

American Handbook of Psychiatry

**LITERATURE
&
PSYCHIATRY**

Leon Edel

LITERATURE AND PSYCHIATRY

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e-Book 2015 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *American Handbook of Psychiatry: Volume 1* edited by Silvano Arietti

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LITERATURE AND PSYCHIATRY

Leon Edel

The common ground of literature and psychiatry is the world of irrational being: that is, the study of humans prone to a wildness of the imagination beyond the experiences of everyday life and “the usual”—and an acting out of this irrationality. As psychiatry has addressed itself from the first—from ancient times—to the study and treatment of mental states, so literature has depicted them with great imaginative power. We need only remind ourselves of the passionate and prophetic Cassandra and the horror of her visions; the violence of Lear’s rage at the moment of the disintegration of his world; the sleepwalking and madness of Lady Macbeth; or the eternal question of Hamlet’s sanity. Nor should we forget Dostoevsky’s “idiot” or, in modern times, William Faulkner’s empathic portrayal of a mental defective. These are literary cases that not only reveal an intense and powerful observation of mental states; they also represent remarkable intuitive understanding by artists of the workings of the distraught mind. As such, literature has provided verbal pictures of the very stuff—the human stuff—in which psychiatry deals.

Traditionally poets have been considered mad. In their transcendent visions, and in their use of symbolic language, they seem to talk in fables and mysteries. They have been regarded, like Cassandra, as irrational but also as gifted with extraordinary insight. Out of this was born, long ago, the observation of the “daemonic” in man. The individual as one “possessed,” facing priests and doctors who must drive out the devils, is a familiar figure in the old dramas, both religious and secular.

Literature has helped establish mythic archetypes, that is, supreme examples, for varieties of mental being and has made psychiatrists aware of mental states beyond those they encounter in daily practice. Medical literature, moreover, contains examples of healers who have themselves been imaginative writers and have recorded for us the mysteries of madness, whether in the sparse annals of primitive societies, the lore of witchcraft and demonology, the occult of the Middle Ages, or the theories of mental being during the Age of Reason—when the “unreasoning” began to be shut away from society. We must remember that *The Rake’s Progress* ends up in Bedlam. It was perhaps no accident also that the celebrated Jean Martin Charcot, teacher of both Freud and William James, should have been an authority on demonology, or that Jung should have conducted studies into the history of alchemy, or that William James, all his life, pursued psychical research in a scientific way.

Journey into the Unconscious

Writers have always felt some sense of mystery in their creations. They have recognized that a subliminal or unconscious self presides over the material they put down on paper; they have known that at a given moment they seem to be able to bring out of dim recesses whole trains of lost associations and memories. They have been aware of their power to take the clutter of life and bring some kind of beautiful order into it. In the East, centuries ago, Buddha spoke of the mind and of the imagination as consonant with life itself. He said, “All we are is the result of our thoughts. It is founded on our thoughts, made up of our thoughts.” If we accept these words—and modern psychology tends to bear them out— we find ourselves well on the road to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud and what he spoke of as the unconscious. To be sure, Buddha was speaking of conscious thought. But I suspect he was also speaking of everything that comes into the mind, even the irrational; and I do not think he was saying *Cogito ergo sum*—“I think, therefore I am”—the celebrated dictum of Descartes that gave so pronounced a stamp to the Age of Reason. Descartes referred wholly to rational men: he repudiated the guidance of the senses. The Age of Reason distinctly felt that man’s senses tend to mislead, that they interfere with and prevent the observing of reality.

