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AUTHORS AND PSYCHOPATHS*

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Of what interest, you may be wondering, is the psychopathology of authors except perhaps to the psychiatrist? I hope to show that it raises questions of considerable importance, primarily to doctors, but indirectly to everyone else. The relationship of mental instability to genius in general may seem to be of merely theoretical interest, but, since authors directly influence the minds of their fellow men more deeply than any other kind of genius, their mental peculiarities possess great social implications. Moreover, if we conclude that there is some positive relationship between their abnormalities and their achievements, we may find in this creative tension a contribution to the solution of the problems that confront many of our ordinary patients. Finally, our appreciation of an author's writing is greatly enriched by an understanding of his psychology.

At this point two possible objections need to be considered. Is it not enough, you may think, for us to enjoy the works of genius without bothering to analyse how they came to be produced, if, indeed, it is possible to do so? Wordsworth thought that nobody ought to pry into the lives of authors. "Our business," he said, "is with their books—to understand and to enjoy them. And, of a poet's more especially, it is true—that if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary for their being comprehended and relished." Wordsworth had his own secret—an illegitimate child in France—but it is true that we need know nothing about an author in order to enjoy his works. Surely, however, we shall enjoy them more if we know a little about his personality, if we understand not only the internal difficulties over which he had to triumph in order to produce them but how these very elements of his nature find expression in his writings. Biography adds a fourth dimension to the understanding and enjoyment of the works of genius; for, though we can enjoy a poem, a picture, or a symphony without even knowing who created it, we then enjoy it in isolation from the whole of the author's personality except its expression in that particular work of art. But when we understand his biography—and by biography I mean not merely a historical account of the facts of his life but also all that we can learn about his heredity, the workings of his nervous system, and the conflicts of his mind—we find his works enriched by being seen in perspective, in the dimension of time in which all his past has made him what he is and his creations what they are.

There is another objection also which is sometimes expressed. "What interests us about a genius," some people say, "is what is unique in him—not his neurosis or his psychosis, which is something he possesses in common with thousands of others." But it is a fallacy to suppose

The photograph of the statue of John Donne in St. Paul's Cathedral is here reproduced by kind permission of the Dean.

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that the unique mental features of a genius exist in isolation from any abnormalities he may exhibit, for what is interesting in the neurosis or psychosis of a genius is not the features it shares with similar disorders in ordinary people but the part that it plays in his individual and therefore unique mental life. Indeed, the most important feature of any neurosis or psychosis is not what it shares with other disorders of its class but its uniqueness as an integral part of a particular personality. But I must add a word of caution. It is easy to let speculation run riot on the subject of the psychology of genius and justify oneself by the generalizations of some particular psychological theory. We shall be on firmer ground and still find plenty to interest us if we stick to descriptive psychiatry and concern ourselves only with those grosser traits of conduct, thought, and feeling which are obvious in the writings of our subjects or in the observations of their contemporaries.

Instead of generalizing about the psychopathology of authors I propose to describe in some detail a few case histories; but before I do so, and lest you should think I exaggerate the relationship between mental instability and great literature, here is a list, which is certainly not comprehensive, of some great writers who were either insane in the sense that they would to-day have been regarded as certifiable, or, though perhaps never certifiable, were cyclothymes, schizophrenics, obsessionals, psychopaths, alcoholics, or drug addicts: Beddoes, Blake, Boswell, Bunyan, Burns, Byron, Chatterton, Clare, Coleridge, Collins, Cowper, Crabbe, De Quincey, Dickens, Donne, Gray, Johnson, Lamb, Rossetti, Ruskin, Shelley, Smart, Swift, Swinburne, Tennyson, and Francis Thompson. And to show that English literature is not exceptional in this respect let me add a few from other nations: Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Goethe, Gogol, Holderlin, Nietzsche, Poe, Rimbaud, Rousseau, Strindberg, Swedenborg, and Verlaine.

