**Elegy and the Erotics of Narratology**

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For all that narratology can seem a “hard” and austerely formalistic pursuit, prominent literary theorists, from Roland Barthes in *S/Z* and *The Pleasure of the Text* through Peter Brooks’s *Reading for the Plot* and *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*, each building on Freud’s assumption that sexuality and narrative form are analogous, have intimately probed the associations of erotics and the analysis of narrative. Brooks in particular sought to move beyond formalist narratological models, which he sees as “excessively static and limiting,” toward a concern with plotting, namely, “with the activity of shaping, with the dynamic aspect of narrative—that which makes a plot ‘move forward,’ and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and a portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning.”¹ He continues:

> Whatever its larger ambitions, narratology has in practice been too exclusively concerned with the identification of minimal narrative units and paradigmatic structures; it has too much neglected the temporal dynamics that shape narratives in our reading of them, the play of desire in time that makes us turn pages and strive towards narrative ends.²

A move beyond pure formalism involves attempting to talk of “the motor forces that drive the text forward.” The “drive” to follow a narrative has two aspects that are in tension with each other, Brooks suggests. On the one

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¹ Brooks (1984), xiii.
² Ibid., xiii.
hand, we seek to discover bounded and totalizing order to the chaos of life in some sort of “closure.” But the order provided in closure must not come prematurely; it is most satisfying after the delays and detours that we associate with plot. Brooks expresses his doubts that we can ever “understand” force, but in seeking to characterize the “force” which keeps the reader moving on toward the fulfillment of closure, Brooks associates it with Freud’s understanding of desire, and he fashions a model of “textual erotics” by aligning the forward momentum with Eros, the pleasure principle, and the will to closure with Thanatos, the death drive. Brooks puts it thus:

The paradox of the self becomes explicitly the paradox of narrative plot as the reader consumes it: diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making. If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end. (emphasis in original)³

Brooks’s use of the term “consummation” is hardly coincidental, as he is fully aware that if desire structures narrative, it also structures the analysis of narrative, and both theory and scholarly method are themselves brought within the more general ambit of “textual erotics.”⁴

Of course, narratology arises out of such intellectual movements as Russian formalism and French structuralism; of course, Freud’s key metaphor of “drives” comes out of the machine age.⁵ Nonetheless, it is possible to tell a story in which this is not entirely new. It was observed some time ago that grammar and rhetoric on the one hand and sexual position on the other share a common vocabulary in the ancient languages.⁶ The slippage between erotics and rhetoric is nowhere more pronounced than when Ovid seeks to codify and theorize the techniques of elegiac love in his Ars Amatoria; much of the pleasure of this text lies precisely in the way in which it plays with the interaction of erotics and its own literary form. Erotic activity is not simply illustrated by narratives (the extensive exempla that punctuate the work and contribute so much to the rhythm of its exposition), but is conceptualized and articulated in terms of standard story patterns: thus lovemaking is variously figured as a journey or a race, as in the advice of the praeceptor

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3. Ibid., 51–52.
4. “The plot of my own argument in this study will make loops and detours in pursuit of its subject,” Brooks (1984), xv.
5. See Culler (1981), 169–70 for a brief historical contextualization of narratology; and Brooks (1984), 41–48, on the importance of the metaphor of the “motor” for Freud’s thought.
amoris in the closing lines of Book 2 on how to achieve simultaneous orgasm (725–28):

sed neque tu dominam uelis maioribus usus
defisce, nec cursus anteeat illa tuos;
ad metam properate simul: tum plena uoluptas,
cum pariter uicti femina uirque iacent.

but neither should you let out your sails and leave your mistress in the lurch, nor should she race ahead of you; pick up speed together toward the winning-post: pleasure is only full when woman and man lie overcome together.

