

We appreciate how psychoanalytic insight into the intricacies and complexity of human behavior is a capability we all have, reflecting the perceptiveness, depth and range of the individual capacity for understanding. Particular aptitude has always been accorded creative artists in their intuitive understanding of behavior and the penetrating power of their observation. The artists, as well as other insightful people, may not systematically organize such thinking or present it as a body of knowledge, as a psychoanalytic thinker might, using his clinical observation of behavior to provide verification of his insight. Instead, creative artists use their artistry to *reveal* behavior, showing how it is experienced and expressed in the way we interact with each other.

As a poet I thought it might be of interest to present poems revealing how psychoanalytic concepts might be given imaginative life. I selected five concepts: transference, narcissism, reaction formation, repression, and compulsion to repeat; or, rather, these were the ones which rose up out of the unconscious and presented themselves to me.

My hope is to provide an insightful and authentic way of viewing these concepts, and, as a consequence, offer something original that exists in its own right as a work of art, apart from any didactic purpose—just as, to take a most dramatic example, Sophocles, in *Oedipus the King*, presents human interaction in a work of art that reflects our understanding of what we now have come to call the Oedipus complex.

## **Psychoanalysis 101 Poems**

By  
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### 1

#### Transference

The way I keep on seeing you  
with supporting detail of my view  
may little have to do with you  
and more to do with me

in the way I keep on framing  
the image you represent to me  
like the picture of those primal  
ones who shaped me as a kid,

who stamped into my head  
the way it's going to be  
when I was learning to interact  
to come to know myself

and skirt the abyss of aloneness.  
Something about you is reminiscent  
of this, but I can't separate  
the you from it with any accuracy.

Then there's the feelings  
that connect to the image of a way  
of being, interesting, that captures  
a world of attachment feelings

like empathy and resentment,  
almost knowing the minefield  
I'm entering, an existential summons  
to act out and/or manage my life.

That's why when you sit  
in your chair, I know you're going  
to ask me where the salt cellar is  
though we're both looking at it,

as if I'd hidden it from you,  
my task being to make things right  
by accepting that I'd hidden it,  
creating what you expected

rather than requiring you to reach  
and get it, as a privilege of my being  
freed of the need of your homage  
with the salt passing between us equally.

## 2

## Narcissism

Not only am I the greatest  
to show my face on earth—  
not just the needed enhancements  
to prop ourselves up—

the world is cruel enough.  
We need some beef in the pot  
to keep even the scrawniest  
standing up, a natural self-love—

I like it, join you in that.  
But a stronger will looks  
most deeply into the well  
and sees it's shallow there—

I will never again die of thirst  
raising a bucket with the half-filled.  
Is that all there is? I go for over kill.  
I will not be wounded

and join the limping legions—  
offering excuses—and accept this  
wretched life, this weight  
of blighted yearning and fulfillment.

## 3

## Reaction Formation

Induces a smiley face  
even when your head space  
is not one of kindness today

thinking of the world's abundant  
cumbersomeness, the weight  
of foreclosed anger and distress.

Nevertheless, a spunky cheerfulness  
finds its way, to endorse  
continued civilized deportment.

This is the mildest take.  
The kiss on the cheek's  
a more strenuous enactment

in place of all the catalogued  
complaints, enduring their wait,  
or lying on your back ready to placate

instead the lunging snarl of redress.  
None of this happened with intent  
so much as it materialized itself,

the lure of light through clouds,  
an orchestrating network  
of acquiescence, humbling a part of ourselves.

## 4

## Repression

Different from forgetting  
the anniversary's date, remembering  
with urgency in the morning.

It returned through an effort  
of faith. What of the thing  
that took it out and brought

it back again, that of itself  
removed and restored it, not  
subject to your effort to control it

when your intent would have been  
to hold it steady within? What's the power  
to keep it out of mind

not remembering some particular graphic  
thing that menaced mind or limb  
happening ever over again,

but not to be thought or imagined  
in its eclipse, a transaction  
in which you had no say.

The anniversary's remembering  
is all a good thing, not the withering conflict  
of the binding choice you made.

## 5

## Compulsion to Repeat

What we do is repeat  
the way we've come to be  
with the next new version  
of ourselves we see

in an invitation to attach  
to a lover or friend,  
depending on the strength  
of our need of them,

how bringing into being  
the original communion  
construed the complexity  
of how we are together.

This memory is mostly forgotten.  
But the unrelenting nexus  
captures the frustrated hearts,  
shadows the eyes and voice, drawing us

to the other, a kind of puzzle,  
where our pieces fit  
a pattern with each other  
not necessarily working the good—

the lure of the need  
to fix incompleteness,  
pursue a new arrangement  
of the interlocking pieces.