Literature as Early Warning

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> "…there were Court Anthologists in the early days of the Chou Dynasty (1134-247 [B.C.E]) whose function was to collect songs through the length and breadth of the land for the sake of supplying the king with data for gauging the mores (*feng*) of his realm…." (Achilles Fang, "Introduction" to Ezra Pound, *The Confucian Odes*, vi)
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> …artists are useful to society because they are so sensitive…. They keel over like canaries in coal mines filled with poison gas, long before the more robust types realize that any danger is there (Kurt Vonnegut, "Address to the American Physical Society," *Wampeters Foma & Granfalloons* 92)

According to one ancient tradition, the oldest extant collection of poems, the Chinese *shijing* came together because the government presumed that poetic art, in addition to expressing personal emotions, also mirrored the changing social and political climate of the empire. This was an early version of Vonnegut's assumption about sensitive artists, their private pains a response to public woes. Disturbingly, the best-known English translation of the *shijing* was made in a psychiatric ward by Ezra Pound, who, like its fabled kings, tried to find his own politics in it. Considering Pound's ambiguous situation (Bollingen Prize Winner but also alleged lunatic and traitor), one may, of course, worry about any attempt to find predictive significance in art. With the coalminers in mind, however, one may better worry about withdrawing attention from the canaries, i.e., responsive writers.

Such responsiveness to personal and public problems is often very deliberate and clear as in Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1968). Its prefatory section and authorial interpolations thereafter show Vonnegut himself during the Vietnam War painfully ruminating on the World War II bombing of Dresden and relating these wars to other long-running American issues. Alongside this appear the sufferings of Billy Pilgrim, modeled on Vonnegut's own. Somewhat explicitly in *Slaughterhouse Five* and more so in a series of lectures that he gave at university campuses, Vonnegut drew the conclusion that Western culture inclines people to give a Cinderella-like shape to their lives, their happy endings requiring the punishment of the demonized ugly stepsisters (e.g., Dresden's citizens, the Vietnamese, or non-WASP Americans).

Artistic responsiveness is less clear when, either as a deliberate stylistic choice or from lack of self-knowledge, the authors hide the connections. Ernest Hemingway, for example, wrote "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" (1926) when he was an expatriate in Paris during the breakup of his first marriage. Instead of depicting that directly, however, it portrays the already existing strains in his parents' marriage and has the character based on his father shoot himself (something that had not yet occurred). The story was written two years before his father actually did shoot himself in 1928—and thirty-three years before Ernest also committed suicide with a gun (Berman 105).

Vonnegut had to keep delivering the same message because the larger culture was disinclined to heed it; Hemingway continued to write machismo-permeated tales of suicide, self-destruction, and reckless risk taking, perhaps because of some gender-related contradiction within both him and the culture, which neither was willing to heed. Sometimes, of course, a fiction manages to deliver part of its message, as when Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* (1906) brought reforms in meatpacking hygiene, but not the social reforms that were its main point. Consequently, like repeating nightmares, writers consciously or unconsciously tend to echo warnings work after work. Occasionally, they do so also, in their own suicides, e.g., Virginia Woolf, Georg Trakl, John Kennedy Toole, Sara Teasdale, Anne Sexton Cesare Pavese, Yukio Mishima, Jack London, Vachel Lindsay, Primo Levi, Jerzy Kosinski, Arthur Koestler, Yasunari Kawabata, Randall Jarrell, William Inge, Hart Crane, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Thomas Chatterton, Paul Celan, John Berryman, and Ryuosuke Akutagawa. Not merely in such suicides but in their works, why and how are writers sensitive to what kinds of dangers?

Somewhat Depressing Statistics

"You cannot be a good writer of serious fiction if you are not depressed" (Vonnegut, *Fates Worse than Death*, 29).

Perhaps one of the reasons turbulence has fascinated artists is that its subtleties mirror the ... shifts in our own psychologies and moods (Briggs, *Fractals*, 136).

