

ADDRESS DELIVERED IN THE GOETHE HOUSE AT FRANKFURT

My life's work has been directed to a single aim. I have observed the more subtle disturbances of mental function in healthy and sick people and have sought to infer - or, if you prefer it, to guess - from signs of this kind how the apparatus which serves these functions is constructed and what concurrent and mutually opposing forces are at work in it. What we - I, my friends and collaborators - have managed to learn in following this path has seemed to us of importance for the construction of a mental science which makes it possible to understand both normal and pathological processes as parts of the same natural course of events.

I was recalled from such narrow considerations by the astonishing honour which you do me. By evoking the figure of the great universal personality who was born in this house and who spent his childhood in these rooms, your distinction prompts one as it were to justify oneself before him and raises the question of how he would have reacted if his glance, attentive to every innovation in science, had fallen on psycho-analysis. Goethe can be compared in versatility to Leonardo da Vinci, the Renaissance master, who like him was both artist and scientific investigator. But human images can never be repeated, and profound differences between the two great men are not lacking. In Leonardo's nature the scientist did not harmonize with the artist, he interfered with him and perhaps in the end stifled him. In Goethe's life both personalities found room side by side: at different times each allowed the other to predominate. In Leonardo it is plausible to associate his disturbance with that inhibition in his development which withdrew everything erotic, and hence psychology too, from his sphere of interest. In this respect Goethe's character was able to develop more freely.

I think that Goethe would not have rejected psycho-analysis in an unfriendly spirit, as so many of our contemporaries have done. He himself approached it at a number of points, recognized much through his own insight that we have since been able to confirm, and some views, which have brought criticism and mockery down upon us, were expounded by him as self-evident. Thus he was familiar with the incomparable strength of the first affective ties of human creatures. He celebrated them in the Dedication to his Faust poem, in words which we could repeat for each of our analyses:

Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten,
Die früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt,
Versuch' ich wohl, euch diesmal festzuhalten?

.....

Gleich einer alten, halbverklungenen Sage
Kommt erste Lieb' und Freundschaft mit herauf

He explained to himself the strongest impulse of love that he experienced as a mature man by apostrophizing his beloved: 'Ach, du warst in abgelebten Zeiten meine Schwester oder meine Frau.'

Thus he does not deny that these perennial first inclinations take figures from one's own family circle as their object.

Goethe paraphrases the content of dream-life in the evocative words:

Was von Menschen nicht gewusst
Oder nicht bedacht,
Durch das Labyrinth der Brust
Wandelt in der Nacht.

Behind this magic we recognize the ancient, venerable and incontestably correct pronouncement of Aristotle - that dreaming is the continuation of our mental activity into the state of sleep - combined with the recognition of the unconscious which psycho-analysis first added to it. Only the riddle of dream-distortion finds no solution here.

In what is perhaps his most sublime poetical creation, Iphigenie, Goethe shows us a striking instance of expiation, of the freeing of a suffering mind from the burden of guilt, and he makes this catharsis come about through a passionate outburst of feeling under the beneficent influence of loving sympathy. Indeed, he himself repeatedly made attempts at giving psychological help - as for example to the unfortunate man who is named as Kraft in the Letters, and to Professor Plessing, of whom he tells in the Campagne in Frankreich; and the procedure which he applied goes beyond the method of the Catholic Confessional and approximates in some remarkable details to the technique of our psycho-analysis. There is an example of psychotherapeutic influence which is described by Goethe as a jest, but which I should like to quote in full since it may not be well known and yet is very characteristic. It is from a letter to Frau von Stein (No. 1444, of September 5, 1785):

'Yesterday evening I performed a psychological feat. Frau Herder was still in a state of tension of the most hypochondriacal kind over all the unpleasant things that had happened to her at Carlsbad. Particularly through the woman who was her companion in the house. I made her tell and confess everything to me, other people's misdeeds and her own faults with their most minute circumstances and consequences, and at the end I absolved her and made it clear to her, jestingly, in this formula, that these things were now done with and cast into the depths of the sea. She herself made fun of it all and is really cured.'

Goethe always rated Eros high, never tried to belittle its power, followed its primitive and even wanton expressions with no less attentiveness than its highly sublimated ones and has, as it seems to me, expounded its essential unity throughout all its manifestations no less decisively than Plato did in the remote

past. Indeed, it is perhaps more than a chance coincidence when in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* he applies to love an idea taken from the sphere of chemistry - a connection to which the name of psycho-analysis itself bears witness.

I am prepared for the reproach that we analysts have forfeited the right to place ourselves under the patronage of Goethe because we have offended against the respect due to him by trying to apply analysis to him himself: we have degraded the great man to the position of an object of analytic investigation. But I would dispute at once that any degradation is intended or implied by this.¹

We all, who revere Goethe, put up, without too much protest, with the efforts of his biographers, who try to recreate his life from existing accounts and indications. But what can these biographies achieve for us? Even the best and fullest of them could not answer the two questions which alone seem worth knowing about. It would not throw any light on the riddle of the miraculous gift that makes an artist, and it could not help us to comprehend any better the value and the effect of his works. And yet there is no doubt that such a biography does satisfy a powerful need in us. We feel this very distinctly if the legacy of history unkindly refuses the satisfaction of this need - for example in the case of Shakespeare. It is undeniably painful to all of us that even now we do not know who was the author of the Comedies, Tragedies and Sonnets of Shakespeare; whether it was in fact the untutored son of the provincial citizen of Stratford, who attained a modest position as an actor in London, or whether it was, rather, the nobly-born and highly cultivated, passionately wayward, to some extent *déclassé* aristocrat, Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford, hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain of England. But how can we justify a need of this kind to obtain knowledge of the circumstances of a man's life when his works have become so full of importance to us? People generally say that it is our desire to bring ourselves nearer to such a man in a human way as well. Let us grant this; it is, then, the need to acquire affective relations with such men, to add them to the fathers, teachers, exemplars whom we have known or whose influence we have already experienced, in the expectation that their personalities will be just as fine and admirable as those works of art of theirs which we possess.

All the same, we may admit that there is still another motive force at work. The biographer's justification also contains a confession. It is true that the biographer does not want to depose his hero, but he does want to bring him nearer to us. That means, however, reducing the distance that separates him from us: it still tends in effect towards degradation. And it is unavoidable that if we learn more about a great man's life we shall also hear of occasions on which he has in fact done no better than we, has in fact come near to us as a human being. Nevertheless, I think we may declare the efforts of biography to be legitimate. Our attitude to fathers and teachers is, after all, an ambivalent one since our reverence for them regularly conceals a component of hostile rebellion. That is a psychological fatality; it cannot be altered without forcible suppression of the truth and is bound to extend to our relations with the great men whose life histories we wish to investigate.

When psycho-analysis puts itself at the service of biography, it naturally has the right to be treated no more harshly than the latter itself. Psycho-analysis can supply some information which cannot be arrived at by other means, and can thus demonstrate new connecting threads in the 'weaver's masterpiece' spread between the instinctual endowments, the experiences and the works of an artist. Since it is one of the principal functions of our thinking to master the material of the external world psychically, it seems to me that thanks are due to psycho-analysis if, when it is applied to a great man, it contributes to the understanding of his great achievement. But, I admit, in the case of Goethe we have not yet succeeded very far. This is because Goethe was not only, as a poet, a great self-revealer, but also, in spite of the abundance of autobiographical records, a careful concealer. We cannot help thinking here of the words of Mephistopheles:

Das Beste, was du wissen kannst,

Darfst du den Buben doch nicht sagen.³