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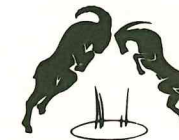
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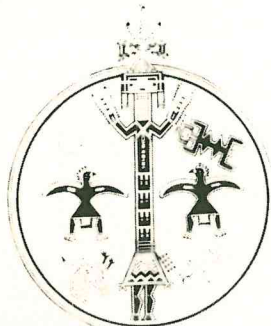


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THE CHARACTERS SPEAK BECAUSE THEY WANT TO SPEAK

MARY WATKINS
(Belmont, Massachusetts)

. . . the characters speak because they want
To speak, the fat, the roseate characters,
Free, for a moment, from malice and sudden cry
Complete in a completed scene, speaking
Their parts as in a faithful happiness.
Wallace Stevens, "Credences of Summer"

The science of psychology has not looked kindly on characters who speak because they want to speak. Talk of these troublemakers—these autonomous and wilful beings—has been relegated largely to discussions of hallucinations, hysterical dissociations, and split personalities. In these discussions the concept of projection serves two key functions: (1) to *relocate* to a shadowy interior of 'mind' characters who appear externally; and (2) to *transfer agency* from the characters to an imagining self, the host of such invisible guests. Inevitably, those characters who appear to us in dreams, fantasies, symptoms, and thoughts—who appear spontaneously and often not within the region of the head—are believed to be aspects of self or of the self's experience which are projected outward by the self and given personified form.

When one turns to literature, myth, and religion, one finds not only appreciation and discussion of the *nonpathological* experience of characters'

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autonomy but often an active *desire* that characters should speak when they want to speak, say what *they* want to have heard, become known in all their particularity. Perhaps, as students of psyche, we would do well to linger awhile in this other camp where imaginal dialogues are nurtured and treasured, the autonomy and articulation of characters more freely debated.

I. *The Characters' Autonomy*

One cannot "make" characters, only marionettes.
Elizabeth Bowen, 1975

Just when we begin to treat all characters of the imagination as mere projections of self, a central paradox emerges. Although the other may bear some resemblance to myself or my experience, this is sometimes not the case. I often do not plan his appearance. In the midst of my thinking, my activities, my speaking, I find he has appeared and spoken to me. In some cases, I cannot predict what he will say or know when he will end. It is true that it is *my* awareness which occasions *my* noting of him but, apart from that, the imaginal other may have as much autonomy as the so-called real others I meet in consensual space. If one insists theoretically that I created him, it can with equal force be maintained that, in experience, it seems as though he created me. "The songs made me, not I them," said Goethe. Even should one accept that I have created him, one must also acknowledge that this creation, like the procreation of a child, leads to my offspring's existing independently of my conscious intention.

I say "often" and not "always" because one can consciously conjure up a character and deny her autonomy, carefully lending her only one's own words and desired qualities. However, when setting about this attempt to cabin, crib, and confine, one can often catch oneself *suppressing* actions, phrases, and characteristics that threaten to assert themselves outside one's conscious intention. Elizabeth Bowen (1975, p. 172), in speaking of the creation of a novel said, "The term 'creation of character' (or characters) is misleading. Characters pre-exist. They are found." A similar ambiguity concerning "invention" and "discovery" is found among mathematicians and philosophers of mathematics. Do mathematicians invent their remarkable structures or do they discover them? The ambiguity and paradox are even more compounded when one realizes that "to invent" originally means 'to find out,' 'to discover.' The inescapable

interpenetration of fact and fiction already suggested by their common root is surely hinted at in this ambiguity.

Among those who have most profoundly challenged the scientific and reductionistic attempt to denature and derealize those objects of experience that do not fit neatly into the scientific construction of reality is the philosopher, Ernst Cassirer. In his critical examination of those reductionistic conceptions of the structure and function of the mythic world, Cassirer (1955, p. 155) argued against all attempts to "twist the world of objective change back into the subjective world and interpret it according to the categories of the subjective world."

For man does not simply transfer his own finished personality to the god or simply lend him his own feeling and consciousness of himself: it is rather through the figure of his gods that man first *finds* this self-consciousness. (P. 211)

The articulation of the imaginal other is at the same time an articulation of the being and activity of the self. These articulations are not aimed only at establishing a *rudimentary* sense of self but rather are an ongoing and changing way of participating in the complex meanings and correlative definitions of self and world.

