THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LITERATURE

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THE PSYCHOLOGY of literature, as a topic, includes almost everything we want to know about literature because literature is a product of the mind, a peculiar by-product of the human psychological make-up. To find out what literature is, all you have to do is find out what life is all about and how we fit into it. Naturally this is an area fraught with controversy and large differences of opinion. Nevertheless, psychology is a half-science, and we may get further with it than if we were to approach the problem through philosophy or theology, which don't seem to have much in the way of new insights to contribute to the enlightened modern mind.

Using psychology to understand literature, we would first have to know how the mind works. The magnificent self-assurance of Professor Northrop Frye, for example, derives from the fact that he believes he has discovered exactly how the mind (or imagination) works, and therefore he can explain everything in literature. I mean no disrespect to Professor Frye. He is probably the greatest critic of the century, the most profound, systematic, comprehensive theorist of literature in a very long time — I believe Lionel Trilling has said the most original since Aristotle — and he is a writer we all read avidly over and over again, with ever-repeated pleasure, and with ever-increasing irritation. In fact, it is impossible to speak or to think of "The Psychology of Literature" without coming up against Northrop Frye's ideas, and having to thrash them out again, and having to dispose of them again, before we can go a little on our own way.

Professor Frye claims he has discovered how the mind, or imagination, works. He says it thinks in archetypal patterns. All new thoughts — all new works of literature — are variations upon the relatively few archetypal patterns outlined in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. Actually, the main scheme, or pattern, is the cycle of the seasons, the curve of rise and decline from spring through summer to fall and winter; all imaginative literature and all genres derive from phases of this pattern.

Aristotle in the *Poetics*, wanting to illustrate what a metaphor is, compared the life of man to a day: old age is the evening of life. Northrop Frye has taken up this simple commonplace and built the central mythology of literature around it: man's life from birth to death is equated with the day, from dawn to darkness; which in turn is equated with the seasons, from spring to winter; and this in turn is equated to the literary genres, from romance (spring) through comedy (summer) to tragedy (autumn) and satire (winter). All the other major archetypes, for example heaven and hell, are simply derivatives from this, heaven being the ultimately desirable good things of spring and summer, youth and morning, and hell being the unwanted evils of autumn and winter, or the darkness of old age and death. So too, the ur-myth of all literature, according to Frye, the quest myth is derived also from this cycle of life and the seasons, since the quest is the pursuit of the humanly desirable, the ultimate good, which is lost in that rise and fall, or descent into darkness. To think imaginatively, for Frye, is to think within this cycle, chained to the eternal wheel of mythology, because that, without possible exception, is how the truly imaginative mind works.

I am not sure whether, in Frye, the psychological operations behind all this are explained by heredity or by environment. Professor Frye is not a metaphysician, he is a literary scholar; so that, unlike the philosophers Hegel or Kant, he does not provide a work of metaphysics to support his mythopoeic theory. Therefore we do not know whether the myth patterns occur because the human mind works that way from its inherent constitution — and what, therefore, this would imply about the nature of the universe in which such a mind was made to think that way — or whether the mythologies have come together by gradual accretion and boiling down, Professor Frye's being only the final distillation, or elixir, of a historical product. There is a third possible alternative: that they are constructions which result from a logical necessity, like mathematics, or perhaps the structure of atoms, things being what they are because they could logically not be otherwise without self-contradiction. Whatever the answer may be — and Professor Frye will no doubt eventually tell us — or maybe I have not read deeply enough to realize that it is already there — we have the archetypes as the key to how the imaginative mind thinks.

Clearly it's a very odd psychology. To get at these archetypes in any work of literature, says Professor Frye, you have to be a "literary psychologist".[1] This is a very strange expression. There is one human mind, and only one kind of psychologist, the psychologist of the human mind. If there is a special kind of *psychologist of literature* — or a special *mind of literature* — then we want to know what that is: it must be a new creation. Otherwise, let's get back to humanity, and the real sort of mind that general mankind is endowed with; let's not reserve a special kind of mind for the literary types.

