

**GEORG GRODDECK:
THE UNTAMED ANALYST
(1866-1934)**

Martin Grotjahn (*)

Georg Groddeck was born in Baden-Baden, South Germany, in 1866. The son of Karl Groddeck, a physician he revered as wise and profound, Groddeck came to be known as the “father of psychosomatic medicine,” a term he despised as shallow and misleading.

Georg remembered his mother as beautiful but aloof. He was the fifth and last child. There were three older brothers; Lina, the fourth child and only girl, was the mother’s favorite and Georg’s playmate. For a time he attended a girls’ school with Lina. Georg assumed that his life-long close relationship with Lina helped him to understand man’s bisexual nature, pregnancy envy in men, creativity, and how to be a good healer -a “mother-father.”

After Karl Groddeck was ruined financially, the family moved to Berlin, where Karl became a physician to the poor. Georg was encouraged to study medicine; while arranging for medical training, he was required to sign up for eight years of Army service.

Georg’s favorite teacher was Ernst Schwenger, whom he considered the greatest living physician. Schwenger was tyrannical, brutal, and bizarre; he antagonized everyone. Through the influence of a grateful patient, Otto von Bismarck, Schwenger was permitted to teach his eccentric physiotherapeutic ideas at one of the university hospitals.

Between 1889 and 1897, Groddeck endured Army service. During this unhappy time, his mother died; he turned to Else, a married woman with two small children, whom he married after her divorce and his army discharge. Georg moved his family to Baden-Baden, where he became Medical Director, and eventually the owner, of a small sanitarium originally founded by Schwenger. His sister Lina was Georg’s devoted helper.

Groddeck spent the rest of his life here, developing around his stern faced but curtly polite person an aura and sanitarium regime that eventually brought patients, including other psychoanalytic pioneers, from all over Europe. He dominated the daily routine of his patients, prescribing diets and massages -often administering the massages himself.

Groddeck believed that no one should be allowed to die alone, as had both of his parents. Although seeming almost brutal at times, he gently tended his sister Lina on her deathbed. Soon thereafter, the deaths of his three brothers, one by one, led Groddeck to the dark feeling that he was the sole survivor of a family marked for early death.

His publications began at about this time -1903- and covered a wide range: Schwenger’s methods, novels, essays, and literary criticism -Ibsen’s plays (Grinstein, 1957, pp. 790-792). He organized two clubs, one devoted to the education of the working man, the second designed to advance his father’s ideas concerning the building of inexpensive homes for working people.

Despite his busy medical and literary life, Groddeck found himself becoming bored, dissatisfied, and unable to understand his patients; but when he became aware of the ubiquitous symbolism of his patients’ communications, his boredom disappeared. He then saw illness as a physical reaction of the body to trauma and also as a symbolic creation, expressing the inner needs of unknown forces of the “It” by which we are ruled. His term was later adopted by Freud, whose translators preferred “Id” as a less mystical rendering of

Das Es. At first, Groddeck did not see that his opinions were related to psychoanalysis. In 1912, he published a novel, which became quite popular for a remarkable and unfortunate reason: it attacked psychoanalysis and deplored its Freudian emphasis on sexuality. Later, Groddeck freely admitted that he had attacked psychoanalysis before he had studied it.

In 1914, he separated from his first wife, who had gradually drifted into melancholic isolation. He began to live with Emmy, a young woman who had taken Lina's place at the sanitarium and whom he eventually married. During World War I, he was recalled to duty as an Army surgeon. In trying to run his Army hospital as he had what he often called his "Satan-Arium", he antagonized everyone and was soon dismissed, despite the intervention of his grateful patients, who included the Kaiser's sister and her husband.