Studies documenting a statistical link between affective turbulence and creative production include Andreasen (1987); Andreasen and Glick (1988); Hershman and Lieb, 1988; Jamison (1989, 1993, and 1995); Wittkower and Wittkower (1963). According to one British study, 38% of creative writers tested suffered from affective illnesses, as opposed to between 1 and 5 percent in the population at large at that time (Jamison 1993: 80). Vonnegut wrote to Lawrence Broer: "The medical school at the University of Iowa did a study of established writers at the Writer's Workshop, myself included, and learned that we were all depressives" (Broer 13). Vonnegut underwent therapy for that condition, which is to say that even if it may have increased his sensitivity, he thought it amounted to too much of a good thing, especially since it probably underlay his attempted suicide in 1984 (Vonnegut 1988, 87). Although affective illnesses seem to be the most common disorders among writers, they are obviously not the only ones that increase various sensitivities. Perhaps, we are all one another's canaries (i.e., warning systems), albeit responding to different stressors and with widely varying powers of expression. Human variety thus may provide community with a greater range of cautionary tales—one possible reason why psychological diversity evolved. Furthermore, the University of Texas psychologist James W. Pennebaker has spent years publishing evidence that writing about one's problems increases the body's immune system as if the energy of repressing awareness had become available to the writer once the problems were faced

(Pennebaker 1997). He has been studying college students confronting issues very close to consciousness. From literature, one expects a deeper probing, that thereby insures greater potential for healing, e.g., John Stuart Mill's ameliorating his debilitating adolescent depression by reading Wordsworth (Mill 88). As contrasted with literal autobiography studied by Pennebaker, fiction, drama, and poetry, however, provide material harder to understand and also, perhaps, more frightening, by confronting the deeply repressed.

Nightmares

"The child to begin with commonly likes horrors and he continues to indulge in them even when he does not like them….The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had first an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for is St. George to kill the dragon….Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him for a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors had a limit….Sometimes the sea at night seems as dreadful as any dragon." (G. K. Chesterton *Tremendous Trifles*, "The Red Angel," XVII)

"The gallows in my garden, people say,/ Is new and neat and adequately tall;/I tie the noose on in a knowing way/As one that knots his necktie for a ball;/But just as all the neighbours--on the wall-- Are drawing a long breath to shout "Hurray!"/The strangest whim has seized me. . . . /After all I think I will not hang myself to-day." (G. K. Chesterton, "A Ballade of Suicide")

A predecessor of Vonnegut as philosophical humorist, G. K. Chesterton, in both his above verses and fairy-tale theory, expresses wittily his defying the "limitless terrors"--night sea and dragon, images not of the finite dangers perceived by consciousness (aware of only five to nine themes at a time), but of the much more numerous threats sensed unconsciously—a vastness inspiring anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and suicidal musings. Chesterton recognizes that the child at first finds this unconscious alarm system congenial, and even when "he no longer likes" it, his developing consciousness maintains a fascinated contact with the depths. To the sensitive, though, this fascination risks turning one into an almost literal canary, plunging in death. Indeed, falls (if one includes hanging and diving into water) number among the most common suicides—perhaps literalized metaphors for reversing the painful development of the conscious mind rising from the unconscious. Since artist canaries should instead live to articulate the warning, one might wish Chesterton had said more about how the "whim" prevented suicide or how St. George limited the "limitless." (Chesterton continues his poem with a list of the attractions of life, but leaves out the nature of the mere "whim" that saves the poem's speaker.") In contrast to Chesterton's amusing brevity, according to the Golden Legend (ca. 1260 C.E.), St. George (a patron of healing) tamed the dragon and led it through the town, a miracle inspiring citizens to choose the symbolic death and rebirth of baptism. In the period of Chesterton's "Red Angel" (1909), alas, that would have sounded preachy to a modern audience that, like the child, wanted to shift from the limitlessness of the spirit to the definiteness of materialism. Despite being personally a conservative Roman

Catholic, Chesterton gives an abbreviated St. George (no more than the British, patriotic symbol) and that knight limits the "limitless terrors" simply by slaying (i.e., repressing) the "dragon" unconscious—hardly a permanent solution.

Is a temporary fix sufficient? It seems to be for the speaker of "Ballade of Suicide" but not for the speaker of Silvia Plath's 1962 confessional poem "Lady Lazarus." Powerfully, she merges her unnamed present plight with holocaust imagery, with her own childhood traumas, and with feminist anger, which together constitute a sufficiently large difficulty to justify the apparently limitless pain of her depression. The poem expects rebirth via parasuicide, i.e., an unsuccessful attempt at suicide. The verses prophesy a coming attempt—the speaker's third—one each decade, and she expects a total of nine before she dies in old age. After writing "Lady Lazarus," Plath herself survived into 1963, leaving a trail of warning poetry as she went, until her husband left her, and she finally failed to fail at suicide (Berman 156). Both Chesterton and Plath, thus represent a very common problem of modern literary canaries: doubting, blaming, or even trying to "kill" the messenger (the unconscious), e.g., by repressing it or trying to silence oneself through self-directed violence.

