



*An Alternative History of  
Psychoanalysis: Fact and Fiction in Irvin  
D. Yalom's When Nietzsche Wept*

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*En Alternativ Historia Om Psykoanalys: Fakta och fiktion i  
Irvin D. Yalom's När Nietzsche Grät*

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## Abstract

This essay provides an analysis of the novel *When Nietzsche Wept* written by Irvin D. Yalom. The novel takes place during the late eighteenth century in Vienna and throughout this essay I explore how Yalom has created a setting, where he has placed some of most prominent philosophers of this time in his fictional world in order to educate the reader about the birth of psychoanalysis and give an alternative version to how it emerged. I argue that Yalom manages to implement different original theories in connection to psychoanalysis to show how the ideas circulating at that point in history contributed to the development of psychoanalysis. The essay compares the original theories of Freud, Breuer and Nietzsche to those brought forward by the characters and illustrates the similarities in order to support Yalom's alternative version. In conclusion, this essay demonstrates how Yalom has created an alternative version of the development of psychoanalysis by blending original theories with fictive events in order to show how psychoanalysis was a zeitgeist of its time and had more than one founding father.

Keyword: *When Nietzsche Wept*, Irvin. D Yalom, Psychoanalysis, alternative historical fiction, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud. Josef Breuer

Irvin D. Yalom wrote *When Nietzsche Wept* (1992) as a novel with the intent to teach the reader about the birth of psychoanalysis and to show how it was a product of theories and ideas of its time, rather than a theory developed by a single mind. Yalom is a professor in psychiatry at Stanford University and has many years of experience in both teaching psychology and working as a psychotherapist. Yalom has written several novels on the topic such as *Love's Executer* (1989) and *Lying On The Couch* (1996), where he uses his knowledge and experience in order to create a narrative around psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. As stated on the cover of *The Yalom Reader* (1998), "both in his nonfiction and his fiction, Yalom uses the lens of psychotherapy to explore human nature and shows us that the line between the true and the imagined is not always easy to distinguish".

With *When Nietzsche Wept*, Yalom starts blending real events and historical figures with fiction, effectively creating a work of alternative history. The genre alternate history is by definition "a genre of fiction in which the author speculates on how the course of history might have been altered if a particular historical event had had a different outcome" (Collins), and this is precisely what Yalom does in regard to the history of psychoanalysis. This is a genre with its point of departure in the question "what if?" and in the novel Yalom places the historical figures of Sigmund Freud, Dr. Josef Breuer and Friedrich Nietzsche at the creation of psychoanalysis and presents a scenario where Nietzsche and Breuer, rather than Freud are the driving forces behind psychoanalysis and its development. The "what if"-questions Yalom asks in the novel are: What if Lou Salomé, after studying Breuer and Freud's treatment of their patient Anna O, had contacted him and urged Breuer to treat Nietzsche with the same talking approach in order to cure his despair? What if Breuer had accepted and Nietzsche would have agreed? In his afterword to the novel, Yalom writes that he was inspired by a quotation he took from Andre Gide's *Lafcadio's Adventures*: "Fiction is history which *might* have taken place, and history fiction which *has* taken place" (104).

The novel takes place during the year of 1882, a time during which all the characters in the book lived and were active in the same intellectual circles (Yalom 303), and therefore Yalom uses historically accurate relationships and

settings in order to show, in dramatized form, how psychoanalysis evolved, while still staying true to the original theories of his characters. In the scenario Yalom creates, Freud is a young medical student and Breuer is his mentor and a prominent physician in Vienna. Nietzsche is at the beginning of his philosophical career and not yet recognized by his peers. He suffers from poor health, severe migraines and despair. Lou Salomé whom is the cause of his despair is convinced of his excellence and is certain of his future impact on the world, and is therefore keen to ensure his recovery. Yalom uses the voices of these recognized philosophers – Breuer, Freud and Nietzsche – to put their ideas and theories into a historical context, thereby creates a narrative that tells the story of how psychoanalysis starts to develop. By incorporating many original ideas such as Freud’s theories of an unconscious mind, Breuer and Freud’s work on hysteria and talking cure, as well as Nietzsche’s theory of eternal return, Yalom unfolds a story which is grounded in historically accurate events and theories as the following sentence from his afterword expresses “Given the very improbable history of the field of psychotherapy, all events of this book could have come to pass if history had rotated only slight on its axis”. Even though Freud is popularly and usually thought of as the point of origin of psychoanalysis, Yalom qualifies that by including the ideas of others as well. I argue that in his novel, Yalom uses the genre of alternative history fiction in order to show the affinities of the ideological and philosophical positions of the main characters and thereby also describes a sort of zeitgeist in which psychoanalysis arose as a theory and treatment.

