A Psychoanalytic Critique of Eccentricity

by

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1. Introduction

<u>Eccentric</u>: 1. Deviating or departing from convention; irregular or odd.

> **2. Situated away from the centre or axis. …**

> **5. A person who deviates from normal forms of behaviour.**

Source: The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus (1987), Collins, London.

'Eccentricity' has received little attention so far in the work of psychoanalysts. As a discipline, psychoanalysis has grown out of clinical work, with practice shaping theory and theory underpinning practice. Psychoanalysts are concerned with the development of the psyche and the influence of early experience on adult mental states, together with the nature and role of unconscious mental material. They also reflect on their own practices and understanding of therapies.

In such a world, the vast body of the population has not been the subject of psychoanalytic therapy or theory. And as will become clear, it is hard to imagine many eccentrics presenting themselves in the analyst's consulting room.

There is much in human behaviour that has yet to be analysed. The insights of experiential psychology are informed by studies of how undergraduates perform in experiments, but these trials can be narrow and deceptive. Psychiatrists are well versed in the behaviour of people who have had mental breakdowns, but such knowledge can distort the wider picture.

My dissertation, with its focus on eccentricity, will seek to open this largely untapped yet interesting avenue for psychoanalytic study.

All schools of analysis agree, when considering the optimum conditions for the development of a healthy adult psyche, that being born to parents who love, trust and respect one another and are consistent in their attitudes to each other and to their children is significant. Children who grow up in stable families are likely to enjoy mental health. They are likely to be free from disabling neurotic symptoms, and they will tend to become self-reliant adults who can form and maintain meaningful relationships.

Eccentrics can be considered to have such a degree of 'psychological health', although he/she may also appear to have 'unhealthy' characteristics and defences. In this dualism lies the fascination of the eccentric for psychoanalysis.

Psychologically healthy adults are defined by Freudian analysists as possessing a 'strong ego'. Kleinians view such adults as having 'introjected a good object'. Ericksonians will

claim they have learned 'basic trust'. For Fairbairn and his followers, they display 'mature dependence'. For Bowlby and his admirers, they have succeeded in constructing a model for themselves as both being able to provide help and be worthy of receiving help from others should the need arise. For Jungians, such healthy adults are well on the road to 'individuation' – the condition of a person 'becoming himself, whole, indivisible, and distinct from other people or collective psychology (although also in relation to these)'. (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut (1986), p.76) All such characteristics are evident in the 'good, light side' of the eccentric. Yet in the same personality there may also be a dark side.

The academic interest in 'eccentrics' in the field of psychology was first developed in the work of David Weeks. Ten years before he published his book, Weeks started asking questions about what it meant to be 'eccentric'. He considered that the definition of an eccentric as someone who 'deviated from the conventional or established norm, who is different from the rest of us' was hardly a definition that was likely to satisfy a trained psychologist. That description might just as well apply to 'a criminal or a person with a birth defect'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.4)

One might expect psychiatry, clinical psychology, and psychoanalysis, all of which have produced theories on almost every conceivable deviation from 'normal' behaviour, to have some satisfactory academic view on eccentricity and how that condition might be distinguishable from other forms of mental aberration. Yet Weeks found that in the four best known textbooks in psychiatry, three make no mention of eccentricity. The fourth

describes it, critically, as a form of 'predominately inadequate or passive psychopathy', adding that it is 'usually difficult to distinguish the symptoms of eccentricity from schizophrenic manifestations'. Weeks notes that these summary statements are 'tossed off with nonchalance, and there is no mention of the fact that they are based upon a data base of zero patients or research subjects, and upon clinical observations that are at best haphazard'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.5)

Weeks' study of eccentricity began in Edinburgh in 1984 where Weeks is a clinical psychologist at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, and soon attracted media attention. Families, friends and eccentrics themselves referred 'subjects' to Weeks and his research team. Before long, their study extended to the United States. Over 1,000 eccentrics were interviewed by Weeks and his team over ten years and that research provides the basis for the book he co-wrote with Jamie James. He was interested in the thought processes of those who both came to regard themselves as eccentrics and who were also viewed by others as eccentrics. Weeks hoped it might be possible to distinguish their behaviour from certain forms of mental illness such as schizophrenia. The frequent association of eccentricity and genius was also of interest as the accounts of eccentrics include names such as Wittgenstein, Blake, Einstein, and Dali, who all in varying degrees produced extraordinary breakthroughs in their creative fields.

From the start, Weeks faced the problem of establishing how much deviation from the norm it takes to qualify as a true eccentric. Everyone will have some degree of 'eccentricity' as absolute, uniform, and obsessive conformity (if such a thing exists)

would itself be some form of eccentricity or mental ill-health. Social factors will also play a part here – what is acceptable in Los Angeles may seem very strange to someone living in Glasgow and vice-versa. And there is a wide variation to the degree of nonconformity different societies will tolerate. In Japan, a greater degree of conformity may be expected than in the United States or Britain. It is also the case that differentials will exist within a society. Will Suffolk be more tolerant of nonconformity than London, or the other way round? Class stratification may also enable odd patterns of behaviour. Both the Sitwell and Mitford families had more freedom to be bizarre because their social position permitted it. One person's eccentricity is another's acceptable behaviour. With all these questions in mind, Weeks set out to find a definition and a list of characteristics.

Each subject in Week's research had a one and a half hour, one-to-one interview, although many lasted longer. Eccentrics tend to talk! These interviews were taped. The interviewer began by asking questions designed to establish if there were any obvious mental disorder (taken from recognised psychiatric tests used to diagnose schizophrenia and other mental illnesses). Open-ended questions were used to draw out the subjects and discover not only their opinions and beliefs but also to throw light on their ways of thinking. They were also given standard IQ and personality tests.

Although the subjects in this research were a clearly diverse group of people, they revealed many common traits. A picture emerged with fifteen characteristics that applied to most eccentrics, ranging from the obvious to the trivial. The first five

characteristics are the most important and apply to virtually all eccentrics.

Nonconformity is the principle defining trait:

- nonconforming

- creative

- strongly motivated by curiosity

- idealistic – he/she wants to make the world a better place and the people in it happier

- obsessed, happily, with one or more hobby horses (usually five or six)

- aware from early childhood that he/she is different

- intelligent

- opinionated and outspoken, convinced he/she is right and that the rest of the world is out of step

- non-competitive, not in need of reassurance or reinforcement from society

- unusual in eating habits and living arrangements

- not particularly interested in the opinions or company of other people, except to persuade them to the eccentric's – correct - point of view

- possessed of a mischievous sense of humour

- single

- usually, the eldest or an only child

- a bad speller

If nonconformity is the vital defining trait and if the other characteristics in the top five in the list above are the most important, a fascinating question can be posed:

Was the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, an eccentric?

When Freud began to write and lecture on psychoanalysis, one motivation was clear: the discovery of a cure in the treatment of what were called hysterical symptoms. Interestingly, he might well have recognised some of these symptoms in the above list. In fact, Freud was facing a conundrum, without perhaps being fully conscious of the difficulty. In so far as psychoanalysis was a medical treatment, the concept of cure is relatively unproblematic. By removing the pathological material, the conditions in which the cure can take place are created. Such an approach sounds scientific. However, psychoanalysis at its start had no texts, no institutions, and no rhetoric. The first practitioners of psychoanalysis were reacting to material from their clinical work. Does Freud's role as the original creator of this new discipline make him an eccentric?