Cassirer (p. 168) carefully emphasizes how, in mythical consciousness, even if a tutelary spirit is closely associated with a person—perhaps even conceived of as inhabiting his body (as we conceive of thoughts) or as governing his being—this spirit is not conceived of

as the man's I, as the "subject" of his inner life, but as something objective, which dwells in man, which is spatially connected with him and hence can also be spatially separated from him. . . . And even where the closest possible relation exists between the tutelary spirit and the man in whom it dwells . . . it nevertheless appears as something existing for itself, something separate and strange.

For example, the Bataks of Sumatra take it as true that it is a spirit who determines the character and fortune of a person. The spirit is like a man within a man, but it "does not coincide with his personality and is often in conflict with his I; it is a special being within the man, having its own will and its own desires, which it is able to gratify against the man's will and to the man's discomfiture" (Warneck, 1909, p. 8).

Experiences of this sort are not confined to times past and cultures far away. We need only to turn to novelists' experiences with their characters.¹ According to the novelist, painter, and aesthete Joyce Cary (1958, pp. 87–88), when Proust was writing *Remembrances of Things Past*, a woman, Mme. Schiff, wrote Proust to complain that he had made his character, Swann, become ridiculous. Proust, Cary says, responded that *he* (Proust) “had no wish to make Swann ridiculous, far from it. But when he had come to this part of the work, he had found it unavoidable.” In his jealousy Swann acted in the ridiculous way he did *in spite* of Proust's intention as author. Cary (p. 88) continues,

It is a form of intuition; it is the immediate recognition of a real truth, a penetration into the realities of character. And it has broken through Proust's first conception of Swann, and immediately deepened his awareness of Swann's possibilities. Swann, as a character created by Proust, here assumes an individual personality, to be intuited by his own author.

Cary presents another example of a character being so autonomous that the intensity of his words and beliefs radically alters the author's intention for him—Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky's famous “Pro and Contra” chapter, rather than asserting the inadequacies of atheism against orthodoxy, as Dostoevsky had intended, did the reverse. When Dostoevsky, Cary (p. 85) says,

asked himself how would Ivan see reality, how would he argue about it, he realised with the force of intuition a truth that had been before only the statement of a hypothetical case, and then expressed it, with the utmost power. So that his scheme for that chapter, his concept *a priori* of what that chapter would mean, was completely ruined.

Ivan's arguments arise independently of Dostoevsky's desires. Indeed, as Cary (p. 41) points out, Dostoevsky was “terrified.”

He feared the Government censors. He wrote to all his religious and orthodox friends to tell them that in the very next instalment he would bring in his priest, the saintly Father Zossima, to answer Ivan. He spent weeks on those fifty pages which were to give the refutation. And, after all his work, he failed most dismally.

This experience of autonomy appears to be true as well for characters based on real life people. Eugene O'Neill claimed he had never written

about a character who was not an actual person. He was quick to add the following, however: “But even these things have a way of developing!” (1981).

Marina Tsvetaeva, a great twentieth-century Russian poet, described how she was moved to write by the imaginal being “which want[ed] to exist through” her (quoted in Muchnic, 1980, p. 7). The hand of an artist, she said, belongs not to oneself but to that being. In a letter to Pasternak, Tsvetaeva (p. 7) said, “We dream and write not when *we* please but when it pleases.” She would often experience herself writing against her own will, motivated instead by the beings that chose her to give them life.² The poet Joseph Brodsky compared Tsvetaeva's poetry to folklore, saying that she spoke not in a “heroine's monologue” but in a “shepherd's song,” in “speech intended for one's self, for one's own being,” when “the speaker is also his own hearer” and “the ear listens to the mouth.”

Certainly not all authors experience their characters forcing them to write against their will (what psychiatry calls a delusion of influence). Not even Tsvetaeva experienced that all the time; nor do we experience imaginal others always having this high degree of autonomy. What I am pointing to is a continuum ranging from the imaginal other's having no thoughts, feelings, or actions which the conscious self does not lend it to the imaginal other's acting, feeling, and speaking in ways that surprise the self. An intermediate example on this continuum might be the following experience of the novelist Francine du Plessix Gray (quoted in Christy, 1981):

I know the characters personally. They are sleeping in my bed with me. They wake me. They demand and insist on knowing what I am going to do with them next. I can let loose in my writing, make an alternate world that stands next to the real one. I can create the characters I would have liked to have been.

