

## **NWRPA Newsletter July 2021**

**Dr Mark Fisher**

**Dissolutions**

**A Zoom Webinar**

**Friday 9 July 2021**

**Summary by Frank Kelley**

**Dr Mark Fisher's** introduction to psychoanalysis took place during the 1970s while a research fellow at Oxford University. Following an individual analysis there was group analysis and then a Lacanian analysis. For many years Mark worked within the NHS. He now runs a clinical and supervisory practice in Liverpool and online.

You can read about Dissolutions, and more, on Mark's blog at:  
[SIMON FISHER \(simonfisher.blogspot.com\)](http://simonfisher.blogspot.com)

In this Zoom talk Mark reflected on the end of psychotherapy and analysis as a dissolution/de-solution/desolation.

Margaret Atwood wrote a short story, *Happy Endings*, about John and Mary. This had alternative endings. You can choose the ending you like and treat the others as fakes. (For the story see below.)

Many analyses start every year and there are as many endings as there are analysands. Why should they end in the same way? There are codifications of endings but these ideas come from outside psychoanalysis.

However clients always want to know when analysis will end. Want to know how the ending will be. Want to know how well they will be at the end. Year after year they will ask the same questions.

Mark worked in an NHS service where managers set the length of therapy. The end was set at the beginning.

The English word *ending* is rich in meanings, a conclusion, a stage, a new beginning. An end also means an objective.

The psychoanalyst Michael Balint believed psychoanalysis is always about new beginnings. The ending of analysis can be a new beginning. When analysis gets stuck we should always look for a new beginning. For the analyst a beginning should always be available.

Mark's old fashioned view is that he cannot promise clients what he cannot foresee, for example that they will feel better when therapy ends. Training organizations for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Cognitive Analytic Therapy and others gloss over the problems that often occur at the end of therapy. Of course we can always blame our patients for any difficulties with ending. We can tell ourselves a clear story about the responsibilities for these troubles in ending. But how do I know if this is true or something I have made up.

In common with earlier psychoanalysts Melanie Klein thought an analysis had failed if the client did not end analysis as a full and practising heterosexual. This tradition continued and by the 1990s there were complex debates about the refusal of training organisations to allow gay men to train as psychoanalytic psychotherapists. You have to be very careful with your expectations of what patients should be like when you finish.

Jacques Lacan wrote about the ethics of psychoanalysis and advocated there should be no overall system. He was writing at a time when many analysts had to qualify in Latin to complete their training.

As you know Mark has a liking for the literature of antiquity. Sophocles wrote a play about Antigone the daughter of Oedipus. After his death the two sons of Oedipus were eligible to be Kings. The two agreed to alternate the throne each year until they quarrelled. Eteocles decided not to share power with his brother. Polynices left the kingdom, gathered an army and attacked the city of Thebes. Both brothers were killed in the battle.

King Creon became king after the death of the brothers and decreed that Polynices was not to be buried or even mourned, on pain of death by stoning. However a failure to bury the dead is contrary to Greek law and culture and the wishes of the Gods. Antigone, Polynices' sister, defies the king's order and makes a symbolic burial and is caught. She is put in a cave and buried alive. Although Creon has a change of heart and tries to release Antigone he finds she has hanged herself. Creon's son Haemon, who was in love with Antigone commits suicide with a knife, and his mother Queen Eurydice, also kills herself in despair over her son's death.

When you finish analysis, like Antigone, you should be able to follow your fate. In the play this means a fate including dying alone and without help. Ending means accepting the times in your life when you are utterly desolate and without human or divine help. Without this acceptance analysands would choose another analyst and go on and on.

Sándor Ferenczi had been a close friend of Sigmund Freud but they parted company. He was later ill with pernicious anaemia and the influential psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, who was close to Freud, spread the rumour that he was psychotic.

Such was Ferenczi's standing that other analysts saw him as the analyst of last resort. He was seen as having an unusual elasticity. He would see patients while he was on holiday or in the early hours. His determined goal was to help people and to do his best for all his patients. For Ferenczi the end of analysis is a kind of exhaustion.

Jacques Lacan was severely critical of the American ego psychology school of psychoanalysis. They believed at the end of a successful analysis the analysand would identify with the neutral therapist. By contrast Lacan wanted independence from the analyst rather than identification.

**Thank you to Dr. Mark Fisher** for a refreshingly different view on psychoanalysis and the ending of therapy.

### ***Happy Endings by Margaret Atwood***

John and Mary meet. What happens next? If you want a happy ending, try A.

A. John and Mary fall in love and get married. They both have worthwhile and remunerative jobs which they find stimulating and challenging. They buy a charming house. Real estate values go up. Eventually, when they can afford live-in help, they have two children, to whom they are devoted. The children turn out well. John and Mary have a stimulating and challenging sex life and worthwhile friends. They go on fun vacations together. They retire. They both have hobbies which they find stimulating and challenging. Eventually they die. This is the end of the story.

