

ADLER AND GOETHE

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Having both an uncommon love and a great respect for creative writers, Adler admitted that, "among poetic works of art which have led [him] to the insights of Individual Psychology . . . fairy tales, the Bible, Shakespeare, and Goethe . . . stand out as pinnacles." (3.p.329) Goethe, he said, "united within himself the focal points of all sensations of man." (2.p.226)

In *Über den Nervösen Charakter* (l.a.), the work with which he founded his new School of Comparative Individual Psychology, Adler quoted Goethe three times.

(1) In the chapter dealing with the mental compensation of inferiorities and its preparation he gives support to his theory by saying: "Among others, Goethe also points out that 'while perception is connected with the practical satisfaction of needs, man leads a life beyond this, a life of feelings and imagination.' Thereby the coercion towards enhancement of the self-esteem has been excellently comprehended. This also becomes clear from one of Goethe's letters to Lavater where he remarks: 'This passionate desire to drive the pyramid of my existence, the base of which is given to me, as high as possible outweighs everything else and barely admits momentary forgetting.'" (1.a.p.26; 3.p.123)

(2) When studying the child's feeling of uncertainty about his being a boy or a girl, Adler again quotes Goethe, the "fine observer with so great a comprehension for the soul of the child", who said in his novel *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung*, "Just as at certain periods in their life, children begin to pay attention to the differences in the sex of their parents, and their glances (through the envelopes which conceal these secrets) bring forth more wonderful emotions in their nature, so it was with Wilhelm after his discovery; he was more quiet and less quiet than before, though he had learned something and just from this perceived that he knew nothing." (1. b.p.51)

(3) Dealing with the problem of old age neuroses befalling many people who have not in time prepared themselves for the last phase of their existence, he says: "Goethe's radiant readiness to die, refreshingly expressed in his 'Father Kronos', seems to be for most people an unattainable ideal." (1.a.p.80) The last lines of this noble poem; addressed by the old man to Kronos, here the postilion of a stage-coach read:

"Blow, then, gossip, thy horn!
Speed on with echoing trot,
So that Orcus may know we are coming;
So that our host may with joy
Wait at the door to receive us." (5.p.130 of Vol. I)

One can agree with Adler when he says that "the analysis of a work of art for the purpose of discovering the main-springs of human action is justified." (2.p.266) He warns us, however, not only to proceed tactfully, but also that "the attraction of a work of art arises from its synthesis and the analysis of science profanes and destroys this synthesis." (2.p.268)

Those who intend to carry out literary criticism on the basis of his teaching might well be guided by Adler's words: "We have no desire to tamper with the marvellous outpourings of our poets and thinkers and shall therefore attempt merely to determine, through their creations, to what an extent we are on the right path and how much of their work can be understood by reference to the working methods of Individual Psychology." (2.p.267)

Adler applied these his own rules at the end of a lecture on "Dream and Dream-Interpretation" (1912). Having shown that the dream, "a subsidiary psychic manifestation as far as action is concerned, . . . may betray events and bodily attitudes that are related to subsequent acts," he ends by saying: "Goethe has expressed the dreamer's 'glimpse into the future' and the help and strength flowing from it in a wonderful ballad: The Count returning to his castle from the Holy Land finds it empty and desolate. At night he dreams of a dwarf's wedding. The conclusion of the poem is: 'And were we now to sing of what happened later on, then all the noise and riot would have to cease. For what he saw so nicely in miniature, he became acquainted with and enjoyed on a larger scale. Trumpets and the jingling, ringing peals of music rang out, and rider, chariot, bridal throngs, all approached and bowed before him, an innumerable happy lot. Thus it was and thus it will be.'

The feeling that this poem of the dreamer is directed toward thoughts of marriage and children is quite sufficiently stressed by the poet." (2.p. 226)

Going beyond the anticipatory character of dreams, Adler compared a dream with a dress rehearsal, for the dreamer tries out a possible reaction to a personal problem, without being responsible. When we do not isolate the dream from the dreamer we discover in both the same dynamism; and when the situation changes or, in the course of a successful treatment the dreamer's courage increases, the dreams will change correspondingly. This, also, Goethe had guessed and expressed already as the young man who wrote "Goetz of Berlichingen with the iron hand, a tragedy". (6) A disciple of Adler's showed this in analysing a scene in Act I, where Goetz interprets a dream of his own. He wrote:

"Goetz and Weislingen, free knights of the German Empire during the fifteenth century, had been close friends in their youth. When Goetz lost his hand in battle he hoped that Weislingen would in future be his 'right hand': a vision of compensation. Weislingen, however, began to like flirting with the idle women of the court society and at bishop's palaces, which brought him under the influence of the selfish princes and estranged the two old friends, who now belong to opposite camps.

At a certain moment Goetz succeeds in seizing Weislingen, makes him his prisoner, but treats him amiably at his castle, as a member of his family.

After a few days, Weislingen thinks he has fallen in love with Goetz's sister Maria, the very opposite of the frivolous ladies at court. When Weislingen asks for the hand of Maria Goetz consents, and continues: 'What I hoped in a dream, I now see with my eyes, and feel as if I still dreamed. Now my vision is out — I thought to-night, that, in token of reconciliation, I gave thee this iron hand; and that you held it so fast that it broke away from my arm! I started and awoke.'

As Goetz has been talking to Weislingen about the good old days, hoping for a renewal of their friendship and of Weislingen's giving up the side of the princes, it is natural that he dreams of the handshake . . . which is anticipatory. But there is also doubt in the mind of the dreamer: Weislingen holds the iron hand so fast that it breaks off! So after all it is a warning dream from which Goetz awakes.

Now that Weislingen, through the engagement to his sister, seems to be more securely attached to Goetz, . . . Goethe lets his hero imagine how the dream might have changed under the changed circumstances. Goetz continues:

'Had I but dreamed a little longer, I should have seen how thou didst make me a new living hand.'(8)

In the *Handbuch* (7) there are 15 references to Goethe by various contributors; Furtmüller (4) masterfully interpreted Goethe's "Iphigenie auf Tauris" and recently it was shown that Goethe's concepts of Psychotherapy anticipates much of Adler's Science of Living. (9)

Modern paperback editions of good translations, especially Wilhelm Meister and Faust, give the English reader a new possibility for a better acquaintance with Goethe's Weltanschauung, so similar to that of Adler's Comparative Individual Psychology.

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