Introduction

Western artistic culture is dominated by three essential constituent elements: story, melody and image. In our literature we are constantly drawn to the narrative power of a story. In music we are forever falling in love with melody. In painting, sculpture and photography our eyes are again and again seduced by the delight and thrill of an image. All three of these aesthetic domains can be blended together to create cinema, drama, dance and opera.

The centrality and dominance of the story is interwoven into the daily rituals of our lives. Ever since – as tiny children – we ended our day by being read to, narratives of every kind have been laced and intertwined with our own personal story, as it unfolds from week to week.

In recent years we have developed a ravenous appetite for the television mini-series, which our streaming services toss, so profitably, across the globe. *The Sopranos*, *Game of Thrones*, *Succession* and our own royal family as presented in *The Crown* are just four of the numerous family sagas which provide us with reassurance that our own families are not quite as contorted and dysfunctional as these afflicted dynasties. On a wet weekend, there are few activities that are more comforting than bingeing our way through a box set.

The streaming service mini-series is only the most recent

delivery system that indulges our cravings for story. Previous technologies supplied decades-long TV soap operas and a worldwide cinema, spawned by Hollywood, which filled picture house after picture house. Before that, for nearly 300 years the novel provided us with that most satisfying narrative that is both portable and somehow intensely personal, which we tuck away safely on a bookshelf, for a lifetime, like some precious treasure. And then there is theatre with its provenance ranging back two-and-a-half millennia when Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles created humanity's first recorded theatrical experience.

Personally I find the most compelling, the most all-embracing and complete story, is that of an entire human life, from cradle to grave, with all its complexities, paradoxes, effronteries, frailties and charms. Every one of us is living out of our own personal narrative, and it is these individual stories which are the bedrock, the content, the fascinating subject matter, which makes up the practice of psychotherapy.

This is a book containing an account of ten profound ideas from the first century of psychotherapy combined with the biographies of twenty remarkable human beings whose dramatic and intriguing lives were deeply impacted by one or more of these ideas. These exceptional individuals include one painter, one poet, one dancer, one philosopher, two scientists, two actors, three politicians, three novelists and six psychologists, including those twin peaks of our profession Freud and Jung. The reason that I have included psychologists is because their theories emerged from the challenges and experiences of their own fascinating psychobiographies.

Our psychotherapeutic enterprise has a pedigree of a little over 120 years, beginning in the very first weeks of 1900, when Freud published his founding text *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This groundbreaking work begins with an epigram from Virgil: 'If I cannot bend the Gods above, then I will move the infernal regions below', a poetic opening that is so prescient when considering the turmoil and trauma of the twentieth century that inaugurated the new discipline: something between an empirical science and a speculative philosophy, an apt positioning, given the complexity of the century that it foreshadowed.

Freud's debut was followed by wave upon wave of theories, conjectures and hypotheses as the new ideas sought a critical mass of philosophical and medical respectability. Psychotherapeutic theorists of every persuasion built elaborate models as they speculated about the nature of the psyche, patterns of infantile experience, strategies for adult adaption and, in some cases the purpose of our psychological development and of life itself. Freudians were followed by Jungians, who argued with Kleinians, as this intense debate whipped up a tsunami of different schools and creeds: the Kohutians, the Rogerians, the Winnicottians, the Gestalt practitioners, the Intersubjectivists, the Attachment Theorists, devotees of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and many other groups and tribes, too numerous to mention here.

From this great cavalcade of ideas, concepts and propositions I have found that ten particular theories describe and explain behaviour patterns and personality styles which almost all my clients have presented. It is these significant and important ideas that seem to me to stand proud of the

blizzard of conjecture that we as therapists are faced with. By and large, because of their pertinence, these ten big ideas have attracted a measure of consensus among all these competing theories and models and it is their application which is shared in the practice of most of the different schools of psychotherapy.

