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RETELLING  
A LIFE

*Narration and Dialogue  
in Psychoanalysis*

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Although competitive, envious, possessive, and prurient interest in the analyst keeps coming up all through the analysis, its forms usually become much more temperate, and they do not undermine the intense and benevolent collaborative spirit that usually characterizes the final phase of analysis.

This mature self interest will be evident at the very end of a beneficial analysis when progressed analysands depart, smiling or crying or both, convinced not only of a better and truer set of storylines with which to give an account of a past life, including a past analytic life, but convinced that there are better and more truth-making sets of storylines with which to organize and conduct a life among people in the future. Analysands recognize the inseparability of self-interest and self interest and the inseparability of both from interest in the self-interest and self interest of others. For the most part it will no longer seem to serve well or to be necessary to keep saying or implying of self and others, "I don't care," "I don't dare," and "It's no use trying," and also "You don't care," "You don't dare," and "You're not trying." There are other and better stories of human relatedness to construct and tell.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Narratives of the Self*

THE concept of the self can be approached in two ways: as posing a significant problem for theory construction in psychoanalysis and as a significant feature of the self psychology of everyday life. Herein I attempt to show that the terms and the results of these two approaches need not be as different as might be expected. That is, the self psychology of theory may be shown to have a good deal in common with everyday self psychology as it appears in ordinary language, such as analysts hear from the couch. In particular, both approaches may be characterized as the construction of narratives. Grossman (1982), it should be noted, took up some of these problems under the aspects of individual *fantasy* of a self and individual *theory* of a self and considered both aspects in relation to psychoanalysts' theories of the self.

#### THE SELF IN CONTEMPORARY ANALYTIC THOUGHT

The self has become the most popular figure in modern, innovative psychoanalytic accounts of human development and action. Usually the self is presented in these accounts as an active agency: It is the source of motivation and initiative; it is a self-starter, the originator of action; it is the first-person, singular, indicative subject, that is, the "I" of "I come," "I go," "I will," "I won't," "I know," "I wonder," and "I do

declare!" This is the self that exhibits itself and hides itself and can love or loathe its own reflection.

There is still more to the usual presentation of this active self. The self appears in these accounts as the subject of experience: It constructs and participates in an experiential world; it is the self of taste and value, impression and emotional direction; it is the sexual self, the private self, the fragile self, and the bodily self.

Furthermore, this featured active self is the central organized and organizing constituent of the person considered as a structured psychological entity. In this aspect the self is the unity, the essence, the existential core, the gestalt, and the mastermind of a person's life.

In modern times this self or some selective version of it has been called by many names: the self and the self-system by Sullivan (1940), the action self by Rado (1956), the true self by Winnicott (1958), and the cohesive or nuclear self by Kohut (1977). Additionally, it is the superordinate self of Kernberg (1982) and the self as agent of the philosopher Macmurray (1957).

Concurrently, however, this self is not always and only active. Usually it has been presented as also being the object rather than the subject of action and experience. And often, as in reflexive locutions, this self appears as the object of its own action and experience, as when we speak of self-observation and self-esteem. Moreover, the self as object is not just a reactive agency or an observed agency; it is also the ensemble of self-representations. That is, it is the core content of all of a person's ideas about him- or herself, the self-concept or self-image. In this mixing together of agency and content, there is, I believe, some serious overloading of the conceptualization of self and possibly some theoretical incoherence as well (Schafer, 1976, 1978). Despite this, modern theory has it that the object-self is impinged upon by internal and external stimulation, and as a result of this impingement, both the functional self and the represented self may be fragmented, shriveled, inflated, chilled, and so forth.

Even in a brief and incomplete introductory survey of the self in contemporary analytic thought, which is all I claim for this section of this chapter, it is mandatory to mention that this self has also been presented, at least implicitly, as a force. In one respect this force is very much like an instinctual drive the aim of which is full selfhood or self-realization; in another respect this force is very much like a growth principle that vies with or replaces Freud's (1911b) pleasure principle. I believe this obviously teleological self principle or self drive is at the center of Kohut's (1977) self psychology; there it plays just as essential a part in explanations of psychopathology and cure as

it does in explanations of normal development and personality organization. And I believe there can be discerned a similar teleological thrust in Erik Erikson's (1950, 1956) "ground plan" of development and its particular manifestation in a close relative of the self, namely, ego identity.

