

*Psychoanalysis and
Storytelling*

Peter Brooks



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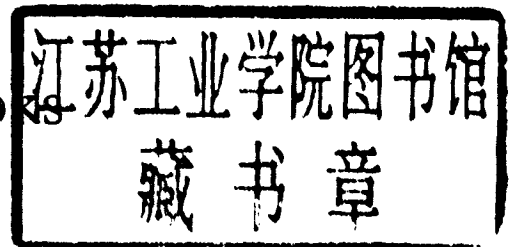
The lectures in this series explore some of the fundamental changes in literary studies that have occurred during the past thirty years in response to new work in feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. They assess the impact of these changes and examine specific texts in the light of this new work. Each volume in the series includes a critical assessment of the lecturer's own publications, an interview, and a comprehensive bibliography.

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Psychoanalysis and Storytelling

Peter Brooks



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Preface

Fundamental and far-reaching changes in literary studies, often compared to paradigmatic shifts in the sciences, have been taking place during the last thirty years. These changes have included enlarging the literary canon not only to include novels, poems, and plays by writers whose race, gender, or nationality had marginalized their work but also to include texts by philosophers, psychoanalysts, historians, anthropologists, social and religious thinkers, who previously were studied by critics merely as "background." The stance of the critic and student of literature is also now more in question than ever before. In 1951 it was possible for Cleanth Brooks to declare with confidence that the critic's job was to describe and evaluate literary objects, implying the relevance for criticism of the model of scientific objectivity while leaving unasked questions concerning significant issues in scientific theory, such as complementarity, indeterminacy, and the use of metaphor. Now the possibility of value-free skepticism is itself in doubt as many feminist, Marxist, and psychoanalytic theorists have stressed the inescapability of ideology and the consequent obligation of teachers and students of literature to declare their political, axiological, and aesthetic positions in order to make those positions conscious and available for examination. Such expansion

and deepening of literary studies has, for many critics, revitalized their field.

Those for whom the theoretical revolution has been regenerative would readily echo, and apply to criticism, Lacan's call to revitalize psychoanalysis: "I consider it to be an urgent task to disengage from concepts that are being deadened by routine use the meaning that they regain both from a re-examination of their history and from a reflexion on their subjective foundations. That, no doubt, is the teacher's prime function."

Many practising writers and teachers of literature, however, see recent developments in literary theory as dangerous and anti-humanistic. They would insist that displacement of the centrality of the word, claims for the "death of the author," emphasis upon gaps and incapacities in language, and indiscriminate opening of the canon threaten to marginalize literature itself. In this view the advance of theory is possible only because of literature's retreat in the face of aggressive moves by new historicism, feminism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis. Furthermore, at a time of militant conservatism and the dominance of corporate values in America and Europe, literary theory threatens to diminish further the declining audience for literature and criticism. Theoretical books are difficult to read; they usually assume that their readers possess knowledge that few have who have received a traditional literary education; they often require massive reassessments of language, meaning, and the world; they seem to draw their life from suspect branches of other disciplines: professional philosophers usually avoid Derrida; psychoanalysts dismiss Freud as unscientific; Lacan was excommunicated even by the International Psycho-Analytical Association.

The volumes in this series record part of the attempt at Bucknell University to sustain conversation about changes in literary studies, the impact of those changes on literary art, and the significance of literary theory for

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the humanities and human sciences. A generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has made possible a five-year series of visiting lectureships by internationally known participants in the reshaping of literary studies. Each volume includes a comprehensive introduction to the published work of the lecturer, the Bucknell Lectures, an interview, and a comprehensive bibliography.

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Introduction

I have not been able to resist the seduction of an analogy.
Sigmund Freud, *Constructions in Analysis*

The publication of *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* in 1984 established Peter Brooks as one of the foremost contemporary theorists of prose narrative. His two earlier books – *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal* (1969) and *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (1976) – had already demonstrated his ability to provide sophisticated readings of individual texts and to raise important larger questions about, for example, the function of social relations or “worldliness” in eighteenth-century French literature or the need to reconsider the importance and influence of a scorned “popular” genre such as melodrama. *Reading for the Plot* resembles Brooks’s earlier books in that it examines a number of prose fictions in order to explore and develop a larger thesis about literature: in this case, the fundamental congruence between modern literature and Freudian psychoanalysis and the implications this mutually illuminating relationship has for the study of narrative plot. His newest book, *Body Work*, continues to develop this focus on the relationship between literature

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and psychoanalysis, shifting our attention, as Brooks points out in his introduction to *Body Work*, from “a dynamics of desire animating narrative and the construal of its meanings” to “the objects of desire,” specifically the sexualized human body. The first lecture in this book addresses the analogy between reading and erotic pleasure, and the essays included in general connect the concerns of *Reading for the Plot* with those of this most recent work.

