidelity to the exciting necessity of totalitarianism and terror, Žižek proclaims that

Our defense of lost Causes is thus not engaged in any kind of deconstructive game in the style of “every Cause first has to be lost in order to exert its efficiency as a Cause.” On the contrary, the goal is to leave behind, with all the violence necessary, what Lacan mockingly referred to as the “narcissism of the lost Cause,” and to courageously accept the full actualization of a Cause, including the inevitable risk of a catastrophic disaster. (Žižek 2008, 7)

It does not sound to me like this is leaving the narcissism of the lost Cause very far or very irrecoverably behind. Still, for ideas to become unavailing is sometimes also for them to become newly available in unlooked for ways. There may well be advantage in the fact that, with the depletion of the authority of psychoanalysis, or of particular psychoanalytic persuasions, there is less pressure than heretofore to take psychoanalysis whole, and as implying an entire and unexpurgatable worldview in the way that Žižek suggests it should be taken, as though there were only the choice of courageously cleaving to ‘the One’ (Žižek 2008, 4), or a contemptible slither into ‘the morass of imbecilic Being’ (Žižek 2008, 7). Though *imbecilis* is glossed by the ingenious Isidore of Seville as ‘Inbecillus, quasi sine baculo, fragilis et inconstans’ (Isidorus 1911, X.128), without the support of a stick, weak and wavering, an etymology said by Pascal Tréguer now to be ‘accepted by competent authorities’ (Tréguer 2017), the word *imbecile* has long had to make its way in the world without a settled etymology. Still, as Freud affirms in the comforting final words of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ‘it is no sin to limp’ (Freud 1953-74, 18.64). The very fact that psychoanalytic ideas may have come to seem wilder and more refugee than when they were more firmly ‘in the true’, in the phrase from Canguilhem adopted by Foucault (Canguilhem 1968, 46; Foucault 1981, 60), may also foster livelier and less chain-ganged kinds of thinking. I regret the retrenchment of psychoanalysis in the income-generating basics of individual therapy because, like many others, I find enterprise in the very waywardness of psychoanalysis, its capacity, like some of its subjects, to miss their stop or change to the wrong train at Crewe. It is for this reason that I value rather than deplore the many different, even incompatible schools that psychoanalysis has engendered, ensuring that if you don’t like its principles, it has others, so you can put psychoanalysis to work as a thought-hack in ways that do not obviously accord with its job description.

Social services

In Laura Marcus's work, psychoanalysis is a current within modernism, even, perhaps, an idiom of it, rather than an interpretative key to it. Quoting the epigraph Joyce took from *Metamorphoses* for *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 'Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes', Hugh Kenner relates the *ignotas artes* of modernism to the new technical devices that filled and transmitted their work (Kenner 1987, 10). Freudian psychoanalysis is very much part of that world of tricks and technics, and Laura's attentiveness to the way in which the rhythms of train-travel and cinema-going are geared together with dreaming and joke-telling is mediated by psychoanalysis, conceived as itself a kind of metatechnology, or 'mechanic muse', in Kenner's phrase. Among Laura's greatest contributions is to have shown that psychoanalysis is part of a modernist technical ecology, not so much a commentator on modernism as a co-conspirator with it.

Yet perhaps this is part of what is still happening to psychoanalysis – that it is in the process of being disarticulated into a meccano culture of imaginary gadgets, or dream-machines (Connor 2017). The amplification of the prestige of psychotherapy combined with a retreat from the specificity of psychoanalytic treatment results in the regressive simplification of psychoanalytic models. In place of the fiendish feints and false starts of psychoanalytic explanations, typified in the whodunnit structures of Freud's case-studies, patients live out or 'exist' their conditions in crudely behaviourist models of action and reaction, stimulus and response, poison and antidote. Nothing is cruder in this line than the metaphor of the 'trigger', a word which, though interestingly (for me) sharing an etymology with the paradoxical Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, 'drawn-after-ness', programmes the absolute, on-off passivity of the patient and the motor predictability of their automatic response. Everywhere the intricacy of psychodynamics, though it can certainly trigger its own kind of exasperation, gives way to the reassuring regularity and explicability of dream mechanics, which scarcely require the involvement of a therapist except to certify what is often a pre-approved self-diagnosis. As our actual machineries become ever more magically unintelligible, so popular psychomechanics regress to the more familiar pumps, pulleys and pistons of machinery c. 1760. Fantasy mechanics recalling those of the *Numskulls* comic strip that began life in *The Beezer* in 1962 do away with any need to understand the mechanics of fantasy. Under such circumstances it is not mental illness that calls for psychoanalytic interpretation so much as the literally labour-saving therapeutic models deployed to dramatise it.

Perhaps the equivalent of the cultural psychotechnics that preoccupied Marcus in *The Tenth Muse* and *Dreams of Modernity* is the collective cathexis of what we call digital technology, though the crucial feature of it is that it is less a matter of what we might call 'actual' or physical technologies – or to use the clankier, more antique name, machinery – than of imaginary mechanisms (Connor 2023b). As such, it perhaps continues to be continuous with the cultural dreamwork that Laura explored.

