

## Review Article

# The Troubles with Psychoanalysis ...

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- Kalu Singh, 2000: *Guilt*. Cambridge: Icon Books; ISBN 184046190X, 80 pp. £3.99.
- Estela V. Welldon, 2002: *Sadomasochism*. Cambridge: Icon Books, ISBN 1840463783, 79 pp. £3.99.
- Julia Segal, 2000: *Phantasy*. Cambridge: Icon Books. ISBN 1840461896, 78 pp. £3.99.
- David Bell, 2003: *Paranoia*. Cambridge: Icon Books. ISBN 1840463775, 78 pp. £3.99.
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- Nicola Abel-Hirsch, 2001: *Eros*. Cambridge: Icon Books. ISBN 1840462760, 80 pp. £3.99.
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- Jeremy Holmes, 2001: *Narcissism*. Cambridge: Icon Books. ISBN 1840462450, 77 pp. £3.99.
- Graham Music, 2001: *Affect and emotion*. Cambridge: Icon Books. ISBN 1840462434, 79 pp. £3.99.
- Ivan Ward, 2003: *Castration*. Cambridge: Icon Books. ISBN 1840464429, 80 pp. £3.99.

This paper reviews a series of short books on ideas in psychoanalysis. Its main focus is the relevance of psychoanalytic ideas to auto/biographical practices. It discusses some common ambivalences about psychoanalysis and its applications to understanding life stories. Does psychoanalytic thinking give us unique access to hidden truths about human lives and human nature? Or is psychoanalysis just a useful language for exploring the vicissitudes of stories? Or could it be a novel language that we can use to invent new stories, or new dimensions to stories? The paper concludes that, for many auto/biographers, the great value of psychoanalysis lies, not in enabling us to reveal the 'real' selves of our subjects, but as a tool to create new spaces for thinking about both selves and stories.

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If we look at our lives, we shall probably find that we spend most of our time neither in behaviour nor in contemplation, but somewhere else. I ask: where? (Donald Winnicott, 1971: 105)

When my children were young they took great delight in goading me about the way their psychologist-mother made sense of the world. My apparent propensity to see deep psychological motives anywhere and everywhere, they found hilarious. They even went as far as inventing for themselves quasi-psychological excuses for things they didn't want to do. 'Eat your greens,' I said, 'they're good for you.' 'Yuk! They're horrible' came the defiant retort. And then my nine-year-old daughter gleefully pointed out, in a voice that parodied mine, 'If the midwife who was there when I was born hadn't had such horrible green eyes, I wouldn't hate sprouts.' Having offered this insight, she and her brother then pushed their sprouts to one side and collapsed into an extended fit of the giggles. They had grasped the idea that a psychoanalytic language can be used to undo the traditional narrative of authority and replace it with a new kind of final word. This encapsulates, quite neatly, the potentials and the troubles that psychoanalysis poses for auto/biographers.

For many, psychoanalysis offers a set of fundamental truths about human nature, revealing previously hidden dimensions of persons. The books in this series are mostly written by practising therapists, so it was of no surprise to find that they tend towards this view. Auto/biographers who have some sympathy with that perspective will find tools to dig into the deepest recesses of their subjects, equipped at last to get at the real meaning of the life. Others who are more sceptical about such implicit truth claims will regard the relevance of psychoanalysis to auto/biography as dubious at best. Both would be mistaken. Preoccupation with the 'truth' or otherwise of psychoanalysis may well stand in the way of creative thinking about the possibilities as well as the limits of life writing.

I once had a first-year student who wrote an essay on Freud. The great master's name was misspelt throughout the essay as 'Fraud'. The student assured me that it was a genuine mistake and, having some ambivalence towards psychoanalysis myself, I was inclined to believe him. For this student, psychoanalysis painted a picture of the world that was so far removed from common sense that it was difficult to imagine how it could be of any use at all. His hostility to psychoanalytic discourse is there for all to see. Yet, the systematic 'slip' that he made itself revealed the possibility that a psychoanalytic reading could produce a potent counter-narrative that challenges dominant representations of 'reality'. Psychoanalysis certainly disrupts the shaky boundaries between 'truth' and 'fiction' that auto/biographers routinely grapple with. My little stories point to the possibility

that psychoanalysis and life writing can trouble each other in intriguing ways.

