

“FICTIONAL MINDS”

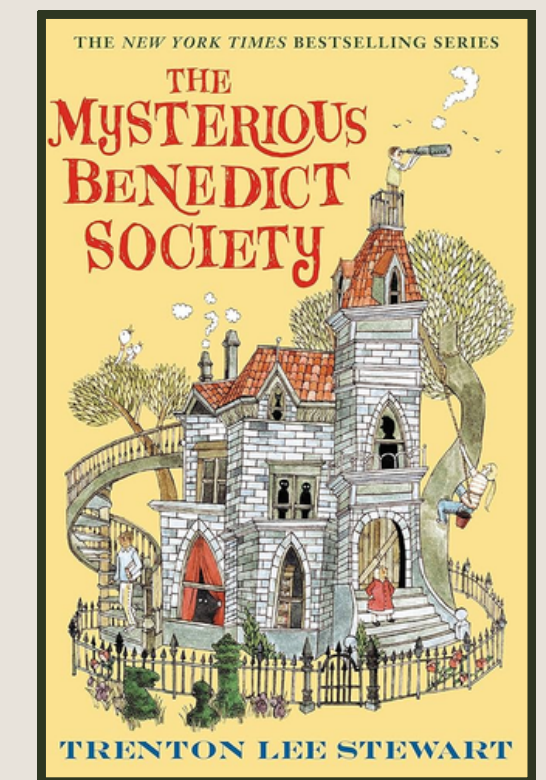
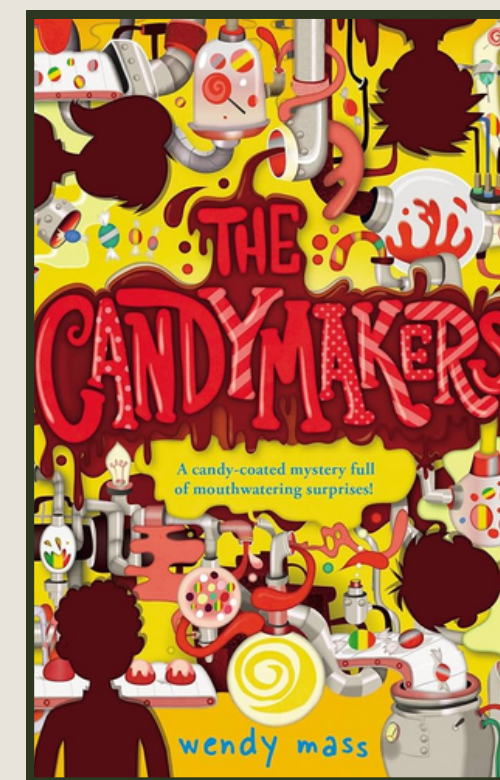
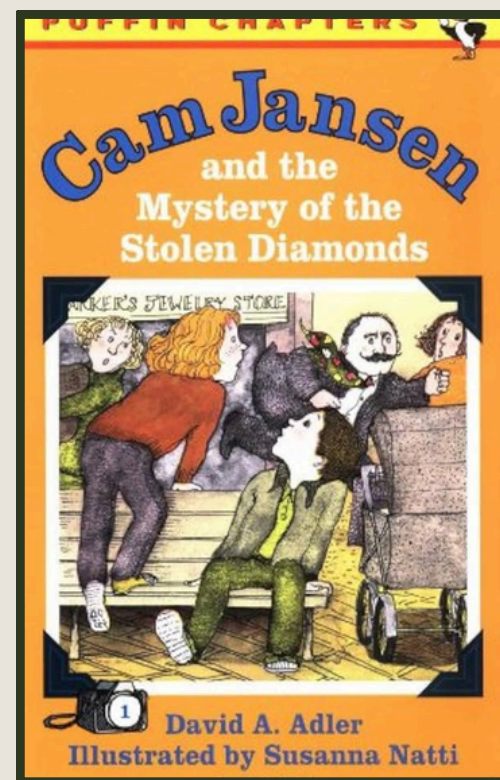
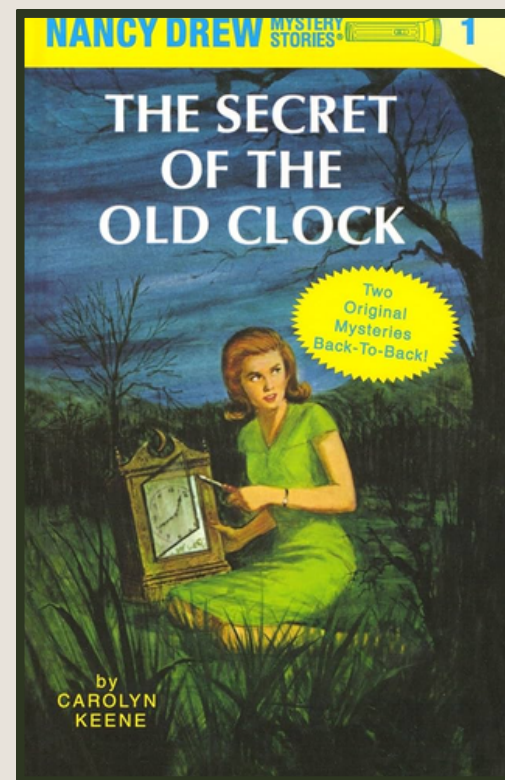
THE INTERSECTION OF NARRATIVE & COGNITIVE PROCESSING

A Capstone Presentation

By Jasmine Chang



EARLY FICTIONAL INTERESTS



Here are some of the narratives that shaped how I perceive and understand others, which became the foundation for exploring how fiction engages the mind and mirrors real psychological processing.

