

FREUD AND LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

Although many people find fault with Freud, the horse that they flog is not yet dead. I should in fact maintain that we are all still under Freud's long shadow. Last autumn the American press reported a dreadful crime: a young man, egged on by his mother, murdered his father. The newspapers helpfully explained that the young man had a very prominent Oedipus complex. If we dismiss this as just a journalistic excess, we would do well to remember how hard it is to open our own mouths without registering the effect of Freud upon the language. We converse casually about the sexual proclivities of infants, about sibling rivalries, about dependency upon the mother, about sadomasochistic impulses. When we forget things, we suspect ourselves of having wanted to forget them. We may shun the technical vocabulary of Freud, words such as *ego*, *superego*, *id*, *the pleasure principle* and *the reality principle*, *the anal*, *oral*, and *genital stages*, yet we are hardly likely to do without such words as *aggression*, *anxiety*, *compulsion*, *the unconscious*, *defense mechanism*, *narcissism*, *death wish*, *erogenous zones*, *fixation*, *guilt feeling*, *sublimation*, *wish fulfillment*. Freud may not have invented most of these words, yet he

connected them together and he gave them a special color and shape. And quite apart from terminology, Freud has given us the conviction that a secret life is going on within us that is only partly under our control.

Perhaps no part of society has been more disrupted by the coming of Freud than has the community of letters. During the nineteenth century, literature grew more and more in the habit of claiming autonomy as a privileged and separate subject. Words such as *art* and *artist* took on an extraordinary dignity. Psychoanalysis has disrupted these pretensions in several distinct ways. First, it has argued that we are all, artists and non-artists, involved in the chronic production of symbolic fantasies, in dreams or daydreams, in more or less directed oneirism. This being so, artists are not an elite; they are much like other people, at most Rembrandts when the rest of us are only Grandma Moseses. Second, psychoanalysis, an infant discipline, takes over terms such as *Oedipus* and *Narcissus* from age-old literature and to some extent pre-empted them, so that their literary uses become merely illustrative of larger principles. In fact, the word *Oedipus* now makes us think of Freud, not of Sophocles. That is because psychoanalysis lays claim to an even greater antiquity: Oedipuses were living before Sophocles wrote about him; minds expressed their basic drives before artists seized upon them for subjects. Third, literature becomes something that psychoanalysis fancies it must validate; literature cannot know what it is doing, and in spite of its verbliness, cannot speak for itself. It can only offer the practice for which Freud would provide the theory. Fourth, literature, by reason of being without theoretical comprehension of its own processes, uses words in an unconsidered way; it talks of love, when it might be better advised to speak of libido; it speaks of what Byron calls "the gentlemanly vice of avarice" when it might better talk of anal erotism. So its putative revelations are imprecise. Finally, in the nineteenth century we looked to literature, especially to the novel, for news of the human mind; now we turn to psychoanalysis for the news behind the news.

Freud himself was at once respectful and disrespectful of literature. He acknowledged and even insisted that many of his discoveries about the psyche had been anticipated by literary works. In his discussion of Jensen's *Gradiva*, for example, he

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praised Jensen for just such an anticipation. Jensen, then still alive, was singularly ungratified by such a view of his work. But when Freud considered art at large, he was often (though not always) less laudatory. The writer sublimates his desires, or, as Freud says, “The writer softens the egotistical character of his egoistic daydream by altering and disguising it”. Writing becomes a pleasurable cover-up, furtive rather than open, a repression of reality at least as much as it is an expression of it. It conceals neurosis rather than freeing one from it. Qualities that writers have cherished—their aesthetic power, their inspiration and exaltation, their development of previously established forms—have no psychoanalytic standing; they are demystified, or it may be, explained away as results of more basic drives and appetites. Writers fancied they were eagles, and are only clams.