Many of my students have trouble coming to terms with the whole idea that things may not always be as they appear to be. I remember only too well my own first encounters with Freud. I found his ideas both riveting and uncomfortable. I looked for myself in his case studies, as my students do now, and I found it difficult, as they do, to see myself as comprised of a chaos of conflicting life and death instincts, wild passions and strange pleasures, denials and repressions, often of a 'sexual' origin. But as well as being unsettling, psychoanalysis is also compelling. Like life writing, it seduces us into its narrative, tempting us to suspend reason as we enter its story. And it seems to promise those precious insights about the 'real' person that auto/biographers dream of being able to discover or convey in our reading and writing.

This series of books is not explicitly concerned with life writing, which may seem a little odd when you think that the entire edifice of psychoanalysis is built on the telling and interpretation of life histories. It indicates, I think, the extent to which a dominant narrative of psychoanalysis itself has evolved, in which the theories and the therapies have acquired a truth status that can only be challenged in their own terms. That is alienating for a lot of people, and it can be disempowering to find one's healthy scepticism apparently 'explained away' as a defensive and motivated attempt to avoid the truth at all costs. The reader will almost certainly encounter those kinds of frustrations. These books introduce some of the main ideas of psychoanalysis to a general readership. But readers may then do what they will with those ideas and insights. Freud or Fraud, or somewhere in between, the choice is yours.

One of the most interesting things about reading and writing auto/biography is discovering the different ways we make sense of the world. Through producing and consuming life writing, we enter a kaleidoscope of meaning making that can transform our lives and our worlds. We see the world as others see it, and it changes our own.

Psychoanalysis is a form of life writing. The theory, since the days of its founding father Freud, has been built on the life stories of ordinary people, and although there have been many revisions to the theory, and developments in the practice, personal narratives of lives continue to be the very stuff of psychodynamic therapies. It might be expected, therefore, that auto/biographers would be keen to embrace the ideas and the insights, if not the practices, of psychoanalysis as essential tools of their trade. But such has not been the case. On the contrary, auto/biographers have tended to remain deeply sceptical. Psycho-biography as a genre, for example, has attracted more criticism than appreciation or praise.

It is certainly paradoxical that Freud, himself a notorious plotter of other people's lives, was deeply sceptical about the projects of auto/biographers. As Adam Phillips (1999) reminds us, Freud took active steps to thwart the attempts of his future biographers when he destroyed many of his early papers, manuscripts and letters, and he looked forward to his biographers floundering as a result. It is as though he wanted to keep the 'truth' about himself to himself. Interestingly, his own autobiographical writings focus more on psychoanalysis, and we are left wondering about Freud the man. This points to a central enigma of psychoanalysis – our deep ambivalences about knowing and being known.

These ambivalences are evident, for example, in what has been called the 'narrative turn' in contemporary life. We are increasingly surrounded by personal stories – often of an intimate kind – which have become *the* currency by which to know ourselves and others. If the nineteenth century brought our storied secrets from the confessional box onto the couch (Foucault, 1979), the late twentieth century – what Dunant and Porter (1996) have called 'the age of anxiety' – has witnessed an even more profound shift. Glib talk about the 'Oprahfication' of culture probably masks the seriousness of the transformation in the storying of lives and identities (see, for example, McAdams, 1993; Eakin, 1999) that daily takes place before our eyes. Followers of *Trisha* and other talk shows, fans of *Big Brother*, or *Wife Swap* and 'reality TV' more generally, as well as the new generation of 'bloggers' are regularly treated to a kind of narrative striptease where anything goes and apparently nothing is spared. Formerly 'private' tragedies, reflections, musings and anxieties that once were safely contained behind closed doors, or tucked away in the pages of a private diary, or which found expression in letters marked 'confidential', have become public property, to do with what we will.

But we remain ambivalent about what all this means, and about whether or not all this exposure and self-exposure is a 'good thing'. How 'real' is 'reality TV'? Are those people really like that, or are they just 'acting up'? Does 'reality TV' provide new opportunities to make visible the complexities of real lives, or does it contribute to a culture of superficiality? Between these opposite poles, the only thing that can be said with any certainty is that this 'narrative turn' is troubling the boundaries between the public and the private, and between fact and fantasy. Speaking optimistically, it seems that new forms of public confessionals are providing spaces in which consumers can grapple with what is and is not real for themselves. But psychoanalysis can further trouble the debate. It has deep implications for how we formulate questions of agency, responsibility and autonomy.