The Romantic Movement, as we know, rejected the enthronement of

Reason. Within that movement we can discern a great “inward turning” that ultimately created the intellectual and artistic climate for Freud’s discoveries. Goethe argued that the novel is valid only when it portrays man’s inmost thoughts; no other form of literature, he said, can more effectively give us access to the inner modalities of a human being. Blake, a precursor of romanticism both in his poetry and in his drawings, found symbols for inner states and cultivated a personal mythology. Coleridge, in glimpsing peripheral states of consciousness (aided by his addiction to opium), could speak of man’s “flights of lawless speculation” and man’s “modes of inmost being.” Rousseau in seeking childhood experience to understand himself, Schlegel and Jean Paul in their quest for the laws of man’s nature, Balzac in his recognition that there was an “undiscovered world of psychology,” or Hawthorne in his awareness of the “topsy-turvy” world of dreams—all these writers were fascinated by the life of their imagination, its contradictions and ambivalences, its mythic landscapes quite as real and often more real than the human landscape outside themselves in which they moved. Coleridge writes of the “stuff of sleep and dreams” adding, “but Reason at the Rudder,” and Lamb characterizes the difference between night dream and the fantasies of the artist by saying that artists dream “being awake.” So, too, writers as different as Dostoevsky, Strindberg, Ibsen, Dickens, Henry James, and Conrad knew before the systematic observations of Freud and his charting of the dream world that they lived with old submerged and disguised realities of

their lives, tissued into a fabric of personal mythology. Dickens stumbled on the fact that hypnosis could touch hidden depths and, long before Charcot and Freud, tried in his amateur way to give aid to a mentally ill friend by hypnotizing her. He wrote a letter on dreams in which he argued that these never deal directly with daytime experiences. He explained how they are elaborate transformations—all this half a century before Freud’s book on dreams. “If I have been perplexed during the day in bringing out the incidents of a story,” he wrote, “I find that I dream at night, never by any chance of the story itself, but perhaps of trying to shut a door that *will* fly open, or to screw something tight that *will* be loose, or to drive a horse on some very important journey, who unaccountably becomes a dog and can’t be urged along.” He added: “I sometimes think that the origin of all fable and allegory, the very first conception of such fictions, may be referable to this class of dreams.”

Between the times of Dickens’s insights and the publication of Freud’s book on dreams, there occurred a series of movements that were the logical consequences of romanticism—a bursting of the bonds of the rational and the observed—as if the Western world were preparing for the journey into the unconscious. “Realism” and “naturalism” had had their day, but to this period belongs (in literature) the development of the Symbolist Movement guided by the poets Baudelaire, Mallarme, and Rimbaud, who understood symbolic metaphor and, like their fellows of the paint and brush, sought the *impression* of things, the sensory world, and all that this afforded by way of

intuition and subjective experiences. At a later stage, in the realm of psychology and philosophy, Bergson and William James explored in a more rational way psychological or human time, and man's feelings for the occult. No one so far as I know has traced the "climate" in which Freud worked on his dream studies; but we know that in all the arts the "inward-turning" was taking place, and in the so-called decadent movement of the 1890's symbolism had led to curious adventures in synesthesia. Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* of 1900 brought these currents into focus; it was a key book, like Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. From the period just before the Freudian work, and in the immediate decades that followed, we can date "the modern movement" in art and the direct insemination of surrealism by Freud's explorations of the unconscious after World War I. Surrealism established a conscious link between literature and psychoanalysis when Andre Breton journeyed to Vienna and dedicated his first book to Sigmund Freud. Author of the surrealist manifestoes, Breton would for years seek to find verbal equivalents for the inchoate stuff of the unconscious, through automatic writing, through recording of consciousness at hypnagogic moments, and through a persistent attempt to tap primary processes. The modern movement in painting would dramatize the visual counterpart of literary surrealism in its quest for the symbolic abstractions of dream material, as in the work of Dali or Chagall.

Interdisciplinary Problems

What value does literature have for psychiatry, or psychiatry for literature, beyond the contribution of each to the culture of the practitioner? There is no question in literature of attempting diagnosis; quite obviously therapy is not involved. Characters described in literature are figments of their author's imagination. We can never know Hamlet's blood pressure, nor his blood chemistry; nor can we usefully say he was paranoid or schizoid or manic-depressive. Literature can, however, suggest to psychiatry systems of value, dimensions of human personality, evidence of the way in which structures of words are part of symbol and myth. Psychiatry on its side offers literary criticism and literary biography valuable guidelines and insights into the psychology of thought, language, and imagination.

