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## Death and Creativity: A Jungian Approach

R. Gordon 

### Introduction

One of the most outstanding features of Jung's work is the importance he has attributed to man's drive to create, and to the pervasiveness of man's concern with death. Indeed, one of the reasons which first attracted me to Jung's work was the seriousness with which he treated the need to make, that is to create, invent and transform; as early as 1929 Jung had classified creativity as one of the five main instincts characteristic of man. As regards death, he believed that there is a natural and innate disposition in man to concern himself with death, and to prepare himself for it as his life moves towards it.

While I responded quickly and easily to Jung's ideas about creativity, my grappling with his thoughts about death and man's concern with it arose from my own analytic experience. For I had discovered, almost to my surprise, that, whatever the age and whatever the symptom picture, sooner or later concern with death becomes a feature in nearly every analysis. Such concern may make its appearance either directly and overtly, or else in a more or less disguised and symbolic form.

It will be the thesis of this paper that there is much similarity between the psychological constellation that favours good and peaceful dying and that psychological constellation which favours creative work. In the first part of this lecture I will share with you my reflections about death as it is experienced in the human psyche. I will then move on to discuss some thoughts and speculations concerning the creative process. In the final part of the lecture I shall try and explore the possible parallels and similarities between these two vital human pre-occupations and activities.

In this first part, but before I begin to discuss my own thoughts regarding our concern with death, it might be useful and relevant to start by quoting some of the remarks that Jung himself has made about it, for it is these passages that helped me make sense of my own analytic work and experience.

Already in 1930 and in 1931 Jung had written of death as an essential

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constituent of life. In his paper, 'The stages of life' (1930), he remarked: 'As a doctor I am convinced that it is hygienic to discover in death a goal towards which one can strive' (JUNG 15), and in 1931 in *The secret of the golden flower*, he wrote: 'Death is psychologically as important as birth and, like it, is an integral part of life' (JUNG 14).

However, his most salient points about the psychology of death are to be found in his *Symbols of transformation*, published in 1952. The following is a rather long passage, but it summarises well his general thinking:

In the morning of life the son tears himself loose from the mother, from the domestic hearth, to rise through battle to his destined heights. Always he imagines his worst enemy in front of him, yet he carries the enemy within himself—a deadly longing for the abyss, a longing to drown in his own source, to be sucked down to the realm of the Mothers. His life is a constant struggle against extinction, a violent yet fleeting deliverance from ever-lurking night. This death is no external enemy, it is his own inner longing for the stillness and profound peace of all-knowing non-existence, for all-seeing sleep in the ocean of coming-to-be and passing away. Even in his highest strivings for harmony and balance, for the profundities of philosophy and the raptures of the artist, he seeks death, immobility, satiety, rest...

If he is to live, he must fight and sacrifice his longing for the past in order to rise to his own heights. And having reached the noonday heights, he must sacrifice his love for his own achievement, for he may not loiter. The sun, too, sacrifices its greatest strength in order to hasten onwards to the fruits of autumn, which are the seeds of rebirth... The neurotic who tries to wriggle out of the necessity of living wins nothing and only burdens himself with a constant foretaste of aging and dying (JUNG II).

This passage has strangely close affinities to Melanie Klein's hypothesis that—and I quote from Segal:

The immature ego of the infant is exposed from birth to the anxiety stirred up by the inborn polarity of instincts—that is the immediate conflict between the life instinct and the death instinct (SEGAL 23).

As I re-read Jung's passages in preparation for this lecture I was amazed how much my own thinking and experience had in fact run parallel to his thought, and, indeed, with how much sensitive intuition Jung has pointed to psychological processes and conflicts that are the object of much contemporary observation, interpretation, debate, denial or acknowledgement.

All my personal experience lends weight to the assumption that death is intimately relevant to all psychological growth. A person's relationship to death, the intensity of his attraction to it, his fear of it, the type of defence built up against conscious awareness of it, the symbolic meaning given to it—all these greatly affect and shape the personality both of an individual as well as of a culture.

And yet for at least half a century, death has been the most taboo'd subject in the Western world. Geoffrey Gorer has drawn attention to

it in his article, 'The pornography of death', published in *Encounter* in 1955 (GORER 9). And an interesting study of the psychological literature—or, rather, the scarcity of the psychological literature on death—was published in 1966 in

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the journal *Human relations*, by Mary Williams. Having made a thorough survey of *Psychological abstracts* between 1931 and 1961 she discovered that the total number of contributions on the theme of death, suicide and murder in 1961 was only a little higher than they had been in 1931, and this in spite of the fact that by 1961 there were a far greater number of workers in this field and a greatly increased volume of psychological literature.

From time to time Western man has dared to turn his face from the fact of death in order to contemplate a life without it. The stories of Dr Faustus, or of the Wandering Jew spring to mind. So does Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's travels*. In one of his travels Gulliver meets the Strulbrugs, the Immortals, and is told that '... whenever they see a funeral they lament and repine that others have gone to a harbour of rest to which they themselves never can hope to arrive.' And that 'because of the dreadful prospect of never dying' they are 'not only opinionate, peevish, covetous, morose, vain and talkative, but also incapable of friendship and dead to all natural affection' (SWIFT 26).