Part of the lasting effect of *Reading for the Plot* is the result of its insistence on extending the stakes of this discussion of plot beyond mere literary formalism or traditional psychoanalytic criticism, both of which Brooks claims as precursors that are, in their older forms, unsatisfactory, too rigid, and even (in the case of earlier psychoanalytic criticism) “something of an embarrassment” (p. 20).¹ Both of these ways of reading, in their most reductive forms, tend to impose static “grids” or rigid structures of meaning on what Brooks insists are the dynamic processes through which narrative makes meaning and helps us impose meaningful order on the flux of temporal existence. By bringing a more dynamic narratology shaped by an emphasis on desire together with a more “textual and rhetorical” (p. 22) understanding of psychoanalytic criticism, Brooks suggests a more eclectic and productive approach to the development of form in modern narrative, supplementing the necessary but limited terminology of narratology with the rich, and perhaps more suggestive, language of psychoanalysis. The second part of this Introduction will address some issues implied in this development.

For the sake of better understanding Brooks’s contributions to the study of narrative and psychoanalysis, we can isolate three major strands in his discussion of the nature and function of plot in prose narratives, none of which can be fully separated from the others:

- 1 an historical narrative, sometimes implied and sometimes explicit, that traces a movement in the nature

and function of plot in Western culture, from the earliest myths and tales to the fractured narratives of postmodernism;

- 2 a careful examination of Freud’s psychoanalytic practice and formulation of a “masterplot” or paradigm for reading plot in narrative; and
- 3 close readings of prose narratives chosen to illuminate the various features of Brooks’s argument in *Reading for the Plot*.

Part of the appeal and elegance of Brooks’s work is the way in which these elements work together to create a synthetic, flexible model for understanding and discussing the dynamic processes of narrative. The stakes are indeed high in Brooks’s meditation on narrative, for it is clear that he cannot imagine sustained thought without plot and sees narrative as a vital and necessary element of our lives, a psychic process in which we recognize and work through essential psychological needs for coherence and understanding.

Rather than viewing plot as a formula that inevitably ends up articulating a set structure, as in Propp’s understanding of plot as a recombination of various relatively changeless syntactical elements, Brooks sees the narrative impulse as a more urgent attempt to cope with the human facts of our existence in the body and in time. He is acutely aware of the ways in which narrative helps us negotiate an unstable present through the counterpoint of hermeneutics and proairesis as “we engage the dynamic of memory and the history of desire as they work to shape the creation of meaning within time” (*RP*, p. xv). Plot becomes, for Brooks, kinetic rather than static, a desire machine designed and intended to adapt itself to the tensions inherent in the human condition, caught as we are between an often obscure yet powerful past wherein the origins of desire are buried, and a desired future that takes its shape from the past and present.

Implied in the argument of *Reading for the Plot* is an historical plot that takes us, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "out from under the mantle of sacred myth" (RP, p. xii) and into a modern world in which narrative is scrutinized and destabilized, in which we have become both "suspicious of plots" – their artificial turnings and closings – and nostalgic for the order they seem once to have bestowed on our lives and cultures. Brooks's investigations of plot follow a generally chronological pattern, moving from tightly plotted narratives of closure and cure (fairy tales and detective stories, for example) to heavily plotted nineteenth-century novels such as *Great Expectations* to full-blown modernist narratives such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Absalom, Absalom!* The chapters of *Reading for the Plot* alternate between these readings of literary texts and considerations of theoretical issues raised by Freud's writings and clinical practice. Brooks's ability to oscillate creatively between theory and criticism and his application of theoretical insights gained from narratology and psychoanalysis to his articulate and productive readings of Balzac, Flaubert, Conrad, Faulkner, and others enrich his writing and allow him to develop an increasingly complicated argument about the "correspondence between literary and psychic dynamics" (RP, p. xiv). His theoretical speculations and his explorations of works such as Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* or Roland Barthes' *S/Z* suggest new ways of looking at such familiar texts as *Le Rouge et le noir*, *L'Education sentimentale*, *Great Expectations* or *Heart of Darkness*, and his readings of such texts in turn clarify his larger ideas about the nature of narrative.