KEY TERMS

- **Cognitive Psychology**
 - “A branch of psychology that explores the operation of mental processes related to perceiving, attending, thinking, language, and memory, mainly through inferences from behavior.”
- **Cognitive Process**
 - “Any of the mental functions assumed to be involved in the acquisition, storage, interpretation, manipulation, transformation, and use of knowledge.”
- **Cognitive Flexibility**
 - “The capacity for objective appraisal and appropriately flexible action...also implies adaptability and fair-mindedness.”





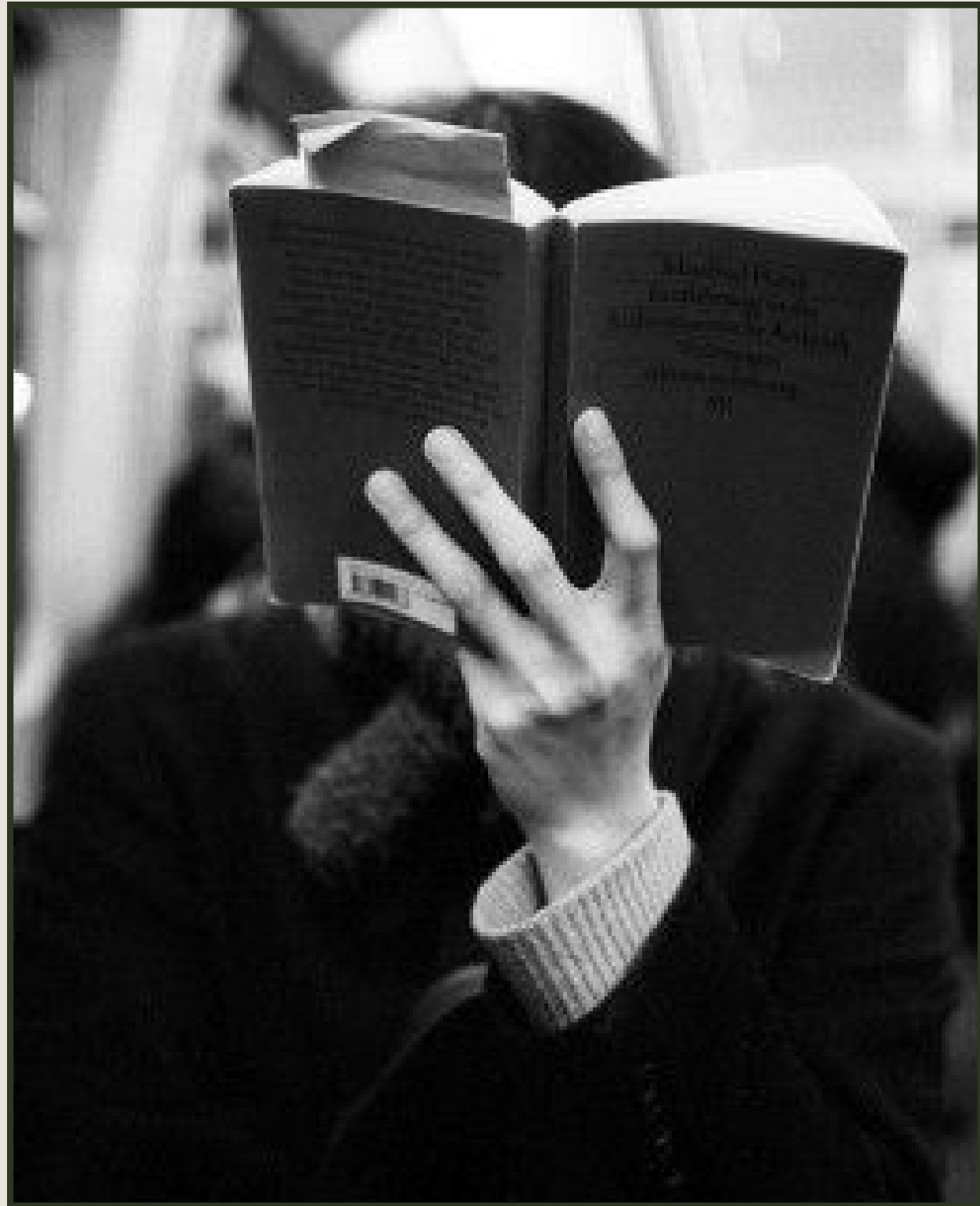
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THEORY OF MIND