In May 1917, Groddeck wrote his first long letter to Freud. He began by thanking Freud and recognizing him, especially for the concepts of transference and resistance. He apologized for having written unfavorably about psychoanalysis, admitting that his attack had been rooted in envy. He was still unable to finish reading *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The difference between Freud's scientific clarifications and his own intuitive knowledge of the It was more than he could reconcile. Groddeck included pages of clinical material in his letter and shyly asked whether he would have the right to call himself an analyst and whether he would be acceptable to the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society. Freud replied that although Groddeck wanted to be treated as incorrigible and rejected, he regretted that he couldn't oblige: "I must lay claim to you and must state that you are an analyst of the first order." Their mutual respect and affection survived the many storms that could have been anticipated in the relationship between a devotee of "Its mysticism," as Freud later called it, and his more controlled scientific colleague.

Groddeck transferred to Freud all the images lost by death in his past -father, mother, sister, brothers, and Schweninger- and loved Freud with guilty, melancholic, masochistic devotion. Freud's friendly warning about "Its mysticism" wounded Groddeck deeply. Freud saw in him a gifted, intuitive, demonic innovator: perhaps Freud recognized in Groddeck his own inner demon, his own unconscious. He tried to tame, train, and love Groddeck as one would a favorite stepchild. Freud greatly respected a revolutionary flame and did not want to see it extinguished in any man or movement.

Groddeck's symbolic and definitely unscientific novel, *Der Seelensucher* ("The Soul Seeker"), was rejected by many publishers but delighted Freud, who, in 1919, offered to issue it through the Psychoanalytic Publishing House. "We will ask you to allow us this heretic work for publication because I myself am a heretic who has not yet turned into a fanatic," he wrote, ending with a great and sincere compliment, "I do not think I could easily get along without you." Freud showed undisguised amusement at the horror of some of his colleagues when the novel appeared.

DER SEELENSUCHER

Der Seelensucher, which was published in 1921 but has never been translated into English, concerns a retired bachelor who gives up a hopeless battle against bedbugs and, as a result, leaves his home to become a wanderer. He assumes a new name, Thomas Weltlein (Thomas Littleworld), and wanders throughout the land seeking the meaning of life. He slips into a joyous madness in which he makes uninhibited depth interpretations -utilizing philology, mythology, and literature-in all manner of unexpected situations. He lectures at a ladies' luncheon, asking them to educate their daughters for the great joy they have to give to men. At his place on the speaker's platform, he plays upon everyone's interest in railroads by imitating locomotives having intercourse. His disgusting noises and obscene movements interpret, convince, and infuriate. Never has a more hilarious interpretation been given. The presiding officer, frantically swinging her bell, throws Thomas Weltlein out, while he excitedly continues to interpret the meaning and function of the ringing bell.

Weltlein is a fool and a madman. At a labor union meeting, he surprises everyone by speaking reasonably but with passion as he joins the men in their fight for freedom and equality. He is all in favor of creeping socialism.

At the book's close, he is killed in a train wreck. His stuffy sister identifies him by his gold pencil and a scar high up -very high up- on his left thigh.

THE BOOK OF THE IT

Groddeck's writings fitted well into the thoughts of Freud, who, in 1922, was working on *The Ego and the Id*. In that book, Freud acknowledged his indebtedness to Groddeck. Around the same time, in 1920 at the International Conference at The Hague, many analysts were shocked by Groddeck's describing himself as a "wild analyst" and by his associating freely, instead of reading his prepared paper. Only a few -among them, O. Rank, S. Ferenczi, K. Homey, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and E. Simmel- shared Freud's interest and affection. Groddeck was accompanied to the Conference by Emmy, who had not yet become his wife. It was not until the Groddecks had been properly married that Freud admitted that, being somewhat of a Victorian himself, he had been displeased when Groddeck had brought his mistress to their first meeting.

Groddeck feared that the word might kill the thought. He did not want to become a scientist, but to write and live in a freely associative manner. In his disappointment about his reception at the Congress, he tried to stay away from all analysts but Freud, who admonished him against erecting such a wall.

Ernst Simmel became his friend and a visitor in Baden-Baden. Simmel quoted Groddeck, who was fluent in English, as saying: "The Eye is I, and anyone who is short-sighted does not want to see far ahead. . . ." Under Groddeck's personal influence, Simmel could read a clock several miles away and conduct a Psychotherapeutic Congress in Baden-Baden without glasses, although in Berlin he was again badly in need of them.

