POSSIBLE BOOKS: Carl Gustav Jung: The Collective Dream, Part 2

Modes of Creation

The creative process of the poet, so far as Jung was able to follow it, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image and its elaboration into a finished work. By giving it shape, the poet translates it into the language of the present and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest wellsprings of life. Primordial images, numerous in themselves, appear in works of art or in the dreams of individuals only when they are called into being by the waywardness of the general outlook; they are activated, one might say, "instinctively"; they come to light to restore the psychic equilibrium of the epoch. In dreams we can see this process quite clearly: The dream picture is "symbolic"; it states the situation indirectly "by means of a metaphor." The metaphor is not a deliberate disguise but, quite simply, a formation of emotionally charged language that reflects the deficiencies in our understanding. The similarity of the personal dream to the collective dream is made clear enough by Jung in a single sentence: "A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal."

The creative impulse, according to Jung's theory, arises in the poet from the unconsciousness—strong, capricious, and willful. The process of creation is a living thing implanted

in the human psyche. In the language of analytical psychology, this living thing is an *autonomous complex*, a split-off piece of the psyche that leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness. The nascent work of art is a psychic formation that remains unborn or subliminal until its “energy-charge” is sufficient to carry it over the threshold into consciousness. The energy needed for such a transformation is naturally drawn from the consciousness of the poet, unless the bearer of that consciousness happens to identify with the complex and loses himself. Once born, the work of art can be neither inhibited nor voluntarily reproduced; it can only be perceived: therein lies its autonomy.

Representative Authors

Psychological Authors, Significant Authors, and Visionary Authors

“The Work of Art” (1930), excerpted from *Psychology and Literature*, is the essay which opens this collection. It is Jung’s unofficial prologue. In it Jung distinguishes the two modes of literary creation, the psychological and the visionary. These two modes of creation are treated again more thoughtfully in the second essay, “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry” (1922). Straight off, Jung distinguishes from the “psychological” those works of literature in which the author does not give a psychological interpretation of his characters. To this class of significant authors belong E. T. A. Hoffman’s tales, with their scurrilous but magnificent imagery, the fantastic romances of Pierre Benoit, English fiction in the manner of Rider Haggard, including that vein that Conan Doyle exploited to yield the detective story, H. G. Wells’s novels of inner transformation and mythical compensation, and Melville’s *Moby Dick*.

Countless literary works belong, on the other hand, to the class of psychological creations: novels of love, environment, family, crime, and society; didactic poetry; the larger number

of song lyrics; and drama, both tragic and comic. No obscurity surrounds their themes: the themes repeat themselves millions of times in daily life and are responsible for the monotony of their manifestations in social creations like the police court and the penal code. Jung calls their mode of creation "psychological" because nowhere do these works transcend the bounds of psychological intelligibility. The author of the so-called psychological novel, to whom the layman often goes for "psychology," attempts to reshape his material *consciously* in order to raise it from the level of crude contingency to that of psychological exposition and illumination.

The procedure of conscious tampering with the messages of the unconscious is not restricted to the novel. Jung points to this procedure again when he compares the first and second parts of Goethe's *Faust* drama:

> *The two parts of Faust demonstrate by way of extremes the profound distinction between the two modes of literary creation. . . . The love-tragedy of Gretchen explains itself; in the second part, the richness of the imaginative material so overtaxes the poet's formative powers that nothing is self-explanatory. It is a strange something from the hinterland of man's mind that suggests the abyss of time or evokes a super-human world of contrasting light and darkness.*

This visionary mode of artistic creation exemplified in the second part of *Faust*, he says, "astonishes us, confuses us, puts us on our guard, even disgusts us. . . and we demand explanations and commentaries."

Jung finds such vision also in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, in Dante, in Nietzsche's Dionysian exuberance, in Spitteler's *Olympian Spring*, in the paintings and poems of William Blake, and in Jacob Boehme's philosophic and poetic stammerings. In the chapter on Dante, Jung shows us how the poet has smoothed out the approach to the vision by cloaking it in historical

facts. Other writers, and Jung enumerates them, use the story as the primary means of giving expression to significant material. This much Jung makes clear: While we, in our everyday lives, strive to construct a safe and manageable world in which natural law holds the same place that statute law holds in a republic, the poets in our midst now and then glimpse spirits, demons, and gods and have presentiments of incomprehensible happenings in the pleroma. They, and Jung, see something of the psychic world that once struck terror in the primitive of antiquity and still strikes terror in a part of ourselves.

Visions of Love

The reverberations of the initial love-experience, expressed in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, in the *Divine Comedy*, and in the *Faust* drama is shown by Jung to be completed and fulfilled by a vision. The author of *Hermas*, Dante, and Goethe can be taken as three steps in a sequence that stretches across nearly two thousand years of human development; in each we find the personal love-episode to be not only connected with the weightier visionary experience but frankly subordinated to it. It seems as if the love-episode served as a release, as if the personal experience were nothing but the prelude to the all-important "divine comedy." This is the point: to reduce artistic creation to merely personal factors takes us away from the psychological study of the work of art and confronts us with the psychic disposition of the poet himself. The work of art is something in its own right, and the actual task is to interpret the work of art psychologically. For such an undertaking, it is essential to give serious consideration to the basic experience that underlies it—namely, to the vision.

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