I will begin with a brief introduction of those components of psychoanalysis that are active in the novel in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the connections I make later on in my arguments. As Saul McLeod phrases it, “psychoanalysis is commonly used to treat depression and anxiety disorders”. According to the American Psychoanalytic Association (APSA), “psychoanalysis is built on the theory that many of the factors that affect our behavior and emotions, are hidden in the unconscious mind and thus we are not aware of them. In examining what lies beneath the surface of human behavior, psychoanalysis teaches us about the unconscious psychological forces within us outside of everyday awareness” (About Psychoanalysis). The APSA

reports how “unconscious factors have the potential to produce unhappiness, which in turn is expressed through a score of distinguishable symptoms, including disturbing personality traits, difficulty in relating to others, or disturbances in self-esteem or general disposition” (About Psychoanalysis). Furthermore APSA states that “psychoanalysis as a therapy, also referred to as a treatment, aims to discover core issues, to trace unconscious factors to their origins and shows how they have evolved and developed over the course of many years, and subsequently helps individuals to overcome the challenges they face in life” (About Psychoanalysis). One method that is widely used within psychoanalysis and psychotherapy that Yalom also chooses to give a central part in his story is free association. Kristin M. Beystehner defines free association as “a method that entails a situation where the patient speaks about any subject matter whatsoever and the analyst draws conclusions based on what is said”. Saul McLeod claims that Freud is the father of psychoanalysis and developed the treatment to treat mental illness and founded the theory in order to explain human behavior, a statement Yalom contradicts by showing in his novel that psychoanalysis could be assigned more than one father and was a child of its time rather than of one man’s mind.

I intend to compare the ideas of Yalom’s fictional characters with those of the historic figures to show their affinities and how Yalom shows, by merging them together, that they all contributed to the development of psychoanalysis. By doing so I will show how Yalom tells a story where psychoanalysis is a product of its time and intellectual climate. Friedrich Nietzsche published the *The Gay Science* (1882) where he presents the theory of eternal recurrence, also referred to as eternal return. The theory plays an important role in Yalom’s story and his alternative version of the birth of psychoanalysis, as I will show in this essay. Yalom applies the theory of eternal return to his character’s despair and shows how it could work as a talking treatment. The theory is relevant to psychoanalysis and its aim to discover core issues, trace unconscious factors to their origin and release despair. Habab expresses the connection between eternal return and its ability to force one to review one’s life as “eternal recurrence was a way to force attention on life exactly as it is, with no alternative, not even nothingness on the other side of life, not even eternal

novelty. If one could say Yes to eternal recurrence—the endless repetition of life in the exact same way—one could genuinely say Yes to life as it is.” In other words, the theory can be used to search deep within oneself in order to arrive at a happier place. Yalom places the theory of eternal return in a historical situation and gives it the task to cure despair by inventing a psychotherapy based on Nietzsche’s ideas together with Breuer and Freud. By doing so and in a relevant way using the original ideas, Yalom shows the reader how psychoanalysis can be assigned to not only Freud discovery of an unconscious mind, which I will elaborate on later in this essay, but also Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas and Breuer’s research on free association. As a result it supports Yalom’s version where Nietzsche together with Freud’s and Breuer’s ideas created an intellectual environment from which psychoanalysis emerged.

