The Intimacy of Influence. Narrative and Theoretical fictions in the works of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson

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Anxiety, Intimacy, and How to Make a Luminous Web

Anxiety and intimacy may work in close alignment but are distinct concepts, as are the models accounting for them. The first of these two is the ancestor concept, and is the heart of the matter in Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Since its publication in 1959, this key work has confronted the question of how, between the generations, poems exert their influences upon each other. Bloom succeeded in examining questions about the relationship between poets and tradition. He did so without treating the latter word as a synonym for a historical sequence. He does not argue for historical “periods” as forces controlling or defining their literary harvests. For Bloom, the fruit feeds the poet who wakes up to the fact that he is already Fallen. Bloom goes on to claim that “Satan is the modern poet, while God is his dead but still embarrassingly potent and present ancestor, or rather, ancestral poet” (1973: 20). Poetic sons are doomed to fight their fathers. Wanting to make the best of their Hell, each son makes a quest for an impossible goal - originality. Bloom suggests that the artist engages in an “antithetical battle against nature” (9). The latter word is used figuratively. The enemy is the literary tradition and its canon. Poets take up their task despite being “condemned,” as Frank Lentricchia puts it, to “dialogue with their ancestors” and “intertextual continuity” (1980: 330). In this relationship of hostile dependency, the son needs the father but needs to vanquish him.

Having said this, the idea that the father’s works precedes those of his sons through a diachronic structure, is upset by Bloom’s anxiety model. Quoting Kierkegaard from *Fear and Trembling*, Bloom further defines the poet as one who “gives birth to his own father” (quoted in Bloom: 56). Bloom’s next excerpt comes from Nietzsche: “When one hasn’t a good father it is necessary to invent one” (56). Kierkegaard’s pronouncement could be read as his appropriating for the male a female act, that of birthing. Yet in this example, the roles of parent and
child are reversed. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that Bloom cites Freud's essay "Family Romances" (1909). Here, Freud suggested that when children feel bereft of their parent's love or when these same children cannot esteem and hence love the mother or father enough, the parents become replaced with fantasy versions. These children regard the substitutes as more successful and nourishing. For the child this game of substitution produces day-dreaming. For the writer, the game is played with selected ancestors who are chosen or rejected as efficacious models. In Bloom's statement which is the epigraph to my book, the anxiety of influence is regarded as re-enacting this romance. For instance, in fantasy a boy might replace his father with a King. So in quoting Kierkegaard, Bloom suggests paradoxically that the act of re-birthing the male parent can involve eliminating the original father. The King is dead, long live the King newly born. He has been specially re-generated to compensate for the precursor's failings.

Acts of "re-birthing" and reinvention through fantasy can be further examined in Bloom's six "ratios," the strategies of revision deployed to deal with the predicament of incompleteness. Three of these ratios will provide points of contrast for the intimacy model which is the keystone of my study. The ratio of tessera defines the activity of "completing" the gaps in the ancestor's work, but doing so with the implication that the precursor's contribution did not push itself far enough (4). Deploying this ratio, the successor brings to the fore what he considers his predecessor to have omitted. Kenosis is what Bloom terms a "breaking device;" this offsets the tendency to simply repeat the ancestor's contributions (4). The precursor poem deflates its borrowings from the inheritor. Thus this ancestor is also emptied of his riches (5). If the ancestor is not so emptied, he can overwhelm the inheritor (37). This process finds itself reversed through the ratio of apophrades in which the dead father returns as a pale imitation of his son, thus making the young pretender appear stronger. Through apophrades, the son cannibalises his father's text until the two become fused. Birthing father, replacing him, cannibalising him, dealing with him as one besieged by the Flood, offers little in the way of models for either intimacy or reciprocity. Between Bloom's father and son, a symbiosis is as dominant as the struggle to escape it. Furthermore, Bloom conflates the notion of the "ancestor" with that of "literary work." What is more, despite the determination to produce coherent
categories by which to measure revision in poems, Bloom conflates the emotions a poet suffers with the poetic text so produced.

In her canonised, genre-breaking narrative essay, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929; 1983) Woolf pursues quite a different strategy for assessing how to do things with influence. She offers no categories nor formulas for revisionary force. Rather, she imperceptibly and intricately unravels a dynamic theory of how women writers can shape their work, suggesting that great writing allows for a separation between excess emotions and artistic production. Between women writers of successive generations there is little opportunity for an agonising symbiosis as the lines of literary transmission are so limited. She figures the process through an important metaphor. Woolf suggests that “fiction” can be compared to a “spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” (1983: 41).

The arguments which develop in my study contend that in Woolf’s work, the web is no static metaphor, but through a series of metonymic connections this web can transform and link up to other metaphors which are related but different from it. Not only does Woolf mix her metaphors and make of this vice a virtue, she performs the mixing with an alchemist’s art, enabling the product to transmute into kindred, rhetorical figures. The web is a metaphor which has as its precedent that famous woof and weft of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-2). Not only is its substance a text in the sense of texture, but it is also Lydgate’s “web” of primal tissue (1994: Book I, Chapter 15: 177).

Woolf’s non-static articulation of a web spins not just from her immediate ancestor George Eliot but to the successor, my contemporary, Jeanette Winterson. The web constitutes the woof and the weft of the term “influence.” Be it active between generations of women writers, “individual” texts or between theories and literary objects, this web will be the starting point for my development of a theory of “intimacy” as opposed to “anxiety.”

The network of friendships and raptures between works of succeeding generations of women writers, the knowledge and passion generated between them, form, re-weave and re-shape an already existing web. As time passes, as Freud’s “family romance” is lived and re-lived through textual probing, the web is re-woven, not just through the decisive individual experiments of a “strong” poet/writer, but through intimacy with “parents” and “grandparents.” Woolf claimed
that as writers, "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (1983:72). These are mothers who have been transformed from their parental role into that of friends. Some of these friendly texts may be argumentative.6

Writers or poets who are men have problems quite different from their female counterparts. A comparative reading of Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) might suggest such a hypothesis. Bloom declares that male poets “wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death” (1973: 5). Women poets and novelists, claims Woolf, suffer from a lack of female precursors. These are crucial. “We think back through our mothers,” she argues, but in the quest for a female tradition, male writers are not to be discarded. Despite the playful gibe suggesting that women can learn a “few tricks” from the male canon she lists, Shakespeare is a writer to whom she will return, and in praise. She does so to invent a hypothetical predecessor who will be reincarnated into the future, namely, “Shakespeare’s sister” (48; 108). In the Renaissance, Woolf explains, the “sister” failed because the vicissitudes of historical conditions would not support her creative endeavours. Addressing the women writers in the audience, Woolf addresses a collective “you” to “earn money and have a room of your own;” furthermore, she recommends living in the “presence of reality, an invigorating life” (105). The call is for women to become independent and to take part in the world. Woolf claims that the work of Charlotte Brontë would have benefited from travel and greater social interaction (67). For Woolf, the writer’s commitments are to an interconnection between cultural life and tradition, “for masterpieces are not single and solitary births” (63). She insists that successful pieces of art are a result not just of literary tradition but the “experience of the mass” (63). She hardly espouses the figure of the woman writer wandering lonely as a solitary ego determined to compete with and outdo the forerunners.

For Bloom, monetary economics and class difference are not the issue. His concern is the literary embarrassment of riches with which every writer must contend. The male line is crowded out. Bloom does not include Shakespeare in his list, he explains, because it is precisely this congestion of influences that the bard could escape: he had fewer forerunners (11). In *The Anxiety of Influence*, men who are writers are not just overwhelmed by their predecessors; they can never
formulate a friendship which is not troubled by paternal complexes and exhausting symbioses. Young poets are driven to eat their father's flesh.

*A Room of One's Own*, however, suggests a process of one woman writer discovering another and becoming a conduit for both mother and daughter work, while allowing the distinctions to remain between the two writers and their texts. I contend that Woolf's elegant remark that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" carries within it more subtle implications for understanding the influences between the narrative fictions and essays of women writers. In other words, Woolf's comment implies more than the "mothers" and the "women" to which these nouns refer. To more effectively expand on the possible implications to be teased from Woolf's sentence I turn first to some useful semiotic tools provided by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce.

In "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs" (1897), Peirce lays down three semiotic tools in the form of three types of signs: the icon, the index and the symbol (quoted in Innis 1985:1-23). Reading a passage from Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1988; 1989) is not only aided by Peirce's terms. Winterson's novel actually helps its theoretical partner to offer its tools not as separate entities, but as capable of operating as an ensemble.

The opening page of Winterson's third novel finds its hero Jordan, a seventeenth century adventurer who explores exotic lands and temporalities, considering life as a letter written in invisible ink. I will suggest that his description of the letter has a bearing on Woolf's line concerning intimacies; the connection between the Woolf and Winterson text can be usefully sought with friendly help from Peirce's signs. For Jordan is particularly interested in meanings which can be both pictorial and linguistic. He considers the Greeks for whom

the hidden life demanded invisible ink. They wrote an ordinary letter and in between the lines set out another letter, written in milk. The document looked innocent enough until one who knew better sprinkled coal-dust over it. What the letter had been no longer mattered; what mattered was the life flaring up undetected (1990: 10).
Broadly speaking, the passage is figurative, implying that below the surface of visible, written elements is a life which can no longer be contained by markings on a piece of paper. This life can flare up to form new letters from a source "undetected." In Peirce's terms, the icon is a sign which bears some similarity to the thing it describes. Thus the "ordinary letter" is an icon, bearing resemblance to those pieces of paper on which messages are written for a prospective addressee. Peirce's index requires that it operate contiguously or continuously with another sign. The paper-sheath as letter is also an index of the "life flaring up undetected." The flame and the paper touch, that is, they are juxtaposed. As Peirce notes about the index, it would "at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant" (1984:9-10). Without the sheath of paper and the invisible ink there is no flaring up of life; without this life, the index of the sheath disappears.

The two signs icon and index are accompanied by Peirce's "symbol," a more arbitrary operator and more abstract. Printed words on the page, mathematical formula and abstract traffic signs all constitute symbols. In Winterson's passage, the letter itself can be read as a symbol for the psyche. Just as the human psyche can be conceived of a structure which consists of layers, certain of their elements being conscious, others hidden away at deeper levels, so the Greek letter presents surfaces with explicit messages and other sections full of hidden symbols. In other words, the letter with its scribbles of invisible milk forms a complex comparison which is both icon, index and symbol.

To return to Woolf's hypothesis that women writers think back through their mothers, I suggest that "mother" is indexical of the female, literary ancestor; in turn, she is indexical of the text which "she" produces. Moreover, the word "mother" functions symbolically not as the symbiotic and troublesome father figure so dominant in Bloom's work, but as a mentor who offers a detached yet inspiring source of help for the woman writer. What is more, the "mother" can symbolise not a person, but a text which functions as a friend. In Woolf's terms, therefore, "parent" and "friend" need not be mutually exclusive but rather, doubly supporting categories. Mothers can develop into friends.

According to Code's hypothesis, friendship includes the notion that the deals which are struck between different parties may vary. Deals may require reciprocity on the one hand, yet be subject to
imbalances and inequalities on the other (95-105). Applying this notion to narrative and theoretical objects, I would suggest that different texts, different theories or narrative fictions may be unequal in their interactions. Despite Woolf's optimism, I should add that the narratives of a woman writer can reinvent her precursor's work ruthlessly. Rupturing the web might be a pre-requisite for re-weaving it.7

Women possess, argues Woolf, a capacity for "intricacy" (81). Not thinking like "great men" she continues, a woman discovers even in a room, a world which to be accounted for, "the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch" (83). The implication, here, is that language is a fabric which has yet to be pulled and extended into as yet undiscovered shapes. When this occurs, the rooms, these zones of uncharted experience can transform.