In 1921, Groddeck began '*The Book of the It*', a series of letters presumably written to an intelligent young woman interested in his analytic ideas. It was published in 1923. Freud found the work charming and irresistible. Even skeptical Anna Freud was interested. Ernest Jones found it amusing and "racy". Oskar Pfister, analyst and clergyman in Switzerland, was shocked and complained to Freud, who answered: "I am defending Groddeck energetically against your respectability. What would you have said had you been a contemporary of Rabelais?"

Groddeck wrote with frankness, honesty, and dignity. For the most part he avoided being exhibitionistic or masochistic. He insisted on calling his method "wild" and artistic; he could not have cared less about scientific proof. His central theme was: Man is lived by his It. He is born with this knowledge, but later loses it.

Groddeck wrote freely about his and every man's envy of mothers: His big belly expresses his wish for a child; or man wants a brain-child like Pallas Athene, who was born from the head of her father, Zeus. Writing a book brings him the worries and tortures of delivery. His goiter of many years disappeared only after he had learned about his unconscious pregnancy fantasies, which he believes caused the goiter.

Whether his interpretations are right or wrong, he does not know. He knows that talking and explaining the It helps patients. The It does not study medicine and can use any organ of the body as a symbol. Groddeck credits Freud with anything that makes sense; anything that sounds silly and fantastic is his own -a most ambivalent compliment.

The It is the wish to become sick and the wish to become well. To be helped, patients must again become children, to whom God will give insight while they sleep. They should trust their mother-doctor with innocence and in love and read this book the way children read fairy tales.

It is silly for any woman to miss the highest pleasure in life: the pain and lust of delivery. Natural childbirth is the way a natural woman wants to have her baby. The arrogant, conceited doctor should not interfere.

A mother may fear that her child is an avenger for her sin of masturbation or incest. No one is so holy as to be able always to love an avenger.

Man can never cease longing to return to the womb of his mother.

A good woman does not feel castrated and does not suffer menstrual cramps. She knows well that blood and pain do not stand in the way of lust, but she may feel tempted to test a man's strength and knowledge by putting the menstrual taboo between his and her desires.

Our unconscious expresses itself in symbols: in love for God, crime and heroism, good deeds and evil ones, religion and blasphemy; in staining the tablecloth and breaking glass; in the invention of tools and machines; in art, sickness, and death -in every aspect of our lives.

Accidents may be understood as dreams and symbols. Whoever breaks an arm has either sinned or wished to commit a sin with that arm—murder, incest, or masturbation. Whoever goes blind desires to see no more, has sinned with his eyes, or wishes to see what he dares not see. Whoever gets hoarse has a secret he dares not tell.

The language of the unconscious is hard to decipher. The child in us will understand the language of the unconscious in sleep, or not at all. Some may consider this madness, but they should respect this madness since it has method.

Insight into the importance of mother transference illuminates all Groddeck's case histories. Every sick man is a child. Everyone who cares for a sick child becomes a mother. We owe our lives to the mother -and our deaths, too. All die on the Cross, the os sacrum, which is the mother. Love for mother is expressed in the Cross of Christianity, in Michelangelo's "Pieta," in the writings of Shakespeare and Sophocles. All are interpreted by Groddeck with great poetry, intensity, and a phenomenal literary knowledge. He seduces his readers into exposing themselves to the curative and maturing experience of art. He shows how to endure creative anxiety.

The reader is encouraged by Groddeck to acquire a new, perhaps mad (or maddening) way of looking at life. The mouse reminds Groddeck of a woman's penis, cut off and left alive. The horror we feel about a wounded bird also reminds him of castration anxiety.

For the It, love and death are alike, since in the sex act love dies.

Mother took care of us, made us feel our bodies, seduced us, taught us to masturbate and then punished us for it, because this is a mother's destiny. We all commit the original sin against mother. In our guilt, our It invents cancer and consumption; it does so in the same way it grows eyes, hair, nails, teeth. A fantastic explanation is better than none.