From the outset, psychoanalysis was improvised with free association at the heart of treatment. However, Freud wished to establish psychoanalysis within the domain of science since improvisation is difficult to legitimate outside such an official field. Yet with the discovery of what he called the unconscious, Freud faced an alarming vision: a profession of improvisors closer to the inspiration of artists than to the discipline of science. In considering the characteristics of eccentrics, psychoanalysis may be discussing the traits which helped form its own birth. And there is perhaps one more

paradox. In seeking to 'cure' and overcome defence mechanisms, psychoanalysis seems to be on the side of the mainstream and conformity and so working against the very factors which lead to creativity, growth, and progress.

People present themselves for analysis when they sense that their lives are not 'on track', when they feel 'different', or when their relationships are not working. Yet Weeks' study presents us with a picture of 'happy, even joyful, people' whose joy was 'infectious'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.175) It also provides evidence of the physical health of this group of people. Those interviewed in the study rarely visited the doctor and when they did it was almost always for the diagnosis and treatment of serious health problems:

'The eccentrics in our sample averaged one consultation every eight years, far fewer than the general population. In Great Britain, for example, the average person goes to the doctor twice a year – 16 times more often than the eccentric does.' (Weeks & James (1995), p.176)

Weeks suggests that eccentrics are healthier because they are happy and experience low levels of stress. They do not feel the need to conform, nor do they fear failure. The medical profession's position is that stress upsets our equilibrium and thus makes the body more susceptible to illness and slower to repair injury. It therefore seems that the eccentric may have something to teach those whose search for health and happiness has brought them into analysis, and perhaps also their analysts.

This writer, during an optional session held in an Open University Summer school, conducted a survey with a group of students to establish what they felt were the characteristics of eccentrics. They produced the following list:

- mad scientist

- inventor of useless things

- crazy

- uncaring about clothes or appearance

- nonconforming

- strange ideas (about life, living, food, inventions)

- artistic

- poetic

- different – not aware of the same things as others, e.g. time of day, nor living like the rest of us

- rich – needing a private income

- aristocratic

- religious – living like a hermit

- fixed ideas

- non-threatening (on being questioned further by this writer, the student explained that someone who was psychiatrically ill and released into the community was 'threatening', while the eccentric was not).

Much of this list gives a rosy picture of the eccentric which is not surprising as it was drawn from a group of students who had chosen to attend this session. They were, presumably, interested in and for the most part attracted to the idea of eccentricity. In fact, when presented with the idea that some of the eccentric's behaviour might be exhibitionist, unacceptable, or narcissistic, and that the eccentric's sense of humour and practical jokes might be evidence of unacknowledged anger, the students protested.

The eccentric does have appeal. We are fascinated by them, and yet we are also ambivalent about them. Something within us yearns to be reassured that our worldview is the 'right' one; those such as eccentrics, who are fundamentally different, threaten that inner conservative streak. Yet even whilst fearing the outlandish, the rebel within us loves the idea of encountering it in our lives. Perhaps the eccentric represents the child within, the child we seek to tame, the child who must assimilate to survive but who is also the anarchist with an infinite capacity for metamorphosis and who, for a limited time, has the curiosity and imagination to imagine endless possibilities.

There are many stories and myths, both in our culture and in others, through which people examine their lives. Perhaps the eccentric who is seen as living and creating their own myth holds some of these possibilities.

2. What is normal?

On 17 September 1859, Joshua Norton, in the San Francisco Bulletin, declared himself Emperor of the United States. Born in London in 1815, he was raised in South Africa and made a fortune in the California Gold Rush speculating in property. He then lost his money within the rice market. Undaunted, Norton found what he considered to be his true vocation: ruling an empire.

He acquired instant fame, taking his responsibilities very seriously. He suspended the Constitution and dissolved both the Republican and democratic political parties as he considered they encouraged dissension. Every week, he attended a different church to avoid sectarian strife. He printed his own money which was accepted in shops and restaurants and wore a blue military uniform with golden epaulettes, a tall, plumed beaver hat, and carried a sword. When his uniform became shabby, he issued an edict stating that 'all our imperial wardrobe is a national disgrace' and that 'we warn those whose duty it is to attend to these affairs that their scalps are in danger if our said need is unheeded'. (Weeks & James (1995), p. 76) The city's Board of Supervisors appropriated the money to buy him a new uniform! In gratitude, he knighted the entire board.

For over twenty years, Joshua Norton walked the streets of San Francisco, ensuring the sidewalks were unobstructed and that the streetcars ran on time. He never missed a session of the State senate, where a seat was reserved for him. When he died in 1880, the San

Francisco Chronicle ran the headline: 'Le Roi Est Mort'. The police were called in to ensure order among the crowds who flocked to the funeral parlour to pay their last respects to their beloved monarch. The flags in the city were flown at half mast and crowds gathered along the streets to watch the funeral procession with thirty thousand mourners attending the graveside service.

During his lifetime, Emperor Norton – while not being regarded as 'normal' – was considered a harmless eccentric, a source of delight, and even an asset to the community. Would he be accorded the same degree of tolerance today? Or, more likely, defined as 'suffering' from some form of mental illness, diagnosed, tranquilised, and then sent into therapy to become 'normal'. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that he was unhappy, or that his life would have been improved if he had been compelled to surrender his eccentricity and made to conform. Indeed, one might argue that his life and that of the society he lived in might have been impoverished if he had succumbed to a 'normal' life.

The expression 'normal' is frequently used and carries an assumption that there is general agreement about its meaning. We speak of normal behaviour, normal development, normal families, normal grieving, and normal health, both mental and physical. 'Normal' is used in contrast to neurotic and psychotic. Psychoanalysis, for instance, tends to discuss the development of children in the light of the neurosis and defences that develop when conditions are far from 'ideal'; that is to say, 'not normal'. What insights, then, does psychoanalysis have to offer about the nature of the 'normal'? This is a vital question. If

there is such a phenomenon as eccentric behaviour, it follows there must be a 'norm', which is known and recognised, from which the eccentric is deviating.

In his paper, 'Normal in Psychoanalysis' (1982), Joseph quotes Freud thus: 'A normal ego is, like normality in general, an ideal fiction'. Nevertheless, Joseph goes on to state that Freud's work is 'replete with the use of normal as neurotic in a variety of ways.' It seems that Freud himself subscribed to the notion that there is a concept of normal that he and his patients were working towards. In his paper, 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), he attempts to describe a 'normal' mourning and contrasts it with melancholia, presumably an abnormal reaction.

Offer and Sabshin (1973) addressed the question of normality from a psychoanalytic point of view in their book 'Normality' and offered several perspectives. One of these is normality as health. In a sense, it is logical that normality will be equated with health, both physical (in the absence of disease) and mental (in the lack of pathological symptoms). In the case of the physical, a deviation from the norm can be defined and measured with some precision; however, in relation to mental health, it is not so easy. The claim that pathological symptoms are evident or not seems to be dependent on a subjective evaluation. In the case of Emperor Norton, he was allowed to be eccentric rather than seen as suffering from a pathological delusion. Nevertheless, Joseph (1982) notes that psychoanalysts tend to accept the equation of mental health and normal, proceeding to offer definitions of mental ill-health as deviancy from the norm.