Viewed in terms of their associated narrative structures, journeys and races are emphatically end-directed. But argument is similarly figured in the Ars Amatoria: the praeceptor alludes to his progress through his argument by describing it either as a sea voyage en route to port at the end of the poem (the poem rides at anchor at the end of Book 1 [772], waiting for the next stage of the journey), or as a chariot race, where the books are the equivalent of laps (e.g., 1.39–40). Form and content are fused in the term opus (“work of literature”/“sexual act”) as the work moves toward its “climax” in the discussion of sexual intercourse leading to orgasm: finis adest operi (“the end/goal of the job is at hand,” 2.733). If the Ars Amatoria is a text about sex, as a didactic poem it is no less a text about knowledge, and the two are never wholly distinguished. It enacts desire, in respect of both sex and knowledge, and moves toward satisfaction of that desire, in its literary form. From this perspective, it seems no accident that one expression for sexual fulfilment is “carnal knowledge,” and it is not difficult to experience a momentary sexual frisson in such technical terms of narratological analysis as “frequency,” “duration,” “retardation” or “interruption technique.” On the back of such theorization, venturing into some of the murkier sexual resonances of scholarly method has become a cottage industry. The scholar and the lover are united in the desire to “know.”

“Narratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification,” Brooks

7. See Kövecses (1988), 16.
8. See Kennedy (1993), 50.
9. These terms are taken from the glossary to De Jong (2001), xi–xix.
10. See Jed (1989), who traces connections between the “discipline” of philology, with its “correction” of the text, and the reader’s implication in scenes of sexual violence.
Narratives of desire work to entice the reader into the very dynamics of desire they seek to represent. How is this theorized? In the *Ars Amatoria*, the *praecceptor amoris*, in seeking to represent erotic pursuit as knowledge, tells the reader who wants to be a lover to “act the role of the lover and to imitate the wounds of love in his words” (*est tibi agendus amans imitandaque uulnera uerbis*, 1.611), that is, to position himself within stories of desire and act them out, whilst cautioning him that lovers can so internalize the role they are playing that they end up by becoming what they had started out by pretending to be (*saepe tamen uere coepit simulator amare; / saepe, quod incipiens finxerat esse, fuit*, 1.615–16). Roland Barthes speaks in terms of identification. In *A Lover’s Discourse*, itself a web of repeated allusions to Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Schubert’s *Winterreise*, and other famous exemplars of romantic passion. Barthes suggests that the lover, like Werther, ceaselessly identifies himself with other lovers: “I devour every amorous system with my gaze and discern the place which would be mine if I were part of that system.” By writing thus in the first person, Barthes’s voice identifies itself as that of the desiring subject caught up in the very dynamics of desire that it is trying to understand, and enacts a dramatic mimesis of a lover’s discourse as it obsessively stages repeated scenes of absence and abandonment. But how is narrative to be conceived of as *capturing* its reader? Elsewhere, Barthes speaks of a “contract” between the narrator and his listener: the story seeks something in exchange for what it supplies, whether that be a story in exchange for a night of love, as in the case of Balzac’s *Sarrasine* which Barthes discusses, or, as in the *Thousand and One Nights*—“a story instead of a simple night of love (ended by a beheading), a story to keep desire alive, to prolong and renew the intersubjective and interlocutionary relation.” For Brooks, “contract” is too static a notion; the listener is bound in, to be sure, but it is precisely the prolongation and renewal of this relationship that for Brooks is the focus of enduring fascination. The key, he suggests, lies in Freud’s realization that “the relation of teller and listener is as important as the content and structure of the tale itself. Or rather: the relation of teller to listener inherently is part of the structure and the meaning of any narrative text, since a text . . . exists only insofar as it is transmitted, insofar as it becomes part of a process of exchange.” Most narratives, he believes, speak of their “transferential condition—of their anxiety concerning their transmissibility, of their need to be heard, of their desire to

become the story of the listener, something that is most evident in ‘framed tales’ . . . which embed another tale within them, and thus dramatize the relation of tellers and listeners.”¹⁵ This is applicable, of course, no less to Brooks’s own *Reading for the Plot*, which embeds tales of desire from the classic novels of the nineteenth century within it so as to discuss their interpretation, than to Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, where such tales are incorporated into an eroticized pedagogical dynamic of teacher and pupil that Alison Sharrock has aptly characterized as the “seduction of the reader.”¹⁶