The rooms differ so completely; they are calm or thunderous; open on the sea, or, on the contrary, given to the prison yard; are hung with washing; or alive with opals and silk...one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of femininity to fly in one's face (83).

A room opens onto other spaces, ones alternately humdrum or exotic, as though "flight" has repudiated limitations. Yet as Woolf adroitly remarks, this plenitude of vision on the part of the woman writer has been born from centuries of being sequestered within rooms. The mundane, the limited, the incomplete life excluded opportunities for travel and adventure, weaves for itself an intimacy with all which has been experienced as lacking.

Intimacies of influence, then, work along the paradoxical edges of what Woolf theorises and imagines to be a "web" which can transform into the rooms which open out onto a landscape. What functions in the passage above as an unashamed mixing of metaphors between opals and washing and rooms, becomes further utilised in Woolf's sixth novel Orlando (1928; 1977), a comic, fictional biography which through such mixtures and enmeshings, combines and separates precursor and inheritor texts. The titular protagonist of Orlando starts out as a man born in the reign of Elizabeth I. With a startling talent for longevity, the he who becomes a she reaches a mere thirty-six years old by 1928. Moreover, Orlando is the male-female personification of the literary
tradition spanning four centuries. Not only does he/she refer to an array of playwrights and poets, including Shakespeare, Marlowe, Donne, Nick Greene and Johnson, to name but a few, but Orlando undergoes a miraculous and inexplicable sex-change in the seventeenth century (1977: 106). This allows him/her to be the first hero-heroine through which the vicissitudes of the poet's life can be scrutinised. Orlando's past as a man can act as tradition for Orlando the woman. Yet the woman poet was once a man who then became a woman. In a cunning and preposterous twist, Orlando is a one man-woman band of literary precedence. The man gave birth to the woman; in the fictional excesses and exuberance of Orlando, if anyone were to write a sequel, then perhaps the woman might change back to the man. "He" would then be able to think back through himself as a male and female writer.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf sets the woman writer on a map of male as well as female precursors, though the female line is one of her important concerns. Women writers need their tradition. The already existing one consisting of men can be traced, but the women's line is threadbare; that is so is problematic. It is the longing to seek friends, rapturous interlocutors, mothers, daughters, male writer friends when necessary, disagreement as well as agreement which inspires the woman writer. By so doing she takes on the burden and invitations of that web of tradition.

It would be to indulge another sort of family romance to either imagine or argue that influence is a process entirely nurturing. Recreation can necessitate destruction, misunderstanding and damage. The journey of re-inventing one's ancestors will not allow a flight into a utopian quest. In an essay on the heritage of George Eliot which pays special attention to *Middlemarch*, Woolf pays her respects to Eliot for ensuring that her narrative fiction acknowledges through her heroines, the demand "for something which is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence" (quoted in Barrett, 1979: 159-160). Furthermore, Woolf commends Eliot for exercising "far too strong an intelligence and too broad a humour to mitigate the truth because it was a stern one." Re-inventions may be achieved, but between women's texts the disturbances which haunt them may not devolve from the over-burden of male precursors, but from the weight of ideology which still keeps women's narratives hidden away, particularly if they experiment with form. In *Sexing the Cherry*, Jordan discovers that
his "own life was written invisibly, was squashed between the facts" (1996: 10). The evolving tradition of women's writing and women's theoretical work has had to find techniques for deciphering the invisible ink of the cultural palimpsest.

In the process of re-weaving, rips and ruptures may be incurred. Creating new patterns and new configurations through the web may require tearing away the cobwebs. The "forerunner's" sections may be damaged if the process of renewal is to take place. This passion for re-invention may incur a price. What is damaged and left open may return like the Freudian repressed. As an essayist, Winterson is dismissive of Victorian fiction. Yet my reading of Gut Symmetries (1997) suggests that the text includes strands which could be strengthened by being re-connected to nineteenth-century threads. The novel might be read with Bloom's apophrades in mind; despite the eschewing of the nineteenth century novel, its ghosts re-appear. Put alternatively, so-called "realist" novels may prove to be learned in strategies more often associated with their modernist inheritors. In turn, these spirits carry heritages which can be tracked back to the Renaissance and to texts predating the sixteenth century. There may be stopping points, or mandatory places of "origin" which, in turn, imply even more sites of inception.

When narrative subjects return to what might be accounted for as a place of origin, she or he may find a starting point which requires still more negotiation. The epigraph to Sexing the Cherry employs the metaphor of a dynamic terrain, that is, a matrix of "empty space and points of light." Space and time travel is made possible through the novel's determination to be "antithetical," to borrow Bloom's word, to the convention that narrative space and time obeys rules of unity and consistency. Jordan of the seventeenth century becomes a young Navy recruit in the twentieth, if only for a couple of pages (117-121). Jordan's co-narrator Dog Woman, a giantess of Rabelaisian proportions, can also move from the seventeenth into the twentieth century. Doing so, she raids the Pentagon in Washington to challenge the Arms Race (122). After this she incarnates into a woman suffering from the consequences of mercury poisoning (123). The fact that there are two principal narrators who can take on different identities and who, unbeknown to their own reincarnations, can challenge the notion of time's linearity, questions the idea that an account of history is adequate if it divides experience into past, present and future tenses.
The novel's quantum mechanic web articulates the inexorable nature of the human predicament as it attempts to forge forward but is frequently re-routed backwards. Jordan sums up the predicament of pursuing journeys which curve back to a familiar place.

The shining water and the size of the world.

I have seen both again and again since I left my mother on the banks of the black Thames, but in my mind it is always the same place I return to, and that one place not the most beautiful nor the most surprising (1989:17).

The old parts of the web must be returned to again and again as though the woman writer is fated to forever weave and disentangle her work, so that through repetitions where no one iteration will be identical, what is damaged can be confronted.

The metaphor of the "web" not only connects to those figures which lie at the heart of the novels of all three women writers, it is a metaphor which transforms and further, contiguously links to related metaphors. In Woolf's seventh novel The Waves (1931), the six principal characters are also narrators, each made from verbal particles of fine, textual consciousness. The six soliloquies interweaves time, shared experience and even what might appear to be the solipsistic sensibilities of each identity. These monad-like inner worlds are nonetheless synthesised from the filaments of common experience which unite the six: Bernard, Susan, Neville, Jinny, Rhoda and Louis variously experience their round of love affairs, marriages, careers, births of children, disappointments and ultimately, death. Each stage of the characters' lives is followed through the books' nine sections. Each of these represents a phase of the characters' lives as they grow from childhood through to old age. Bernard is an important presence in the book, taking on the task of narrator in chief, being responsible for the novel's closing and epiphanic section.

The one character who is not a narrator, whom Gillian Beers terms an "opaque" figure, is appropriately called Percival (1996: 85). He is a vital focus for the dreams and aspirations of the other characters. Like Parsifal, he is represented as the ideal knight whose quest for the Grail is vicariously experienced by his friends. His untimely death midway through the novel sets the characters into crises. Around these the
The poetic texture of the work modulates, both prior to and after the actual death. Around the abyss left by death the six friends bond through language, rhythm and metaphor. The poetic description of waves and sunlight which constitutes each italicised passage introducing a section, figures much more than the diurnal cycle of tides. Waves as theorised by early twentieth century physics become metaphors and metonymies for energies forging and breaking apart the subjectivities of the six figures whose renewed, mutual encounters constitute the fabula's fabric. The Waves also adopts the metaphor of a tree and its branches to explore how characters grow through each other. Each of these metaphors connects contiguously to another, or becomes mixed, almost self-consciously. In other words, the metaphor of the "web" becomes connected to or even grafted onto the "wave" and "tree" metaphors.

Such a strategy, however differently, is deployed in Sexing the Cherry, where the notion of time and subjectivity being formed from "empty space and points of light" transforms into the photosynthesising energy of plants as they are grafted into new hybrids. In Jeanette Winterson's Gut Symmetries, the web finds its formation through the most contemporary ideas of modern physics. Newton theorised a universe of three dimensions but, as the "Prologue" tells us, it now consists of ten. Our paradigm for understanding the universe has expanded and multiplied; the forerunner's work, that is Newton's, has been added to richly. Moreover, be it the hyperspace dimensions of Gut Symmetries, the anti-gravity spaces of Sexing the Cherry, the energy curves of The Waves or the fractured yet self-generating and temporal webs of Mrs. Dalloway, the web is the "medium," to adopt George Eliot's term, through which characters and narrators become intimate with desire and passions which would otherwise remain in the shadows.

As Woolf notes in A Room of One's Own, art worthy of its name produces the "incandescent" and nothing is "impeded" (55). Here, the web conjures associations of energised filaments, electrical circuits which act like superconductors. In Woolf's view, what prevents the flow in fictional writing is a "writer" subjecting the fictional form to ineffective distortions. In terms of modern narratology, one might say that the implied author rudely interferes with the role of the external narrator. This will happen, argues Woolf, when a wrong is being
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thrashed out. Charlotte Brontë, for instance, betrayed a rageful voice in Jane Eyre. It is such anger which impedes incandescence.

When the current of energy can flow without hindrance the web can give the illusion of existing without other supports. Woolf weaves a metaphor for a fiction which

is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare’s plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things (1929: 41).

The main thrust of Woolf’s argument throughout A Room of One’s Own is that unavoidable networks of political and social reality are what have prevented the development of a female tradition. Shakespeare had advantages denied his sister. The web he wove is finely wrought, imperceptible almost, as one might imagine with Woolf’s delicate mix of metaphors. A web so finely wrought might give the impression of being pure light. His female contemporaries, however, suffered human conditions disallowing them the privilege of producing something so “lightly attached,” the word “light” serving a double connotation as both weightless and incandescent. Yet what this metaphor implies, is a web to which all can contribute. Woolf does not allot separate metaphors for male and female lineages. They partake of the same web. There is no “female” texture distinct from that of a “male.” Nor indeed does Bloom, whose entire book assumes throughout that tradition is per se, male. So what is Woolf’s “difference in view” if both male and female writings weave themselves out of the same web?

The notion that socially and psychically, human subjects are all constructed through a shared medium, finds a parallel model in Jacques Lacan’s notion of the “symbolic order” in one of its most crucial dimensions, language. This is the structure which pre-exists the arrival of the human infant and makes that child into a gendered subject. Lacan’s symbolic follows in the tradition of Saussurean linguistics. The framework implied is both social, cultural and comprises a countless number of signifiers which represent subjects in relation to each other
The arguments which follow below will explore the degree to which Lacan’s notion of this symbolic order can be adjusted or re-formulated. This can occur when the model is engaged with related theories such as those of Judith Butler and Kaja Silverman. These politicise the notion of the symbolic order.

Bloom’s model of male tradition does not deal with social contingencies except as the continual inspiration and tyrannies of fore-runners who crowd the scene. Bloom’s concept of tradition uses literary myths - the poet is like fallen Satan - and psychoanalytic deployment of myth - the poet is blinded like Oedipus or the child-like adult of the family romance - as mediums constituting poetic development. Woolf’s text does not deny the possibility of reading tradition in this way. She gives many examples of how men solidify themselves through similar “histories,” myths and fictions. What she does offer, however, and which is not accounted for in Bloom, is the recognition that the web of female tradition is woven from social as well as psychical facts. The exploration of influence in A Room of One’s Own accounts not only for the personal conditions and literary products of women writers, but links these to the wider monetary, social and cultural web of the world at large. As a result, Woolf’s agenda is political.