The area most common to literature and psychiatry is the exploration of the unconscious, initiated in particular in the therapy of Freud. Psychoanalysis brings psychiatry much closer to literature—and correspondingly, literature to psychiatry—by the very fact that it is concerned with the imaginative faculty of man. Man's way of dreaming, thinking, behaving—here we can say the two disciplines establish a remarkable kinship. In literature this study involves the exploration of verbal forms and structures—the novel, the play, the poem—in which the artist embodies personal and social symbols and myths. In psychoanalysis personal symbolism and personal mythology is studied privately between psychiatrist

and patient, for therapeutic ends. Literary theory and literary ideas as well as the substance of fiction, poetry, and drama offer much material by which the psychiatric horizons may be widened. Once we begin to think in terms of man's unconscious, literature and psychiatry become sister disciplines.

Freud's studies in literature were revolutionary: his examination of a minor German novel, *Gradiva*, was an excursion into fictional dream work, and even his speculations on Leonardo, which he so carefully qualified because he was extrapolating from meager data, had within them useful guidance for students of literature. If Freud extended our grasp of Aristotelian catharsis, he went beyond to see how far art represents a territory between wish-denying reality and wish-fulfilling fantasy. This was of enormous help to the biography of art: it made possible for artists a deeper sense of the unconscious promptings in their own work. However, Freud recognized that psychoanalysis has its limitations in such application: it has yet to explain the genesis of art; and he carefully placed this question among the unsolved mysteries of human experience.

Psychiatry and Biography

Literature and psychiatry achieve their most relevant mutual irradiation in the field of biography, that is, the writing of lives of individuals who have aroused in the world a particular curiosity. A corollary field is the

study of the process by which such individuals have been enabled to create. We might roughly speak of two categories of biography: writing of “quiet” lives, that is, of individuals who assert themselves by a kind of physical passivity and by tremendous imaginative action; and writing of those who are physically active and seek the world, rather than withdrawing from it in order to verbalize it. Literary biography is concerned mainly with individuals at their writing desk. It has particular value for interdisciplinary study because we find in it the verbalization of so much of man’s inner landscape. Human curiosity usually leads us to seek the personality of the poet once we have been excited by his poem—or by his novel or play. The literary work suggests mysteries; it offers, as T. S. Eliot puts it, the “objective correlative” of the poem’s creating imagination. We understandably speculate about the poem’s immediate source, the human vitality and the mind, the dream-making symbols and myths that have gone into its production. The biography that celebrates a statesman or a general may be concerned with certain of his imaginative ideas, but fundamentally it describes an individual in action—in battle, or in parliament, in a hurly-burly of public life—as against the private life of the writer.

In speaking of the “objective correlative” we recognize that a work of art is in reality indissoluble. It is impossible to recover the intricate threads of memory, association, craft, tradition (and much more) out of which the artistic structure has come into being. Biographers also are forced to consider

questions of privacy, even when they are not bound by the oath of Hippocrates; they know that they cannot map all the stages of creativity. The artist scarcely wishes to offer his life history as appendage to his created work. At best all we can hope to do is obtain glimpses of the imagination in action. But precisely by seeking the particular symbolic landscape or imagination, and the particular myth that these symbols express, the psychiatrically oriented biographer is writing the only kind of biography that can be said to have validity. Biographers of James Joyce, who have accepted that writer's own legend and myth (which was that of a world hostile to Joyce), have simply chronicled the illusions by which the Irish writer lived and defended himself. With the knowledge of what life patterns are, and how defenses function, it is possible to assert that a psychiatric biography of Joyce would reveal precisely the opposite of his own legend—that Joyce was extremely hostile to the world. His formidable aggressivity, his explosive thrust, can be read in every line he set down. Privacy of a writer is not invaded in this kind of biography, for our concern is not with his little daily doings (although these, too, may illustrate character and personality), but his whole imaginative being *as he himself expressed it*. A whole generation, misled by *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, has sympathized with the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, in his conflict between the flesh and the devil, and the manner in which this is told in the novel; and its readers have been so dazzled by the virtuosity of the writing that they fail to see that the young