It is intermediary in the sense that the characters do initiate actions—they wake, demand, insist—yet she is in charge of what happens to them next, who they are to become.

On either side of this example we can find Sartre and Mauriac, engaged in a debate about the role of the author in modern literature. The debate concerns whether or not the author takes an omniscient role with respect to the characters, knowing all their actions, thoughts, and feelings and

delivering these to the reader. Sartre argued that Mauriac himself sat in the center of his heroine's consciousness: "I help her lie to herself and, at the same time, I judge and condemn her" (quoted in Harvey, 1955, p. 162). Mauriac, says Sartre,

wrote that the novelist is to his own creatures what God is to His. And that explains all the oddities of his technique. He takes God's standpoint on his characters. God sees the inside and outside, the depths of body and soul, the whole universe at once. In like manner, M. Mauriac is omniscient about everything relating to his little world. What he says about his characters is Gospel. . . . The time has come to say that the novelist is not God. (P. 163)

Sartre asks Mauriac, "Do you want your characters to live? . . . See to it that they are free" (p. 162).

He might also have asked this of George Sand, whose method of putting *her* words into the mouths of the characters contradicts her intention for them not to be like dolls.

He obeys my every whim, my mood, my will . . . all his movements are the consequences of my own thoughts and my own words which I have put into his mouth. . . . he is "me," in short, a human being and not just a doll. (Quoted in Rambert, 1949, p. 1)

Were she to have known Jean Paul Richter or Sartre, they probably would have fought. Richter said, "A poet who must reflect whether he shall make a character say yes or no—to the devil with him; he is only a stupid corpse" (quoted in Darwin, 1871).

Sartre was intent on wanting "to drive providence from our works as we have driven it from our world" (quoted in Harvey, p. 162). In the place of a god-like author, Sartre (p. 164) wanted to

find an orchestration of consciousnesses which may permit us to render the multidimensionality of the event. Moreover, in giving up the fiction of the omniscient narrator, we have assumed the obligation of suppressing the intermediaries between the reader and the subjectivities—the viewpoints of our characters. It is a matter of having him enter into their minds as into a windmill.

Enid Blyton (quoted in Stoney, 1974) describes how, in the process of writing, her characters let *her* know what is going on, rather than the other way around.

I shut my eyes for a few moments, with my portable typewriter on my knee—I make my mind blank and wait—and then, as clearly as I would see real children, my characters stand before me in my mind's eye. I see them in detail—hair, eyes, feet, clothes, expression—and I always know their Christian names, but never their surnames. . . . I don't know what anyone is going to say or do. I don't know what is going to happen. I am in the happy position of being able to write a story and read it for the first time, at one and the same moment. . . . Sometimes a character makes a joke, a really funny one, that makes me laugh as I type it on my paper—and I think, "Well, I couldn't have thought of that myself in a hundred years!" And then I think, "Well, who *did* think of it, then?"

We see development from one side to the other of this continuum of autonomy-dependence in children's early relations to their dolls. At first the imaginal other is an egocentric extension of one's habitual stance. The other is not allowed an autonomy and often not even an attributed or projected interiority. The child puts the doll to bed and pretends to read it a story. The doll is not lent or allowed animation of its own but is rather the prop of the imaginer's intention to be a caretaker. But this phenomenon is not restricted to children. The puppet-like status of the imaginal other is easily found in imaginal transactions in adulthood as well. The imaginer may speak to an imaginal child but allow it no response. The feelings of the child may be assumed by the imaginer, but never is the child asked, nor are her spontaneous expressions noted (if even allowed for at all). The absence of autonomy can result in repetitive fantasies; only one point of view is being played out.

How different this is from experiences in which one does not know how the characters and their scenarios will unfold, in which the novel and the ego-alien will appear and develop. Henry James, in his preface to *The Ambassador*, described how this book arose from an anecdote told him at a garden party in Paris. The anecdote concerned an older man telling a younger about his philosophy of life. This was to be the central scene of a book. "But what else?" asks James (1934, p. 313).

Where has he come from [this older man] and why has he come, what is he doing. . . . To answer these questions plausibly, to answer them as under cross-examination in the witness box by counsel for the prosecution, in other words satisfactorily account for [the character] Strether and for his "peculiar tone," was to possess myself of the entire fabric.