In our own time the French writer Simone de Beauvoir has, in her novel *All men are mortal*, attempted once more to explore this theme. In this book the hero—a man whose wish for immortality was granted—loses, as the centuries pass by, all capacity to see, to taste, to laugh, to cry, to search, to be surprised—all experiences really essential to the process of creation. But for the 'immortal' man life comes to seem increasingly more dull and monotonous, and he himself becomes a sort of 'no-person', for he can be neither mean nor generous, neither brave nor cowardly, neither good nor bad. If time stretches indefinitely, then there can be no measure and no meaning. And then there is only 'always the same past, the same experience, the same reasonable thought, the same boredom. A thousand years, ten thousand years. I can never take leave of myself.

And so he is alone. Envious of mortals upon whose lives he tries from time to time to graft his own, he becomes himself envied by those he envies. There can be no pity between him and them. All bonds, all mutuality, all possibility of communication is irrevocably broken once they have discovered his secret. Thus the freedom from death has turned into the curse of immortality and this renders all life vacuous and empty (BEAUVOIR 2).

I think that Simone de Beauvoir has here described with great insight, feeling and sophistication the inner experience of an immortal man. She seems to have little doubt that pain and despair are inevitable components of the fate of a person who cannot die. The world of the immortal man into which Simone de Beauvoir draws us strikes me as remarkably similar to that of the schizoid person who, having attempted to opt out of time, has then lost all sense of time's shape and its human dimension. And so he, too, is haunted by a sense of isolation, of lostness, of meaninglessness, which then makes him feel like a sleepwalker, like a shadow, stumbling along in a world of men, untouching and untouchable. As Jung has put it in *Symbols of transformation*: 'The neurotic who tries to wriggle out of the necessity of living

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wins nothing and only burdens himself with a constant foretaste of aging and dying' (JUNG II). I cannot believe that it is only a literary or aesthetic disapproval that accounts for the fact that this particular novel is so little known.

During the last few years the theme of death has suddenly emerged out of its taboo'd position. It seems that, as we have neared the end of the honeymoon between man and science, man and technology, we begin to discover that in spite of increasing material welfare and the various benevolent attempts at social servicing and social engineering, active death-seeking continues in the form of violence, murder and suicide. Consequently, an increasing number of people are driven to take a new look at mankind in general and at themselves in particular, and there is now observable a new thrust in the direction of introspection and introversion. This then paves the way for a re-assessment and a re-valuing of the personal, the experienced, the subjective and the non-material. But the exploration of ourselves as conscious beings, who have deeply rooted needs to establish our own personal identity, leads inevitably, I believe, to the recognition that the fact of death and our attitude to this fact is a vital element in our development of consciousness. This has been clearly recognised also by the Existentialists, who believe that it is the relationship to meaning which is for man the most vital question, but that the search for meaning and for personal identity cannot by-pass awareness that our life is bounded by a birth at one end and by a death at the other.

Of course, the great pioneers like Freud and Jung intuitively perceived and grappled with this problem many decades before others were ready even to notice that there was a problem to perceive. I have already given some quotations from Jung's writings. Freud gave expression to his concern with the problem of death in 1920 when he published *Beyond the pleasure principle* (FREUD 7). In this book he proposed the concept of the 'death instinct', or *thanatos*. This has remained a very controversial concept, even within the psychoanalytic school and many psychoanalysts have in fact rejected it as a hypothesis. Freud himself, who had so boldly stated that, 'The goal of all life is death', had later retracted from that position, when he conceded that the death instinct, unlike the life instinct, is a 'dumb' or 'silent' instinct, by which he meant that one cannot imagine the goal of that instinct and that it cannot possibly express itself directly in terms of a wish or need for death. The only way it could possibly be experienced would, he thought, be in terms of a fear of death.

One of the most scholarly discussions of the concept of the death instinct is to be found in Flugel's monograph which, was published in 1953. In this treatise Flugel discusses six features which, he believed, had contributed to the formulation of that concept.

As a first feature Flugel singled out the universal tendency of all living organisms—to die:

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This most fundamental and obvious implication [he wrote] has received little direct treatment in psychoanalytic literature and contributions have been made under headings other than the straightforward need to die (**FLUGEL 8**).

Indeed how could we explain that, on the whole, men have not fallen victim to depression, panic or paralysing inaction because of death and their knowledge of it, unless we postulate the existence of some force within man which enables him to accomplish his psychological functions: that is to live, to learn, to develop his potentialities, to create more life and then—to disappear again?

The second reason for the development of this concept was the need to find the source of aggression. Although Freud thought of the death instinct as a silent instinct, he later on suggested that it did have a voice, and that voice was aggression.

Thirdly, there is the general tendency to reduce or to abolish tension; this operates on both the physiological and the psychological levels. Freud had proposed that while *eros* expresses itself in active pleasure seeking, *thanatos* expresses itself in tension-reducing efforts.

Fourthly, there is the phenomenon of the repetition compulsion; that is, the compulsion to reinstate an earlier condition, even if that earlier condition had been an unpleasant one. Freud had been puzzled by that phenomenon and had been casting around for some explanatory principle.