Death's Duellist

John Donne (1572-1631) is one of the strangest figures in English literature—the Catholic who died Dean of St. Paul's, the poetical amorist who became the author of the Holy Sonnets. His influence upon English poetry—which, according to his biographer, Edmund Gosse, was almost entirely malign—can still be traced without difficulty to-day. Dr. Johnson thought his metaphors far-fetched and at times indelicate. His eloquence as a preacher and his preoccupation with the fate of the body after death drew large crowds of fascinated hearers, and this perennial theme came so to possess him that the last events of his life seemed a drama in which he was ready at length to act the part he had so often rehearsed. For, he wrote,

Since that I
Must dye at last, 'tis best
To use my selfe in jest,
Thus by fain'd deaths to dye.

His *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, written during a serious illness in 1623, not only consist of characteristic reflections upon mortality but include in the headings of the chapters a summary of the stages of his disease and the conduct of the doctors. "The first alteration, the first grudging of the sickness. . . . The patient takes to his bed. The Physician is sent for. The Physician comes. The Physician is afraid. The Physician desires to have others joyined with him. The King sends his own Physician. Upon their consultation they prescribe." Then follows the treatment—cordials and pigeons—but "the Sickness declares the infection and malignity thereof with spots. . . . I sleep not day nor night. . . . From the Bells of the

Church adjoining I am daily remembered of my buriall in the funeralls of others. Now this Bell tolling softly for another, saies to me, Thou must die." (In that chapter occurs the famous sentence, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, And therefore never seek to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.") But "at last, the Physicians after a long and stormie voyage, see land." They proceed to purge, the patient recovers, but he is warned of "the fearful danger of relapsing."

Donne could never long avert his mind from the thought of the body's dissolution. It appears in his sermons on all sorts of occasions, one of the grimmest meditations on this theme being in a sermon preached at the marriage of the Earl of Bridgewater's daughter. Here is one such passage in his magnificent prose from his last sermon, preached before King Charles I. "That that Monarch, who spread over many nations alive, must in his dust lie in a corner of that sheete of lead, and there, but so long as that leade will laste, and that privat and retir'd man, that thought himselfe his owne for ever, and never came forth, must in his dust of the grave bee published, and (such are the revolutions of the graves) bee mingled with the dust of every highway and every dunghill, and swallowed in every puddle and pond: This is the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that wee can consider."

Donne was dying when he preached this sermon, which came to be known as "Death's Duell." "Many that saw his tears and heard his faint and hollow voice," says Izaak Walton, "thought that Dr. Donne had preached his own funeral sermon."

But there was a stranger episode to come. Dr. Simeon Foxe, his physician, urged him to arrange for a monument to be erected to him in his cathedral. Donne agreed on condition that Dr. Foxe should not interfere in any way with the character or form of the memorial. Here is Walton's account of what followed:

"A monument being resolved upon, Dr. Donne sent for a carver to make for him in wood the figure of an urn, giving him directions for the compass and height of it; and to bring with it a board of the just height of his body. These being got, then without delay a choice painter was got to be in readiness to draw his picture, which was taken as followeth:—Several charcoal fires being first made in his large study, he brought with him into the place his winding-sheet in his hand, and having put off all his clothes, had this sheet put on him, and so tied with knots at his head and feet, and his hands so placed as dead bodies are usually fitted, to be shrouded and put into their coffin or grave. Upon this urn he thus stood, with his eyes shut, and with so much of the sheet turned aside as might show his lean, pale, and death-like face. . . . In this posture he was drawn at his just height, and when the picture was finished he caused it to be set by his bedside, where it continued and became his hourly object till his death, and was then given to his dearest friend and executor, Dr. Henry King, then chief Residentiary of St. Paul's, who caused him to be thus carved in one entire piece of white marble, as it now stands in that Church."

No doubt Donne's attitude to death was in part Elizabethan, and it can to some extent be paralleled in contemporary writers, such as Webster and Sir Thomas Browne, but it was also an obsession, springing from what Gosse rightly calls "the morbid and fantastic character of his genius."