Yalom’s choice of characters is based upon a mix of historically existing relationships and fictional relationships, which supports the notion that all the theories presented in the novel contributed to the emergence of psychoanalysis. Firstly, Lou Salomé, who in the story takes it upon herself to initiate a rescue mission for Nietzsche, lived during this time and was in fact romantically involved with him (Martin 6). The way the relationship between Freud and Breuer is portrayed in the novel is similar to the real relationship the two had. They had a “long-lasting friendship and collaboration where the older, eminent physician Josef Breuer was mentoring Freud” (Milton, Polmear & Fabricius 42-43). Based on findings made by the real Josef Breuer in regard to free association with his treatment of his patient Bertha Pappenheim – who went under the pseudonym Anna O. – the two friends and colleagues published the book *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895. At the time in which the novel takes place, the historic figure Josef Breuer “was a recognized physician whereas Sigmund Freud was only just qualifying as a doctor” (Breuer & Freud, ix), which is also how the relationship is described in the novel and therefor supports Yalom’s version where Freud was not the single mind behind psychoanalysis, but many ideas of that time served as influencers to the birth of psychoanalysis.

Beside the two protagonists, the above-mentioned character of Bertha Pappenheim plays an important part in understanding why Yalom explores the scenario of Breuer and Nietzsche meeting. In Yalom’s scenario, she is the object

of Breuer's obsession and cause of his despair. It is because of Breuer's previous work with Bertha Pappenheim that Salomé chooses to contact Breuer out of all physicians in Austria. Salomé has heard about his work on hysteria where he has previously explored the talking treatment and she is convinced it will work on Nietzsche. This shows how Yalom lets Breuer's research on free association, which can be found in *Studies on Hysteria*, serve as a connecting point in bringing Nietzsche, Breuer and Freud's ideas together and that later on results in the development of psychoanalysis. Drawing on the fact that the relationship between the characters of Nietzsche and Lou Salomé, Breuer and Bertha Pappenheim as well as Breuer and Freud are portrayed in a similar way as the historical figures relationships to one another, Yalom creates a scenario in which the ideas and theories the characters discover influence each other and when put together develop psychoanalysis. By fictionalizing the scenario of Nietzsche being the patient, Yalom applies Nietzsche's philosophical ideas to psychoanalysis and shows how they manage to cure despair. Yalom uses his characters to show, rather than tell the reader about the foundations of psychoanalysis and by doing so he provides a virtual insider's perspective to the development of the talking treatment.

Before psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as a medical treatment was developed, despair was not considered to be something one could approach with a talking treatment, which is also the attitude of the characters before they have applied their theories in order to find a cure for despair. The story opens in Venice where Breuer spends his vacation, when he receives a note from Lou Salomé asking for a meeting. During their encounter, Lou Salomé urges Breuer to try to treat her friend and former lover, the philosopher Nietzsche, with the same method of talking treatment that she has familiarized herself with from his previous research. In the novel Nietzsche suffers from despair after Lou Salomé ends their love affair by leaving Nietzsche for another man, his friend Paul Ree. Salomé is afraid that Nietzsche's mental state and severe migraines might drive him to commit suicide and is therefore desperate to find help. Breuer is most hesitant to the request and at first hand he fails to see how he as a medical doctor could treat someone suffering from despair of the mind. Breuer questions his ability to help Nietzsche, the reason being that psychoanalysis was not yet

developed and there was no such thing as therapeutic treatment involving doctor-patient talks (Borch-Jacobsen and Shamdasani 1). The following conversation between the characters Breuer and Salomé, illustrates the attitudes towards despair as a medical symptom: “ ‘Suppose Doctor Breuer, we consider despair to be a symptom. Couldn’t you approach it in the same manner?’ ‘Despair is not a medical symptom, Fraulein; it is vague, imprecise. Each of Anna O.’s symptoms involved some discrete parts of her body...’ ” (Yalom 10). This passage is important for the understanding of the stage before psychoanalysis was developed and it shows that the theories and methods developed by Yalom’s characters were groundbreaking for that time.

