

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
About the author	xv
Preface	xvii
1. A polemical introduction	1
2. The time travelers	21
3. Psychoanalysis' philosophical and historical context	49
4. The evolution of psychoanalytic theory	77
5. Creating the transformational frame	111
6. The <i>Lover</i>	135

7. The <i>Exorcist</i>	159
8. The <i>Critic</i>	181
9. Concluding unscientific postscript	213
Index	233

Acknowledgments

Within a few years of my first clinical psychology internship in 1979, watching senior psychoanalytic scholars struggle to define psychoanalysis troubled me. Professors and supervisors alike wrestled with categorizing the subject they taught—an unbearable irony. After obtaining extensive education and experience myself, and masochistically earning the status of Training and Supervising Psychoanalyst (recognized by the American and International Psychoanalytic Associations), I took to tackling the problem myself. The metaphors of lover, exorcist, and critic formed the first few images of a new unique organizational system. Explaining the meaning of these analogies in this book—more than ten years in the making—represents a major step toward explaining, in understandable terms, precisely how *depth psychotherapy* works.

As noted in greater detail in the Preface to *Lover, Exorcist, Critic: Understanding Depth Psychotherapy* (LEC), the phrase *depth psychotherapy* covers a wide range of psychoanalytic psychotherapies. These include formal psychoanalysis itself—defined as patients lying prone on a couch for psychoanalytic sessions held minimally four times per week. Even in the early days of my career, these designations struck me as absurd. Why constrict a two-person, interpersonal transformational

experience by requiring a specific number of sessions? And why insist upon the couch? Sigmund Freud, who invented psychoanalysis as the nineteenth century transitioned into the twentieth, is responsible for these traditions. He used the couch, and he required patients to consult him six sessions per week. Interestingly, Freud used the term *Monday crust* to describe resistances encountered in patients who, because he took that one day off, were more defensive. The 48-hour break partially sealed up, and therefore limited his access to, patients' unconscious wounds. Every single aspect of the world, from physics to neuropsychology, from technology to globalization, has exponentially evolved since then. We now live in a technology-contaminated, hyper-capitalist, and de-humanized 21st century. Contemporary psychoanalytic approaches, providing a rare and crucial service by privileging individual human subjectivity, need not comport to standards established while Queen Victoria still reigned.

As such, depth psychotherapy cannot and should not be arbitrarily associated with session frequency or use of the couch. Responsibility for these decisions belongs, instead, to each unique psychoanalyst–patient dyad. In the ensuing pages, I expand upon my definition of depth psychotherapy, suggesting it contains three universal, basic components: *framing*, *presence*, and *engagement*. I also introduce four foundational phenomena—the unconscious and its manifestations in the transference, repetition compulsion, and dreams (as well as other signifiers of the unconscious mind). As I explain in great detail, these unite even widely divergent psychoanalytic approaches and need not require archaic practices, like patients lying prone on a couch, to be effective.

I owe thanks to many individuals, including some who offered ideas in the earliest days of my working on this project. David Impastato, Nora Smith, Dana Amarisa, and Natalie Abeles offered editorial and conceptual advice from the get-go. Enrico Gnaulati, another scholarly friend and colleague, has four published books; we meet up often to have fun, discuss ideas, and provide needed encouragement for our writing projects. Revealing the true meaning of oedipal conflicts, some of my motivation resulted from competitive urges triggered by Enrico's publishing success. David Impastato and I enjoy a rare male friendship lasting well over forty years. During a one-year period, our friendship almost ended when he offered to edit a few chapters without compensation.

The tension reached nearly fisticuff heights when I (foolishly) disregarded many of his suggestions. My other “best friend,” David Wolff, also offered much-needed emotional support and helpful ideas. When and if I fall into dementia, I shall appreciate having two close friends sharing the same name. Easy to remember.