It is somewhat odd, then, that narratologists have paid so little attention to elegy, a genre which historically, whether in lamenting the dead or appealing to the beloved, has absence and desire as its central preoccupations: coming to terms with them is the “force” that “drives” it. Indeed, in many circumstances for elegiac lovers—notably the narrators of the *Heroides*—their only available means of erotic expression lies either in the telling of their stories, or, as Laurel Fulkerson has argued, identifying themselves, sometimes disastrously (as Madame Bovary was to do), with the protagonists of stories to which they feel especially powerfully drawn.¹⁷ Furthermore, a key feature of the *ego* of Roman love elegy is that he is not only a lover but a storyteller, and doubly so: in the first person about himself, and, mainly through the *exempla* that he adduces, in the third person, about others. Moreover, the elegiac lover’s implied addressee is very often not his beloved, but the reader, conceived of precisely as a subject similarly caught up in the dynamics of desire. The Propertian lover offers his poems as accounts which subsequent lovers will be able to identify with and benefit from (1.7.13–14):

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me legat assidue post haec neglectus amator
et prosint illi cognita mala nostra.
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Let the spurned lover read me with constant attention hereafter, and may the knowledge of my sufferings be of help to him.

This recalls Brooks’s comments about the “transferential condition” of narratives of desire, “their need to be heard, their desire to become the story of the listener”; and, just as the *exempla* narrated by the lover are “framed tales” which he tells for his own benefit *within* individual poems, so the interpella-

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¹⁷. See Fulkerson (2005). Thus, for example, Phyllis, the author of *Heroides* 2, in what seems a fatal misprision, identifies herself with Ariadne, and her beloved, Demophoon, with the treacherous Theseus (22–39).
tion of his anticipated readership transforms those poems into “framed tales” within the context of that relationship.

The Propertian lover speaks of his experiences as “sufferings” (mala), and his anticipated reader as a “spurned lover” (neglectus amator). The elegiac lover’s discourse is normally one of dilations, detours, and delays; the “benefit” gained by the “spurned lover” who reads these poems is troped as knowledge (cf. cognita). Roland Barthes characterizes the issue the lover continually agonizes over as “not: make it stop! but: I want to understand (what is happening to me)!”

Brooks spoke of narrative desire as “ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end” and the “end” to which the elegiac lover looks forward (for, like Barthes’s first-person lover in A Lover’s Discourse, he is characteristically “placed” in the midst of his story) in his narrative of, specifically, erotic desire, finds manifestations both in knowledge and in sexual intercourse. However, only two elegies, Propertius 2.15 and Ovid Amores 1.5, describe at any length a sexual encounter that has led to “consummation.” My major concern will be with the latter poem, and my recollection of that term which Brooks self-consciously used in his discussion of the dynamics of narrative desire and its fulfilment suggests the role that Ovid’s poem can play in my argument—which will be to explore Brooks’s ideas in the context of a narrative of erotic desire and its fulfilment.

Amores 1.5 has been often admired for its vividness and explicitness. It is a triumph of immediacy, arguably love elegy’s most effective foray into what Barthes termed “the reality effect.” However, this very immediacy for long discouraged closer analysis of a poem that does not parade its artistry. What if criteria other than naturalistic description were relevant?” asked Stephen Hinds in 1988 in his brilliantly succinct demonstration of the poem’s word play, its exploitation of the literary tradition, and in its subtle manipulation of the conventions of divine epiphany in the sudden appearance of Corinna. If this poem represents erotic desire and its “consummation” on a referential level, the “metaphorics” involved in its use of the language of desire may allow us to read it also as an exploration of some of the questions raised in the discussion of textual erotics.

The poem has often been admired for the elegance of its form, with three passages of eight lines followed by the coda of a triumphant couplet. The

19. See, for example, Peter Green’s introduction to the notes on his translation of Amores 1.5 (1982), 273: “This is a straightforward account of a successful act of love.” Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, in her essay in this volume, tracks how this picture has been complicated in the scholarship that has appeared since.
first eight lines describe the atmosphere in the bedroom, with the opening of the second section of eight lines marked by the apparition of Corinna (ecce, Corinna uenit, 9) and the struggle to remove her tunic. Ovid’s commentator, James McKeown, comments of 11–12 that “[a]s in 4ff., the comparisons here delay the action, thus creating dramatic tension. They also heighten our expectation of a lively account of the meeting by their contrast with uere-cundis . . . puellis (7).” 21 The third section of eight lines focuses on Corinna’s naked body, with the consummation coming in the final coda (25–26):

cetera quis nescit? lassi requievimus ambo.
proueniant medii sic mihi saepe dies.