Professor Frye, however, is on the side of the "specialists". He says: "The critic takes over where the poet leaves off, and criticism can hardly do without *a kind of literary psychology* connecting the poet with the poem."[2] [My underlining] Elsewhere he even supposes a special kind of unconscious as a storage-place for the archetypes. After all, the contents of the human mind that Professor Frye claims to have discovered do not correspond with those that Freud was so certain *he* had discovered — "scientifically", as Freud so often maintained — and they do not correspond with the multitudes of things that C. G. Jung claimed to have discovered in the collective unconscious. Freud has the Oedipus Complex, the Ego and the Id, the Superego and the Libido; Jung has the Anima, the Shadow, the Animus, Eros and Logos, the earth spirit Baubo, the mother imago and "the immemorial and most sacred archetype of the marriage of mother and son."[3] Northrop Frye, however, has the cycle of the seasons and the genres, the quest myth, and the poles of paradise and hell. Every researcher who returns from that undiscovered country seems to bring back a different bag of tricks. And like the gold of El Dorado, the treasure turns to common rock as soon as the air of our prosaic world touches it. What they say about the unconscious is their own mythology, pure poetry; the secret life of the imagination is not so easy to put into a cage.

We should be clear where all these archetypes come from. Their origin is in Platonic philosophy, and their first appearance is recorded in Hermetic and Neo-Platonic writers, weird names like Philo Judaeus, Irenaeus, Hermes Trismegistus and Dionysius the Areopagite.[4] The OED tells us that "In Platonic philosophy, archetypal is applied to ideas or forms of natural objects, held to have been present in the divine mind prior to creation, and still to exist, as cognizable by the intellect, independently of the reality or *ectypal* form." The OED quotes Francis Bacon as among the earliest English uses: "Let us seek the dignitie of knowledge in the Arch-tipe or first plat-forme, which is the attributes and acts of God." As Jung says, " 'Archetype' is an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic ."[5] In other words, the archetype, like the Platonic idea and Kant's *Ding an Sich*, is an unknowable absolute posited by the theorist. Actual dreams, myths, poems, novels, are supposed to be derived from it, just as phenomena are derived from the *Ding and Sich* or from the absolute idea.

The archetype in itself is unknowable. But as we are well aware, modern man doesn't like transcendental absolutes. Only the known and the knowable is real for the modern. Therefore the archetypal philosophy must be made empirical and realistic. That is, the archetypes must be known by their appearances, not in their essence. This is so in both Jung and Frye. In Jung, the archetypes are only known by their conscious manifestations: "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived . . . "[6] In Frye, too, the archetype in itself is unknowable, it is a hidden

reality which is, so to speak, "reconstructed" by the critic: "Each event or incident . . . is a manifestation of some underlying unity, a unity that it both conceals and reveals . . ."[7] "No rendering of any myth into conceptual language can serve as a full equivalent of its meaning."[8] And most important for literature, Frye makes the astonishing statement: "One essential principle of archetypal criticism is that the individual and the universal forms of an image are identical. . . ."[9]

In other words, the form in which you find them in poems, plays, short-stories and novels is identical with the archetypal form. In fact you can never get any nearer to the archetype than by reading *Paradise Lost*, and *The Tempest*, and "Tintern Abbey", and Eliot's "Ash Wednesday". Actual works of literature are archetypes, and the archetypes are completely unrepresented by actual works of literature. (At least that's what I understand from this, if Frye means what he says.)

WELL, NOW WE SEE the general area of philosophical thinking into which the archetypal psychology falls, and we see that it's an empirical or secular form of the transcendental. Immanuel Kant is the Plato of modern philosophers; he told the scientific age that we know only appearances in the only way that the human mind knows appearances — through the categories of the understanding — but that behind what we know, the visible world, there is the noumenal or transcendental world we cannot know. The world is a great Christmas package, containing a secret, which you must not open until the great day arrives, that is, the Day of Judgment. After Kant, right up to our own time, poets and philosophers have tried to open that package, and get somehow, by trick or by cunning, at the noumenal reality hidden within. In trying to do this, most of them have used reality as the symbol or signature of the noumenal. For example, in the Romantic period, Nature became the key to the noumenal world. Schelling told Coleridge, and Coleridge told Wordsworth to look into Nature for "A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things. . . ." There's no need to go into the whole history of romantic poetry. But as the nineteenth century wore on, the scientists were at work undermining the romantic theory of nature. They turned nature into dead inanimate matter — "an indifferent nature", a vast empty "mindless hostility", as Northrop Frye calls it — a mechanical monster described as the Grand Panjandrum in E. J. Pratt's poem "The Truant". I. A. Richards has called this scientific reductive idea "the neutralization of nature": it seemed to put an end to the hope of finding the noumenon in the West Wind, or "the round ocean and the living air".