Since the editing misadventure with David Impastato, and for many years now, Andrea Rosas Howe has provided invaluable editing and copyreading assistance to me. Although not in the field, Andrea understands the meaning of the lover, the exorcist, and the critic more than many psychoanalytic professionals. Her editorial services included submitting the book proposal to publishing houses, offering ideas for cover art, managing my weekly newsletter (titled “Journeys to the Unconscious Mind”), and more. She not only reviewed the *LEC* manuscript with an eye on grammar, structure, and continuity, but she also made stylistic suggestions like moving paragraphs or sections to improve the reader experience. Her husband, Josh Howe, deserves a shout-out as well. He manages my website and all things digital and meta-universal.

I owe a debt of thanks to other professionals involved in the publication of this work. Special thanks to Kate Pearce of Phoenix Publishing, who triggered near-euphoria in me when her July 25, 2022, email pronounced:

The editorial board unanimously agrees your book fits perfectly into the Phoenix list and you bring a fresh understanding to depth psychotherapy that will appeal widely. The book is well-written, engaging, and the use of the three case studies interwoven throughout the book alongside theory works brilliantly.

I may print these sentences, frame them, and hang them on a wall next to my lonely writing desk. Her acknowledgment of the metaphors I propose for depth psychotherapy means the world to me; the compliment about writing quality didn’t hurt. Along similar lines, I offer thanks to Mark Kerr of Rowman and Littlefield and Alexis O’Brien of Taylor & Francis, who passed on *LEC*. I appreciate their care in reviewing the work and suggesting other publishing houses. Regarding other professionals, I use my intellectual property attorney, Jim Duda, Esq., of Bulkley, Richardson and Gelinas, LLP in Springfield, Massachusetts,

to impress colleagues. You can imagine the line, right? “I’ll have to run this by my attorney, etc.”

Truth be told, Jim and I have been close friends since we were roommates before the end of the last century. In a story I fit into a novel-in-process titled *The Radioactive Psychoanalyst: Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know*, Jim snuck into a Santa Monica, California house I rented during my undergraduate years. We could live cheaply by sharing rooms in a four-bedroom house not far from UCLA. While preparing to move in and lacking a housekey, Jim pried open a window and stuck his head and neck inside. In that most vulnerable of bodily positions, he encountered the smartest-dog-ever, a 22-lb mixed-breed dog named Daisy. Lucky for him, not to mention his profession, Jim’s a smooth talker. Daisy growled for a few minutes. Jim complimented her on her beauty and wit. Within seconds, Daisy’s tail began wagging. She allowed him to wriggle his body the rest of the way into the house unharmed.

A few depth psychotherapists, both immersed in the Jungian school, helped me personally over the decade I worked on the book. Michael Gellert and Cyndy Rothe, the latter whom I still consult once a week, encourages immersion in *being*—almost applying a Buddhist perspective. Our work reminds me of Penn’s struggles. Depth psychotherapy offers a crucible for self-reflection unavailable in any other medium. Friendships, even the most intimate, remain understandably constricted by censorship. Competent depth psychotherapy assists in identifying one’s authentic voice. Both Michael and Cydney helped me to bring the truest possible articulation to *LEC*. I also send a shout-out to Alice Cheng, another dear person who similarly has helped me on my personal journey.

I have many colleagues who I also consider friends. They offered emotional support, as well as occasional ideas, as I stumbled through creating and editing this manuscript. Jon Mills, a Canadian philosopher and psychologist, provided remarkable help. Our friendship blossomed when I shared the rejection of one of my articles by the journal *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. The friendship was instantly forged, and it thrives to this day. Jon almost insisted I continue working on *LEC*, pointing out how scholars enjoy greater freedom when writing books as opposed to articles. Jon reviewed the book proposal, suggested publishers he knew, and connected me with a few of his own contacts.