L'Enfant Terrible

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) could claim distinction as politician, Dean of St. Patrick's, and satirist, but his satires

are remembered by many who know little about his politics and less about his theology. His satires spring from his feelings, and his emotional life was very odd, so odd indeed that it considerably puzzled his contemporaries and is still the subject of speculation to-day. In 1701 Swift, then 34, invited to live near him in Ireland two ladies, Esther Johnson, aged 20, whom he immortalized as Stella, and her older companion Rebecca Dingley. Till the death of Stella in 1728 Swift remained on terms of affectionate friendship with both of them, writing to them when he was absent letters which included messages couched in the language of the nursery. This strange relationship was complicated by the intrusion of another woman, Esther Vanhomrigh, whom Swift called Vanessa, and who fell in love with him.

The question which has been discussed ever since is, What were the relations of Swift and Stella? Swift was a single man of irreproachable morals: why did he never marry her? There seemed to his contemporaries, to Dr. Johnson, and to most people since, to be only two possible explanations: either he did marry her, but for some reason concealed the fact, or there was an external barrier to their marriage. They were, it has been suggested, uncle and niece or half-brother and half-sister. The barrier was real, but it existed in Swift's emotional life. The clue is to be found in *Gulliver's Travels*. "The greatest difficulty that occurs in analysing his character," wrote Johnson, "is to discover by what depravity of intellect he took delight in revolving ideas, from which almost every other mind shrinks with disgust. The ideas of pleasure, even when criminal, may solicit the imagination, but what has disease, deformity, and filth, upon which the thoughts can be allowed to dwell?" Swift's preoccupation with excretion is a constantly recurring theme upon which he plays some fantastic variations. His attitude to the body, and especially the female body, is equally pathological, and is magnified when the body is enlarged to the Brobdingnagian scale. Freud has a word for all this, but one does not need to be a Freudian to see that Swift was emotionally arrested at an infantile stage of development.

Perhaps the most illuminating piece of evidence for his abnormality is the speech which he puts into the mouth of Gulliver when meeting his wife and children on his return from his last voyage: "As soon as I entered the House," wrote Gulliver, "my Wife took me in her arms and kissed me; at which not having been used to the Touch of that odious Animal for so many years, I fell in a Swoon for almost an Hour. . . . During the first year I could not endure my Wife or Children in my Presence, the very smell of them was intolerable, much less could I suffer them to eat in the same Room. To this day they dare not presume to touch my Bread or drink out of the same Cup; neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the Hand." This, it may be said, is Gulliver, not Swift, talking, but it is the imagination of Swift speaking through Gulliver, and no man who could feel so perversely about normal human relationships would be likely to marry. Swift may not have known why he felt as he did, but he had too much insight to be self-deceived. In a poem called *Cadenus and Vanessa*, in which he is Cadenus (an anagram of Decanus the Dean) and Esther Vanhomrigh is Vanessa, he writes:

He now cou'd praise, esteem, approve,
But understood not what was Love. . . .
Love, hitherto a transient guest,
Ne'er held Possession of his Breast:
So long attending at the Gate,
Disdain'd to enter in so late.

We do not know whether Stella ever challenged him in this way, but she seems to have come to accept the Platonic role he assigned to her. Swift was broken-hearted when she died. He lived on to die demented, after a period of melancholia, nearly twenty years later. There is a legend that this perversely fastidious man, who had been so revolted by the flesh, was buried in the same coffin with her. This invention was the last unconscious irony of the Yahoos.

The Great Convulsionary

I suppose that most people who possess an average man's knowledge of Samuel Johnson (1709-84) regard him as a monument of British common sense—a kind of intellectual John Bull, dogmatic, tough, and rather insensitive. This is only half the truth, the superficial half, for beneath his assured demeanour lay a torment of apprehensiveness, doubt, and misgiving which found expression in great eccentricity of behaviour.