Listen to how James (p. 315) describes himself in relation to the development of this novel.

These things continued to fall together, as by the neat action of their own weight and form, even while their commentator [James himself] scratched his head about them; he easily sees now that they were always well in advance of him. As the case completed itself he had in fact, from a good way behind, to catch up with them, breathless and a little flurried, as he best could.

Similarly, Flannery O'Connor (1961, p. 100), in her essay "Writing Short Stories," talks of how she often did not know where she was going when she sat down to write a story. She uses her experience writing "Good Country People" as an example of how her writing was like discovery.

When I started writing that story, I didn't know there was going to be a Ph.D. with a wooden leg in it. I merely found myself one morning writing a description of two women I knew something about, and before I realized it, I had equipped one of them with a daughter with a wooden leg. As the story progressed, I brought in the Bible salesman, but I had no idea what I was going to do with him. I didn't know he was going to steal that wooden leg until ten or twelve lines before he did it, but when I found out that this was what was going to happen, I realized that it was inevitable.³

O'Connor (p. 116) says that nothing can be predicted about these mysterious moments in a story, for "they represent the working of grace for the characters." Although such "moments of grace" are rarely focused on within academic and clinical psychology, there are some notable exceptions. Let us approach Jung as one of these.

Jung began his psychiatric career working in the asylum, surrounding himself with the voices and visions of patients' psychoses. Rather than relegating the experience of imaginal figures to the limbo of pathology, he actively sought his own 'voices.' This led him to his researches in the history of mythology, religion, and alchemy. In these domains, Jung found support for his theory that imaginal figures are not necessarily evidence of pathology but are indicative of the process of personification that occurs spontaneously in the "unconscious."

Jung argues that it is not *we* who personify these figures but they who "have a personal nature from the beginning" (1968, §62). He tries to ac-

count for their autonomy with his notion of archetypes. The figures are not considered as mere projections but issue from non-personal archetypes, from formative dispositions. The individual characters one experiences are both expressions of one's own ego and life and also variations on forms which exist independently of the person. In this way, Jung accounts for the experience of the figures' autonomy and his observation of parallels in imagery across time and place.

When Jung engaged the imaginal figures that appeared to him in dialogue—such as Philemon (1961, p. 183)—he directly experienced their autonomy.

Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I. He said I treated thoughts as if I generated them myself, but in his view thoughts were like animals in the forest, or people in a room, or birds in the air, and added, "If you should see people in a room, you would not think that you made these people, or that you were responsible for them." It was he who taught me psychic objectivity, the reality of the psyche. Through him the distinction was clarified between myself and the object of my thought. He confronted me in an objective manner, and I understood that there is something in me which can say things that I do not know and do not intend, things which may even be directed against me.

Psychologically, Philemon represented superior insight. He was a mysterious figure to me. At times he seemed to me quite real, as if he were a living personality. I went walking up and down the garden with him, and to me he was what the Indians call a guru.

Whether or not we accept the theory of archetypes and Jung's idea that "there are things in the psyche" that one does not produce, these are attempts to have theory conform with experience, rather than the other way around (as in psychoanalytic theory). This conformity of theory with experience involves Jung, on the one hand, in creating explanatory principles which have yet to be widely accepted; on the other hand, it leads to a set of therapeutic procedures which encourage one to pursue experiences with imaginal figures in the manner that they present themselves—to relate to them as autonomous.

Jung calls the process of engaging figures and images, coming to form a conscious relation to them, "active imagination." He (1937, p. 2) understands this process as an ancient one with many parallels in history.

In antiquity when a man had to direct a prayer to the statue of the god, he stepped upon a stone that was erected at its side to enable people to shout their prayer into the ear, so that the god would hear them, and then he stared at the image until the god nodded his head or opened or shut his eyes or answered in some way. You see this was an abbreviated method of active imagination, concentrating upon the image until it moved; and in that moment the god gave a hint, his assent or his denial or any other indication, and that is the numinosum.