I send special thanks to Helen Yee, Ron Novotny, Bobbi O'Brien, Stuart Kirschbaum, Debbie Kirschbaum, Linda Kallan, James Goodwin, Bob Ozwoeld, Robin Lewis, Steve Karbelnig, David Levy, and Sam Karbelnig—friends and family alike—who supported me personally. In my view, we're all family now. Peiyi He, Mona Kumar, Deborah Peters, Ryan Witherspoon, and Joy Merritt showed great excitement about my ideas. They, too, provided yet another emotional foundation for facilitating my creation and ultimate completion of this work. Most writers thank a supreme being, but my belief system in that regard remains in process. I'm not sure we can consider it intelligent, but, for sure, our lives exist in a boundless context enshrouded in mystery. Atheism requires a leap of faith I cannot take. To avoid tribalism, I often switch metaphors. Of late, I prefer *Shiva*, the Hindu god of the dance, of creation and destruction. Ergo, thank you, *Shiva*, for helping this work come into existence.

The endless clichés about love meaning everything cannot be overstated. My family's love, and tolerance for my long periods of writing, allowed me to ultimately finish *LEC*. These include my loving wife of forty years, Amy, our daughters, Misha and Natalie, and their husbands, Jim and Tom. I send a special nod to my three-year-old granddaughter, Naomi. With a single, innocent smile, she evokes both conflict and motivation: conflict over writing versus playing with her, and motivation to create a work that she herself might enjoy decades from now.

About the author

Dr. Alan Karbelnig practices psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and couples therapy in Pasadena, California. He earned two PhDs, one in Counseling Psychology from the University of Southern California (USC) in 1986, and a second in Psychoanalysis from the New Center for Psychoanalysis (NCP) in 1996. Later, he was Certified in Psychoanalysis by the American Psychoanalytic Association, which also bestowed him with the status of a Supervising and Training Psychoanalyst. Dr. Karbelnig is also Board Certified in Forensic Psychology by the American Board of Professional Psychology. He founded, serves on the Board of Directors of, and teaches at Rose City Center—a not-for-profit psychoanalytic psychotherapy clinic serving the economically disadvantaged in California. An award-winning teacher, Dr. Karbelnig lectures locally, nationally, and internationally, including in Beijing, China, and in Delhi and Ahmedabad, India and Tel Aviv, Israel. He has published twelve scholarly articles and three book chapters. He also writes a weekly Substack newsletter titled, “Journeys into the Unconscious Mind.” *Lover, Exorcist, Critic: Understanding Depth Psychotherapists’ Work* is his first book.

Preface

Psychoanalysis, subjectivity, and freedom

I was nine years old when my parents first started worrying about me. I felt sullen about my sickly, inferior status. I grew tired of kids teasing me and picking me last for sports games. I became depressed. Later, the painful emotions coalesced, erupting as rage. I slapped a kid twice my size. He beat me up, fracturing three of my ribs. I changed the combination on the bicycle lock of another kid who bullied me. I felt triumphant. His parents rented a truck to get his bike home. I told one of my teachers she “sucked.” When she sent me to the principal’s office, I refused to speak.

But the final straw was this:

One day I told my mother, “Go to hell!”

The angry, disrespectful remark earned me my first visit to a psychoanalyst—better described by the broader term *depth psychotherapist*. These clinicians focus on deeper, unconscious themes, on dark emotions. I resisted. But my parents forced me. The elderly gentleman, ensconced in a darkened university office lined with mahogany bookshelves, greeted me with a warm smile. He listened to my tales of

insecurity, fears, and furies. When he asked me to elaborate, I told him about the kid I slapped, the lock I changed, and the principal I ignored. The psychoanalyst administered a Rorschach Inkblot test. I told him what I saw in the gray, orange, and red images. Although I had been dispatched only for a consultation, I wished I had more time with the kind old man. His words soothed me. I didn't know why, but they did. I felt better after talking to him. A few years later, when my fury bordered on the violent, my parents often referred to the psychoanalyst's conclusion.

"You have tremendous anger," they told me.

I felt rebuked.

They brought me to him for answers.

I already knew *that* answer.