Webs are structures which can be pulled back and forth, being made to connect through repeated movements. Roland Barthes shared Woolf’s sense of textuality, developing the idea of the spider to symbolise the role of the narrative subject who “unmakes” him or herself in the “constructive secretions of its web.” With each movement, is the implication, this spider-subject removes and replaces, makes and unmakes that which is both web and itself. This miniature narrative is an analogue to Freud’s papers on the vital processes of psychoanalysis. The subject of the analyst-analysand interaction emerges through transferences which conjure the subject as a totality but which also challenge that unity by eliciting discourse which unravel those identifications to which the subject anchors herself. Psychoanalysis requires that the subject formulate and destabilise herself into the web of narrative discourse. The repetition of this process, the constant movement of making and unmaking, is very broadly speaking, what constitutes traversal.
The Dynamic Loop of Traversal: Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through

The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out (repetition) replace remembering. The ideal remembering of what has been forgotten which occurs in hypnosis corresponds to a state in which resistance has been put completely on one side (Freud, "Remembering and Repeating" (1914).)

What, then, does he who has passed through the experience of this opaque relation to the origin, to the drive, become? How can a subject who has traversed the radical phantasy experience the drive? This is the beyond of analysis, and has never been approached. Up to now, it has been approachable only at the level of the analyst, in as much as it would be required of him to have specifically traversed the cycle of the analytic experience in its totality (Lacan, Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis 1986).

The word traversal surfaces for the first time in the closing section of the seminal Seminar XI (1986). The concept is left enticingly incomplete. Though introduced at the seminar’s eleventh hour, “traversal” is not an afterthought. Lacanian notions such as “lack,” “transference,” and “phantasy” modulate towards “traversal,” a term cunningly undefined. I suggest that if this key concept be kept dynamic, it will be enriched through interactions with the literary texts and other theoretical models. But equally importantly, my contention here is that traversal as an organic notion is already implied in those papers of Sigmund Freud considered to be corner-stones of his paradigm. Two examples are “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912) and “Remembering, Repeating and “Working-Through” (1914). I will read these papers so as to develop the initial aspects of my term traversal. I suggest that by bringing it into dialogue with the literary fictions at this study’s heart, traversal will emerge as a model difficult to reduce to a series of ratios. While predicated as a theoretical model, traversal will transform and enrich itself by being engaged with both fictional and contemporary theoretical works. In a subsequent section I will explore Judith Butler’s notion of “citation” and Kaja Silverman’s theory that the “gift of love” can be made active. In their own idiosyncratic manner, these models...
contribute to an evolving model of traversal. In this dynamic guise, the model is fundamental to any notion of textual intimacy.

In “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” (1914), Freud reviews what psychoanalysis does with patients. These “analysands” suffer from symptoms. They want to be relieved of them (SE XII: 147). Their troubles stem from the “resistance” which inhibits the analysand from remembering what caused the illness in the first place. Resistance blocks access to the unconscious.14 As Freud explains, if the resistance can be broken down, then a process of remembering will occur, particularly of what happened in early childhood (149). Freud does not tackle the tricky issue of what exactly can be meant by the notion of “remembering.” Ten years later, Freud’s model of the “Mystic Writing-Pad” (1924) will discover memory not as a substance to be seized, but as itself a dynamic of representation. The past will be theorised as relying on the present moment as much as the business of reducing resistance.

The paper of 1914 focuses on “remembering” as that which can be opposed by “repetition.” If a memory is blocked, the patient “acts out,” behaving or speaking in a manner which unwittingly performs the memory without this being recalled. The task of “working-through” the resistance enables repeating to give way to remembering (147-152). The problem for the analyst transpires when the patient, about to remember something crucial, conjures a strong resistance which gives way to yet another bout of acting out.

One example of remembering struggling with repetition can be found in Winterson’s second novel, The Passion (1987; 1988). When Villanelle, that web-footed gambler of human hearts states “You play, you win. You play, you lose. You play,” she describes an impulsive action which refuses to reminisce upon its cause (1988: 66). Villanelle’s psychology is not the prime issue. As one of the novel’s narrators she produces a text which both acts out and undergoes working-through. Possible precedents to the gambling compulsion do transpire in earlier parts of her narrative. What she “works through” is a prose poetry which responds to the lacunae in the text, but only to a degree. There are levels at which The Passion not only refuses to engage in working-through, but reflects on the short-comings of the presupposition that to have everything signified is a useful goal of interpretation.
Literary texts, though, are not human subjects. A novel does not suffer from symptoms nor “express” the desire to be alleviated from whatever cannot be remembered or from whatever remains in the text’s lacunae. As Mieke Bal suggests, psychoanalytic criticism does not, or should not, consist of diagnosing characters but of understanding how texts affectively address the reader on a level that comes close to unconscious preoccupations” (1997: 121). Grappling with what is meant by an “affective address” and, for that matter, understanding where a theory of interpretation and one of affect overlap, is of crucial import to my inquiry.

The 1914 paper emphasises the importance of psychical work done upon affects. Freud refers to Breuer’s technique of “catharsis” (147). From its Greek connotations, this word means purgation and purification. Freud ends the 1914 paper by emphasising the importance of achieving the “abreacting of the quotas of affect strangulated by repression” (108). This is clearly part of the job to which psychoanalysts are committed. To abreact is to engage in a process of working-through which releases the patient’s free associations which, in turn, should result in rememberings conveyed through spoken text. Together, analyst and analysand can collaborate to produce still more interpretations which conjure yet more spoken text. But after so much cleansing what is the crystallite which will remain? In the closely related paper, “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912) Freud suggests a possible answer by way of clarifying what underlines the psychoanalyst’s daily battle.

This struggle between the doctor and the patient, between instinctual and intellectual life, between understanding and seeking to act, is played out almost exclusively in the phenomenon of transference (108).

This tussle can go on endlessly. The cycle of repeating, remembering and working-through has an equivalent in Lacan’s illustration of the dogged process as an internal figure “8” (1986: 270). In Freud’s terms, circuiting the loop should not mean going around in circles. Results are expected, even though the price comprises peregrinations. With each turn of the process, the product should be the manifestation of “emotional impulses” which the patient can fit into the “nexus of the
treatment and of his life-history” (SE XII: 108). The last word is pivotal. As the loop is pursued, more is added to the narrative of the analysand’s life.

The process of undergoing a cycle of remembering, repeating and working-through, which adds, piece by piece to a life-history, has its analogue in the activity of interpreting literary fiction. A particular theory can elicit from a text those meanings which might otherwise be repressed. A certain approach to decoding, however, might uncover little or become lost in the fictional text’s lacunae should it enforce a strategy encountering resistance. Furthermore, the narrators of literary texts can be caught repeating themselves. In The Passion, the young French soldier Henri would persuade readers that his tales of adventure on the battle-field and in love are true. His claims to veracity he underlines with the statement “I’m telling you stories. Trust me” (1988: 160). I infer that he protests too much. In his discourse lurks a lie. If this were not the case he would hardly need to act out his sincerity. Or with self-irony, this narrating character draws attention to the possibility that narrative fiction itself comprises a series of acting outs which need to be interrogated before they will proffer their secrets.

When texts affectively address the reader, they are not just affecting that reader’s emotions. Affects define unconscious energies which when bound, connect to ideas which can generate yet more affects and ideas. In interpreting a narrative fiction, the reader might produce yet another instance of narrative, which either repeats its object or, quite differently, produces a tale, fictional or theoretical. This tale adds to the evolving “life-story” of what critics have traditionally termed, the “primary source.” Furthermore, and highly relevant to my study, the literary “object” can also incite resistances in the theoretical paradigms. I propose that engaging the two in mutual dialogue can elicit the working-through of blocks in the theoretical model. Thus the latter can come to have its own “life-history,” one which attests to the dynamic life of a paradigm (Bal 1997: 57).

Thus the process of remembering, repeating and working-through can occur between theoretical and literary text in a manner which is either mutual or plain imbalanced. Different theorists, fiction-writers and film-makers set up different contracts between the paradigm with which they engage and the “creative” product. For example, in the introduction to her book on Lacan, Shoshana Felman
emphasises the anti-institutional quality of the French psychoanalyst’s work. She states that not only did his oeuvre become a “tool” for her “enhanced literary understanding” but that her literary studies helped her to “gain” a “clearer insight into his own work” (1987: 5). The contract here between psychoanalysis’ output and literature is one of mutual support. Both help each other. Both are good friends. Oddly, little friction is claimed to have taken place.

Another example contrasts with this. The gruesome tale from *Totem and Taboo* (1913; *SE* XIII) in which Freud tells of the savage brothers slaying the primal father is encountered by Bal in her essay “Myth à la lettre: Freud, Mann, Genesis and Rembrandt, and the story of the son” (1987). She tackles the story of the brothers by deploying the tools of narratology. I will follow her reading because, next to the approach stipulated by Felman, Bal’s analytic strategy will aid me in suggesting the shape of my own shifting contracts between theoretical and fictional texts.

For Bal, Freud’s citing of the brothers who join forces to slay and eat their tyrannical kinsman, is “pseudo-historical.” It is so in a way which reveals much about the inception of narrative and myth-making (1987: 68). She begins her unmasking of Freud the story-teller. She does so by comparing two definitions from Laplanche and Pontalis’ dictionary. The first is “phantasy” and the second is “primal phantasy.”

**Phantasy (or Fantasy):** Imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes (1988: 314).

**Primal Phantasy:** Typical phantasy structures (intra-uterine existence, primal scene, castration, seduction) which psychoanalysis reveals to be responsible for the organisation of phantasy life, regardless of the personal experiences of different subjects; according to Freud, the universality of these phantasies is explained by the fact that they constitute a phylogenetically transmitted inheritance (1988: 331).

Bal draws attention to those elements in the discourse which lend themselves to narratological unmasking. In the second quotation, the
scientific and universalising claims about what all humans are supposed to experience gets caught out in the word "fact" and the phrase "phylogenetically transmitted inheritance." As Bal points out, the "fact" constitutes an "objective fallacy." I would add to this that the second definition begs the question of what in fact is supposed to constitute a fact. Furthermore, as Bal notes, the second definition parades as third-person narrative, as if there were no protagonists inside the story with its plot of precursors, of sons taking on their father's legacies. A "narrative fallacy" is at work here, she suggests (66). This is committed when narrative pretends to be explanation. The first definition is more open about its narrative elements of scene and protagonist. If scenes are part of fantasies, as the first definition proposes, then logically such scenes would be operating in the primal fantasy.

Bal's next step is to take her insights and apply them to Freud's "story of the sons." Her procedure reveals much about what may be in the realm of theory-to-object interactions, a necessary inequality (66-68). Bal delineates the way in which Freud's narrative deploys the techniques of focalization. This invites "us" into the scene. According to Laplanche and Pontalis' definition, scenes involve "us" in our own distortions and, by definition, the activation of our resistances. Hence, I should add, our affective interactions are elicited.

It is useful to recall here my earlier reference to "affects." If the literary and theoretical text elicits our fantasies, it is also confronting our resistances. Thus such a theoretical narrative involves us in the task of binding affects (abreactions) not all of which are our own. But beware of the "us." It is a plural pronoun which universalises. Narratives can also invite this projection.

Furthermore, Bal highlights Freud's gift as a story-teller. He uses "fairy-tale" conventions such as "one day" and, like Darwin and Frazer, he uses the techniques of the eighteenth-century novel in which the deployment of "reliable sources" signifies "fictionality" (67). Thus the fictional parades as the theoretical. Bal is frank in putting narratology in the position of the knowledgeable party who can suss out the object of analysis. The inequality between analyst and analysand, between the one who can unveil secrets and the one who suffers symptoms finds a parallel in Bal's reference to Freud's "story." She describes it as his "most crazy, most creative phantasy" (67, my emphasis). The tale has gone bonkers. Its resistances have been uncompromisingly challenged.
Felman’s optimistic implication that there can be a flattering friendship between theory and object is different from Bal’s fertile exercise in creating an inequality between the two domains. Together, the two examples proffer different contracts binding together the allegedly theoretical and “creative.” Contracts between theoretical and literary works can vary considerably, moving between precious compromise and necessary inequalities. The procedure of remembering, repeating and working-through is never static nor formulaic. And some of this has been said before. My contribution to this debate, though, is this. The hypothesis being explored throughout this study argues that the unequal liaisons or tentative intimacies between psychoanalytical and literary texts finds its corollary in the intimacies between the fictional works of Eliot, Woolf and Winterson.