Controlling our own life story is one of the ways in which we try to keep control over our lives, and manage our anxieties about their

inevitable finitude. Adam Phillips (1999) argues that it was Freud's understanding of the 'death instinct' – the force that pushes us to spoil, and ultimately to destroy our lives – that underlay his view that auto/biographical narrative coherence was both undesirable and impossible. For Freud, self-destructive behaviour – and the narrative undoing of lives – was integral to the unconscious logic of life. Auto/biographical claims to reveal real lives and real persons were bogus because the logic of life necessarily escapes us. It is 'unformulateable' – a 'riddle without a Sphinx', as Phillips (1999) puts it. Freud, in a letter to Zweig in 1836 declared, 'Anyone who writes a biography is committed to lies, concealments, hypocrisy, flattery and even to hiding his own lack of understanding, for biographical truth does not exist, and if it did we could not use it' (quoted in Phillips, 1999: 85).

The late Ian Craib was explicit about his ambivalence towards the 'narrative turn' (Craib, 2000), regarding the apparent intimacy of auto/biography as spurious at best. For him, selves are always more than stories can express. Stories that claim otherwise are 'bad faith' narratives. He worried that there was a banalization going on, that we habitually sanitize and idealize life stories, leaving out uncomfortable psychic realities. On this view, we should be wary of the apparent coherence and plausibility of life stories, since they are designed as much to conceal as to reveal.

Similarly, Stephen Frosh (2002) worries that the 'turn to narrative' is in danger of reducing the self to an effect of language. He wants to explore what happens if we turn our attention to that which is internal to the psyche – the stuff of psychoanalysis – and therefore outside discourse. Both Craib and Frosh want to be able to talk about aspects of the self that necessarily evade narrative formulations. Hollway and Jefferson (2000a; 2000b) similarly problematize the narrative subject. They posit a 'defended' subject, one whose emotions and defences colour their experiences and fashion the stories they tell to make sense of the world.

In these examples, an engagement with psychoanalysis produces a deep scepticism about 'the real' in narrative accounting. For these writers, new levels and kinds of realities emerge when personal stories are interrogated by psychoanalytic language. But these writers are going further than just suggesting that there are aspects of selfhood that lie 'beyond' the text, or that selves necessarily spill out over the edges of the stories we tell about them. Rather, what is being suggested is that the storied selves we habitually present are but superficial covers for something that is deeper, more complex and much more threatening. Frosh (1999: 382), for example, sees identities as 'important protective devices against something worse'. So, far from encapsulating or articulating the self, the storied self is, on this view, something that *defends against it*. In telling one story of our life, we are simultaneously – and systematically – avoiding telling other

possible stories. Phantasy, denial, repression, displacement, projection, transferences and so on are all common – though not immediately obvious – features of life stories according to psychoanalytic thinking. Thus we might advocate reading life narratives through a psychoanalytic lens, uncovering the concealed parts of the stories – or the internal conflicts of their narrators – by ‘reading between the lines’. But, equally, we might read psychoanalysis itself as a story with a plot and an axe to grind.

The central issue for auto/biographers may be summarized thus: does psychoanalytic thinking give us unique access to hidden truths about human lives and human nature? Or is psychoanalysis just a useful language for exploring the vicissitudes of stories? Or could it be a novel language that we can use to invent new stories, or new dimensions to stories? The books in this series do not address, let alone answer, these sorts of questions. But they do provide auto/biographers with at least the possibility of raising such questions.

Psychoanalysis clearly troubles auto/biography, but can auto/biography also trouble psychoanalysis? Life stories can point, not to the logic of life – conscious or otherwise – but to the ways in which chance and discontinuities conspire to disrupt our struggles for coherence and plausibility. A life story, well-written, enables us to identify the ambivalences that chip away at our attempts at wholeness and authenticity. Psychoanalysis is a tool that helps us to probe between the cracks, and to scratch among the debris, if not of our lives, then of the stories we tell about them.

The legacy of Freud that is of use to auto/biographers is the language of psychoanalysis, a language we can use to talk about the multiple and contradictory dimensions of our lives and our culture. Love it or loathe it – and psychoanalysis does have a propensity to provoke very particular passions – it is the only language we have to talk about the ways in which both perceptions and real experiences are immediately invested with, and continually reworked through, psychic fantasies.