McKeown, as we have just seen, draws attention to some of the strategies of delay in the narration of this scene (the descriptions of the light, the comparisons of Corinna with Semiramis and Lais), and explicitly sees them as devices to heighten the reader’s (“our”) expectation. The description of Corinna’s body, for all the pleasure that is invoked in describing its detail, might also be included in these strategies of delay, for where is this narrative going? What is its end? To consider this, let us turn to David Lodge’s marriage of the romance and campus novel, Small World, in which the thrusting critic Morris Zapp scandalizes his provincial English audience by developing his theory of interpretation through a detailed and explicit exploration of what he calls in this passage “a valid metaphor for the activity of reading,” the way “a striptease dancer plays upon her audience’s curiosity and desire”:

Now, as some of you know, I come from a city notorious for its bars and nightclubs featuring topless and bottomless dancers. . . . This is not striptease, it is all strip and no tease, it is the terpsichorean equivalent of the hermeneutic fallacy of a recuperable meaning, which claims that if we remove the clothing of its rhetoric from a literary text we discover the bare facts it is trying to communicate. The classical tradition of striptease, however, which goes back to Salome’s dance of the seven veils and beyond, and which survives in a debased form in the dives of your Soho, offers a valid metaphor for the activity of reading. The dancer teases the audience, as the text teases its readers, with the promise of an ultimate revelation that is infinitely postponed. Veil after veil, garment after garment, is removed, but it is the delay in the stripping that makes it exciting, not the stripping itself;

because no sooner has one secret been revealed than we lose interest in it and crave another. When we have seen the girl’s underwear we want to see her body, when we have seen her breasts we want to see her buttocks, and when we have seen her buttocks we want to see her pubis, and when we see her pubis, the dance ends—but is our curiosity and desire satisfied? Of course not. . . . To read is to surrender oneself to an endless displacement of curiosity and desire from one sentence to another, from one action to another, from one level of the text to another. The text unveils itself before us, but never allows itself to be possessed; and instead of striving to possess it we should take pleasure in its teasing.22

I have purposefully left some gaps in this citation, one of which I shall return to in a moment. The argumentative end to which Zapp is himself moving is the infinite postponement of a final and definitive interpretation of a text, the “ultimate revelation of meaning.” Like the dancer, he suggests, the text unveils itself, but never allows itself to be possessed; “when we see her pubis, the dance ends—but is our curiosity and desire satisfied?” We may now partially fill in that ellipsis, as Zapp remorselessly pursues the logic of revelation:

. . . Of course not. The vagina remains hidden in the girl’s body, shaded by her pubic hair, and even if she were to spread her legs before us [at this point several ladies in the audience noisily departed] it would still not satisfy the curiosity and desire set in motion by the stripping. Staring into that orifice we find that we have somehow overshot the goal of our quest, gone beyond pleasure in contemplated beauty; gazing into the womb we are returned to the mystery of our own origins. Just so in reading. The attempt to peer into the very core of a text, to possess once and for all its meaning, is vain—it is only ourselves we find there, not the work itself.

As the description of Corinna’s body in Amores 1.5 moves toward the moment of sexual “consummation,” to cite the words of McKeown: “With the brief question cetera quis nescit? in the final hexameter, Ovid abruptly disappoints our expectations of further revelations.”23 But with Zapp’s comments in mind, perhaps “further revelations” are not the point, for where is such a narrative to stop? The rhetorical question deftly negotiates this issue by troping sexual consummation as “knowledge,” rather than by narrating

it as, say, penetration, position and orgasm, even as the text immediately, and eagerly, anticipates the resumption, indeed the repeated resumption, of desire (proueniant medii sic mihi saepe dies, 26). Are the reader’s expectations “disappointed”? Narrative is abandoned before “fulfilment,” perhaps, because the point of this narrative may be not so much to represent fulfilment (cetera quis nescit?) as to enact desire.

