

D. W. Winnicott and the Finding of Literature

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In this chapter Elizabeth Sarah Coles reads Winnicott's critique of the synthetic force of psychoanalytic interpretation alongside what she argues is a powerful alternate discourse on aesthetic relationship in his best-known writings on creative and cultural experience. Testing the limits of two terms he puts to enigmatic use – 'finding' and 'creating' – the chapter argues that Winnicott's vindication of resistant, incomprehensible and dissatisfying objects in both early infant and adult cultural life, offers critical practice in the humanities – and critical readings of literature in particular – a curious and unexpected ally in its recent search for alternative approaches and forms of critical writing.

In an interview in 2003, the poet Jorie Graham posed the following question: 'Will a communal action—via a writer's and a reader's meeting on the page—create a tenable "we"?'¹ Graham was reflecting on where meaning happens in her poems and to whom exactly it belongs: whether what she calls a reader's 'instinct' is what sets the limits of description, or whether it is instinct that is bound by a 'communal action' of literature, belonging to neither reader nor writer but placing intangible demands on both. Graham's question echoes several lines of inquiry in the recent history of literary studies that seek to recast the bonds between form and social life.² Yet it is at the intersection of literary and psychoanalytic theory that we come closest to her immediate concerns: where to ask about the 'we' of reading and writing is to ask about the emotions, fantasies and instincts summoned or suspended on the printed page; and where thinking about the creation of 'we' from 'I' (and 'I' from 'we') might compel us to ask another question, with which Graham ends her remarks: 'Can that "we" combat our capacity for destruction and self-destruction?'³

¹ Graham (2003).

² See James (2015) on 'the social lives of form', a review of three recent studies addressing the complex and contingent relations between literary, social, and political forms. Among the works reviewed by James is Derek Attridge's *The Work of Literature* (Attridge, 2015), which argues that any examination of literature's social and political efficacies must engage with the 'affective and somatic as well as [...] intellectual' experience of texts, whose meaning is bound to the bodily 'event' of their reading (p. 7).

³ For example, Blasing (2007) has written on the 'public, emotional power of language' as the guarantor of the private lyric 'I'. In Blasing's psychoanalytically oriented account, 'an individuated speaker is heard in a language that foregrounds the materiality of the linguistic code and resists an individual will' (p. 28): the lyric 'I' is a creation of the linguistic 'we'.

Psychoanalysis has long understood that with the beginning of a ‘we’ comes the beginning of thought.⁴ For the British psychoanalyst and paediatrician, Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971), the bond between ‘we’ and ‘I’ at the deepest keel of cognition is one of the *raison d’être* of psychoanalysis, both as a communal action and a mode of conversation. Throughout his working life, however, Winnicott would return to the problem of just how communal, how equitable, this action can ever really be – or what kind of conversation really goes on between an interpreting analyst and a patient, between interpretation and its objects. It is a problem that runs on a parallel current to Winnicott’s ideas on how conversation with the world – how a shared world, we could say – first becomes possible in the life of the infant; how others come to exist for us beyond what Martin Heidegger, in his late critique of psychoanalysis, called the ‘container mind’ (Heidegger, 2001, p. 90; p. 227–228). What joins Winnicott’s writings on the ‘nursing couple’ with his vision of the analytic pair is his concern for how a ‘we’ ever becomes real in the first place – and the sometimes radical consequences when it doesn’t.

This chapter returns to questions that have long shaped Winnicott’s legacy in the literary humanities, the undisputed centrepiece of which is his ‘transitional object’ and the repertoire of ‘transitional phenomena’ through which the human baby begins to comprehend difference.⁵ Beyond infancy and throughout adulthood, the ontological and psychic distinction between ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ is a distinction whose precariousness, whose gradations and whose consequences cross from aesthetic and religious experience to the shakier contingencies of social and political life: how we use and talk about the objects of human culture, how we are able (and unable) to agree on their meaningfulness, are questions in Winnicott that understand the tenability of culture in terms of the tenability of relationship. Imagining the kind of object *literature* might be, reflecting on contemporary and future conversations between literature and its interpretation, this chapter brings Winnicott’s notions of what he calls ‘object-relating’ into dialogue with his critique of the relationships of interpretation, in which he consistently emphasises relationships of language. What these elements share, and where the one lends itself to a reading of the other, is a tantalising and troubling distinction that Winnicott himself

⁴ See Sigmund Freud’s essay ‘Negation’ (1925) in Freud (1961), p. 253, and Wilfred Bion’s essay ‘Theory of thinking’ (1961) in Bion (1967) for discussions of how hunger and other examples of lack set in motion the capacity for abstract thought.