If this is to intimate that psychoanalysis is being engineered into a branch of the administered society, we might note that Freud seems teasingly to have allowed himself a glimpse of such a future:

Our civilization imposes an almost intolerable pressure on us and it calls for a corrective. Is it too fantastic to expect that psycho-analysis in spite of its difficulties may be destined to the task of preparing mankind for such a corrective? Perhaps once more an American may hit on the idea of spending a little money to get the 'social workers' of his country trained analytically and to turn them into a band of helpers for combating the neuroses of civilization. (Freud 1953-74, 20. 248-9)

Freud's term for this functionary is 'Seelensorger', carer for souls, translated by James Strachey as 'secular pastoral worker', a term which loses the resonance with the many evocations of the 'seelisch' in Freud's German, for which Strachey regularly prefers the business-like term 'mental'. The development of interpretative powers and dispositions is also probably less compatible with mass education than it had been in the education of mandarins, as they used to be called in recognition of the origin of bureaucratic systems in imperial China, now that education is seen as the development of underling bureaucratic competence rather than less aggregable and institutionally tractable powers of autonomous judgement. Education may even be passing into a new phase, in which its task is no longer to staff centralised agencies and instruments of the administered society but to bring about a society of self-administration, invited and incited by digital means and methods. The Institute of Psychiatry is as likely nowadays to send you away with therapeutic apps and games to dab and stab at as to enrol you in expensive apprenticeships in the talking cure.

Perhaps psychoanalysis has not so much disappeared from public life as been diffused into its workings, in the psychobureaucracies of mental health administration. In one of the most remarkable developments in recent years in the world of public psychiatry, Allen Frances, who was chair of the American Psychiatric

Association team overseeing the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, subsequently resigned from the team setting to work on *DSM-V* because of his uneasiness about what he saw as its contribution to the rampant medicalisation and overdiagnosis of psychological disorders, an *ad opinionem dolemus* (Seneca 1920, 188) which has actually had the effect of diverting resources away from patients with genuinely distressing and dangerous conditions, in order to stem the spate worried but well-off well (Frances 2013).

I might conclude by saying that I do not regard the *sic transit* of psychoanalysis as wholly to be mourned and, if I am completely honest, can hardly muster an ululation over it. The less alleged impact an area of thought and discourse has, and the less time it feels it must devote to the alleging, the less absurd it seems, the less damage it can do, and the more interesting it has the off-chance of being. Lost causes are far from futile, on the occasionally operative principle that the less of a good thing you have, the better.

For many years, since I first encountered it, I have bucked myself up with Vernon Lee's observation that the pleasure and value she obtained from art depended on not overestimating its powers. Contrariwise, one should probably avoid exaggerating the significance of the subtraction of psychoanalysis from the field of general academic discourse. Otto Kernberg warns that 'academia can, of course, very well survive without psychoanalysis while it is questionable whether, in the long run, psychoanalysis can survive without this link' (Kernberg 2011, 616), but I am doubtful whether the latter part of this is true. There is little risk for the time being of psychoanalysis dropping completely out of existence, even if it looms each year a little less. The appearance from Rowman and Littlefield of the revised Standard Edition of the Works of Freud might even succeed in nudging its share price up a little. I don't myself see the minor alliance of psychoanalysis with neuroscience making it top of the pops again, even underpinned by the fact that Mark Solms, the editor and translator of the revised Standard Edition is also the leading figure in neuropsychology. A minor revival in the fortunes of psychoanalysis may be imaginable through the attention it is learning to pay to digital culture and the forms of collective quasi-affect to which it seems to give rise, an endeavour which might take impetus from Lacan's curious late curiosity about cybernetics. Time will tell, if anyone cares to lend an ear.

Ultimately though, despite all the influences in contemporary life which might be thought to be exerting extinction pressure on it, psychoanalysis may have retreated

somewhat from view and general explanatory power for the same reason as many other ideas do, simply through growing old, as all ideas do, good and bad, and rarely because of how good or bad they are. Just as most ideas are caught rather than taught, so they expire of old age rather than in open combat. The fact, however, that psychoanalysis seems in a fair way to being doomed as well as barmy argues for an extension to it of a certain measure of historical extenuation, and imparts a certain glamour and even grandeur to the efforts of writers like Laura Marcus to assay its meaning, measure and reach.

More consequential than the localised withering away of psychoanalysis, however, would be if it were to be a harbinger of the slow, stately and unstoppable scuttling of the arts and humanities themselves, of which in fact I suggest that the accelerating abolition of the 'arts' in favour of the 'humanities' may be an unmistakable omen. Despite the amicable, come-on-in encouragement that cross-disciplinary compliments to 'the humanities' seem to hold out, the renaming of 'arts' as 'humanities' almost always means (and most obviously in the case of the study of literature), a downgrading into the condition of a subsidiary social science. Perhaps, indeed, Freud's twinkly prospect of psychoanalysis becoming a kind of social work or secular *Seelsorge* is an anticipation of the polite demotion of the humanities into the mood-management facility of the administered society, or Foucault's 'minor civil servants of moral orthopaedics' (Foucault 1995, 10). I think that too might happen, soon.

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