I contend that by engaging these intimacies, a productive model emerges; it is one which can contribute to a feminist, literary and critical practice which avoids the pitfalls of allowing any one model of interpretation to dominate and obfuscate another. The title to my study mentions “narrative” and “theoretical” fictions. Narrative fictions broadly define the novels in this study, though as I have just explained, theories can be caught in narrative modes. Theoretical “fiction” is a term which will apply to those theories which deploy narrative fiction as a method of aiding their form and conveyance. Theories do not only operate in critical discourses, but make their homes in narrative fictions in camouflaged forms or quite openly, eager to strike up a “dialogue” with the reader. Thus narrative and theoretical objects can enter into dialogue with each other, argue together, reject one another or even “make friends” within a novel or between the novel and the theoretical model.

Whenever two parties meet, a transference will take place. In Freud’s “The Dynamic of Transference” (1912), the topic of working-through is not explicitly mentioned. The psychoanalyst’s job, though, is defined as “seeking out the libido” which resistances keep unconscious. Resistance can be confronted by or, in contrast, produce positive or negative transferences (SE XII: 105-107). The doctor aims to conjure the patient’s free associations. A positive transference involves the patients’ libidinous impulses coming to the fore. These may be directed at the doctor. Once summoned, the affective energy can be dealt with to help the patient fit the newly emerging material into her or his life-
history. When the transference becomes negative, the resistance is once again in control, and the free-flow of material becomes blocked (104-108).

The negative transference finds its corollary when the patient repeats or acts out. When positive, what is enhanced is the figuration of unconscious impulses, that is, remembering. When these are integrated into the developing life-history, which can be close read as it emerges, then a working-through takes place. The problem for the analyst is that the two types of transference, both necessarily linked, can often cancel each other out. The struggle between “understanding and seeking to act out” suggests Freud “is played out almost exclusively in the phenomena of transference” (SE XII: 108). When understanding gets the upper-hand, then progress can be made. This comprehension relies on the patient being helped to disentangle a certain aspect of the transference which may be at the cusp of being either positive or negative. Briefly recalling Lacan’s diagram of an internal figure eight helps to clarify Freud’s description of the paradoxical movements of transference. The patient may launch herself on a series of productive associations. These come about because the unconscious libido has been summoned. But this process can equally well turn against both patient and analyst. For libido can instil regression. If this process becomes hostile, the transference has curved into the negative loop of the figure eight.

When regression takes place, argues Freud, what has been revived are the “subject’s infantile imagoes” (102). He takes the term imago from Jung. Freud suggests that the “father-imago” or “mother-imago” can be cast upon the doctor. While these projections can be useful, they can also inhibit further free associations. The projection onto the doctor becomes the “most powerful resistance to the treatment” (SE XII: 101). The next question to consider is whether and how this transference model is performed by literary texts.

Exploring the two types of transference in rhetorical terms, Cynthia Chase evaluates ways in which this model can apply (1987: 211-232). Broadly speaking, she traces the argument in Freud’s two papers to define the two conflicting modes of transference as type one and two. The former constitutes a tropological dynamic whilst the latter results from the subject’s projection of imagoes. Chase defines type one by paraphrasing Freud’s notions of transference from The Interpretation of Dreams (1900). She suggests that the “transference of affect from an
unconscious idea onto a preconscious one” comprises type one (Chase 1987: 212). But even though the second type which inhibits the first is directed onto the doctor, it too involves an “idea.” So a cut and dry distinction between the two types will be problematic.

This is even more the case when it comes to analysing texts. Chase argues that the “hermeneutic” enterprise of interpretation (type two transference) demands a specific meaning couched in a “voice.” To approach the “poetics” of the text (type one) is to explore not what the text means, but how it goes about producing its meanings (213). To disentangle the devices of meaning, to puzzle through the networks of metaphors and metonyms to extricate what is being hidden, engages with the products of the first type of transference. Through its agency, it may be possible to unravel a text’s lies, secrets and silences.

When Bal highlights the story-telling conventions in Freud’s tale of the sons, she is challenging the historical message he claims to tell “us” all (his hermeneutic enterprise) by drawing attention to his rhetorical and narrative strategies (the poetic enterprise). In Chase’s terms, working-through would take place when the unravelling of the text’s strategies fathoms more meanings than would be produced if the hermeneutic enterprise took the upper-hand.

Just as different contracts between theories and literary texts can vary, so can those deals struck up between literary texts from different generations. One novel may become intimate to its other by drawing attention to its devices whilst still contending what its forerunner might “mean.” When Chase refers to transference in its first sense, that is a reading which highlights the poetics of the text, she is, in the light of Freud’s 1914 paper, defining the process of working-through. But for this to be achieved, the second type of transference is required.

As Freud emphasises throughout his two papers, one mode of transference cannot be conjured without the other. It would not be possible to explore the manner in which a text unravelled itself, or performed the same service for a literary or theoretical intimate, if the hermeneutic level of meaning only was active. Examining the poetics of a textual enterprise is to engage with the working-through process only. By itself, this movement would be insufficient in tracking intimacies of influence. Although an analysis of the poetics of literary and, theoretical practice challenge and unmask its hermeneutic dimension, it would be a mistake to reads texts and their contracts with each other as involving
the constant mastery of this dimension. Even when a hermeneutic interpretation inhibits one which unravels the text's poetics or manipulation of narrative, the resistances produced will be of consequence.

This brings me to the first aspect of the model of traversal. When the hermeneutic and poetic levels of interpretation are in struggle and invite an analysis which finds resolution between them, then traversal takes place. This aspect of traversal does, in some respects, correspond to Paul de Man's terms of "figuration" and "disfiguration" and his ideas about the constant unravelling which takes place between the tropes of metaphor and metonymy. These will be examined below.

Interpretation is not a question of working-through meanings which sort out the novel's "life-history." For if this were the case, the possible readings which could be delivered would be most limited. When novels remember and repeat another intimate work or, when they act out against a "friend," when novels conjure the two transfers, one pitted against another, then meanings may emerge which collide and contradict. Friendships between literary or between theoretical models are not always about agreement. An interpretation which takes traversal into account will find dissonance a matter of vital interest.

**Tussling and Pleasuring in *Middlemarch, Orlando* and the work of Paul de Man**

At the beginning of Chapter 15 (Book 1), the external narrator of *Middlemarch* claims that he/she belongs to a group of "belated historians" (1994: 170). They are not like their predecessor Fielding. He has a "place" among "colossi." In comparison to this giant, the external narrator worries that his/her "chat would be thin and eager." Yet when introducing Fielding, the external narrator refers to "A Great historian, as he insisted on calling himself" (170, my emphasis). Here is a strand of irony. Perhaps the man has made himself great through self-advertisement. The external narrator will not be doing likewise.

I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not
dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe (170).

Narrating can be jolly hard work. Or perhaps it is not. If the extract has a point worthy of hermeneutic delivery it is that the narrator suffers no delusions of grandeur. Moreover, he/she has faced the limitations of the times. What is more, he/she has her work cut out. It is pointless to waste energy on attempting to tell the story of the universe. Yet if this is the case and is not an issue, why bother the reader with the admission? The narrator has claimed to lack the space which Fielding had to make “copious remarks and digressions” (170). But the passage itself is a digression.

Such detours are even more prolific in Woolf’s Orlando. The narrating protagonist could beat Fielding at his own game. The novel is replete with remarks about the joys and agonies of the writing process. Tussling with a conceit which sits uncomfortably, the narrating protagonist asks “why say Bedfellow when one’s already said Bride? Why not simply say what one means and leave it?” (1977: 78). The protagonist’s plea for a state of hermeneutic innocence is hilarious, given that he/she is dedicated to tropes, to puns and complaints about being overwhelmed by too many metaphors (78).

In this section I shall explore literary detours as examples of tension between language as a mode of acting out and language as a process of working-through. Once they are made intimate with each other, the metaphors and metonyms of the excerpt from Middlemarch and the quotations from Orlando can be both capable of positing and deconstructing one another. The result of this is not cancellation but a traversal of the anxiety of influence which leads to surprising pleasures.

This traversal begins with a repetition. Eliot’s narrator cunningly pretends no aspirations to Mr. Fielding’s stature. But the implication is that the eighteenth century novelist remains a pestering ideal. Self-effacement is a performance, a rhetorical strategy. Acted out is an anxiety that he/she cannot match up to the ancestor. Orlando acts out a different though related anxiety. His problem is the “disorderly and circuitous way in which his mind worked;” furthermore, he experiences confusion as to “why the oak tree flowered and faded so often before he came to any conclusion about Love” (78). Throughout the novel the tree is a symbol of the burgeoning of time, of generations, of the rise
and fall of literary forms. As Orlando’s work becomes intertextually enmeshed within this cycle of efflorescence and decay, he finds it difficult to posit a definitive statement about “Love.” Yet by so claiming this difficulty, he unwittingly acknowledges the provisionality of the positing act. To try and make a statement of fact about love, that is, to have recourse to what is in speech act theory the constative dimension of language, may be frustrating. Woolf’s text brings home this point by offering us an example of Orlando’s eccentric and hilarious poetics. Orlando bemoans his “circuitous” habits of writing. Eliot’s narrator complains that he/she is not great enough to digress, but does so anyway. Oddly enough, Orlando’s “disorderly” mind performs that which is inherent in literary praxis - the tropological aspect of language detracting from the hermeneutic function.

This detraction takes place when a struggle ensues between what may be broadly termed “literal” as opposed to “figurative” language. Tropes are crucial to this process. These tropes are often button-holed under the definition of “figurative” as opposed to “literal” language. This opposition proves misleading. As Paul de Man’s work relentlessly argues, so-called literal language can serve the purposes of figural discourse and the latter can enhance an apparent literalness. As de Man insists (1979), language has the function of producing syntactical forms which offer literal and figurative meanings. The choice of which is to be adopted can produce even more connotations. These can both embrace and reject the alternatives.20

What de Man defines as “rhetoric” is not a hold-all for “tropes.” Rather, it is how these interact with each other and the grammatical structures which would otherwise keep in check their figurative departures. As he remarks: “Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration” (1979: 10). Thus for de Man, the study of rhetoric comprises not merely the exploration of categories or a detailing of how grammar operates; rather, rhetoric studies how grammar is figured, how tropes generate from apparently logical, de-familiarized meanings a variegated range of potential interpretations.

Furthermore, de Man argues that while metaphor and metonym need to be formally distinguished, treating them as a binary opposition instead of exploring the field of interaction between the two, would lead nowhere. Both metaphor and metonym work for, against and with
each other. The one can show the qualities of itself in the other. De Man does not mention in this context *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) in which Freud explores condensation and displacement as resulting from unconscious processes transferred onto the preconscious (*SE IV*: 282-286). Freud’s dream analysis has been examined through semiotic analyses which link the distortions and displacements of dream images with tropes. Kaja Silverman (1984) makes important distinctions between condensation and displacement, metaphor and metonymy, without making either of the paired terms entirely parallel. In condensation, various significations cluster into a new signifier. Displacement takes place through a chain of contiguous terms (1984: 89). Silverman defines metaphor and metonymy as having more sophisticated functions than merely corresponding to the terms condensation and displacement. Rather, “metaphor and metonymy mediate between the extremes represented by the other two sets” (1984: 109).