To continue establishing the terms for a narrative account of the self, I discuss, first, the self as active agent and second, the experiential self.

### THE SELF AS AGENT

It is intrinsic to any psychological theory to present the human being as an agent or actor in certain essential ways and to some significant extent (Schafer, 1976, 1978, 1983). Even an extreme tabula rasa theory must include an account of how the person who has been written on by the surrounding world and by bodily processes becomes, in turn, an author of existence. Although the person may be a repetitive and largely preprogrammed author, he or she cannot be that entirely, for there is no one program to be applied to everything identically. The person must select and organize in order to construe reality in one adaptive way or another or one maladaptive way or another. Certainly, the theorist who is advancing a new set of ideas about human psychology must be viewed as a selective and organizing agent.

An author of existence is someone who constructs experience. Experience is made or fashioned; it is not encountered, discovered, or observed, except upon secondary reflection. Even the idea of experience as that which is turned up by the introspecting subject introduces an actively introspecting subject, an agent engaging in a particular set of actions, and thus someone who may introspect in different ways and for different reasons (Grossman, 1967). The introspecting subject extracts from the plenitude of potential experience what is wanted; in one case it may be sense data and in another case a self or, as is more usual, an array of selves. Introspection does not encounter ready-made material. For these reasons, developmental theories cannot avoid giving accounts of the different ways in which experience is constructed as advances take place in the child's and adult's cognitive and psychosexual functioning. Analysts refer to this as phase-specificity.

All this has to do with the self, for in their necessarily presupposing an agent, psychological theories of the self usually equate agency with selfhood. These theories then speak of what the self does. This is a

permissible move in the game of theory construction. Once agency and selfhood have been equated, however, at least two new problems will have to be dealt with.

### Self or Person?

The first problem is explaining what advantage is gained by saying that a self engages in actions rather than saying that a person does. Why speak of activity at one remove from the person—from him or her or, for that matter, from you or me? Might there be some misguided need on the theorist's part to add an air of detachment to the discussion, an air that spuriously gives it an appearance of scientific legitimacy or clinical objectivity? Is it demonstrably more plausible or heuristic to say that a self can be organized and organizing than to say that a person can be?

But perhaps it is not an image of scientific detachment and of clinical objectivity that is at stake; perhaps it is a culturally reinforced need to retain in our psychologies some extrapersonal source of agency and thereby some implicit passive stance toward life. Although the self that is set apart from the person is not quite a soul or a god, it may be viewed as an idea that is not quite free of the kind of disclaiming of personal agency that most of us associate with souls and divine visitations. This is so because in adequate accounts of human action the person is retained alongside the self as a necessary activating figure.

Self psychologies retain the person in this way. They tend to exempt the "I"—the first-person pronoun, singular indicative—from the self in order to make the theories work; for the "I" is the informative witness to its own self and the source of the theorist's data. Comparably, when Freud talked of psychic structure, he still found it necessary to refer to the person or subject, for the structural theory could not do all the work; it needed a psychological being to stand behind it and to contain it, and it is that being that I call the person. In "The Ego and the Id" (1923a), for example, Freud introduced the person through blatant personification of the ego (see, for example, p. 58).

### Doubling and Multiplying the Self

The second problem encountered by a psychological theory that attributes agency to the self rather than to the person follows on the heels of the first. If the theorist tries to deal with the first problem by making every effort to include the "I" within the self, then he or she is required to speak of that self as being self-constructing, self-maintaining, self-containing, and self-evaluating. That is, the theory is committed

both to self as mental mover and to self as mental content, or to self as subject and object simultaneously—and thus to a self that includes itself. There occurs at the least a doubling of the self. This doubling is a feature of Kohut's (1977) self psychology: The Kohutian self is not only an experiential self, it is also a center of initiative that establishes and repairs self-experience in general and self-esteem in particular. Additionally, in order to account for the profusion of diverse tendencies that characterizes each person's life, the self psychologist must sooner or later, and more or less officially, propose the existence of various subselves (for example, the grandiose self, the true and false self). Each of these subselves is supposed to be viewed as acting as a more or less independent agent even while it is still to be regarded as part of one basic self.