Another perspective that Offer and Sabshin (1973) consider is normality equated with the average. Statistical work and mathematical concepts have provided us with the familiar bell-shaped curve from which standard statistical averages are determined. The average – that which we expect as normal – will be found in the central bell-shaped portion of the curve. The extremes at either end represent the deviation from the average, and can be defined as abnormal. Such a statistical analysis of human behaviour would locate eccentric behaviour at the extreme ends of any such curve. Interestingly, it would be possible to apply such an analysis to eccentrics themselves and come up with your 'average' eccentric!

This idea of the frequency distribution fits with common sense and seems to have shaped both the expectations of the psychoanalysts – and those entering analysis. The presumption is that normality provides the ideal, the goal of full mental health. In the history of psychoanalysis, the concepts of average and normal have underpinned much thinking. Both Anna Freud and Erickson have put forward theories within which there are stages of development which the child has to negotiate to achieve normal adult pathology. Concepts arising from mathematical models and life experience have entered both the common thought of society and the discipline of psychoanalysis as underlying assumptions.

However, it is the extremes of the curve – the territory of the deviant, the abnormal, and the eccentric – that may provide a fuller understanding and a better definition of what it is to be normal. As each of us moves through life, our behaviours at different times can be

located at varying points of the bell-shaped curve. We may not be formally identified as eccentric or mentally unstable – we are normal - but our behaviours at those times are remarkably like those who deviate.

It seems possible that the 'normal' mind does not in fact exist and perhaps such an ideal can never be achieved. Indeed, one may wonder why anyone would wish to achieve normality and averageness. Certainly, the eccentric would not. As early as 1931, Ernest Jones stated that 'It is not possible to clarify nor to find a 'normal' mind'.

Jones further argued that the concept of 'normality' holds the criteria of happiness, efficiency, and the capacity to adapt to psychological reality. Jones clarified what he meant by 'happiness', an equally problematic concept. He understood it to be freedom from 'intolerable anxiety … fear, hate, and guilt'. (Jones (1931), p.7) Happiness was a mental efficiency marked by a free flow of psychic energy and manifested not only by external signs of success but by the 'full utilisation of a person's potential. (Jones, ibid) Hartman (1939) also considered health and normality are a result of an individual's adaptiveness to reality and he saw this adaptation as indicating a degree of freedom from anxiety. He argued that a healthy ego has a plastic quality. The capacity to regress at times can be healthy; adaptive rather than 'maladaptive'. (Hartmann (1939), p.314)

Hartmann's view is that defence mechanisms, while having a pathological side, are not in themselves unhealthy. They are normal and should be seen as instruments of adaptation, helping to resolve internal conflicts. He emphasises that:

'… health is characterised not by the existence or non-existence of conflicts, defence mechanisms, developmental stages and modes of reaction, but rather by the fact that all of these interact. This interaction must be considered from the point of view of adaptation, and in relation to the individual and to the community within which he operates.'
(Hartmann (1939), p.314)

Melanie Klein (1957) describes five components to an integrated personality, again emphasising the importance of effective adaptation:

- emotional maturity

- strength of character

- a capacity to deal with conflicting emotions

- a balance between an inner life and adaptations to reality

- a welding into a whole of the different aspects of the personality, leading to an integrated self.

In the light of this range of insights from psychoanalysis and keeping in mind the list of the characteristics of eccentricity, it is not difficult to understand Weeks' claim that eccentrics can teach us something about psychological health. They may well be seen as normal, healthy, happy individuals. But perhaps that is not 'normal'!

Be that as it may, eccentrics do exhibit traits which appear far from normal and formerly 'eccentricity' and 'madness' were sometimes used almost interchangeably to describe such

behaviours that were strange and unpredictable. Throughout their study, Weeks and his research team tried to distinguish between eccentricity and mental illness, but it was no easy task to clarify the line of demarcation. There are forms of mental illness which do mimic eccentricity and it is an area which confuses psychiatrists as well as psychoanalysts.

Weeks & James found that in one large teaching hospital, over a ten-year period, only two out of 23,350 patients received at discharge a primary diagnosis of eccentric personality. One of these was a 21-year-old student drop-out and the diagnosis seems to have been based on his mother's comment to the examining psychiatrist: 'When I get depressed, I wonder what I have done to have such eccentric children, but when I'm well I feel glad that they have such individuality'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.96)

To better answer this crucial question whether eccentrics share any of the core characteristics of the genuinely mentally disturbed, Weeks and his team carried out what they termed the Present State Examination, a series of carefully crafted questions designed to elicit the symptoms of mental illness. Weeks knew that eccentricity has been considered by some to be a form of schizophrenia, in short, a schizoid personality disorder. It is also the case that the most common trait found in the healthy, non-psychotic relatives of schizophrenic patients has been some form of eccentric behaviour. Might not some of the symptoms found in schizophrenics also be found in eccentrics? This test would show if there was more than a merely circumstantial relationship between the two conditions.

Weeks and James concluded that the results showed that the mental life of the eccentric is unlike anything yet described by psychologists and that the this is probably also the case within the field of psychoanalysis. Some symptoms found in schizophrenics were found in eccentrics albeit in a mild form with one notable exception: 'thought insertion' did not occur at all. While schizophrenics consider thoughts are being put into their head which are not their own, the eccentric believed that all his thoughts were uniquely and originally his own. These are findings which leave some interesting questions for the psychoanalyst.

The symptoms of schizophrenia are essentially splitting and dissociation, where the inner world is projected onto the outer to build that world up in a delusional way. Other symptoms, such as regression and narcissism, appear as the ego tries to make sense of material, normally kept repressed, that is now flooding the mind. The eccentric, however, has an apparent lack of dissociation and an absence of splitting, suggesting a degree of psychic health and ego strength. One wonders, in passing, what sense would the object relations school of thought make of eccentrics? What part have 'good' and 'bad' objects played in the infancy of eccentrics?

Week's study provides further evidence to support the lack of dissociation within the population of eccentrics. Only one of the supposed eccentrics interviewed was found to have a full-blown psychosis. He was a man of 58 who showed clear symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia and pronounced delusions of grandeur, claiming he had killed Rommel and fought in the Battle of the Bulge before it had happened. We can contrast this instance with the case of the 25-year-old in the study who had constructed his own alternative reality, a

secondary imaginary world which he had built out of miniature models, replicating

occurrences such as regular fuel deliveries and rubbish collections. He had also tried to

reproduce accurate weather conditions such as wind and rain. This was a secondary world

which involved areas of concern from the 'real' world such as elections and environmental

battles with industrial corporations. His fantasy life had clearly taken over, but he was self-

aware: 'I have produced a fantasy Secondary World in response to living in the real one.'

(Weeks & James (1995), p.104)

This young man had not lost his sense nor his awareness of reality, nor does he demand that

anyone else believes in his secondary world. However, unlike most of the eccentrics in the

study, he was not happy, saying that he was lonely and had trouble making friends. Yet life

carries no guarantee of happiness. While some would see his imaginary world as a neurotic

attempt to escape from reality, there is no evidence that giving up his chosen path as

caretaker of a parallel universe would have enhanced his life.