⁵ The establishment of this reading of Winnicott comes in the wake of Adrian Stokes’ influential account of post-Kleinian visual aesthetics, in which the artwork receives and contains projected impulses (see Harris Williams, 2014). Winnicott’s terms appear in his landmark essay ‘Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena’ (Winnicott, 1971, pp. 1-25).

never clearly or finally theorises, and which offers a powerful set of terms for rethinking the interpretive conversations of literary criticism. The terms Winnicott uses, which together form the central axis of this chapter, are the object lesson of ‘finding’ and its would-be counter-experience, the psychic action he calls ‘creating’.

Winnicott’s roughly drawn account of ‘finding’ and ‘creating’ – experiences that, for the child as much as for the psychoanalyst, occupy the tenuous ground between fantasy and action – offers an aesthetics that is far less straightforward than Winnicott’s more explicit remarks on culture and the work of art would seem to suggest. A reappraisal of Winnicott’s aesthetics in light of his thinking on interpretation and interpretive language is now particularly pressing: the concerns converging in recent years around the written discourses of literary criticism, the established vogue for so-called ‘critique’, and the vagaries of what Paul Ricoeur famously called the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, have begun to make a problem of the discipline’s own interpretive conversations (Ricoeur, 1970). From its deterministic commitment to exposure and narrow affective range, to the seductive appeal of the broad-stroked, forceful intelligibility Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls ‘strong theory’, the problem of ‘critique’ is something the literary humanities has only recently begun to get to grips with (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 133). Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, has long been conversant with its own unease regarding interpretation, beginning in the dialogues of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi, placed securely on the agenda in the Controversial Discussions of the 1940s, and theorised most forcefully in the late work of Jean Laplanche (Ferenczi, 1988; Laplanche, 1996, 1999). While I will not be suggesting that the current pull against critique is a direct legacy of psychoanalysis, I want to propose that Winnicott’s accounts of interpretive and early object-relating can, in unexpected ways, help to clarify what kind of object literature might be for those of us whose task is to describe it; what kind of ‘we’ might be at stake in its reading; what it is in literary works that certain forms of critical reading appear to betray, denature or deny, and what that might say about the contradictory lures and responsibilities of reading literature.

Critique and creative imagination

In her 2003 volume, *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick makes a case for the overriding ‘feeling’ of contemporary literary criticism, going one step further than Ricoeur’s ‘suspicion’ by speaking in terms of ‘paranoia’. The signature affect of criticism in the wake of deconstruction, ‘paranoid reading’ has, Sedgwick says, ‘limited the gene pool of literary-critical perspectives and skills’

(Sedgwick, 2003, p. 144). Yet its distaste for surprise, its surprising disavowal of curiosity, means paranoid reading makes it ‘less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower or teller’ (Ibid., p. 124). What is at stake, Sedgwick suggests, is *possibility* – both vis-à-vis the object of reading and, by extension, in the reader’s own self-relation. Invoking possibility again, she notes that the hermeneutics of suspicion is ‘widely misunderstood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities’: suspicion turns possibility into an action that closes down possibilities in its wake (Ibid., p. 125). Sedgwick’s language also evokes Ricoeur, who asked of the hermeneutics of psychoanalysis: ‘does not this discipline of the real, this ascesis of the necessary, lack the grace of imagination, the upsurge of the possible?’ (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 36). Suspicion can unleash deterministic and graceless truths. Finding wherever it seeks, it culls where most it could cultivate.