So, if not the West Wind then perhaps the East Wind. No one has written an Ode to the East Wind. It's high time that someone did; though by now it would not be "the trumpet of a prophecy" but the summary of a *fait accompli*. If the

external world of nature is not the source of revelation, then perhaps the opposite direction, the interior world of the mind may be that source. Here we come to the centre of Professor Frye's position. He derives the germ of his ideas from William Blake, a visionary poet for whom "All deities reside in the human breast"; who has uttered the shameful blasphemy, "Where man is not, nature is barren". Blake looked within himself for the source of all that the "Poetic Genius" creates: "Imagination, the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow. . . . "[10]

Professor Frye's critical theory is based on the apocalyptic assumptions of visionary poetry. That is why he has pitched on Blake; why he reverts so often to the Book of Revelation; why he has borrowed the archetypes from C. G. Jung; why he refers at certain times to such writers as Ernst Cassirer and Mircea Eliade. (A good scholar leaves great big footprints all over the place so you can tell where he stole the stuff.) Thus Frye says in a crucial passage in "The Archetypes of Literature":

> Patterns of imagery . . . or fragments of significance, are oracular in origin, and derive from the epiphanic moment, the flash of instantaneous comprehension with no direct reference to time, the importance of which is indicated by Cassirer in *Myth and Language*. By the time we get them, in the form of proverbs, riddles, commandments and etiological folk tales, there is already a considerable element of narrative in them. They too are encyclopaedic in tendency, building up a total structure of significance, or doctrine, from random and empiric fragments. And just as pure narrative would be unconscious act, so pure significance would be an incommunicable state of consciousness, for communication begins by constructing narrative.
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> The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth *is* the archetype. . . . [11]

As we can see, this is a virtually religious statement, but a religion of a very special kind. The mystic who returns enlightened from the ecstatic experience usually tells us that he cannot describe or give an account of what he has seen or received. The visionary world is closed to reason and to our ordinary modes of knowing. But Northrop Frye has tried to put together what the mystic cannot express; he has assembled systematically what he considers to be the body of intellectual knowledge that is implied in mystical experience. More important still, he has found the fragments of that knowledge in literature: "building up a total structure of significance, or doctrine, from random and empiric fragments." And when particular writers like Dylan Thomas or William Blake have had the whole archetypal vision descend upon them, or like Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare, they have constructed works of an epic or tragic wholeness, Frye has found the entire system implicit in works of literature.

Now, I should say one more thing about the archetypal theory before I leave it here. Like Ernst Cassirer, Professor Frye is a Renaissance scholar. The Renaissance is an outgrowth of the great centuries of religion; and the literature of the Renaissance is soaked in Christian reference and the theology of the Bible. If you are teaching literature in a modern school or university, this material is very hard to translate into valid contemporary terms: as we say, we have outlived all that — it's out of date — God is dead — science knows — and the frame of reference of traditional literature is dusty and moth-eaten as an old sofa. What Professor Frye has done is give this old paraphernalia a new shining look. He has made its concepts of Heaven and Hell, its kingly tragedies, its religious quest, eternal properties of the human mind. Thus the scheme of the Great Chain of Being, descending from God and the angels down to man, the animal creation, and so to plants, rocks and stones (which seemed to have been set aside by science) has been given a permanent place in literature by this new psychology. ("Psychological truth" is the phrase Jung has used[12] — it recurs in Robertson Davies — for things you *must* believe because, as they say, the mind is made to think that way. This used to be one of the standard proofs of God; now it's a proof of the archetypes.) Even the Ptolemaic astronomy, which Milton held fast to a half-century after Galileo, has been refurbished as a structural unit in the archetypal scheme. For the theory of archetypes nothing is ever out of date, and nothing is ever true — as relating to the common world we live in — it is all part of the eternal vision revealed by the awakened imagination. No wonder that people for whom all truths have vanished, or who find their traditional truths rather shaky, find this theory of literature very congenial.