These books provide, to an interested but non-specialist audience, a discussion of the main ideas that comprise the body of psychoanalytic theory from Freud to date. There’s a whole series of small books, reasonably priced, each on a single topic. Some explain the central concepts of psychoanalysis – the Oedipus complex, for example, or Eros, Narcissism, Paranoia and the Superego. Others offer a psychoanalytic take on issues of broader concern – Phantasy, for example, and Sado-masochism, Affect and Emotion, and Guilt. Each book is written by a different author – all specialists in their field – and so content, scope, tone and quality, as might be expected, are highly variable. The theories deployed in the quest for explanation, the examples given by way of illustrations – including clinical and case-study materials, drama, poetry and occasionally contemporary cultural phenomena – vary according to the interests and expertise of each

author. As a series, the books amount to a reasonably comprehensive coverage of many of the main ideas that psychoanalysis has to offer.

I would like to have seen some more evident editorial input to enable the books to hold together more coherently as a series and to provide, especially for students and others new to the area, some contextualization of the individual topics within the body of that troublesome entity we call psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis comprises such a range of theoretical frameworks and analytic 'schools' and practices, I felt sure that newcomers at least would need rather more signposts than appear in each individual volume. In particular, some broader discussion of the nature of psychoanalysis – as an individual therapy, as a critical idiom, as a part of social theory, for example – would have greatly enhanced the appeal of these books to a wide range of readers. Nevertheless, many readers will find in these books things to contemplate, now or in the future. Others will encounter, possibly against their better judgement, compelling insights that change their lives or their work.

The books in this series that use a broad range of illustrations, including, but not confined to, 'clinical material', and including also ordinary vignettes of everyday situations, are the most successful. Two books in this series stand out in this regard – Priscilla Roth's on the *Superego* and Julia Segal's on *Phantasy*. The latter is a good place to start our discussion, since phantasy (spelt with a *ph* to distinguish it from its conscious counterpart, *fantasy*) is a concept that can help the reader negotiate a path through the ideas in the other books. The idea of unconscious phantasy describes how we unwittingly transform the world by mixing up our own emotional baggage with our everyday perceptions of 'reality'. To our ordinary perceptions, we all add powerfully emotive elements belonging elsewhere, so translating them into something else may leave long-term traces that annoy or distress or comfort us. Phantasies may not be 'real', but their influences and effects can be all too real. For example, at a personal level, we may have trouble getting on with our boss at work because of an underlying phantasy about authority, deriving from our relationship with a parent, that we carry around with us.

Or, at a broader level, the idea of phantasy can be useful for thinking about puzzling aspects of our culture – the surprising mass mourning for the late Princess Diana would be a case in point. Advertising routinely exploits our unconscious phantasies. Adverts manipulate the meanings associated with particular goods, and implicitly invite us to consume not only the goods themselves, but also their symbolic qualities. Ian MacRury (1997) argues that the appeal of adverts depends primarily upon our unconscious engagement with the product and the routes to identity that it offers. Ads play a significant role in the modulation of our emotional relations towards the world of symbolic goods. They address our unconscious

needs and wishes. In short, advertising plays with our narcissism, transporting us into a kind of transitional space where the ambiguities of self and product are 'held' in creative tension, and narcissistic phantasies of wholeness, omnipotence and perfection are played out.

And phantasies – increasingly global ones – operate in politics too. An immediately pressing example, as I write this, is the preoccupation of the overdeveloped world with the threat from 'terrorism' in the wake of the tragedy of 11 September. We have a set of well-developed phantasies that daily masquerade as 'reality', expressed in George W. Bush's now infamous dictum that 'you're either with us or against us'. The underlying message is that 'we' are good and 'they' are bad and, further, that 'they' are a threat, and that it is incumbent upon 'us' to stamp out the threat with all the force we can muster. In this fantasy, the world is split into two opposing camps. In this 'splitting' we unconsciously imagine that our enemy represents everything that is evil and so must be destroyed. The emotional work of the fantasy is to deny the aspects of ourselves that are bad and destructive by projecting them onto the other, the enemy. In the ongoing 'war on terror', powerful political rhetoric embodies this kind of split thinking, making the possibility of a negotiated solution that much more difficult. In this example, fantasy combines with political rhetoric on a global scale. Phantasies have real effects when we act on them unaware of the level of unreality we have defensively introduced into the situation. Psychoanalysis, as we see here, has something important to say about the workings of groups, institutions, cultures and whole societies as well as individuals. The work of groups, Isobel Menzies-Lyth (1989) on anxiety in institutions and of Mike Rustin (2001) on society and politics are good places where the reader will find more detailed discussion of these sorts of issues.