For Eliot’s narrator, the web is a metaphor for the narrative process. Yet equally well, the strands within it connect to other untracked, webbed domains in that wide beyond, the “universe.” By virtue of being renunciated, these web-like terrains may indeed beckon. The web as metaphor condenses many signifiers, including the will to be self-effacing. But condensed there too are desires lacking totalities. These desires search of their way out of the webbed town of Middlemarch. They set out along a contiguity of threads leading to unknown destinations. For Orlando, the metaphors do more than intimidate. They take him around a circuitous route of contiguities which leave him in a muddle. Metonymy can lead to all sorts of distractions and displacements, all of which in unison correspond to the “Oak Tree,” that metaphor for life and generation.

Thus metaphor and metonymy are bound to each other, serving each other’s functions yet mutually loosening the grip of one over the other. When Orlando seeks to be expressive about “Love” with a capital L, he aspires to tackle Love figured as a personification. This could also be regarded as an “imago” in Freud’s sense, as the prototype of a human figure is implied. But such a figure will be broken apart by the volley of metaphors contiguously linking to the image of a tapestry (78). When Orlando considers “What is Love?” (77) this question acts to
hustle Books or Metaphors of What one lives for into the margin, there to wait till they saw their chance to rush into the field again. What made the process still longer was that it was profusely illustrated, not only with pictures, as that of old Queen Elizabeth, laid on her tapestry couch (77-78).

Books are made contiguous with metaphors which line up in margins waiting to dash off onto a "field." Perhaps it is one of battle. The contiguous connections between the pictures and the tapestry implies a weaving of visual images which make a narrative text. Thus the visual texts of pictures and tapestry and the maternal imago, Queen Elizabeth, are vulnerable to a working-through and to their images being extricated by a juxtaposed reading which unMASKS the entire passage as a complex thread-work of metonyms.

In his essay "Shelly Disfigured," de Man insists that the positing power of language, the determination to claim that $X = Y$, is a sham (1984: 114-115). Orlando would pin down Love. Orlando would posit its meanings. I should add that to make $X$ equivalent to $Y$, is to enact the metaphorical process. Orlando’s musings on love do quite the opposite. Metonymy unknots metaphor. The tropological deconstruction taking place in Orlando’s interior monologue disturbs metaphor, and by implication, the metaphorical veracity of her poem "The Oak Tree." Its very title is iconic of a tree, which in turn symbolises a family tree and hence generations. The poem’s title thus signifies metaphor as a generative force. However, Orlando’s reflections enable metaphor to be read metonymically. Thus the metaphorical power of genealogies is de-stabilised. The poet’s authority is rattled. When de Man refers to his concept of disfiguration, he draws attention to the manner in which figures of thought come to be obliterated. When something is forgotten such forgetting combines with the re-emergence of what is forgotten, or what de Man terms "the repetitive erasures by which language performs the erasure of its own positions" (119). Here is the rhetorical enactment of repetition in which the unconscious acts itself out through transference. It does so onto a trope giving clues to the effect that erasure is being conducted.

For Eliot’s external narrator and Orlando’s narrating protagonist, the erasure is not about cancelling out the self of narrative subjectivity.
Critics often cite the narrator’s reference to the web as an example of scientific performance. His/her putting together and pealing apart of the strands is compared to the experimental method. Yet these vital insights overlook a more obvious point. The web-making is also cloth-making and sewing. Traditionally, this is a female occupation. The external narrator who will not confess its gender, will not aspire to being the hotshot eighteenth century novelist; rather, he/she will concentrate passion on a female activity transformed into narrative art. The web is refused a synecdochic function. In other words, the reader is discouraged from associating the act of sewing as a “part” activity which stands in for the “whole” of narration. The mastery of the precursor is renounced. The anxiety of influence is of male precursors. If the inheritor takes on some of the master’s legacy, then logically, some part of the web would be handed on. By dis-entwining and piecing together the narrative web, Eliot’s narrator disfigures the tapestry of the precursor. Between anxiety and its undoing traversal takes place, to be continued in Orlando.

Woolf’s novel further repeats but also enables a working-through of the predecessor’s female anxiety, further developing what is implied even in Eliot’s text, to be the hard but rewarding activity of weaving. Orlando may suffer the anxiety of metaphorical configuration but there is the fun of comparing literature to saucy figures such as Brides and Bedfellows. The caprice of the metaphors jaunting down the page acts out libidinous joys, waiting for the realisation of a conceit which Orlando can achieve. But he will not. The ecstasy will be delayed, the working-through will be on the threshold of completion so that traversal can continue. From the external narrator of Middlemarch, Orlando’s protagonist has further lifted the burden. The anxiety of influence has given way to the delightful frustrations of textual intimacy buoyed by intimations of libido.

Fantasy Making and Theoretical Fictions

How can a subject who has traversed the radical phantasy experience the drive? This is the beyond of analysis and has never been approached (Jacques Lacan 1986: 275).
The first stage of building a traversal model involved making intimate literary, psychoanalytic and rhetorical approaches. Woolf's calling to women writers to respect tradition, to study it and to "think back" through the underestimated lines of female, literary heritage can be aided by Freud's model of remembering, repeating and working-through. Texts and intertexts between generations of women writers need to be recalled from the shadows, put into action repeatedly by their inheritors and submitted to a working-through which can re-invent the durable elements of these ancestor texts into idiosyncratic new forms. Rhetorical theory allows the movement and interaction of tropes to be read as engaging the fundamental tension between acting out and working-through.

The second stage of building a traversal model requires examining what is meant by the term "radical phantasy." Tackling exactly what Lacan might mean by the qualifier "radical" means returning to the two definitions - "fantasy" and "primal fantasy" cited earlier. The latter was posed as a phylogenetic phenomenon. Furthermore, according to Laplanche and Pontalis' reading of Freud, primal fantasies can be sub-divided into limited categories. As Bal has noticed, in the definition of "fantasy" the word "scene" also comes to the fore. The narratological elements of mise-en-scene and the subsequent staging of focalizors are already implied in the reference to the "imaginary scene" and the factors "representing the fulfilment of a wish" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 314).

A focalizing agent would be required to apprehend the objects of the imaginary discourse. Thus the fantasy and its "primal" off-shoots are implied to be part of the cycle of remembering, repeating and working-through which functions in the process of traversal. This, in turn, can be explored within the paradigm of narratology. This might throw light on the question of whether fantasies can indeed be organised into primal and secondary units. For if this is the case, fantasy as an imaginary construction is also reliant on the influence of precursor versions.

According to Laplanche and Pontalis, "primal phantasies" involve a complicated definition which is bound up with that for "primal scene" (1988: 331). They explain that Freud considered the material of prehistory to be absorbed into fantasy life. In Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1916-17), Freud considered castration to be a
primal phantasy because he inferred it to have been actually carried out by the fathers of archaic times (SE XVI). Laplanche and Pontalis add to the list. Other fantasies of origin are included, namely, that of “seduction” and the “primal scene” (332). The former is a fantasy of the origin of sexuality, but is problematic in Freud’s oeuvre and became abandoned (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 404). The primal scene defines the child’s fantasy of its parents having sexual intercourse. This scene is constructed by the child as involving the father’s violent act towards the mother. Again, according to Freud’s contention that these scenes are part of a phylogenetic heritage, following Bal’s reading, they would also be narrative experiments making claims to prehistorical validity.

To what extent these primal scenes may be a part of the psychical lives of individuals is not within the scope of my study. However, what is of note is the psychoanalytic model of fantasy. Fantasies are curious interweavings of truth and lies. They are inevitably exercises in focalization. Like the process of dreams, psychical material becomes submitted to distortions, condensations and displacements. By definition, a fantasy will contain its resistances which, once figured and worked through, enable the fantasy to be re-configured into yet another narrative. The transferential process constantly involves tackling fantasies.

As the life-history develops, the transferential process continues. This would mean that even the emerging narrative of a patient’s life requires constant re-interpretation. The task of self-reflection, of recalling the past and representing it yet again, is potentially endless. Logically, even the life narrative as it develops contains imagos and their further narrative contexts (fantasies) which must be subject to yet more rememberings and repeatings before even they can be worked through. Thus the emerging narrative of a patient’s life will be a fantasy-in-process. The developing document is what is both understood and acted out.

My argument is not that patients leaving psychoanalysis are still caught up in their fantasies. For Freud, understanding was the goal. Patients might hope to leave their analysis having reduced the resistances in their stories and therefore having won a limited victory over their symptoms. Yet logically, there is no narrative account which is bereft of focalization. No narrative is without fantasy. According to
Lacan, the symbolic order of language and the law never operates alone, but interacts with the “imaginary” of perception and fantasy will always accompany it.\textsuperscript{22} To what extent a patient going through analysis discovers the “truth” is not an issue. Literary texts, unlike human subjects, are imaginary constructions and are, therefore, inescapably woven through fantasy. Yet having said this, a literary narrative is \textit{not} equal to a fantasy, because fiction is not without the intervention of ideas, ideologies, the ethical, the moral, the theoretical and above all, the symbolic as a dynamic force.

In Jonathan Culler’s formulation of framing, literary works “contain metalinguistic commentary” (1987: 199). Reflections, comments, judgements, equivocations, the expression of doubts and anxieties about characters, plots, the deployment of tropes and literary procedure in general, are an active part of story-telling. Eliot’s narrator and Orlando have already furnished examples. These narrative agencies are not surrendering to the imaginary; they engage with it in order to tackle it, utilising the symbolic, the medium of language and narrative technique as aids in breaking up the dominance of the imaginary.

To put it crudely and to invoke here a useful cliché, narrative practice is about the activity of meaning-making, not just as an abstract exercise, but as a political and cultural praxis. Furthermore, theories also narrate. The hermeneutic procedure can be helped along not by being brought into an antagonistic encounter with the text’s poetics, but by the two being made intimate with each other in a manner which is demanding, in a procedure which grapples with the resistance forcing apart hermeneutics and poetics. In the job of tussling, the fantasy is submitted to continued work, its shape and form and content being reproduced and shifted. In this sense, traversal is that which operates on fantasy. Theories may also contain their primal scenes, their fantasies. Whilst these may not be necessarily the exact type stipulated by Freud, the resistances in a theory can be submitted to traversals every time they encounter a narrative object and its theories within.

If primal scenes and fantasies do have phylogenetic sources, then these “originary” forms imply yet more precursors. Whatever the historical status of these ancestral forms, they are accessible only through the fantasy. Put simply, it is useful to understand a fantasy as a narrative which has a precursor. In this sense, the term “primal” is a misnomer. For if there is a phylogenetic heritage, then preceding the
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primal scene there will be yet another. Access to it may only come through displaced sources. Even though Freud was keen on the notion of originary fantasies, he also indicated that the concept of things “primary” was itself provisional.

In section VII of The Interpretation of Dreams (SE V: 509-610), Freud reviews his model for the human psyche. He uses the term “mental apparatus” (762). Although he does not state this explicitly, an apparatus is a machine. It is not just a metaphor for the psyche. It is one which contains its own sections and compartments. Freud remarks on this choice of models:

... what I had in mind was not merely considerations of relative importance and efficiency; I intended also to choose a name which would give an indication of its chronological priority. It is true that, so far as we know, no psychical apparatus exists which possesses a primary process only and that such an apparatus is to that extent a theoretical fiction" (SE V: 603).