Freud (1937) wrote:

'Every normal person, in fact, is only normal on the average. His ego approximates to that of
the psychotic in some part or other and to a greater or lesser extent.' (p.235)

He described how the ego of the client was willing to co-operate up to a point before

resistance and defence mechanisms took over and the client withdrew from analysis. In an

ideal world, the fictious 'normal ego' would have continued to co-operate. Joseph (1931)

had already engaged with the idea that there is a need for another definition of normality –

to be expressed as 'analysability'. Joseph was suggesting that normality becomes defined as the ability to respond with purpose and success to the unique situation of analysis. Abrams (1979) also concluded that there are 'psychoanalytic normalities': 'the norm of health, the norm that is disease, and the norm of analysability'. Within this supposed norm of analysability, it is difficult to see the eccentric as normal since it is almost impossible to see the subjects of Week's study presenting themselves for analysis or to even consider themselves in need of doing so.

Offer and Sabshin (1973) did offer another perspective on normality, suggesting that normal could be defined in terms of adaptation to change or process. Erickson's life cycle concepts would fit into this understanding of normality since they represent change over a period of time, with a sense of developmental tasks to be completed and with normality looking different at each stage of life. In the light of such a perspective, eccentrics with their creative and original ideas seem remarkably normal and indeed serving as instruments in society's change and progress. Screaming Lord Sutch of the Monster Raving Looney party with his slogan 'Vote for Insanity – You Know It Makes Sense', has campaigned on matters that were first seen as oddball and eccentric but are now recognised as utterly acceptable. The first issue he campaigned for was votes for 18-year-olds. He is now fighting for passports for pets, something that is likely to happen.

Nevertheless, the eccentric, just like other people, may get 'stuck' at a stage, meaning that growth, change, and progress – the path to individuation – does not happen smoothly. That would also seem to be normal.

3. Childhood and the embryonic eccentric

Frequently, clients presenting themselves for analysis speak of the moments in life when they feel 'different' – when they are not part of the crowd, when they do not feel they belong or fit in. They may dread the thought of being inappropriately dressed or expressing a view contrary to the majority opinion. They may even express a view that there is a world out there that they are not a part of, yet they long to join in.

For the eccentric, the opposite is true. They can be said to revel in the feeling of 'differentness' and to seek it out. It follows that at some stage, usually in childhood, the eccentric took the risk of derision and rejection to declare their non-conformity, even before they could experience the pleasure and sense of freedom their eccentricity eventually gave them.

The science fiction writer, Isaac Azimov, captured such a moment in his own life:

'When I was six years old, I was standing on the corner gazing up at the sky during a snowstorm. I was watching the snowflakes, which were dark against the clouds but instantly turned white when they moved downwards against the buildings. My mother called me into the house and lectured me endlessly, to the effect that I must cease my peculiar behaviour. As I grew older, however, I came to be viewed as an unusual person in a complimentary sense.' (Weeks and James (1995), p.110)

Weeks' study found that two thirds of the eccentrics they interviewed realised that they were different between the ages of 4 and 8, although some kept this awareness secret until

they felt confident enough to express it. One may well wonder why some individuals positively choose to live a non-conforming, eccentric life, while others in their misery seek analysis in their drive to conform. There is food for thought in the possibility that those undergoing analytical psychotherapy might come to accept their own eccentricity, seeing it as the fruitful outcome of their own individuation – the process of 'becoming oneself, whole, indivisible and distinct from other people or collective psychology'. (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut (1986), p.76)

Psychoanalysis has brought us an appreciation of the importance of childhood, stressing its developmental significance and emphasising the relevance of childhood experience. Freud saw psychological development as passing through a series of stages: oral, anal, phallic, and genital, with pathology arising from a blockage at one stage or another. The evidence for this was found in his clinical practice and in the transference and countertransference arising out of the psychoanalytic relationship. Such evidence is beyond the remit of Weeks's study, but what it does provide is material that fits into Erikson's stages of life.

Erikson's explanations for how we develop through time do offer some insight into the eccentric during childhood. He suggests the possibility that the child can indeed choose the eccentric life at this childhood stage:

'Being firmly convinced that he is a person on his own, the child must now find out what kind of a person he may become.' (Erikson (1968), p.115)

For Erikson, the child is initially deeply identified with his parents who may appear powerful and good most of the time although sometimes unreasonable, disagreeable, and even dangerous. In the world of nursery and school, the child will begin to make comparisons as he mixes with a wider set of people and influences. During what Freud called the 'latency' period, a time which sees the dissolution of infantile sexuality and the desexualisation of object relations, feelings such as shame and disgust emerge along with moral questioning. The child's conscience develops. He hears the 'inner voice' of self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment.

For some children, their conscience may be cruel and uncompromising. They learn to constrict themselves within ties of strong obedience and conformity. The eccentric child clearly does not. One of the conflicts some eccentric children experience is caused by hate for the one who was initially the model and executor of the conscience but who then was later found to be trying 'to get away with' the transgression the child could not tolerate within himself. Several eccentrics in Weeks' study talk of this stage and the part it played in their awareness of their own difference.

One eccentric woman told of observing how her mother was upset when her father would give her as a child a cigarette to calm her. When she was left to look after her baby sister who began to cry, it crossed her mind that this might work with her. When her parents discovered her trying to place a lighted cigarette in her baby sister's mouth, they thought she was trying to choke her, and she was so severely beaten she could hardly walk.

'What angered me was the unfairness of it. From then on it became a battle of wits between my father and me, and I cared nothing for my mother. I regarded my sister as alien to me. My main priority was space – I insisted on my own bedroom and got it by terrorizing my sister until she showed intense distress at being left alone with me. Antisocial behaviour served me well.' (Weeks & James (1995), p.111)

She consolidated her success through the tactics she used to avoid being used for child-caring, developing the habit of 'not remembering' – not remembering where she had left her sister, and abandoning the pram in various places.

Few of Weeks' eccentrics looked back on their families of origin with warm and positive feelings. In fact, their family relationships seem to be unhappy and fragmented; both the father or mother might equally have been the source of critical comment or argument. The primary means of control the parents tried to exercise over their difficult and non-conforming children appear to be extremely repressive and even abusive. For example:

- 'Very little emotion was expressed in my family except anger. My family thinks I am a deadbeat and always has. My parents divorced in the early 50s and have been fighting World War 111 ever since. Megatons of criticism have been directed at me.'
- 'I had no one to talk to … One simply felt like driftwood, and it never entered one's head to ask. It wasn't the done thing. I received every criticism under the sun.'
- 'I remember once, when I was a little girl, I was second in the class and instead of praising me, my mother said, 'Oh, second …'. I think she was critical of me because she used to compare me with my father who she didn't like.'
  (Weeks & James (1995), p.115)

Might the use of praise and positive reinforcement have produced more conforming children? It would be possible for psychoanalysis to suggest that these childhood

experiences led to non-conformity and eccentricity as a defence, encouraging a tendency towards omnipotence and the possible development of a narcissistic personality. Or, in Kleinian terms, such experiences leading to a defence against the depressive position and the realisation that the frustrating and hated object is also the one that satisfies and is loved, with all the ambivalence and guilt that is likely to accompany such an understanding.

The eccentric child comes across as very aware and certain of the unfairness of their treatment. Their ego appears to have a degree of strength; they do not need to act out the 'victim' role. For some, this sense of the unfairness in life is reinforced by their experience of school which by its very nature is a system which rewards conformity. Young eccentrics frequently felt patronised by their teachers and questioned not only educational methods and school procedures but also the content of syllabuses and sometimes their underlying philosophy.