Many years later, having undergone more extensive depth psychotherapy and entered the profession myself, I gained an understanding of my rage and its relation to my early life experiences. The gray-haired, tall psychoanalyst set me on a path to discover how many of my needs had gone unsatisfied, how my passions went unnoticed, and how my parents' neglect, caused, in part, by their busy 1960s lifestyle—enraged me. I *was* a furious boy, adolescent, and young man. But, of course, that lovely psychoanalyst lacked sufficient time to help me to further identify, articulate, and address these primitive feelings.

As I introduce this book about how psychoanalysis or any type of depth psychotherapy works, that cordial man, his friendly demeanor, and his welcoming office come to mind. He definitively helped me transform from an angry teenager into an assertive, opinionated adult. Depth psychotherapy stimulates growth in varied ways—resolving traumatic pain, exploring meaning, releasing untapped talent. In a phrase, it elucidates persons' subjectivities. It expands their awareness of how they perceive self as well as other, initiating waves of interpersonal, social, and even political change.

Writing a half-century after I met the doctor-with-the-inkblots, I believe depth psychotherapy matters more than ever. We live in an era dubbed "post-humanist,"¹ a period psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas calls the "age of bewilderment."² We ingest social programming at unprecedented rates. Anything not observable, measurable, weighable, or consumable lacks value. The ideas of agency, autonomy,

and even freedom are increasingly marginalized. Christopher Lasch, a contemporary historian and social critic who coined the phrase, “the minimal self,” writes:

Beyond the injunction to “get in touch with your feelings”—a remnant of an earlier “depth” psychology—lies the now-familiar insistence that there is no depth, no desire even, and that the human personality is merely a collection of needs programmed either by biology or by culture.³

Depth psychotherapy, a phrase broadly encompassing a wide variety of psychoanalytic or psychodynamic approaches, counters these individuality-constricting social forces. It facilitates exploration of the unconscious mind, including how sociocultural, historical, and other contextual features affect subjective experiences. Psychoanalytic approaches, ranging from the original Freudian, Kleinian, or Jungian ones to the more recently developed object relations, self-psychology, and intersubjective or relational models, share this consciousness-expanding goal.

While psychoanalysts facilitate their transformational processes, patients share what they have barely dared to tell themselves. They tell stories—of triumph and failure, of love and loss, of meaning and nihilism. They explore attitudes—biases, distortions, preferences, and stereotypes. They experience feelings—sadness, shame, guilt, anxiety, loss, terror, and joy. In several scholarly articles,⁴ I proposed that psychoanalysts stimulate growth by *framing* their professional relationships, by offering *presence* in the form of empathy or attunement, and by *engaging* their patients in dialogue—conscious and unconscious, verbal and nonverbal. These ways of structured, interpersonal relating alter patients’ *internalization* processes, bringing their intrapsychic conversations, and their previously hidden feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors, into the light of day.

Internalization processes exist on a continuum ranging from the conscious, like the quiet internal conversations you know about, to dissociated mental content, like disavowed conflicts or deficits (unmet need states), to actual, concretized unconscious structures such as the superego or “dynamic structures.”⁵ (Proposed by psychoanalyst Ronald Fairbairn, dynamic structures consist of parts of self (or ego) linked

to internal representations of other; they exist in the unconscious and propel an inner drama influencing our relationships and our life path.) Depth psychotherapy uncovers and alters the dynamics of these conscious and unconscious internal conversations. Again, these conversations range from the conscious secrets we tell no one else, through the problematic behaviors we disavow, to those we essentially are blind to—through denial. Denial, as formally understood, signifies the transition into the *actual* unconscious. In the unconscious realm lie any number of phenomena obviously outside of consciousness. They may be described as id, ego, superego, dynamic structures, or, to use Melanie Klein’s metaphor for unconscious structure, “unconscious phantasies.”⁶ Put more simply, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan reduces psychoanalysis to the process of liberating the *subject*, namely the real, authentic you, from the *ego*, the you created to please your parents, society, and other sociocultural influences.