The mode of narration in Amores 1.5 is first-person, but that first-person is a complex construct in this poem. The elegiac ego is both character and narrator as he reviews with a sense of satisfaction an experience represented as now in the past. Such narratives of the self combine two temporalities, that of the narrated self and that of the narrating self who looks back on the narrated self. Each has a “now.” These two temporalities can be manipulated in different ways to different effects. The opening lines are marked by a succession of verbs in the past tense which mark the distinction between the “now” of the narrated self and the “now” of narration:

Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam;
apposui medio membra levanda toro.
pars adaperta fuit, pars altera clausa fenestrae. . . . (1–3)

The progress of the narrated action is marked by these past tenses: deripui (13), pugnabat (14), uicta est (16), stetit (17), fuit (18), uidi tetigique (19), fuit apta premi (20), uidi (23), pressi (24), requieuimus (25). The “now” of narration is equally clearly signalled by the present tenses in the deliberative question singula quid referam? (23), in the rhetorical question cetera quis nescit? (25), and in the optative proueniant medii sic mihi saepe dies (26). But the distinction between these two temporalities can be blurred. How are we to interpret the present tenses in the comparisons of light and shade in 4–8 and of Corinna with the famous females in 11–12? Are they “gnomic” presents, to be associated with the “now” of narration, or are we to regard them as focalized through the narrated self so as to represent Ovid’s thoughts and desires at the time? A clear distinction cannot and perhaps should not be drawn. The deictic exclamation and the present tense in ecce, Corinna uenit (9) seem to represent a momentary fusion of the two temporalities as the narrated self’s surprise or pleasure at Corinna’s apparition in the narrated past is represented as powerful enough to impress itself on the narrator’s present. The narrated self is represented as a desiring subject in the midst of the action, whose thoughts may be revolving around the prospect of sex

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24. Though these are implied, of course, by lassī requievimus ambo (25).
(1–8), and who is thus captured in a moment of anticipation. The narrating self from the vantage point of his temporality retrospectively knows the outcome for he is narrating in its aftermath, and so strictly speaking is not experiencing the suspense of desire (“for the end,” to cite Brooks), which is part of the temporality of his narrated self. This has implications for our reading of the poem. Brooks ponders the “interesting and not wholly resolvable question how much, and in what ways, we in reading image the pastness of the action presented, in most cases, in verbs in the past tense.”

Do we realize the action as a kind of present in terms of our experience of it? Do we do so in anticipation of a structuring conclusion, given that we would find frustrating an interminable narrative, one in which the end we desire is indefinitely postponed? He concludes:

If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place, already in wait for us to reach it. Perhaps we would do best to speak of the anticipation of retrospection as the chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic. (emphasis in original)

In the first-person narrative in Amores 1.5 that looks back on looking forward to sexual consummation, the combination of the anticipatory and retrospective viewpoints, associated with the narrated self and the narrating self respectively, offers a striking dramatization of the dynamics of reading proposed by Brooks. Brooks sees the sequentiality of narrated events in terms of metonymy: the chronological and causal sequencing of distinct events in a plot are seen as “metonymic” moves on the part of the narrator, in the sense that they take the readers from one event to another, with the events acting as contiguous “parts” evoking a larger “whole” that (like Corinna’s person in 19–22) is not explicitly or exhaustively represented. Still, however much we enjoy the associated dilations and delays, we would not want them to go on forever, as a metonymical chain might. The closural quality we anticipate and desire Brooks associates with metaphor, and in Amores 1.5, that is supplied in the rhetorical question cetera quis nescit? The eventual metaphorical meaning of a narrative retrospectively makes sense of the metonymical dilations and delays of the narrative, Brooks suggests: “the metaphoric work of eventual totalization determines the meaning and status of the metonymic

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26. Ibid., 23.
27. Brooks thus aligns metonymy and metaphor respectively with the pleasure principle and the death drive.
work of sequence—though it must also be claimed that the metonymies of the middle produced, gave birth to, the final metaphor.”

So, what is involved in *Amores* 1.5’s metaphorical closure?

Brooks takes his cue from Roman Jakobsen’s argument that narratives (and prose more generally) are characterized by the rhetorical figure of metonymy since narratives tend to proceed by moving from one connected event to another. Metonymy is, in Jakobsen’s term, “syntagmatic” because it works in temporal sequence, like the syntax of a sentence. For Jakobsen, poetry is characterized by metaphor, since it is concerned with tying together all its metrical features and images into a single atemporal, “paradigmatic,” unity. The “reality effect” may lead us to forget that, in reading *Amores* 1.5, we are reading a poem, and that our elegiac ego is a poet. Let us pursue these issues of temporality by looking more closely at the exclamations in 19–22:

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quos umeros, quales uidi tetigique lacertos!
formae papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
quas castigatam planum sub pectore uenter!
quantum et quale latus! quam iuuenale femur!
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They incorporate a narrative element (*uidi tetigique*, 19; *fuit apta premi*, 20), as the perfect tenses indicate, but the exclamations function as intensifiers in a way that is highly significant for this text and its authorial “voice.”