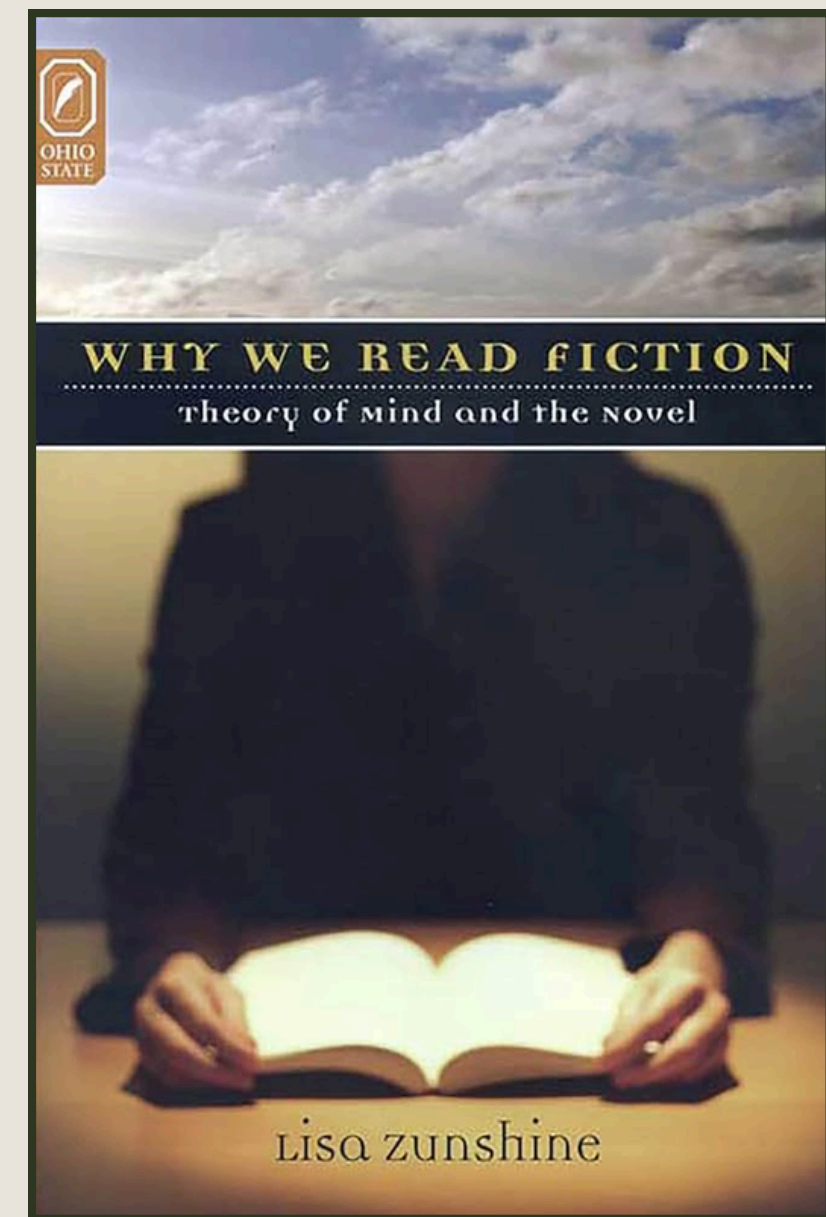
ToM: “The understanding that others have intentions, desires, beliefs, perceptions, and emotions different from one’s own and that such intentions, desires, and so forth affect people’s actions and behaviors.”

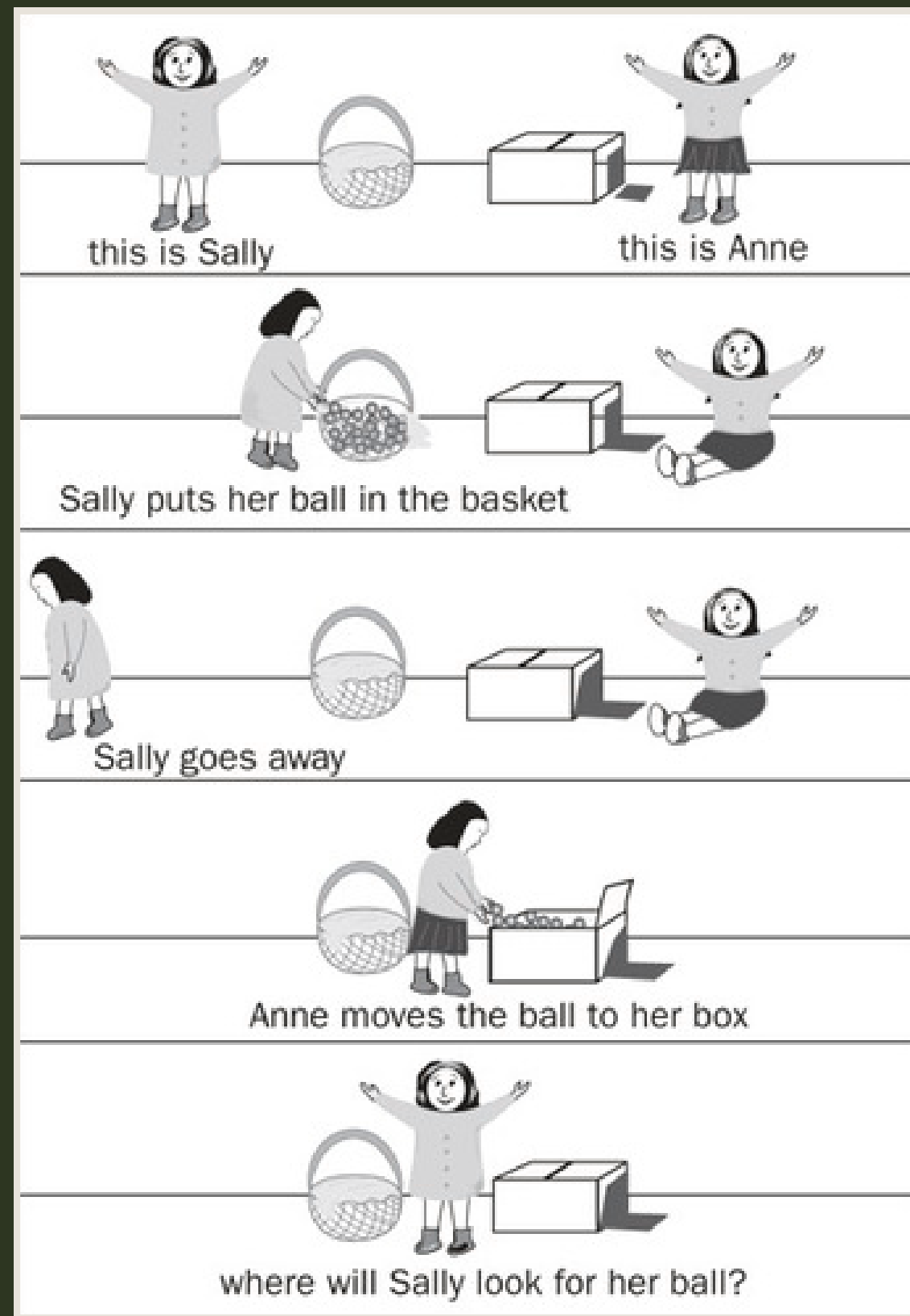
- Essential for understanding a narrative, since what we read would be meaningless without being able to put ourselves in the characters’ shoes.