In the documentary film *The Trials of Franz Kafka* (narrated by Vonnegut) and in various essays, Vonnegut makes Kafka a prime example of a canary warning through death songs. For Vonnegut, Kafka's nightmarish fantasies and relatively early death come from presentiments of World War II horrors. This appraisal differs from most academic studies of Kafka, which come to the tamer conclusion that he was writing not about his era but about his father and that he died of tuberculosis. There is, of course, the third possibility that both interpretations are parts of a larger truth. Kafka's case is important to my argument because it suggests strongly—story by story—that creative writing may provide warnings to writers of self-destructive forces within themselves—forces that may also mirror self-divisions within their socieity.

Franz Kafka: Cockroach and/or Canary?

No one pushes his way through here, certainly not someone with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window and dream of that message when evening comes.—Franz Kafka, "The Imperial Message," *The Complete Stories*, 243.

The above quotation concerns a message that comes at most in day dream. It is the kind of message that writers gain through introspection and that leaves them wondering if it is some mere fiction they have themselves fabricated. This is the essence of all Kafka's tales: he is at the brink of a communication with something beyond the ordinary, but stops to ponder if the suspect message is real.

Do these halted messages arise merely from his personal concerns. Although Kafka's best-known story, *Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*) has his persona turn into an insect and be murdered by his father, Kafka wrote to his non-Jewish friend Milena Jesenska that anti-Semitism made him feel like a cockroach being exterminated in a bathroom, so that one of the tale's roots may have been that public issue (Kafka, *Briefe an Milena* 249). As is usually the case in the arts, personal and private stressors probably had a way of intertwining (e.g., the way Plath's domestic traumas were holographs of general misogyny in Anglo-American culture). As for Kafka's death, in his mind at least, it was not just a physical event: he believed that his contracting and surrendering to tuberculosis followed a long psychosomatic preparation, much of it during the strained ambience of World War I.

In August 1917, the month when he was making final revisions to his short story collection *A Country Doctor*, he himself had to consult a physician when he began coughing blood. He commented, "Sometimes it seems to me as though brain and lungs had communicated without my knowledge. 'Things just can't go on this way, said the brain; and after five years, the lungs offered to help" (Quoted in Pawel 364). He thus thought he was willing himself to death during the period when he wrote *Metamorphosis* (protagonist murdered by father), "The Judgment" ("Das Urteil," protagonist ordered to drown by father), *The Trial* (*Der Prozess*, protagonist executed by a mysterious court), and the tales of *A Country Doctor*, many of which also seem like warnings of an unconscious, self-destructive process directed by an internalized authority figure. On submitting *A Country Doctor* for publication, he wrote in the letter accompanying the manuscript: "The disease which for years now has been brought on by headaches and sleeplessness has suddenly broken out. It is almost a relief" (*Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors* 9/4/17).

Frustrated that Kafka accepted his disease as inevitable and was not seeking further treatment for it, his friend Max Brod noted in a diary, "Kafka sees it as psychogenic, his salvation from marriage, so to speak. He calls it his final defeat. But has been sleeping well ever since. Liberated?" (Brod 144). Breaking off his engagement with Felice Bauer, he wrote her how his psyche reflected the surrounding wartime world, "As you know, there are two of me at war with each other. … It wasn't my lung that the blood came pouring out of, but a decisive stab wound inflicted by one of the two opponents" (F 9/30/17). This ambivalence (desiring both health and disease) took many forms, such as his drinking un-pasteurized, probably tuberculosis-contaminated milk during an epidemic, but ostensibly as part of a natural, healing diet (Pawel 361).

To what extent do the stories in *A Country Doctor* evidence any awareness of what was about to happen? "In the Gallery" ("Auf der Galerie"} describes "some frail, consumptive equestrienne in the circus … urged around and around on an undulating horse for months" by a typical authority figure (*Complete Stories* 401). Kafka's narrator imagines this slowly tortured victim of tuberculosis but complains that he does not know why these images come into his mind in the midst of a seemingly healthy circus. In "The Problem of Reality in Kafka's 'Auf der Galerie," Claus Reschke guesses that this imagined situation is the real one, perceived unconsciously, while the narrator's consciousness accepts the theatrical illusion, yet (because of the unconscious awareness) bursts into tears without knowing why (Reschke 50).

