***Jane Eyre***

**Psychoanalytical Criticism**

In his essay, “A Child is Being Beaten,” Freud explores the linkage of desire and punishment in the father-daughter relationship. Several of his women patients reported fantasies in which they watched the beating of a child; at first, they could say nothing about the fantasy except “a child is being beaten” or: ”a child is being beaten on its naked bottom.” Freud questions his patients – who has the child? the one producing the fantasy or another? Was it always the same child? Who beat him or her? – and discovers a structure of desire that links subject, object and action in three characteristic scenes and narrative ph(r)ases. Eventually Freud’s patient is able to identify the punisher as an adult, and indeed as “the (girl’s) *father*,” and herself as the child being beaten. Freud interprets the beating fantasy’s first phase, the, as the phrase, “*My father is beating the child*” and the second phase as “*I am being beaten by my father*.” In the third phase, the subject fantasizes (boy) children being beaten by a “representative of the father” as the subject looks on: “*a child is being beaten*.” The three phases of this fantasy, Freud says, represent three historically located versions of the girl’s identifications with others and her erotic feelings for her father. In the first phase, the subject hates the child who is beaten and interprets it as taking the father’s affection away from herself; this phase signifies, “My father does not love this other child*, he loves only me*.” The second phase, unlike the first, is never recollected but reconstructed in analysis; it signifies a fantasied substitute for sexual desire of father by daughter as well as punishment for that desire. This repressed phase signifies the girl’s “humiliation,” and “deprivation of love”; the chastisement[[1]](#endnote-1) as proof or sign of his love and her guilt. In the third phase, the subject looks on while a figure from the “class of fathers” beats a boy. Because punishment is displaced onto a child of the opposite sex, Freud says, the subject protects herself from the degradations and deprivations of paternal love by removing herself and her father from this fatasied situation.

Freud interprets this fantasy as originating in the struggles of the Oedipus complex and expressing erotic love for the father. “Connected with the incestuous wishes,” the fantasy is “justified by the persistence of those wishes in the unconscious.” In the beating fantasy, the daughter represents herself not as the beaten child, but as the spectator, as someone who watches. The fantasizing daughter looks on a scene of paternal punishment and it produces perverse pleasure; or she escapes from the “demands of her erotic life altogether” and, turning herself “in fantasy into a man” without herself becoming “active in a masculine way,” becomes “no longer anything but a spectator of the event which takes the place of a sexual act.” By adopting the position of the spectator, Freud’s female patients remove themselves from their beating fantasies and disavow[[2]](#endnote-2) them as self-representations. Yet paradoxically they recognize their desires as perverse and so submit them to censorship and repression. For the beating fantasy takes shape within the Oedipus complex’s sphere, out of which the girl’s adult sexuality will develop. Freud therefore identifies beating fantasies as “precipitates” or “scars” of the Oedipus complex, the “nuclear complex of neurosis.”

1. The act of chastising; pain inflicted for punishment and correction; discipline; punishment [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. To disclaim knowledge of, responsibility for, or association with.  
     
    [↑](#endnote-ref-2)