Reducing exclamation to description and narrative will help to make the point. For the narrating self to say that “Corinna had lovely shoulders, arms, and breasts, and I looked at them and touched them,” though (possibly) an adequate paraphrase, lacks the investment of passion associated with exclamation. Exclamations act rhetorically as signifiers of the emotion that caused them, but here they shift that investment of emotion from the “now” of the narrated self (who, even if he made some comparable exclamations at the time, was, the perfect tenses suggest, keenly occupied with looking, touching, and caressing) to that of the narrating self, from the temporality of action to the temporality of writing. The investment of passion associated

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29. Ibid., 56; for a more extended discussion of Jakobsen’s theories, see Lodge (1977), 73–124.
30. Compare the apostrophes and exclamations with which Propertius 2.15 begins: *O me feliciem! nox o mibi candida! et o tu / lectule deliciis facte beate meis! / quam multa apposita narramus verba lucerna, / quantique sublato lumine rixa fuit!* “O lucky me! O shining night! And O you / little bed made blessed by my delights! / How many stories we told each other by lamplight, / And how many fights we had when the lights were turned down (1–4).” My argument in this paragraph is profoundly influenced by Culler’s discussion of apostrophe (1981), 135–54.
with the exclamations is one marker of the “now” of writing. The rhetoric of line 20 (forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi) works toward this end also. McKeown notes that the expression forma papillarum “seems rather grand, and not simply equivalent to formosae papillae.”31 The expressions forma papillarum, “the shape of her breasts,” and apta premi, “ripe to be caressed,” have a generalizing quality, and relate not to the temporality of action but to that of writing, transporting Corinna’s beauty out of the particular event in the past and into a timeless present, “that special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say ‘now,’”32 and which is particularly developed in “poetic” uses of language and associated with a “poetic” voice. An expression that “seems rather grand” is precisely an element of that voice. Exclamation can also have an invocatory function. The optative explicit in the final line (proueniant medii sic mihi saepe dies, 26) is implicit in these exclamations, and further works to associate desire with the “now” of narration and the temporality of writing. The optative dimension of this discourse expresses the renewal of desire and looks forward to bringing into being what it refers to, repeated coupling with Corinna. But nothing need happen (or need have happened), because the poem itself is to be the event, and the ring composition (Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam [1], proueniant medii sic mihi saepe dies [26]) swings the cycle into action as often as one wants. The exclamations, and the other rhetorical devices which enact the “now” of writing such as the rhetorical questions in 23 and 25, run athwart the narrative drive of the poem. They work to make the poem not (simply) the representation of a past sequence of events, but to generate a discursive event that involves both writer and reader. They complicate the narrative, with its sequentiality and teleological drive, because their “now” is not a moment in the narrative’s temporal sequence (contrast the emphasis on temporal sequence in the opening lines of the poem). In the discursive event that the poem creates, these rhetorical features allow the writer and the reader precious moments of shared simultaneous pleasure. The slyly collusive rhetorical question cetera quis nescit? (25), in troping “consummation” as “knowledge” to enact closure, appeals to the poet’s and reader’s shared competence in recognizing narrative form. The rhetorical question allows writer and reader together in one deft move to sidestep the problems involved in working out (if, as is often supposed, narrative is a form of explanation and understanding33) precisely what sort of “knowledge” this is and what sort of

31. McKeown (1989), 117 ad loc.; my emphasis.
32. Culler (1981), 149.
closure it offers (a consideration we shall return to presently). These rhetorical figures seek to displace desire from empirical time, the “metonymical” experience of time associated with the narrated self, into discursive time, the “metaphorical” experience of time associated with the narrating self. They look to govern the interplay of absence and presence, lack and satisfaction, desire and fulfillment, not by the dictates of experiential time but of poetic and rhetorical power. Even better than sex?