This is not an attempt to give an exhaustive, objective account of these theories. Rather it is a set of personal thoughts that arise, at this late hour, from a desire to re-examine and distil fifty years spent exploring psychological texts, undergoing the challenges and rewards of being a psychotherapeutic patient and training in this hybrid art as well as decades spent with numerous clients attempting to decipher and unravel the mysteries that lie deep in their psyches. So this book makes no pretence at scientific objectivity. It is a set of musings and reflections carved out of my own subjective views, coloured by my own particular preferences and prejudices and viewed through the skewed prism of my own psychobiography with all its woundings and distortions, clouding any hope of objective perception.

My editor and I, after much consideration, chose as our title a reference to what has been described as 'the most famous piece of furniture of the twentieth century': a well-upholstered couch, covered by a richly coloured Persian carpet, that resides at 20 Maresfield Gardens in north London, a shrine for so many of the visitors who make their way to what has become the Freud Museum. It was on this couch that Sigmund Freud would ask his patients to lie down and relax before relating to him their innermost thoughts, a process which seemed to relieve them of a range

of perturbations and emotional disturbances that they were afflicted by.

In the early summer of 1938, this famous couch, with its even more famous owner, escaped from what had been their home in Vienna for almost forty years and made the perilous journey to London, thereby avoiding the fate that awaited four of Freud's siblings who were loaded onto trains bound for the Polish villages of Treblinka and Auschwitz a few years later.

So this iconic couch survives and has become a kind of talismanic emblem of the psychoanalytic movement, even though the vast majority of today's psychotherapeutic clients sit in an armchair facing their therapist.

Sigmund Freud's Theory of the Unconscious (Pablo Picasso)

In the earliest days of January 1900, in Vienna, a forty-three-year-old Sigmund Freud had the satisfaction of finally seeing in print the book that he would regard as his magnus opus, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, of which he wrote: 'Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime.' He felt certain that this was to be the founding work, the launchpad for his revolutionary theories, which in 1896 he had named 'psychoanalysis', and he was confident that this leviathan of a book would match the impact upon humanity that his great hero Charles Darwin had achieved with *On the Origin of Species* (1859). However, whereas Darwin had sold out all 1,250 copies of its first edition on its first day of publication, Freud had to bear the disappointment that in its first six years his supposed masterpiece only sold 351 copies.

A few months after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* another revolutionary idea spluttered into existence. In this opening year of the new century the German physicist Max Planck told his son that he had just made a discovery as important as the theories of Newton, which would change the way in which scientists and humanity viewed the world. These ideas were first expressed in a series of poorly attended lectures at Berlin University in the earli-

est months of the twentieth century. As Max Planck made the first tentative steps in the new physics, which would become quantum mechanics, he shared with his Viennese counterpart the bitter realisation that his innovation was barely noticed.

These unobtrusive opening salvoes that heralded the new century would, during the next thirty years, attract two groups of remarkably talented individuals: young men and women who would, in parallel endeavours, totally alter the way in which mankind not only viewed human behaviour, but also the physical world within which our species exists.

Quantum mechanics would penetrate the mysteries of the sub-atomic world and provide us with nuclear power, nuclear weapons, the entire computer industry, the internet, micro-chips, smart phones, laser technology, global positioning and satnav, fibre-optic communications, MRI scanners and the beginnings of artificial intelligence. So Max Planck turned out to be right when he spoke so optimistically to his son in 1900.

This is, of course, a book about psychoanalysis and not quantum mechanics, but I have mentioned this strange coincidence of Freud's and Planck's simultaneous yet unnoticed announcements because of a central feature shared by both theories. Both psychoanalysis and quantum mechanics are based upon suppositions which are barely empirically observable. Lying at the centre of Freud's model is the 'Unconscious', his description of a deeply embedded, invisible psychic system that, while having discernible consequences, has no physical empirical reality. This unobservable, hidden, latent core of what Freud called our 'mental