WHY WE READ FICTION:

“...Applying what we know about ToM to our study of fiction is that it makes literature as we know it possible. The very process of making sense of what we read appears to be grounded in our ability to invest the flimsy verbal constructions that we generously call “characters” with a potential for a variety of thoughts, feelings, and desires, and then to look for the “cues” that would allow us to guess at their feelings and thus predict their actions. Literature pervasively capitalizes on and stimulates Theory of Mind mechanisms that had evolved to deal with real people, even as, on some level, readers do remain aware that fictive characters are not real people at all” (Zunshine, 2006).

THEORY OF MIND & THE NOVEL





INSIGHT FROM AUTISUM STUDIES

- The Sally-Anne Test tested whether children understand that others can hold false beliefs.
- Children with autism often answer based on reality, not belief.

“[Grandin] remembers being “bewildered by Romeo and Juliet: ‘I never knew what they were up to.’” Fiction presents a challenge to people with autism because in many ways it calls for the same kind of mind-reading—that is, the inference of the mental state from the behavior—that is necessary in regular human communication” (Zunshine, 2006).

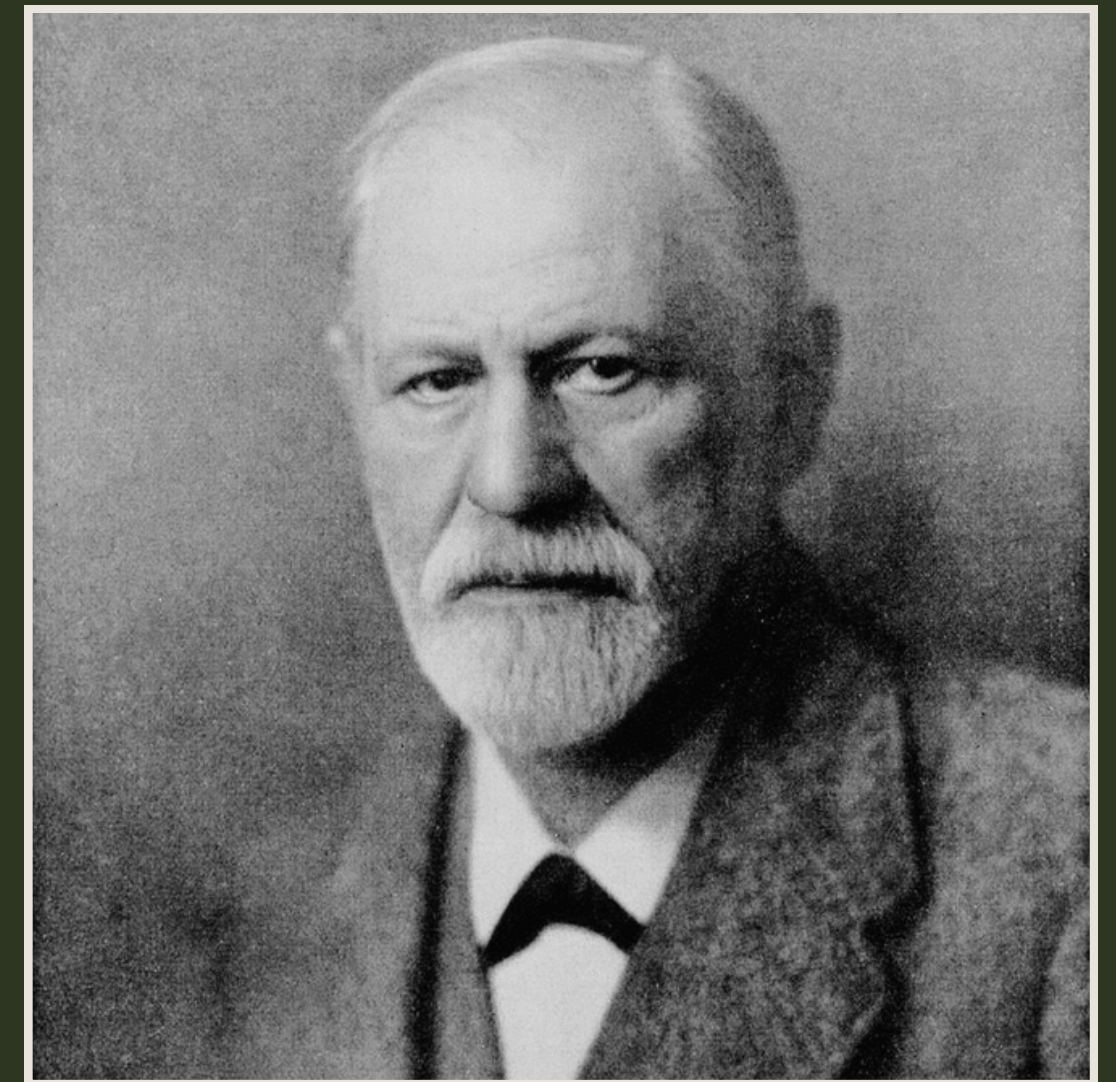
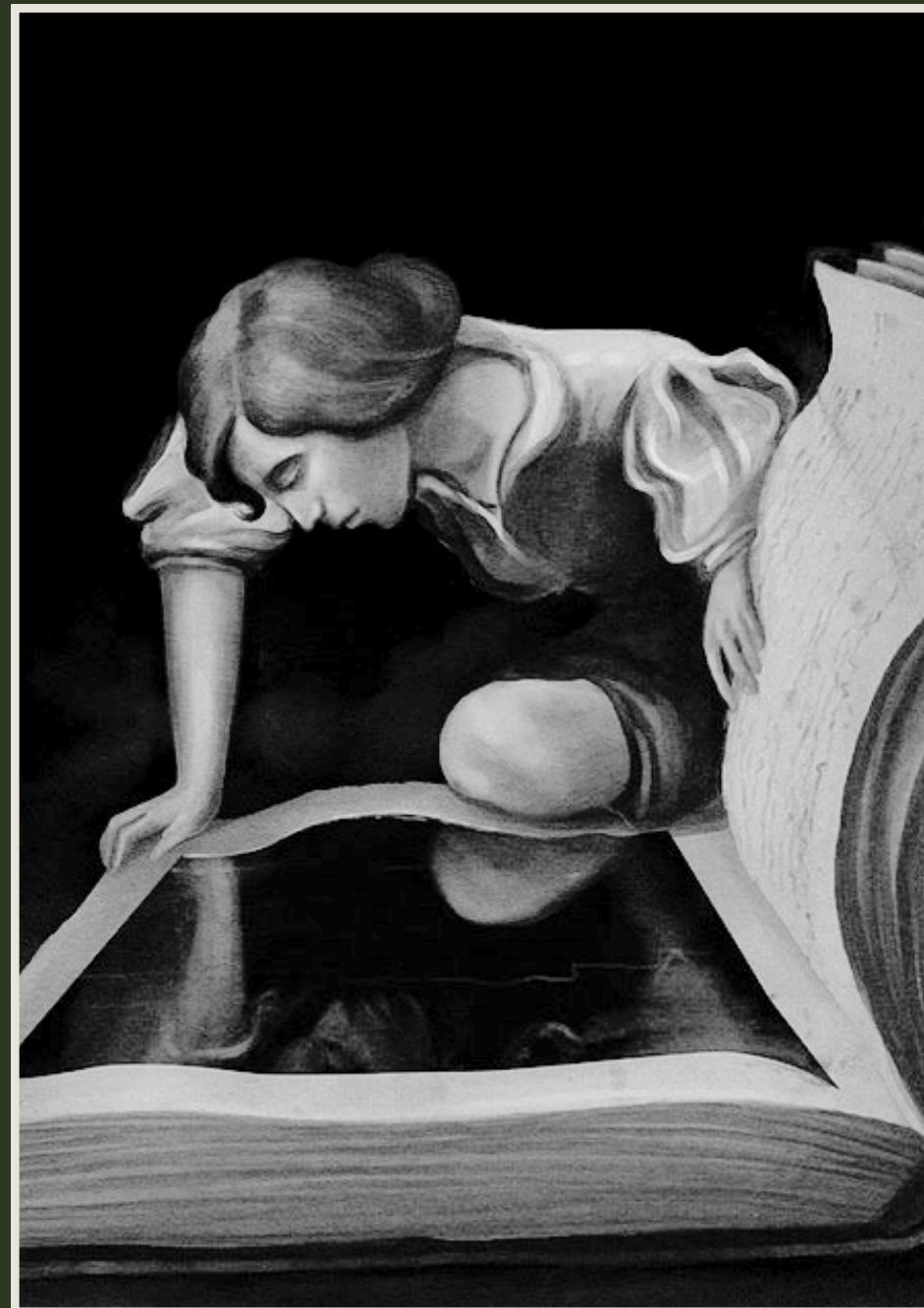
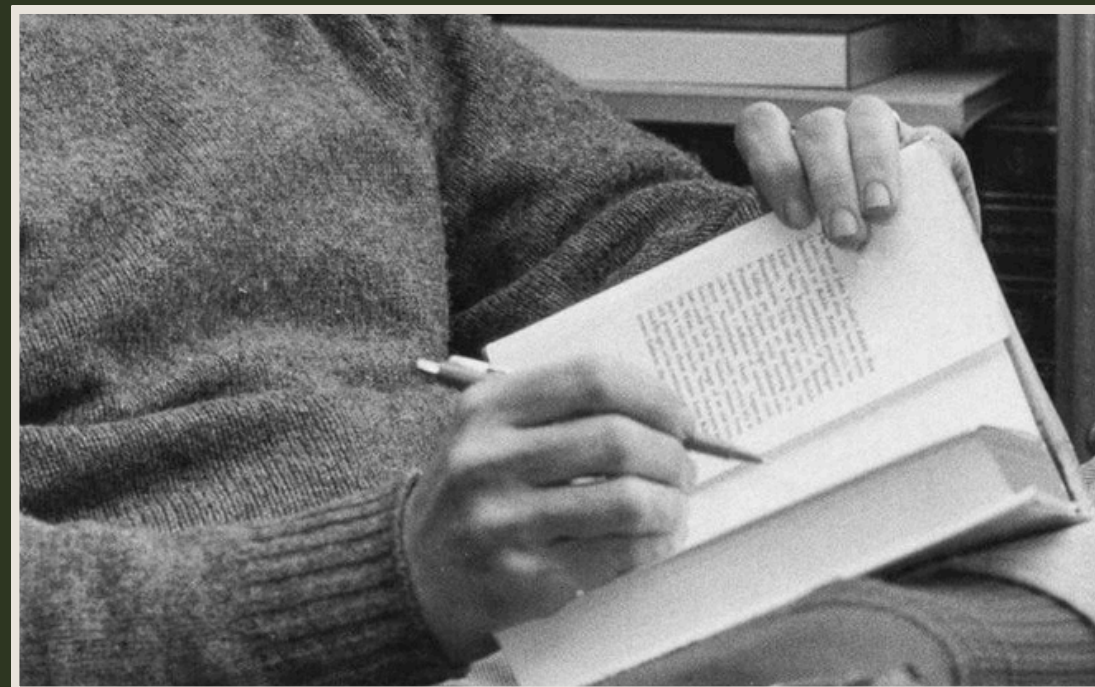