What is the result of this doubling and multiplying of selves? We seem to end up with a mind that is located both *within* and *outside* its boundaries and that contains numerous little minds that are *within* itself and at the same time *are* itself. This odd turn in self theory is a sign that it is in deep trouble. It has become fluid if not weakened. In contrast, it is less artificially detached and perhaps theoretically and scientifically less pretentious to think more plainly in terms of persons constructing and revising their various experiential selves of everyday life and ordinary language. Then each person is taken to be a narrator of selves rather than a non-Euclidean container of self entities. In the next section I hope to strengthen the case for a narrative approach to the self.

### THE EXPERIENTIAL SELF

I begin with a puzzle and my solution to it. The puzzle is analogous to the one where you look for hidden faces in a sketch of the landscape. Here is the puzzle: How many selves and how many types of self are stated or implied in the following account? A male analysand says to his analyst: "I told my friend that whenever I catch myself exaggerating, I bombard myself with reproaches that I never tell the truth about myself, so that I end up feeling rotten inside, and even though I tell myself to cut it out, that there is more to me than that, that it is important for me to be truthful, I keep dumping on myself."

I count eight selves of five types. The first self is the analysand self talking to his analyst, and the second is the social self who had been talking to a friend. These two selves are similar but not identical in that self-organization and self-presentation are known to vary to some

extent with the situation a person is in, and in many ways the analytic situation is unlike any other in life. The third self I count is the bombarding self; the fourth, the derogated self that exaggerates; and the fifth, the exaggerated self itself. The sixth is the truthful self the man aspires to be; the seventh, the conciliatory advisor of the bombarding self, the self that advises cutting out the reproaches; and the eighth is the defended self, the one with redeeming features. As to type, there is what is presented as the actual self (whether exaggerated, reproached, or defended), the ideal self (truthful), the self as place (the one with the rotten inside and the one that can be dumped on), the self as agent or subject (the teller, the bombardier, the aspirant, and the advisor), and the self as object (the self observed, evaluated, reproached, and defended).

My answer to the puzzle introduces once again my thesis that there is value in viewing the self in narrative terms. I suggest that the analyst's experiential self may be seen as a set of varied narratives that seem to be told by and about a cast of varied selves. And yet, like the dream, which has one dreamer, the entire tale is told by one narrator. Nothing here supports the common illusion that there is a single self-entity that each person has and experiences, a self-entity that is, so to speak, out there in Nature where it can be objectively observed, clinically analyzed, and then summarized and bound in a technical definition—as if Humpty Dumpty could be put back together again. Whether the material is rhymed, brief, and cute like Humpty Dumpty, or prosy, long, and difficult like most analytic material, we analysts may be said to be constantly dealing with self narratives—that is, with all the storylines that keep cropping up in clinical work—such as storylines of the empty self, the false self, the secret self, and so on.

## SELF NARRATIVES

I must point out first that it is consistent with ordinary language to speak of self *narratives*. In ordinary language, we refer to ourselves or to the self of another person in a variety of ways that derive from the different vantage points that we occupy at different times and in different emotional contexts. Implicitly it is accepted that, except for certain rhetorical purposes, there is no one way of telling it “like it is.” For example, in my puzzle, it comes across as perfectly acceptable to produce what appears to be one narrative that includes a self that never tells the truth and another self characterized by other and more

estimable tendencies within which self is situated the self that exaggerates. It is taken for granted, it is common practice to converse on the understanding that, whether in the role of observer or observed, a person can only *tell* a self or encounter it as something *told* (Schafer, 1983). Or, as the case may be, tell more than one self. The so-called self exists in versions, only in versions, and commonly in multiple simultaneous versions.