Thomas Tyers said of Johnson, "He was to the last a convulsionary. . . . His gestures, which were a degree of St. Vitus's dance, in the street attracted the notice of the many, the stare of the vulgar, but the compassion of the better sort." Johnson's gesticulations, which gave Hogarth the first impression that he was mad, have often been described, but nowhere better than by Miss Reynolds, who speaks of "his extraordinary gestures or antics with his hands and feet, particularly when passing over the threshold of a door. On entering Sir Joshua's house with poor Mrs. Williams, a blind lady who lived with him, he would quit her hand, or else whirl her about on the steps as he whirled and twisted about to perform his gesticulations: and as soon as he had finished, he would give a sudden spring, and make such an extensive stride over the threshold, as if he was trying for a wager how far he could stride, Mrs. Williams standing groping about outside the door, unless the servant or the mistress of the house more commonly took hold of her hand to conduct her in, leaving Dr. Johnson to perform at the Parlour Door much the same exercises over again. . . . But the manoeuvre that used the most particularly to engage the attention of the company was his stretching out his arm with a full cup of tea in his hand, in every direction often to the great annoyance of the person who sat next to him, indeed to the imminent danger of their cloaths, perhaps of a Lady's Court dress; sometimes he would twist himself round with his face close to the back of his chair and finish his cup of tea, breathing very hard, as if making a laborious effort to accomplish it."

According to Miss Reynolds he carried out similar manoeuvres in the street while his companions went ahead to wait for him, and caused a crowd to collect in Twickenham Meadows by his violent see-sawing over Grotius's *De Veritate Religionis*. Boswell has described his rolling gait and his habits of whistling and blowing and counting his steps in order to reach a certain point with his right or his left foot; and from Whyte we learn of his practice of touching posts in the street and going back when he had missed one to repair the omission.

Johnson's contemporaries were divided into two schools of thought on the question of the nature of his malady. Boswell, like Thomas Tyers, thought it was a physical disease, St. Vitus's dance, and believed he was confirmed in his opinion by Sydenham's own description, which he quotes. Sir Joshua Reynolds, however, with the acute observation of an artist, noted that Dr. Johnson's "strange antic gestures" accompanied his reveries and that he never exhibited them when engaged in conversation. He thought,

therefore, that the gesticulations were "improperly called convulsions which implied involuntary contortions." Sir Joshua also made an observation of profound psychological insight when he said that Johnson's actions always appeared to him as if they meant to reprobate some part of his past conduct. It is quite clear to-day that Reynolds was right and that Johnson's movements, although involuntary in the sense that they were not under his control, were not, like St. Vitus's dance, due to organic disease of the brain but were of psychological origin. He knew this himself, for when a young girl, a Miss Hunter, asked him, with some temerity, "Pray, Dr. Johnson, why do you make such strange gestures?" he replied, "From bad habit."

Fears and Apprehensions

This view of the nature of his gesticulations is confirmed by the fact that symptoms of a similar kind occurred in the realm of thought and feeling. Here involuntary fears and apprehensions took the place of involuntary movements. It is impossible to agree with Raleigh that Johnson's fear of death was only a fear of Boswell on death. It was clearly an obsession which could be evoked not only by Boswell's inquiries but by the sight of bones or of a memorial urn, and this is the probable explanation of the outburst of almost hysterical laughter which was excited by Langton's making his will and which so puzzled Boswell. Another obsession was his fear of insanity, which remained with him from his youth, when he consulted Dr. Swinfen and received an answer "importing that the symptoms indicated a future privation of reason," to his old age, when at the time of his stroke he prayed God that however he might afflict his body he would spare his understanding—a prayer which, that he might try the integrity of his faculties, he made in Latin verse.

He was also obsessed with a sense of guilt. As Mrs. Thrale put it, his "daily terror lest he had not done enough originated in piety, but ended in little less than disease. . . . He . . . filled his imagination with fears that he should never obtain forgiveness for omission of duty and criminal waste of time."