Through these brief examples of the various workings of fantasy at individual, social and cultural levels, we have some sense of what psychoanalysis can offer. In discussing fantasy, we have necessarily touched on other psychoanalytic ideas – splitting, projection, narcissism, reparation and so on, that are discussed in more detail in this series of books. Some of the books I found disappointing. A potentially very interesting contribution to understanding 'guilt' is compromised by a largely inaccessible writing style. Or perhaps I just had too many defences in play when I was reading it! The book on 'Eros', I found disjointed and difficult to follow. David Bell's text on 'paranoia' is well worth a read. He places paranoid thinking in a social as well as a developmental context, and his discussion of paranoia as a defence against an awareness of vulnerability is particularly timely.

Bob Young's essay on the Oedipus complex is a bit too theoretical for the uninitiated, and there are few examples to bring the text alive. It reads



like a lecture to a group of undergraduates who share Young's own enthusiasm for the topic. It is intelligent and informative, but it does assume quite a lot of prior knowledge. Unlike many of the other books in this series, this one does include a pronounced critical dimension, as we might expect from a writer like Bob Young, though I am aware that some will not find it quite critical enough. I did think that there was not sufficient detailed consideration of the social and cultural ordering of gendered inequalities and how these impact on the Oedipal situation. Feminists will find that their approaches to Oedipus insufficiently represented.

Priscilla Roth's discussion of the 'superego' is well written and informative. Even complete beginners will find it easily accessible. It includes many easily recognisable examples, linked with a clear explanation of psychoanalytic ideas and principles. Roth makes a very interesting point in this book, which is rather too often overlooked, especially in 'popularized' accounts of psychoanalysis. It is this: the severity of the superego seems in no way to correspond to the severity of treatment a particular individual has actually received at the hands of their parents, or otherwise. This brings us back to the work of phantasy and reminds us of the complexity of unconscious processes which often gets lost.

It is in the nature of the unconscious that it deftly slips away the moment we think we might have grasped it. Sometimes, it all but disappears from psychoanalytic writing, even though the word 'unconscious' is there in the text. Object relations theory, partly because it has most often been popularized, seems particularly prone to this kind of slippage. But perhaps there are more sinister forces at work. As well as being a set of, often divergent, theories, psychoanalysis is a therapeutic practice, and it has spawned a diverse array of therapies, each with its own internal logic. These practices necessarily position themselves in various ways in relation to broader discourses and practices of 'welfare' in contemporary British society. As such, some are more infused than others with more or less dominant ideologies – I am reminded here of what Furedi (2004) calls 'therapy culture' – about what constitutes a 'problem' requiring 'treatment' and the best ways of achieving social and political aims. The 'taming' of the unconscious in some therapies and in accounts that derive from those therapies is, in Foucauldian terms, part and parcel of a disciplinary power that functions to produce docile and complicit subjects. Of course, no one expects psychoanalytic writers – let alone therapists – to engage with this kind of critical social theory every time they open their mouths. But to shy away from the rich complexities of unconscious processes can position psychoanalysis too much as the servant of disciplinary power.

Roth negotiates these dilemmas well. She never loses sight of the unconscious in all its contradictory complexity. The superego, she

reminds us, is established as the child internalizes not its parents, but the parents as viewed through the child's phantasy world and, in particular, the child's own unconscious (and projected) aggression against them. The father and the mother are introjected by the child, not as they are, but as the child imagines them to be. This is a highly significant point.

It reminds us that people are active agents, continually involved in making our selves and our worlds as we struggle to make sense of them. It reminds us too that we are not the passive victims of others' treatment of us, nor of circumstances, but are actively engaged in constructing and reconstructing our lives, often employing the building blocks of unconscious phantasy that we did not even know we were using. Popularizations of psychoanalysis are particularly prone to oversimplifying, but Roth's discussion of the superego is a timely reminder that there is something very nasty in the woodshed, and we ignore it at our peril.