For example, to say “I told myself to get going” is to tell a self story with two characters, an admonishing self and an admonished self, or perhaps with three characters if we include the implied author who is telling about the admonishing. To say “Deep inside him there is a grandiose self” is also to tell a story about two selves, this time about one self contained within another. And smacking one's head after making a mistake is to make a show of punishing a dumb self. This last example also makes it plain that some of these versions of self are nonverbal. That is, they are versions that are shown in expressive movements or life-style rather than told verbally; however, showing or enactment may be regarded as a form of telling, so that it is warranted to treat nonverbal manifestations as self narratives in another form of our common language, say, as charades of self narratives.

To debunk the idea, as I have been doing, that personal experience discloses a single self-entity and that theory must include that self is not to maintain that all self narratives are inherently unstable and inconsistent; nor is it to maintain that all these narratives are on the same level; nor yet that the content of these narratives concerns only chronic flux or chaos. Many of our actions may be presented noncontroversially as differentiated, integrated, and stable, and these presentations themselves may share these organized and enduring qualities. In many instances, certain self narratives are so impressively stable in organization and content and so clearly superordinate to others that it seems a matter of simple observation to say that there must be, or we must be seeing, psychic structure. There must be nuts and bolts somewhere, we feel, or good strong glue to make it possible. But in reacting thus we are, I submit, following the good old storyline of primal chaos: This chaos is the baby with only an id to start life with, the seething cauldron of instinctual drives that must be curbed and contained by psychic structures. This is not the account of a preadapted baby in a world of prepared objects or others, the account that today seems much more adequate to express the way we make sense of humanness and its development.

Furthermore, through developmental study and analytic recon-

struction, we can often impressively claim to trace a progressive differentiation, integration, stabilization, and hierarchical arrangement of self stories.

At the same time, however, it must be said that in daily life we seem to have acquired an exaggerated impression of single and unvarying self-entities. This results from our unreflective attitude toward the heavy use we all make in our ordinary language of first-person singular pronouns and of such reflexive terms as self-esteem and self-control. Also, as we have self as agent available to us as a culturally or linguistically well-established narrative possibility, we gain an apparently experiential conviction that we possess a unitary and enduring self that may be experienced directly, unmediated by language and story. Locutions such as "be yourself" and "divided self" are instances of what I mean. Our common language authorizes us to think and speak in terms of single, stable self-entities. And so we want to protest that the self is not a matter of language, theory, and narrative mediation at all: The self is something we know firsthand; it is (in that marvelously vague phrase) the sense of self, a self we feel in our bones. I submit that it is correct to reply that "to feel it in your bones" is to resort to yet another good old storyline of the knowing body or the body as mind; the "sense of self" does not escape the web of narration.

In addition, from the psychoanalyst's point of view, there are still more and differently told experiential selves to take into account than my first answer to my puzzle suggested. I referred only to selves that appear to be consciously or preconsciously available at the moment. Yet unconsciously, the analysand in my puzzle may also be regarded as experiencing and presenting to the analyst *in the transference* a helpless self—that is, a child-self that cannot run its own affairs and so must appeal to a parental figure for help. Additionally, the puzzle statement may be indicating to the analyst that, unconsciously, the speaker is maintaining, among other experiential selves, a cruel and totalistic moral self, a grandiose self without blemishes, and an anal self that defiantly makes messes by lying.

I have just named only a few of the narrative retellings of the troubled analysand's self stories that the analyst may have to develop in the form of interpretations. Even what I called his actual self may have to be retold. For example, it may turn out that, for this analysand, his actual self is given very little to exaggerating; he produces no impressive analytic evidence in his sessions that he does exaggerate to any notable degree; and the significant problem may be that, fearing the envy of others, he has suppressed the presentation of a justifiably proud actual self and has substituted for it an unconvincing defensive

account of an outrageous braggart. The self that is claimed to be felt in one's bones could not possibly encompass all of these experiential selves, even if it could think; neither could the "sense of self" encompass all of them.