Doubtless it was these fears of insanity, death, and damnation that racked his mind when he was alone and rendered solitude so distasteful and indeed distressing to him. "I lie down," he said, "that my acquaintance may sleep; but I lie down to endure oppressive misery; and soon rise again to pass the night in anxiety and pain." Nothing conveys so moving a picture of his lonely and distracted spirit as Murphy's account of how "for many years, when he was not disposed to enter into the conversation going forward, who ever sat near his chair might hear him repeating, from Shakespeare,

"Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods."

This "morbid melancholy," which Johnson himself believed to be inherent in his constitution, pervaded his thought and made him, in his own words, "mad all his life, at least not sober." I can find no better or nobler expression of it than the last words of the last *Idler* which he called the "Horror of the Last." In the course of this essay he says: "This secret horror of the last is inseparable from a thinking being, whose life is limited, and to whom death is dreadful." And he concludes: "I hope that my readers are already disposed to view every incident with seriousness, and improve it by meditation: and that, when

they see this series of trifles brought to a conclusion, they will consider that, by outliving the *Idler* they have passed weeks, months, and years, which are now no longer in their power; and that an end must in time be put to everything great as to everything little; that to life must come its last hour, and to this system of being its last day, the hour at which probation ceases, and repentance will be vain, the day in which every work of the hand and imagination of the heart shall be brought to judgement, and an everlasting futurity shall be determined by the past."

Thus we can trace Johnson's morbidity at three levels—his compulsive gestures, his obsessive fears and sense of guilt, and his insistence on the evils of life, its transitoriness, and the ultimate and inescapable judgment, which sounds a note of doom in so many of his writings. Like many obsessionals he was subject to periods of severe depression, the worst of which occurred when he was between 50 and 60. His prayers and meditations in the first half of his sixth decade reveal his struggles with a deepening gloom. Dr. Adams told Boswell that he "found him in a deplorable state, sighing, groaning, talking to himself and restlessly walking from room to room." Mrs. Thrale says that he did not stir out of his room for weeks or even months, till she and her husband carried him off to Streatham.

Johnson's mental disorder was clearly compatible with the greatest intellectual powers and with considerable, if sporadic, energy. He found that he lost his symptoms partially or completely when his attention was fully occupied with something else; hence his eagerness for company and reluctance to go to bed. His discovery of the value of distraction is illustrated by one of Mrs. Thrale's anecdotes. "When Mr. Johnson felt his fancy, or fancied he felt it, disordered, his constant recurrence was to the study of arithmetic; and one day that he was totally confined to his chamber and I enquired what he had been doing to divert himself; he showed me a calculation which I could scarce be made to understand, so vast was the plan of it and so very intricate were the figures; no other indeed than that the national debt, computing it at one hundred and eighty millions sterling, would, if converted into silver, serve to make a meridian of that metal, I forget how broad, for the globe of the whole earth, the real globe." Dr. Johnson would have had no difficulty in making our present national debt reach to the moon.

He prescribed the study of algebra for a fellow obsessional who consulted him about his scruples, though he did not show him much sympathy. This was a man who was obsessed with guilt at having taken his employer's paper and pack-thread even with his permission. "I would advise you, Sir, to study algebra, if you are not an adept already in it: your head would get less muddy, and you will leave off tormenting your neighbours about paper and pack-thread, while we all live together in a world that is bursting with sin and sorrow."

To trace the effects of the obsessional state upon the temperament is beyond my present scope, but I would draw attention to one characteristic trait, the sufferer's attitude to the past. More than most men, the obsessional is in bondage to the past; for what is an obsession but a past idea of which he cannot rid himself? In Johnson's own words, "an everlasting futurity" is "determined by the past." The past is both inescapable and unchangeable: for Johnson, therefore, guilt endured, and salvation must ever be in doubt. This perverse vitality of his past is well illustrated by the remarkable episode at Uttoxeter market when in old age he stood bare-headed in the rain for a

considerable time to expiate an act of disobedience to his father in his youth. It provides a basis too for Sir Joshua Reynolds's remarkable observation that the gesticulations appeared as if they were meant to reprobate his past conduct.