Fifthly, *thanatos* is one form of expression of the principle of homeostasis, that is, the tendency in both the organic and the inorganic world to achieve and to maintain equilibrium. Here Flugel reminds the reader that the more perfect is the action of the equilibrating mechanism the nearer one comes to a state of 'complete equilibrium', which, in the case of organisms, is death. Reflection on this fact led him to formulate what he called the 'paradox of life', which is that the more perfect is the homeostatic life process, the nearer the dynamic equilibrium approximates to the condition of stable equilibrium, that is to that complete cessation of vital processes which we call death.

The final point which Flugel makes is that the concept of *thanatos* is part of a basic dualistic conception which was characteristic of Freud's whole approach.

Since Freud believed that fundamental physiological processes have mental equivalents, he thought of the death instinct as the psychological equivalent of physiological processes such as katabolism and the constant dying and re-creation of cells.

Jung, unlike Freud, did not postulate the existence of a distinct death instinct, but instead regarded it as an essential constituent of libido; and he thought of libido as deriving its very energy from the tension of the opposing life and death forces. Jung has often been criticised for his monistic view of libido, but I suspect that the difference between Freud and Jung in relation to the concept of the libido is really a matter of different levels of abstraction. Jung wrote, for instance, when discussing Freud's death instinct theory, that:

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What Freud probably means is the essential fact that every process is a phenomenon of energy, and that all energy can only proceed from, the tension of opposites ... it is sufficiently obvious that life, like any process, has a beginning and an end, and that every beginning is also the beginning of the end (**JUNG 12**).

And in his essay 'On psychic energy' Jung defines libido as a 'hypothetical life energy, resulting from the tension of the opposing life and death forces' (**JUNG 13**). Jung also, like Freud, saw death in terms of homeostasis: 'Like every energy process, it is in principle irreversible and is therefore directed towards a goal. That goal is a state of rest' (*Ibid*, **13**).

But, again unlike Freud, Jung believed that the psyche of man can and does in fact concern itself directly and naturally with death and with the process of dying. For just as 'nature prepares itself for death, so does man'. And in support of this hypothesis Jung described many dreams of patients who were approaching death: dreams in which particular symbols tended to recur, such as the theme of the journey of movement from one place to another, of re-birth, etc.

Jung had a definite conception of the archetype: he described it as a psychosomatic entity which has a physical expression in the form, of instinctive activity and a mental representation in the form of images. In other words, he claimed that archetypal images represent the goal or the object of the instinct, which is thus transformed into a psychic experience. The concept of 'unconscious phantasy', which Melanie Klein has developed, and which she has described as the 'mental expression of instinct', is strangely analogous to Jung's concept of the archetypal image.

But Jung diverges from Klein in that he recognises that the death wish and its archetypal imagery may be—and often is—experienced directly; Klein on the other hand, believed that the ego threatened by this 'deadly longing' very quickly deflects it, either through projection and/or through its conversion into aggression. She has therefore tended to discuss Thanatos almost exclusively in terms of the defences against the experience of the original instinct.

I would therefore now suggest that while the psychoanalyst, with his concept of the two opposing instincts, tends to dwell on tension, conflict and potential disintegration, Jung's concept of libido as encompassing both the life and the death forces leads to greater attention on the potentially creative nature of conflict. In consequence, not opposition but complementarity tends to be emphasised.

## Cases

To cite just a few examples through which I hope to convey something of the flavour of my impressions:

1. A young boy, aged 17, with many gifts and talents and an I.Q. far in advance of his emotional development, tells me that he has been obsessed

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with thoughts of death, that he is terribly aware of the passage of time; that he has just realised that he has already lived a quarter of his life. 'I have the odd feeling', he tells me, 'that at one moment I am looking forward to something, say a cross-country run, and shortly afterwards I am looking back on it'. A man in his early thirties dreams:

I am on a bicycle, a very strange one. I sit very high up on it. But it is difficult to control. The wheels are on the ground ... but they seem far away. Then I am suddenly on an ordinary bicycle, in an ordinary urban setting. There are people about but I am almost like a skeleton. I can see my flesh disintegrate; it putrefies; then it is almost all gone. But there is also a me who observes the skeleton me. I am terrified that it may frighten the people around me. On waking I am amazed that I was not more horrified by the dream.

The over-sized bicycle seemed to symbolise the dreamer's temptation to escape from his earthly bonds. Yet his emphasis that the bicycle's wheels are on the ground shows that there is nevertheless also a wish to remain 'earthed'. However, in the second part he does become aware that he has a body which is impermanent and liable to decay—but then some sort of individual self can be perceived and then he actually acquires a companion.

