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Human Navigation and the Sixth Sense

R. Robin Baker
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981, 138 pages, $14.50.

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Human Navigation and the Sixth Sense is a persuasive book. It is persuasive because R. Robin Baker guides the reader step by step through his Barnard Castle and Manchester experiments, which demonstrated a magnetic sense of direction in human beings, and it is persuasive because it is so well written. Baker writes clearly, concisely, and smoothly, making his most complex experimental variations easy to follow. It is at once refreshing and reassuring to read "scientific" prose which makes no attempt to impress the reader with the difficulty of research by assuming a style which conveys a sense of difficulty. Baker never obfuscates; he always clarifies. Consequently, this book is accessible to the general reader as well as the specialist.

Baker provides the reader with sufficient background to appreciate his experiments; he discusses the history of research into human and animal navigation, and he explains the unfortunate disrepute into which such research — and the notion of a "sixth sense" — had fallen. In addition, he clearly defines his essential terms. *Navigation*, "the method of determining the direction of a familiar goal across *unfamiliar* terrain" is distinguished from *pilotage*, and *route-based navigation* is made clearly distinct from *location-based navigation*. Baker thoroughly examines and explains the numerous mechanisms of navigation: visual landmarks, accoustic landmarks, the internal clock, the sun-arc grid map, and the magnetic sense.

While the verification of the magnetic sense in human beings is doubtless the most important aspect of the book from a scientific point of view, it is the history and accounts of navigation, the evolutionary implications of the sixth — or magnetic — sense, the discussions of exploration and navigation, and the inquiry into the unconscious nature of the magnetic sense which have particular appeal for the general reader.

Baker presents the wealth of navigational information available to humans and animals, a wealth which would seem at first to make the magnetic sense superfluous. Baker's own experiments demonstrated that humans could use the magnetic sense as a back-up system when other cues were eliminated

(visual cues by blindfolding, for example). He suggests that there is a great advantage in having a sense of direction which can function independently of other senses needed for exploration: early humans, for example, needed to keep their eyes open for danger and game as they explored, thus an unconscious sense which could help locate home and which freed our conscious senses for other tasks was definitely an asset to survival.

The primary purpose of the magnetic sense, Baker suggests, is "to maintain a rough sense of direction in between each conscious check of location relative to the usually more reliable visual clues." Baker makes the very interesting suggestion that the "relegation of the magnetic sense to the bottom of the hierarchy of preferences" is not only in agreement with the rule of *least navigation* but that in humans "the psychological basis of the hierarchical arrangement of navigational senses is a hierarchy of consciousness."

Finally, the attitude of this book is as agreeable as it is welcome. Baker, in the true scientific spirit, strongly encourages investigation and repetition of his experiments. In fact, he has included appendixes to aid prospective experimenters, including a how-to section for calculating the essential statistics. The attitude of welcoming honest and productive dissent contributes to the book's persuasive nature. Beneath the book's surface runs a powerful invitation to reconciliation. Baker declares early that two major themes of his book are "the application of zoological techniques to the study of man" and the "mutual benefits that arise when the navigational mechanisms of humans and other animals are studied, each in the perspective of the other." *Human Navigation and the Sixth Sense*, then, is at once a plea that "behaviourists be allowed to continue their studies away from the distractive and destructive battlefields of ideological warfare" and a powerful demonstration of the "practical and academic benefits" that can result when "behaviourists simply get on with the task of studying Man and other animals each in the perspective of the other."

This is an interesting, even fascinating, book on many levels, and it is successful on all of them. The book was well conceived and well planned. It is well written and attractively illustrated. But above all, it is exciting, persuasive, and ultimately important — important in its attitude, its attempt to heal a counter-productive ideological schism, as in its demonstration of a human magnetic sense.

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Stuff of Sleep and Dreams: Experiments in Literary Psychology

Leon Edel
New York: Harper and Row, 1982, 353 pages, $20.00.

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Literary criticism no longer shrinks from applying the theories and discoveries of psychology to literature, but this has not, with the exception of a few farsighted critics, long been true. Leon Edel joined the ranks of the "psychological critics" early, and those who are intrigued by the strange relationship between literature and psychology will certainly want to read *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams*, as will students of modern literature. Edel recounts the genesis of his interest in psychology and his account, especially of the 1930 meeting in Vienna with Dr. Alfred Adler, is an especially appropriate opening. The gradually learned "lesson of Vienna" provides the book with its foundation: "After a while I came to believe that we can hardly write a line without informing ouselves of the promptings unveiled for us in the psychoanalytic study of the imagination. They lie close to the heart of all literary creation."

Edel eventually came to practice what he calls " 'literary psychology': the study of what literature *expresses* of the human being who creates it." The critic is thus carried along with the increasingly inward, increasingly individual movement of modern literature, the movement which gave birth to psychology as well as to *Ulysses* and *Remembrance of Things Past*. The first sentence of Edel's "Foreward" is central: "We know that all literature is a form of disguise, a mask, a fable, a mystery; and behind the mask is the author." Certainly one of the most singular aspects of modern literature is the narrowing of its focus from an entire society to the psychology of its protagonist, and Edel's statement is certainly true for most modern literature. But, as the title of Joseph Campbell's monumental study of mythology, *The Masks of God*, implies, God and society have been behind the mask at other times. Clearly, "literary psychology" is a logical phase of literary history and its usefulness is primarily limited to literature since the Renaissance. It becomes more useful as the individual becomes more important as the focus of literature.