Yalom uses the form of talking sessions between Nietzsche and Breuer, where Nietzsche takes the role of the therapist and applies his philosophical ideas to Breuer’s despair. Furthermore, Yalom uses the narrative around the sessions to merge Nietzsche and Breuer’s minds in order to show how their ideas, in a relevant manner could have contributed to the development of psychoanalysis. After further convincing by Salomé back in Vienna, Breuer agrees to take on Nietzsche as his patient and explore talking as the treatment of his despair. Yalom concocts a secret plan between Breuer and Salomé in order to integrate Nietzsche’s theories to the story. With the secret plan to cure Nietzsche’s despair by locating the original cause, Yalom introduces the basics of psychoanalysis: “the theory of making unconscious thoughts and motivations conscious and by identifying and understanding the core issue” (McLeod). Salomé is sure that Nietzsche would not agree upon such a talking treatment since he never talks about personal feelings. Instead Salomé and Breuer come up with the plan to get Nietzsche to engage in sessions where Nietzsche can be convinced to help Breuer with his despair by applying his philosophical ideas, and in return Breuer will monitor his health. Nietzsche who suffers badly from his migraines agrees to enroll at the Lautzer clinic in order for Breuer to monitor his health, while he in return helps Breuer with his obsession for his former patient Bertha Pappenheim. As Yalom’s story takes off and the sessions begin, the secret plan plays out differently than Breuer and Salomé had in mind. Instead of getting Nietzsche to open up by Breuer’s confessions, the roles of doctor and patient reverse as Breuer experiences great relief by unveiling his inner thoughts

to Nietzsche. Yalom creates a scenario where “Nietzsche applies his philosophical theories to Breuer’s angst and thereby creates a narrative that portrays a philosophical psychoanalysis of sort where he puts Nietzsche in the role of the therapist analyzing Breuer” (Schuster 133). By doing so, Yalom shows how Nietzsche and Breuer’s theories, when merged together work in the same manner as psychoanalysis does – it provides a release of despair. By using the sessions to apply their theories onto despair, Yalom shows how the birth of psychoanalysis as a tool to cure despair was a product not only by Freud, but was part of the zeitgeist, the ideas in intellectual circulation at the time, specifically, those of Breuer and Nietzsche.

Along the sessions between Nietzsche and Breuer, there is a parallel narrative running throughout the novel that Yalom uses to bring Nietzsche’s and Freud’s ideas together. In this part of the story, Yalom introduces many of the historical Freud’s theories, which will be discussed in more depth later on in this essay. Yalom also uses the parallel narrative to analyze Nietzsche’s original theories through Freud’s perspective and by doing so connects them to psychoanalysis. In the following passage, Yalom introduces the reader to the basic notion of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy when Breuer and Freud discuss Nietzsche’s work:

Psychological surgery- it’s interesting to hear you put it in that way,’ said Breuer. ‘Perhaps we’re developing a whole medical subspecialty. Wait, there’s something else I wanted to read to you that seems relevant.’

He turned the pages of *Human, All Too Human* for a couple of minutes. ‘I can’t find the passage now, but its point is that the seeker after truth must undergo a personal psychological analysis- he terms it ‘moral dissection’ ... He claims that in order to discover the truth, one must first know oneself fully. And to do that, one must remove oneself from one’s customary point of view, even from one’s own century and country- and then examine oneself from a distance! (Yalom 86)

Here Yalom manages to dramatize the first trace of psychoanalysis as a theory. He does so by letting Breuer tell Freud about what he read in Nietzsche’s book

*Human, All Too Human*. Nietzsche's original thoughts in the book, which Breuer tries to explain to Freud, correspond to psychoanalysis since the fundamental aim of psychoanalysis is to "break down our own defenses in order to effect basic changes in the structure of our personality and behavior" (Tyson 18). By using this parallel narrative Yalom shows the reader how Freud and Nietzsche's ideas work together and by doing so, he manages to show the reader that psychoanalysis was surely inspired by them both.