At this point, we might ask whether, in the interest of our own mental safety, we should not avoid this milling crowd of narrated selves in which we could easily get lost or trampled. Should we not instead mingle with only a few well-behaved self categories? My answer is, first, we do have available superordinate self categories, such as the actual self and the ideal self (Schafer, 1967). Second, we should be careful not to lose sight of the proliferation of selves in each person's construction of experience lest we begin to mistake our superordinate categories for entities discovered in Nature and observable without narrative mediation. In principle, no limit can be set on the number of experiential self constructions that it may be profitable to discuss in one or another context of inquiry. It is no good saying that we already have enough concepts to do the job of interpretation, for to do so is to close the book on new approaches and the new phenomena made available by these approaches. As I have argued in connection with prisoner fantasies (1983), each proposal in this realm should be assessed on its merits.

## STORYLINES

Although I have alluded to the storylines of self narratives, I have neither attempted to define them nor provided examples. In this connection, however, we must ask not only "What is a storyline?" We must also ask "What is the relation of storyline to self-representation, fantasy, and metaphor, the three apparently germane concepts that clearly occupy more or less established or at least familiar places in analytic thought?" It is around these questions that I have organized this next section of my argument.

First, then, what is a storyline? By "storyline" I refer to whatever it is that can be used to establish a set of guidelines and constraints for telling a story that conveys what convention would certify as having a certain general kind of content. These guidelines and constraints may be derived from one or more symbols, metaphors, similes, images, themes, or dramatic scenes, or some combination of these. This storyline serves as a tool for working out ways to retell other stories in its terms, and so it makes it possible for narrators both to generate many versions of what is conventionally regarded as the same basic story

and, through reduction, to create faithful repetitions of these versions out of apparently diverse narrative materials. In one respect, for example, we have the storylines of imprisonment, rebirth, and odyssey that are commonly developed in the course of analytic work.

Take, for example, the instance of using rebirth as the storyline: The analyst may understand an analysand's references to new growth, new beginnings, glowing embers among the ashes, emergence from water, revival, and so on, as references to rebirth. In other instances, analysts develop narratives of oedipal victory and defeat and of masochism: When using the oedipal storyline, analysts may take a negative therapeutic reaction in part as a frightened retreat from oedipal victory and in part as a switch to the negative oedipal position. In contrast, when using the masochism storyline, analysts may take a negative therapeutic reaction in part as a sign of powerful reluctance to give up preferred forms of compromised and painful gratification and in part as a bid for their pain-inducing, preferably sadistic response to the dashing of their own therapeutic hopes.

With this sketchy account of storyline and its uses in analytic interpretation, let us now compare and contrast storyline with self-representation, unconscious fantasy, and metaphor. In this way I hope to bring home what I mean when I speak of the storylines of self narratives and why I give storyline the central position that I do.

### Self-representation

Self-representation is a concept with a complex history and current status in psychoanalysis. As one of its most relevant features, the concept of self-representation is intended to announce the writer's assumption or realization that the self, like the object, is knowable only through more or less individual, partial, or whole versions of it. These are the versions the analyst encounters or defines in the analysand's psychic reality, and they may have little to do with conventional or putatively true versions of the self.

There is nothing mutually exclusive about the concepts of storyline and self-representation. Storyline may, however, be regarded as the more inclusive concept of the two. This is so because in practice single representations are not identified and analyzed as static and isolated mental contents. Rather, they are dealt with thematically, that is, as being significant insofar as they actually or potentially play parts in basic stories of the self. For example, the prisoner storyline includes a large array of not necessarily glaring representations of the self as deprived, confined, or punished; at the same time, it includes a large array of more or less subtle representations of others as judges, jailers,

or fellow prisoners. It is the job of interpretation to show that those are the representations it will be important to define more sharply and relate to one another in a thematically unified rendition of the analysand's diverse associations. Seen in this light, storyline pulls together and develops important aspects of the conceptualization of self-representations—and object representations, too.