By contrast, in Estela Welldon's book on 'somasochism' the complexities of the unconscious all but disappear, and dominant ideologies, and accompanying moralities, move in to occupy centre stage. This book illustrates how a tendency to moralize can stand in the way of thinking about things that are inherently difficult to think about. This book makes simplistic connections between a person's (often assumed) past 'abuse' and their present enjoyment (seen as 'acting out') of S & M. Child murder (such as carried out by the Wests and by Brady and Hindley, and Beverly Allitt) as well as 'child abuse' are brought into the same general 'cycle of violence' framework. Moreover, the apparent failure of people who enjoy S & M to recognize the problem and to acknowledge the formative influence of the past is explained away as defensiveness and denial: 'One could assume, but of course, without any firm evidence, that their strong denial was the only tolerable defence mechanism available to them because of very early and severe disturbances' (p. 8). This is the kind of analytic arrogance that puts many people off psychoanalysis. More worrying, though, are the social, moral and even legal implications of this kind of writing. It lends itself to calls for more interventions of the 'therapeutic state' – in this case, more surveillance and assessment, utilizing profiling of female abusers and concepts of female perversion – to be brought into play to address the unrecognized problem of abusive mothers – 'mothers as creators of somasochism' (p. 57) – and parents whose relationships demonstrate 'malignant bonding' (p. 53).

The concept of *narcissism* is of great contemporary relevance (see, for example, Lasch, 1979) and is explored by Jeremy Holmes. He sets out a number of theories of narcissism, but the text is best when he discusses his own 'attachment theory' perspective. Holmes maps 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' narcissism onto different attachment strategies, and emphasizes the continuities between a 'secure base' outside the self (in the

infant's early relationships) and that inside the self. The relationship with a secure base is necessarily narcissistic (healthily so), and is a precondition for seeing the 'other' as separate and for establishing functional relationships. By contrast, insecure attachments lead to attempts to use the self as a secure base surrogate, and to a reliance on coercion and power to maintain relationships. Attachment theory, however, is not everyone's cup of tea, and again some readers will be frustrated by the foregrounding of relational issues at the expense of unconscious processes.

Graham Music's *Affect and emotion* is a good general introduction to the inner world of feelings, with lots of accessible examples. But again there is a tendency to gloss over the real complexities and deep contradictions that are features of the emotional lives of all humans. The series editor, Ivan Ward, writes about *castration* in an intelligent and informative way. Of particular interest to auto/biographers are his sections on creativity and sublimation, which he discusses with reference to contemporary examples, such as the comedy of John Cleese, the art of Damien Hirst, and the protest activities of the Greenham women. He shows how the castration complex is implicated in both the horrors and the highest ideals of humanity.

It is not possible to make an overall assessment of the usefulness of this series of books in bringing psychoanalytic ideas to the popular imagination precisely because they are so variable in content and quality. There is a real danger in some that they deal rather too much in knowing and not enough in the kind of questioning that encourages real understanding. Some implicitly borrow from the 'medical model' in warranting the supreme authority of, and giving the last word to, the author/therapist by invoking 'clinical material' that masks the extent to which ideas and arguments are suffused by dominant ideologies. Ideally, books like these would facilitate a better understanding of self, others, lives and worlds and so enhance readers' relationships and enrich their lives. But, set against introductory texts that have been tried and tested with my students – including, for example, Ian Craib's *Psychoanalysis: a critical introduction* (Craib, 2001), Anthony Elliott's *Psychoanalytic theory: an introduction* (Elliott, 1994), Stephen Frosh's *For and against psychoanalysis* (Frosh, 1997) and Mike Rustin's *The good society and the inner world* (Rustin, 1991), this series of books is a bit of a poor relation.

For me, and I suspect for many other auto/biographers, the great value of psychoanalysis lies, not in enabling us to reveal the 'real' selves of our subjects, but as a tool to create new spaces for thinking about both selves and stories. Ian Craib (2000) makes a very useful distinction between psychoanalysis as a means of 'understanding', which it can be, and as a form of 'explanation', which it cannot. For me, psychoanalysis provides a language for exploring the creative and transformative potentials of

auto/biography. Life writing becomes a kind of Winnicottian ‘transitional space’, where the possibilities for creative writing and reading are limited only by our willingness to let the imagination run. In that space, we can embrace new kinds of truths that do not depend on factually accurate accounts, but are important truths nevertheless. If the books in this series encourage us to open up those kinds of spaces, in our lives and in our work, they will have done their job.

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