BOLLINGEN SERIES XX

THE COLLECTED WORKS
OF
C. G. JUNG

VOLUME 7

EDITORS
SIR HERBERT READ
MICHAEL FORDHAM, M.D., M.R.C.P.
GERHARD ADLER, PH.D.
WILLIAM MCGUIRE, executive editor
VI

THE SYNTHETIC OR CONSTRUCTIVE METHOD

The process of coming to terms with the unconscious is a true labour, a work which involves both action and suffering. It has been named the “transcendental function” by because it represents a function based on real and “imaginary” or rational and irrational data, thus bridging the yawning gulf between conscious and unconscious. It is a natural process, a manifestation of the energy that springs from the tension of opposites, and it consists in a series of fantasy-occurrences which appear spontaneously in dreams and visions. The same process can also be observed in the initial stages of certain forms of schizophrenia. A classical account of such a proceeding is to be found, for example, in Gérard de Nerval’s autobiographical fragment, Aurelia. But the most important literary example is Part II of Faust. The natural process by which the opposites are united came to serve me as the model and basis for a method consisting essentially in this: everything that happens at the behest of nature, unconsciously and spontaneously, is deliberately summoned forth and integrated into the conscious mind and its outlook. Failure in many cases is due precisely to the fact that they lack the mental and spiritual equipment to master the events taking place in them. Here medical help must intervene in the form of a special method of treatment.

As we have seen, the theories discussed at the beginning of this book rest on an exclusively causal and reductive procedure which resolves the dream (or fantasy) into its memory components and the underlying instinctual processes. I have indicated above the justification as well as the limitation of this procedure. It breaks down at the point where the dream symbols can no longer be reduced to personal reminiscences or aspirations, that is, when the images of the collective unconscious begin to appear. It would be quite senseless to try to reduce these collective ideas to anything personal—not only senseless but positively harmful, as painful experience has taught me. Only with much difficulty, after long hesitation and disabuse by many failures, was I able to decide to abandon the purely personalistic attitude of medical psychology in the sense indicated. I had first to come to the fundamental realization that analysis, in so far as it is reduction and nothing more, must necessarily be followed by synthesis, and that certain kinds of psychic material mean next to nothing if simply broken down, but display a wealth of meaning if, instead of being broken down, that meaning is reinforced and extended by all the conscious means at our disposal—the so-called method of amplification. The images or symbols of the collective unconscious yield their distinctive values only when subjected to a synthetic mode of treatment. Just as analysis breaks down the symbolical fantasy-material into its components, so the synthetic procedure integrates it into a general and intelligible statement. The procedure is not exactly simple, so I will give an example which will help to explain the whole process.

A woman patient, who had just reached the critical borderline between the analysis of the personal unconscious and the emergence of contents from the collective unconscious, had the following dream: She is about to cross a wide river. There is no bridge, but she finds a ford where she can cross. She is on the point of doing so, when a large crab that lay hidden in the water seizes her by the foot and will not let her go. She wakes up in terror.

Associations:
River: “Forms a boundary that is difficult to get across—I have to overcome an obstacle—probably to do with the fact that I’m progressing so slowly—I ought to reach the other side.”

[For an account of amplification see “The Theory of Psychoanalysis,” pars. 536ff.—Eurwals.]
Ford: “An opportunity to cross in safety—a possible way, otherwise the river would be too broad—in the treatment lies the possibility of surmounting the obstacle.”

Crab: “The crab was quite hidden in the water, I did not see it before—cancer [German Krebs = crab] is a terrible disease, incurable [reference to Mrs. X, who died of carcinoma]—I am afraid of this disease—the crab is an animal that walks backwards—and obviously wants to drag me into the river—it caught hold of me in a horrible way and I was terribly frightened—what keeps stopping me from getting across? Oh yes, I had another row with my friend [a woman].”