The central thread that seems to run through Brooks's complex and inextricable web of narratology, psychoanalysis, the history of plot, and close reading is the connection between narrative and epistemology: an emphasis on story as a means of seeking knowledge and estab-

lishing truth. This interest in the relationship between narrative and truth connects *Reading for the Plot* with the lectures in this volume as well as Brooks's latest book, *Body Work*. In *Reading for the Plot*, the movements of memory and desire as they shuttle back and forth to uncover the origins of desire and to move toward the revelation or "full utterance" that we hope will come at the end or death of the plot,² the dialogic *Zwischenreich* or "intermediate region" (RP, p. 234) created by the transference, the breakdown of belief in plot – all partake of a need, even an instinct, for knowledge, for discovering the origins, development, and ends of the plots of our lives and our fictions. In *Body Work*, Brooks again turns to Freud for a central term in his argument: *Wissstriebe* or epistemophilia, the instinct for knowledge that arises, in Freud's "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," from the child's desire to solve what Freud calls "the riddle of the Sphinx" – the mystery of where babies come from (BW, pp. 96–9). *Body Work* concerns itself with the desire to locate and uncover truth in or on the sexualized human body. The desire for knowledge and truth outlined in *Reading for the Plot* is generally less concerned with sexuality as both field and cloak for truth, though Brooks does align the motive narrative desire he discusses with sexual desire in an attempt to create what Susan Sontag has suggested could become "an 'erotics' of art" (RP, p. xv). On the whole, however, we find in *Reading for the Plot* a more generalized epistemophilia, a desire to uncover the past in order to move beyond the repetitions and returns that characterize middles for Brooks and move instead toward the desired end of narrative.

The history of modern plot that Brooks charts in *Reading for the Plot* mimics the movement of Freud's career, from his early confidence in the ability of psychoanalysis to discover the origins of neurosis and effect a cure to his growing sense that the truths reached in analysis were

more likely to be constructions than fact and that analysis might prove to be interminable. Brooks's debt to Freud in *Reading for the Plot* extends primarily to two complex notions, as Brooks points out at the end of his book: "the energetic-dynamic model" adapts Freud's discussion of the tension between the competing drives of eros and thanatos in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* into a "masterplot" for narrative, while, on the other hand, Brooks constructs "a model of the psychoanalytic transference as consonant with the narrative situation and text" (RP, p. 320) from his reading of the Wolf Man case history.

In the first of these central chapters, the widely anthologized "Freud's Masterplot: A Model for Narrative," Brooks examines narrative beginnings, middles, and ends using Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a paradigm for understanding narrative's "instinctive" desire to seek its own cure in the death of plot, a death that can only come – following the psychoanalytic model – after the text has remembered and worked through its own original and repressed secrets and traumas. Narrative middles repeat and replay lost time, delaying the ending of the plot, in an attempt to gain a knowledge and understanding of the relations of origins to desire and to the ends of desire. Thus, in Brooks's reading of *Great Expectations*, the novel begins with the loss or obscuring of Pip's origins, identity, and name. Pip's confusion about himself and his struggle to sort out inappropriate plots and identities from his "true" self generates the desire for knowledge that energizes Pip, the reader, and the plot itself. Not until the past is mastered through Pip's correct knowledge of himself can "this highly plotted novel" (RP, p. xvi) reach its terminus.

The other model for reading narratives that Brooks constructs from his reading of Freud is his suggestion of psychoanalytic transference as a model for the working out of a coherent narrative or *sjuzet* in response to an

incoherent *fabula*, an irretrievable primal scene. This model for narrative again foregrounds the desire to understand origins and the need to find a workable "truth," an explanation that will overcome narrative resistance and allow the "plot" – of one's life or one's fiction – to resume its movement into the future and toward its desired end. The most important focal point for Brooks's extensive discussion of the transference is Freud's Wolf Man case, treated at length in a chapter on the Wolf Man in *Reading for the Plot* and especially in his essay "Changes in the Margins: Construction, Transference, and Narrative" in this volume. Brooks's interest in the transference as a model for reading is reflected in his readings of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, modernist novels that reach similarly unsettling conclusions about the status of truth in narrative – its provisional nature, the impossibility of "full utterance," the inevitable obscurity of the past, and a modernist willingness to "settle" for a coherent narrative, an "incomplete, but not false, image of the universe" (RP, p. 318). In this model, plot and truth have become part of the transference – the negotiation of meaning between the analysand and the analyst, between the text and the reader, between one character and another – an attempt to *construct* a pragmatic, rather than empirical, truth. Thus Quentin and Shreve struggle, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, to recover and reconstruct the past in "a necessary hermeneutic fiction" (RP, p. 304; my emphasis). While in traditional prose narratives such as fairytales plot "works through the problem of desire gone wrong and brings it to its cure" (RP, p. 9), modernist and postmodernist narratives betray a deep suspicion of narrative "cure" achieved through formal closure. Faulkner's novel, like Freud's later writings, accepts the possibility that narrative (and analysis) can be interminable, but the need to know and understand, to find a "cure" for desire, and to construct a plot that will give order to the world

is, as Quentin's compulsive desire to narrate demonstrates, as urgent as it ever was. Modernists such as Freud and Faulkner betray a nostalgia for plot that stands tragically against the modern awareness that "We have, in a sense, become too sophisticated as readers of plot quite to believe in its orderings" (*RP*, p. 314).