Sensing a challenge, the literary community responded uneasily to the new psychology, especially in an area where it is particularly intrusive, that of biography. Traditional biography has relied upon two kinds of information: documents such as letters, and written or oral reminiscences. These being absent, biographers have often made their surmises or conjectures on the basis of written works. Shakespeare, they think, was a bit like Hamlet as a young man and like Prospero as an old one, and books have been written on such speculations. Freud himself was not inhibited by scarcity of documents or oral histories. He took up Leonardo da Vinci’s reminiscence of being in his cradle as an infant when a kite came and struck his mouth with its tail feathers. Freud insists that this was not a memory but a dream; he mistranslates *kite* as *vulture*, and on these beginnings offers a psychological sketch that takes in not only Leonardo’s childhood but his mature paintings. In the same way, he finds Dostoevsky’s parricidal guilt feelings to be the cause of that writer’s immediately subsequent contraction of epilepsy. It appears, however, that the epilepsy did not develop until long afterwards. Freud is equally bold with Goethe’s childhood memory of throwing crockery out of the window. This he traces to the birth of a sibling, and does so quite plausibly, though we don’t know whether the crockery was actually thrown at the time of a birth or not. No recent biographer has, I believe, followed Freud’s theories of Leonardo, Dostoevsky, or Goethe. But Freud was perhaps just exploring possibilities. He was more

resolute about his theory of Moses, though even here he worried that he “was obliged to construct so imposing a statue upon feet of clay, so that any fool could topple it”. He was perhaps more interested in the general truth of such psychological patterns than in their accuracy in the particular instance.

Jean-Paul Sartre wrote three huge volumes on Flaubert that took off from a similarly minuscule beginning. Flaubert’s niece, Mme Caroline Commanville, wrote in old age about her uncle, and recalled his having confided that he could not learn to read at the age of nine. Unfortunately, we have a letter of Flaubert written just at the beginning of this ninth year, and written very well, in which he speaks of having already written plays. Sartre might have decided that Mme Commanville, writing as an old woman, had confused her uncle with somebody else. But he wants to use her reminiscence, so he decides that she has just made a little slip and remembered that Flaubert said nine when he must have said seven. He then postulates that someone said to the boy of seven, who could not learn his letters, “You are the idiot of the family” (Those familiar with Sartre’s writings will recall that in his biography of Genêt he imagines that someone said to the child Genêt, “You are a thief”). So the title of Sartre’s biography of Flaubert is *The Idiot of the Family*. Were we to object that the child Flaubert, even supposing that he had trouble learning to read, was in other ways precocious, I cannot imagine Sartre retreating. For, ultimately, Flaubert must be shown to fail in the eyes of his family and, I think we could say, in the eyes of Sartre. And if Sartre lacked the testimony of Mme Commanville, however unreliable that testimony may be, he is quite willing to say that, by observing the effects in the mature Flaubert, we can reason back to the causes in Flaubert the child. Given a particular kind of dog’s tail, we can deduce a particular kind of muzzle.

The rigorous scrutiny that psychoanalysis offers writers, depriving them of their elite status and sitting as a sort of posthumous authority that takes note of their aberrations and concealments, has roused considerable misgivings among them. There has been no one response to Freud. Thomas Mann belauded him. Auden begins *The Orators*: “By landscape reminded once of his mother’s figure”, and we realize we are in the age of Freud. T. S. Eliot’s reaction was more mixed: in *The Dry Salvages* he said

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that “to explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams” is among the “usual / Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press”, though in *The Cocktail Party* he included among the characters a benign and unworldly psychoanalyst. Joyce in *Finnegan's Wake* speaks mockingly of the time “when we were jung and easily freudened”, but he was perhaps the first writer to use Freudian slips in a conscious way: Leopold Bloom speaks of “the wife’s admirers” when he consciously means “the wife’s advisers” and unconsciously thinks of his own wife’s admirer; and his tongue slips again when he speaks of that admirer as is wife’s “business menagerer” instead of “business manager”. Joyce did not subscribe to the Freud-Jones theory of *Hamlet* as Oedipal conflict, though it fascinated him, and in *Ulysses* he centered a psychological explanation of the play in the feelings of the dead king rather than those of the living son—*Hamlet* without the prince almost. Joyce turned down a suggestion that he be analyzed by Jung, but he allowed Jung to attempt to cure his distraught daughter. In a later generation Ernest Hemingway would revolt against the idea that his works were the result of a psychic trauma rather than of the utmost aesthetic cunning. There are, of course, examples of writers who have been analyzed, such as Doris Lessing and H.D., but other writers have felt that the peculiar synthesis of weakness and strength that constituted their gift would not profit by being anatomized. Erich Fromm advised Conrad Aiken not to risk it.