Henry Miller (1939, p. 70) describes just this sort of experience, albeit secularized:

Occasionally this same sort of bitchery would start up with statues, particularly chipped and dismantled ones. I might be loitering in some backyard gazing absentmindedly at a marble head with one ear missing and presto! it would be talking to me . . . talking in the language of a proconsul. Some crazy urge would seize me to caress the battered features, whereupon, as if the touch of my hand had restored it to life, it would smile at me. A smile of gratitude, needless to say. Then an even stranger thing might happen. An hour later, say, passing the plate glass window of an empty shop, who would greet me from the murky depths but the same proconsul! Terror stricken, I would press my nose against the show-window and stare. There he was—an ear missing, the nose bitten off. And his lips moving! "A retinal haemorrhage," I would murmur, and move on. "God help me if he visits me in my sleep!"

In a letter to a Mr. O, Jung (1973, pp. 459–60) described the process of active imagination.

The point is that you start with any image, for instance, with just that yellow mass in your dream. Contemplate it and carefully observe how the picture begins to unfold or to change. Don't try to make it into something, just do nothing but observe what its spontaneous changes are. Any mental picture you contemplate in this way will sooner or later change through a spontaneous association that causes a slight alteration of the picture. You must carefully avoid impatient jumping from one subject to another. Hold

fast to the one image you have chosen and wait until it changes by itself, and if it is a speaking figure at all then say what you have to say to that figure and listen to what he or she has to say.

If we approach the imaginal other as a projection resulting from a defensive refusal to recognize certain qualities, feelings, or wishes in oneself—i.e., if we approach it from the point of view of usual causal explanations—then the therapeutic move involves a process of reclamation, whereby the ego attempts to recognize, claim, and assimilate the psychic fragments which have appeared in personified form. There is a widening of the ego as a multiplicity of figures are absorbed and de-personified. From this point of view, the autonomy of imaginal others is a negative or pathological phenomenon.⁴

While some imaginal figures are clearly personifications of rejected possibilities for the self, can we account for all of them in this way? Moreover, even if the self gains distance by dislocation and personification of psychic possibilities, would not an intense reciprocal dialogue with these resulting imaginal figures ultimately mitigate their supposed defensive function by requiring the self to come to terms with its partners in dialogue?

If we approach the experience of imaginal dialogues by valuing the dramatic quality of mind which gives rise to imaginal worlds, then the interpretive and explanatory moves, which result from projection theory and which aim at depersonifying and depotentiating these figures, would become problematic. When the dramatic quality of mind is valued, a different set of moves would have to be proposed. These moves need not invite a demonology, in the pejorative sense.

If we begin, as Jung did, with a respect for the imaginal other that sees the presence of a figure as a nonpathological occurrence (i.e., that personifying is a spontaneous process, not necessarily always serving a defensive function), then the activities of the imagining ego need not be *de*-personification, *de*-potentiation, reclamation, assimilation, but the building of relationship in dialogue. The self does not attempt to abolish the autonomous presence of the other. Development does not coincide with a move from presence to absence, from projection to assimilation, integrating the voices and figures. Development occurs rather in the dialogue between self and other, in the process of mutual articulation.

And, indeed, it is dialogue we find when autonomy is granted. Whether we note how Egyptians spoke to their *Ba*, Homeric men to their *thumos*,⁵ Henry Miller to his characters, or Jung to Philemon, dialogue is the consistent activity. "Dialogue is the ideal means of showing what is between the characters. It crystallizes relationship," says Elizabeth Bowen (1975, p. 180).

*

We have focused on the *experienced* autonomy⁶ of the characters: the experiences of their initiating interactions, of their seeming to have lives apart from the ego, of their affecting the ego, creating the ego, as much as the ego them. By "autonomy" I make no claim that such characters exist in objectified nature, in and of themselves, independent of their being experienced. Nor do I mean that their apprehended qualities are independent of the relationship they are in with a particular ego.

I am, however, stressing that whereas psychological theory which values *abstract* thought would most often see changes from autonomy to dependence, depersonification, and reclamation as positive developments, theory which valued *dramatic* thought would encourage a development toward autonomy of characters. Similarly, we find that theorists who reduce the development of thought to the development of abstract thought propose that the early multiplicity of specific characters in childhood play becomes, by adulthood, homogenized into a single voice, the "generalized other" as described by George Herbert Mead. That characters not only become more autonomous but also more highly specified and discrete in their identities goes against the grain of much of developmental theory. But is it not precisely the particularity of characters that differentiates the multiplicity of perspectives which is so critical to the development of thought as well as literature and myth?

II. *The Articulation of the Imaginal Other*

Tolstoy criticized Gorky: "Most of what you say comes out of yourself, and therefore you have no characters, and all your people have the same face."