In using Freud's work as the basis for a masterplot for narrative, Brooks takes certain risks but also gains much in the way of an implied truth value and referentiality. The Freudian model of mind is of course now often viewed not only as arbitrary, but also as phallogentric, Eurocentric and ahistorical. Nonetheless, Brooks continues to depend on psychoanalysis, asserting his own "personal affinity with psychoanalytic thinking" (*BW*, p. xii), and continuing "to dream of a convergence of psychoanalysis and literary criticism because we sense that there must be some correspondence of literature and psychic process, that aesthetic structure and form must somehow coincide with the psychic operations they evoke, activate, appeal to."³ As previously noted, by linking his own way of reading to Freud's, Brooks gains a model that mimics, in its own development from confidence to uncertainty, the historical narrative of plot that Brooks wishes to trace through modernism into postmodernism. Even more important, however, is the way in which the connection with psychoanalysis raises the stakes of his discussion of plot and suggests a sort of referentiality and reality through its focus on a textuality built out of the life stories of real individuals such as Dora or the Wolf Man. Torn between his desire to assert the anthropological importance – really, the possible *truth* – of psychoanalysis and his growing reluctance to privilege one term of the psychoanalysis/literature opposition over the other, Brooks has come to claim an intermediate or pragmatic truth value for the constructions arrived at through the psychoanalytic model of reading, a referentiality that he has come to qualify as "a certain

referential function for narrative, where reference is understood not as a naming of the world, and not as the sociolect of the text, but as the *movement of reference* that takes place in the transference of narrative from teller to listener, and back again" (p. 72). Following Freud, Brooks sees that all "Attempts at seeing and knowing are attempts at mastering" (*BW*, p. 106), and, by extension, we can conclude that attempts to reach a final narrative truth, whether in psychoanalytic practice or in literature, are always of necessity attempts to master a reality and a temporality beyond our control. Perhaps, as Freud suggests, in his summing up of the Wolf Man case, "We must be content . . . with having clearly recognized the obscurity."⁴ Within this model of narrative, memory and desire, reader and text, analyst and analysand work together dialogically in an effort to create, in an age of suspicion, narratives that may achieve a provisional but crucial truth, allowing us for a while longer to make meaning in the world.

John S. Rickard

*Die Psychoanalyse war vor allem eine Deutungskunst.
Freud, Jenseits des Lustprinzips*

In the opening paragraph of the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud announces that "twenty-five years of intense work" had made him realize that psychoanalysis was more than hermeneutics. The patient, asked "to confirm the analyst's construction," alas, never attained a conviction of the truth of any account of his repressions. Rather than remembering the unconscious "as something belonging to the past" (*ein Stück der Vergangenheit*), the patient was forced to repeat the unconscious in his present experiences. Freud's "*Stück der*

Vergangenheit” is the lost object of an art of interpretation, a *Deutungskunst*, thwarted by the suddenly complicated phenomenon of “present experiences.” Not only is the past no longer “one piece,” to which one may return at will, but the patient who would have pleased the doctor (*wie der Arzt es lieber sähe*) if he had remembered himself in the process, is thus cast into a state of perpetual dismemberment.

In the second of the three lectures of this volume, Peter Brooks quotes a case in point, Freud’s infamous “Dora Case,” which predates *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* by fifteen years. While formerly, as we have seen, Freud’s psychoanalytic method had modelled itself on a more straightforward art of interpretation, that of Sherlock Holmes’s logic of deduction, “Dora” illustrates the unforeseen complications Freud encountered in the transference relation of the analyst with the patient. “Now the present itself is shown to be the place of struggle,” as Brooks points out, and “What we thought at first to be a relatively straightforward . . . recapture of the past turns out to be something quite different” (p. 64). Indeed, the past under these changed circumstances is now “the story of the past” (p. 53) and “the analysand must eventually be led to a renunciation of the attempt to reproduce the past” (p. 53).

