

Henry A. Murray

An Appreciation

In these days in which the nation searches the state of its intellectual resources, it would be worthwhile for the Federal Government to make available a grant for the study of the personality of Henry A. Murray.

For Henry Murray is a creative man: This can hardly be news about the father of the most important native American personality test. Though his "Explorations in Personality," is also a classic, I don't think that his personality theory, as expressed in the "Explorations" is sufficiently appreciated in the U.S.A. It has seemed to me that it has attained more importance in some European countries, notably Scandinavia, and will yet have a renewed impact here. His was a perceptual theory of personality long before the rest of the academic community saw any of the systematic experimental values of psychoanalytic concepts. Psychoanalysis might still profit from Murray's need-press schemata or from his systematization of the concept of projection. It might be difficult to think of even one other psychologist who could have organized the psychological section of O.S.S. when Murray did: One must remember that clinical psychology hardly even existed then as a concept. Murray had the psychoanalytic training, the experimental know-how and above all the flexibility and vitality to create whatever the circumstances called for.

What the dynamics of his early life were that engendered such spirit we do not know; his later training in varied fields obviously contributed: After Groton and Harvard College, an M.D. from Columbia in 1919, supplemented by an M.A. in Biology. A surgical internship at Presbyterian Hospital from 1920-22 was followed by research at the Rockefeller Institute and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry

from Cambridge University in England, in 1927; and after that to Morton Prince, the Harvard Psychological Clinic, psychoanalytic training under Franz Alexander and Hanns Sachs, to mention the barest outline (which, for instance omits his contact with Carl Jung; that too left its imprint). This background may help make intelligible the organismic nature of his personality theory: it was often thought that the picture of a schema of need and press looked like an organic chemical compound.

All this does not necessarily make Henry Murray the easiest person to be with: to start with, it is difficult to keep pace with him, be it walking or thinking. Particularly the latter process is rapid, nearly bubbling, accompanied by the exhilaration of "Aha" experiences, and bewildering: especially to a Graduate student who would like to get his thesis firmly circumscribed and reacts with anxiety to a constant flux of ideas; alas, the process which Kris has called "regression in the service of the ego" can be observed in awesome proportions in Henry Murray; after a while one may plot an "r" for the excursions—not without having sweated some.

There is the curious admixture which Jones had observed in Freud: sometimes an easy credulity, too much open-mindedness, and then the sharp testing. I think it's probably just a form of regression in the service of the ego of very gifted people who can let themselves go more freely than others. That Murray is deeply imbued with an almost mystical need to search is evidenced by his life-long interest in Moby Dick—that romantic American version of the Faust theme. The Harvard Psychological Clinic Annex is called the Balleen, and an imprint of the mighty whale

serves often as Henry Murray's informal signature.

There are frozen faced men who, with impeccable judgment, are ever ready to guard against the smallest error in irrelevant issues and who meet with a total lack of imagination every problem of importance. In short, Henry Murray is not such a man.

If the picture of Henry Murray is not complex enough so far, add to it the fact that he had been voted the most popular lecturer at Radcliff year in and year out, and could attain the same distinction with any other female group extant. Add also the fact that he had made the Harvard Psychological Clinic a jewel of a Gold-coast claustrum behung with old prints, letters from the world's great; he instilled it with the freest and easiest spirit (among a slew of rugged individuals) that can be found anywhere. Then, add to this a boyish

figure and a willingness to help; an often very conservative element, not without some traces of Boston's Beacon Hill's aristocratic notions; an easy social footing with many prominent people and probably all the gifted ones, and a first-name relationship to the tobacconist of many years acquaintance; he never wears a winter coat, probably supports Harvard at least as much as it supports him, has never held office in any professional society, possesses courage and an immaculate prose—and you have a small part of the man that is Henry Murray.

On his 65th birthday: *Gaudeamus igitur . . .*

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