Yalom uses the theme of despair in his novel in order to show how the different theories of that time, put forward by his characters, together arrive a cure for despair. The reader is aware from the start of the novel that the source of Nietzsche's despair lies with the unrequited love and abandonment by Salomé. This however, is beyond Nietzsche's insight, or at least he is unwilling to acknowledge it. Breuer's mission is for Nietzsche to realize and admit his despair in the hope that it will cure him. Breuer is unhappy in his marriage and feels more trapped by the responsibilities towards his family everyday as his free mind takes escape to his old patient Bertha Pappenheim. During the sessions, the two protagonists Breuer and Nietzsche arrive at the conclusion that in order to cure Breuer's angst, they, or Breuer himself, need to find its source, which Nietzsche believes to be the obsession for Bertha Pappenheim. During a conversation with Nietzsche, Breuer remembers the approach he used for his former patient Bertha Pappenheim as described in the following passage:

And Breuer proceeded to describe how he had erased not only each of Bertha's symptoms by tracking down its original cause but, finally, every part of her illness when he helped her discover and re-experience its fundamental cause- the horror of her father's death. (Yalom 160)

Nietzsche is intrigued by the approach Breuer used in his treatment of Bertha Pappenheim and it leads him towards the notion that by identifying the source of despair one can find the way out of despair: "I like the possibility of your being helped by your own discovery. For one can never really be helped by another; one must find the strength to help *oneself*. Perhaps you, like Anna O., must discover the original cause of each of your psychological problems" (Yalom 160).

This passage is important to the novel because it is where the characters first realize that they need to apply the same approach Breuer used when treating Bertha Pappenheim to themselves, and the first trace of Yalom applying Nietzsche's theories in order to successfully cure despair. Nietzsche suggests that Breuer must locate the cause of his obsession, which causes him angst and despair. According to psychoanalysis, "until we find a way to know and acknowledge to ourselves the true causes of our repressed wounds and fears we hang on to them in disguised, self-defeating ways" (Tyson 13). Once again, Yalom manages to weave history into his fictional world when he uses the case of Bertha Pappenheim and the findings from the book *Studies on Hysteria*, which he in a realistic manner applies to his characters for the story to move forward and show how the original ideas of his characters are relevant to psychoanalysis and how they could have influenced the development.

In the book *An Outline of Psychoanalysis 1949*, Freud recounts these very ideas of finding the source of a problem, often located in one's unconscious mind, in order to cure it, which further supports the method Yalom's characters use to cure despair and one can see the similarities between the original theory and the one brought forward in Yalom's fictive version. The historical figure Freud "produced a multi-layered view of the human mind" (McLeod), which is certainly also true for Yalom's character Freud. As Billig informs us, the historical Freud referred to "psychoanalysis as a depth psychology since its aim is to study those processes in mental life, which are withdrawn from consciousness" (12). This notion is put forward in the following passage from the novel where Freud argues for his case of an existing unconscious mind:

I agree, it does seem ridiculous- yet look at the evidence for it, look at all the scientists and mathematicians who have reported solving important problems in dreams! And, Josef, there is no competing explanation. No matter how ridiculous it seems, there *must* be a separate, unconscious intelligence. I'm sure-. (Yalom 40)

The historical Freud recognized the importance of unconscious mental activity (Beystehner) and with that in mind, one can see how Yalom contextualizes the

real Freud's persuasion of an existing separate mind. By presenting the idea through his narrative, Yalom strategically utilizes alternative fiction to provide an insight into Freud's reasoning and a preconception of the notion of the unconscious mind, which is important for the further development of psychoanalysis in the story, and it also places the theory in an intellectual and historical context. Later on during the conversation, Breuer expresses concern for Freud and his provocative statements, which I believe Yalom does in order to illustrate the ground-breaking mind of Freud compared to his peers. Furthermore it serves a pedagogical purpose to use a "Socratic dialogue" where Yalom shows the reader how the argument is built by challenging the idea and uses reasoning to arrive at the conclusion gradually. This way of mixing Freud's original theory, with fiction and putting the idea into historical context, Yalom teaches the reader about one of the basic components of psychoanalysis. By analyzing the original theory of an unconscious mind and the one portrayed in the novel, one can see the affinities between the two, which further supports Yalom's notion that Freud's theory of the unconscious mind was one of the contributing ideas to the development of psychoanalysis.