What is meant to be renounced here is the hypostasized past, the past as fact or fetish, from whose determinations psychoanalysis promises liberation – while attempting not to fetishize the cure itself. If not in fact, the cure must be in fiction, or not in “what was” but in “what might be,” as Aristotle famously defined the difference between history and poetry, even to the extent that what might be, as Freud concedes, may be pure hallucination (p. 60). To mention Aristotle in the context of a fictive curative narrative recalls also Freud’s enormous debt to the genre of tragedy itself. Like psychoanalysis, the form of tragedy, as Hannah Arendt in-

sightfully points out, allows the protagonist to become “knowledgeable by re-experiencing what has been done in the way of suffering, and in this *pathos*, in resuffering the past, the network of individual acts is transformed into an event, a significant whole.”⁵

Evidently Freud’s case histories are modern tragedies, transformations of suffering into a narrative event, “a significant whole.” Stanley Fish’s discovery of a rhetoric of deception in Freud’s case of the Wolf Man thus amounts to little more than a discovery of the necessarily rhetorical nature of the cure. “What might be” must inevitably be “what must be” – at least for the time being. Fish’s attempt to expose a Freud dubiously entrenched in an imperious *Deutungskunst* out to establish nothing less than “‘unimpeachable fact,’”⁶ simply neglects to read Freud’s assertions of fact as necessary fictions. Moreover, these are fictions, as Freud’s endless revisions intimate, that are consciously – Brooks thinks, heroically – entertained as such.

“In Brooks’s reading,” Fish explains, “the Wolf Man’s case is a ‘radically modernist’ text, a ‘structure of indeterminacy’ and ‘undecidability’ which perilously destabilizes belief in explanatory histories as exhaustive accounts whose authority derives from the force of closure.”⁷ While Brooks, in an extended response to Fish, will staunchly reaffirm Freud’s hermeneutics of indeterminacy, Brooks’s own notion of the curative narrative construction nevertheless repeatedly stresses just those authorities of completion, closure, and force of conviction which Freud had allegedly left behind. Indeed, at first, and in certain fundamental assumptions, Brooks’s theory does not depart too far from, say, John Crowe Ransom’s advice to the aesthetically minded to “contemplate object as object,” so as not to be “forced by an instinctive necessity to take it and devour it immediately.”⁸ With only minor differences, Brooks advocates “a tropology of the perversities through which we turn

back, turn around, the simple consumption of texts, making their reading a worthy object of analysis" (p. 34). "Narrative truth," he declares, is "a matter of conviction, derived from the plausibility and well-formedness of the narrative discourse, and also from what we might call its force, its power to create further patterns of connectedness, its power to persuade us that things must have happened this way . . ." (p. 59). Fish's notion of the analyst's will to power, and perhaps as well the ideological implications of a formalist aesthetic, echo here audibly in Brooks's rhetoric of force and power. In spite of his advocacy of the transferential and therefore volatile and interminable nature of the talking cure, it bears initially all marks of a rhetorical construction demanding the coherence, force and completion formerly assigned to the aesthetic or to the explanatory histories and exhaustive accounts mentioned by Fish. Like the aesthetic, Brooks's "well-formed" narrative appears to seek refuge from the irreparable realities of history; it is a "special place," "an artificial illness," "the realm of the 'as if,' " "a special kind of present," a "symbolic replay of the past . . ." – all Freudian terms to which Brooks adds "a possible fiction to take the place of history" (p. 67). It is a fiction well exemplified in Balzac's story *Adieu*, where too literal an understanding of the past usurps the place of fiction, harming rather than healing the patient.

Brooks's aesthetic conception of psychoanalysis – emphasized by his insistence on the formal properties of narrative, its coherence, completion, and rhetorical force – leads necessarily to the admission that psychoanalysis is not really different from literature. Such an admission, however, now leaves open the possibility for a correspondence between the two discourses where neither is dominant. If literature and psychoanalysis relate to each other as an interplay, or as a catachresis, as Brooks proposes, both terms emphasize that neither fiction nor psychoanalysis is ground to the other, and that their

positions of authority are interchangeable. The lack of a distinction between the literal and the figurative allows thus no judgement as to any truth value, and neither can psychoanalysis therefore have any explanatory power (p. 24); it takes place in the unverifiable twilight of Freud's transferential *Zwischenreich*. If this calls into question Fish's misgivings about Freud's alleged intentions, it also calls into question the legitimacy of psychoanalytical criticism itself. Brooks responds to such a charge that the sameness of structure, the cognitive and emotional correspondence between literature and psychoanalysis (p. 39), nevertheless reveals what he calls "the human stakes" (p. 35).

Brooks's claim hinges almost singly on his following of Freud's assumption that sexual desire and narrative plot, that erotics and aesthetic form are analogous, so much so that literature itself constitutes a fundamental part of human existence and that it would be advisable, Brooks suggests, to study precisely the form of literature, rather than the author or reader, or the fictive characters, if the human stakes were to be revealed. This amounts to an unexpected reversal of the usual argument that formal and aesthetic questions are gratuitous and indifferent to human affairs.