man of this book is callow and possessed of an unpleasant and distinctly hostile nature. The two disciplines enable us to understand with greater certainty both the aesthetic and the psychological qualities of this autobiographical work and to recognize that however much Joyce shuffled the facts of his own boyhood and youth, he expressed their truest meaning, the deepest modes of his being. This kind of biography, far from being gratuitous, helps us to arrive at truth, the truth of which Goethe wrote when he attempted the story of his own life—even though he characteristically deceived himself in telling his personal story, as all writers must. The biographer, working within the truths of criticism and psychoanalysis, can unmask the self-deception.

Dr. Phyllis Greenacre, in her study of Charles Darwin entitled *The Quest for the Father*, draws a valuable distinction between the roles of the psychoanalyst who wishes to write biography and the psychoanalyst engaged in therapy. It is apparent, she writes, “that the psychoanalytic biographer approaches the study of his subject from vantage points precisely the opposite of those of the psychoanalytic therapist. The latter works largely through the medium of his gradually developing and concentrating relationship with the patient who is seeking help and accepts the relationship for this purpose. The personal involvement and neutrality of the therapist permit the patient to be drawn almost irresistibly into reproducing, toward the analyst, in only slightly modified forms, the attitudes (and even their

specific content) which have given rise to his difficulties. In this setting, the analyst can help the patient to become feelingly aware of the nature of his difficulties and to achieve a realignment of the conflict-driven forces within him. Psychoanalysis as a *technique* is distinctly for therapeutic purposes, and is not generally useful for investigating the personality structure of the individual who is in a good state of balance.” From this, Dr. Greenacre is led to define, both for the psychoanalyst and for the literary biographer, the precise difference between the writer who works with the living subject and the writer who works from documents. In contrast to the “biography” of the patient formed out of direct confrontation and the transference situation, the “psycholiterary” biographer, if one dares to combine the two, “approaches his subject almost wholly by avenues which are unavailable in therapeutic technique. He has no direct contact with his subject, and there is no therapeutic aim. He amasses as much material from as many different sources as possible. Lacking the opportunity to study the subject’s reactions through the transference neurosis, he must scrupulously scrutinize the situations from which the source material is drawn, and assess the personal interactions involved in it. Further, the study is made for the purpose of extending analytic [and we might insert also literary] knowledge and is not sought by the subject.”

This helps us clear the ground. It suggests to literature that the Boswell type of biography may need to be reexamined, for the Boswells know their

subjects personally and the direct consequence of such relationships between subject and author requires close scrutiny. One would have to examine, for instance, the large biography that Lawrance Thompson wrote of Robert Frost; or that planned by Carvell Collins of William Faulkner; or the one proposed by Richard Goldstone of Thornton Wilder—in the light of their years of intimacy and observation of their subjects. Boswell, worshiping Johnson, is extremely vulnerable as an objective biographer, and there can be no doubt that his formidable work is a biography of countertransference. On this subject Freud long ago offered us valuable advice. Undertaking a biographical speculation in his *Leonardo*," he remarked that biographers in many cases "have chosen their hero as the subject of their studies because—for reasons of their personal emotional life—they have felt a special affection for him from the very first. They then devote their energies to a task of idealization, aimed at enrolling the great man among the class of their infantile models—at reviving in him, perhaps, the child's idea of the father. To gratify this wish they obliterate the individual features of their subject's physiognomy; they smooth over the traces of his life's struggle with internal and external resistances; and they tolerate in him no vestige of human weakness or imperfection. They thus present us with what is in fact a cold, strange, ideal figure, instead of a human being to whom we might feel ourselves distantly related. That they should do this is regrettable, for they thereby sacrifice truth to an illusion, and for the sake of their infantile phantasies abandon the opportunity of penetrating the

most fascinating secrets of human nature.”