One eccentric female professor, whose IQ measured 150, stated:

'I first realised that I was odd when I went to school at the age of 5. I thought the teachers were stupid. For instance, on my first day they asked me if I would like a drink of milk. I said 'No, thank you.' They insisted I drink it anyway. I thought how stupid the teacher was for asking me in the first place. I could already write my name, but she insisted that I keep a name card on my desk. This would have been alright if she had told me the reason was so that she could remember my name … but I was not given a sensible reason. … the reason I felt so odd was because the other children seemed to accept all this was quite normal, but I didn't'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.116)

Others when describing their school days talk of the banality and pointlessness of group play; the eccentrics' sensitivity to this is something carried into adult life. Boredom is to be avoided and the eccentrics interviewed tended to see co-operation as meaning being held back by the less able. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the young eccentric is regarded as an 'oddball'. One stated:

'I found it very difficult to communicate with other children. I spent most of the breaks at school standing on my own in a corner of the playground. Whenever I tried to socialise with my fellow pupils, I was amazed by their pettiness, their selfishness, and most of all by their hypocrisy. I cried often, and children who are prone to crying are never popular at school'.

(Weeks & James (1995), p.116)

There are, however, instances where the young eccentric emerges as a charismatic ringleader. One subject who was bored in her early years because she could already read and write, embarked on a career of disruptive behaviour which led to her being expelled from several schools. Neither her parents nor schoolteachers could discipline her which led to her disrespecting them. 'Punishment, even sever beatings, had no effect on me. I laughed in the face of it, and of course that made whoever was doing it even angrier'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.117)

Erikson describes this school-age stage of childhood as 'socially a most decisive stage'. (Erikson (1968), p.126) It is a time which involves doing things beside and with others. There may be development of identification with those who both know and are able to do things, for example, their teachers. The child will transfer their trust from the parent to the teacher,

and in fact many adults do acknowledge that a particular talent was inspired by a particular

teacher.

Not so the eccentric. There is, therefore, no danger that the embryonic eccentric will

become the over-conforming, compliant child who sees work as the criteria of

worthwhileness, sacrificing imagination and creativity. Winnicott is cutting in his critique:

'Through this False Self the infant builds up a false set of relationships, and by means of
introjection even attains a show of being real, so that the child may grow to be just like
mother, nurse, aunt, brother, or whoever dominates the scene. The False Self has one very
positive and very important function: to hide the True Self, which it does by compliance with
environmental demands.' (Winnicott (1960), p.145)

This is not the path of the eccentric in childhood. Can we then make the leap to say that

they have developed a True Self? Winnicott saw this as developing when:

'The good enough mother meets the omnipotence of the infant and to some extent makes
sense of it. She does this repeatedly. A True Self begins to have life through the strength
given to the weak ego by the mother's implementation of the infant's omnipotent
expressions.' (Winnicott (1960), p.145)

While there is insufficient information available about the lives of eccentrics during infancy,

it seems most unlikely from their tales of childhood that the Winnicott model is applicable

to them. Is there, therefore, another path to the True Self: the path taken by the embryonic

eccentric?

One of the surprising trends discovered in Weeks' study was that slightly more than 70 per cent of the subjects were first-born children. (Weeks & James (1995), p.110) The eldest child is seen in many cultures as having a traditionally advantageous position. Studies show that it is the eldest child who more often attends university. Other research has indicated that the eldest child becomes overly conformist, liking 'to take part in the exercise of authority and exaggerate the importance of rules and laws.' (Adler (1956), p.377) Yet this is clearly not the case with eccentrics.

Adler may have provided an answer to this puzzle in his analysis of what he calls 'dethronement', the situation when another sibling arrives in the family:

'Another child is born, and he is no longer unique. Now he must share the attention of his mother and father with a rival. We can find in problem children, neurotics, criminals, drunkards, and perverts that their difficulties began under such circumstances.' (Adler (1956), p.377)

Is the arrival of a sibling one of the significant factors in the eccentric's adoption of their idiosyncratic behaviour?

Adler also offers an insight into what may happen in a family where there in only one child. He considers it possible that such a child can be caught up in a 'mother complex' in which:

'The child is scared to death lest he should have brothers and sisters following him. … He wants to be the centre of attention all the time. He really feels that it is a right of his and if his position is challenged, he thinks it is a great injustice. In later life, when he is no longer the centre of attention, he has many difficulties.' (Adler (1956), p.381)

Does eccentricity provide an unconscious solution to this dilemma? The research evidence is lacking; the question remains open.

An eccentric childhood that has gained a measure of renown is the one that was shared by the Mitfords and described by Nancy Mitford in 'The Pursuit of Love' and 'Love in a Cold Climate' and by Jessica Mitford in 'Hons and Rebels'. The six daughters and one son were the children of Lord and Lady Redesdale, known as 'Farve' and 'Muv'. Farve, almost a child himself, was openly hostile to books and learning. He built the family house like a fortress, difficult for the family to escape from and for outsiders to enter. He was loving but changeable. At any one time and for no apparent reason one daughter would be the favourite whilst another blamed for everything during what became known as Rat Week. Muv was seen as a placid and remote figure who lived in a dream world of her own, with strange ideas on child-rearing especially about diet and health.

The Mitford girls, perhaps not surprisingly, did not conform from their earliest youth. When taken to see Peter Pan, at the point when Peter asks the children to say they believe in fairies to save Tinker Bell's life, the Mitfords all shouted our 'No!' There was a constant state of sibling battle usually led by Nancy, the eldest. Perhaps she never recovered from the shock of dethronement. She certainly appears to have spent her time trying to make life miserable for Pam, the next to be born. Deborah was another Mitford daughter who was particularly at the receiving end of the tormenting games. It is of interest that the two who were most in victim role during their childhood grew up to lead the most conventional and conforming lives, Deborah marrying the Duke of Devonshire.

One eccentric who is known to the writer is fascinated by Church architecture and eccentric clergymen. He acknowledges the part his early life played in his non-conforming personality, describing himself as:

'The only child of elderly parents who were determined that I should not be spoilt and that I should be able to occupy myself. This accounts for the oddity you know today.'

Parents do have powerful and persuasive means at their disposal – as well as unconscious influences – which shape the behaviour and personalities of their children.

Families are formative for both the 'normal' child and for the young eccentric. There is, however, little evidence that eccentricity can be implanted by child rearing or early unconscious processes alone. Most eccentrics are raised by ordinary, conforming people who are bemused by their child's idiosyncratic behaviour. And the children of eccentrics may show a compulsion to conform to the dismay of their nonconforming parents! Perhaps it is important not to ignore the significance of the conscious choice to adopt the eccentric life. Psychoanalysis has focused on the unconscious drives that underpin behaviour. But for eccentrics, there seems to come a point in life when they consciously opt to be different and enjoy it, whereas other people end up following the path of conformity or assuming the role of the victim.

One other question of interest arises before we close this focus on childhood. We have seen how many parents and teachers of eccentric children have labelled them as different and difficult, and in time, perhaps, as eccentric. The eccentrics themselves have happily

taken on this ascription and role. Can it be said then that there is an archetype of the eccentric? Samuels, Shorter & Plaut (1986) claimed that 'archetypal behaviours are most evident at times of crisis, when the ego is most vulnerable' (p.27). The adoption of eccentricity then becomes a singular event, usually in childhood, that in effect establishes an archetype for a lifetime.

A narcissistic personality?