This picture of Johnson's mental suffering is of course only one aspect of him, but we cannot fully appreciate the light without the shade, nor his achievements without knowing the difficulties he had to contend with. If I am right, the light and the shade are complementary. It was to find escape from his private gloom that he sought the Club and the drawing-room. It was despite nights passed in "oppressive misery" that, as Fanny Burney said, he had "more fun and comical humour and love of nonsense about him than almost anybody I ever saw"; and it was from an overpowering depression and lethargy that he roused himself to accomplish the *Dictionary* and the *Lives of the Poets*.

"Bozzy"

I need say little about James Boswell (1740-95), because his psychology has recently been so admirably summed up by Dr. Douglas Hubble.* Boswell was a cyclothyme, subject to the characteristic alternations of elation and depression, and no doubt it was this inherited psychopathic trait which brought his brother and his daughter to actual insanity. Dr. Hubble has traced the influence of external factors upon his variations of mood, and, in particular, has stressed the importance of his relation with his father. "Whenever James was in the company of Auchinleck the image of himself dwindled until it was no larger than a small boy, beloved and indulged by his mother, but intimidated by the stern and sarcastic tongue of Alexander Boswell." The effect of this conflict was to send Boswell in search of a father substitute who should be great and good, and one such was Johnson. Dr. Hubble concludes that "those who are tempted to take sides in this predetermined struggle between father and son will refrain when they recall that the direct outcome of the conflict was the immortal biography of Samuel Johnson."

One might perhaps go a little further and suggest that if Boswell was in search of a father, Johnson was looking for a son, and the psychological miracle was that these two great eccentrics exactly suited one another. Boswell had all the cyclothyme's vivacity, spontaneity, and warmth of feeling which in Johnson's character were absent or overwhelmingly inhibited. But these qualities alone would have been intolerable to Johnson: they were balanced and redeemed by Boswell's high intelligence and literary gifts. There may have been deeper emotional factors; but here, surely, is a sufficient psychological basis for that unique partnership through which each immortalized the other. Finally, I cannot refrain from quoting one other comment by Dr. Hubble: "Boswell was a drunkard. Boswell wrote two masterpieces of English literature—the one unsurpassed and the other unsurpassable. Boswell was a lecher. Boswell was unusually humane and generous. Boswell was a buffoon. Boswell was the friend of Johnson, of Burke, of Reynolds, and of Paoli—all of whom loved him. Those who find such contrasts irreconcilable have long lost the power of self-examination."

The Flea that Became an Eagle

The eighteenth century produced several mad poets: Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Clare—who just comes into it—all became insane. Christopher Smart (1722-71) is unique in that his poetry was improved by his madness.

Dr. Johnson, when asked whether Derrick or Smart was the better poet, replied: "Sir, there is no settling the point of precedence between a louse and a flea." Except for a few lines such as his verses *On an Eagle Confined in a College Court*, Smart wrote nothing before or after his mental breakdown that could be quoted against Johnson's dictum, and, however he may have appeared to himself, nobody else pictured him soaring among the mountain-tops of poetry. He became insane, and the miracle that so much puzzled Browning occurred—he wrote *A Song to David*. The flea for a time became an eagle.

It is from Johnson that we learn much of what is known about Smart's madness as it appeared to others, and Boswell records the following conversation between Johnson and Burney. "Burney: 'How does poor Smart do, Sir; is he likely to recover?' Johnson: 'It seems as if his mind had ceased to struggle with the disease; for he grows fat upon it.' Burney: 'Perhaps, Sir, that may be from want of exercise.' Johnson: 'No, Sir; he has partly as much exercise as he used to have, for he digs in the garden. Indeed, before his confinement, he used for exercise to walk to the ale-house, but he was carried back again. I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as anyone else. Another charge was that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it.'" Smart was a cyclothyme: he himself said, "I have a greater compass both of mirth and melancholy than another." His disorder is easy to diagnose from his poem *Jubilate Agno*—"Rejoice in the Lamb"—which was written in a madhouse and which shows all the features of maniacal excitement. In the *Jubilate* the spate of ideas sweeps away both sound and sense, and the process of mental association occurs so readily as to be poetically meaningless. The mere sound or clang of words is sufficient to link them together, or the arbitrary apposition of a person and an animal, bird or plant acquires for the poet a spurious significance.