In an earlier paper I pointed out that Freud omitted the kind of biographer who uses his subject as an expression of anger and hate rather than of love for the “infantile model.” This explains the school of “debunking” biography, which arose with Lytton Strachey and resulted in the wholesale smashing of Victorian idols. It simply replaced adulation with hostility, excessive praise with extreme mockery.

The best, the most objective, biography is the one that recognizes the unpleasant as well as the admirable characteristics of genius; that is, the biography that uses its evidence in a “scientific” way. Boswell’s stated desire to show us his subject, warts and all, conforms to the scientific ideal of most biographers. Yet their countertransference soon blurs the lines and alters the image, as Freud predicted. What are biographers to do? One hardly can propose they undergo a prolonged psychoanalysis; but they might seek the counsel of the psychiatrist, and recognize that it is precisely here that interdisciplinary relations should be cultivated. It can make the difference between a work created in total worship or in total malice. On his side the psychiatrist who feels a need to write a biography rather than a case history should call on his colleagues in literature to teach him something about literary tradition, proper saturation in the materials, and the cultivation, insofar as his talents permit, of literary art. Such a psychiatrist, we would

hope, has himself been sufficiently analyzed to be able to avoid the dangers of countertransference. But there are many instances of superficiality in both disciplines. We can find literary biographies that have modeled themselves on Erik Erikson without fully understanding the relation of art to the unconscious; and psychoanalytical biographies that have ignored the modalities of the creative act. And then psychiatrists often fail to translate their special language into the discourse of everyday life. They write, after all, in the language of their profession, rather than in that of the unindoctrinated reader. A reader without psychoanalytical orientation is asked to understand assumptions, concepts, conclusions, known to anyone who has been exposed to psychiatry and psychoanalysis, but which can only baffle the uninitiated. I have always given as an example of this a paragraph in the first chapter of Ernest Jones's life of Freud in which he writes of Freud as a child during the impending birth of a sibling:

Darker problems arise when it dawned on him that some man was even more intimate with his mother than he was. Before he was two years old, for the second time, another baby was on the way, and soon visibly so. Jealousy of the intruder, and anger for whoever had seduced his mother into such an unfaithful proceeding, were inevitable. Discarding his knowledge of the sleeping conditions in the house, he rejected the unbearable thought that the nefarious person could be his beloved and perfect father.

This doubtless has meaning in psychoanalysis, but is it valid biography? Surely it never "dawns" on a two year old that some man "is even more intimate with his mother than he was." As I have had occasion to remark, such

a precocity would be ready for the couch and would not need play therapy. In a word this passage is written in nonbiographical language. Jones is reading into the consciousness and awareness of the child material that according to Freudian theory exists (we may speculate) in his unconscious. The use of words such as “jealousy” and “seduction” in relation to a two-year-old, even if that child be as gifted as Sigmund Freud, disturbs the reader’s sense of verisimilitude. A more skilled biographer would say that Freud, years later, may have felt that in his infantile experience he had undergone a period of disturbance, or a sense of having been set aside, on the advent of another child into the family. And even though he had felt, in the intuitive ways of childhood, that somehow his father was involved in the event, he had concealed this thought that his parent, who seemed to him an ideal and powerful figure, would deprive him of the place he occupied in the very center of his mother’s life. In some such way the psychoanalytical ideas can be translated into the language of everyday life.

In my work as a biographer I have found that Freud’s observations on slips of the pen can be of enormous help in reading the manuscripts of writers. In the old days these slips would have been ignored; today they can be of extraordinary use in uncovering hidden process. In writing the life of Henry James I first began to pay attention to the unusual sibling rivalry between the novelist and William, his psychologist brother, when I noticed that Henry had made an error in giving his brother’s birth date, in a book