“FICTION AND THE UNCONSCIOUS”

“...Fiction strives to give us as much pleasure as it can without resorting to false-hoods: the satisfaction of our desires is the propelling impulse, the reality principle is the restraining one.”

“Fiction and the Unconscious” (1957).

— Simon Lesser



“The creative writer does the same as the child at play.

He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously—that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion—while separating it sharply from reality.”

“Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1907).

— Sigmund Freud

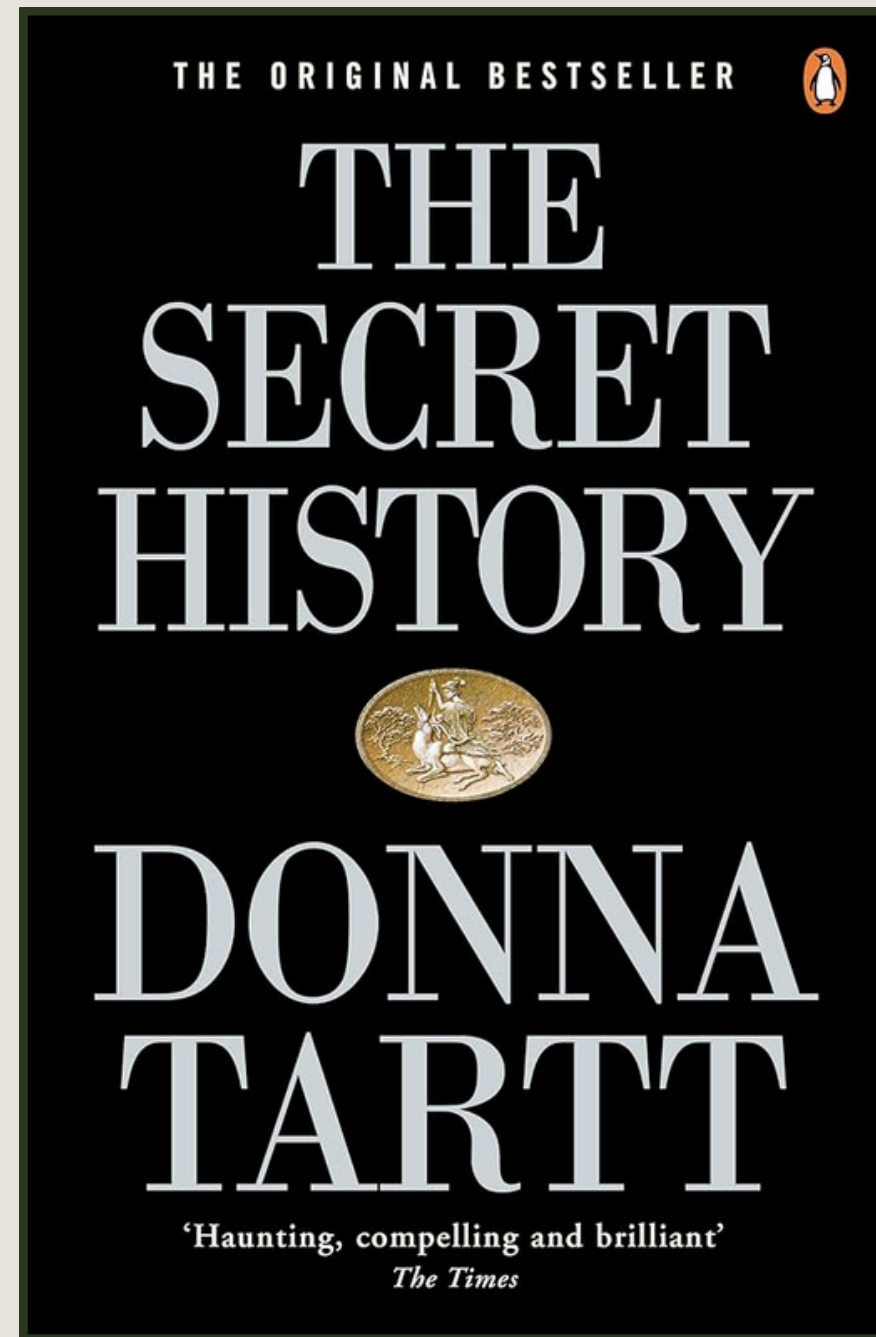


UNRELIABLE NARRATORS

It's nearly impossible to craft a truly reliable first-person narrator, since every storyteller recounts events filtered through their own unique set of experiences, beliefs, and biases.