Given Brooks's aesthetic preferences, which lodge solidly in nineteenth-century realism, the dynamics of psychic processes seem to find their most fulfilling deployment in an aesthetic, with determinable beginning, middle and end, which offers (if only as a necessary fiction) the libidinal satisfactions of aesthetic closure. If "Dora" thus appears to Brooks as "a kind of failed Edwardian novel, one that can never reach a satisfactory dénouement" (p. 50), such a failure, one must hasten to say, seems inscribed in any narrative genre, even, as Freud's revisions of "The Wolf-Man" testify, in the various closures and hence in the perpetual openness of that narrative. Since a confirmation of narrative truth can

thus only be established as "the illusion of creating a space of meaning" (p. 34), neither the denial nor indeed the patient's affirmation can, it seems, really terminate the analysis. Assertions such as "things must have happened this way," or "we must consider all narrative truth to be 'true' in so far as it carries conviction, while at the same time asserting that if it carries conviction it must in some sense be true" (p. 60) announce rather perilously, the absence of a ground of truth, and the necessarily circular epistemology of a narrative cure and psychoanalytic criticism. Neither psychoanalytic criticism nor the cure itself seem, therefore, to be immune from becoming themselves the mental disorder which Brooks discovers in the "faulty narratives" and which cause the patient to seek the counsel of the analyst. Hence the interchangeable roles of analyst and analysand or of reader and text.

Since modernism is contemporaneous with Freud's discovery of psychoanalysis, there is here then more than a coincidental resemblance between modernist texts and faulty narratives. The patient's story, "riddled with gaps, with memory lapses, with inexplicable contradictions in chronology, with screen memories concealing repressed material" (p. 47), resembles the modernist text, but so does the analyst's construction with its irony about its form and its anxiety about its readability. When Brooks generalizes these modernist characteristics, claiming an anxiety over transmissibility even for the realist novel, this might ultimately mean that, in some degree, psychoanalysis itself must be included in the illness it seeks to cure.

Thus, Brooks will take us in his understanding of cure and narrative "beyond a formalist narratology" (p. 72). Rather than in the fetishizing of the aesthetic experience in a certain form and truth, and rather than as a "naming of the world" (p. 72), the cure takes place, like the reading of texts, "in the movement between text and reader" (p. 72). Rather than "the coherent, ordered chro-

nological story," what is at stake is the process "in which narrative discourse orders story" (p. 55). The word for this process is the transference, perhaps the most fundamental of Freud's discoveries both for psychoanalysis and for the study of literature. It implies that the cure of mental illness, like the construction of a work of art, or like the interpretation of either, takes place neither in the present nor in the past, neither in the patient nor in the analyst, neither in the text nor in the reader. Its authority lies in its exchange, which is to admit also the indeterminacy of what constitutes that authority. "The truth of narrative is situational," Brooks concludes in his third lecture, "the work of truth reciprocal" (p. 101). The truth, like the authority of the analyst's constructions, is thus a self-conscious, interminable textual edition of the past, a story always under revision, always in transition between reader and text or between analyst and patient. Freud's interminable revisions of his past constructions may be the precursors of such a concept of narrative truth. Proceeding by addition rather than by substitution, Freud's texts exemplify the status of truth as endless text.

Thus, only in its dynamic interaction, in its dialogic form, or as Brooks claims – and this implies as well Freud's returns to his own texts – when the analyst "enters into the logic of [the patient's] symptoms" (p. 69) can the cure attain its coherence, force, and completion – although the claim for completion, for the terminable analysis that is also implied here, must appear under erasure. All the more so if it is largely the literary – that is to say, the interactive, transmissible, or scriptible nature of narrative, not the establishment of fact – that constitutes truth or mental health. Brooks quotes Freud to make the point that indeed the analyst proceeds by the same principle of interpretation as the modern reader of a text for whom an interpretation is likewise interminable: "The analyst . . . finishes a piece of construction and communicates it to the subject of analysis so that it

may work on him; he then constructs a further piece out of the fresh material pouring in on him, deals with it in the same way and proceeds in this alternating fashion until the end' " (p. 56). But the end, as desired as it is impossible, seems ever delayed. "We have a feeling at the end of Marlow's narration," as Brooks writes about the epitome of modernist narrative, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "that retelling of his tale will have to continue: that the ambiguous wisdom he has transmitted to his listeners will have to be retransmitted by them as narrative to future listeners" (RP, p. 260). "[I]n the last analysis," Brooks declares in the third lecture, "the desire for and of storytelling . . . subtends all other meanings, in literature as in the psychoanalytic transference" (p. 99).

Closure then, like aesthetic coherence and completion, is not in itself the cure, even if it is the motor of narrative, promising an eventual retrospective revelation of some – it would seem necessarily temporary – meaning of the story. Referring in his third lecture to Benjamin's celebrated essay "The Storyteller," Brooks points out that, for Benjamin, storytelling, understood as an oral, transference relationship, will ultimately amount to an authentication of the reader's presence. Such a claim is, however, partially denied by Brooks: "we may not want to say, with Benjamin, that the reader encounters himself in this type of narrative" (p. 100). But why not? According to Brooks, "the reader must . . . come face to face with his inescapable desire for narrative, as the ultimate motivation of oral or written storytelling" (p. 100), and if this is true, then this desire seems to me to have its motivation in the reader's or patient's fundamental need to counteract his dismemberment with at least a symbolic form of presence – even if that presence can only be in language, the presence of an other.

