

SELF-ANALYSIS, LEARNING AND LITERATURE*

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I would like to address the importance of self-analysis, or at the very least self-awareness, through relatedness to authors and characters. The evidence I present is my own experience. I make no demand of generalization from a sample of one. As experienced clinicians, however, we base our expertise, in part, on our personal experience. To do otherwise is to question the validity of the intensive years of training we ask of ourselves and others in the field of psychoanalysis. Literature, including professional literature, has been very important to my learning in the psychoanalytic field. Mind you, I am in no way slighting the importance and indispensable value of one-on-one psychoanalytic work. I daresay that I would not and could not be writing this article today if I had not had several years of personal analysis. Its value has been immeasurable in my life; and is worthy of trying to explicate at another time. That, however, is not the issue here.

I came from a rigorous research, academic, scientific, statistical background in my undergraduate and masters work in sociology and psychology at Iowa State University. Part of my exposure to the psychoanalytic field in graduate school in clinical psychology at Columbia University was the reading of Sullivan's ideas as well as Freud, Carl Rogers, Adler, Fromm-Reichmann, to name a few. I was particularly impressed with

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Sullivan's (1956, Ortmeier, 1995) use of the scientific method in his detailed inquiry into a patient's life. It was the inquiring, hypothesizing, collecting information in relation to the hypotheses, relating to the patient the hypotheses as hunches or associations, the patient often rejecting the hypotheses, the patient stimulated to associations and often developing his/her hypotheses, the collecting information to support or disagree with the assertions, and so on. In keeping with the scientific approach, Sullivan developed a method of collecting data as part of his detailed inquiry. The who, what, when, where, how and why were indispensable to the inquiry of current experience that the patient relates. Such care in the inquiry provided a method to test, in a qualitative manner, hypotheses that were formulated. The detailed inquiry, in my experience, is valid for here-and-now experience, not for awareness and structuring of earlier life. Memory research would support this assertion. Early life experience is a story agreed upon by analyst and patient as the best fit for the the patient's past life; and acquired through dreams, associations, transference. Transference and dream analysis cannot be part of self analysis; at least not if previous analysis has never occurred. Witness the distortions perpetuated by Freud ^{and} Jung in their highly disciplined self analyses.

My self-analysis, as I read Sullivan and heard others lecture about his ideas, was in the form of dialogue with him as a peer or sibling, an egalitarian give-and-take. His detailed inquiry, then, became a model for me, not only in my work with patients,

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but also in looking at my own experience, i.e. in constructing and understanding my own selves-others interaction. In keeping with Sullivan's work, his approach minimizes the idealization, positive or negative, in the transference. The therapist has no vital investment in having to be right. Self-inquiry, then, becomes more a form of learning about selves through play, in addition to its therapeutic function as a way of coping with stress. Such inquiry also draws forth the possibility of a critical and/or negative array of feelings from the patient about the therapist that he/she ought to be absolutely correct, i.e. perfect. The analyst, not having to be right, is less likely to be defensive. He can pursue the analysis. A similar situation holds for self-analysis. I free myself to feel annoyed, critical, affectionate with others and of myself, a flexible floating of feelings without rigidifying the feelings and using them in the convicting of others or of myself.

I never knew or met Sullivan, but I imaged him and related to him in my fantasy as an equal. It was much more than intellectual, having much of enthusiasm, criticism, argument, disagreement---a feeling discourse as well. It did not focus directly, however, on feelings, and had little to do with dreams, metaphor, or the careful pursuit of a fantasy life separate and distinct from reality. To stress again my earlier position, the uncovering of difficult and stressful early experience is not possible through self-analysis. Defenses are too characterological, and letting go of the defenses too painful, i.e. stressful.



Neither was I in discourse of feelings, dreams, metaphors in growing up in my family nor with my peers nor teacher in the one-room little white schoolhouse I attended the first eight grades of my education. I very much related, however, to certain characters in novels, such as Tom Sawyer, or authors such as Richard Halliburton in the "illicit" reading I did on a rainy Saturday afternoon in the local library. Since my family rarely traveled outside of the Iowa farm county I lived in, my learning of the conveniences, adornment, styles, luxury, the technology of living in the "outside" world largely came from Montgomery Wards and Sears Roebuck catalogues, put in the outhouse to be used as toilet paper. While such was the practical use, no one ever appreciated, including myself, the extent of my learning in poring over the hundreds of pages of these catalogues that were brand new once a year. It was only in the outhouse that I had the right of privacy, momentarily freed from the constant social interaction in a large farm family and the ever-press of the care of the hundreds of livestock, pets and the growing of crops.