entitled *Notes of a Son and Brother*. Such errors, I suppose, are not always significant; nevertheless, Freud alerted us to them, and I was led from this slip of the pen to its context, and ultimately to observing that what had always been described as an unusually affectionate relation between two men of genius had in it profound subterranean rivalries. The novelist nearly always chose second sons as his heroes (William was fifteen months older) and usually relegated older brothers to wars, where they were killed off, or sent to mental institutions; and upon the younger rival then fell the mantle and guardianship of family name and honor. The image the world originally had of Henry and William James was that of peers in their creative kingdoms. What was important was to see the many levels of this relationship: the overt affection and concern of the two, their roles in the cultural life of America and Europe, their consistent development, yet each working out his own destiny within a frame of covert infantile emotion, transformed by the novelist into fiction, and often great art, and transformed by the psychiatrist—for William James had taken a medical degree—into observation of human behavior. In order to give an objective picture, I told the story not only from Henry's side (he being my subject) but from William's as well. In this way I offered an interpersonal study. And since what occurred between these brothers was an age-old phenomenon of which psychiatry is well aware, I translated the entire situation into the Jacob and Esau story of the Old Testament, extending the relation I was examining by bringing out its mythic and archetypal qualities.

The most common accusation leveled at the use of psychiatry in literary criticism and biography is that it is “reductive.” It is argued that we take the life of a genius and deal with its pathology, or try to show that certain “conditioning” produced the poetic inspiration. The genesis of poetry can be called irrelevant, for the poetry itself represents the essence of the genius. The genesis of any work can be of no concern to a critic; it belongs to the study of creative process. But there is more to be said about the “reductive” nature of any psychological or biographical probing of a writer and his work. If the psychoanalytical student of literary creativity spends his time (as I have had occasion to observe) snorkeling around the base of the iceberg seeking to see what is submerged without looking at the glittering exposed mass visible to the world, then, indeed, the process is reductive. We can always find id explanations for this or that part of a talented life and say that an individual’s “orality” or his “cannibalism” has made him keep his large grasp on life in order that he may consume it. The early essays in “applied” psychoanalysis are filled with this kind of inquiry. Nevertheless, it is the visible shape of genius that has encountered the world, and it is the relationship between the submerged and the visible that should be the focus of our study. The inquiry of Thomas Mann in *The Magic Mountain* into man’s way of passing through illness into health is an example in fiction of the nonreductive method: that is, the recognition that it is not necessarily the bellyache that inspires the poem, but the poet’s determination to overcome the bellyache. Most art of the

transcendent kind represents a drive to health, not to illness; and while one could find illness in the lives of many of our greatest artists—Proust’s allergies, Virginia Woolf’s depression, Joyce’s pathological defenses—what is truly striking is the heroic resistance of their art to death and annihilation, the age-old will to perpetuate the human spirit and the human consciousness. Approached in this way, the psychoanalytical inquiry can be life-enhancing rather than life-reductive.

On the other hand, we know that pathology exists in certain kinds of artists, and that their work reflects illness rather than a drive to health. Psychoanalysis, and the larger field of psychiatry, could do a great deal to help literary criticism understand the nature of pathology. There must be found ways of educating literary criticism to understand that some of the elements of art that may seem highly idiosyncratic are in reality products of alienation and madness, derived from man’s destructive side. If we could say with greater assurance that the truly “sick” work of art is profoundly pathological, it might not be praised for the wrong reasons. This would require a large measure of delicacy and insight; and I am certain that most critics today would balk at such instruction, feeling the dangers of “censorship” and recalling the Hitlerian formulization of “bad” art and “good” art. It is not difficult to see the pathology of a book like *Mein Kampf* and to recognize how contagious such pathology can be. But it is more difficult to deal with the writing of the avant-garde, as it calls itself today, which confuses psychedelic

experience with natural experience and dwells on the excremental and the obscene in ways that degrade life and only record profound morbidity. In this one must distinguish with great caution between the need for education and for evaluation while making clear censorship is not intended.