There is something peculiar about her relations with this friend. It is a sentimental attachment, bordering on the homosexual, that has lasted for years. The friend is like the patient in many ways, and equally nervy. They have marked artistic interests in common. The patient is the stronger personality of the two. Because their mutual relationship is too intimate and excludes too many of the other possibilities of life, both are nervy and, despite their ideal friendship, have violent scenes due to mutual irritability. The unconscious is trying in this way to put a distance between them, but they refuse to listen. The quarrel usually begins because one of them finds that she is still not sufficiently understood, and urges that they should speak more plainly to another; whereupon both make enthusiastic efforts to unbother themselves. Naturally a misunderstanding comes about in next to no time, and a worse scene than ever ensues. Faute de mieux, this quarrelling had long been for both of them a pleasure substitute which they were unwilling to relinquish. My patient in particular could not do without the sweet pain of being misunderstood by her best friend, although every scene “tired her to death.” She had long since realized that this friendship had become moribund, and that only false ambition led her to believe that something ideal could still be made of it. She had formerly had an exaggerated, fantastic relation to her mother and after her mother’s death had transferred her feelings to her friend.

Analytical (causal-reductive) interpretation.4 This interpretation can be summed up in one sentence: “I see well enough that I ought to cross the river (that is, give up relations with my friend), but I would much rather that my friend did not let me out of her clutches (i.e., embraces)—which, as an infantile wish, means that I want Mother to draw me to her in the exuberant embrace I know so well.” The incompatibility of the wish lies in the strong undercurrent of homosexuality, abundantly proved by the facts. The crab seizes her by the foot. The patient has large “masculine” feet, she plays the masculine role with her friend and has corresponding sexual fantasies. The foot has a notoriously phallic significance.5 Thus the over-all interpretation would be: The reason why she does not want to leave her friend is because she has repressed sexual desires for her. As these desires are morally and aesthetically incompatible with the tendency of the conscious personality, they are repressed and therefore more or less unconscious. Her anxiety corresponds to her repressed desire.

This interpretation is a severe depreciation of the patient’s exalted ideal of friendship. To be sure, at this point in the analysis she would no longer have taken exception to such an interpretation. Some time earlier certain facts had amply convinced her of her homosexual tendency, so that she could freely admit this inclination, although it was by no means agreeable to her. If, then, I had given her this interpretation at the present stage of treatment, I would have not encountered any resistance. She had already overcome the painfulness of this unwelcome tendency by understanding it. But she would have said to me, “Why are we still analysing this dream? It only reiterates what I have known for a long time.” The interpretation, in fact, tells the patient nothing new; it is therefore uninteresting and ineffective. Such an interpretation would have been impossible at the beginning of the treatment, because the unusual prudery of the patient would not under any circumstances have admitted any-
thing of that kind. The “poison” of understanding had to be injected with extreme care, and in very small doses, until she "gradually became more reasonable. Now, when the analytical or causal-reductive interpretation ceases to bring to light anything new, but only the same thing in different variations, the moment has come to look out for possible archetypal motifs. If such a motif comes clearly to the forefront, it is high time to change the interpretative procedure. The causal-reductive procedure has in this particular case certain disadvantages. Firstly, it does not take accurate account of the patient’s associations, e.g., the association of “crab” with “cancer.” Secondly, the peculiar choice of the symbol remains unexplained. Why should the mother-friend appear as a crab? A prettier and more graphic representation would have been a water-nymph. (“Half drew she him, half sank he under,” etc.) An octopus, a dragon, a snake, or a fish would have served as well. Thirdly, the causal-reductive procedure forgets that the dream is a subjective phenomenon, and that consequently an exhaustive interpretation can never refer the crab to the friend or the mother alone, but must refer it also to the subject, the dreamer herself. The dreamer is the whole dream; she is the river, the ford, and the crab, or rather these details express conditions and tendencies in the unconscious of the subject.