In the wake of Sedgwick’s essay, several critics have linked the culling of possibility to specific argumentative qualities that turn a key legacy of deconstruction, the practice of ‘critique’, into a heavy-handed and formulaic operation. Isobel Armstrong homes in on the excision of textual ambiguity, and with it ambiguous emotional states, from the pedagogies and practices of criticism (Armstrong, 2000). Citing a range of rebarbative examples, Lisa Ruddick writes of the determined contemporary vogue for ‘deadness or meanness’, the normative coldness and cruelty of a critical discourse that leaves its own workings unexamined (‘In the name of critique, anything except critique can be invaded or denatured’ (Ruddick, 2015, p. 71)). In her influential 2015 work, *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski argues that ‘suspicious’ styles of reading ‘can be stultifying, pushing thought down predetermined paths and closing our minds to the play of detail, nuance, quirkiness, contradiction, happenstance’. By these means, Felski says, the critic ‘conjures up ever more paralysing scenarios of coercion and control’ (Felski, 2015, p. 34). Sedgwick’s ‘strong theory’ is now more than ever being construed as a theory of force; its vehement interest in exposing the object – doing so ‘strongly’, convincingly – renders such writing indifferent to the object.⁶ It is also, by the same token, a theory of *seduction*

⁶ See Marielle Macé’s account of the emotional economy of reading, what she calls a ‘pas de deux’ in which empathy, embodied experience and even estrangement are only falsely separable from hermeneutics (Macé, 2011, p. 190).

approximating Ferenczi's sense of the term: a discourse, a tongue, seducing and seduced by its own strength of argument.⁷

Yet if calls for a 'post-critical' writing go largely unheeded, it is perhaps because the force of argument is something that continues to satisfy – authors arguably more than readers – and that both force and satisfaction now rank among the highest points of value in critical discourse.⁸ While what is and is not of value for literary criticism is a question answerable only by way of literature, the arguments emerging against critique can be understood to express a psychoanalytic problem, a problem to which Winnicott's thinking in particular offers a vivid set of theorisations and imaginative possibilities. Since Freud first theorised the transference, psychoanalysis has been alert to the allure of forceful and compelling interpretive stories. In his clinical diary, Ferenczi accuses Freud of 'artificially provok[ing]' the very transference effect he interprets, by dint of a hermeneutic authority Ferenczi argues should be 'mutual' (Ferenczi, 1988, p. 93). The issue here is not the transference – which we might say is, de facto, both artificial and a provocation – but the question of an unchecked or at least un-confessed hermeneutic authority; as opposed to a subjective centre or 'I' that, in the words of Augustine's famous confession, glaringly psychoanalytic *avant la lettre*, has 'become a problem to [itself]' (Augustine, 1961, p. 239).⁹ At the heart of Ferenczi's insistence on openly discussing the transference and countertransference is a belief that the psychoanalytic cure is only a solution – only really cures – if and because it also remains a problem; interpretation can only do its work, he seems to suggest, if the interpretation's authority is in doubt from the start.¹⁰

Winnicott's attitude to interpretation could not have been clearer. In an essay on 'Interpretation and Psychoanalysis' (1968) he tells us, citing the same impasse as Ferenczi, that 'there are analysts who in their interpretative role assume a position which is almost unassailable so that if the patient attempts to make a correction the analyst tends rather to think in terms of the patient's resistance than in terms of the possibility that the communication has been wrongly or inadequately received' (Winnicott, 1989, p. 208). Winnicott's concern is for the preservation

⁷ See Coles (2014), pp. 65–71.

⁸ E.g. Hoy (2004) and Ulmer (2002), pp. 83–110. See also Anker and Felski (2017).

⁹ This of course anticipates the project of deconstruction with regard to interpretation, a project that shares its own non self-centred subject with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Jacques Derrida's 'circumfession', in the autobiography co-written with Geoffrey Bennington, plays on the original self-problematising spirit of Augustine's *Confessions* (Bennington and Derrida, 1993).

¹⁰ There is a long tradition of critiquing interpretation in psychoanalysis, including but not limited to: E. Balint (1968), M. Balint (1968), Khan (1974), Lomas (1987), Bollas (1989), pp. 77–116; Bollas (2007).