The doctor has two questions to decide: By what means is the It contriving to remain sick, and by what means can it again be induced to want to be healthy? The It must be helped by analysis, by hot baths, by massages, by masterful commands, and by that kind of love which a sick child expects from its mother.

In 1920, Groddeck became a member of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society. In one of his communications to the Society, he suggested, "Put off action as long as you can, and watch for signs of the patient's It. Sooner or later, it will probably whisper to you advice you can pass on to the patient." He cautiously tried to explain his opinions about the psychogenic factors in disease, agreeing with his Berlin colleagues on one point: All medical treatment succeeds or fails with the transference.

One of his patients, a woman, suffered from severe, generalized edema, despite treatment for her heart condition with medication and with the special massage Groddeck had learned from Schweniger. The patient then confessed her "sin" -that she had vowed to remain a virgin and to become a nun, but she had since married and was no longer a virgin. After her "confession," she passed enormous quantities of urine; a veritable sin-flood was released. Within twenty-four hours, she had lost fifteen pounds.

Another patient, a shepherd, had developed retinal hemorrhages, which threatened him with blindness. Against great resistance, he told Groddeck that he had once stoned a crucifix, knocking the figure of Christ to the ground. His It had punished him severely. The effect of this short and deeply penetrating interview was that no hemorrhages occurred thereafter; and, thirteen years later, the patient worked as an accountant, which calls for constant use of the eyes.

In his own way, Georg Groddeck was a profoundly religious man, "The It and the Gospels," published in 1926, is one of his most original and profound writings.

“Coughs and Colds”, which appeared in 1928, is a truly revealing self-analysis, relating his own heavy cough to the famous Groddeck family cough, which all the members of his family had developed during their lifetimes.

Having seen his entire family die -father, mother, three brothers, and his only sister- Groddeck felt near to death, and he believed that death meant nearness to the unconscious. Facing death calls for courage to face the It. Groddeck’s wild and often desperate courage and temper was respected by Freud, who also lived close to death.

Ferenczi never tired of singing Groddeck’s praises and telling others of the benefit he derived from his regular, annual “analytic holiday” in Groddeck’s sanitarium, to which Ferenczi brought his analytic patients. Another guest was Karen Horney, who retreated to the sanitarium in deep grief after the sudden death of her beloved brother.

When Groddeck toyed with opening a special ward for maternity cases, he consulted Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, who became his good friend. Later, she often gave Groddeck credit for her method of treating hospitalized schizophrenics.

In 1926, Groddeck fought the taboo against applying psychoanalysis in the field of medicine -the taboo against relating dream work to psychic or organic symptoms. As he pointed out, both show the same relationship between the manifest form and the latent unconscious conflicts.

Groddeck had proudly and challengingly called himself a “wild analyst.” At Groddeck’s sixtieth birthday celebration, Ernst Simmel added:

Groddeck may be permitted to style himself “wild” -in relation to the movement of which he is a supporter- in the sense that he owes his training to no one but himself. He may also be termed “wild” by virtue of his passionate temperament, which impels him to action where others throw up a case as hopeless or disguise their real helplessness under the cover of “accurate diagnosis.”

THE UNKNOWN SELF

In this collection of articles published between 1925 and 1929, Groddeck gave his imagination free rein. He wrote frankly about himself -more so than any analyst, with the possible exception of Sigmund Freud. Groddeck expressed himself joyously, loudly, innocently -perhaps with masochistic honesty. By offering himself as if constantly in analysis, he invited his patients to follow his example.

Groddeck’s recollections go back to his school years and a few teachers he loved. The end of boyhood came to him when his father died. Before then, Groddeck had believed in his own special power to help and heal. After his father’s death, he gained insight into his megalomania, which he recognized as a triumphant introjection of his parents into his unconscious.