I have therefore introduced the following terminology: I call every interpretation which equates the dream images with real objects an interpretation on the objective level. In contrast to this is the interpretation which refers every part of the dream and all the actors in it back to the dreamer himself. This I call interpretation on the subjective level. Interpretation on the objective level is analytic, because it breaks down the dream content into memory-complexes that refer to external situations. Interpretation on the subjective level is synthetic, because it detaches the underlying memory-complexes from their external causes, regards them as tendencies or components of the subject, and reunites them with that subject. (In any experience I experience not merely the object but first and foremost myself, provided of course that I render myself an account of the experience.) In this case, therefore, all the contents of the dream are treated as symbols for subjective contents.

Thus the synthetic or constructive process of interpretation is interpretation on the subjective level.

The synthetic (constructive) interpretation:

The patient is unconscious of the fact that the obstacle to be overcome lies in herself; namely, a boundary-line that is difficult to cross and hinders further progress. Nevertheless it is possible to pass the barrier. But a special and unexpected danger looms up just at this moment—something “animal” (non-human or subhuman), which moves backwards and downwards, threatening to drag with it the whole personality of the dreamer. This danger is like a deadly disease that begins in some secret place and is incurable (overpowering). The patient imagines that her friend is hindering her and trying to drag her down. So long as she believes this, she must go on trying to “uplift” her friend, educate and improve her; she has to make futile and senselessly idealistic efforts to stop herself from being dragged down. Naturally her friend makes similar efforts too, for she is in the same pass as the patient. So the two keep jumping at each other like fighting cocks, each trying to get the upper hand. And the higher the pitch the one screws herself up to, the fiercer become the self-torments of the other. Why? Because each thinks the fault lies in the other, in the object. Interpretation on the subjective level brings release from this folly; for the dream shows the patient that she has something in herself which prevents her from crossing the boundary, i.e., from getting out of one situation or attitude into another. The interpretation of a change of place as a change of attitude is corroborated by forms of speech in certain primitive languages, where, for example, “I am thinking of going” is expressed as “I am at the place of (on the point of) going.” To make the language of dreams intelligible we need numerous parallels from the psychology of primitive and historical symbolism, because dreams spring essentially from the unconscious, which contains remnants of the functional possibilities of all preceding epochs of evolution. A classical example of this is the “Crossing of the Great Water” in the oracles of the I Ching.

Cf. “On Psychological Understanding.” Elsewhere I have called this procedure the “hermeneutic method; cf. infra, pars. 498 ff.
Obviously, everything now depends on what is meant by the crab. We know in the first place that it is something connected with the friend (since the patient associates it with her friend), and also something connected with her mother. Whether mother and friend really have this quality is irrelevant so far as the patient is concerned. The situation can be changed only by the patient changing herself. Nothing can be changed in the mother, for she is dead. And the friend cannot be nagged into changing. If she wants to change, that is her own affair. The fact that the quality in question is connected with the mother points to something infantile. What, then, is there in common in the patient’s relation to her mother and to her friend? The common factor is a violent, sentimental demand for love, so impassioned that she feels herself overwhelmed. This demand has the character of an overpowering infantile craving which, as we know, is blind. So we are dealing with an undisciplined, undifferentiated, and not yet humanized part of the libido which still possesses the compulsive character of an instinct, a part still untamed by domestication. For such a part some kind of animal is an entirely appropriate symbol. But why should the animal be a crab? The patient associates it with cancer, of which disease Mrs. X died at about the same age as that now reached by the patient herself. So there may be a hint of identification with Mrs. X. We must therefore follow this up. The patient relates the following facts about her: Mrs. X was widowed early; she was very merry and full of life; she had a series of adventures with men, and one in particular with an extremely gifted artist whom the patient knew personally and who always impressed her as remarkably fascinating and strange.

An identification can occur only on the basis of some unrealized, i.e., unconscious, similarity. Now in what way is our patient similar to Mrs. X? Here I was able to remind the patient of a series of earlier fantasies and dreams which had plainly shown that she too had a frivolous streak in her, and one which she always anxiously repressed, because she feared this dimly apprehended tendency in herself might betray her into leading an immoral life. With this we have made a further important contribution towards understanding the “animal” element; for once more we come upon the same untamed, instinctual craving, but this time directed towards men. And we have also discovered another reason why she cannot let go of her friend: she must cling to her so as not to fall victim to this other tendency, which seems to her much more dangerous. Accordingly she remains at the infantile, homosexual level, because it serves her as a defense. (Experience shows that this is one of the most potent motives for clinging to unsuitable infantile relationships.) In this animal element, however, also lies her health, the germ of a future sound personality which will not shrink from the hazards of life.