2. One patient turned to me angrily one day and exclaimed: 'You can't cure me of the ultimate disease—death.' He broke off analysis for three weeks and when he returned his first remarks were: 'I have only come back to spite my mother's ghost.'
3. One young woman frequently said in analysis: 'I wish I could go mad; then I could die and not feel guilty'; or, 'I don't passionately want to be dead, but I see no reasons for being alive; there is too much pain in it.' And, describing states of dissociation, she told me that these sometimes felt like her being in 'a fourth dimension; it is like stepping into space; like being in the universe'.
4. A gifted young artist, who walked uneasily on the borderline of schizophrenia, brought me the following dream. I will take from it just that part that seems relevant to my theme here:

There is a sea and on it a battle is going on between us and extra-terrestrial beings. In the end we do get across the water. Then we are on the final lap to the Gates of Heaven. I tell you—or it may be my mother—that we must shield our eyes when we get there, as the light would be dazzling and that we have no permission to go inside. When we get there it is as I had foreseen. But then we are suddenly outside my town and I point out to you my art college.

It is when he tells me this last part of the dream about the art college that he actually breaks down and cries. After a time he tells me that he feels like an unfixing photograph which will quickly fade away—'and yet', he continues, 'there are also the two of us, hewn in stone or rock; and we each have a tree which grows and which has arteries and veins.'

My own thinking about death and *thanatos* has led me to the following ideas, which for the sake of brevity I shall try to summarise in the form of statements:

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1. None of us, in this life, can know what death is really like. But it does not follow that the psyche may not have symbols and mental representations of it—whether accurate or false is beside the point, and anyway apparently not verifiable.
2. In man's psyche death seems to be represented as a state of absorption in a union, an absorption which tends to preclude boundaries, differentiation and separateness. One form of experiencing such a state is in, what Freud has termed, the 'oceanic feeling'.
3. Given this definition, I suggest that death represents one of the primary goals, the goal of the homeostatic process. Its attractive force reveals itself in such human behaviour as an individual's surrender to a cause or a goal or to another person—apart of course from its various neurotic manifestations like self-mutilation, purposive accidents, invalidism, suicide, etc.
4. The fear of death resides in the ego, in other words in that mental institution where consciousness predominates, and which, therefore, serves the needs for individuality, separateness, achievement and relationship to the realities of both the outer and the inner world. Thus it is only when a person has achieved a certain amount of ego organisation, when he has developed a sense of identity and has learned to tolerate his separateness, only then can he experience 'dying', that is the loss of the ego. For it is the uniqueness and the separateness of one's psychosomatic entity which is threatened by death and—of course—by the intra-psychic death wishes. This seems borne out by the fact that many incipient schizophrenics, threatened with sudden ego disintegration, first experience this as forebodings of an impending death.
5. Jung had developed the concept of the self, in part at least, in order to account for the experience of symbols of completion and totality. I find the juxtaposition of ego and self useful as it makes sense of the existence of our bi-polar feelings about death. I think of the self as that psychic institution from which emanate the oceanic feelings and the wish for fusion, in juxtaposition to the ego forces which strive for separateness and identity. The self-forces are essentially expression of the psyche's integrating—or centre-petal—functions, and in more mature states it is they who enable the ego nuclei—those islands in the ocean of unconsciousness—to come together, and to coalesce into a coherent land-mass—the ego—as Michael Fordham has described in his opening centenary lecture.

We find quite overt and explicit acknowledgement that there exists in man a death-wish in Buddhism, where this wish is named *vibhava tanhāt*. This has been translated as 'non-becoming', 'de-becoming', 'ceasing to become', or 'annihilation', and it is actually considered as the third of the three 'cravings', the other two being the craving for sense-pleasure and the

craving for becoming. In other words, the oriental person has been aware of these self-annihilatory forces inside him very much sooner than seems to have been possible for European man. The amazement and the opposition with

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which Freud's and Jung's theories about it have been received is evidence of how much this 'craving' had been repressed.

Yet clinical experience and the study of dreams and poetry reveal the existence in all of us of a whole iconography of death. In a pilot study in which I gave the Rorschach ink-blot test to five quite ordinary people, who through illness were nearing the end of their lives, though not consciously aware of it, I personally encountered, and so found confirmed for me, the existence of some very powerful and meaningful symbolic images of death. Death, in what one might call its negative aspect, seemed to be represented by several of the subjects in such images as: empty fruit; small deathly creatures; severed plants; threatening persons; drowning; clinging, etc. But other responses seemed to symbolise death as an integral part of life and clearly alluded to renewal. Thus I found responses such as: the life cycle of plants; the old sower; a sea journey; a juice flowing from a tree that makes the hair grow.

This research and the observation of my own thoughts, feelings and phantasies about death, as well as those of my patients, has led me to conclude that death has a thousand faces: it may show itself as either friend or foe, as isolating or uniting, as eerie or cosy, raping or loving, the axe or the cradle. Each one of us may see only one of these faces at a time and perhaps only a few in the course of our whole life.

6. I do not regard the death wish as necessarily neurotic. The need to undo separateness, the need for wholeness, can act as a regressive force in certain neuroses and psychoses. But it will also appear and be experienced when, following Bellak's definition of a strong ego, there is enough energy left over to 'permit the self-exclusion of the ego for purposes of creativity and *ad hoc* needs' (BELLAK I). In Western cultures it seems to have been above all the poets and the artists who have given expression, clearly and frequently, to longings for death; indeed, fingering through an anthology of poetry, I was struck how difficult it was to find poems that mourned the coming death; there seemed so many more that welcomed it. Thus Walt Whitman:

Come lovely and soothing death  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later, delicate death (WHITMAN 27)

or Stevenson:

Under the wide and starry sky  
Dig the grave and let me lie,  
Glad did I live and gladly die,  
And I laid me down with a will.  
This be the verse you grave for me:  
'Here he lies where he longed to be;  
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill' (STEVENSON 24).