Tolstoy, quoted in Gorky, 1964, p. 21

Tolstoy shares with Gorky his knowledge that, when one does not allow characters their autonomy, one merely projects from oneself, lending

them one's own face. When one allows characters to speak, to be known apart from the self, then a depth and specificity of characterization develop.

Virginia Woolf in *The Common Reader* (1925) discusses the difference between Elizabethan drama and modern novels. In the former, she claimed, there were no real characters. For instance (Woolf, pp. 53-54), in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*, we gropingly come to know that the character Annabella

... is a spirited girl, with her defiance of her husband when he abuses her, her snatches of Italian song, her ready wit, her simple glad love-making. But of character as we understand the word there is no trace. We do not know how she reaches her conclusions, only that she has reached them. Nobody describes her. She is always at the height of her passion, never at its approach. Compare her with Anna Karenina. The Russian woman is flesh and blood, nerves and temperament, has heart, brain, body and mind where the English girl is flat and nude as a face painted on a playing card; she is without depth, without range, without intricacy.

These two characters, Annabella and Anna, are not just models of two different literary forms (the play versus the novel) or two literary periods but of two different kinds of relations to imaginal others.

How do novelists describe the development of a relationship with a character, such as Tolstoy and Anna's? Elizabeth Bowen speaks of patiently placing oneself in the presence of the imaginal other and observing the details of the other's being: "They reveal themselves slowly to the novelist's perception—as might fellow-travellers seated opposite one in a dimly-lit railway carriage" (p. 172).

Trollope (1933, pp. 49-50) described how, in order to make his readers intimately acquainted with his characters, he himself had to get to know each figure in great detail.

... and [the author] can never know them well unless he can live with them in the full reality of established intimacy. They must be with him as he lies down to sleep, and as he wakes from his dreams. He must learn to hate them and to love them. He must argue with them, quarrel with them, forgive them, and even submit to them. He must know of them whether they be cold-blooded or passionate, whether true or false, and how far true, and how far false. The depth and the breadth, and the narrowness and the shallowness of each should be clear to him. And as, here in our outer

world, we know that men and women change,—become worse or better as temptation or conscience may guide them,—so should these creations of his change, and every change should be noted by him. On the last day of each month recorded, every person in his novel should be a month older than on the first. If the would-be novelist have aptitudes that way, all this will come to him without much struggling;—but if it do not come, I think he can only make novels of wood.

It is so that I have lived with my characters, and thence has come whatever success I have attained. There is a gallery of them, and of all in that gallery I may say that I know the tone of the voice, and the colour of the hair, every flame of the eye, and the very clothes they wear. Of each man I could assert whether he would have said these or the other words; of every woman, whether she would then have smiled or so have frowned.

The development of depth of characterization corresponds to the development of the character's autonomy. As the character becomes more autonomous, we know about its world not just from external observation or supposition but from the character directly. The author or narrator becomes less omniscient and can be surprised by the other. Observation of the character's actions can be supplemented by his or her account of thoughts, feelings, and wishes through which the imaginal other gains interiority and depth.

In a study of schizophrenics' representations of imaginal figures in dreams, I found that the imaginal other (*not* the "I" of the dream) was often known only in terms of behavior or action, rather than of thoughts, feelings, or wishes (Watkins, 1978). The descriptions of others were neither vivid nor realistic but shallow, superficial. The dream ego did not respond to the character's feelings and thoughts, thus decentering the dream ego position, but assimilated the other's actions with respect to the dream ego's feelings and thoughts. Thus, rather than pathology having to do with an overarticulation of an imaginary being and a weak ego or "I," pathology coincided with shallowness in the characterization of the imaginal other and marked egocentricity in which the imaginal other is known only insofar as it affects the "I." Jung observed in schizophrenia and other forms of dissociation that characters such as homunculi, dwarfs, and boys often appeared having no individual characteristics at all (Jung and Kerényi, 1949, p. 84).

Both in acting and in fiction-writing, the actor or writer becomes absorbed in the details of the imaginal other's character, life, point of

view.⁷ For Henry James, "the artist is one on whom nothing is lost," and thus he accused bad authors of "weak specification." But as Flannery O'Connor (1961, p. 93) points out,

... to say that fiction proceeds by the use of detail does not mean the simple, mechanical piling up of detail. Detail has to be controlled by some overall purpose, and every detail has to be put to work for you. Art is selective. What is there is essential and creates movement.