The volume's title story, "A Country Doctor," features an ineffective doctor abandoned naked in a snowstorm and a child dying of an enormous wound. As in a dream, the doctor's thoughts guide what transpires: he thinks of horses; they miraculously appear and sweep him to his destruction; he thinks of what the groom may be doing to his maid Rosa and a large "*rosa*" (rose-colored) wound appears on the child with a worm going in and out, even though he completely missed it in his first examination. In "A Dream of Jewishness Denied: Kafka's Tumor and 'Ein Landarzt'," Sander Gilman argues that the boy's symptoms may derive from "classical turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic views embedded in the popular (and clinical) medical discourse of the day," including an alleged predisposition of Jews to tuberculosis (in Rolleston 275). Gilman does not go so far as to suggest that this association had a psychosomatic effect, but, as I have shown elsewhere, a close parallel to the worm-infested-rose wound is Andersen's fairy tale "The Snow Queen," where the character Kay is afflicted with a demonic vision that causes him to see worms crawling in and out of a rose that seems beautiful to everyone else (Whitlark 71). Kafka was thus alluding to a connection between mind and body, which, of course, is complicated in the story, since child and doctor are both personae of Kafka, to the extent that all characters in a dream are parts of the dreamer's mind, though parts that may be in conflict with one another. The results of the doctor's thoughts are nightmarish (including the appearance of the wound), but they need not be. That the power of his mind begins by worsening his situation might not preclude his reversing that effect by controlling that mind.

The pioneer of using narratives in hypnotherapy, Milton Erickson, for instance, sometimes would first suggest that his patients' symptoms grow worse. He did this because the patients came with the preconception that they could not have their very real pain simply wished away. Once, however, they accepted that they could control a symptom enough to exacerbate it, they believed in their power to suggest the discomfort away.

Unaware of that therapeutic possibility, Kafka's Doctor just proclaims that he is sick and wishes to die. His young patient also expressed that wish. A long critical tradition reads the dreamlike story in Freudian fashion with the child either a version of the doctor or some aspect of him (see Triffit, 209, n.1). At the conclusion of "Ein Landarzt," its title character, condemned by the child's relatives and friends, freezes to death in "the frost of this most unhappy of ages" while (according to the Doctor) the minister unravels his robes because his congregation have lost their faith. According to the Hasidic Rebbe Israel of Rizhin, "In the latter days" that is, before the coming of the Messiah there will be great coldness in regard to faith. And the remedy for this will be to "gather" and speak about faith in God and in the *tzaddikim* [the righteous]" (Buxbaum 204). As has long been recognized, Kafka's story parodies various Hasidic narratives, including those where the Baal Shem Tov (the faith healer founder of Hasidism) communicates with his miraculously swift horses (whereas Kafka's Doctor is taken by his equally gifted steeds to his doom).

During World War I, Eastern Jews displaced from their Hasidic communities brought with them the belief that telling tales of the *tzaddikim* (righteous) could bring healings of soul and body. The oral narratives are themselves often stories within stories about such remedies. According to one tale, while relating how his grandfather's teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, danced in religious ecstasy, the lame Rebbe of Helish began to caper and suddenly found his legs well (Buxbaum 177). In another legend, a Belzer Rebbe, by telling about a cure, staunched a baby's bleeding (Buxbaum 185).

Through Georg Langer, a disciple of a later Beltzer Rebbe, Franz Kafka learned of exiled Hasids in Prague (Karl 404; Robertson 195-96). Max Brod recalls that actual contact with them (beginning in 1914) left Kafka internally divided, attracted by the "primordial strains" but alienated as if in "a visit to a tribe of African savages" (Brod 137). Based on Kafka's interest at this period, Dagmar Lorenz's article "Kafka and Gender" largely interprets "The Judgement" as a reaction to Baal Shem Tov legends (in Preece 184). At some time, Kafka bought various tomes of Jewish lore including M. J. bin Gorion's *Sagen der Juden, Von der Urzeit: Jüdische Sagen und Mythen* (1913) and Max Buber's *Die Legende des Baalschem* (1908). A diary entry for October 6, 1915, for instance, summarizes tales of the Baal Shem Tov. In 1917, he wrote Brod, "The Hasidic tales in *The Jewish Echo* may not be the best. But all these stories—I don't know why—are the only thing Jewish in which, regardless of my condition, I always and immediately feel at home" (*Letters* 9/17). Strange images from a religious past, Hasidism came to him like a visitation from the unconscious and thus attracted him only to the point of not quite embracing it. In a 1922 diary entry, Kafka recalls "A Country Doctor" in connection to his tuberculosis and interprets the story as meaning that miraculous help may come when people exceed their personal resources (T 892). Since, however, the "help" (receiving magical horses) destroys the Doctor, this late comment shows no more than his usual, irony-tinged, incomplete faith and also the continuing importance to him of this tale, whose title he gave to the entire collection

In "Before the Law" ("Vor dem Gesetz") another tale from that collection, a Man from the Country comes to the gateway of the mysterious Law, is intimidated by the Gatekeeper (who says that many guarded gates lie beyond), withers with age, while the gatekeeper remains strong, and dies without ever entering. The repression, the barrier, is the narrative's pervasive image, but through it, the Man from the Country, now almost blind, glimpses a light streaming immortally from the "Law." The Law may signify (among other things), the Torah from which Hasids expected healing light. "Rabbi Nahman [a successor of the Baal Shem Tov] said that a person has to know how to tell a story because every story has something that is concealed. What is concealed is the Hidden Light.…Where was it hidden? In the Torah—or in holy stories" (Buxbaum 111).