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Indeed it has been the artists and their biographers who, in Western culture, have been most sensitively aware of the interdependence between death and creativity. J. W. N. Sullivan in his biography of Beethoven, for instance, describes it very perceptively when he wrote about the 'Eroica' Symphony as follows:

Beethoven was here speaking of what was perhaps the cardinal experience of his life, that when, with all his strength and courage he had been reduced to despair, that when the conscious strong-man had tasted very death, there came this turbulent, irrepressible, deathless, creative energy surging from depths he had not suspected ... Having survived death and despair, the artist turns to creation (SULLIVAN 25).

This leads me quite naturally to Part Two of this lecture in which I will consider some ideas about the creative process. What do we mean by 'creativity'? It has clearly something to do with 'inventiveness', 'originality', 'productivity', and yet it is none of these or any of these alone. The most important quality that seems to mark a work—or, for that matter, a relationship, or a way of living one's life—is that it expresses a man's need, and genuine search for, meaning.

Essential to the activity of making and creating is what I have called the 'urge to incarnate', to 'make flesh'. Professor Louis Reid has introduced the term 'creative aesthetic embodiment' and he has explored this concept in considerable depth (REID 21). Clearly these two concepts—'incarnation' and 'embodiment'—overlap. But in the Latin form there seems to be implicit a greater emphasis on the element of sacrifice, and sacrifice, it seems to me, accompanies inexorably the acceptance of the limits and limitations that impose themselves when the 'abstract' or the ideal is given form, that is body. The urge to 'embody' or to 'incarnate', so I believe, rests on the fact that we sense and dream, and we always live at the same time in a world of objects and in a world of meanings, and inevitably we carry in us the desire to bring these two worlds together. And while on the one hand we always search for ever more adequate forms through which to express



the ever-changing world of our sensuous experiences, we also strive always to imbue with meaning and significance the sensuous forms that we encounter.

The creative process seems to depend on man's capacity to mobilise contradictory but mutually reciprocal qualities: activity and passivity; consciousness and unconsciousness. The interaction and interdependence of these contradictory processes emerges clearly when one looks at the stages of the creative process as these have been discovered and identified by artists and researchers. Nearly all of them seem to agree that there are four of them; but their relative importance or their relative duration may vary from one person to another, from one activity or discipline to another, or even from one particular creative act to another in the same person. What is more, the process may be a continuing one, so that the last stage in one work or one

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part of a work can lead on to the first stage in the next phase of a work or to an altogether new work. In other words these four stages have to be recognised as an elastic and merely schematic description of the process of creation.

These four stages of the creative process have been identified as follows: first comes the stage of preparation, which is the time when a person immerses himself in a problem and feels himself drawn into a period of conscious concern and struggle. The second stage has been called the stage of 'incubation'. It is the stage when, one might say, a person 'sleeps on it'—either literally or metaphorically. He feels baffled, confused, ignorant. Then, if he is lucky, the third stage may 'happen' to him. This is the stage of inspiration; it tends to arrive suddenly, unexpectedly, marked by a feeling of certitude, and is often accompanied by a feeling of having been merely a passive bystander: 'I had only to reproduce obediently what made itself visible within me', wrote Max Ernst (**ERNST 5**). Naturally this is often accompanied by exuberance and ecstasy.

But the fourth stage is a sort of coming-down-to-earth—one of verification, of critical testing and of finding relevant and appropriate expression for what had been received in the moment of inspiration.

When one examines these four stages and thinks about their implications it becomes evident that creativity depends on a person's being able both to use his ego functions and to surrender his ego functions. Clearly ego functions predominate in the first stage and they must re-assert themselves in the fourth stage. But during the second and third stages the capacity to surrender ego functions is essential, so that one can risk 'not-knowing' and 'not-controlling' and so make oneself available to a possible experience of surprise, wonder, awe. It is this that the poet Keats has named 'negative capability', by which he meant the capacity to be in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (**KEATS 17**).

The sort of relationship one should have to the creative process and its products has been most amusingly described by Kekulé, the discoverer of the benzene ring. 'Let us learn', he admonished his learned colleagues, 'to dream—then perhaps we shall find the truth. But let us beware of publishing our dreams before they have been put to the proof by waking understanding' (**KEKULÉ 18**).

The interdependence of activity and receptivity has been understood and conceptualised by psychoanalysts like Marion Milner and Hannah Segal when they describe the creative process as 'a genital bisexual activity, necessitating a good identification with the father who gives and the mother who receives and bears the child' (**SEGAL 22**). A similar conceptualisation of the creative process also underlies Neumann's thesis that every artist is an essentially bisexual person (**NEUMANN 20**), a thesis that recent researchers into the personality of creative individuals have tended to confirm.

