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
Lee Jenkins

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
cumbersomeess, 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.
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.