Hartmut Binder notes another Hasidic analogue of "Vor dem Gesetz: The Baal Shem Tov told a story of a king (i.e., God) who amazed his courtiers with a palace that seemed to extend unreachably far (as Kafka's way to the Law does according to the gatekeeper). The prince, however, sees that this effect is an illusion created by a mirror (as the insuperable boundary in Kafka's story depends on mere report). Being a fairly simple

healing story, the Baal Shem Tov's parable shows how an obvious change of perspective can solve the problem. With the protagonist's perceiving the Light of the Law, Kafka also focuses on how an altered perception can transform a situation. He raises, though, the modern question, how can one reconcile the man's subjective experience of luminous vision and his objective one of declining in size, eyesight, and vitality?
A first clue to a possible solution is that the gatekeeper remains powerful and seemingly unchanged while the Man from the Country, as if from the frustration of waiting, ages and grows childish. His deterioration, thence, is at least as much a result of his state of mind as of the passing time. Supporting a psychological reading of the entire narrative is its oneric vagueness, devoid of any explanation how the protagonist could be fed and maintained over years of waiting in an anteroom of the Law. If the story is indeed like a dream, then the conflict between protagonist and gatekeeper resembles that between the two opponents in Kafka's divided psyche. Throughout many of his fictions, a childlike, literally or figuratively little person opposes a large, parent-like authority. Commenting on the presence of this pattern in his earlier story *The Judgment* ("Das Urteil"}, he noted that his main character's father was psychologically within the son (*Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910-1913*, 278; Whitlark 42).

Instead of paying enough attention to his unconscious to reconcile the conflicts, Kafka prefers the Modernist alienation of leaving his persona blocked. Before composing "Before the Law," he wrote in a November 30, 1914 diary, "I am at the final boundary, before which I should perhaps sit for years, in order again perhaps to begin a new, again-unfinished story." Admittedly, he managed to amplify this metaphor into "Before the Law," but (except for one, ambiguous glimpse of the light) the tale is permeated with the idea of failure to reach the goal—a goal that the diary entry designated as creative writing, which for him seems to have meant accessing the unconscious only to break off contact in disbelief. Given this trajectory, Kafka understandably often suffered from writers' block, and his doing the short stories of *A Country Doctor* was partly because of difficulties tackling a longer (also despairing) work such as *The Trial*. The major characters of those short stories are not very happy—the despondent, wounded ape of "A Report to an Academy" ("Ein Bericht für eine Akademie") the Shopkeeper of "An Old Page" ("Ein altes Blatt") afflicted by filthy, subhuman invaders, the unreconcileable enemies of "Jackals and Arabs" ("Schakale und Araber"), and the murder victim of "A Fratricide" ("Ein Brudermord).

Perhaps this emphasis on negativity and blockage is precisely what appealed to Vonnegut. In *Slaughterhouse Five*, for instance, Vonnegut describes himself as spending many years unable to write about his Dresden experience. Even when he does, the vehicle is Billy Pilgrim's suffering by being "unstuck" in time, as if the preferable condition was to be stuck. The volume ends with Vonnegut declaring that he has been turned to a pillar of salt by the events, an image of radical immobilization comparable to the depression he associates with serious literature. This is a peril in his otherwise intriguing canary metaphor: the implication that artists should stick to the cage and keel over.

Kafka's short story with the closest tone to Vonnegut's dark comedy is his satire of contemporary colonialism, "In the Penal Colony." Kafka was revising the story when he first noticed the tuberculosis. The story is notable for its graphic description of a writing machine whose acid-spraying needles penetrate into the victims' internal organs, as colonialism itself was the invasive imposition of European writing (scriptures, science, literacy) on non-European cultures. For his coughing blood during the first week of August 1917, see Pawel 358. For his work on "In the Penal Colony" from August 8-9 (the latter date being when he had the most massive pulmonary hemorrhage—the one that he could not ignore), see *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1913-23*, 178-180. His revisions contained in that diary focus on the gruesome suicide of the officer, very literally stuck on a spike, which protrudes "as if it bore witness to some truth" (D2 178). As usual for Kafka, that truth remains a mystery.