I have spent some time wrestling with Northrop Frye, poking a little fun at him, trying to put his theory into perspective. What he did, however, had to be done. The visionary view of literature, which had gathered force through the nineteenth century and within which literature served as a kind of religion — in fact it replaced religion — has needed a full systematic statement of its theology. Frye's psychedelic view of literature — for that's what it is — where the archetypal background provides "an immense reverberating dimension of significance"[13] to works of literature, needed to be put systematically on record. In fact, it is when it has been fully stated that we can stand away from this position and decide whether we want to accept it or not.

Personally, I do not. *Dubito ergo sum.* I cannot accept the view that someone else's oracular vision, or the revelation through literature of a supernal order of some kind, is the key to literature or to life. I cannot accept the view that the constructs of Northrop Frye — which are, after all, particular with him — are the patterns I must keep looking for when I read new novels and poems. I cannot accept the visionary view of literature, that something other than this world is

revealed, or some meaning other than that we know by the light of sense and reason is suddenly revealed by an extraordinary experience; and that some such special revelation, and not the light of common day, is the truth about life and art.

They "want a 'vision', / having the sun-blasted world before their eyes. / It has been given!" Whatever meaning life has, we have to create out of the material given us here. I cannot accept that imagination is pre-programmed as "A strutural power, which, left to itself, produces vigorously predictable fictions." I revolt against a view of literature that sees in it "abstract story-patterns" with "interchangeable motifs that can be counted and indexed." I oppose the tyranny of a view which claims that "mythology as a total structure, defining as it does a society's religious beliefs . . . is the matrix of literature, and major poetry keeps returning to it." I do not want to keep "returning"; I want to go forward. And I believe that literature does go forward, as human thought goes forward.

With Frye, all the meaning is to be found in the past, or elsewhere than right there on the page. The great myths and archetypes rarely appear in toto in any particular poem or novel. The archetypal appears in bits and pieces only; and yet it is the real meaning you are to pick up. I object to this way of looking at literature. In one poem, for example — a poem by Irving Layton — Northrop Frye interprets two fragments, a reference to the sun as a "bloodsmear" and the phrase "my heart beating in the grass" as signifying "a hanged god or nature spirit torn apart and distributed through the landscape."[16] Since there is no hanged god or nature spirit in the poem, this is to me a gratuitous importation which yet claims for itself the place of primary importance in the interpretation of the poem. "Each event or incident," says Frye, " . . . is a manifestation of some underlying unity . . . "[17] I do not want to look for such an abstract unity, nor for any single meaning; I want multiplicity, and actuality, and a forever-expanding field of unpredictable useful meanings.

To understand this alternative, we must go back to the very roots of the psychology of literature. This has to do with the way man thinks and the way he has learned to think. The ultimate nature of things is unknown to us, but we know the world through our minds and our senses. This knowledge begins with perceived things, which later acquire meaning. The dog, the cat, the bird receives some image of an object — a bone, a mouse, a moving insect — so that he can effectively pursue that thing. Man must have begun his long mental history with the mere perception of things — he gave names to things — and he must have gone on to find relations between things, to "think with things". Lévy-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* gives us some inkling of the concreteness of primitive thought: its capacity to classify immense quantities of things and to relate things to one another by analogy and "magical" relation.

Art is often a leap forward in insight, but it also has something very archaic about it. It wants to go back to this method of thinking with things.

So much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

Why does so much depend upon the concrete thing, the vivid object? Imagine a wheelbarrow in the farmyard and chickens round-about: the farmer says to his son, "John, will you take that wheelbarrow into the barn, and be careful you don't scare the chickens." How does that wheelbarrow differ from Williams' Red Wheelbarrow? It differs because it is a mere object of utility, while the wheelbarrow in the poem is something more than that. The wheelbarrow in the poem is *an object of thought*, and as such carries meanings which the utility object does not have. What kind of meaning? Well, the kind that objects have when you "think with things". Not one meaning, but quite a number of possible meanings. A red wheelbarrow could suggest simply the idea of beauty, a beautiful red wheelbarrow; or it could connote labour, democratic values — red might even suggest communism; or it could suggest manure and dirt — that's what wheelbarrows carry; or it could suggest a heap of flowers — a red wheelbarrow might be in a flower garden; it could suggest bricks and building; it could suggest farming in general; it could suggest an old technology; it could suggest a decorated thing, no longer useful — a red wheelbarrow. . . . Ask your students what a red wheelbarrow means. Every answer is a possibility.