The last part of *The Unknown Self* contains Groddeck’s interpretations of German mythology (*The Ring of the Nibelungen*), *Peer Gynt*, and Goethe’s *Faust*. The symbolic meaning of the Siegfried-Brünhilde relationship is a warning that mother and son will love each other but shall destroy each other. Siegfried recognizes his mother in Brünhilde. From all her teachings, he learned little; he remains a boy and a fool. He knows that, in front of her, he is not a hero and that he succumbs to her. The man dies in her arms and becomes a child again. The figure of the dwarf symbolizes another aspect of male sexuality: He is small, old and ugly, but has great hidden strength and will finally triumph over the enormous giant.

Sigmund and Siglinde are twin brother and sister, symbolizing the Janus face of every man, since man is bisexual.

Groddeck’s interpretation of *Peer Gynt* follows similar lines. To his mother, Aase, Peer was always a little boy, while she remained a never-aging mother. The women in Peer’s life are different incarnations of the eternally desired and dreaded mother.

For Groddeck, Goethe’s *Faust* represents Every Man. Goethe wanted us to understand *Faust* as a man

who finally recognized his unconscious (“Der dunkle Drang,” the dark impulses of man) as his most human part. Faust wanted to live in harmony with his It, not in combat and in surrender. Groddeck found the final confirmation of his opinion in Goethe’s definition of symbolic reality: “Alles Vergaengliche ist nur ein Gleichnis” (All that is mortal is but an image).

Late in 1930, Freud received the Goethe Prize. Although desperately ill, Groddeck wrote to “my most honored teacher and my most dearly beloved man” about his life-long passion for Goethe. His letter shows deep insight into Goethe’s writings. Groddeck concluded by asking whether Freud agreed with Groddeck’s interpretation of Goethe’s Faust. Freud replied briefly, kindly, and with benevolent skepticism that he could not settle the controversy about Goethe, since “I do not understand Goethe in that any better than I understand Groddeck.”

THE WORLD OF MAN

In Groddeck’s last book, *Der Mensch as Symbol* (“Man as Symbol”), which appeared in 1933, Groddeck took up problems of art and language, of sickness, and of man’s relation to the symbol. In many places he combined his intuition for language with the knowledge of the philologist. For Groddeck, the true artist is neither a spectator nor a master: he is an interpreter of the unconscious. Long before the brain came into existence, the It was already active.

Man is forever striving toward what he was and had in infancy. His choice lies between becoming either childlike or childish. A child fears no king, and even the majesty of death does not awe him. As Groddeck put it: “In this respect I have remained a child; death says nothing to me”.

The best written and probably most personal chapters of *Der Mensch as Symbol* are the last two, “Love and Death” and “Death and Transfiguration.” Love and death are closely connected because the man dies in the woman while having intercourse. Eros and death are similar since life begins with death, finds its fulfillment in sexual union, and ends in death. Dying is a pleasant experience, like falling asleep. Like dreaming, talking, loving, painting, or becoming ill, dying, too, is an expression of the It. Groddeck was convinced that every man’s death is the fulfillment of a last wish.

Groddeck hesitated to trouble Freud with the manuscript for, by then, the German world was too sad in reality to allow escape into literature. However, he finally did send it to him, together with a letter that closed with the words, “Your unfortunately somewhat senile and feeble, but still grateful student.” Freud did not personally acknowledge the receipt of the manuscript, but his daughter Anna wrote to Groddeck that Freud had read it from beginning to end with great interest and did not believe “in your mental infirmities or senility.”

Ferenczi wrote from his sickbed in Capri that he loved the new book, *Der Mensch as Symbol*. At the time, he was in the final stages of pernicious anemia, traveling was difficult, and he could not go to see his friend Groddeck. Ferenczi called himself “an atomizer of the soul”; Groddeck had tried to save his friend from this danger. After Ferenczi’s death in May of 1933, his wife wrote that Lou Andreas-Salome, a close friend of Freud, Groddeck, and many great men, had said: “Groddeck would have saved him.” Troubled greatly that he might have neglected Ferenczi, in a long letter to Ferenczi’s widow, Groddeck tried to show that probably he could not have helped:

Just as one cannot stop the raging storm with the bare hand, so I could not have helped Sandor. As close as we were, he was already far removed from me in a flight to the stars in which I could not and would not join.