### Unconscious Fantasy

Unconscious fantasy is another concept with a complex psychoanalytic history and current status. Arlow (1969a, 1969b), in two discussions that seem to have become the standard references in modern Freudian literature to unconscious fantasy, came close to the idea of basic storyline. He took note of the aspect of unconscious fantasies he called "plot line." However, Arlow was not concerned, as I am now, with working out a narrative approach to psychoanalytic topics. He referred to these plot lines, such as *Sleeping Beauty*, in a way that was conceptually subordinate to fantasy, and he mentioned plot line only in passing, in a footnote (1969b, p. 47); obviously, he was engaged in making another kind of contribution.

As I see it, we must go beyond the consideration that to speak of a fantasy is to imply that we are referring to mental content organized by a storyline; we must also note that storyline has a more obvious generative connotation than emplotted fantasy does, for it is forward-looking or anticipatory. It is on this basis that storyline can more readily encompass the many variations of basic stories we conventionally recognize in daily life and analytic work. Fairy tales, too, have many versions; indeed, they have so many that it becomes unclear at what point we may no longer speak persuasively or confidently of a specific story as an unusual version of the same basic story (Smith, 1980). The same is true of any of the storylines I mentioned earlier: *Odyssey*, for example, which can encompass many variations, has the generative advantage and at the same time the disadvantage of unclear outer limits. In practice, it can become unclear when the analyst is forcing the same storyline on material that is extremely varied.

### Metaphor

Have I been talking of metaphor all the while, and also of metaphoric entailment (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980)? Metaphoric entailment is exemplified by the basic spatial metaphor, *Good is Up*. This metaphor entails that, among other attributes, intelligence, good taste, and wealth are *Up*, while stupidity, vulgarity, and poverty are

Down. These are entailments insofar as consistency and coherence of discourse are being aimed at, which they often are. Thus, for example, very intelligent is "highly" intelligent. These few remarks on metaphor and entailment seem to suggest that metaphor says the same as storyline.

Again, however, it seems to me that storyline is the more inclusive term of the two. As I noted earlier, metaphor may establish a storyline, and what is called unpacking a metaphor is in certain respects much like laying out the kinds of story that are entailed by the metaphor. For example, "Analysis is Hell" entails the analyst being experienced as the devil. The analyst's attention to departures from the fundamental rule are experienced as the heat being put on. Perhaps in analogy with "War is Hell," the analyst's discipline is likened to Sherman marching to the sea. The stress of the analytic process becomes punishment for past sins; and so on. It is understood that the manifestly metaphoric "Analysis is Hell" is to be used as a set of latent instructions or rules for telling certain kinds of story about being analyzed. Analysts who can work through a core conflict show that they understand the narrative regulations of metaphor; they show it by their steady sense of relevance as they listen to apparently diverse communications.

### *A Clinical Example*

There are many ways by which children are provided with storylines for the construction of self narratives and at the same time the construction of narratives concerning others. The dynamic content involved in these transactions is well known to analysts, but because that content has not usually been conceptualized in narrative terms, I should like to present a clinical example of consequential storylines and to bring it into relation with the topic of childhood memories.

The example concerns a successful, hard-driving, loveless career woman in her forties, once-divorced, who had never managed to establish a lasting, intimate, and gratifying relationship with an adequate and assertive man. From her early years on, she had been warned emphatically by her mother never to let herself be dependent on a man. That warning may be retold as having conveyed to her a number of interrelated storylines, only some of which I shall mention here.

It was being conveyed to her that as a girl and woman she was fated to be vulnerable to helplessness in relation to any man with whom she got deeply involved; further, that the only way to develop and main-

tain significant strength and dignity was to cut herself off from heterosexual love. Thus, she was being told that a heterosexual female self is a weak and degraded self and, also, that to love her father was to make herself vulnerable to this fate. In the broadest terms, she was fated to live in a world of powerful, dangerous, and certainly untrustworthy men. Although this woman had by no means renounced her heterosexuality altogether, she had repetitively developed and played out many versions of this set of storylines in her relationships, and ultimately she did so in her transference to her male analyst. Penis awe and envy, fantasies of castration and of a hidden penis, and primal scene themes were woven into the grim stories of her life that she both elaborated and enacted.

