

Organ Inferiority and Criminality

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The recently published, beautiful English edition of *TYL ULENSPIEGL*, by Charles DeCoster, has over a broad field riveted attention on this literary masterpiece. The original was published in French in 1869.

The book deserves the highest interest not only for its literary value but for its analogy between what has happened today to the many countries occupied by Hitler with what occurred in the sixteenth century in Belgium when it was occupied by Philip II, the place and the time of the book. Tyl Ulenspiegel is the fabulous hero and his life became the Flemish legend of courage, patriotism, and love of freedom. The book even is regarded by Belgian writers as the foundation of Belgian literature. In spite of the tragic background of the book, it is full of jokes, but jokes which serve to cheat and mock the oppressors and traitors of the Belgian people.

Tyl Ulenspiegel is a peasant, who has nothing to save his life but his wit, his cleverness, and his courage. Yet he succeeds not only for himself, but for his people, whom he is able to free from a man, the fishmonger, a dreadful monster who in the most cruel way possible murders people. He uses a toothed waffle iron which bites like a set of wolf's teeth. Sneaking up behind his victims, he kills them with this weapon, biting it into their necks. When the corpses are found, it looks as if a werewolf, in which the people believe, had killed them. Ulenspiegel sets a wolf-trap and catches the supposed werewolf, thus bringing the fishmonger to trial for his crimes.

When the fishmonger is caught and brought into the torture chamber, a discourse takes place which shows in a marvelous way the eminent psychological knowledge of the author. DeCoster, who wrote the book in 1869, anticipated with the splendid visionary power of a great writer what forty years later, Alfred Adler first explained scientifically as the connection between shortcomings and the urge to compensate, sometimes in very destructive ways.¹

The judge asks the fishmonger how Satan had whispered to him "such dark designs," and the fishmonger's reply shows the way in which so many criminals seek to overcompensate their inferiority. It reads like a textbook on the problem, "How to become a criminal."

The fishmonger says:

"I myself am Satan, my natural being. Even when a child—but ugly looking, unfit for all bodily exercises—I was taken for a ninny and often beaten. Neither the boys nor the girls had any mercy. In my youth nobody wanted me, even when I paid.* So

*The English translator made a mistake in translating the original "nulle" with "nobody." "Nulle" is used exclusively in the feminine and DeCoster wanted to stress the point that the fishmonger was rebuked by woman even when he was willing to pay, which means much more than the vague "nobody."

I conceived a frigid hatred for everything born by woman. That was why I denounced Claes, beloved by everybody. (Claes is Ulenspiegl's father whom the fishmonger, by his denunciation, brought to death.) And I loved only money, which was my white or golden darling; in having Claes killed, I found both—profit and pleasure. (In those days, the denunciator received pay.) After that it was necessary for me to live more than ever like a wolf, and I dreamed of tearing with my teeth."

Then he refers to his last victim, a young girl:

"For her—when I saw her so sweet, sleeping on the sands in the sun—I had love and pity, but feeling myself too old and not able to take her, I bit her."

In the fishmonger's reply we find, point by point, the criterion of overcompensating shortcomings in a destructive way: The urge to cultivate hatred when love cannot be found, to search for satisfaction by destroying what one cannot possess, to worship money as a substitute for love, and to feel oneself the enemy of the whole world which, one believes, has definitely rebuffed him and ostracized him. "Why don't I have you all by the neck!" the fishmonger exclaims.

As mentioned before, there are many analogies between our time and the time of Philip II. It seems not too far-fetched to think of Hitler who, having been rebuffed in his youth, became the world's enemy and, with technically improved weapons, like a much more monstrous werewolf, tried to "have you all by the neck."

One of the greatest dramatists, the Norwegian, Henrik Ibsen, in his masterpiece, *The Pretenders*, has created a very powerful personification of the same problem: Bishop Nicholas, the eunuch. Out of desolation and despair about his physical misfortune, this demoniac man wants to throw his own country into complete ruin. He hatches plot after plot, sows distrust and discord everywhere to prevent any reconciliation between two equally strong pretenders to the Norwegian throne, for their union would assure peace for the whole country. But peace is not what the frustrated Nicholas wants; what he wants is to insure destruction to all, as does the frustrated fishmonger in *Tyl Ulenspiegl*. Speaking about one of his intrigues, Nicholas says:

"I would hatch it out into a hawk that should cast the dreadful shadow of his wings over all the land and strike his sharp talons into every heart."

And much like the fishmonger, he explains how he happened to become so vile:

"Ay, I have hated much . . . But I hated because I could not love. Fair women—oh I could devour them even now with glistening eyes! I have lived eighty years, and yet do I yearn to kill men and clasp women; but my lot in love was as my lot in war: naught but an itching will, my strength sapped from my birth; dowered with seething desire—and yet a weakling . . . the halfman

... Now it is over. . . I have not sinned; it is I that have suffered wrong; I am the accuser!"

"I am the accuser!" Here again we meet this feeling of believing the whole world to be one's enemy, the root of the urge to compensate by destroying others.

The most famous and best-known example of this kind of compensation for physical shortcomings is Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, telling how he turned into a villain through his deformity:

"But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty,
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd thus of fair proportion,
Cheated of feature, by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
Why I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity;
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain, "

No scientist could ever describe as impressively this terrible result of being physically frustrated as have these great poets. Yet we needed the scientist to understand the connection between inferiority-feeling and the urge for compensation. And we need psychological understanding to avoid destructive compensation and to find the way for satisfaction by constructive means.

¹Uber Organminderwertigkeit, Vienna (1907)—Study of Organ Inferiority published in 1917 in New York.