not just of possibility but of a driven interpretive precariousness, reflected in his wariness about cultivating what he calls elsewhere ‘an intermediate area in which play can take place, and then inject[ing] into this area or inflat[ing] it with interpretations which in effect are from [his] own *creative imagination*’, a wariness that led him to ‘retain some outside quality by not being quite on the mark or even by being wrong’ (Winnicott, 1971, p. 102; Winnicott, 1965, p. 167). He also observes that ‘by the language we use [with a patient] we show our natural interest in [the] matter’, which includes the tonal and lexical engagement, perhaps even the mirroring, of one ‘language’ in another (Winnicott, 1971, p. 104). The language of analysis has a precarious relationship to possibility, including the possibility of relationship itself. This precariousness is linked to the faculty he calls ‘*creative imagination*’, an index in Winnicott both of relationship and – as above – its jeopardy, hence the unilateral and unchecked force implicit in ‘injecting’. At stake in interpretation, then, is the preservation of a ‘we’, an essential element of which is the linguistic and psychic non-reducibility of one to the interpretations of the other; the possibility of resistance that is not already pre-empted, as Jacques Derrida warned, by the interpretation of resistance (Derrida, 1998).

Winnicott’s written style has been said to sustain a similar position. Anne Clancier and Jeanine Kalmanovitch suggest that, in keeping with his commitments in the consulting room, ‘[t]hanks to his creative style, Winnicott provided only part of the organisation of his ideas: the rest he left to the reader to create’ (Clancier and Kalmanovitch, 1987, p. 66). We begin to get a sense of the double potentiality of ‘creating’ and the ‘creative’: something that can be liberating, vital and above all relational, and a form of aggression that shares traits (self-satisfaction, closure to possibility, non-relation) with the vagaries of suspicion. In the context of his developmental theories, Winnicott’s notion of creating is bonded at the deepest level to the experience he calls ‘aliveness’ in our relationships with the world; yet the experience of creating must eventually touch its own limits, must encounter some resistance, if the reality and aliveness of others is to get a look-in. We might say that some element or experience keeps ‘creative imagination’ from collapsing into fantasy, a fantasy incapable of perceiving its own edges or, perhaps just momentarily, ‘becoming a problem’ to itself.¹¹ In what is an undeniably complex theoretical arrangement in Winnicott – one which does leave much ‘creating’ to the reader – the condition

¹¹ Discussing what he also calls ‘creative imagination’, the philosopher and theologian Henri Corbin offers a similar distinction, placing fantasy (‘an exercise of thought without foundation in nature’) on the side of ‘madness’ (Corbin, 1969, p. 179).

of possibility for ‘creative living’ is the same as what ultimately sets limits on it: the complementary experience Winnicott calls ‘*finding*’.

Found objects

In ‘The Location of Cultural Experience’ (1967), Winnicott describes ‘found’ objects in the following terms:

Yet for the baby (if the mother can supply the right conditions) every detail of the baby’s life is an example of creative living. Every object is a ‘found’ object. Given the chance, the baby begins to live creatively, and to use actual objects to be creative into and with.

(Winnicott, 1971, p. 101)

Recalling the *objet trouvé* of twentieth-century modernism, the ‘found’ object lends itself to creative appropriation as though lying in wait for it (in Winnicott’s terms, ‘lying around *waiting* to be found’, Winnicott (1965, p. 181)). What this means is that the object must be freely available, permissive in its receipt of associations and participating in shared reality only to the extent that anyone and everyone can appropriate it too (see Bollas, 1987). Interpretation, we saw, can strive to be similarly accommodating: ‘Psychotherapy’, Winnicott says, ‘is not making clever and apt interpretations; by and large it is a long-term giving the patient back what the patient brings’ – a response *in kind*, we could say (Winnicott, 1971, p. 117). The baby whose mother’s face mirrors his internal states enjoys a similar sensation of a world ‘in rapport’ with his projections (ibid., p. 113). And yet in his discussion of the mirror-role of the mother, Winnicott introduces a caveat to the child’s ‘creation’ myth, the belief that he made, and commands, the world: creative capacity is about ‘a significant exchange with the world, a two-way process in which self-enrichment alternates with the discovery of meaning in the world of seen things’ (ibid.). Replace ‘discovery’ with ‘finding’ here and we have the beginnings of the paradox of finding and creating in Winnicott: that the ‘finding’ of meaning includes the recalibration and refusal (as well as the receipt) of projections, and that, provided the infant first experiences ‘creating’ her world, this recalibration and refusal is as essential to a tenable ‘we’ as the primary fantasy of creation. After the infant has ‘created’ the world, the lesson of finding is a lesson in the reality of others.