The detailing work of the imaginal realm is not the same as that of the naturalistic realm. In the imaginal work, details do not seek merely to replicate nature, says O'Connor (1961, p. 71), but "while having their essential place in the literal level of the story, operate in depth as well as on the surface"; that is, the selectivity of details contributes to their resonance on a symbolic level. Not all is said about a character but just enough detail such that, as Virginia Woolf (1975, p. 172) says of George Eliot's characters, "even in the least important, [there is] a roominess and margin where those qualities lurk which she has no call to bring from their obscurity." All that is presented, however, should be essential; "Every sentence in dialogue should be descriptive of the character who is speaking," says Elizabeth Bowen (1953, p. 181). The mind that comes to know the character, James said, should be "the most polished of possible mirrors"; that is, it should reflect the other rather than using the other as a prop in telling one's own story.

Let us look more formally at dimensions that would specify depth of characterization in imaginal dialogues: degree of animation of the imaginal other, degree of articulation of psychological properties, degree of complexity of perspective on the character, degree of specification of the identity of a character. These dimensions (outlined below) represent movement from a character in an imaginal dialogue who is a passive recipient of the other's⁸ actions, without thoughts, feelings, actions, and identity of her own, to a character whose identity is known, whose psychological properties (thoughts, feelings, and wishes) are articulated from both an internal and an external point of view, who is an active agent in her own right, and who is not just a one-dimensional, stereotypic figure of only negative or only positive attributes.

1. Degree of animation
 - a. Character is passive recipient of other's actions; character does

not act or speak. Character is a prop for the other's actions and perceptions.

- b. Character is again the recipient of the other's actions, but here the character acts or speaks in response to these actions. The character does not, however, initiate action.
- c. Character initiates actions and/or dialogue, is no longer a passive recipient and reactive responder. The character can act upon the other(s) present (see Lowe, 1975).

2. Psychological articulation

- a. Character is known by actions alone.
- b. Psychological properties (thoughts, feelings, wishes) are attributed to the character by another character or by the self (acting as a kind of narrator). Psychological properties are known from an external point of view only.
- c. Psychological properties are expressed by the character. They are known from an internal point of view and imply a self-consciousness on the part of the character.

When a character is known only through its behavior or from another's point of view, the understanding of it is often superficial, fragmented, or distorted. The imaginer often assimilates and reduces the character's actions to the set of meanings which are important to the ego, thus failing to allow the character's presence and point of view to de-center the habitual stance of the ego.⁹ The imaginer too quickly assumes she understands what a character wants or feels, without so much as an attempt to ask. It is such assumptions that change a basic *telos* of the experience of imagining itself from an experience which counteracts egocentricity to an experience which sustains it. In the latter, the imaginal scene and its people become servants to the usual, most powerful point of view. In the former, as a character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations become known from its own point of view, it is freed from being a mere prop to the habitually central voice.

3. Complexity of perspective(s) on the character

- a. Character is known from an external perspective only. Although the character may act and may even be attributed psychological properties, it is given no voice. The motivations for his or her actions are assumed.

- b. Character is known from an internal perspective. He expresses a point of view. His actions are understood from his point of view only.
- c. Character is known from internal and external points of view. Here there is an alternation of perspectives on the character so that his actions and speech can be understood from both his point of view and from the other's. Here one both sees and can be seen.

At the beginning of this continuum, where the first character is known only through the second's eyes, the first character serves the second's self-image; i.e., an assailant is created to sustain the other's role as an innocent victim. At the end of this continuum, one character's reality can be challenged by the other. The scene is deepened as the possibility arises for different perspectives. "Characters possess degrees of being in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived" (Burke, 1945, p. 503).