Although Freud intended to introduce a new, modernist form of medical intervention when he named the profession *psychoanalysis* in 1896, he instead launched what ultimately evolved into a method for illuminating the human *subject*. The radical approach toward self-understanding and transformation began as a method for treating mental disorders. Mostly, these were the hysteric and conversion disorders common at the time. Over time, though, psychoanalysts turned their attention to persons other than those with pathological mental conditions. The two World Wars brought traumatized soldiers and civilians alike to seek their help. During and after the Vietnam War, feminism and civil rights came to a head, European existentialism gained in international popularity, and adherence to religion waned. As a result, persons feeling lost, alienated, or having other problems in living began cascading into psychotherapists’ consulting rooms. Depth psychotherapists helped persons deal with tragic losses, with fragile senses of self, or with feelings of loneliness just as frequently as they counseled individuals with anxiety, depression, or psychosis.

We all have unconscious themes, which I prefer to call internal dramas.⁷ They prevent us from fully becoming who we are, from enjoying deep, intersubjective intimacy, or from working or playing in ways that are maximally satisfying. As Lacan noted, these dramas

serve the falsely accommodating *ego*. They beg for replacing with dramas more reflective of the true, authentic self, the *subject*. These internal dramas restrict personal freedom in myriad ways: Promoting inauthenticity, launching harsh self-criticism, or compulsively repeating destructive patterns, to name but a few. The process of helping patients uncover and alter these internal dramas therefore constitutes an intensely humanistic, freedom-enhancing endeavor. By introducing psychoanalysis as a distinct profession, Freud unwittingly re-kindled the Romantic project, that revolutionary reaction to the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, scientism, and other reductionist forces shaping humanity then and now. He joined the ranks of philosophers, political scientists, and writers such as Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, Rousseau, Keats, Blake, Wordsworth, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Whitman. These artists rejected the devaluation of all things that could not be measured, weighed, or quantified. They rebelled against objectification. They privileged the subjective.

These intellectuals influenced broad swaths of humanity.

Psychoanalysts similarly exert influence, but slowly—and one person at a time.

Contemporary culture assaults the unique nature of personal *subjectivity* like never before in human history. The extremely rapid advancement of technology, for example, alters the *experience* of being human, particularly in how we communicate. People spend less time speaking face-to-face. Their use of words, gestures, and touch has lessened. They rarely sit down and talk. They email rather than write. They send texts rather than make calls. As contemporary comedian Aziz Ansari puts it, “What—are you on fire? Quit wasting my time. Text me that shit!”

And more change awaits us. Already, common household items wirelessly connect us to the web. Soon, your refrigerator—rather than your spouse, roommate, or lover—will tell you when groceries need ordering. Your automobile already informs you which parts need replacing. Companies like Tesla automatically download software, spontaneously making some repairs. Your house, apartment, work site, rapid transit vehicles, and more will advise you, in computer-generated-faux-feminine-soothing-voice tones, of their status. One could argue, as did Wittgenstein,⁸ that technology frees persons to perform tasks

more effectively. It gives them more time to commune with one another. But he died before the invention of Skype, Instagram, Tinder, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, or YouTube. Ironically, these media, intended to accelerate information and to monetize sociability, only draw persons more deeply inward.

They may well result in us talking *more*.

But we are mostly talking *at* each other.

And, when not in monologue, we are forced to listen. The only silent space exists behind our noise-canceling headphones. Except for such blissful, safe, hidden moments, we are constantly besieged by information. The international media delivers its biased content; the international advertising industry aggressively coerces us. We, in turn, passively cooperate by staring at television sets, computer monitors, or mobile phone screens. On a daily basis, we are exposed to thousands of conflicting new “facts,” and to thousands of different brand names. These oppressive, invasive mechanisms of interpersonal influence objectify, stultify, and imprison subjectivity, compromising our capacity to freely think, feel, behave—or even imagine. Humans, once accustomed to living life as experiencing *subjects*, instead exist as consuming *objects*. French philosopher Michel Foucault describes the modern human as an “object of information, never a subject in communication.”⁹ Many people need help not only to counter their own unconscious dramatic themes, but also to offset the invasive information overload contaminating their capacity to find their authentic selves.