Much of the literary psychology in this book is inarguably marvelous. "The

Mystery of Walden Pond" explores the personal myth Henry David Thoreau created in *Walden*, and it contrasts the myth with the reality. The exploration of Thoreau's creative psychology is a small masterpiece. So, too, is the investigation of the relationship between T. S. Eliot's abulia and his poetry. This is criticism at its best; it generates not only a fuller understanding of the man (which is ultimately biography) but also of the work (which is, of course, the primary duty of criticism). "The Madness of Virginia Woolf" also probes the intertwining of neuroses and art and it is, for the most part, convincing. Nearly all of these essays imply that artistic creation is often neurosis transmuted and transformed, and Edel is less convincing with other writers than he is with Thoreau, Eliot, and Woolf. Most psychological critics tend to ignore the inverse of this interpretation of the relationship between neuroses and literature: the possibility that neuroses are transformed creativity. Yet Freud and his pupils have themselves made this suggestion; e.g., Dr. William Hoffer offered the opinion that Theodore Roethke's recurring "madness" was "merely the running expenses he paid for being his kind of poet."

It is just here that Edel goes wrong in two of his essays on Joyce. He approaches the man and his work as if convinced that Joyce's personality defects directed his creativity when, as numerous accounts suggest, much of Joyce's neurotic behavior was certainly a consequence of the herculean artistic tasks he attempted with *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

Edel is the most entertaining when he is being the literary psychologist. The discussion of "how the unconscious imagination dictates choices which seem to most people accidental" is especially convincing and pleasurable in its application to Rex Stout's creation of Nero Wolfe. And the clever "castration" explication of Auden's psyche is entertaining, even though it is neither convincing nor especially helpful in appreciating Auden's poetry. Happily Edel does not limit himself to the role he describes: "The literary psychologist works with the text alone and can go only where the text leads." Just as the formalist critics pretended for decades that they had no outside information, Edel, too, implies that the text alone is sufficient for literary psychology. Yet his excellent essay on Thoreau would be impossible if he had confined himself to *Walden*. In fact, he finds his clues and cues in the works of Thoreau's biographers, in Emerson's journals, in letters, in the words of Henry James, Sr., and in his own knowledge of America — and especially New York and Concord — of the 1840's. Edel does, to be sure, fashion the myth of self Thoreau was trying to create primarily from the text, but the clues are taken from whatever sources are available.

While Edel entertains as a literary psychologist, he does his best writing when he recounts his own experiences. The memory of his first view of Joyce, at the Paris opera in 1929, is concise and evocative: he manages to sketch a

convincing portrait with a few bold strokes. He does it again in the "split second of literary history" he brings to life: Joyce listening to his *Work in Progress* being read aloud at an Adrienne Monnier soirée. The passages in this book when Edel slips on his biographer mask alone make the book worthwhile — especially the first-hand reports. Edel's meeting with Edith Wharton, his anecdotes of Joyce, Eliot, Adler, and especially his moving account of Edmund Wilson echoing a John Berryman "drowned in his own anguish," these are the highlights of a book packed with stimulating material.

Because of the preponderance of first-class material in *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams*, the few discordant notes are all the more distressing. After three insightful, balanced, and even joyful Joyce-related essays, Edel's literary psychology deteriorates almost to the level of disparagement in "The Injustice Collector" and "The Psychopathology of Shem." A statement such as "Joyce wrote not for literature but for revenge" is sweepingly unfair; and in light of Edel's own suggestion that Joyce was too often caught up in the performance of literature, it is fatuous. Edel is also curiously squeamish with regard to Joyce's now notorious erotic letters to Nora. Perhaps Edel's reaction (to apply his literary psychology to the critic) says more about the limits of Edel's sexual imagination than about Joyce's "wallowing in excrement" (and certainly Edel's choice of the word "wallowing" is the sort of textual clue a literary psychologist would pounce upon). Sexual normality, as the literature of psychology repeatedly points out, varies greatly from era to era and culture to culture.

Readers and critics are just now catching up with Joyce the author; it seems likely that his sexual nature was as advanced as his artistic spirit. Certainly the notion that *Ulysses* is an obscure and dirty book is outmoded. Perhaps we need to catch up with Joyce the writer of erotic letters as well. These two essays are doubly disappointing, for they indicate that Edel has fallen woefully behind on his Joyce scholarship: he certainly could not have read Hugh Kenner's most recent book, for example, and still feel comfortable writing "Joyce's choice of the name Leopold for Bloom was less accidental than might seem." Recent Joyce scholarship emphasizes just how little *was* accidental in Joyce. Few writers were more in touch with the workings of their own subconscious and, consequently, few made more conscious artistic choices.

Purists may quibble with the subtitle: *Experiments in Literary Psychology.* Certainly these are not experiments, but rather learned speculation. Nevertheless, with the exception of the two weak essays on Joyce, a dead-end essay on Auden, and some excessive ennobling of critics in "The Critic as Wound-Dresser," this is first-rate work. Books such as this are essential if serious scholarly attempts to sort out the complex relationship between psychology and literature are to be made. Edel amply demonstrates the positive benefits

of joining the two fields; with luck others will follow the fine example this book provides.