One would insist then that the therapeutic quality of the transference resides precisely in the same qualities that make a literary text literary. And this may reemphas-

ize the similarity between literature and psychoanalysis. For like the literary text, which (as Hans-Georg Gadamer has memorably pointed out) recovers the lost voice of writing by requiring an "always new, ideal speaking," psychoanalysis lastly reconfirms the presence of the analysand, reveals him – in his state of dismemberment – as the subject of a story, through which telling the patient might become (temporarily) whole – as whole at least as the story itself.

While the past resembles writing, psychoanalysis is the recovery of that writing through an always new, ideal speaking. Hence Benjamin's and Brooks's insistence on the interactive, dialogic nature of narrative. The analysand recreates himself as a fictional character in a story that "will never really be told. It can only be constructed, in the most conjectural manner" (p. 94). However, if it is "only" in the most conjectural manner, and in nothing more determinate than in a manner of conjecture that the difference of the present experience can be affirmed against the past, this might undermine Brooks's claim that psychoanalysis "believes in cure" (p. 71). If mental health cannot be established as fact, if the past is incurable, psychoanalysis can offer no cure. But what narrative conjectures, what the discourse of otherness can promise nevertheless, is treatment, a word that might intimate the interminability of psychoanalysis.

At least that much seems to me implied in Brooks's notion of Benjamin's oral storyteller, who appears as the ideal psychoanalyst, whose constructions necessarily include the listener and thereby assign the listener the role of correspondent in a structure of exchange impossible without his presence. I am not sure that such a "situational" or fictional ontology finally suffices to affirm the otherwise frail postmodern notion of subjectivity. But, in the absence of firmer, more determinate values – and Brooks's argument always returns to that absence – his

narrative theory implies the importance of present (and this means interminable) social interactions. These now must replace both the final cure as well as the truth of the past. The Freudian subject, as Malcolm Bowie has pointed out, "is no longer a substance endowed with qualities, or a fixed shape possessing dimensions . . . it is a series of events within language, a procession of turns, tropes, and inflections."¹⁰ Bowie's, like Brooks's, notions of subjectivity thus stress the enormous significance of keeping alive a humanistic tradition, or its narratives, which appear to be, alas, our only mode of being.

Harold Schweizer

REFERENCES

The following works by Peter Brooks are cited in the Introduction:

Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) (RP)

Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) (BW)

NOTES

- 1 Simple page references in this Introduction refer to Brooks's lectures in this volume.
- 2 Conrad, *Lord Jim*: "Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention?" Brooks uses this passage as the epigraph for *Reading for the Plot*.
- 3 "The Proffered Word," *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 4623 (November 8, 1991), p. 11.
- 4 "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund*

Freud, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), vol. 17, p. 105.

- 5 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 28.
- 6 Stanley Fish, "Withholding the Missing Portion: Psychoanalysis and Rhetoric," in *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 545 and cf. p. 552.
- 7 Fish, p. 534.
- 8 John Crowe Ransom, *The World's Body* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1938; repr. 1968), p. 44.
- 9 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, vol. 1 (1960; reprinted Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), and *Ergänzungen/Register*, vol. 2 (1986), p. 353.
- 10 Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 76.

The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Criticism

If psychoanalytic literary criticism has been with us at least since 1908, when Freud published his brief essay, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," the enterprise hasn't on the whole made a good name for itself. It's in fact most often been something of an embarrassment. The notion of psychoanalysis applied to literary study continues to evoke reductive maneuvers that flatten the richness of creative texts into well-worn categories, finding the same old stories where we want new ones. I find myself resisting the label "psychoanalytic critic" – though no doubt I am one, in some sense still to be defined – and worrying about the legitimacy and force that psychoanalysis may claim when imported into the study of literary texts. If the enterprise has recently been renewed in subtle ways by post-structuralist versions of reading, under the aegis of Jacques Lacan, a malaise persists, a sense that whatever the promises of their union, literature and psychoanalysis remain mismatched bedfellows – or should I say, playmates.