THE SECRET HISTORY BY DONNA TART



“Does such a thing as 'the fatal flaw,' that showy dark crack running down the middle of a life, exist outside literature? I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does. And I think that mine is this: a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs” (Tart, 1992).

“If there's one thing I'm good at, it's lying on my feet. It's sort of a gift I have” (Tart, 1992).

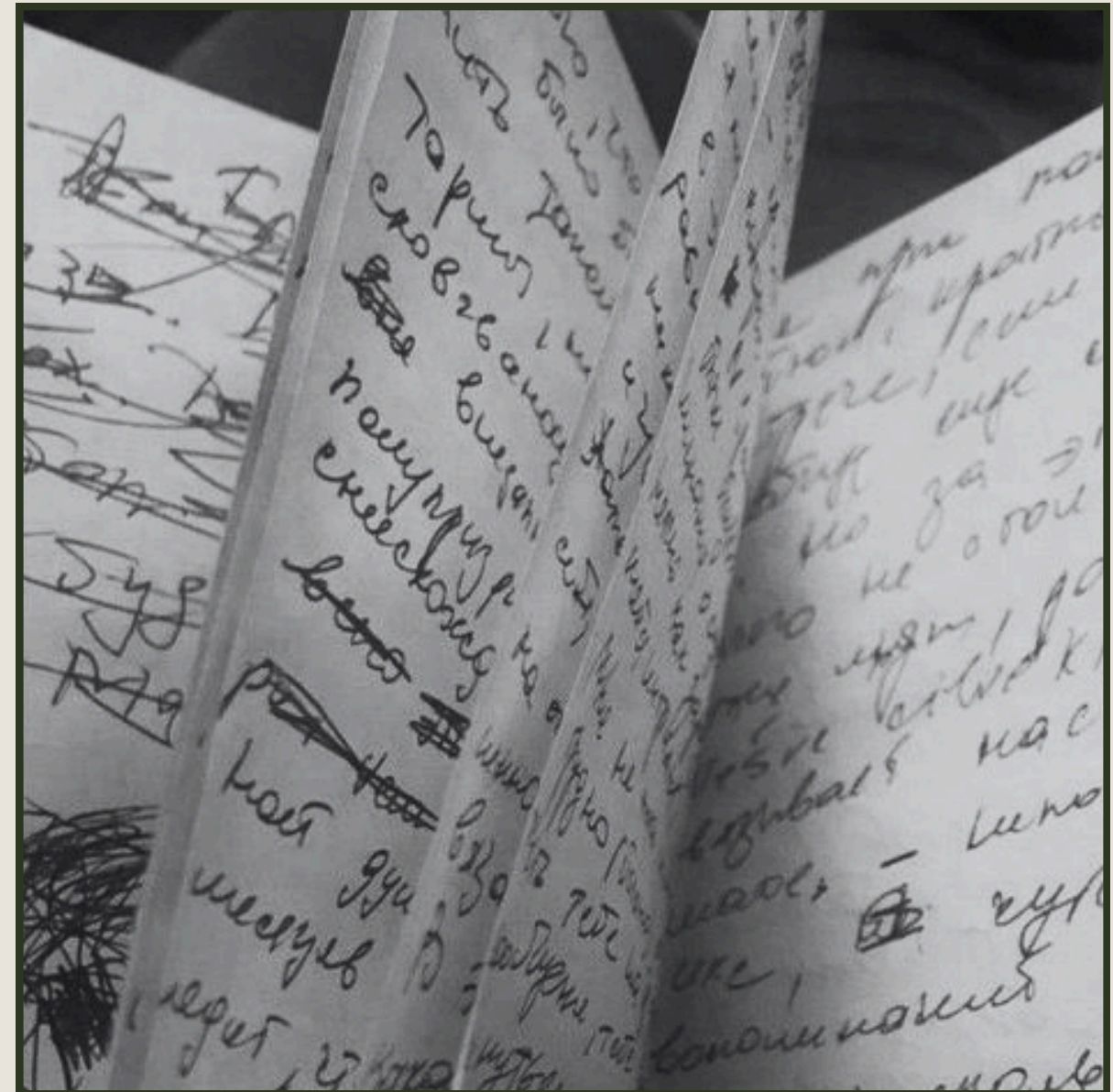


Bacchanal (1899)
Jules Dalou

THE SECRET HISTORY BY DONNA TART

“Just for the record, I do not consider myself an evil person (though how like a killer that makes me sound!). Whenever I read about murders in the news, I am struck by the dogged, almost touching assurance with which interstate stranglers, needle-happy pediatricians, the depraved and guilty of all descriptions fail to recognize the evil in themselves; feel compelled, even, to assert a kind of spurious decency. 'Basically, I am a very good person.' This from the latest serial killer – destined for the chair, they say – who, with an incendiary axe, recently dispatched half a dozen registered nurses in Texas. I have followed his case with interest in the papers.