Inasmuch as the analytic process is also a creative venture, so analysis and

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and analyst, too, are likely to experience these oscillations between activity and passivity, between certainty and doubt. They, too, are likely to pass through periods of 'incubation', marked by feelings of 'muddled suspense'. If they are lucky they may then both be available to 'inspiration' which in that particular work-context would have to do with the discovery of a new insight, or a novel experience or the emergence of a new quality in their relationship. Certainly in my own work I am quite familiar with the experience of feeling baffled, confused, and unable to make sense of something, be it a dream or a particular situation that has developed in the transference-countertransference between the analysand and myself. I have learned to value these moments of bewilderment, to accept them and not battle against them, although they can of course be painful for both of us. But in my acceptance of this 'not-knowing', in my shedding of the mantle of omniscience and omnipotence—whether I verbalise it, and so make it explicit, or not—I know that I may ultimately help the patient to find release from his own compulsion to cling to the known and the controllable. For my acceptance of 'not-knowing' may mediate for him the awareness that he, too, may dare to grow and to create, which involves taking the risk to make something, even though he is not in possession of perfect knowledge or perfect skill or perfect control; and so good-enoughness may come to seem good enough.

I believe that there has been in recent years an interaction and a reciprocity between the studies of creativity and art on the one hand and the theoretical and clinical developments in the field of analysis and psychotherapy on the other. The pioneers like Freud and Jung first drew attention to some of the unconscious roots in art. Indeed, they helped to decipher some of the symbolic codes embedded there. Students of the creative process may in their turn have affected analytic thought and ethos. One can, for instance, detect that some analysts have come to value anew their patient's experiences of silence and of aloneness (not to be confused with loneliness), and they have re-explored the effectiveness, during certain stages in the analysis, of such analytic procedures as non-intervention and what Masud Khan has called 'un-interpreting' (**KHAN 19**). In this context I am thinking—apart from Jung of course—of the more recent work of analysts like Balint, Milner, Little, Winnicott and Khan. And it seems to me unlikely to be just an accident that these analysts have been particularly interested in art, play and creativity and in the less active, less conscious and less controlling phases of these processes.

Freud himself had already expressed considerable intuitive awareness of the value of such attitudes and phases in analytic work, as is well shown in his paper, 'Recommendations to physicians practising psychoanalysis'. In this he enjoins upon the analyst 'a calm quiet attentiveness of evenly-hovering attention' in which 'all conscious exertion is to be withheld from the capacity for attention'. And in the same paper he cites with obvious approval an old French surgeon who had taken as his motto the words: *'Je le pansai, Dieu le*

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*guerit'* (I dressed his wounds, God healed him), to which he added that the analyst might content himself with a similar rôle (**FREUD 6**).

Nor is it, I believe, just a coincidence that those analysts who have been particularly concerned with man's creative processes have also been most ready to accept the existence of a death wish. This is, of course, quite clear in the case of Jung, who seems to have been well ahead of his time. But in recent years an American psychoanalyst like Phyllis Greenacre, for instance, has stated quite boldly and explicitly that she can no more conceive of life without an intrinsic movement towards death than she can conceive of perpetual motion (**GREENACRE 10**).

One of the most important psychological processes, and one that is most relevant to the creative process itself is of course symbolisation. To symbolise involves the ability to experience the existence of links between objects which are also recognised as separate and distinct, and thus, without sacrificing uniqueness to wholeness or wholeness to uniqueness, one succeeds in experiencing both what is individual and what is universal in any particular object or situation. The capacity to symbolise, that is to have what Jung has called an 'as if attitude, depends on maturation and the achievement of a certain level of ego growth. We may, from early on, experience potentially symbolic images, the images that Jung has called 'archetypal', because they appear so spontaneously and almost universally in men everywhere and at all times. But we can only experience them 'symbolically' when enough ego consciousness has emerged so that one can relate to the paradox of identity and separateness. In other words, it is not the mental content but the attitude of mind to the mental content that determines whether or not it is 'symbolic'.

A great spurt to our understanding of the nature and development of the symbolic function has come in recent years from Winnicott's concept of the 'transitional object'. This is the name he has given to any object—tangible or intangible, formed well or hardly at all, like a blanket, a sucking vest, a teddy bear, a tune or whatever—which the child has, as it were, appropriated as his first self-chosen possession.

Winnicott regarded the child's attachment to such an object as the earliest expression of man's creative drive: for such an object is both given—it actually exists in the external world—and yet it is also made; for it is the infant that invests it with a meaning which he has drawn from within his own inner world. The transitional object thus represents both the mother and the infant and his inner world, and the bond between himself and his mother. Attachment to a transitional object occurs when mother and infant are no longer experienced by him as more or less fused. It then acts as a bridge which connects the inner world of phantasy to the outer world of reality, and so constitutes the seed of a third area of the mind, the 'area of experience'.

Here such questions as 'Is this real?' and 'Did you conceive it or was it presented to you from without?' are quite irrelevant. And this area of experience becomes then the source of play, of imagination, of culture, religion

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and art. It seems to me that what Jung has described as 'psychic reality' is that which is of the essence of what constitutes the area of experience. In this third area sensuous experience meets imaginative invention, cognitive activities are brought into relationship with emotional activities and the need for meaning finds expression in the discoveries and in the creation of forms that 'embody' or 'incarnate' experience.