The first problem, and the most basic, may be that psychoanalysis in literary study has over and over again mistaken the object of analysis, with the result that whatever insights it has produced tell us precious little about the structure and rhetoric of literary texts. Traditional

psychoanalytic criticism tends to fall into three general categories, depending on the *object* of analysis: the author, the reader, or the fictive persons of the text. The first of these constituted the classical locus of psychoanalytic interest. It is now apparently the most discredited, though also perhaps the most difficult to extirpate, since if the disappearance of the author has been repeatedly announced, authorial mutants ceaselessly reappear, as, for instance, in Harold Bloom's psychomachia of literary history. The biographical continues to hold a perennial interest in our culture, and provides grounds for the deployment of psychoanalytic approaches, from the professional to the most amateur.

Like the author, the fictive character has been deconstructed into an effect of textual codes, a kind of thematic mirage, and the psychoanalytic study of the putative unconscious of characters in fiction has also fallen into disrepute. Here again, however, the impulse resurfaces, for instance in the moves of some feminist critics who want to show how the represented female psyche (particularly, of course, as created by women authors) refuses and problematizes the dominant concepts of male psychological doctrine. Gender-based criticism has in fact contributed to a new variant of the psychoanalytic study of fictive characters, a variant one might label the "situational-thematic": studies of Oedipal triangles in fiction, their permutations and evolution, of the roles of mothers and daughters, of situations of nurture and bonding, and so forth. Work of this nature can be methodologically disquieting in its use of Freudian analytic tools in a wholly thematic way – though this is of course part of its contestatory force – and in its implicit claim that the identification and labeling of human relations in a psychoanalytic vocabulary is the task of reading. The third traditional field of psychoanalytic literary study, the reader, continues to flourish in ever-renewed versions, since the role of the reader in the creation of

textual meaning is very much on our minds at present, and since the psychoanalytic study of readers' responses willingly brackets the impossible notion of author in favor of the acceptable and also verifiable notion of reader. The psychoanalytic study of the reader may concern real readers (as in Norman Holland's *Five Readers Reading*) or the reader as psychological everyman (as in Simon O. Lesser's *Fiction and the Unconscious*). But like the other traditional psychoanalytic approaches, it displaces the object of analysis from the text to some person, some other psycho-dynamic structure, a displacement I wish to avoid since – as I hope to make clear as I go along – I think psychoanalytical criticism can and should be textual and rhetorical.

If the displacement of the object of analysis has been a major failing of psychoanalytic literary criticism, it has erred also in its inability to rid itself of the underlying conviction that it is inherently explanatory. The problem with "literature and psychoanalysis," as Shoshana Felman has pointed out more effectively than any other critic, lies in that "and."¹ The conjunction has almost always masked a relation of privilege of one term to another, a use of psychoanalysis as a conceptual system in terms of which to analyze and explain literature, rather than an encounter and confrontation of the two. The reference to psychoanalysis has traditionally been used to close rather than open the argument, and the text. This is not surprising, since the recourse to psychoanalysis usually claims as its very *raison d'être* the capacity to explain and justify in the terms of a system and a discourse more penetrating and productive of insight than literary critical psychology as usual, which of course harbors its own, largely unanalyzed, assumptions. As Simon O. Lesser states the case, "no 'common-sense' psychology yet employed in criticism has been helpful"; whereas psychoanalysis provides a way to explore "the deepest levels of meaning of the greatest fiction."²

Why should we reject such a claim? Even if psychoanalysis is far from being a "science" with the formal power of linguistics, for instance, surely certain of its hypotheses are so well established and so universally illustrated that we can use them with as much impunity as such linguistic concepts as "shifters" or "the double articulation." Yet the recourse to linguistic and to psychoanalytic concepts implies a false symmetry: linguistics may be universalistic, but its tools and concepts are "cool," and their overextension easily recognized as trivial; whereas psychoanalysis is imperialistic, almost of necessity. Freud works from the premise that all that appears is a sign, that all signs are subject to interpretation, and that they speak of messages that ultimately tell stories that contain the same *dramatis personae* and the same narrative functions for all of us. It is no wonder that Freud called himself a "conquistador": he extends remarkably the empire of signs and their significant decipherment, encompassing all of human behavior and symbolic action. Thus any "psychoanalytic explanation" in another discipline always runs the risk of appearing to claim the last word, the final hermeneutic power. If there is one thing that post-structuralist criticism has most usefully taught us, it is the suspicion and refusal of this last word in the interpretive process and history, the refusal of any privileged position in analysis.

The post-structuralist versions of psychoanalytic criticism have attempted to move out from the impasses of an inglorious tradition, to make psychoanalysis serve the study of texts and rhetoric rather than authors, and to stage an encounter of psychoanalysis and literature that doesn't privilege either term, but rather sets them in a dialogue that both exemplifies and questions how we read. The work of such critics as Felman, Neil Hertz, Leo Bersani, Sarah Kofman, Malcolm Bowie, Jane Gallop, Jacqueline Rose, Toril Moi – to give only a very partial list of those who have renewed the enterprise –