But while I have never considered myself a very good person, neither can I bring myself to believe that I am a spectacularly bad one. Perhaps it's simply impossible to think of oneself in such a way, our Texan friend being a case in point. What we did was terrible, but still I don't think any of us were bad, exactly; chalk it up to weakness on my part, hubris on Henry's, too much Greek prose composition – whatever you like” (Tart, 1992).



USING FICTIONAL NARRATIVES IN A CLINICAL PRACTICE

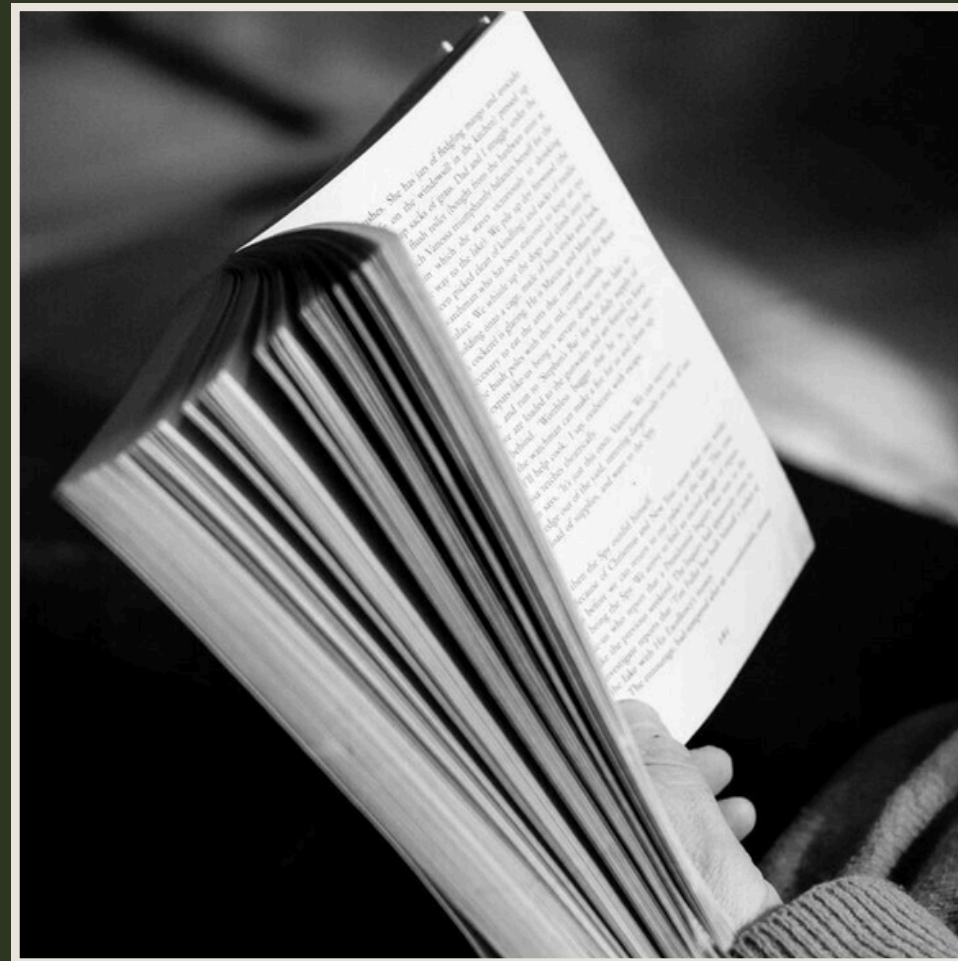
In attempting a discussion of the Interpretation of Dreams, I do not believe that I have overstepped the bounds of neuropathological interest. For, on psychological investigation, the dream proves to be the first link in a chain of abnormal psychic structures whose other links, the hysterical phobia, the obsession, and the delusion must, for practical reasons, claim the interest of the physician. The dream (as will appear) can lay no claim to a corresponding practical significance; its theoretical value as a paradigm is, however, all the greater, and one who cannot explain the origin of the dream pictures will strive in vain to understand the phobias, obsessive and delusional ideas, and likewise their therapeutic importance. But this relation, to which our subject owes its importance, is responsible also for the deficiencies in the work before us. The surfaces of fracture which will be found so frequently in this discussion correspond to so many points of contact at which the problem of the dream formation touches more comprehensive problems of psychopathology, which cannot be discussed here, and which will be subjected to future elaboration if there should be sufficient time and energy, and if further material should be forthcoming. Peculiarities in the material I have used to elucidate the interpretation of dreams have rendered this publication difficult. From the work itself it will appear why all dreams related in the literature or collected by others had to remain useless for my purpose; for examples I had to choose to be. I was restrained from utilizing the latter material by the fact that in it the dream processes were subjected to an undesirable complication on account of the intermixture of neurotic characters. On the other vi hand, inseparably connected with my own dreams was the circumstance that I was obliged to expose more. The dream (as will appear) can lay no claim to a corresponding practical significance; its theoretical value as a paradigm is, however, all the greater, and one who cannot explain the origin of the dream pictures will strive in vain to understand the phobias, obsessive and delusional ideas, and

- Fiction creates a shared cognitive space between therapist and patient.
- Fictional narratives in therapy help clients project and process feelings.



FINAL REFLECTIONS

*Fiction matters not just for the entertainment it brings us,
but for how it helps us understand and process ourselves and others*



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