One of the first times Winnicott ventures the finding/creating distinction is in his essay ‘On Communicating and Not Communicating’ (1963).

In health the infant creates what is in fact lying around waiting to be found. But in health *the object is created, not found*. [...] A good object is no good to the infant unless created by the infant. Shall I say, created out of need? Yet the object must be found in order to be created. This has to be accepted as a paradox, and not solved by a restatement that, by its cleverness, seems to eliminate the paradox.

(Winnicott, 1965, p. 181)

At this point, Winnicott's terms appear to collapse in on one another in a paradox he tells us not to do anything with: the object must be created by the infant, yet the object must be found in order to be created; the fantasy of creation is made possible by – and experienced as simultaneous with – the reality of finding something already created, an unconscious Freudian *fort/da* game in which the reel is, let's say, both 'gone' and 'there!' at once. Winnicott's knotty little paradox bears a striking correspondence to the etymology of 'finding': the verb *invenire* is the root of 'to find' as well as 'to invent'; the twin experiences co-depend, as at the level of fantasy, to the point of collapse.¹² Yet where 'found' objects are a pretext for their creation by the infant, they are also a gentle rebuttal of his private 'creation' myth: created, *not* found, or found to be *not created* by the infant. A 'found' object can signify subjective availability but it can also belong to the category of phenomena that pertain to 'shared reality', a reality established as such by its refusal and recalibration of creative projections – or as Winnicott says elsewhere, by 'get[ting] in the way' (crucially, the infant's own experience of '*not being found*', his own power of refusal, is of equal, if not greater, importance in establishing his stake in 'shared reality', see Winnicott (1965, p. 211)). The experience of availability (or 'object-relating', as Winnicott calls it) 'can be described in terms of the subject as an isolate'. What marks the shift to what he calls 'object *use*' is the addition of 'features that involve the nature and behaviour of the object,' which 'must necessarily be real in the sense of being a part of shared reality, not a bundle of projections [...] but as a thing in itself', of which Winnicott emphasises 'the object's independent existence, its property of having been there all the time' (Winnicott, 1971, p. 88).

It is this quality of realness as established by 'finding' – by something 'in the way', real 'in the sense of being a part of shared reality' – that comes to bear on the question of literary interpretation: its conversation with the work of literature, the operations of force and fantasy

¹² Thanks are due to Amador Vega for bringing this shared etymology to my attention.

in that conversation, and, as Winnicott described in the case of his patients, its affective consequences for readers and interlocutors in whose ‘we’ the work of language participates. As a hermeneutic object, language sets some basic terms of its own. A ‘found’ object par excellence, language is happened-upon in a shared, public world, belonging to the other in ways that recall and repeat its early acquisition by the child; this re-discovery is an inexhaustible pretext for invention that, at the same time, continually undermines the unconscious fantasy of creation. Like Winnicott’s transitional object, language allows both infant and adult to ‘weave other-than-me objects into the personal pattern’ (Winnicott, 1971, p. 3). In Julia Kristeva’s memorable tableau, language is gifted to the child by others whose own autonomy it comes to symbolise as well as endlessly re-enact: the child’s belief in language is a leap of faith that matches and meets – while also inevitably falling short of – his belief in the existence of others (Kristeva, 2009).¹³ Repeating this original misrecognition and the faith it gives rise to, the gift of language for the linguistic individual is defined, at least in part, by its irreducibility to both the giver and receiver of the gift: by its forms of ‘autonomy and life’, by its shifting and widening public sphere, by its ‘property of having been there all the time’. Its universalising capacity to pertain, to *belong*, both permits creativity and prohibits totalising ‘creation’.

If language is always already ‘found’, then what does it matter if interpretive discourses have become more interested in ‘creating’ the work of literature than in finding and re-finding its operations; more taken by what confirms their suspicions than by what, in diffuse or precise forms, continues to elude them? One of the vocations of literature – and contemporary literature in particular, perhaps – has been to showcase and magnify the paradoxes and double binds of language, at the heart of which is the dilemma of autonomy and belonging, finding and creating. Considering the case of literature and what the ‘finding’ of language might mean for interpretation and criticism, I return now to Winnicott and to the complex emotional drama underpinning the finding of objects beyond our control.