Narcissus and Goldmund

In *Beneath the Wheel* (1906), the only Hesse book I've read that has a hopelessly unhappy ending, he shows himself as an abused schoolboy who gets drunk and drowns.—Kurt Vonnegut, "Why They Read Kafka, *Wampeters Foma & Granfalloons*, 114.

In "Why They Read Hesse," Vonnegut generally portrays Hesse as a non-canary, because of his reassuring fairy tales. Despite also being belittling, the above sentence from that essay, recognizes a darker work, *Beneath the Wheel*, Hesse's semi-autobiographical novel about his own bipolar condition and about the grievances of fin-de-siécle adolescents. Hesse, thus, qualifies as a canary, albeit a very different one from Kafka, in that, after his Jungian psychoanalysis, Hesse had his protagonists abandon self-destruction for self-improvement.

Like most people, he experienced the present flavored by a remembered past and an imagined future, but his fictions usually reconciled readers to these in a psychological manner. This is most obviously true in *Narcissus and Goldmund,* whose title characters are associated with future and past problems respectively, but with those set reassuringly in a fairy-tale Middle Ages.

Hesse needed to make it this gentle. His readers expected from him some Taoist-tinged tale of the far-away and long ago, such as *Siddhartha*. Instead, he had just been writing simultaneously the jarring, semi-autobiographical novel *Steppenwolf* and the autobiographical collection of poems *Krisis: A Piece of Diary in Verse* (both composed 1926-1927). Together they describe insomniac nights spent in joyless drinking and partying to forget his broken second marriage. At this point his bipolar condition was exacerbated both by personal and public worries at the end of the Roaring Twenties (as T. S. Eliot had written his *Waste Land* concerned about a breaking marriage and world, but at the Twenties beginning). Given Hesse's previous fans' dissatisfaction with the two volumes' relatively direct presentation of his crisis, he was wise to withdraw from the Zurich dancehalls to his castlelike Swiss retreat and make *Narcissus and Goldmund* into a more charming version of society on the point of collapse than either *Steppenwolf* or *The Waste Land*.

In other words, from 1926-1927, he was a fairly primitive canary, screaming, more than singing his agony. Throughout his life, what his biographer Ralph Freedman calls “ghosts of the past” pursued him, causing him to threaten suicide, repeatedly (43-49, 51-52, 190, 261-66, 280-290). He might have joined the long catalog of famous authors who killed themselves—the simplest canaries. Based on the previous work of C. Neuringer and E. S. Schneidman, Denys deCatanzaro’s *Suicide and Self-Damaging Behavior: A Sociobiological Perspective* notes that suicidal thinking commonly is of an unliterary, simple sort, using “terms such as *all, none, always,* or *never*” (75). Although in rare cases, such as Silvia Plath’s last poems, a suicidal mood may yield enduring art, that is not often the case. Consequently, artist-canaries who do more than signal a problem through their demise, must find a more nuanced way of depicting the issues through transmuting these into literature.

Narcissus and Goldmund does this first by showing how to deal with the past memories affecting the present. Goldmund begins tormented with guilt, because of “some secret flaw [*Sühne*, more literally, expiation,] attached to [his] birth” (Hesse 17/21). He has “forgotten [his] childhood” (44), but in response to Narcissus’s therapeutic probing, he, under carvings of dogs and wolves, howls, ”I’ll lose my mind and those animal snouts will devour me” (47) He is having the basic insight of *Steppenwolf*, that each person contains an inner wolf from the steppes; to be bitten by him is to become him, pulled back into savage nature. Terror about this (coupled to his awakening sexuality) leads him to fears of damnation. A step beyond *Steppenwolf*, when this nature/past/unconscious threatens to devour his conscious self, he finds it taking on the kindly *anima* form of his mother. Obviously, Hesse had been reading the tomes of his therapist, C. G. Jung, who had helped him extricate himself from the sense of sin his missionary parents had instilled in him. So, like Hesse, Goldmund (despite a scene where he longs to drown) does not actually kill himself but becomes an artist. Hesse provides a few descriptions of Goldmund’s sculptures to convince the readers of this, but ultimately Goldmund’s greatest project remains unfinished. The (Romantic) convention is of the professionally failed artist, whose true art is his life—in this case, a life as witness to the manic glut of bourgeois culture. It sickens Goldmund and he keeps fleeing from it, thereby sabotaging his career. He also sees the literal sickness that descends on the urban affluence: the plague. In this detail, Hesse was a somewhat obtuse canary, aware that the Roaring Twenties were heading for disaster, but presenting a wrath-of-God-like plague, rather than the economic depression (that, ironically, was a closer metaphor for the psychological depression that was Hesse’s own recoil from the glut). More perceptively, Hesse has Narcissus witness a massive pogrom, for the medieval citizens’ deal with disaster by killing Jews—what actually reoccurred in Hesse’s own age, the Great Depression preparing the way for Hitler.