Depth psychotherapy encourages these creative, freedom-loving, self-actualizing forces. In confirmation, Mari Ruti proclaims technology and the mass media promote “conformist yearnings that masquerade as our desire,” adding depth psychotherapy seeks, in contrast, to “release the singularity of our being from underneath the Other’s oppressive signifiers.”¹⁰ Here, Ruti acknowledges the essential role of freedom in the depth psychotherapy process, working as it does to liberate patients from oppression on all fronts—internal and external alike.

When persons feel chronically insecure or inadequate, find themselves trapped in unsatisfying jobs or relationships, or habitually engage in self-defeating habits, they live in a state of self-deception, of internal oppression. Psychoanalysis exposes these dark recesses of human subjectivity. Further, it introduces people to the indoctrination, the lies,

and the distortions affecting our perceptions of ourselves, of others, and of the world. Breaking through our internal conversations proves difficult—whether we learned them in childhood or had them imposed on us by contemporary culture. Depth psychotherapy offers arguably the *only* professional service directly intended to reverse self-deception and indoctrination. By enlightening subjectivity, by raising consciousness, depth psychotherapy liberates.

Its mission is *freedom*.

Meanwhile, the global, regressive trend to objectify the human subject marches forward, impacting depth psychotherapy itself. Contemporary culture increasingly mandates empirically based and objectively measurable interventions in educational, medical, and other institutions.¹¹ Psychotherapies comporting with the renewed emphasis on empiricism, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), lack an emphasis on personal freedom and autonomy. They provide rapid symptom relief but, by design, avoid uncovering unconscious themes. For example, if a barista at Starbucks becomes depressed, the firm's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) would likely refer him or her for a short-term course of cognitive behavioral therapy. The CBT psychotherapist would strive to reduce the employee's emotional discomfort and return him or her to work as rapidly as possible. Such a therapist would *not* pursue the *meaning* of the emotional discomfort. If the symptom represents a minor adjustment problem, then perhaps no harm has been done. But if, for example, the barista's psychological problem *actually* refers to an underlying, deeper conflict, or betrays unsatisfied authentic needs, then CBT or similar forms of behavioral psychotherapy serves Starbucks rather than the employee. It enhances what Karl Marx called alienation¹² because of the gap between what humans *desire* and what they ultimately *do*. His concept of alienation relates to *wage slavery*. Many of us work in jobs we hate, counting the seconds until our evenings or weekends free us from our oppressive work. Psychotherapies like CBT serve the interests of corporations rather than of individuals. It maintains the status quo. It supports workforces by constricting rather than by expanding subjectivities.

Perhaps precisely because it liberates, psychoanalysis threatens our post-humanist, audit-oriented, global society. Any endeavor daring to explore the ambiguous, shadowy world of human subjectivity risks

becoming—irony intended—*subject* to suspicion. You’ve seen the assault. It’s ubiquitous. Although serving as only the messengers, major media conglomerates such as *Time* magazine, *The New York Times*, or *The Wall Street Journal* repeatedly proclaim psychoanalysis’ demise. CBT overshadows depth psychotherapy in the curricula of most clinical psychiatry and psychology programs. Formal psychoanalytic training institutes have difficulty filling their classes.¹³ If anything, dark sociocultural forces already impacting the field risk the extinction of the depth psychotherapy approaches.