Love, destruction and the case of literature

In ‘The Use of an Object’ (1969) Winnicott outlines how, just as the neonate depends on his mother’s responsiveness in order to feel real, so that real or ‘true self’ (as Winnicott calls it)

¹³ Shoshana Felman, perhaps in tension with Winnicott, has called interpretation a ‘gift of language’ (Felman, 1987, p. 119).

becomes a social self among equally real others through the mother's survival of his aggression – his response, that is, to the small sparks of dissent, the everyday non-compliances, that introduce him to a non-creatable other. It is a movement, Adam Phillips has said, 'from seeing himself through the other, to seeing the other' (Phillips, 1988, p. 130). Its denouement arrives as follows:

after "subject relates to object" comes "subject destroys object" (as it becomes external); and then there may come "object survives destruction by the subject." But there may or may not be survival. A new feature thus arrives in the theory of object-relating. The subject says to the object: [...] "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*." Here fantasy begins for the individual. The subject can now *use* the object that has survived.

(Winnicott, 1971, p. 90)

Perhaps the most important lesson in Winnicott's vignette of object love is that it is not only the object's reality that is at stake in its survival (or not) of unconscious fantasy. What is also at stake is its 'value for me' – 'You have value for me *because* of your survival of my destruction of you'. The experience is marked by the same collapsed causality we saw in 'finding' and 'creating' objects: 'destroyed because real, becoming real because destroyed (being destructible and expendable)'. The price of this reality must be paid, Winnicott says, 'in acceptance of the ongoing destruction in (unconscious) *fantasy*' (Ibid.).

When we say a work of literature has 'value for me', might we think about literary value as bound up in a similar dilemma? What might it mean for an act of language (in or as literature) to 'survive' us? If love of an object includes – and, for psychoanalysis, always involves – a destructive wish, then, Winnicott's logic goes, that destructiveness can only be felt because the object is capable of surviving it. At the kernel of this logic is an admission that loving is only possible if and because its object survives. The price of loving literature might, finally, be the paranoid and punitive impulses of critique, expressions of the darker hues of human psychic life; yet the lesson of Winnicott's genealogy of human 'value' is that the highest point of such value, and the very genesis of object love, is the experience of the object's excess, resistance and survival of our uses, the refusal of an unconscious wish to create it in our image.

Winnicott's stated views on art, it should be noted, pull strongly against these ideas. In his brief formulations on the artwork, Winnicott hands it over wholesale to the realm of subjectivity and to an untroubled fantasy of creation: 'I enjoy it because I say I created it [...] This is mad, but in our cultural life we accept the madness' (Winnicott, 1989, p. 57–58). He adds the following justifications: 'the fact is that an external object has no being for you or me except in so far as you or I hallucinate it' and 'it is only what you create that has meaning for you' (ibid., p. 54; Winnicott, 1987, p. 95). In the realm of aesthetics, we might be led to believe, we have no use for – perhaps even no possibility of – the object lesson of finding; art is only meaningful insofar as it placates what Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit call 'appreciatively appropriating subjects' (Bersani and Dutoit, 1993, p. 5).

On the subject of poetry, however, Winnicott seems to have other ideas. Referring to a patient's 'great interest in poetry', Winnicott notes that 'fantasying was about a certain subject and it was a dead end. *It had no poetic value*' (the italics are Winnicott's, 1971, p. 35). In his numerous remarks on poetry and poems, Winnicott evokes a phenomenon defined by its evasion of capture and categorisation, a cultivated excess of its own expressed form; he links these qualities to the sovereign singularity of the patient's language, which the language of interpretation should attempt to preserve (Coles, 2014). Yet returning to Winnicott's remarks on 'survival' (which implicitly equate what has not been created by the infant with what he is unable to 'destroy'), there are other elements to be considered vis-à-vis poetics. Poetry in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has come to rely increasingly on haphazard operations and non-material elements that challenge the kind of object literature can be understood to be. Contemporary poets such as Anne Carson, Susan Howe, Tom Raworth and Mary Ruefle, among others, play with the contradictory allegiances of sound and text, multiple drafts and versions, errata, erasure and randomisation (the generation of 'found' lineation using a random integer generator, a twenty-first-century incarnation of 'potential literature').¹⁴ The normalisation of copying, citation and other forms of appropriation alongside more traditional expressions of literary creativity, while a challenge to established notions of authorship, deliberately multiplies the experience of 'finding': the singular, single-authored work quickly announces itself (or allows itself to be discovered) as anything but that, amalgamating source