This kind of thinking is the oldest thinking in the world. When man advanced in consciousness beyond the dog and the cat, he learned to make things connect with other things, even "stand for them" — by analogy, by metaphor, by imaginative association — and the history of ideas began. Well, perhaps not yet the history of ideas, but the history of thought. For a very long time the primitive mind *thought only with things*, and learned to make complex connections between stories, significant objects, animals, trees and stones, ritual actions, masks, costumes — and the ordinary activities of life. There is obviously a great richness and value provided by the ambiguity and emotional impact of pure presentation. But this very ambiguity involves a lack of precision, and it is clear that as time went on man desired greater and greater precision, for some purposes, in his use of language. (This is the history of language from emotive symbolism to mathematics.) In the search for precision *thing-words* were frozen into what we call abstractions, old words in which some "thing" is hidden, but which now has become a name for a specific category. ("Abstract" used to mean *abs* — away and *traho* — I drag something; but nobody thinks of dragging anything at all

when they talk in abstractions: it all goes along smoothly like floating on air, from pure idea to pure idea.)

THIS PROCESS, in a way, goes counter to poetry and art, and one might even say that a great dividing line in the history of human culture, lost somewhere in the backwards of time, was marked by the transition from a language rich with symbolic concreteness to one made efficient and precise with abstractions. "Poetry has a limited tolerance for abstractions," says Northrop Frye, with whom I agree here; and he adds, "Poetry seeks the image rather than the idea."[18] Fine, but here a small clarification is needed. The relation between concrete imagery and abstraction has been a very confusing problem in twentieth-century modern poetry, and it has not yet been properly solved. William Carlos Williams' dictum "No ideas but in things" is only a half-truth, or maybe even less. We can no longer have ideas *only* in things; that would be a regression to pre-history. There must be abstract ideas and there must be ideas in things; it's the proportion between them that remains the real issue for poetry.

"No ideas but in things," in any case, is an *idea* borrowed from Ezra Pound. And he learned it from Ernest Fenollosa, a scholar of Eastern languages, who pointed out that the Chinese language depended on concrete visual presentation, whereas English tended to non-visual abstraction. Ezra Pound ruined his Cantos with this idea, by making his poem a mere avalanche of concrete things, samples, without giving the reader much help in connecting these "things" together with clear abstract ideas. It's still a magnificent poem, very vivid and very suggestive of multitudes of meanings; but it lacks the proportion between connecting ideas and multifaceted realities that communication now demands. It pretends to be an epic with a coherent thought, but it has no coherent thought, either in the parts or in the whole.

Consider, in this light, William Carlos Williams' "Red Wheelbarrow". The key to this poem, the abstract idea that makes it a poem, and that gave him the push to write it, is right in the opening phrase:

> So much depends
> upon

The *thought* that so much depends upon concrete perception of an object — I do not even have to mention the red wheelbarrow and the chickens — the thought that actual things, experiences, are important, is the whole point of the poem. (You see, all the meanings suggested above, for "wheelbarrow", were wrong: it means simply an object, a concrete thing. What the images mean in a poem is controlled and limited by the idea.) Thus, Williams could hardly have had a poem without the idea.

A red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

These words, alone, would be a haiku. And that kind of poem, coming from Japan, assumes a preliminary preparation of thought, of meditation, so that things in themselves speak, evoking thoughts that are already in the mind.

Meditation, or thought, is the key. Whatever you look at, for itself, becomes an image fraught with meaning, a poem. You could have a real wheelbarrow standing in the yard, and keep looking at it, for itself, until it became a poem in your mind. But if you kept looking at it only sporadically, with the irritated thought, "I've got to get that thing out of the way!" it would never become a poem; it would remain an object of utility, not an object of thought.