To speak of the primary and secondary processes at all is a necessary fiction to help with the task of theorising. I infer from Freud’s remarks that fiction, and by close association, narrative, is an indispensable tool not just for getting the point across (the hermeneutic task) but in taking apart the theoretical apparatus. To take to pieces a theory is analogous to close reading a text’s poetic strategies and its interweaving of tropes. Moreover, this is because theories can operate as theoretical fictions. Knowing that the latter are devices might prevent the one who deploys them from taking them too literally. More specifically, what Freud’s comments do imply is that the notion of the “primary” finds its corollary in the concept of a theoretical fiction. Narrative levels which can be read as functioning importantly for the overall structure of the text, may be functioning in this “primary” way, but also do so as theoretical fictions.

One important “ur” text and theoretical fiction to Orlando is Shakespeare’s Othello. This latter work is both a historical precursor and enables the narrative of Orlando to divulge its theoretical as well as narrative secrets. In Woolf’s novel, Othello is repeated, forgotten, remembered then re-worked in forms which are politically challenging. The process is two-way. Orlando can also take its role in helping Shake-
speare's play to signify in unexpected ways. To use Micke Bal's terms, *Othello* could comprise the "embedded fabula" which "explains and determines" the primary one, as well as allowing the latter to also do some explaining (Bal 1997: 54). Orlando is both the protagonist and character who narrates at the second level, accompanied at the first level by an external narrator, the biographer, who is in charge of the primary fabula. As Bal emphasises, the role of the embedded fabula is not just explanatory. Its function has consequences for the novel's poetics. Moreover, if *Othello* is more "primary" to Woolf's novel, it is because Shakespeare's play is the historical precedent. In order to maintain some sense of Freud's term "primary" without claiming this to be a primal scene, I will adopt his term "theoretical fiction" to characterise those narratives, embedded or otherwise, which refer to precursor texts from the literary tradition.

Furthermore, *Middlemarch* intimately approaches *Orlando*. Eliot's "Prelude" refers to the mythical tale of Saint Theresa. The "Finale" makes a reference to Antigone. The myth of this Greek heroine and her narrative as dramatised by Sophocles are implied. As such, these texts are not embedded at the second level. They are intertextually cited at the first. But as precursor fictions which impact on many aspects of Dorothea Brooke's story, Theresa and Antigone are the protagonists of a theoretical fiction. Between the novels and their theoretical fictions, much is remembered and repeated. Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* embeds within it a precursor myth which, as a theoretical fiction, disquiets the optimistic control of the primary fabula. Between the novels, fictional workings-through bring new theories to the fore. What it is to make rapture rather than love emerges as one product of the combined traversals.

Another form of theoretical fiction, one which combines the narrative and the theoretical through its own complex tradition is Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex. It is one of the corner-stones of the psychoanalytic paradigm. There is the mythical tale of Oedipus, then Sophocles' play, both precursors to Freud's theory which deploys focalizors, protagonists, actors and characters. What is more, Freud produced more than one version of his theoretical fiction. I will be bringing these versions into intimate quarters with *Middlemarch*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Passion*. The resulting embeddings between the fictional theories from the novels, as in Lydgate's scientific quest for
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the ultimate tissue of life, produces a maze. Through this labyrinth, Freud’s theory perhaps emerging as a re-worked novel, the novels potentially discovering their paradigms within. Here, traversal may pose the greatest onslaught to the distinctions between theory and fiction.

Theoretical fictions can manifest themselves as embedded narratives. By “embedded” I refer to Bal’s notion that an “embedded story can explain the primary story” (1985; 1997: 53). The two stories present two fabula, one can be at a secondary or tertiary level to its primary counterpart; one can reflect upon the other. The intertexts within and between Daniel Deronda, The Waves and Gut Symmetries are not, strictly speaking, of a precursory type. I return to the concept of mise en abyme and married this to Eliot’s concept of parable. The former Bal terms a “mirror text” (1997: 57-58); the latter Hillis Miller defines by way of Eliot, as a technique for repairing distorted vision (1992: 76). One half of Daniel Deronda splits off into a mirror text which, in turn, melts and ripples apart, its imagos transformed into tropes which pave the road forward from nineteenth century realism to early twentieth century modernism. The Waves contains within it a lady writing. She has no discernible place in a precursor narrative, but she does offer a key to the novel’s poetics. Gut Symmetries fragments into monads which repeat mises en abyme from Eliot and fail to remember those from The Waves. The traversal of these cardinal narratives leads to the formation of a paternal figure most unlike that of Freud’s tale of the primal father.

The ultimate and most enigmatic focus of traversal is a textual black hole around which narratives accrue but into which they dare not venture, although they encounter it closely. Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) approaches not only the topic of repetition but of death, that unknown which perhaps no traversal can ever entirely circuit. Between Daniel Deronda, The Waves and Gut Symmetries, fictional theories, that is, ideas and narratives about science abound. The products of traversal which emerge may be the force of “death” which offers many challenges in the task of naming, defining, theorising and narrating its various functions.

In short, none of the novels can be interpreted upon the basis of static definitions of what constitutes a primal scene or fantasy. Through the different chapters, different models are posed - theoretical and theorising fictions, Oedipal narratives, mise en abymes and an imagined structure, a theorising fiction which should test the limits of my own
enterprise. At the end of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan chooses the word "radical" and not "primal" to define the fantasy which has been traversed. Radical is an apt word, for it captures not something necessarily primal, but that narrative-in-process which has vital import in whatever respect it is idiosyncratic to a particular novel or theory. At the end of his 1912 paper on transference, Freud notes that "when all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone in absentia or in effigie" (1958: 108) Behind the radical fantasy is that which can never be reached. Traversal is the quest to re-mould what is in absentia. The past can only be healed in the present. The literary tradition is made new in the contemporaneous. The dead, as T. S. Eliot said, come with us.

Between any of the three novels which are the source of interpretative adventure in this study, the task of bringing new meanings to light occurs between the novels and those radical fictions and theories which mediate them. Traversal operates through the process of remembering, repeating and working-through of the narrative and theoretical forms of what has been broadly termed the "radical fantasy." When the three-tiered process of remembering, repeating and working-through produces a specific form of narrative embedding, when this process occurs in one novel or links together any two or three novels, and when the radical fiction/theory is returned to through abreaction, then traversal takes place. When a confrontation and negotiation between the two types of transference occurs, with its radical interlocuter at work, be this within one text or between textual intimates, then likewise, a traversal leaves its trail.

**Political Makings: Let My Abjects Free**

For Lacan, traversal releases the analysand from being under, and from constructing, the hypnotic power of the analyst (1986: 272). To do this requires the psychoanalytic process to help the analysand "cross the plane of identification" (272). When under the analyst's gaze, the patient, at some level, identifies with the analyst. According to Lacan, this is a necessary stage in which the analysand is caught in an imaginary bond with the analyst. The aim is that the analyst become the Other, that is, the element who brings the analysand into the cutting edge of the symbolic order. Yet equally well, as Lacan's diagram of an internal figure eight implies, crossing the plane of identification, loosening the
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grip of the analyst’s mastery comprises an activity that goes around in circles, generating small shifts one at a time (271). I infer that what happens after the radical fantasy has been traversed takes theory into an arena of terra incognita. Freud’s two papers in transference and working-through argue for analysis reaching a resolution. The closing sections of The Four Fundamental Concepts leaves a trail of question marks. Despite this, if Lacan implies some quest for resolution, then it is that the analysand no longer approaches the analyst as master, or the “subject who is supposed to know” it all. If Lacan is to be followed à la lettre, the terms of power and the attributing of that status between analyst and analysand should shift as a consequence of traversal.

Between literary texts and theories, this process of negotiation can be potentially endless. If this were not the case, scholarly and fictional works would no longer be open to interpretation. As cultural ideologies shift, so too do the contracts of friendship or disagreement between the objects of cultural analysis. Psychoanalysis has encountered many challenging second persons, not just narratology, but feminism, transnational or postcolonial theory, gay and lesbian theory to name a few. In this section I will suggest that Judith Butler’s work on “performativity” and Kaja Silverman’s model of the “active gift of love” are some of the theoretical intimates who will be making important contracts with the novels in this study.

The process of remembering and repeating can refer to more than the mechanism by which affects inscribe and mould individual subjects. Psyches together produce the psychical topography of cultures. The web which as metaphor implies others contiguously linked to it, symbolises in the Peircean sense a cultural enmeshing of psyches. It is relevant here to recall Lacan’s concepts of the symbolic and the imaginary. In that the former constructs the subject through a field of prohibitions, that is, acts and behaviours which support or break the law and the norm, the symbolic order has an ideological function.

Tackling what this function involves requires turning to the tricky endeavour of theorising “construction.” Judith Butler critiques this notion as it is received through the notion of gender in Bodies that Matter: the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (1993: ix-xii). For as a concept, notes Butler, it is reliant on its own “discourse” (xi). The notion that gender is all around us and that physically as well as psychically it is...
inescapable, implies that there is no prediscursive "sex." Butler addresses herself to the task of returning the notion of bodies and of sex into the discursive field. Her job is to discover where sex can be materialised. This task leads to reconsidering the concept of "gender construction" (1993: 7). For if this happens to a "we" or an "I," then logically notes Butler, someone or something must be involved in "performing" this construction. This is not just an activity or mode of self-expression (9). The concept of interpellation, notes Butler, precludes notions of agency, having recourse rather to the concept of identity as an effect within the social order of things.

Yet to follow this logic, and to do so bearing the Lacanian "subject" in mind, brings with it yet more pitfalls (1993: 12-14). Lacan’s notion of sexed subjects presupposes that the symbolic order is a structure into which all subjects are obliged to fit themselves, making the sacrifices which are needed. Lacan’s symbolic order affords little room for its subjects to shape it, to bend it, to re-define it without them being considered overtaken by the imaginary. In this sense, Lacan’s symbolic order does not sit comfortably when signified by the metaphor web. Anything web-like has more capacity to pull and bend; it can be broken and re-fastened, melted and re-configured with less risk of damaging the fabric. By "damage" I mean the process by which the imaginary can deteriorate the structure. Yet such damage may be productive if it involves a radical breaking-up of the text as texture so that this can be re-configured. What I have already emphasised, though, is that the metaphor of the web carries more than one connotation. It is thus conceivable to figure an apparatus as behaving like a web, if that apparatus has malleable parts capable of bending, melting and re-shaping. This figuration has productive implications for the conception of theories in the cultural disciplines. Often for theories the word "model" is deployed. These would not be adequately metaphorised as pieces of hard-ware, but flexible structures which can be re-shaped, though not without much intervention.

Butler’s concept of “performativity” can extricate the bodily subject from being both disembodied of sex and conceived only as that constructed through gender. It entails the interaction of both sex and gender through a series of iterations. Butler nuances the old notion of construction by defining it as a “process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and
surface we call matter” (1993: 9). The temporal dimension is crucial to an understanding of performativity. The concept does not refer to theatrical performance, but to the manner in which norms repeat themselves and in which the law is cited through being materialised again. Any assumption of “sex” is thus a product of the citation of norms and prohibitions (12-13). As power is cited, so it forms sediments, or what constitutes its materiality (15). In the case of heterosexuality, norms are cited through the prohibitive intervention of identificatory processes (15). The tendency to identify as a heterosexual both cites and performs a series of already performed identifications. But with every repetition, something can go awry. The identification may warp and that which it represses may, if even to a small extent, induce changes in the subject’s life.

Butler’s topic of “phantasmic identification” gives closer attention to the way in which longings which have been made “abject,” that is deemed disgusting and to be repudiated, can begin to work their way into signification through iterations and the gradual lifting of prohibitions. Politically, non-heterosexual identities have a long history of being deemed abject. Identification with what is valorised and repression of the abject is what installs a heterosexual identity. But what is abject will return. The repressed will, with every citation, fight its way back in. If prohibitions are lifted, then this repressed has a chance of configuring itself. This may occur at another price. Many lesbian and gay identities are instituted at the cost of repressing the heterosexual affiliation. One prohibition replaces another. One term of power replaces another. The repudiations involved, argues Butler, are effected at the price of a certain violence (118).