Having reached adulthood, most eccentrics are outgoing, talkative characters, but some are not. There are shy, withdrawn eccentrics, often those who have chosen the life of the recluse. All seem to attract attention and comment, most of it affectionate. This tendency to draw attention raises the issue of a possible narcissistic element in behaviour. Is there a need to be talked about and noticed? Did the exhibitionist and perhaps eccentric journalist, Jeffrey Bernard, achieve his aim when he was immortalised by Keith Waterhouse in one of the most successful West End productions of recent years?

It would be quite possible to equate such attention seeking behaviour with the mythological story of Narcissus. The message of this tale lies in the idea of seeing one's own reflection – whether it is in the surface of a pond or in the mirroring face of one's mother -and becoming transfixed there, unable to separate and relate to others. In the myth, Narcissus becomes mesmerised by his own reflection in a pool and, unable to move from the spot, dies of malnutrition. The symbolic message is that the individual child can become fixated at tone stage of development, hoping to establish a sense of their true Self but unable to complete the task of separation for fear of primal rejection by the parent.

The child in this situation can be condemned to a lifetime of restriction, cut off from both the Self and the inner child and unable to deal with the disturbing, shadow side of life. In the adult, this problem makes it very difficult for the individual to relate to others or to the spiritual reality of the Self. The narcissistic personality is vulnerable to the least failure and craves admiration and adulation to support the false Self, which is maintained by a protective set of behaviours to control the anxiety of the situation. The child in the adult is tormented by feelings of envy and rage, despair, isolation, and depression.

Some eccentric behaviour is, perhaps, open to an explanation derived from the Narcissus myth. Such behaviour certainly can attract attention and possibly admiration and even adulation, thus helping to control separation anxieties. However, such a perspective may derive from our ambivalent feelings in relation to the eccentric who appears to be so happily 'getting away' with nonconformity, whilst radiating great charm. Envy could be a player here.

Narcissism is currently of great interest within the field of psychoanalysis and in more popular psychology, with some considering it to represent the problem of our age. Narcissists do not have a good reputation. Interestingly, psychotherapy and analysis - with their emphasis on the individual's search for self and desire to understand unconscious processes – are sometimes considered narcissistic activities. But this is to miss the point. As Jacoby argues, 'Analysis revolves not around the ego but around the self, and thus is neither narcissistic nor encouraging of narcissism.' (Jacoby (1985), p.21)

Nevertheless, it could be argued that the embryonic eccentric may become fixated with the initial attention-seeking experience and that thereafter the personality is shaped by reinforcing behaviour. Freud's concept of narcissism is of relevance here and is developed in his paper 'On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914). In this paper, he describes narcissism as 'the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is treated – who looks at it, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities'. (Freud (1914), p.65) He goes on to say that 'narcissism might claim a place in the regular course of human sexual development' (ibid). Freud introduces the concept of primary narcissism, characterised by the total absence of any relationship to the outside world and by a lack of differentiation between ego and id. This phenomenon was one Freud encountered in schizophrenic patients who took a megalomaniac stance, turning away from interest in external matters, be they people or things, and in hypochondriacs who noticed the most minute and fleeting detail in their own physical states. They seemed to have withdrawn their libido from the outer world and were directing it instead to the ego.

Are eccentrics schizoid or hypochondriac? Weeks found no such link between his eccentrics and schizophrenia, but one eccentric, the pianist Glenn Gould, was known to be a hypochondriac. He was constantly worrying about his health, feared draughts, and appeared on stage dressed as if for an arctic expedition in hat, mittens, scarf, and coat. He consulted several doctors, specialists in whatever symptoms were concerning him and without telling them what any of the others prescribed. His mother, who had

determined during her pregnancy that her child would be musical, later died after suffering a stroke and a year later Gould was diagnosed as suffering from hypertension. By his fiftieth birthday, he was taking medication for hypertension, headaches, gout, and anxiety, as well as various non-prescription drugs. Two days after that fiftieth birthday, Glenn Gould suffered a fatal stroke.

His biographer and friend, the American psychiatrist, Peter Ostwald, describes him as a 'unique genius', commenting on 'his humour, his charm, his originality, and his problems'. (Ostwald (1997), p.335) Ostwald noted that from their first meeting Glenn liked to be in control, his talk focussed on his health and himself:

'At no time did he ask what my thoughts and reactions might be.' (Ostwald (1997), p.28)

Throughout his friendships with Ostwald and others, Glenn, an insomniac, would telephone during the middle of the night and talk for hours, regardless of their need for sleep. Ostwald comments:

'It suddenly occurred to me that during the five hours we had spent together, Glenn had minimised all human relations; he'd said very little about his family and almost nothing about any friends, teachers or other people who might have been close to him.'
(Ostwald (1997), p.32)

There is much material here to suggest that Gould may have had both an eccentric and narcissistic character, but it does not necessarily follow that all eccentrics are therefore narcissistic.

The modern composer, David Fanshawe, provides an interesting contrast to Gould as an example of an eccentric who can form and maintain relationships. In his autobiography 'African Sanctus' which bears the same title as his major musical work in which tribal melodies are interwoven with the texts of the Latin mass, he describes how he walked alone from Egypt to Uganda, recording the music of fifty African tribes. The elder of two boys, he grew up in Camberley with a military father. He was attracted to Africa from his earliest childhood.

His life story is revealing. He did not waste money: 'Total cost £48 – Travel Expense £2.2.0 – distance covered 12,000 miles.' (Fanshawe (1975), p.9) Before he set out on his travels, he wrote:

'My vision is Vast and Simple. My music will communicate a message of love, peace and faith in the One God.' (Fanshawe, ibid)

He achieved so close a rapport with the local people that they allowed him to be present at their most sacred ceremonies, and even on occasion danced and sang for him.

Tellingly, he relates the 'Potato Story':

When he was ten, he threw a shrivelled potato onto a fire. He suddenly felt desperately sad for the potato and picking it up ran outside with it. With tears streaming down, he flung it into the snow. Fanshawe connects his feeling in the story with that of a person who is lonely, dejected, and sad but adds: 'Potato Sadness is sadness which touches the heart almost to breaking point'. (Fanshawe (1975), p.31)

Fanshawe reconnects with this 'Potato Feeling' throughout his travels, and while this may be seen as a narcissistic mirroring of his own pain, it can also be interpreted as an empathic reaction. His story is told in the setting of an imaginary trial by a Witch Doctor in which Fanshawe features as both the accused who must describe all the facts of his life from childhood onwards, and as the patient whose creative gifts can only be released if he comes to know who he is. The reader as well as the Witch Doctor is called on to pronounce a judgement based on the evidence. There are many ways in which his autobiography can be seen as the story of his individuation.

Kohurt (1971) identified in the narcissistic personality a variety of possible symptoms:

- sexual phantasies

- lack of interest in sex

- work inhibitions

- inability to form or maintain significant relationships

- delinquent activity

- lack of humour

- lack of empathy for other people's needs and feelings

- tendency towards rage

- pathological lying

- hypochondriacal preoccupations with health.

He also took the view that whatever the analyst's original diagnosis this could only be confirmed through a study of the developing transference. Such a position rather rules out the typical eccentric who is unlikely ever to find themselves in analysis. In any case, a comparison of Kohut's list of narcissistic characteristics with Weeks' list of the features of eccentricity points to the conclusion that there is very little link between narcissism and eccentricity.

