

PHILLIP BLUMBERG, Ph.D.

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### INTRODUCTION

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*Abstract:* Creative artists and psychoanalysts often express both idealizing and devaluing attitudes toward one another's tasks. We have invited a group of novelists, psychoanalysts, and critics to comment on their understanding of how psychoanalysis has been represented in the media.

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*Keywords:* psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, art, literature, film, representation

FROM THE BEGINNINGS OF FREUD'S EXPLORATIONS, psychoanalysts and creative artists have been fascinated by each other's imaginative processes. Artists and analysts immerse themselves in the most private, elusive aspects of human subjectivity, and each has expressed admiration for the other's capacity to comprehend and transform the darkness that often lies at the heart of the psyche. Freud (1928) famously stated, "Before the problem of the creative artist analysis must, alas, lay down its arms" (p. 177). Artists, too, were initially in awe of psychoanalysts' early advances. By the mid-1920s the German director G.W. Pabst unsuccessfully begged Freud's assistance as a technical advisor on one of his films. Popular commercial novelists such as Olive Higgins Prouty (1941) created characters like Dr. Jaquith, the benevolent, all-knowing analyst/protagonist of the novel *Now, Voyager*.

Still, as Freud was among the first to realize, idealization can often serve as a smoke screen concealing envy and competitiveness. For each fictional "saintly" analyst, there were also frightening figures such as Fritz Lang's (1922) Dr. Mabuse, who, under cover as the director of a cosmopolitan psychiatric hospital, was actually the criminal mastermind of the Berlin underworld. In our time, we have Hannibal Lecter, a psychiatrist who occasionally snacks on his more "resistant" patients (Demme, 1991).

Similarly, despite Freud's (1928) apparent respect for "the unanalyzable artistic endowment," he was all too willing to conceptualize formal artistic processes as mere "bribes" through which "the writer softens the character of his egocentric day dreams by altering and disguising it" (p. 153). In the midst of their manifest mutual admiration, there was significant unspoken disagreement as to how analyst and artist understood each other's respective vocations.

Irwin Hirsch and I asked a group of novelists, critics, and psychoanalysts to discuss the contemporary state of this disagreement and help us better comprehend the way psychoanalysis is understood and represented in the media. Few psychoanalysts seem entirely comfortable with the idealized or devalued way psychoanalysts (or psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapists, presumably trained as analysts) have often been portrayed in the media. Perhaps the commonly encountered caricatures of psychoanalysts reflects the distrust engendered by a profession whose tangible methods are obscure and mysterious to those who have not experienced them first hand, and even to many who have. On the other hand, some hyperbolic characterizations may reflect exaggerated versions of valid criticisms of particular types of psychoanalytic engagement. One could also speculate that the anxiety generated by a vocation that exclusively explores human emotions and their unconscious roots might infuse portrayals of this profession with fantasies that render analytic work grotesque, stereotyped, or even absurd. What psychoanalysts actually do *is* more subtle and intuitive than the praxis of most other professions, and most colleagues we speak with consistently feel that the media just never get it right or, by rendering analysts absurd, are excessively critical.

Contributors to this written symposium were invited to express their views on how psychoanalysis is currently portrayed in the media and why they believe these particular representations have developed. Responses could include a historical or analytic overview or focus on a particular work of art. Four questions were offered to guide the participants, but they were free to concentrate on any aspect of the representations of psychoanalysis they felt most relevant. The questions were:

- 1) Do you believe (and, if so, why) that the work of psychoanalytic therapists is portrayed more inaccurately than that of other professions? Do you find that there are significant contemporary artworks that successfully depict complex psychoanalyst characters and could you discuss these portrayals?

- 2) Do you believe that representations of therapeutic interactions—both nurturing as well as destructive—might mirror larger cultural anxieties? What might specific depictions of therapeutic processes reveal about the nature of trust, dependency, and psychic integrity in a particular cultural context? What might these representations reveal about the ways individuals in particular social circumstances imagine the pleasures and terrors of psychological transformation and human intimacy?
- 3) How can you account for the consistent depiction of analytic therapists as exclusively instructive and overly intellectualized; personally bizarre and dysfunctional; and inclined toward flagrant violation of professional ethics and boundaries? What apt criticisms of the profession might these portrayals reflect?
- 4) Are there any portrayals of psychoanalytic work that you believe have captured at least reasonably well what psychoanalysts really do?

It is hoped that this symposium, composed of individuals from both inside and outside the field of psychoanalysis, will encourage future interdisciplinary exchanges where those of us who are concerned with human conflict, growth, and development can continue to learn from one another.

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Phillip Blumberg Ph.D. is Faculty, William Alanson White Institute, and an Adjunct Professor in the clinical psychology department of Teachers' College at Columbia University. He also a member of the Board of Trustees of the Philoctetes Center for the Multidisciplinary Study of the Imagination.

*135 Central Park West, #1N  
New York, NY 10023  
pb6338@aol.com*