In one succinct sentence Winnicott expresses his thesis that there is 'a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural development' (**WINNICOTT 28**).

I have for some time puzzled over what might be the intrinsic characteristic of play, and I have come to think that what distinguishes play from other activities is its function in terms of personality development and growth. This is not to say that other activities do not also contribute to personal growth, but in their case personal growth is secondary to the actual purpose of the activity. In the case of play personal growth is the primary, even if unconscious, objective. This hypothesis suggests itself particularly when one thinks of those various play and leisure activities—be it children or adults who are involved—where there is really quite a lot of pain, hardship, anguish and even terror: sailing 'for fun' on storm-tossed seas, sitting for hours fishing, listening to ghost stories in the dark, playing 'cops and robbers' and even 'peekaboo'. Essential to all these seems to be the attempt to increase experience—of the inanimate world, of the animate world, of the world of one's fellow humans or one's own private world.

Play then, I would suggest, is above all in the service of individuation, in the sense in which Jung has used this term. Individuation as I understand it, especially as now developed and elaborated by Michael Fordham, comprises readiness for ever greater awareness of one's own nature, with its positive and negative sides, and an ever sharper definition of who and what one is. This is then reflected in the clarity and the appropriateness of one's self-image, a recognition of one's separateness and personal responsibility, together with, and in the context of, an acceptance of the existence of patterns and processes which exist beyond our control and comprehension. In other words, for me at least, individuation encompasses 'individualisation', but it moves a person beyond this essentially ego-building process towards the search for values and meaning and self-transcendence.

The activity of play is clearly relevant to creativity. Indeed, my clinical experience leaves me in little doubt that a person who cannot play is also deprived of the joys of making and creating, and is truly crippled in his capacity to feel alive. Nor is this a new discovery. Already in 1931 Jung had written: 'The creative activity of imagination frees man from his bondage to the "nothing but", and raises him to

the status of one who plays. As Schiller says: “Man is completely human only when he is at play” (JUNG 16).

But, we may now ask, is there any difference at all between play and

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creation? My very tentative suggestion is that the difference lies in the fact that in the act of creation man tries to transcend even his urge for ego growth and individualisation in order to put himself also at the service of such self-transcending values like truth, beauty, spirit and the search for meaning. Through creativity he searches for communication and perhaps even more for communion with his fellow beings, and for the forging of links, inside himself, between the ego and the self, the personal and the collective, the here-and-now and the transcendent.

But what psychological characteristics or conflicts, one might now ask, could hinder the functioning of the creative process? A few of them come to mind because I have encountered them both inside and outside the consulting room.

For instance, excessive narcissism or the persistent reaching out for—or even worse, delusion of—omnipotence or omniscience; for this inevitably interferes with the capacity to test and to evaluate one's work and one's inspiration. It also discourages recognition of one's dependence on the knowledge and information gained and made available by other people, by other times or by other cultures. Instead, we tend in these cases to encounter haste, impatience and a general lack of persistence, of commitment or devotion, in other words qualities that mark the ‘butterfly mind’ of the dilettante. Such qualities tend to interfere with the work to be done in stages 1 and 4 of the creative process.

Other characteristics can make stages 2 and 3 difficult to attain, or to use. Thus the need to be always in control and carefully aware of all that goes on — this is likely to abort any creative work, much like the impatient cook who cannot let the cake rise peacefully inside the oven but needs to peep at it and so makes it collapse. Of course, such a need might repose on any number of unconscious fears and phantasies. There may for instance be a general fear of ‘undifferentiation and terror of the unknown’, due, as Anna Freud has suggested, to disbelief that the psyche contains spontaneous ordering forces and that they are truly intrinsic to it. Or there may be a dread of the possible disappointment that the object created may turn out not to be as ‘good’, as ‘fabulous’ as the excitement experienced at the moment of inspiration. Again there may be distrust in the ‘good-enoughness’ of one's own inner world and the suspicion that it contains forces so dangerous and so destructive that, if externalised, they would wreak disaster or else provoke revenge. Or the obstacle may present itself in an exaggerated dependence on other people's judgment which brings in its wake great apprehension lest the work that one has drawn out of the very depth of one's self might in fact evoke ridicule and dismissal rather than admiration and praise.

Thus the hindrance to creative work and creative living may stem either from the temptation to be caught up in non-ego processes, which may then be idealised, or else from an excessive distrust of the non-ego forces. For ultimately creativity depends on the capacity to have and to tolerate the ebb

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and flow, the rhythm and the oscillations between conscious and unconscious — control and non-control, ego and non-ego.

I come now to the final part of my paper, where I want to explore the possible similarities and possible interconnexions between those psychological dispositions that favour good dying and those that favour good creating.

In 1935 Helene Deutsch suggested that the art of dying peacefully depends on three factors:

1. The giving up of the object cathexes of this world;
2. The disappearance of feelings of guilt; and,
3. The capacity to silence feelings of aggression towards others.