In the parallel narrative between Breuer and Freud that Yalom uses in order to analyze Nietzsche's theories through their perspective, he allows them to reach a breakthrough after discussing one of Nietzsche's migraine attacks, which leads them to be even more convinced of the existence of an unconscious mind and its role in curing despair. The following passage is important since it explains to the reader how the reasoning around the talking treatment arose in the story, to reveal the unconscious and why that is meaningful to the development of psychoanalysis:

You know whom I'd prefer as a patient? That other one- the one who called for help!'

'You mean the unconscious consciousness trapped inside your patient.'

[...] 'Yes, it'd be a lot simpler to work with him. You know Sig, maybe *that* should be the goal of the treatment- to liberate that hidden consciousness, to allow him to ask for help in the daylight. (Yalom 152)

The incident Breuer describes to Freud is when the otherwise withdrawn and composed Nietzsche, while suffering a severe migraine attack, begged for Breuer's help. Because of that Breuer realizes there is someone else deep inside of Nietzsche whom he has not met before and further convinces him that Freud must be right in the matter of the unconscious mind. The character's reasoning corresponds to Freud's original work; hence the ideas that are communicated are based on facts and therefore support Yalom's notion that this was one of the theories circulating at the time. In my opinion Yalom incorporates the discovery of an unconscious mind and emphasizes its significance in the novel, in order to provide the reader with an understanding for the further process and development of psychoanalysis. By allowing the characters to arrive at the notion that they have to search within themselves to locate the cause of their despair, the story moves forward and shows how the theory of an unconscious mind that Freud was developing during this point in history played a part in the birth of psychoanalysis.

An important component in psychoanalysis and its form as therapy is free association, which Yalom uses through his characters in order to investigate the unconscious mind. The act of free association corresponds to psychoanalysis and more so to psychotherapy, which is a type of therapy that is inspired by the investigation of the mind with a focus on the unconscious (Ernest 4). Yalom introduces the reader to free association as "chimney sweeping", which connects back to Bertha Pappenheim with whom Breuer first developed the method. As I mentioned earlier in this essay, the reason why Salomé approaches Breuer for help in the novel is because of his and Freud's work on hysteria and Berta Pappenheim's case. Yalom places chimney sweeping, or free association, at the center of the development of psychoanalysis as the protagonists use it during their sessions to locate the original cause of despair within themselves. . The novel moves from a premature stage of free association, in Breuer's early work on Bertha Pappenheim, to later on putting it into practice so that the reader can experience the effect of it. The following passage is from a conversation between Breuer and Nietzsche, where Nietzsche suggests that Breuer should apply the same method he used on Bertha to himself.

Perhaps you must learn to speak more clearly to yourself. In the last few days, I have realized that the philosophic cure consists of learning to listen to your own inner voice. Didn't you tell me that your patient, Bertha, cured herself through talking about every aspect of her thoughts? What was the term you used to describe that?'

'Chimneysweeping. Actually she invented the term- to sweep her chimney meant to unplug herself so that she could ventilate her brain, cleanse her mind of all disturbing thoughts. (Yalom 186)

The theory behind free association or chimney sweeping is not fiction but based on facts presented in narrative form, and as Milton, Polmear and Fabricius report "Josef Breuer told Sigmund Freud that he and Anna O. had discovered the value of catharsis. Anna O. would gain relief and temporary stability from pouring out all her thoughts and recent memories concerning the origin of a symptom, what she referred to as 'talking cure' or 'chimney sweeping'" (43). Drawing on that source, it is evident that the concept of chimney sweeping is an accurate report of the real Josef Breuer's work on hysteria and thereby it supports Yalom's version of how psychoanalysis evolved from the theories circulating at that time. One can connect Breuer and Freud's original ideas behind free association from the book *Studies on Hysteria* and the chapter on Breuer's work on Anna. O with those brought forward in the novel, which further shows how Yalom stages original components of psychoanalysis in fictional form and by doing so shows the reader how the theory of free association contributes to the birth of psychoanalysis. In Freud's *An Outline Of Psychoanalysis*, free association is defined in the following way:

In free association the patient reports without censorship whatever goes through his mind. No exceptions are to be made; it matters not whether the thoughts are painful, embarrassing, inconsequential or important. All must be said. If this is done results similar to those achieved under hypnosis are obtained. (Freud xii)

As Breuer and Nietzsche's work during their sessions starts to reach its goal to cure despair, Yalom incorporates Nietzsche's theory of "eternal return" into the narrative and gives it an important role as another catalyst that finally brings Breuer some clarity regarding his choices in life. Yalom includes eternal return into psychoanalysis in the form of a thought experiment. During one of their last sessions in the novel, Nietzsche decides that Breuer is mature enough to handle his theory of eternal return and conducts a thought-experiment on Breuer, which he believes will set Breuer free of his despair:

Josef, try to clear your mind. Imagine this thought experiment! What if some demon were to say to you that that this life –as you now live it and have lived it in the past- you will have to live once more, and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thing unutterably small or great in your life will return to you, all in the same succession and sequence...(Yalom 249)

This passage is a turning point for Breuer when Nietzsche forces him to scrutinize his life and the choices he made. While doing so, Breuer realizes that he himself has not been in charge of his life, which leaves him with a feeling of dissatisfaction and unhappiness because of where his choices has lead him. The angst drives him to re-think his whole life and the consequence is, which will be discussed further later on, that he is finally free of despair.

In order to illustrate how Nietzsche's philosophy of eternal return could be applied to psychoanalysis and its aim to cure despair, Yalom introduces the theory as a thought-experiment that Nietzsche performs on Breuer. As laid out in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains the theory it in the following way: "Imagine the of existence turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust" (194). In the novel, Breuer experiences angst because he does not live his life in a way where he would like to re-live his past or make the same choices over and over for all eternity, which is the idea of eternal return. The concept of eternal return, that everything that has ever been and that is will return, eternally and identically is what the real Friedrich Nietzsche bases much of his

work upon and is among the most important thoughts of the Western philosophical world (Chapelle 17). Drawing on that source, I believe Yalom uses this thought-experiment as the climax in Breuer and Nietzsche's quest of curing despair since it is such a revolutionary theory and Yalom shows that it is relevant in order to cure despair and therefore relevant to psychoanalysis. The theory of eternal return is taken from Nietzsche's original work, which means that the idea does not come from Yalom's imagination, rather it shows how Yalom once more stages an original idea in fictional form in order to teach the reader about complex theories and show the reader that it was one of the important theories of that time and how it connects to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

The theory of eternal return could work when applied to psychotherapy as the thought experiment shows and thereby Yalom hypothesizes, in fictional form, how it could have contributed to the development of psychoanalysis. Nietzsche manages to find the origin of Breuer's despair by using the thought-experiment and as the source of his despair is out in the open, the reader gets to witness how Breuer is released from his angst. In the following passage, Yalom allows the readers to participate during his characters' fictional breakthrough while using the concept of eternal return:

These questions- you know the answer! No, I've not chosen! No, I've not lived the life I wanted! I've lived the life that assigned me. I- the real I- have been encased in my life.'

'And *that*, Josef is, I am convinced, the primary source of your *Angst*.  
(Yalom 248)

Yalom's story goes on and he lets his characters connect their theories of finding the origin of despair as well as eternal return and he shows how they are some of core components of psychoanalysis and connects them to the discovery to Breuer's recovery in the following way:

'I believe', Breuer, responded, 'that the most powerful factor was my identification of the right enemy. Once I understood that I must wrestle with the *real* enemy- time, aging, death- then I came to realize that

Mathilde is neither adversary nor rescuer, but simply a fellow traveler trudging through the cycle of life. Somehow that simple step released all my fettered love for her. Today Friedrich I love the idea of repeating my life eternally. Finally, I feel I can say `Yes, I *have* chosen my life. And chosen well. ( Yalom 282)

Breuer has now identified the core issues for his angst and the passage shows how Breuer, with the help of the concept of eternal return, has reviewed his life and identified his core issues and by doing so realized his problems and angst did not lie with his wife but with the fear of aging and death. The thought experiment of eternal return forced Breuer to analyze his life and make the necessary changes in order to say yes to his life. With the help of Nietzsche, Breuer reaches a point where he loves the idea of living his life, with all the decisions he made in the past and in the present moment, again and again for all eternity. By being able to say yes to his life and identifying his core issues, Breuer is finally free from despair. In other words, Yalom presents an alternative version of how the first steps of psychoanalysis took place and how the theories circulating at this time together influenced the birth of psychoanalysis.