A Song to David, on the other hand, evidently written at the end of Smart's confinement when he had almost recovered, is a true poem, though even here the mood of extreme elation and a certain looseness of the texture of ideas show that the mental storm had not quite subsided. But the after-swell gave him a heightened emotional tension, an associative aptness and a feeling for words that he had never possessed before.

Then he recovered. The eagle became a flea again; or, it would be truer to say, Pegasus lost his wings and reverted to a nag, and Smart's verse ambled along at its habitual jog-trot for the few years of his life that remained.

Bill Sikes and Nancy

Much might be said about the relationship between the personal conflicts of Charles Dickens (1812-70) and his writings, but I can now deal with only two aspects of his temperament—his cyclothymia and his sado-masochism, both stressed by Mr. Edmund Wilson in his study of Dickens's psychology.* Dickens was undoubtedly a cyclothyme. His moods of depression do not seem to have been very frequent, but they were quite characteristic. His son, Sir Henry Dickens, speaks of his father's "heavy moods of deep depression, of intense nervous irritability, when he was silent and oppressed." Dickens himself more than once describes his feelings in his letters. "I am sick, giddy and capriciously despondent," he wrote to Forster; "I have bad nights, am full of disquietude and anxiety." Six

*The New Statesman and Nation, December 28, 1946, p. 485.

*The Wound and the Bow, 1941.

months later he told Georgina Hogarth, "My wretchedness just now is inconceivable." While staying at Bonchurch in 1849, writing of himself as "the Patient," he said: "If he have any thing to do requiring thought and attention this overpowers him to such a degree he can only do it in snatches." He speaks of "extreme depression of mind and a disposition to shed tears from morning to night . . . a dull stupid languor. He has no purpose, power or object in existence whatever." The obverse of these phases of depression was his prevailing mood of elation, which gave him his enormous gusto and from which he derived his energy, which at first was canalized into his prolific inventiveness, in later life feverishly squandered in his readings, and always overflowing into long walks, parties, and amateur theatricals. It was his cyclothymic temperament, too, that enhanced his great sensibility, which made him respond with far more feeling than the average man both to his own experiences and to the sufferings of others. This sensibility was in turn heightened by the vividness of his memory.

Blent with Dickens's cyclothymia was his sado-masochism, which has been analysed especially by Mr. Edmund Wilson. Perhaps having been brought up to regard Dickens as a monument of Victorian respectability and normality, most of us have never achieved sufficient detachment to appreciate this element in him. Though more obvious in some than in others, it runs like a scarlet thread through all his writings. Here, for example, are the instances of violence that occur in one novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dr. Manette spends years in the Bastille; Charles Darnay is on trial for his life; Jerry Cruncher pursues the grim trade of a resurrectionist; the Marquis de St. Evremonde carelessly runs over and kills a child, and is himself murdered in revenge. His brother has raped the sister of Mme. Defarge and killed her brother, as a result of which their father died of a broken heart. Scenes of revolutionary violence dominate the story; the Bastille is stormed and the guillotine falls incessantly. Finally, Mme. Defarge is shot and killed by Miss Pross, and Sydney Carton and the little sempstress, both innocent, are executed together. There is almost as much violence in *Barnaby Rudge*, in which the Gordon Riots take the place of the French Revolution and the sacking of Newgate corresponds to the storming of the Bastille. In this tale execution is personified in Dennis the hangman. Mr. Harold Nicolson has pointed out how often beheading figures in Sam Weller's jokes, and Mr. Edmund Wilson has stressed the large part played by prisons in Dickens's stories. A more personal and refined kind of cruelty is exemplified by the behaviour of the Murdstones to David Copperfield, Squeers to the boys at Dotheboys Hall, and Quilp to his wife.