Once again Groddeck was alone. Turning to the world around him, he refused to recognize its reality. He refused to believe that Hitler was anti-Semitic. He firmly believed that if only he could have had one interview with Hitler, he could have corrected Hitler’s mistaken thinking.

A year after Ferenczi's death, Groddeck suffered a severe heart attack. At the time, the authorities were on the way to arrest this strange doctor who wrote mad letters to the Leader. Frieda Fromm-Reichmann arranged an invitation for Groddeck to lecture before the Swiss

Psychoanalytic Society, and he reluctantly agreed to go. In Zurich, he talked once more about the eyes, vision, and vision without eyes. He collapsed and was taken to the sanitarium run by M. Boss, a noted psychoanalyst.

In his last days, Groddeck was preoccupied with the cure for cancer and with the fight against death in his patients and in the German people. He believed that he could rid the world of all evil. One of his last visitors was Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, who was on her way to America. He got out of bed and, without any sign of sickness, walked her to the station. Shortly afterward he became decompensated and showed signs of agitation and delirium; then came the peaceful end.

SUMMING UP: MAN'S INNATE NEED TO SYMBOLIZE

Georg Groddeck believed in man's innate urge to symbolize. As a physician and a linguist, he disliked artificial terms and preferred the talk of children and artists: they do not have the kind of defenses that interfere with the free creation of the It. But it would be wrong to call Groddeck an artist (which he was) as opposed to a clinical observer (which he also was).

Freud was always careful and cautious but not defensive toward Groddeck's approach, for Freud also recognized an indebtedness to art and literature. Although skeptical of Groddeck's "Its mysticism," Freud saw considerable merit in Groddeck's poetic and original ways of dealing with the sick and their illness.

Georg Groddeck had pride in the correctness of his intuition. His insight and conjectures were confirmed by Freud's work. Whereas Freud had always claimed to be a scientist, Groddeck made no such claim. For him, life was divine.

Many men have continued Groddeck's work: Grantly Dick Read's theory and technique of *natural childbirth* are the final confirmation of some of Groddeck's early ideas. John Rosen has applied Groddeck's approach in the "direct analysis" of schizophrenic patients. In Switzerland, Madame Secheyay has followed Groddeck's ways of thinking and acting in her method of *symbolic realization*. Many of Groddeck's thoughts have found their expression in the system developed by Melanie Klein. Still another application of Groddeck's technique led to Jacob Moreno's Psychodrama. The work of Rene Spitz with anaclitic depression confirms Groddeck's intuition and continues where he left off. The influence of Groddeck's ideas can be seen in Geza Roheim's work. Psychoanalysis has always postulated the pleasure principle as restricted by the reality principle. Recently, a third principle has been formulated, which might be called the principle of magic-mystic, or symbolic, thinking. XW human mental activity starts this way, and Groddeck expressed it and applied it consistently in his praxis of healing.

Georg Groddeck loved the symbol and understood it. He lived by it, and he worked with it. As an analyst and friend of Freud, he remained untamed and much loved.

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(*) Martin Grotjahn (July 8, 1904 - September 30, 1990) was a German-born American psychoanalyst. He was the son of doctor Alfred Grotjahn and was born in Berlin, Germany. In 1937, he emigrated with his Jewish wife Etelka Grosz, daughter of doctor Gyula Grosz, and their one year old son to the United States. He worked in Chicago as a psychoanalyst in the clinic of psychiatrist Karl Menninger and then moved to Los Angeles where he was one of the founding members of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute. A few years later, when that institute split, he became the first dean of the Southern California Institute for Psychoanalysis. He became a very well known psychoanalyst and was one of the first to deal with the trauma of aging. Medical writer, psychiatrist and analyst. Recipient Sigmund Freud award Psychoanalytic Physicians, 1976. Served with Military Cross, Australia, 1942-1946.; Member American Psychoanalytic Association, American Psychiatric Association, Southern California Psychiatric Association, Southern California Psychoanalytic Society. Training Analyst, Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute; Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

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