Of course, writers have always been dubious about putting their lives at the mercy of biographers. They could see that they had much to lose, and probably little to gain, by having their pasts reconstructed without the right of reply. Oscar Wilde remarked that biography “adds to death a new terror, and makes one wish that all art were anonymous”. Thomas Carlyle declared that “the biographies of men of letters are for the most part the saddest chapter in the history of the human race except the Newgate Calendar”. For while traditional biography was usually animated by a desire to be adulatory or when necessary exculpatory, it could scarcely fail to present details that were irrelevant or perhaps at odds with this motive. The lives of creative writers, as of other men, cannot consist only of moments of victorious self-transcendence and transcendence of circumstances, but must include pettinesses and humiliations. Of this Freud was well aware.

In 1936 Arnold Zweig offered to write his biography. Freud responded that he was too fond of Zweig to permit it. "To be a biographer", he said, "you must tie yourself up in lies, concealments, hypocrisies, false colourings, and even in hiding a lack of understanding, for biographical truth is not to be had, and if it were to be had, we could not use it". He went on, "Truth is not feasible, mankind doesn't deserve it, and anyway isn't our prince Hamlet right when he says that if we all had our deserts, which of us would 'scape whipping?" So he offers two objections, somewhat self-contradictory: one that biographers tell lies; the other that if they told truths, the truths would be unbearable. He found a discreet biographer in Ernest Jones, who skirted many of those issues that Freud would have dealt with in other men and who, though a psychoanalyst, made no effort at psychoanalysis.

Given such cogent objections, even from Freud himself, to biographical undertakings, we no doubt will find the proliferation of biography in our century astonishing. The advance tremors that dying writers have felt have proved justified. Scarcely has their breath left them when their widows or widowers feel obliged to choose among the outstretched pens of eager memorializers. There is hardly time for mourning; the public's appetite for information must be filled as soon as the grave is. This appetite is not altogether discreditable. We long to understand our world, and imagine we can do so by understanding the vivid personalities within it. We want to bring them back to life, so far as we can. With literary men this impulse is especially understandable, for while television figures—politicians or athletes or newscasters—are people we can recognize like old acquaintances, writers work in such strict privacy and are generally so secretive about their intentions and sources that we look at their lives with even keener interest. We wish that the biographer would explain the mainsprings of genius. Freud acknowledged that the comprehension of genius was beyond his powers, and later biographers, without disclaiming the task, have had less success at it than we hoped.

No doubt we have also, in reading or writing biography, a less noble aim, a gossipy one, to confirm through the details of a life that a gifted man or woman, though in many ways *unlike* us, is *like* us too, subject to the same needs, smelling equally of mortality. We at once want them to present themselves on the same stage that

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we occupy, and yet—for we have not given up the heroic altogether—we want them undiminished.

Freud understood that his own case histories were close to biographies; he called them pathographies. Yet health and disease are so intermingled by his theory that no one can escape being a potential patient. The universality of the pathic is one of his discoveries. His epoch seems based on the aphorism: one touch of kinkiness makes the whole world kin. Normality, healthy sexuality, and similar terms are out of order. The ordinary is as subject to scrutiny as the extraordinary. Freud's case histories are, however, biographies without heroes or villains. They are also biographies without history, for the linear past interests him less than the imaginative past, especially the mythology of childhood that may well be partially invented by the patient to suit his later needs, and that may suddenly obtrude itself quite out of regular order. There is no time in the unconscious, as Freud points out. Whether we saw the primal scene or not, he eventually decided, is irrelevant; we thought we did, we imagined we did, and that is enough. We live among feelings, to which facts may or may not adhere. Biographers have never felt so free of the necessity of distinguishing fact from fantasy.

Towards biography as practiced before his time Freud was severe. He regarded it as based on deliberate concealment. In his essay on Leonardo, he said that the majority of biographers pass over in silence the subject's sexual activity or sexual individuality, and therefore cannot arrive at an understanding of the subject's mental life. On this point he was obviously right. Pre-Freudian biographers were averse to breaking taboos about sexual details. James A. Froude had heard from a close and reliable friend of Jane Carlyle, on her deathbed, that Carlyle was impotent; but in four long volumes of biography of Carlyle, he avoids mention of this point. While novelists, especially in France, were becoming increasingly open about sexuality, biographers were slow to follow, and tended to cling to notions of respectability that novelists were trying to dislodge.

Freud also declared that

biographers are fixated on their heroes in a quite special way. In many cases they 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 infant 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.