Since then, by the way, many analysts, in particular Searles and Winnicott, have suggested that aggression may in fact help the infant—or the schizoid person—to divide ‘me’ from ‘not-me’, and so lead to stronger identity feelings and defend the individual against the temptation to fall back into the symbiotic or relatively undifferentiated mother-child unity. Of course, when a person is faced with the task of dying, then identity needs to be sacrificed rather than affirmed.

Helene Deutsch believed that these three conditions could be attained if a dying person regressed to the lower levels of psychic development, for this would permit him to exhibit, without guilt or embarrassment, the emotional cathexes of his early childhood years (DEUTSCH 3).

The results from my Rorschach research seemed to confirm some of the points Deutsch had made. The records of my research subjects were in many respects quite different from any others I had collected. They all seemed to enjoy the test, approached it with much less apprehension than one usually finds; indeed, they seemed to throw themselves into it with much enthusiasm and gave fairly free vent to their reactions, feelings and phantasies. On the whole they gave more than the average number of responses, their images were freely elaborated, they felt relatively unrestrained by the potentially cognitive requirements of the test and their emotional responses were often idiosyncratic. They certainly gave many more original responses than is usual, and some of them which I have described earlier in this paper seemed directly related, symbolically, to death and to the process of dying. There were then signs that the ego function of reality testing had become less important to them and had been superseded by a greater surrender to the emotional and imaginal events going on inside them. Their records had certain affinities with those of psychotic patients, yet they were more cohesive and less fragmented; and they supported the hypothesis that the wish for life and the wish for death do co-exist and that the relation to death is in most people a mixture of resistance and of surrender to it.



The intimate link between the death experience on the one hand, and creativity on the other, has often been discussed by Jung in terms of the

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psychological experience of transformation. Its expression in the social, cultural and religious fields has been much studied by anthropologists and historians of religion. Mysterious initiation rites seem to exist almost everywhere and they almost always enact the symbolism of a death and a new birth. This is often ritualised in an almost literal and concretistic way. For example, among certain peoples in Melanesia and Polynesia the candidate for initiation is buried or laid in a freshly-dug grave, or kept in a dark hut outside the village. His rebirth is then enacted, and frequently the neophyte must crawl between the mother's legs or appear as if spewed from the mouth of the monster. As Mircea Eliade has said, the scenario for initiates—whether they be candidates for a new age group, for a cult or for shamanship—is always the same: it is suffering, torture, death—and resurrection (**ELIADE 4**).

African stories of the origin of death show also how much the interdependence of death and creation has been recognised and how well the African knows, from deep inside himself, that man's need to create cannot but triumph over any fear of death, and that it can in fact lead him to accept, indeed to choose and say 'yes' to death.

Since death is one link in the chain of transformation, it tends to be experienced as a paradox, for every change or transformation involves both birth and death. Thus the death of one cell is the birth of the two new cells. Indeed in the case of the unicellular organism, *eros* and *thanatos* function at the same moment—and whichever of these changes one selects as primary will depend on where one's concern lies; with the death of the single cell or with the birth of the daughter cells.

Freud had in fact postulated the inevitable interdependence of *eros* and *thanatos*, claiming that they always work together and that every act is the product of their joint operation. Thus the discrepancy in the positions taken by Freud and Jung is perhaps not, after all, so very different. But Jung has been more explicit in his recognition of the interaction and the interdependence of *eros* and *thanatos* when he declared that, finally, the theme of death and rebirth is a fundamental and basic theme in every man's psyche.

Summing up, I propose that it is a plausible hypothesis that those who would die well and those who would create well are persons who are capable of being open and available both to the life forces as well as the death forces; and so they are available to the processes of differentiation and integration on the one hand and to the process of de-differentiation on the other. In other words, they are people who can learn and think and test and relate and assume control and responsibility, but they can also let go of these and bear doubt and chaos and not-knowing, without excessive panic or pain or resentment.

However, only through more discussion, a greater pooling of our clinical data and further study of biographies can we hope to discover

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whether, in fact, the person who can live and work creatively is also able to die creatively.

I cannot prevent myself from concluding this paper by expressing some profound apprehension at what we, the psychologists, may in fact be perpetrating, by probing the depths of man, where he faces his two most crucial moments: the moment of death and the moment of creation. By revealing and making generally known some of the experiences which are going on inside him, can we be certain that we are not robbing him of his capacity for spontaneous and genuine surrender to the forces that act upon him while he is travailing in order to create or to die? Once this knowledge is really well disseminated will people still be able to regress truly, neither hindering it nor forcing it? Will they really remain able to 'relate' to the unconscious and unknown inside them—or will we have encouraged them to try to seduce it, or even to rape it, in order that it may yield up its gifts of inspiration? Will people still be able to 'die their own death'; and will their death really be a true dying, a surrender, and not like suicide, a manipulation?

Fortunately the attempts to rape the unconscious have so far tended to end in failure. Either there is disintegration or else a person finds himself holding in his hand a mere handful of dust, and not the precious possession he was after. What comforts me when I pose myself these questions is that in spite of our great knowledge of the psychology of dreaming—we still do dream!

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