9/12/07 Peter Brooks, “Freud’s Masterplot”

• NO OH TODAY
• we’ve worked on summarizing a claim; want to move in the direction of the second part of the assignment—using the claim to make an argument of your own. Today, want to work on the implied intermediary stage, which is simply to respond to the article in some way.

• assignment again: summarize a claim, “then disagree with, qualify, extend, or show the assumptions or implications of the argument in order to make an original theoretical point of your own.” (I have changed “its” to “the,” which is a little clearer; consider that change part of the assignment.) What these mean:

  • disagree with--clear enough: show that it’s wrong
  • qualify--show that the argument is only right up to a certain point or in a certain way
  • extend--use the argument as a starting point, then take it somewhere the original author didn’t go
  • show assumptions--usually, you would do this either when you want to discredit the argument or when your central theoretical concern has to do with the assumptions rather than the explicit claim
  • show implications--sometimes can be used to discredit the argument (X implies Y; Y can’t be right, so X is wrong too); but sometimes can be a form of extending the argument.

Don’t get hung up on which you’re doing! I’ve tried to give you a wide range of ways to respond to an argument, but there are no doubt more. Do make sure that you respond substantively, that you are responding to what’s really there, and you aren’t merely repeating what the original article says.

• today: start by applying article to 3 Little Pigs (probably a clearer example than “The Dead’; then we’re just going to ask, Is he right? If not, why not? If so, could we extend the argument? If he is partly right and partly wrong, how?

• 3 Little Pigs:
  • how would Brooks analyze this? Explain repetitions, suspense, ending.
    • 1166 repetition as binding of textual energies which puts them into serviceable form, i.e. perceptible form; textual energy can become usable by plot only when it has been bound and formalized
    • 1167 narratability = tension or irritability. Narrative maintained in tension until the terminal quiescence of the end; must be right end
  • are there any short circuits in this tale?
  • how would it differ if it were interminable?
  • why do we tell such a tale? why is it structured the way it is?
  • common for the whole turnips/apples/butter churn half of the story to be left off. How would we explain that in Brooks’ terms?

• Is it legitimate to impose a model of the psyche upon narrative? Why or why not?
  • on 1165, Brooks links repetition in narrative w/ repetition compulsion. But we think of a repetition compulsion as a form of neurosis. Is all narrative a symptom of neurosis?
  • 1167: masterplot for organic life = fictional plots; what operates in text through repetition is the death instinct, the drive toward the end
  • again, 1169: organism/narrative; live/plot/metonymy vs. die/ending/metaphor. Next paragraph sums up the argument.
  • what’s the implicit link? 1171 “transindivudual and intertextually determined desire as a reader”; 1171 BPP speaks to our desire for fictional plots
• What does this model of narrative show us about plots that we might not otherwise see?
• What kinds of features in plots does this model NOT take account of?
• Does it work on “The Dead”?
• What repetitions bind is “textual energy.” Does a text have energy?
• are there kinds of “perceptible form” which do NOT rely on repetition?
• what is the “right end” and how would we distinguish it from a short circuit?
• essay begins by moving from the “same-but different” in narrative structure to the same-
but-different as metaphor. Is it legitimate to equate these?

[argument at the beginning:
1) ending = same-but-different
2) same-but-different = metaphor. Doesn’t just mean the figure of speech, but a general
   way that literature works. Selection rather than combination. Jakobson.
3) not just metaphor, but metonymy; metonymy = desire (Lacan).
   • what this has done: moved from a narrative term to a psychological one, setting
     up the major premise of the whole article: a text is like a psyche (and perhaps vice
     versa). In your view, is this a legitimate move to make?]

[metaphor and metonymy:
Jakobson, “Two Types of Language and Two Types of Aphasias”: language
has two poles, selection and combination. Selection (e.g. choice of words) is
equated with similarity, or metaphor; combination is equated with contiguity or
metonymy. Although Jakobson begins his discussion by talking about aphasias,
disorders of speech that impair either the faculty of selection or the faculty of
combination, he notes that the m/m distinction can be used to categorize literary
modes: metaphoric mode predominates in Romantic and symbolist literature,
whereas metonymic mode predominates in realist narrative.

Lacan draws upon this distinction, claiming that these functions explain our
sense that language somehow contains meaning when in fact there is constant
slippage of the signifieds under the signifier and an absolute barrier between them.
Meaning “insists” in metonymic chains rather than consisting in language; the
chains of signifiers refer metonymically to those ahead and behind. The deferred
signifiers seem to function as signifieds, thus offering an “effect” of reference. This
effect is the “creative spark” of metaphor and the site (or non-site) of human
subjectivity.
what animates us as readers is desire for meaning; passion is desire for the end
all narration is obituary
what he’s trying to do: read BPP as essay about interrelationship between ends and
beginnings and processes that constitute the middle
narrative makes implicit claim to be in a state of repetition; link with repetition
compulsion
reason for repetition: mastery, movement from passive to active
repetition in narrative; perceptible repetitions in order to create plot; repetition is
return
repetition has function of mastering flood of stimuli (trauma as breaking of shield of
Pcpt-C);
repetition as binding of textual energies which puts them into serviceable form, i.e.
perceptible form; textual energy can become usable by plot only when it has been bound
and formalized
urge to return to earlier state of things—> aim of all life is death; but life tries to
avoid short-circuit
F’s masterplot for organic life “generates a certain analytic force in its
superimposition on fictional plots”; what operates in text through repetition is the death
instinct, the drive toward the end
between two moments of quiescence plot stands a divergence, postponements.
narratability = tension or irritability. Narrative maintained in tension until the
terminal quiescence of the end; must be right end
subplots show different solution, danger of short-circuit
desire of reading is desire for the end, but through detour
org must live to die/must have plot to reach end/must have metonymy to reach
metaphor
summary of whole arg thus far
characteristic of textual energy that it should be on verge of short-circuit
Fr’s model suggestive of what the reader engages when he responds to plot