Although the main focus in the novel has been on Nietzsche's support for Breuer, by applying his philosophical ideas, Nietzsche also reaches a new insight that in the end helps him with his own despair. Nietzsche is haunted by the fear of dying alone and he finally reaches a moment when he speaks out his fears:

No, not sadness! On the contrary, when I talked to you a few minutes ago about dying alone, I felt a powerful surge of relief. Not so much what I said, but *that* I said it, that I finally, finally shared what I felt'

'Tell me more about *that feeling*'

'Powerful. Moving. A holy moment! *That's* why I wept. *That's* why I weep now. I've never done this before. Look at me! I can't stop the tears'

'It's good Friedrich. Strong tears are cleansing'

Nietzsche, his face buried in his hands, nodded. 'It's strange, but at the very moment when I, for the first time in my life, reveal my loneliness in all its depth, in all its despair- at that precise moment, loneliness melts

away! The moment I told you I had never been touched was the very moment I first allowed myself to *be* touched. An extraordinary moment, as though some vast, interior icepack suddenly cracked and shattered.  
(Yalom 299-300)

As the source of despair is brought out into light, just as psychoanalysis aims to achieve, the despair itself is dissolved. Yalom demonstrates how Nietzsche himself concludes that when he for the first time opens up and speaks the words of his loneliness, the fear of it evaporates. The reader finally gets to see the result of the talking treatment that Yalom has been developing the story towards by staging the original theories circulating at that, in order to show how they together influenced the development of psychoanalysis.

To conclude, in this essay I have presented how Yalom uses the genre of alternative history in order to show the affinities of the ideological and philosophical positions of the main characters and thereby also describe a sort of zeitgeist from which psychoanalysis emerged. I answer the question what could have happened if Josef Breuer and the philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud were put in a scenario where their respective ideas of that time were merged and integrated with one another. In the novel, Yalom creates a story in which that scenario leads them to discover a treatment for despair and together arrive at the aim of psychoanalysis, namely to cure angst by discovering and reveal the source of despair. By doing so, Yalom presents his alternative version of how psychoanalysis was born and shows how psychoanalysis was derived from the theories circulating at the point in history. Yalom acknowledges Freud and his groundbreaking theory of the unconscious mind as one of the important contributions to psychoanalysis, however he shows that psychoanalysis was more a product of its time and the ideas circulating at that time, than the work of a single mind.

By blending and merging the different theories active in the novel and by connecting them to psychoanalysis, Yalom manages to show how they indeed are relevant and applicable to the talking treatment that arose during that time and therefore represent the spirit of that time. Furthermore I point out the affinities between the original theories of the unconscious mind, the use of free

association and eternal return and those brought forward by the characters in the novel. I show how Yalom's alternative version of the birth of psychoanalysis supports the notion that it had more than one father and emerged as a result of the intellectual atmosphere in Vienna during the late nineteenth century.

By placing the theories and ideas into a narrative, the novel tells the reader something about this point in history and successfully attempts to educate the reader on this otherwise complex topic. As the author puts it, he "invites the reader to be present at the fictional conception and birth of existential therapy, as we know it today" (Yalom 374). Yalom uses the technique of showing rather than telling to reach his aim of educating the reader about psychoanalysis and its foundations.

In the form of talking sessions between the protagonists, Yalom dramatizes the first traces of psychoanalysis and applies Nietzsche's philosophical ideas to psychoanalysis and manages to show they are relevant to psychoanalysis and thereby how they could have contributed to the evolution of psychoanalysis.

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