A CBT approach would have literally hurt, rather than helped, that angry boy—me—whose parents delivered him to the gentle psychoanalyst all those years ago. It may have reduced my rage, and helped me adhere to academic demands. However, my continued lack of awareness of what angered me may have stunted my emotional growth. No behavioral intervention would have enlightened and, therefore, empowered me. Even after my parents dropped me off for that first meeting with the psychoanalyst, I remained in hiding for years, unable to discover why I was literally going *mad*. Only later did I work through the tremendous loss and sadness hidden beneath my rage, causing my primitive fury to lessen in strength and to morph into assertion, engagement, and passion. I ultimately explored those feelings with my parents, bringing greater understanding, even closeness, to my relationship with them. Just as it worked to free me, the psychoanalytic process releases persons from shackles inside and out. It helps patients not only experience less pain, but cope more effectively with life’s ongoing challenges. It encourages authenticity, allowing lives to be led with fullness and vibrancy.

In *Lover*, *Exorcist*, and *Critic*, I seek primarily to *educate* about depth psychotherapy, to explain it, and to demonstrate in vivid detail how the process *really* unfolds. I expect many readers find concepts of the self, the mind, and the soul intriguing. I imagine you either consult psychotherapists or have contemplated doing so. You may have felt mystified, as many do, about how the depth psychotherapy process works. I hope to extend Thomas Szasz¹⁴ de-mythologizing of depth psychotherapy further, throwing the final dirt on the coffin of the medical model from which it emerged. Unlike Szasz, however, I explain how psychoanalysis includes more than the combination of rhetoric and logic. It also features an intersubjective, inter-emotional, interpersonal, and even

inter-biological exchange—way too complex to fit within the confines of any one theoretical model.

This book also promotes a *political* agenda. By offering examples of the freedom-enhancing nature of psychoanalysis, I advocate for greater personal agency and autonomy as vehicles for counteracting this bewildering, post-humanist era of the minimal self. These dehumanizing trends are *dangerous*. They risk putting more of us to sleep, numbing us to the vibrancy of our authentic selves. I warn you, in advance, of the polemical tone necessary to advance the political theme. I also prepare you—although here I might be talking to myself rather than to you—to the ways I expose my own vulnerabilities, and even a few outright errors, in my work with the three fictional patients presented. Enduring shame and guilt as I composed some passages, I nonetheless think an authentic story of how psychoanalysis works must be told. It should make it a more exhilarating read. Franz Kafka wrote to his friend Pollack in 1904:

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we're reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? We need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.¹⁵

Inspired by the great surrealist himself, *Lover*, *Exorcist*, and *Critic* discloses many wounds and stabs sustained by patients *and* me. In sharing the discipline with such vulnerability, and by delivering a unique perspective of these three unusual metaphors, the book delivers what the contemporary culture's view of psychoanalysis needs most: a smack to the head.

Notes

1. Wolfe, C. (2010). *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press.
2. Bollas, C. (2015). Psychoanalysis in the age of bewilderment: on the return of the oppressed. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 96(3): 535–551.

3. Lasch, C. (1984). *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*. New York, NY: Norton, pp. 57–58.
4. Karbelnig, A.M. (2022). Chasing infinity: Why clinical psychoanalysis' future lies in pluralism. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 103(1): 5–25.
5. Fairbairn, W.R.D. (1952). *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*. London: Tavistock, p. 377.
6. Klein, M. (1946). Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27: 99–110.
7. Karbelnig, A.M. (2020). The theater of the unconscious mind. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 37(4): 273–281. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pap0000251>.
8. Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical Investigations*. Third Edition. G.E.M. Anscombe (Trans.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
9. Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. A. Sheridan (Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage, p. 200.
10. Ruti, R. (2012). *The Singularity of Being: Lacan and the Immortal Within*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, p. 49.
11. Strathern, N. (Ed). (2010). *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*. New York, NY: Routledge, p. 2.
12. Marx, K. (1988). *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. M. Milligan Trans. New York, NY: Prometheus. (Original work published in 1844.)
13. Schechter K (2014). *Illusions of a Future: Psychoanalysis and the Biopolitics of Desire*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
14. Szasz, T. (1988). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
15. Kafka, F. (1959). *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*. New York, NY: Schocken, p. 16.