B. Mary falls in love with John but John doesn't fall in love with Mary. He merely uses her body for selfish pleasure and ego gratification of a tepid kind. He comes to her apartment

twice a week and she cooks him dinner, you'll notice that he doesn't even consider her worth the price of a dinner out, and after he's eaten dinner he fucks her and after that he falls asleep, while she does the dishes so he won't think she's untidy, having all those dirty dishes lying around, and puts on fresh lipstick so she'll look good when he wakes up, but when he wakes up he doesn't even notice, he puts on his socks and his shorts and his pants and his shirt and his tie and his shoes, the reverse order from the one in which he took them off. He doesn't take off Mary's clothes, she takes them off herself, she acts as if she's dying for it every time, not because she likes sex exactly, she doesn't, but she wants John to think she does because if they do it often enough surely he'll get used to her, he'll come to depend on her and they will get married, but John goes out the door with hardly so much as a good-night and three days later he turns up at six o'clock and they do the whole thing over again. Mary gets run-down. Crying is bad for your face, everyone knows that and so does Mary but she can't stop. People at work notice. Her friends tell her John is a rat, a pig, a dog, he isn't good enough for her, but she can't believe it. Inside John, she thinks, is another John, who is much nicer. This other John will emerge like a butterfly from a cocoon, a Jack from a box, a pit from a prune, if the first John is only squeezed enough. One evening John complains about the food. He has never complained about her food before. Mary is hurt. Her friends tell her they've seen him in a restaurant with another woman, whose name is Madge. It's not even Madge that finally gets to Mary: it's the restaurant. John has never taken Mary to a restaurant. Mary collects all the sleeping pills and aspirins she can find, and takes them and a half a bottle of sherry. You can see what kind of a woman she is by the fact that it's not even whiskey. She leaves a note for John. She hopes he'll discover her and get her to the hospital in time and repent and then they can get married, but this fails to happen and she dies. John marries Madge and everything continues as in A.

C. John, who is an older man, falls in love with Mary, and Mary, who is only twenty-two, feels sorry for him because he's worried about his hair falling out. She sleeps with him even though she's not in love with him. She met him at work. She's in love with someone called James, who is twenty-two also and not yet ready to settle down. John on the contrary settled down long ago: this is what is bothering him. John has a steady, respectable job and is getting ahead in his field, but Mary isn't impressed by him, she's impressed by James, who has a motorcycle and a fabulous record collection. But James is often away on his motorcycle, being free. Freedom isn't the same for girls, so in the meantime Mary spends Thursday evenings with John. Thursdays are the only days John can get away. John is married to a woman called Madge and they have two children, a charming house which they bought just before the real estate values went up, and hobbies which they find stimulating and challenging, when they have the time. John tells Mary how important she is to him, but of course he can't leave his wife because a commitment is a commitment. He goes on about this more than is necessary and Mary finds it boring, but older men can keep it up longer so on the whole she has a fairly good time. One day James breezes in on his motorcycle with some top-grade California hybrid and James and Mary get higher than you'd believe possible and they climb into bed. Everything becomes very underwater, but along comes John, who has a key to Mary's apartment. He finds them stoned and entwined. He's hardly in any position to be jealous, considering Madge, but nevertheless he's overcome with despair. Finally he's middle-aged, in two years he'll be as bald as an egg and he can't stand it. He purchases a handgun, saying he needs it for target practice-- this is the thin part of the plot, but it can be dealt with later--and shoots the two of them and himself. Madge, after a suitable period of mourning, marries an understanding man called Fred and everything continues as in A, but under different names.

D. Fred and Madge have no problems. They get along exceptionally well and are good at working out any little difficulties that may arise. But their charming house is by the seashore and one day a giant tidal wave approaches. Real estate values go down. The rest of the story is about what caused the tidal wave and how they escape from it. They do, though thousands drown, but Fred and Madge are virtuous and grateful, and continue as in A.

E. Yes, but Fred has a bad heart. The rest of the story is about how kind and understanding they both are until Fred dies. Then Madge devotes herself to charity work until the end of A. If you like, it can be "Madge," "cancer," "guilty and confused," and "bird watching."

F. If you think this is all too bourgeois, make John a revolutionary and Mary a counterespionage agent and see how far that gets you. Remember, this is Canada. You'll still end up with A, though in between you may get a lustful brawling saga of passionate involvement, a chronicle of our times, sort of. You'll have to face it, the endings are the same however you slice it. Don't be deluded by any other endings, they're all fake, either deliberately fake, with malicious intent to deceive, or just motivated by excessive optimism if not by downright sentimentality. The only authentic ending is the one provided here: John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die. So much for endings. Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favour the stretch in between, since it's the hardest to do anything with. That's about all that can be said for plots, which anyway are just one thing after another, a what and a what and a what. Now try How and Why