Creative Process

The study of creative process need not be gone into in any detail here; a large literature is available on the subject. What we can say is that psychiatry and psychoanalysis has opened up new avenues of insight into the ways in which individuals of genius are capable of transforming life experience into works of art. What is not sufficiently realized is that any direct “imitation” of life is essentially an act of journalism; and that the imaginative transformation is an artistic act involving to a much greater degree man’s sensory—that is, his aesthetic—faculties. In the study of the creative process we attempt to enter—however tentatively and always with great caution — the landscape of a given imagination by examining the works brought forth by that imagination. This is the counterpart in literary study to the psychoanalytic examination of dreams, which constantly use man’s symbol-making capacities. Works of art are much more than dream: they are dream that has been given conscious shape by the verbal, the rhythms and patterns, the color and tactile senses of the artist, depending on his medium. Some psychiatrists have tended to regard a novel or a poem as if it were a dream.

To do this is to ignore tradition, influence, structure, form, the saturation of the writer or painter with the art of the past, and the ways in which the gifted individual mobilizes knowledge and affect within his creative power.

“Creative process” is thus a large term; any study of it requires delicate probing. We must keep in mind always that at best we can arrive only at some crude *schema* or map of our explorations. Nevertheless, literary criticism has performed many subtleties of explication, and when to such criticism is joined the awareness of certain kinds of mental progress, it becomes possible for us to engage in the delicate and humane adventure of exploring a poetic landscape. How delicate and complex the study of creative process invariably is may be judged by Silvano Arieti’s bold attempt to define the relations between primary and secondary process and his suggestion that a tertiary or innovative process must also be discerned. The poetic work combines similarities through symbol and metaphor to arrive at the new. The body of knowledge available to us in Freud, Jung, Kris, Arieti, Schachtel, Greenacre, to choose but a few names out of an immense bibliography, makes possible a cross-fertilization of disciplines by which we can arrive at revelations of form and watch the transformations embodied in the literary work. Literary criticism itself is unaware of how much it has learned since Freud in its study of the iconography of literature, although much of this learning suffers from lack of exact psychological and psychiatric knowledge. Literary critics, borrowing from psychiatry, tend to confuse their speculation about manifest

content with imperfect understanding of possible unconscious elements. And then they tend to regard symbols as having fixed meanings when they draw on certain symbolic explanations in books devoted to psychiatry. The critic, moreover, must be careful in his disassembling of certain creative elements not to fragment the work of art.

Thoreau long ago recognized that a poem is a piece of “very private history, which unostentatiously lets us into the secret of man’s life,” and Henry James observed that “the artist is present in every page of every book from which he sought so assiduously to eliminate himself.”

In the wake of Freud there have been important exponents of “applied psychoanalysis” who met with varying success. Among them we might mention Jung, Rank, Jones, Sachs, Pfister, Kris, Alexander, Fromm, Greenacre, and in the camp of literature such diverse figures as Cazamian, Badouin, Bachelard, Graves, Edmund Wilson, Maud Bodkin, Trilling, and others. The writings of Jung have had particular appeal to literary criticism because of his study of the nature of myth and archetype. His search for parallels between primordial images and fantasies and contemporary dream material touched the wellspring of poetic experience and his theory of the “collective unconscious,” while wholly speculative, had in it a viable attempt to examine the nature of archetypal symbols and fantasies. A striking adaptation of some of his ideas is to be found in the critical theorizing of Northrop Frye,

particularly in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) where he observes that “literature, conceived as ... a total imaginative body is in fact a civilized, expanded and developed mythology.”

To sum up: psychiatry and literature share common ground—in the interest of both disciplines—in the expression of man’s behavioral variousness; in capturing aberrations and idiosyncrasies of thought; in the study of the ways in which the artist projects himself through literary forms. Where in older times these forms were regarded as impersonal, we know them today as embodying and encapsulating the intimate fantasies of the imagination through intricate uses of memory and association and “learned” reactions. The verbal forms of expression may be of help to psychiatry in its pursuit of the physical data; but both disciplines share the pursuit of the biographical record, whether biography as art or biography as case history. The creative imagination and the artist’s dream work can take psychiatry beyond diagnosis and therapy in offering projections of extraordinary cases of a highly individual kind. The disciplines are enabled thus to work toward a better knowledge of human creativity when it takes the form we describe as “genius,” and to extend thereby the potentials of human creativity.

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