But the patient had drawn quite a different conclusion from the fate of Mrs. X. She had taken the latter’s sudden grave illness and early death as the punishment of fate for the gay life which, without admitting it, the patient had always envied. When Mrs. X died, the patient made a very long moral face which concealed an all-too-human malicious satisfaction. To punish herself for this, she continually used the example of Mrs. X to scare herself away from life and all further development, and burdened herself with the misery of an unsatisfying friendship. Naturally this whole sequence of events had never been clear to her, otherwise she would never have acted as she did. The rightness of this surmise was easily verified from the material.

The story of this identification by no means ends here. The patient subsequently emphasized that Mrs. X possessed a not inconsiderable artistic capacity which developed only after her husband’s death and then led to her friendship with the artist. This fact seems to be one of the essential reasons for the identification, if we remember that the patient had remarked what a strong and peculiarly fascinating impression the artist had made upon her. A fascination of this kind is never exercised exclusively by one person upon another; it is always a phenomenon of relationship, which requires two people in so far as the person fascinated necessarily has a corresponding disposition. But the disposition must be unconscious, or no fascination will take place. Fascination is a compulsive phenomenon in the sense that it lacks a conscious motive; it is not a voluntary process, but something that rises up from the unconscious and forcibly obtrudes itself upon the conscious mind.

It must therefore be assumed that the patient has an uncon-
ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

...disposition similar to that of the artist. Accordingly she is also identified with a man. We recall the analysis of the dream, where we met an allusion to the "masculine" foot. And in fact the patient does play a masculine role with her friend; she is the active one who always sets the tone, who bosses her friend and sometimes actually forces her to do something she alone wants. Her friend is distinctly feminine, even in external appearance, while the patient is clearly of a somewhat masculine type. Her voice too is strong and deeper than her friend's. Mrs. X is described as a very feminine woman, comparable to her friend, so the patient thinks, in gentleness and affectionateness. This gives us another clue: in relation to her friend, the patient obviously plays the same role that the artist played with Mrs. X. Thus she unconsciously completes her identification with Mrs. X and her lover, and thus, in spite of all, she gives expression to the frivolous streak in her which she had so anxiously repressed. But she is not living it consciously, she is rather the plaything of this unconscious tendency; in other words, she is possessed by it, and has become the unconscious exponent of her complex.

We now know very much more about the crab: it contains the inner psychology of this untamed bit of libido. The unconscious identifications keep drawing her down further and further. They have this power because, being unconscious, they are not open to insight or correction. The crab is therefore the symbol for the unconscious contents. These contents are always trying to draw the patient back into her relations with her friend.

(The crab walks backwards.) But the connection with her friend is synonymous with disease, for through it she became neurotic.

Strictly speaking, all this really belongs to the analysis on the objective level. But we must not forget that we came into possession of this knowledge only by making use of the subjective level, which thus proves to be an important heuristic principle. For practical purposes we might rest content with the results so far reached; but we have to satisfy the demands of theory: not all the associations have yet been evaluated, nor has the significance of the choice of symbol yet been sufficiently explained.

We shall now take up the patient's remark that the crab lay

hidden in the water and that she did not see it at first. Nor did she see, at first, the unconscious relations which we have just discussed; they too lay hidden in the water. The river is the obstacle that prevents her from crossing to the other side. It is precisely these unconscious relations, binding her to her friend, that prevented her. The unconscious was the obstacle. Thus the water signifies the unconscious, or rather, the state of unconsciousness, of concealment; for the crab too is something unconscious, in fact it is the dynamic content that lies concealed in its depths.

I am not overlooking the fact that the deeper reason for her identification with the artist lies in a certain creative aptitude on the part of the patient.