¹⁴ See e.g. Carson (2013) and 'By chance the Cycladic people' in Carson (2016) for two examples of Carson's use of randomisation software (e.g. <https://www.random.org/integers/> accessed 18.09.2017) to produce accidental lineation and formatting. For examples of the deliberate use of errata and erasure in contemporary poetry, see Howe (1990), Raworth (1996), and Ruefle (2006). See also Levin Becker (2012) for a ludic account of 'literature in the conditional mood' in the wake of the Oulipo group.

texts, readings and revisions in the same literary object.¹⁵ In the case of live and recorded readings, performance introduces other unpredictable elements to verse, prose and other literary installations relying on the contingencies of physical and vocal presence. Performance aesthetics pose a unique challenge to the experience of literature as an object to be ‘hallucinated’ by bringing speakers’ real time into the equation, or by including multiple media and haphazard elements that diffuse, contradict or sabotage the narrative possibilities of vocal action on-stage.¹⁶

Literature has always been exposed to agencies beyond the provisional, fantasised ‘we’ of author and reader, from the accidents and presences of voice and staging, to the material and political circumstances of its production. The keenness of some contemporary literature to make a feature out of these contingencies only ratchets up the challenge for readers and makes the hermeneutics of suspicion look sorely at a loss. Yet such elements also remind us that the emotions of frustration, destruction, bewilderment and love are not only high-points of literary value and attachment. They can also be the confessional centre – rather than the unacknowledged centre of gravity – of *criticism*: interpretation that makes a problem out of its own desire, that confesses and enjoys where the object strays from, refuses or ‘gets in the way’ of its designs.

Returning finally to language, and in contrast to his remarks on the work of art, Winnicott seems to find the experience of being played and controlled by words both compelling and tantalising. Describing the workings of his own theoretical vocabulary, he makes the following mercurial observation, ascribing to language a capacity for realness that situates it deep in the ‘found’ world:

we can use words as we like, especially artificial words like counter-transference. A word like “self” naturally knows more than we do; it uses us and can command us.

(Winnicott, 1965, p. 158)

Some words or some quality of words, he hints, cannot be ‘created’. Frustrating our attempts to command them, surviving our desired destruction, appropriation or suppression of their

¹⁵ For discussions of literary appropriation, see Goldsmith (Goldsmith, 2011, pp. 109–124) and Perloff (2012).

¹⁶ For example: performances of Anne Carson’s ‘Possessive used as drink (me): a lecture on pronouns in the form of 15 sonnets’ (2006), excerpts from which are published in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 32, No. 19, 7 October 2010, and No. 21, 4 November, 2010, and can be viewed at: <http://playgallery.org/video/recipe/> (accessed 20.09.2017).

autonomy, they occupy the open field of ‘shared reality’. The point is not that words or even particular formations of words agree or disagree, so to speak, with our uses of them. The point is the value we place on their ‘found’ forms of life, on our individual and cultural attachments to where they belong, by turns frustratingly and thrillingly, to others.

In the interview quoted at the start of this chapter, Jorie Graham has more to say on the relationships of reading, saying of poems specifically that they ‘don’t want to make the reader “agree”. They don’t want to move through the head in that way. They want to go from body to body’ (Graham, 2003). Such a movement includes any number of bodies, voices and timbres, through public ‘madness’ and private dissent, through words that have ‘been there’ – and that continue to be sounded – ‘all the time’.¹⁷ Love need not exclude such discord any more than loving literature depends on the production of agreement. Perhaps it lies in finding literature, losing it, and finding it again elsewhere.

For Marina Voikhanskaya

¹⁷ For a nuanced consideration of the public and social residues of the lyric ‘I,’ see **Blasing (2007)**.

Elizabeth Sarah Coles, ‘D. W. Winnicott and the Finding of Literature’, *Wild Analysis: From the Couch to Cultural and Political Life*, eds. Shaul Bar-Haim, Elizabeth Sarah Coles, and Helen Tyson, *Beyond the Couch Series* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 3-15.

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