It is for a mitigation of such violence that Butler calls. Her intellectual plea is for a questioning of liberal humanism with its emphasis on tolerance and sympathy. Butler argues instead for a radical mode of practice in which psychical working-through becomes political practice. Butler claims

That identifications shift does not necessarily mean that one identification is repudiated for another; that shifting may well be one sign of hope for the possibility of avowing an expansive set of connections … It will be a matter of tracing the ways in which identification is
implicated in what it excludes, and to follow the lines of that implication for the map of future community that it might yield (119).

She makes connections here between the challenging of personal identities and how they effect a wider community. Furthermore, the emphasis on “avowing an expansive set of connections” implies a type of working-through, a bringing to the fore of previously repressed significations which effect the configurations of ideology.

To return to Lacan, the traversal of the one-to-one psychoanalytic interchange requires transforming the relations of power. The patient no longer desires to be the analyst, but rather, to seize her own sense of lack and desire, and not to have it filled up by the analyst. Following Butler, I suggest that traversal in the political field involves the rememberings (citations) and repeatings (performances) which, through easing of violent prohibitions exercised through heterosexuality (the father’s name as signifying the power of mastery), those connections, those previously abjected identities can come to the surface.29

Working-through may be that process whereby “expansive” connections grow, shift and illuminate the cultural web. To aid this, it may be helpful not to repudiate but to loosen and complement that factor of paternal authority which, in psychoanalytic terms, is the signifier par excellence of the law, of the symbolic order. In cultural terms, traversal does not incite anarchy. Rather, traversal is a painstaking process of iterations which can only shift the symbolic order (theorised as a dynamic force) stage by stage. Gradually, what has been abject may not be set free, but may certainly discover more leeway.

Of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton suggest that it is a “triumph of aesthetic totalisation deeply suspicious of ideological totalities.”30 Eagleton overlooks the novel’s sophisticated utilisation of the web and other choice metaphors. Throughout *Middlemarch*, those who pursue totalities become unravelled by ambitions which can be traced back to ideological imperatives. Eagleton claims, however, that *Middlemarch* never entirely succeeds in critiquing the ideology which forms its woof and weft. The novel “projects back into the past,” he complains, “its sense of contemporary stalemate” (39). I take issue with such an approach later on, suggesting that the alleged conservatism of the novel is interpreted as a type of
critical over-determination which would read the notion of radicalism as an array of characters stomping through the novel like rebels with burning causes. Dorothea Brooke may end up a house-wife and Lydgate may have a Victorian attitude towards women. But the novel's levels of narration, particularly in the sophisticated modulations between external and character narration set up a system of traversals which can be taken over by later literary works and theories. In Middlemarch, the Darwinian model has an important place. If characters and contexts are to change, the evolution will be slow. Lydgate iterates the ideologies of his forefathers, yet these betray signs of transformation. In Middlemarch, ideology is submitted to experimental tests. These cause changes in the narrative's deployment of novelistic form. Middlemarch does not function as a conservative piece of realism.

Drawing attention to what has been culturally under-valorised is a task taken on by many of the novels in this study. Middlemarch features those who fail in precisely those places where they would excel. Daniel Deronda's production of Jewish characters was politically groundbreaking. Mrs. Dalloway takes as its subject a figure who is middle-aged, middle-class and a housewife, or one who would generally not star in the heroic narrative. Clarissa Dalloway is not the young, troubled, questing heroine typical of late nineteenth or early twentieth century fiction. The traumatised Septimus Smith comes lower down the social echelon than Mrs. Dalloway. Moreover, the novel weaves into its discourse the interior monologue of a street tramp. As Gillian Beer remarks in a title to an article, The Waves could be about “anybody,” freely incomplete and unremarkable (1996: 74-91). In Winterson’s Sexing the Cherry the imposing Dog Woman reflects on how “hideous” she is with her “few teeth” all “black and broken,” her person attended by a stinky regiment of dogs (1989: 24). Winterson’s novels often focus on the abject and the undervalued, rallied for the purposes of de-familiarising the familiar and making narratees more capable of treating as a second person, subjects and their habits which would otherwise remain devoid of glamour.

In Kaja Silverman’s The Threshold of the Visible World (1996: 2), one of the main topics addressed is how identificatory practices can be utilised as “political tools.” Social and cultural practices of visual identification cause “certain subjects to have access to a flattering image of self” (1996: 29). Advertisement, photographic and film technologies
offer representations which of what is culturally valorised. What falls into the shadows of the culturally confirmed, is not offered for identification. Silverman carefully follows Lacan’s theory of the “Mirror Stage” and beyond to discover why subjects are strongly normative in their identificatory practices. An important explanation lies in the mechanisms by which subjects idealise. The “visual imago” which lures within the mirror, gives the onlooker a sense of entirety which offsets the dangerous sensation that the body may fall to pieces (10-17). As Silverman explains, idiopathic identification finds the subject wanting to absorb another, so as to be like her or him. Heteropathic identification facilitates a projection of the bodily ego onto more unfamiliar points. The idiopath idealises what she/he can identify with. The heteropath is more functionally capable of idealising without identifying, is more able to find a delusory connection between the bodily ego and served up images.

Silverman makes clear that she does not argue against idealisation. Without it, life would be intolerable (37). Idealism is part of life. But the question is how it can be brought to bear on what society would visualise as abject, as uninteresting or non-normative. Silverman’s response is a practice termed “making active the gift of love” (1996: 77). Before an ideal can come to life it needs libidinous investment, Silverman reminds us (80). Though such acts of endowing the ideal produce pitfalls. The beloved object becomes used as an ego-ideal who can compensate for the lover’s sense of deficit. In The Passion, Henri, one of the novel’s two main narrators, experiences the bitter lesson of doing this. He adores his Emperor Napoleon to the point he fights wars and sees horrors. In fact, Henri “invents” his idol. This idealised figure Henri needs as a narcissistic support. The intimacies involved in idealising without identifying require the act of self-reflection as much as unavoidable projection.

Silverman emphasises that the active gift of love is not something which can be conferred at will (80). What is normatively idealised emerges from the unconscious. What society presents to us as the ideal can affect and effect us powerfully. How a human subject engages with the gift of love depends on how she negotiates her idealisations once they have formed. In this context, Silverman cites Freud’s term Nachträglichkeit, or “deferred action.” To this end, unconscious idealisations, through the after-effects of conscious
processes, can "de-substantialize" (80). In her study, Silverman engages with films which activate this process. To decompose unconscious idealisations requires "intimates" who catalyse this dissolution. This process is a pre-requisite for a love which does not eat its subjects alive.

I will be taking Silverman's and Butler's theoretical approaches and engaging them with their ancestor texts, that is, Freud's papers on transference and working-through. My procedure can reveal intimacies between the theories of Freud and those of his female inheritors. Silverman's entreaty that conventional idealisations be de-substantialized can be grounded in Freud's notion of working-through. This term does not define a complete product. What is so crystallised will be always necessarily work-in-progress. Likewise, in Silverman's conception, deferral can be inferred to be an ongoing process which leads to further idealisations. Yet these undergo transformation. Repeating finds its analogue in idiopathic identification. Though not equivalent, these two terms are closely connected. Repeating defines an acting out which may not be idiopathic.

In Daniel Deronda, Mordecai has spent his life seeking a friend to whom he can pass on his soul. A lifetime of futile attempts might suggest that he is repeating an old, repressed sense of displacement which will not come "right." But eventually it does. His longing to take Deronda into himself is also a heteropathic gift of soul. Character psychology aside, what is important for the novel's affective interaction with its readers is this. Mordecai is Jewish. He would have been treated with contempt by many members of the gentile, Victorian readership. This negative identification on the part of readers would have been part of a series of citations from Christian, anti-Semitic ideologies. That Mordecai discovers his soul-mate with a character with whom the external narrator identifies, draws the Victorian audience into those very idealisations which would challenge its prejudices.

Silverman's theory of the active gift of love and Butler's notion of performance are both closely linked. Both concepts enable idealisation to be teased apart from identificatory practices at textual, as well as social and cultural levels. Both theories involve notions of repetition as iteration, in the case of Butler, and deferred action, in the case of Silverman. Where there is a painstaking process of repetition which gives way to new formations, the dramas of traversal are in action. The path is long and hard. It requires many movements both backwards and
forwards. As the drama unfolds, the arguments between conscious practice and unconscious tendencies refuse easy solutions.

**Conclusion: No Figure, No Fiction, No Theory is Final**

The multifaceted theory of an intimacy of influence does not consist of 'ratios, but is woven from different disciplines: rhetorical, literary historical, psychoanalytical and narrative, to name its basic elements. “Narrative” does not define only the area of narratology, but suggests the potential for each discipline to utilise narrative techniques. Flexible and dynamic, the intimacy model does not necessarily consist of an equal balance of the theoretical and narrative parts which this chapter has set out. When friends meet, one party might tailor her or his subject and mode of conversation to accommodate the other. The two may experience disagreements, but their friendship will encourage each party to find common ground with the other. When approaching a literary work, the intimacy model will foreground certain of its elements over others. It will do so to enhance the co-operation with its interlocutor, even if this involves a conflictive debate. Likewise, the intimacy model can act as an go-between to help facilitate such co-operation between novels of different generations. No meeting between two or three parties needs to be equal. Though despite the asymmetries and the lack of mutual familiarities between the model and fictional/theoretical object, surprising acts of reciprocity may come to light.

Traversal is a dynamic theory partly supported by Freud’s studies of remembering, repeating and working-through; the kernel notion argues that when parental imagos are dismantled, greater insight and knowledge is released. When Woolf acknowledges Shakespeare as a precursor, she does not install him in the position of a father to fight or obey. Nor does she acknowledge him as a writer whose battles with predecessors contaminated his work. Woolf argues that Shakespeare’s “mind” produced “revelations” which do not remind us of a writer at all. She claims that the expressive needs to “protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury” do not characterise his work (1983: 55). Instead, she emphasises, Shakespeare’s “mind was incandescent, unimpeded” (55). I have already drawn attention to Woolf’s reference to an incandescent web. In other words, the “mind” of the unimpeded artist is associated not with the imago in action, but with the wealth of cultural
connections and meanings which is greater than personality. If the Bard has been constructed as a parental imago, Woolf elegantly submits this transference to poetic dismantling.

Yet Woolf does not go to the opposite extreme of disembodying the writer, as though she or he were merely an abstract agent in the production of cultural signs. Woolf argues that Judith Shakespeare, the Bard’s sister “will put on the body which she has so often laid down” (108). Woolf’s biographical essay treads a delicate line between positing a writer’s identity before disentangling this notion into tropes which suggest that literary works are more wide-ranging than individual personality. Thus intimacies of influence can be best studied between narrative and theoretical texts, amidst the inter-linking and re-weaving patterns of the web and the intriguing tensions caused by the hermeneutic pitted against the poetic level. Yet having said this, to recall Barthes’ extended metaphor of the spider’s web, the writing spider herself is not treated as entirely absent. The comments made by novelists about their own writings and those of precursor’s can shed light on the connections or fractures between textual threads.

The very use of the word web suggests an oxymoron, a theoretical comparison which cannot entirely capture the object to which it refers. The web is a theoretical fiction in the following respect. While the spider’s web is made of one texture, those of narratives and theories are not made of homogeneous material, but assembled from many constituents and many tropes, none of which can ever be final. Theories deploy narratives just as fictions argue and theorise. In turn, these theories may assemble any number or ensemble of collaborative or indeed, rival theories.