4. Specification of character's identity

- a. The imaginal presence of the other is indicated by the self's speech but by no other indication; i.e., the self speaks as though to someone, but it is not clear to whom.
- b. The imaginal presence of the other can be noted by the linguistic structure of the thought or speech. For instance, the phrases of speech meet the constraints of conversation or of dialogue, not monologue: where there is a question, an answer follows; where there is a comment, an acknowledgment follows, and so on. This is so despite the absence of any indication that the person is speaking to an imaginal other who has an identity other than that of the habitual self—such as a change in intonation, addressing a character by name or, if in play, designating a different play object to represent a character. Much of thought has this implicitly dialogical structure without a clear articulation as to who the speakers are; i.e., "Now what shall I do today? How about finishing up the paper? I don't think there is enough time. You always say that." In the following segment of play, for instance, despite the absence of explicit reference to a separate character by name, changes in voice, or gesture, one can detect a conversation going on, an imaginal dialogue, between two voices which could

be described as a "supportive instructor" voice and a "pupil" voice. Example: David is engaged in solitary play with a tinker-toy. He says the following: "The wheels go here, the wheels go here. Oh, we need to start it all over again. We need to close it up. See, it closes up. We're starting it all over again. Do you know why we wanted to do that? Because I needed it to go a different way. Isn't it going to be pretty clever, don't you think? But we have to cover up the motor just like a real car" (Kohlberg et al., 1978, p. 695).

- c. Here the other presents itself as a clear, specific, identifiable personality.

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When characters are encouraged to speak to us as they desire, when they are allowed to share their versions of things, dreams cease to be the only place of *explicit* imaginal dialogue. Within the ebb and flow of thought and experience, one can begin to distinguish voices as they enter and suggest their presence. The "purpose of poetry," as Czeslaw Milosz (1974) describes it, becomes a telos of our work with thought itself.

The purpose of poetry is to remind us
How difficult it is to remain just one person
for our house is open, there are no keys to the doors
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

1. Although painters often work from form and color as much as from imagined beings, these too are often experienced as presences who suggest themselves to the artist from the outside. For instance, Miro said that "forms take reality for me as I work. In other words, rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush." For Nolde, forms were vehicles for color: "Colors in their own lives," "weeping and laughing, dream and bliss, hot and sacred, like love songs and the erotic like songs and glorious chorals! Colors in vibration, pealing like silver bells and clanging like bronze bells, proclaiming happiness, passion and love, soul, blood and death" (quoted in *The Smithsonian*, January 1981).

2. Guy de Maupassant would see his double sitting at the other side of his writing desk and would hear him dictating to him what he should write (Rogers, 1970).

3. O'Connor continues, "As soon as the writer 'learns to write,' as soon as he knows what he is going to find, and discovers a way to say what he knew all along, or worse still, a way to say nothing, he is finished. If a writer is any good, what he makes will have its source in a realm much larger than that which his conscious mind can encompass and will always be a greater surprise to him than it can ever be to his reader" (p. 83).

4. The psychoanalyst Roy Schafer (1968) puts it this way: "Too often, introjects are written about (and discussed in the clinic) as if they were actual persons carrying on lives of their own, with energies of their own, and with independent intentions directed toward the subject." "... they should be treated merely as thoughts, ideas, or information. . . . For theory to portray representations in any other way is to verge on an implicit demonology" (pp. 83, 138-39). Thus Schafer advocates an omniscient ego role and a depersonification of psychic life. His moves in therapy through action language encourage this.

5. "A man's *thumos* tells him that he must now eat or drink or slay an enemy, it advises him on the course of his action, it puts words into his mouth." "He can converse with it, or with his 'heart' or his 'belly', almost as man to man. Sometimes he scolds these detached entities, usually he takes their advice, but he may also reject it" (Dodds, 1951, p. 16).

6. See Casey (1976, pp. 177-233) for a discussion of how imagining itself can be seen as an autonomous act.

7. Stanislavski (1936), the famous Russian trainer of actors, taught them "not to present merely the external life of [their] character" but to create the "inner life of human spirit" (p. 14). Moore (1960), writing of Stanislavski's method, says, "A playwright rarely describes the past or the future of his characters, and often omits details of their present life. An actor must complete his character's biography in his mind from beginning to end because knowing how the character grew up, what influenced his behavior, and what he expects his future to be will give more substance to the present life of the character" (p. 30).

8. In these descriptions of the relation between ego and character, ego and dream ego are themselves treated as characters, as "others." While we have focused on characters other than ego being props to ego, the reciprocal can also be true—as in certain structures of hallucination (see Watkins, 1982).

9. In extreme instances, even the attribution of feelings and thoughts breaks down, so that a character's actions appear incomprehensible. Instead of actions being part of a pattern of intention—either attributed by the other or described by the character itself—they appear senseless, arbitrary, without reason or as though controlled by a force outside the character (see Watkins, 1978, pp. 54-55).

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