Aristotle puts thought third in rank among the elements of a tragedy; but this is not really how he sees it. By thought, in the list of six elements, he means the statements or ideas expressed as such by the characters in their speeches. He places the narrative or plot first; characters second; but what he means by plot and characters has really a lot to do with thought. (Northrop Frye would of course agree.) The plot, for Aristotle, has to do with the pattern of action dealing with human happiness or misery; the characters have to do with moral nature, what a person loves or hates; and poetry, he tells us, is "more philosophical than history", so that the meaning of such a plot and such characters expresses a universal truth of life, not just a single incident. That is, the plot must be an idea of universal significance pertaining to human happiness or misery. I always begin the analysis of a novel or a play with the interpretation of its plot. The plot is the key to the whole meaning; it usually contains the meaning in a nutshell: and the meaning, or thought, is primary in all works of literature.

The right proportion between abstract ideas, or intentions, and the concrete presentation of realities is what we expect in any successful work. These things are so combined that the richness and ambiguity that pertains to concrete presentation — the action of a play or a novel, the images of a poem — are given direction and held in control by the general ideas; and neither is the work impoverished by too narrow a purpose, defined by abstraction, nor is it allowed to sprawl and lose itself in a vague and wandering chaos of particulars.

So now we have to ask, how is the meaning generated? And why is the meaning of literature, as distinct from editorials and essays, so powerful and lasting in its impact? Does it derive from archetypal forms, with their "reverberating signifi-

cance"? Or is there another source that explains their interest and continuing fascination?

For an answer to this, we must look to the psychology of creativity. The source of every work of literature is in a human individual, and that individual in a particular state of mind and motivation. What do we know about this? I would say, from long experience and observation, and after long resisting some of the conclusions it leads to, that creativity is a crisis phenomenon. It is the result of problems facing the individual psyche — exactly as Freud explained the origin of dreams — and it is an attempt to resolve these problems in complex symbolic forms.

(The crisis, of course, is internal; it doesn't have to show itself in any external disturbance — but often it does. I only have to mention Eliot's nervous breakdown after the writing of the *Wasteland*, Rilke's emotional upheavals in writing the *Duino Elegies*, Nietzsche's state of possession in writing *Zarathustra*, Dostoevsky's diarrhoea in writing *Crime and Punishment*, Ezra Pound's physical collapse in prison that resulted in the Pisan Cantos, to make it seem very likely that a psychological crisis of some kind usually accompanies the production of great works of literature.)

Gregory Bateson, anthropologist and psychologist, has a theory which asserts that "there is an experiential component in the determination or etiology of schizophrenic symptoms and related behavioral patterns, such as humour, art, poetry, etc." His theory "does not distinguish between these subspecies. Within its terms there is nothing to determine whether a given individual shall be a clown, a poet, a schizophrenic, or some combination of these."[19]

In any case, the first meaning of a poem, a novel, or a play, is biographical: it comes out of the tensions and dilemmas in the mind of the author, and it is therefore a concrete symbolic representation of these tensions and dilemmas. (Solutions are there sometimes; but these are solutions as he would hope to have them work, not real solutions that have resolved the problem finally. That is why didacticism is poor stuff in literature.) By "symbolic" I simply mean that the representation is mainly by means of "things", in the primitive way of thought, and that the "meaning" of these "things" presented is multi-faceted and has a continuing power to generate meaning and to be interpreted. Nothing mystical about this, simply an imaginative method of generating meaning.

The first meaning of a poem, a play, or a novel is biographical. But who is that much interested in the life-problems of the original artist? We can ignore the biographical meaning and still go on with it. Somehow, a transfer of personal symbolism to public symbolism occurs; and this is one of the mysteries of art psychology. (It involves the question of why some works are popular and some are not; why some works become classics and others are forgotten.)

When I said that the writing of literature is "a crisis phenomenon", I implied

that no one would think of constructing *The Magic Mountain* or *War and Peace* in the normal course of his daily activities. Our faculties were not evolved for that kind of undertaking. We think to act, and we communicate to join in communal action. However, when an individual is thrown into an impossible situation, it seems that his psyche plunges into itself, it resorts to the oldest and deepest forms of expression and communication to try to handle the crisis. So-called abnormal psychological manifestations appear — neurosis, and the foreshadowing of psychosis in various degrees — as the accompaniments of this resort to primitive emotional expression. The products of such a mind are highly-charged concrete emotional images, which contain in them many-sided relations to the world of experience; their object is to express, and to integrate, in the old way of "thinking with things" — with some help from the abstract intelligence, which tries to translate their significance and to resolve its own conflicts. I seem to be pushed for a moment into the realm of psychotherapy rather than literature, but I think you can see the relation of this to literature.