This is a vehement indictment that Freud makes, though now a little out-of-date. I should doubt that modern biographers are fixated on their subject or look to them for father figures (or even mother figures, a possibility that Freud characteristically ignored). The modern biographer has read Freud, or even if he hasn’t, he has absorbed him. He has come to recognize the dangers of fixation and idealization. The biography of Woodrow Wilson that Freud purportedly wrote with William C. Bullit originated in what might be called counterfixation, an active dislike, as they admit. If a modern biographer identifies himself a little with his subject, he does so reservedly, and withdraws a bit at the same time.

And it must be said that the subject of the literary biographer—the writer—has also become more wary, apprehensive of being psychoanalyzed too easily. An analyst of my acquaintance tells me that he rarely sees among educated people in cities the classic symptoms of hysteria, such as paralysis of an arm or leg, inability to speak or swallow, fainting or convulsions, which were so marked when Freud began to delineate hysteria. Nowadays even hysterics know a cliché. But an Austrian analyst tells me, “In Vienna we have still the classic symptoms”. Now that our possession of an Oedipus complex has been dinned into us from our early years, writers are much less prone to present so acknowledged a behavior pattern. Were Sophocles alive today, he would write about someone else than Oedipus. Other discoveries

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of Freud, such as meaningful slips of the tongue, are grasped at once by the tongue-slipper, not to mention by his auditors, and so seem to bear a reduced significance, as if whatever was being repressed was not repressed very far down. If we have an accident, we know all about accident proneness, though this may not stop the pain. Nor do we fall so easily into the error marked out by Freud of being too hero-oriented. The unheroic interests us too—moments of shabby conduct or symptoms of disease (Freud's own jaw cancer, for example). Biographers are often accused of indecorum, and reply by accusing their detractors of squeamishness.

Our conception of the creative process has undergone such an upheaval that we no longer look, as a nineteenth-century biographer would, for evidence of the taking of infinite pains that genius traditionally is said to constitute. Mere gumption does not impress us. In the last century it was assumed that literary works came into being because their authors willed them to. The modern biographer would question the autonomy of that will. He would be likely to see the writer as the victim of internal compulsions, or familial and extra-familial complications, bursting into literature willy-nilly, writing not to express finesses but, it may be, to exorcise horrors. Henri Michaux, in one of his imaginary voyages, describes how a people whom he calls *Les Hacs* rear their artists. It might be a parable of our present conception:

The Hacs have arranged to rear every year a few child martyrs, whom they subject to harsh treatment and evident injustices, inventing reasons and deceptive complications, based on lies, for everything, in an atmosphere of terror and mystery.

Entrusted with this work are some hardhearted men, real brutes, directed by cruel and clever overseers.

In this way they have reared up great artists, great poets, but also, unfortunately, assassins and especially reformers—incredible bitterenders.

If a change is made in the customs and social institutions, it's owing to them; if, in spite of their small army, the Hacs have nothing to fear, again they owe it to them; if, in their straightforward language, lightning flashes of anger have been fixed, beside which the honeyed deviousness of foreign writers

seems insipid dog food, it is again to them they owe it, to a few ragged, wretched, hopeless kids.

Art, by these lights, is not the result of virtue but of handicap. Matthew Arnold admired Sophocles for seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. We, on the other hand, admire our writers because they respond with fury and passion to abuse and indignity. The wise contemplative visage of Goethe is not our model, but the hurt, furtive face of Kafka. When Joyce in *Ulysses* has Stephen Dedalus offer us a portrait of Shakespeare, it is not the swan of Avon, serenely regarding the human scene, but a vengeful cuckold writing out of anger and jealousy. I think we can attribute to Freud the way that our biographical attention has been directed away from the perfection of artifacts and onto the imperfection of artificers. Yeats reminds us that all the artistic ladders start in the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart, and the rag-and-bone shop is what we want to examine—not the empyreal loft to which the ladders go. Robert Lowell, an imperfect poet, wrote in a late poem that imperfection is the language of art. Sartre conceives of Flaubert as saying to himself, “Loser wins”, as if only through defeat in life is victory in art possible. The writer gets his own back by writing.