My theme has been the erotics of narratology. Where desire and knowledge are coupled, neither ends up on top as of right. Thus Brooks resists the reductionist claim that Freudian psychoanalysis explains narrative or provides a metalanguage for it; rather, he suggests that they are homologous or isomorphic in structure—spoons in a drawer, if you will. He concludes:

One can, then, resist the notion that psychoanalysis “explains” literature and yet insist that the kind of intertextual relation it holds to literature is quite different from the intertextuality that obtains between two poems or novels, and that it illuminates in quite other ways. For the psychoanalytical intertext obliges the critic to make a transit through a systematic discourse elaborated to describe the dynamics of psychic process. The similarities and differences, in object and in intention, of this discourse from literary analysis creates a tension which is productive of perspective, of stereoptical effect. . . . The detour through psychoanalysis forces the critic to respond to the erotics of form—that is, to an engagement with the psychic investments of rhetoric, the dramas of desire played out in tropes.

Brooks’s emphasis here on “the erotics of form,” “an engagement with the psychic investments of rhetoric,” and “the dramas of desire played out in tropes” have been explored in our reading of Amores 1.5. The juxtaposition of Brooks’s theories with Ovid’s poem plays out the problem Brooks grapples with in the quotation above about the intertextual relation of psychoanalysis and literature. Brooks’s theories do not offer a final “explanation” of Amores 1.5 (or vice versa, for that matter), any more than psychoanalysis “explains” literature; rather “the detour forces the critic to respond to” (we might put it more positively: “enables the reader to enjoy”) “the erotics of form.” With this in mind, let us turn to reflect on the “erotics” of Brooks’s text. As analysts of literature, we may construct arguments that, in the midst of their detours, look toward the end of explanation. Brooks’s insistence that psycho-

34. Ibid., 37.
35. Ibid., 43–44.
analysis does not provide a final explanation expresses in relation to theory and argument his more general perception of desire, that there is nothing that will ultimately satisfy it; any sense of closure that we experience contains within it a lack that will continue to drive us on to resume our quest for knowledge, just as the Ovidian ego’s “knowledge” is not going to be wholly satisfied by one tryst with Corinna. This arouses considerable anxiety in Brooks about “the ‘status issues’ involved in the meeting of psychoanalysis and literary study.” Is psychoanalysis a model? Is it a metaphor? On the one hand, “[e]ven if one begins with the idea that the model is a heuristic fiction, there generally comes a moment of ‘ontological commitment’ to the model, where ‘We pin our hopes on the existence of a common structure’ in the model and its field of application.” Brooks is wary of such an “ontological commitment” associated with the notion of a model, a moment of intellectual closure that would give psychoanalysis a privileged status such that literature was to be explained in terms of it. On the other hand, he cites with approval I. A. Richards’s description of metaphor as a “transaction between contexts,” a fluid exchange between domains of signification, and he is intrigued by the etymological connection between transference and the term in Latin (translatio) that renders the Greek “metaphor,” drawing attention to it in both Reading for the Plot and Psychoanalysis and Storytelling. Metaphor, on this definition, resists the idea that a journey is the model for love, that sex is the model for knowledge, that psychoanalysis is the model for literature (or vice versa); the ontological commitment that worried him in the case of models is deferred, as signification slides to and fro between the domains in an ongoing “transaction of contexts.” In his discussion of metaphors and models, Brooks articulates precisely that tension between the pleasure principle and the desire for the end, between, as he would put it, Eros and Thanatos, that for him is the force that drives narrative.

Whatever two things are not seen as identical and one tropes them as having a “relationship” with each other, as Brooks wants to “establish” a “relationship” between psychoanalysis and literature, the potential for seeing

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36. Or, as Morris Zapp would have it: “[t]he text unveils itself before us, but never allows itself to be possessed” (Lodge [1984], 27). Not finally, at any rate; but if the text is that good (if, as it were, one’s response to its forma is quam fuit apta premi), one is always left looking forward to the next time one gets one’s hands on it.


38. Brooks (ibid., 36–44) devotes a whole section to the question: “Psychoanalysis: Model or Metaphor?”

39. Ibid., 38; Brooks is citing Black (1962).


that relationship in erotic terms is released. But what sort of relationship? Brooks agonizes that he cannot display the “ontological commitment” that Max Black says one must have to constitute the relationship as a “model.” 42 But perhaps that kind of definitive knowledge can wait. Some metaphorical flirting will do quite well in the meantime: *proueniant medii sic mihi saepe dies!*

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