Is there any way for artist-canaries to escape a past-poisoned present? Hesse’s portrait of Narcissus presaged what would become his characteristic manner of avoiding depression: play with ideas, first in *Journey to the East* and more intensely in *The Glassbeadgame*. Their precursor, the speculative theologian Narcissus, lives much of his mental life contemplating the future, which he extrapolates through his deep understanding of people's characters. Reluctantly, he recognizes that his fate is to become abbot and he is first drawn to Goldmund because Narcissus "had been quick to recognize" the latter's "character and destiny" (17).

Thus oriented, Narcissus is free from painful memories and absorbed confidently in working toward the ideal: "despair was unknown to him" (173). When he is still an unmixed character type (before the deep influence of Goldmund), Narcissus believes, "since man is a dubious mixture of mind and matter, since the mind unlocks recognition of the eternal to him, while matter pulls him down and binds him to the transitory, he should strive away from the senses ….in an attempt to construct a purely spiritual world" (293). Thereby, he is constantly refining his own character, through prayer and meditation.

Hesse's Narcissus sounds nothing like the version of his namesake in Greek mythology or in Freudian theory, but corresponds closely with the version of Narcissism encountered by Heinz Kohut, the founder of American self-psychology. According to him, his Narcissistic patients were sensitive introverts, who turned inward because, not having developed a mature sense of self, they retained in the depths of the psyche a childish, grandiose self (which provided only temporary comfort). The primary activity of Kohut's Narcissists is attempting to perfect this radically incomplete, childish self (the childishness Vonnegut suspects in Hesse and his fans). A typical means of self-completion is through intense friendships, where they seek to find in the friend what they lack. Narcissus's attitude toward Goldmund exemplifies this, in that their friendship was so intimate as to be criticized in the monastery, but Narcissus, otherwise scrupulous, persists in it because it helps him to perfect himself.

In this characterization, Hesse draws on many sources, including his own life and the concept of "introversion" a concept popularized by his therapist C. G. Jung. That idea anticipated Kohut's understanding of Narcissism. Note that just as Kohutian "Narcissism" is not identical to "Narcissistic Personality Disorder," supposedly derived from it, Jung's "introversion" is not the permanent orientation it more recently has been considered (e.g., in Myers-Briggs personality typing). Indeed, according to his autobiography, despite being an "introvert" as a child, Jung eventually managed to build a satisfactory self and become an "extravert."

Kohut's prime example of Narcissism is Kafka and the personality characteristics Kohut cites seem tailored to writers in general. What then do Narcissus and Narcissism have to do with canaries? In many regards, Narcissism (withdrawing into the self) functions as the cure for their over-sensitivity to external stressors, but like many cures it has side effects. Even Hesse's Narcissus regrets being emotionally dissociated, his monastery a confining place where one is not fully alive. Since the late 1920s when *Narcissus and Goldmund* was written, however, Narcissistic preparation for the future has become a more alarming activity—as, for instance, in Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963), where a thoroughly dissociated scientist destroys the world.

Fear and Individuation

"That cumbersome computer [the human brain] could hold so many contradictory opinions on so many different subjects all at once, and switch from one opinion or subject to another one so quickly, that a discussion between a husband and wife under stress could end up like a fight between blindfolded people wearing roller skates".—Kurt Vonnegut, *Galapagos* 253.

Like Kafka's "A Report to the Academy" about an ape's sorrow at attaining human intelligence, Vonnegut's novel *Galapagos* derides the idea that evolution has brought progress. He argues that mental contradictions make the present human condition untenable. Although the arts give many specific warnings, their largest function is as commentary on the problems of human development.