This emphasis upon violence and cruelty in the novels was only the reflection of a similar preoccupation in Dickens's own life. One of his favourite recreations in Paris was to visit the Morgue. He went to public executions at home and abroad—and wrote to *The Times* to protest at the spectacle. Wherever he travelled he made a point of visiting the prisons. And when he went to the Zoo he was so fascinated by the spectacle of the snakes being fed with live animals and birds that he could not drive it from his mind for a long time.

Dickens's death was so much the outcome of what it is fashionable to call psychosomatic factors that his latest biographer, Mr. Hesketh Pearson, with some justice describes it as *felo de se*. Soon after he was fifty he began to get warnings of circulatory disorder, in spite of which he carried out an American tour of his readings with

characteristic energy. Back in this country in the following year, he decided to add to his repertoire the episode in *Oliver Twist* in which Bill Sikes murders Nancy. Probably his cerebral arteriosclerosis was already weakening his control over his feelings and allowing his sado-masochism more overt expression. It was still projected into the world of his imagination, but he was identifying himself with his impulses more closely than in his books, for now he was acting the scene and himself impersonating both the murderer and his victim. Many of his friends who saw him do it privately were horrified, and Forster tried to dissuade him from it; but he toured the country imparting, says Mr. Pearson, "to the murder scene such a sense of horror that the audience were semi-paralysed, and sat with blanched faces in frozen silence." It was noted that these readings put his pulse up to 120. Before long he developed a sense of deadness in the left side of the body, and the readings were abandoned. The next year he died of a stroke at the age of 58.

Conflict and Creativeness

How far do the characters of the strange beings whose lives are here briefly considered help us to disentangle "that subtle knot which makes us man?" What part did their mental abnormalities play in their creative genius? What sort of poet and preacher would Donne have been without his death-wish? Would an emotionally mature Swift have written *Gulliver* or any of his satires? Is there any relation between Johnson's contortions and his common sense, his obsessions and his verbal precision; and would a stable Boswell ever have immortalized him? How much of Dickens would have been left without his hypomanic energy and his preoccupation with suffering? Clearly, no man is a great creative artist because he is a psychopath, but our subjects surely show that, given the necessary qualities of mind, more than one process which the psychiatrist calls pathological may be an essential element in the virtues of genius—and perhaps of the rest of us. But what in the mental sphere is the meaning of normal and pathological? Is normality more than a statistical myth? The vast appeal of many creative artists, even the abnormals like Donne, Swift, and Dickens, is to readers whose feelings have something in common with their own. The great artist is a medium through whom our own emotions are expressed, intensified, and illuminated, with results that depend upon their nature and upon our reaction to this heightened experience.

There is a quantitative factor in this which is worth considering. The genius of literature has higher intelligence, more intense and more highly differentiated feelings, a better memory, and a greater capacity for words than the rest of us, and these presumably depend upon a quantitatively richer organization of his nervous system. He also has a dynamic quality which often seems to raise even his madness to a higher power. His creativeness is the resultant of his inner tensions, in which, if he is to create at all, his integrative forces must at least from time to time balance his conflicts and disruptive impulses. Thus for many a genius life is an agonizing struggle from which he may emerge victorious, but which often ends in his destruction by his daimon, the inner fate of the Greeks. Where is man's daimon to-day? Is it the diencephalon, the site of the emotions, or the integrating power of the frontal lobe which, as Dr. Freeman recently said, "is necessary for creativeness as well as for neurosis"? Art and character spring from the relations between these two. Are they not perhaps the two winged horses of the soul, pictured by Plato in his parable being driven by the charioteer he rashly named Reason?