If we try to isolate the features of modern biography, the first is its heightened sensitivity. I think we can attribute this in large part to Freud. The biographer conceives of himself not as outside but as inside the subject’s mind, not as observing but as ferreting. Facts do not speak for themselves. We model ourselves on Freud, analysts without couches. What Freud instructs us, as Philip Rieff observes, is to recognize all experience as symptomatic. Trivia have as much to tell us as crises. We should all like to collect telltale slips of tongue or pen, for example, although these are not so easy to find as perhaps *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* makes them seem. We live in what Paul Ricoeur in his book on Freud calls the age of suspicion; we do not so much present as arraign. Sartre, in writing of Baudelaire, as in writing of Flaubert, often seems the prosecuting attorney, when an earlier biographer would have been attorney for the defence.

The conviction that everything is relevant is somewhat destructive of chronology. The nineteenth century could view a life

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as a progress from primitive childhood to civilized adulthood, followed perhaps by the return to primitivism in dotage. But Freud makes us recognize that linear development may not describe the psyche adequately, that *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, may suddenly project the being into new areas, as hitherto suppressed parts of the self manifest themselves. The ahistorical unconscious is constantly obtruding into the historical layers of the mind. Moreover, the unity of the self is likely to be relinquished by the biographer in favor of a more protean entity. Like the wizened Christ child in some early Italian paintings, we are born old. Sexualized from birth, ridden by undirected or half-directed fantasies, we have no time to grow up even if we have the will. Sartre suggests that a life is simply a childhood with the stops pulled out; but it might well be a childhood with many of the stops pushed in even further. Our seeming selves are only palimpsests under which may be dimly perceived features successfully or unsuccessfully repressed. If we persist in regarding the self as in some sense one rather than many, we have still to allow for what Sartre calls its carousel of motives moving about the pool of its central ipseity.

The lesson of our sexual nature that Freud inculcates has been learned almost too well. The word *Freudian* had become a synonym for *sexual*, although Freud makes clear in his essay “‘Wild’ Psycho-Analysis” how wrong this is, because repression is an essential part of sexuality. The nineteenth-century reticence of which he complained is hard to discover in our contemporary behavior. We are quite prepared to make our sometimes naive deductions from what we can find out about bedroom quirks. That Ruskin’s moral fervor derived in large part from his sexual fears, and that Carlyle’s pungency compensated for sexual impotence, are near commonplaces of biographical interpretation. The latest biographies of Fitzgerald and Auden not only discuss their mating habits but their genital sizes. We are all prepared to acknowledge what Freud called somatic compliance, the body’s submission to the mind, as well as its opposite, the mind’s submission to the body. Even Yeats says, “Our bodies are nearer...to our unconscious than our thoughts”. On the other hand, when Sartre says that Flaubert’s maternal grandfather, after the death of his wife in childbirth, took revenge upon the newborn infant by sickening and

then dying himself, we become skeptical, especially when we discover that his death did not occur until ten years later. What protracted vindictiveness! Psychoanalysis may also relieve our envy of sexual athletes; their success may be as pathological as the more-common unsuccess. Don Giovanni is not sensual, he is sick; he needs a hospital, not a hell. Maybe.

The effect of our newfound methods of detection is vast and unpredictable. The unknown need not be the unknowable. To paraphrase Freud, where obscurity was, hypothesis shall be. In this sense, paucity of information may even be an advantage, because it frees the mind for conjecture. The early years, to which psychoanalysis attaches so much importance, are just those about which we know least. But there are mysteries throughout. Where direct evidence is missing, we have to rely on outside testimony. The witness of friends or relatives may or may not be helpful. A recent collection of taped interviews with friends of Wallace Stevens is proof of how little his friends knew him. Of course, there are always letters. The modern biographer is aware that the letter is itself a literary form, through which writer and recipient play a game of concealment and revealment. What we have to read in correspondence is what is not written there, as at a party we notice who has not been invited. For earlier biographers, letters were saints' relics; for biographers since Freud, they are likely to be duplicitous or at least incomplete.

In presenting his subject, a biographer agrees with Freud that we must be skeptical of heroics. We have always known, even without Freud's help, or La Rochefoucauld's, that our virtues are often vices in disguise. Now the existence of virtue is itself almost in question. In Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* the last temptation of Thomas à Becket is that of martyrdom. We cannot even die for a cause without worrying that it may be just a means of self-aggrandizement. Self-sacrifice is another virtue that has lost much of its earlier prestige. Oscar Wilde connected it with the self-mutilation of savages. The appetite for suffering is one of which Freud has made us intensely conscious. The concept of sadomasochism has put to flight many seemingly virtuous acts. For, what Freud tells us, though he never said so explicitly, is that the stomach hunts the ulcer.