The world of rationality and of precise generalization is the one in which we normally live, and in which we sometimes get stranded high and dry if the vital juices don't reach us up here. But functional abstractions direct our everyday behaviour. And it certainly is a superior level of human existence, this realm of abstract conceptual thinking; on the practical plane it is absolutely essential to our existence as social beings. If we lose touch with these abstractions, or they become confused and disordered, we become alienated — or, as they say, "out of contact with reality". Actually, it is "out of contact with unreality" — the world of concepts — but this fiction, or unreality, is necessary to our survival. "Psychosis," a noted psychologist said to me recently, "is an intellectual disorder."[20] The human being cannot function successfully when he reverts to being a plant or an animal.

At the higher level of rational consciousness when serious life-problems — personal and social problems — come upon us, and we cannot solve them in the usual rational way because they are too much for us, we inevitably regress to the older level of symbolic thinking. The rich human world of "things" is soaked in powerful emotions; we use it for expression — the symbolic projection of our state — and we struggle by means of it for integration, the resolution of our problems, at the level of fundamental subsistence.

Obviously, complete descent into the primitive irrational is catastrophic. For art and literature, cooperation between rationality and the concrete symbolic thought-process is the source of creative achievement. The cooperative working together of reason and archaic imagination is creative activity.

Now, the troubled individual is not alone. He is part of the group, the tribe, or the society in which he lives. If he is driven to extreme anguish, his state must be symptomatic of something in the group or the society. And as mankind has

developed socially, the troubled individual — the shaman-type in primitive societies — is one whom we would call a borderline-case, or a near-psychotic, whose visions are of great use to the whole tribe. Peter Farb, in his study of the Indians of North America, says:

> Search out the least skilled hunter in the group, one who is also physically or mentally handicapped and who makes nervous movements with his hands or feet. You have probably located your man. The shaman actually is different from everybody else, and the Eskimo is smart enough to recognize this and to put it to work in his society. Some Eskimo maintain that they can identify a future shaman, even while he is still a child, by certain signs. He is meditative and introverted; he may have fits or fainting spells; he is disturbed by dreams and suffers from hallucinations and hysteria. The shaman is a psychological type known as the neurotic borderline schizoid . . . [21]

(We put our insane people into hospitals; primitive people put them to use as prophets, medicine men, sorcerers and shamans.) The case could easily be made that exceptional group leaders in times of great crisis are often paranoid or psychotic individuals. There is a corresponding will to follow this kind of leader, as there is a charismatic will to lead; so that we find a profound correspondence between the dynamics of the individual psyche and the needs and responses of the community.

How does this bear on literature? Art is a moderate kind of madness. A mild excess of some kind, an internal upheaval, makes a man write *Finnegans Wake*, or *The Remembrance of Things Past*, or *The Cantos*. Consider the following lines, in which Ezra Pound, in tears and in great dejection of mind (*Dakruon* is poetical Greek for tears), suffering utter humiliation, and caged like a beast in a box (in the concentration camp at Pisa), draws up images out of his inmost self, and gives them to us in words, so that they move us, and record a crisis which is not only Ezra Pound's but ours also, and an image for times to come:

> Le Paradis n'est pas artificiel
> but is jagged
> For a flash,
> for an hour.
> Then agony,
> then an hour,
> then agony,
> Hilary stumbles, but the Divine Mind is abundant
> unceasing
> *improvisatore* . . .
>
> and there was a smell of mint under the tent flaps
> especially after the rain
> and a white ox on the road toward Pisa
> as if facing the tower,

dark sheep in the drill field and on wet days were clouds
in the mountain as if under the guard roosts.
A lizard upheld me
the wild birds wd not eat the white bread
from Mt Taishan to the sunset
From Carrara stone to the tower
and this day the air was made open
for Kuanon of all delights,
Linus, Cletus, Clement
whose prayers,
the great scarab is bowed at the altar
the green light gleams in his shell
plowed in the sacred field and unwound the silk worms early
in tensile
LIGHT

in the light of light is the *virtù*
"sunt lumina" said Erigena Scotus
as of Shun on Mt Taishan
and in the hall of the forebears
as from the beginning of wonders
the paraclete that was present in Yao, the precision
in Shun the compassionate
in Yu the guider of waters[22]