However, it has been argued that narcissism is a necessary part of healthy development, leading to a constellation of the Self. Satinover, in his paper 'The Childhood Self and The Origins of Pure Psychology' (1980), provides the example of a woman who recalls awaking from her nap at the age of two and a half with the sudden awareness of who she was and an awareness that she could decide whether she wanted a nap or not. She called her parents into her room and informed them that she was no longer going to take an afternoon nap. This is a story not too dissimilar from those told by eccentrics of their childhood experiences when they had an early, abrupt kind of experience of identity marked by such specific feelings of importance, even of omniscience and omnipotence.

Satinover considers that these feelings indicate that it is the Self which, under the surface, has been constellated. The child, as part of the normal constellation of Self, needs to experience such a majestic expansion of the sense of who he is. At the core of later adult identity, therefore, is this necessary inflation – in another word, narcissism. Such a childhood Self, which remains at the core of later identity, provides a deep basis for belief in one's ultimate worth and value. In this early experience of self, Satinover sees the basis for

later healthy introversion. The child has learnt that in times of frustration and failure he can turn inwards and connect with a sense of worthiness. This act of turning inwards and depending on himself becomes a habit. Here, one might almost think that Satinover was writing about the eccentric.

Winnicott (1958) provides a case study that neatly illustrates the differences between the narcissist and the eccentric. He references a female patient, whom he considered to be narcissistic, seeing her client-role with Winnicott as 'valuable to her chiefly for her own relief, a taking without giving, a relationship with her own internal objects. She remembered how a day or two before the session how she had suddenly thought to herself: 'How awful to be really oneself – how terribly lonely'. (Winnicott (1958), p. 143) Not a statement that an eccentric would be likely to make.

Fanshawe and other eccentrics show many of the positive attributes of the inner child:

- spontaneity of thought

- creativity in problem solving

- creativity in original expression

- a capacity to risk detachment from one's origins

- an ability to exist in a perpetually evolving state

- the facility to visualise new beginnings and seek out opportunities

- the wherewithal to delight and charm others

In this respect, are they providing us with examples of the 'puer aeternus' and a healthy psyche? The normal child who is not clinically neurotic is intensely alive; whatever he may be suffering, he does not suffer remoteness from life. It is perhaps because of this awareness or memory that adults long to get back in touch with the vitality they lost in 'growing up'. This leads to the speculation that it is our envy of the eccentric which lies behind the negative or ambivalent feelings they may arouse. Might it be the case that our own narcissism needs our conformity reflected and projected, as a reinforcement against the appeal of the eccentric, an untapped aspect of our psyche we cannot accept.

The myth of eccentricity

Our fascination with eccentricity plays its part in shaping the creation of our own myth, as well as developing the myth of eccentricity itself. All men and women, including those who appear completely conventional, invent themselves to some extent. We all create and live the stories of our lives, developing what may be considered our own myth. Parts of this myth may be conscious, parts unconscious. We tell stories of our past to make sense of who we are and in doing that we are constructing the past from our present perspective. And, of course, this is a past which can be reconstructed in the future as we grow and change.

Jung, at the beginning of his autobiography 'Memories, Dreams and Reflections', wrote:

'Thus it is now that I have undertaken, in my eighty-third year to tell my personal myth. I can only make direct statements, only "tell stories". Whether or not the stories are "true" is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is *my* fable, *my* truth.'

He added:
'My life story is a story of self-realisation of the unconscious. Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation.' (Jung (1983), p.17)

Jung was a man of many parts: creative, nonconforming, curious, idealistic, obsessed with his own field of analytic psychology, intelligent, opinionated, outspoken – and ever wishing to persuade others to his own point of view. He was also aware – and had been since childhood - of his difference from others. Jung has at least some of

the credentials of the eccentric. His self-presentation in his autobiography can be taken as a view that may well have similarities with those of other eccentrics.

It is true that analytic psychology has since questioned Jung's interpretation of the importance of myths but there is a recognition that he did offer insights into the part myths play in both individual and group identities. Jung believed that certain motifs from myths and legends repeated themselves in an almost identical form all over the world. He saw this as the explanation of why the dreams of his mental patients contained so many of the same images and associations. He concluded that he must be dealing with 'myth-forming' structural elements in the psyche – which he named archetypes. In his view, these archetypes consistently represented recurring types of situations and figures, such as the hero, the divine child, the trickster, the wise old man, and the mother and the father. He also saw these archetypes, rising from the unconscious, in both the phantasy life and the mythologies of patients. Jung also argued that the collective unconscious too held such archetypal figures and themes.

While Jung accepted Freud's concept of the contents of the unconscious, he did not consider that infantile trauma was sufficient an explanation for neurosis. Jung's formulation of the concept of archetypes was designed to advance the understanding of the unconscious which he now defined as having two layers, that of a personal unconscious and a collective unconscious. The personal unconscious contains the individual's lost memories, or painful and repressed material not yet ready for consciousness, while the collective unconscious is detached from anything personal and is universal, its contents found everywhere. However, more recent

clinical work has shown that personal material reveals the influence of the collective unconscious background and can often indicate a personal voice expressing an age-old myth.

Guggenbühl-Craig (1991) argued that families live their own myths and therefore they cannot be understood fully unless one grasps the myth behind their behaviour. For one family, the myth might be one of independence, of working for themselves; for another, having a job for life, with a pension, is part of their story. Some families may find themselves living out a mythic victim role, with a belief system in which the watchword is 'We put ourselves out to help others, yet we are always being cheated'. For others, the myth will have historical roots such as a sense of pride in an Italian background. What really happened or happens is not what matters; it is the meaning given which is important.

Weeks' study does not provide sufficient evidence to say whether there is a particular myth in the families of eccentrics, playing a part in their behaviour. However, Timpson in 'English Eccentrics' (1991) does suggest that eccentricity is a pattern that runs in some families which might suggest an element of family mythology. He writes of Sir Harvey Elwes, an extremely wealthy man who lived in Suffolk, whose eccentric lifestyle was shown through obsessive economy and thrift. His nephew, John Meggott, showed no signs of his uncle's miserly ways until on Sir Harvey's death he inherited his estate and fortune. Whereupon he changed his name to Elwes and embarked on an equally austere way of living, leaving at his

death at the age of seventy-six the equivalent in today's figures of twenty million

pounds. Did the family myth take him over?

The Marchioness of Salisbury, who entertained extravagantly and hunted until she

was eighty while still dressing in the style and fashion of her youth, also appears to

have founded a dynasty of eccentrics although it initially skipped a generation. The

second Marquess led an orthodox political life but the third Marquess of Salisbury,

Queen Victoria's Prime Minister, brought a touch of his grandmother's eccentric

style back to Hatfield House. His ways were, however, the opposite to hers. He

shrank from people and company and dressed so scruffily that he was once arrested

by a farmer who thought he was a poacher.

Sir George Sitwell was the eccentric father of the equally eccentric Sitwell children.

There was a notice in his house in Derbyshire declaring:

'I must ask anyone entering the house never to contradict me in any way, as it
interferes with the functioning of my gastric juices and prevents me sleeping at
night'. (Timpson (1991), p.157)

His attitude towards his children was one of disapproval of everything they did. This

seems to have led to a predictably rebellious response, especially from Edith. During

her youth she refused to wear white as expected of young society girls at that time,

instead adopting long black dresses, the forerunners of the Plantagenet style she

made her own.   She is later in her life reported to have said that she was not

interested in fashion as she could not possibly reinvent herself every few months.