It is not enough to claim that a theory can be defined as a “theoretical fiction” merely because it combines in various tropological patternings a mixture of theory and narrative. Some narratives may tell a straightforward story. They stimulate tensions between fictional and theoretical concerns, between the work’s hermeneutic and poetic levels and between different ideological layers. Theoretical fictions do not merely place themselves within the framework of tradition; rather, they argue back, re-evaluate and reconstruct what has come before. When Freud first mentions the notion of a theoretical fiction, he is referring to his analogy between human psyche and a series of optical lenses. The paradigmatic revolutions of the seventeenth century did not just take
their cue from Copernicus. Newton’s studies on optics took a key role in re-working entire areas of knowledge.36 Freud’s body of work constitutes a paradigm which orchestrated its own revolutions in the field of knowledge. Furthermore, to compare the human psyche to a system of lenses prefigures the notion of the psyche as a machine, a notion which has become a staple of late twentieth century models of neurobiology and robotics.37

The novels which contribute to the evolving web of this study engage in influences which can be both prefigurative and retrospective. The novels do not only “think back” through their female precursors (and some of their male counterparts), as major works of literature they intimately encourage their readers to think back, through, across and even ahead of themselves. Beyond this horizon lies an unknown literary future in which both authors, readers and texts are endlessly creating.

Notes

1 In “The Spirit of Revenge,” Frank Lentricchia (1980: 319-346) reviews both *The Anxiety of Influence* and Bloom’s sequel to it, *A Map of Misreading* (1975). Though giving credit to Bloom for putting the question of tradition back on the map, and doing so against the ancestor movement of New Criticism with its excessive stress on the autonomous aesthetic object (1980: 319-324), Lentricchia is caustic about the drawbacks of Bloom’s project. He refers to Bloom’s “touting of Milton’s Satan” as a model for the poet as something difficult to “apologize for” (343). The real problem for Lentricchia, though, is that Bloom’s focusing on the “titanic willfulness of strong poets” reinstates the “principle of the author” (343). Bloom issued a response to Lentricchia in “Agon: revisionism and critical personality” (1981: 18-47). Bloom’s influence has been marked, Norman Bryson acknowledging it in his “Preface” to *Tradition and Desire* (1984: xvii). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim (1980: 46-53) that Bloom proposes structures of literary genealogies into which woman cannot be fit at all. Like Lentricchia, they draw attention to extreme role given the poet. Bloom makes him into Milton’s Satan which, for Gilbert and Gubar is incompatible with the possibilities of female identification. They both acknowledge Bloom as “useful” because his study reveals a psychosexual and patriarchal context in action (48). I would add that they underestimate a woman’s
capacity to identify with men by insisting that it is unlikely for a woman to identify with or idealise the modern, scribing Satan.

2 See Christine van Boheemen’s *The Novel as Family Romance: Language, Gender, and Authority from Fielding to Joyce* (1987) for a study which uses Freud’s essay on the processes of family romance as a starting point to examine the development of literary tradition.

Within the same paragraph, Woolf suggests that just as it is “fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex” and not to explore the possibilities of being “woman-manly” or “man-womanly,” so too it “is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause” (99). Importantly, a connection is made between the need to avoid anger which can encroach on the art product itself and the act of giving too much focus to the gender producing the creative work. Curiously, Bloom’s book does not quote one, single woman writer, whereas *A Room of One’s Own* is free in its reference to various male writers, Shakespeare most notably.

3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1992: 3-25) produce the model of the rhizome, the bulb plant which grows in a non-hierarchical manner, with the roots spreading out in plural patterns. Broadly speaking, the Deleuze-Guattari team has developed the idea that the rhizome is a suitable metaphor for signifying multiplicities, diverse connections or what “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (7). I suggest that the rhizome model is apt for reflecting upon Woolf’s web which, as her narrative practice reveals, does not become fixated upon specific metaphors but allows a conglomerate of metaphors to contiguously connect and unravel each other. Gilles Deleuze uses the metaphor of the web in *Marcel Proust et Les Signes* (1964)

4 It could be argued that Woolf was writing shortly before World War II, and that since then, particularly in the late seventies, eighties and nineties, the number of novels and poems by women have taken more territory in the market. Women’s publishing presses such as Virago and The Women’s Press were set up in the seventies. With these facts in mind, her remarks might demand revision as regards lines of female genealogies. Bloom’s influential *The Anxiety of Influence* which studies genealogies in male poets only does, though, confine itself to centuries of work predating World War II, referring to Renaissance examples but excluding the Bard, as the latter’s oeuvre belongs to a period when the anxiety of influence was not “central to poetic consciousness” (1973: 11).
Even though Woolf claimed that as writers, “we think through our mothers if we are women,” yet the works of men, appropriated and remodelled, can be traced in the works of Eliot, Woolf and Winterson. While Woolf claims that women writers cannot turn to men for much help, her narrative fictions hold within them quotations from Shakespeare, from Donne, from Marvell, cunningly ripped apart and re-woven, born again as they would otherwise never have been incarnated.

For a full encounter with issues of sex and gender see my chapter 3, “Last Exit from Thebes.”

In addition to Bal 1999, the notion of “preposterous history” is also explored in chapter 3 of Sasha Vojkovic’s forthcoming dissertation, Father’s, Sons, and Other Ghosts: Narration and Subjectivity in the New Hollywood Cinema.

In Art Objects: Essay on Ecstasy and Effrontery 1995:31 Winterson pays tribute to Emily Brontë, though the work of her sister Charlotte she judges of “uneven power” just as she does the work of George Eliot. She approves of Charles Dickens because he convinces his audience he is a “realist” when in fact, she insists, he is not. Throughout Art Objects, Winterson firmly places herself in the camp of modernist writers.

See Gillian Beer, “Physics, Sound, and Substance: Later Woolf” (1996: 112-124). Beer tracks Woolf’s reading material in the area of contemporary physics. Beer argues that at the end of the 1920s and through into the 1930s, wave-particle theories stimulated the collective imagination (113). Beer notes that Woolf read James Jeans’ The Universe All Around us (1929), The Mysterious Universe (1930) and The New Background of Science (1933) as she was working on The Waves.

Woolf’s web metaphor highlights what is also theorised in Lacan, but often less emphasised in semiotic readings of his work, namely, that the symbolic order cannot be defined as language alone. As well as a societies’ laws and customs, it constructs their economic rules. As I mentioned before, the woman writer, Woolf continually reminds her reader, needs a room of her own and 500 pounds a year. She needs space and quiet, luxuries which traditional family life have not afforded women. She comes into the symbolic order of economic realities “castrated,” constructed through “lack” in terms of her material status. This is a point so adroitly handled in the metaphor which describes the “web” as being “attached to life at all four corners.”

Roland Barthes in The Pleasure of the Text (1975: 64) adds to his spider and web metaphor that the word “hyphology” could define the theory of the text. The Greek word Hyphos can define both the tissue and the web.
Sigmund Freud, "Remembering and Repeating" SE Vol. XII: 151. All further references will be made to this edition.

See J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis (1988: 394). The definition of the term "resistance" is as follows. "In psychoanalytic treatment the name 'resistance' is given to everything in the words and action of the analysand that obstructs his gaining access to his unconscious."

Laplanche and Pontalis (1988: 13) define an "affect" as "any affective state, whether painful or pleasant, whether vague or well defined, and whether it is manifested in the form of a massive discharge or in the form of a general mood...The affect is the qualitative expression of the quantity of instinctual energy and its fluctuations."

For an overview of different positions, see Peter Brooks, "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism" (1987: 1-17). One example of the establishing of an equal rapport between rhetorical and psychoanalytic model can be found in Felman (1983).

More examples of the different contracts which can be forged between theories and fictions, so as to subvert the binary opposition between these two terms, can be found in the following studies. Renée Hoogland's Lesbian Configurations (1997) takes on psychoanalytical and post-structuralist theories, but so without these dominating the primary texts. Her analyses of films such as Roman Polanski's Bitter Moon (1992) and Paul Verhoeven's Basic Instinct (1992) allow these cinematic texts to reveal their theorising of cultural constructions of lesbianism and their cultural constructions of lesbian theory. The primary texts are given space to both narrativise and theorise and be open to criticism. A more radical example of fictional texts being privileged with the task of producing theories can be found in The Chamber of Maiden Thought (Meg Harris Williams and Margot Waddell, 1991). The thesis of this study is that the works of Shakespeare, the Romantic poets, Emily Brontë and George Eliot, all contained elements which had a seminal role in contributing to the formation of the modern, psychoanalytical model of mind. Rather than using literature as a powerful ancestor to psychoanalysis, Teresa de Lauretis uses an inverse procedure in The Practice of Love (1994). Here, she thoroughly scrutinises psychoanalytic theories of lesbian desire, using along with her theoretical tools, literary texts to fathom the fictions and fantasies in the psychoanalytic method. De Lauretis uses the term "psychoanalytical
narrative” (1994: xiv). I would suggest, however, that while her alleged aim is to set up a dialogue between narrative fiction and psychoanalytic theory, she moves more in the direction of focusing on psychoanalysis as a primary text to be cured of its fantasies.

19 Sigmund Freud (SE V: 562). Freud explains that an “unconscious idea is as such quite incapable of entering the preconscious and that it can only exercise any effect there by establishing a connection with an idea which already belongs to the preconscious, by transferring its intensity on to it and by getting itself ‘covered’ by it.”

20 Paul de Man (1979 chapter 1: 3-19) explores how one mode of a poem’s rhetorical interpretation can work against the grain of another. De Man takes W.B. Yeat’s poem “Among School Children” (de Man 11) and suggests that reading the last line “How can we know the dancer from the dance” literally can in fact produce a more rhetorical interpretation of the previous stanzas.

21 For an excellent overview of Freud’s concepts of primary and secondary processes, the unconscious and the preconscious, see Silverman 1984: 54-86).


23 For a detailed explanation of how the concept of embedding relates to the aspects of narrative levels and the movement between these levels, see Bal 1997: 53-73.

24 For a practical and accessible version of what constitutes the Other in the psychoanalytic process see Bruce Fink, A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique (1997: 31-32).

25 For Lacan’s comments on the “subject supposed to know” see “Of the Subject who is Supposed to Know, of the first Dyad and of the Good” (1986: 230-244).

26 In her text, Butler uses the term “interpellate,” which is in fact a term coined by Louis Althusser’s term. See “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1977: 121-173). When the subject is constructed through ideology, or the ISA (Ideological State Apparatus), that is, when he or she defines the limits and extents of him or herself through this ideology, then an interpellation has taken place. Human subjects may recognise or misrecognise themselves on the basis of an interpellation which makes them products of capitalism, culture and society. Everyone is subtly coerced into taking up
subject-positions into which they have to fit. Those aspects of self which cannot be contained by the subject-position come to be rejected. I might add that if successful, interpellation helps the “square peg” subject fit into a “round peg hole” and not challenge the fact that he or she simply does not fit into their role/position. For a thorough analysis of ISAs and what Kaja Silverman terms the “dominant fiction” see chapter 1 in her *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992).


See Judith Butler “Phantasmic Identification and the Assumption of Sex” (1993: 93-120) for a closer definition of abject and abjection.

The topic of the “father’s name” will be dealt with closely in my chapter 4. Put simply, it is a symbolic, intervening term which separates the child from its symbiotic connection with the mother.


Barbara Hardy’s “Introduction” to the Penguin edition of *Daniel Deronda* (1986: 7-29) draws attention to political, cultural and social taboos Eliot’s last novel carefully challenged.

Clarissa Dalloway is not a “romantic” heroine, a quality which was often attributed to the popularity of many female characters in novels written by women. See Gilbert and Gubar (1984: 3-44).


For a comprehensive definition see Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 111. They define “deferred” action as a “term frequently used by Freud in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: Experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness.”

For a study of the interactions between narrative and arguments see Frans-Willem Korsten 1998.