As previously theorized (in Whitlark, "The Sequence of Individuation," http://www.goertzel.org/dynapsyc/2005/Whitlark.htm), Clare Graves' development of conscious states coordinate with the sequence of unconscious states C. G. Jung mentioned in *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, *CW* 9, par. 44-66. The conscious/unconscious pairs are categorized: (1) Survivor/Transitional Object (often a Beast image); (2) Truster/Trickster; (3) Unscrupulous Competitor/Hero; (4) Virtuous/Shadow; (5) Materialistic Analyst of Things/Anim(a/us); (6) Empathizer with Every Person; Wise One; (7) Distancer/Self. Each unconscious state is complementary and compensatory to its conscious state, but naturally, contains memories of earlier states, thereby contributing to that mental self-contradiction of which Vonnegut, Kafka, etc. complained. Each unconscious state has a complex, almost amorphous configuration, but in reaction against that seeming limitlessness, when consciousness perceives these depths, it usually does so in terms of images, limiting and defining them. With Kafka's persona (Gregor Samsa) turning into a bug in *Metamorphosis*, for instance, the character is regressing all the way to a particularly early phase of stage one, imaged as a very primitive form of the Beast. Gregor, however, had previously developed to a virtuous, hard-worker (stage 4). Consequently, the regression is resisted by an Oedipal father—a Shadow figure—punishing him for moving backwards toward a stage when consciousness was a tiny flicker in a vast unconscious night. Similarly, Chesterton's St. George is an abbreviated version of the Hero (an image limiting the unconscious at stage 3). In other words, although the "archetypal" images represent the unconscious, they are a form imposed by consciousness upon the depths and their stories are thus often about the defense of consciousness. What I have been complaining about is the materialistic simplification of this defense (during the Modernist period, dominated by stage 5). Indeed, Kafka's stage-six point is that the reader should empathize with the suffering human-insect, who should not simply be exterminated by his Shadow Father. Psychologically more detailed, *Steppenwolf* teaches that despite the original misgivings of Herman Hesse's persona, Harry Haller, his inner wolf need not be killed, but can be integrated into consciousness.

What does this have to do with artist-canaries? Being only able to handle between five and nine themes at a time, consciousness tends to lump the countless, unconscious alarms into archetypal images. The devouring Beast (e.g., wolf or dragon) is a particularly common metaphor for the worry that all the alarms will pull the mind back into the unconscious darkness, from which stages one to four have risen, with progressively larger, more-differentiated consciousness. What, though, happens from stages five to seven? Although the worry about going backwards may persist, stages five to seven bring a new concern: they gradually integrate conscious and unconscious—a potentially threatening situation for consciousness.

The issue, then, is distinguishing fears of the developmental past (e.g., the archaic Beast) from fears of a technologically developed future (a relatively new entry into the unconscious) The most common image for the latter is now the cyborg, the body turning not into a Beast, but, piece by piece, into unliving/unloving artifice. In the Star Trek series, for instance, the original Borg were part-machine aliens, who threatened to "assimilate" humans into a collective mind, which eliminated individual consciousness. Throughout a number of his books, Vonnegut has the universe destroyed by Trafalmadorians, aliens that look as if they are part plumber's helper and that are unemotional in their absolute fatalism. *Timequake* describes them as anthropomorphic versions of chemical elements, an expression of his thoughts about chemical determinism after being diagnosed as bipolar.

During the lower-numbered Graves/Jung stages, warnings about the future tend to be really warnings about the past coming again—anxieties about the return of the Beast. These, of course, continue but with the Modernist period of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), there has been the concern that extending consciousness might drain life of nourishing emotions (as with Hesse's Narcissus). Unlike the novel on which it is based (in which the monster is an android, the Boris Karloff movie *Frankenstein* (1931) is a step toward the cyborg—the bolts on the monster's neck and the stitching giving him a fragmented, frightening appearance. After World War II, however, the holocaust, atom bomb, and (eventually) awareness of ecological crisis have generally associated cyborgs with super-villains. Before World War II, there were few prosthetically enhanced superheroes and similar figures (e.g., the Bionic Man and Woman) continue to appear, but in the minority. The norm is that moment in *Return of the Jedi*, when Luke Skywalker notices his own mechanical hand and worries that he may follow his cyborg father into evil. His solution, however, is not to reject that father but redeem him through love. Literature needs to do more than warn; it should provide some means of avoiding being immobilized through resultant fear or despair.

Consider, for instance, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (book 2001, film 2003). The Defense-Against-the-Dark-Arts instructor has the pupils confront their fears by laughing at a boggart, who changes itself into an image of each terror. Although less explicitly, much literature employs this device, teaching that fears themselves are re-fashionable images (even when the problems underlying the fears are real). Being thus flexible is not an answer to all the world's problems but it is a necessary beginning. And if literature does provide an early warning for both writers and readers, then both are thereby given at least some extra time to be forearmed about slow but dangerous processes in individual psyches and in society as a whole.

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