Before going any further, I should make it clear that I am not suggesting that her parents and others around her were the only conveyors of storylines for her life. As I mentioned, analysts assume that the child, too, is a storyteller from the onset of subjective experience. For example, there is the storyline "I once had a penis and lost it." The usual analytic term for childhood constructions of this sort is fantasy. I have been saying that fantasy is a story and that children manufacture stories that interweave what they are told and what they imagine. There is nothing analytically new in this point except my emphasis on narration. And, of course, there is always our culture with its stock of established storylines.

To return to the analysand: An additional and congruent burden had been imposed on her explicitly during her adolescence and her early adult years by her father's admonishing her never to have children. In this way, he authorized and reinforced her own guilty, anxious, and defeated account of her childhood oedipal romance. This romance included in the usual way wishing to bear her father's child. Thus, from her father's side, too, she was being pressed to renounce her heterosexual femininity. In large part she was to construct stories of marriage as offering extremely limited prospects of satisfaction and fulfillment; there was little to hope for even in the ordinary marital form of displaced and matured forms of oedipal love. Furthermore, her father's admonishment could not fail to add weight to her own storyline that she was an unwanted and burdensome child who somehow was responsible for her parents' unhappiness and lack of fulfillment. As was to be expected, she repetitively applied and elaborated this self story in her transference. For example, the repetition began with her earliest appointments when she insisted on paying for each visit at its conclusion. It turned out that she did so in order not to be a financial burden on the analyst, and, in addition, in the terms of the



storyline of dangerous dependence on men, so she would not be indebted to the analyst in any way. The storyline she was acting on was this: The only good woman is a good man; more exactly, a tough, utterly self-reliant man in drag. In effect, by paying as she did, she was saying "This is the story of my life." This enactment included some other major storylines, too, such as those touching on anality, concerns with social status, and so forth.

My intent in this summary of a few aspects of this analysis is theoretical clarification primarily rather than revision of the dynamic variables analysts customarily invoke to understand clinical phenomena. My theoretical point is that so-called self-concepts, self-images, self-representations, or more generally the so-called self may be considered to be a set of narrative strategies or storylines each person follows in trying to develop an emotionally coherent account of his or her life among people. We organize our past and present experiences narratively.

On my reading, this perspective on experience as a narrative construction is implied in Freud's final comments in his 1899 essay, "Screen Memories." There, after commenting on the "peculiarity of the childhood scenes" in that the child is portrayed as an outside observer of scenes in which he or she is an involved participant, and thereupon taking this peculiarity as "evidence that the original impression has been worked over," Freud soon concluded:

The recognition of this fact must diminish the distinction we have drawn between screen memories and other memories derived from our childhood. It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in forming them, as well as in the selection of memories themselves. (P. 322; Freud's italics)

I further believe that Freud was indicating the view, subsequently developed in ego-psychological terms by Ernst Kris (1956b) and that I am now recommending in narrative terms, that theoretical clarification of this sort *does* make a difference in practice. It encourages analysts to be aware that the life-historical material being worked with may

be usefully approached as a series of tellings and retellings constructed and reconstructed over the course of development—indeed over the course of the analysis itself. In this light, what we call free association may be retold as the production of bits and pieces or even larger segments of life stories being constructed and related in the here and now of the analytic relationship.

Speaking in terms of memory, Freud said, "the raw material of memory-traces out of which it [the screen memory] was forged remains unknown to us in its original form" (1899, p. 322). I am adding that we do best to think of the raw material itself as having, to begin with, become *psychic* material in narrative form, however rudimentary the narrative. In other words, the clinical questions we put to whatever we hear from the couch are these: Of which story is this now a part or a version and for which further stories has it served or is it now serving as a storyline? With regard to the self specifically, the questions become these: Which self stories are now being hinted at or disclosed or are now in the process of being constructed or revised and for which purposes?