Just as virtues have taken on a little viciousness, so vices have

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lost some of theirs. The vice of extravagance is such a failing. Questionable as a method of household economy, it may be defensible when applied to literary innovation. Joyce regarded himself as guilty of both kinds. Drunkenness may be reprehensible in itself, but as a control over schizophrenia, as Jung said Joyce used it, it may have its merits. Abysses of shyness and evasion may underlie dogmatism; inner firmness may be concealed under wobbling and waffling. Lautréamont said of his fearful book *Les Chants de Maldoror* that he had, indeed, like Byron, Baudelaire, and others, sung the praises of evil. "Of course I exaggerated a bit in order to make an original contribution to the kind of sublime literature that only sings of despair in order to depress the reader and make him long for goodness as a remedy". Beckett's work proceeds somewhat differently; it undercuts despair by saving humour, and undercuts saving humor by unsalvageable despair. All that is certain is uncertainty. Contradictory impulses may coincide; as Freud tells us, there is no *no* in the unconscious. Lacan points out, "What the unconscious forces us to examine is the law according to which no utterance can even be reduced simply to its own statement". When Yeats asks whether he believes in that farrago of occultism and philosophy and poetry that he calls *A Vision*, he seems to reply that he both does and doesn't, and that the question of belief may not belong to our age, and that truth can be embodied in a poet's life but not known. George Eliot, in a sentence admired by Henry James, spoke of "the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts". Freud's term *reaction-formation* indicates how we may repress a wish by doing the exact opposite of it. The modern biographer recognizes that every motive is a multiplicity of motives, many of them in conflict; as Michaux says, we are born of too many mothers.

We must infer that biography has plunged into a new phase. At the same time, many biographies are not written in full awareness of what has been happening. The responsibilities of this kind of subtle and devious interpretation are so manifold that few practitioners rush to take them all on. Their failure to do so is not reprehensible. For one thing, the information they have about matters that are crucial for Freud is often scanty, and they may be reluctant, understandably, to introduce their own speculations as if they commanded equal attention with known particulars.

Another is that the tracing of ultimate causes may reduce differentiation: the biographies of Woodrow Wilson by Freud and Bullitt, of Martin Luther by Erikson, and of Flaubert by Sartre, all make so much of their Oedipal complexes and their relation to God the Father, that the president, the religious reformer, and the writer might almost be confused with one another. The unconscious is a great melting pot. Even Freud sometimes apologizes for the repetitiveness of certain psychological patterns, and a biographer who depends heavily upon them is likely to create a stereotype instead of a person.

It seems likely that certain patterns made available by psychoanalysis may have a blurring effect. For example, among the character traits isolated by Freud is the anal erotic. Edmund Wilson attributed this quality to Ben Jonson. It could as easily be attributed to Ernest Hemingway. For Hemingway, unlike his prodigal friend F. Scott Fitzgerald, was always gathering, absorbing, hoarding, withholding. He prided himself on his secrets, and his method of writing was to offer information as sparingly as possible. "You'll lose it if you talk about it", says Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*. For Hemingway writing was a kind of suppression with only partial release. He behaved in life as in his art, going without food to save money, then engaging in some gush of expense, but all the time keeping a money heap in reserve. His capacity for retention extended to keeping his early notebooks in bank vaults for many years, for future exploitation. Even his method of composing a paragraph in circles around key words suggests a peristaltic movement. Though he wanted to be known as swashbuckling, his strength came from self-concealment. His well-known competitiveness was as much as anything an attempt to protect his winter stores.

A biographer of Hemingway will certainly wish to present this character trait. But the fact that it was presumably shared by Ben Jonson—so different a writer—may make us less cocky about what we have found. Could it be that anal eroticism is pretty general among writers? They are usually inclined to be thrifty, to build up reserve supplies, to play ant rather than grasshopper. But one thing is sure: the daring innovation in Hemingway's style, its fanatical economy, like the humor and lyricism of Ben Jonson, may be disparaged by offering it in the context of anal eroticism.