From this quotation, and almost from every other example of major poetry, it will be at once clear that the integrating power of the imagination turns on large perspectives, on the great issues of life, and on the total frame of reference, rather than on the mere detail. It is essentially philosophical and religious. Despite the descent into particulars and into concrete things, the imagination in its deepest working generalizes the meanings that it combines into an order of rationality; it uses the particular for the general, and thus projects a total order. The crisis phenomenon, at its best, especially in art, releases a kind of super-sanity upon the mind, through images of total harmony, of perfection, and of ideal fulfilment, and this imagery of a desirable goal contains the general model of cure for the ills of any particular life.

SO I HAVE MADE the case that the individual suffering the crisis of a society makes his own pain and prayer the cry of agony and of hope for a whole society. He draws from his inner self emotional images that correspond to his own suffering and his desire for a cure and for salvation. Mankind is so constituted as a body that the individual and the group communicate empathically, just as birds break into panic at the sign of a cry from one bird. The community responds to the complex emotional expression of one exceptional individual. The

peculiarity of this multi-faceted communication is that its meanings proliferate and apply to ever-new conditions. What the artist expressed as perhaps his own personal neurosis, becomes comprehensible as a complex of signs referring to the age he lived in and its human problems. But then decades and centuries pass, and the *language of things* is re-translated again and again into meanings relevant for other times.

In teaching literature, therefore, it is the *language of things* — the ambiguity and suggestiveness of literary presentation — which should be our first object of study. We should learn by example and training to see how objects and incidents can serve to signify an ever-expanding aura of meaning, and how the thought in a poem or story helps to focus and control this meaning.

A good work of art has its own special way to steer the interpretation that we should recognize. Each one of us is born with a unique shape to his nature, a constitution of emotions, talents, predispositions. Life is a kind of electricity that works on this inner being, and modifies it, like an electric current inducing a strong magnetic force. In creating a poem or a story, the writer's powerful internal fields of force arrange the particles of his work — images, words, the shaping of a new reality — according to his inner nature, striving toward that self-realization we all desire. This is the direction of meaning that we must find in his work.

So a work of literature is a wonderful, complex, psychological entity. It has relation, first, to the private biography of the author. It is translated readily, usually by the author himself, into a statement about the problems of his own age, and of the world he lives in. It will be applied, later, to other times and other ages. It is never merely a *literal* statement or representation; it is always *literary*, that is an object of contemplation and communication. As such, it is a symbolic structure of multiple reference — what Pound has called an "inspired mathematics" — referring, not necessarily to any universal archetypes, but to all the unpredictable and yet possible eventualities of life and experience.

NOTES

[1] Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature" in *Fables of Identity* (New York, 1963), p. 13.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[3] C. G. Jung, "Aion" in Violet S. de Laszlo, ed., *Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of C. G. Jung* (Garden City, New York, 1958), p. 11.

[4] See C. G. Jung, "The Collective Unconscious and Archetypes" in Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr., eds., *The Modern Tradition* (New York, 1965), pp. 642-643.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 643.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 643.

[7] *Fables of Identity*, p. 24.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[10] Quotations from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and from "Jerusalem," preface to Chapter IV.

[11] *Fables of Identity*, pp. 15-16.

[12] C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, 1938, 1960), p. 56. See also Robertson Davies, *Fifth Business* (Toronto, 1970), p. 207.

[13] Northrop Frye, "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement" in *Fables of Identity*, p. 37.

[14] Louis Dudek, *Atlantis* (Montreal, 1967), p. 99.

[15] *Fables of Identity*, pp. 29, 31, 27, 33.

[16] Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden* (Toronto, 1971), p. 53.

[17] *Fables of Identity*, p. 24.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[19] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972), p. 272.

[20] Dr. Zygmunt A. Piotrowski, in conversation. A well-known Rorschach expert, he is honorary professor of psychiatry (psychology), Thomas Jefferson University of Philadelphia.

[21] Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization* (New York, 1969), pp. 63-64.

[22] Selections from Ezra Pound, *Pisan Cantos*.