In college and graduate school at Iowa State, I developed an inner relatedness to the likes of Stephen Daedalus, J. Alfred Prufrock, characters in The Cocktail Party. Another student and I met Saturday afternoons with an English professor, reading aloud the works of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. Here, I idealized and related to characters, not authors. The English professor was of the strong conviction that knowing the life of the author only interfered with and confused the reader's knowing of the novel or



poetry or play. We, therefore, read aloud and then discussed the writing style, imagery, content, characters, plot of the writings, avoiding reading about the authors or discussing them.

In the early nineteen-sixties, immediately after graduating from White, I began reading and teaching the ideas and clinical works of Adler, Rank and Jung. I was particularly drawn to Jung's (1961, Ortmeyer, 1983) many ideas and his description of his descent into six years of rigorous self-analysis (1913-1919). In this process, he became aware of his many selves. This was long before Khan wrote about hidden selves (1983) in the tradition of British object-relations; or the Interpersonal school (Ortmeyer, 1995) focused on inner interpersonal relatedness. Jung, however, did not conceptualize the envelope of selves-others inner dialogue. He pursued the awareness and integration of self rather than of inner relationships. I read with fascination, however, his telling the story of his life through dreams, symbols, metaphors and image, rather than a detailed description of his life. He said he conquered the German hero, Siegfried, in him, thereby becoming aware of his authoritarian tyrant self. He was endeared to the blind Salome, and a wise self, Philomen. They led him down untrodden paths of learning as he played them out in story, sculpture, drawing, building. This progression of selves to consciousness in his self-analysis, he viewed as individuation in adult development. It became a cornerstone of his therapeutic work with adult patients. I would suggest that his self-analysis indeed developed

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great awareness. It is open to question, however, if he was able to change his character patterns involved in the images he self-analyzed. I idealized Jung, did not try to converse with him in my mind, but tried to emulate his style of thinking and of analysis. He was a sage, a "master", teaching me methods of associating, dream analysis, writing down feelings, and conversing with my inner selves. He invited me, as author of my selves, to try on the masks of characters to reveal the hidden selves in my psyche.

In the later nineteen-sixties, I began reading and teaching the group of British object relations theorists and clinicians. They were, for a time, my analytic family. Fairbairn(1952) became my distant, precise father; Melanie Klein(1975) my knuckle-whacking mother who had to be right---but was intensely emotionally committed to relatedness; Guntrip(1975) my compulsive, ailing brother; and Winnicott(1971) my lively, amusing, enjoyable playmate. Winnicott was my twin brother in an idealized positive relationship. He was also my transitional object, my collie dog with whom I loved, played and sometimes slept with in childhood.

More recently, in the nineteen-eighties and -nineties, Fromm(Cortina & Maccoby, 1996, Ortmeier, 1995) has become a model for me. He is the only one I have mentioned who was a real person in actual dialogue with me. In real life, in the late nineteen-fifties and early -sixties, during my training as a candidate at White, my transference to him was to idealize him as a master teacher whom I could listen to and learn from. I



deferred to him, and never got over this transference in real dialogue with him. It left me distancing myself from him, and not being able, until the last twenty years, to use him in dialogue with myself. My organizing and chairing a memorial service for him at White in 1980, the year of his death, left me with warm, collegial feelings for him---a working through of my idealization of him. These past years, he has become quite important to me. On the one hand, he is a prophet, the Jesus image that kept me hopeful and often guided me in adolescence. He also has become the strong-feeling analyst who dares me to engage in a lively dialogue with him. He is challenging, but will carefully listen when I express myself, adding to or correcting my logic and reason. I never had such a strong-feeling, challenging person in my own growing-up. I come to this experience later in life, as I am able to let go of the powerful automatic responses to submit and defer or to distance myself emotionally so that I can respond in primarily a logical mode.

Fromm was able to move to another country, another language, another culture and environment when his "voice" was no longer a strident force where he lived. He did this several times in his adult life. I would never be ready to do this, unless survival depended on it. In fact, it may also have begun as survival for Fromm(Ortmeyer, 1995). His year in Davos, Switzerland, recovering from tuberculosis; and then his migration to Chicago at the invitation of Karen Horney in each instance must have been motivated, in part, by survival for reasons of health and

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political persecution. Fromm will continue to be a prophet to me; not as a sainted wanderer but as a teacher-friend-colleague---a hopeful and wise person no matter the culture, the language or the family life. As with Jung, he will continue to be the "great" analyst, the ideal embodiment of hope, learning and growth. Do we not all need ideal images as the centerpiece of hope? Sullivan, and Winnicott, however, will be the peers, the siblings, with whom I carry on an active dialogue in the images of my mind. All are essential to my inner relatedness.

I have evolved from inner dialogue with characters in novels and poetry to authors in the psychoanalytic field whom I read and teach. While it continues an inner rich dialogue, perhaps it is timely to return to characters in novels and plays and poetry, for freedom of play and growth as I enter the last decades of my life.



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