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Another post-Freudian situation arises in biography when the biographer shapes, to the point of distortion, the facts at his disposal in accordance with Freudian theory. Henry James, as is well known and confirmed by love letters to a man, was predominantly homosexual. Freud offers several explanations of homosexuality, including a genetic one, but the one he expounds most prominently, as in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci, is that the homosexual is fixated on the mother. (Freud later regretted that he had had so little to go on in this essay). In Leon Edel's biography of James, Edel searches for evidence that James's mother "smothered" her son Henry. Unfortunately the evidence is lacking, and almost all the testimony he gives—from friends, relatives, of Henry James himself—appears to differ with this conclusion. Of course, one can still say that it is true without evidence. In an area where witnesses are so hard to come by, speculation can be rife. An aphorism of our time for Freudian biography might be: If you can't see it, it must be there. Still, caution is necessary if we would persuade others.

It has required the assurance of Jean-Paul Sartre to carry out a full-scale biography of the modern kind. Though not by any means an orthodox Freudian, since he finds the unconscious to be conscious, he still keeps largely to Freudian patterns. He has little to say of Flaubert's feat of remaking the novel, partly because he is suspicious of literature; in particular, Sartre is contemptuous of late nineteenth-century literature, which he calls an "art-neurosis" engineered by the Knights of Nothingness, whose ideals he finds to be antihuman. Flaubert was a Knight of Nothingness, and Sartre's interest is in showing how he came to be one. I have already mentioned the slender memories to which he often attaches so much weight. When questioned as to how he knows something about Flaubert, he has the assurance to reply, "Well, I've read Flaubert". And though he insists that life and work should not be equated, he does equate them again and again. For example, he relies heavily upon patterns he claims to find in Flaubert's early stories. When he has to allow that these stories are common ones of the period, very much to hand for Flaubert, he counters by asking why Flaubert—faced with many common stories—picked these particular ones. The argument is conducted with great force and wit. Still, it is not quite so convincing as he imagines. In the

stories, for example, he is particularly eager to find instances of sibling rivalry. Usually in the stories the older brother is triumphant, thus confirming Sartre's conjecture that Flaubert felt victimized by his elder brother. But in one story the younger brother is triumphant. Sartre is not fazed: he announces that this time Flaubert has just "shuffled the cards". But of course, the question arises, Why didn't he shuffle the cards some more? And if shuffling the cards is to be conceded, then how do we know that the other stories, in which the older brother is triumphant, are not the ones that have been shuffled the most? I think that we know enough about the creative process to insist that the erect pen has no conscience, that Flaubert may well have imported details from other lives rather than from his own, or just tried his hand at a story that he had happened to hear or read recently. There is always the possibility, which occurs to the reader as Sartre completes his accusatory case against his subject, that Flaubert's family life was quite different from the nightmare version Sartre conjures up. Sartre offers Flaubert no liberty, keeps him on a tight leash, binds him hand and foot, fetish and phobia. With certain presuppositions about family life, largely based on Freud, Sartre can prove his case over and over again. His eloquence about the unknown is staggering. The flimsier the documentation, the more he has to say. When facts are mentioned, they come as a relief. Substitutions are everywhere: about one of Flaubert's stories Sartre insists that the father is really the mother, and the mother the father. (Later on he says that Flaubert's father mothered him after his breakdown at Pont l'Évêque). He has also the family romance at its most intense; not only does son murder father but father murders son. This is grand stuff, and we wish it could be confirmed.

I think that Sartre exemplifies the merits and demerits of modern biographical method. On the one hand, thanks to Freud, we have been alerted to all sorts of complexities in the personality. On the other hand, these can be interpreted so variously that it is hard to establish firm footing. Where everything can stand for its opposite, where fantasies and facts intertwine, we look desperately for a position in time and space. Freud is supposed to have said that there are times when a cigar is just a cigar. But how to recognize these tranquil moments of simple identity?

Freud and Literary Biography

That Freud makes biography difficult does not mean that he should be put aside. Biographers need a depth psychology, and Freud, with his followers and deviationists, offers one. Conceptualizing a life is different from living it; experiences cannot be simply transcribed onto paper without filtering them through an alien consciousness. Perhaps we should be gingerly in applying Freud's theories, for it is when they are most ostentatious that they awaken the most uneasiness. Yet if Sartre runs too fast, not to run at all would be craven. A modern biographer is bound to attend to incursions of the irrational upon the rational, to look for unexpected connections and unsuspected motivations. For all this Freud remains a model, though no doubt a tricky one.

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