Edith Sitwell's eccentricity is well documented; what is less clear is the extent to

which her eccentricity is a sign of her individuation or an indication that her psyche was somehow stuck and no longer growing or changing.

The expression of eccentricity may be shaped by the mythology of some families. There is evidence of families with members playing archetypal roles. Weeks' study does provide some quotes, albeit from the eccentrics themselves, which indicate that their families saw them as different from quite young and that they also shared this view even if they did not live out their eccentric life until later. It is possible that these cases might be examples of an archetype constellating and a projection of eccentricity taking hold.

If this is the case, one wonders what function such an outcome may serve for the parents and other family members. Eccentric children are not always appreciated by their parents! These parents may be conformist and pillars of the community with strong superegos and a persona image which fits with collective standards and is dependent on external validation. Is it possible that they scapegoat their nonconforming offspring who are carrying some of their parents' shadow?

One may wonder, in turn, what lies in the shadow side of eccentrics, an issue which does not seem immediately obvious. Eccentrics do not have a list of 'those whom I cannot stand'. In fact, they seem to be remarkably accepting of people. When they talk freely of their rage against the unfairness of childhood there seems to be no picture of them looking for the 'ideal' parental figures in their future relationships. Weeks does himself comment on their tolerance and respect for different views and

different people. However, the fact remains that their shadow complex will mean

that some 'bad' will be projected onto others since the shadow exists for each and

everyone of us. Perhaps for the eccentric the collective and the conventional is their

shadow – and for them the process of individuation would be about confronting

these.

Eccentrics, with their nonconformity, creativity, even perhaps genius, can become

mythic, a legend in their own lifetime either in their locality or family or for the wider

world. Is the eccentric then compelled to live out that myth? Elizabeth Salter, Edith

Sitwell's secretary during the last years of her life, wrote in her account of that time:

'One of the penalties of becoming a legend in one's own lifetime is that, in the end,
the legend obscures the person. By the time she was sixty-nine and I became her
secretary, the people who met Edith Sitwell for the first time were meeting the
legend.' (Salter (1967), p.12)

Dawn Langley Simmons, Margaret Rutherford's adopted daughter, explained in her

biography of her mother:

'Even then mother was beginning to be typecast much against her will. Accepting the
inevitable with grace, she acknowledged, however reluctantly: "The parts I had been
given had begun to show signs of the eccentricity that I later developed into my own
special technique". (Langley Simmons (1983), p.30)

The cloaks and carpet bags she wore in her films and plays were her own. There was

one occasion when Margaret Rutherford was given a costume allowance for the part

in the play she was in. She carefully chose something she thought was suitable.

When the director saw her chosen costume, he asked her to change back into what

she was wearing when she came in that morning. Margaret Rutherford had become

her own legend. Is this an example of an archetype constellating, leaving this individual eccentric subject to powerful forces which kept her in role?

Myths have a remarkable persistence, despite our attempts to explain and interpret them. They work away in the background of human life as ideas, images, and tales. We do not recognise them if they work. Guggenbühl-Craig (1991) suggests that one of the great modern myths is the idea of progress. In many ways it is natural to consider that we are making progress: technically, materially, economically, psychologically, and in terms of personal freedom. Is there, then, a parallel psychological myth that we may one day live life fully as ourselves? Is that the hope the eccentric can hold for some?

Jung himself assumed that it was possible for humans to gain more self-awareness. This process will include a confrontation with the shadow, the destructive side. We may spend the first half of life founding a family and establishing a working life. But the second half of life involves the process of individuation – the finding of the whole self and an approach towards a higher, better plane; an expansion of consciousness and of the self. With this, we think, will come complete contentment. The eccentric, happily living their nonconforming life, may hold the belief and hope that this will happen for us.

During Poetry Week in October 1996, the BBC polled 7,500 viewers on their favourite post-war poem. 'Warning' by Jenny Joseph 'scored a resounding victory'.

(*The Guardian*, 12 October 1996) This poem has been described as 'a rhapsody on

the delights of growing old disgracefully' (ibid):

'When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've got no money for butter.

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick the flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children,
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old and start to wear purple.'

Is this simply 'a rhapsody on the delights of growing old disgracefully'? It could also

be a wish for eccentricity. What it does show is the longing among those who

responded to the BBC poll for a life of more freedom and less convention. Perhaps it

expresses a desire for the myth of the old fool. Guggenbühl-Craig (1991) sees the

myth of the old fool as complementing the myth of the wise old man or woman. He

considers that there is today great pressure on people to conform to the wise old man or woman mythology, to remain active and productive members of society as long as possible. This association of wisdom and old age can be damaging; the myth of the old fool counterbalances it and restores psychological health. He is not suggesting that old people cease working, rather that they no longer need to be driven by purposes, such as making money, boosting the economy, or being powerful. In short, they can enjoy the freedom of fools.

In what he writes there is much that resonates with the behaviour patterns of the eccentric. It is almost as if Guggenbühl-Craig is advocating a growing into eccentricity. He tells the story of a seventy-five-year-old former politician who would telephone his wife when the whim took him to say things like: 'I will not be back tonight. I feel the urge to take the train to Venice and back'. (Guggenbühl-Craig (1991), p.107) There is also the story of the eighty-year-old who, at a formal dinner given by his son, rose at 10 o'clock and said to the party: 'The old fogey has to go to bed now, otherwise he'll fall asleep in his chair'. (ibid) He no longer felt the need to appear smart and wise. How many of us have longed to be free to do the same?

Another tale is that of a retired bank manager who turned up at a formal function wearing tennis shoes, one of which was painted in many colours. He explained that he had thought it was fun but had not got around to painting the other. The old fool is no idiot, but a free person in touch with their full range of emotions, including the fear of death. When Guggenbühl-Craig writes that '"We demand the liberty to be fools" would be a suitable slogan for a political demonstration by the old'

(Guggenbühl-Craig (1991), p.110), it is resonant of Screaming Lord Sutch of the Monster Raving Looney party and his slogan: "Vote for Insanity. You know it makes sense." There is much of the child – shaped, possibly, by an idealised golden age myth of childhood – as well as the old fool in eccentricity. Perhaps it is children, fools and eccentrics who speak the truth.

Solitude, creativity, and the eccentric

Most of the eccentrics interviewed in Weeks' study had experienced long periods of isolation during their childhoods, either because of exclusion by their peers due to their difference or because of circumstances. They accepted that these periods of isolation may have contributed to the development of their eccentricity. Their solitary pursuits and escape into books and a fantasy world provided them with more satisfaction than any group activity. Their own resources provided amusement as they experimented with their solitary surroundings. Whatever activities they discovered became intensely rewarding, possibly further removing them from a 'normal' childhood and forming the basis of their obsessions in adult life. Their creativity and insatiable curiosity meant they used their solitude constructively. There is clear evidence here that their inner worlds became more important than anything the external world had to offer, and this can be said to be so for both the outgoing, talkative eccentric and the shy, reclusive ones.

The current *zeitgeist* is that a person's psychological health lies in their ability to form and maintain relationships and that happiness comes from close, intimate attachments. This, for many, is undoubtedly true. Man is a social being, but does he need constant companionship from cradle to grave? The criminals of today, from shoplifter to serial killer, are seen as people whose close, intimate relationships have failed. No other explanation is necessary or is sought. Perhaps this current emphasis

is getting in the way of an appreciation of the value, even the necessity, of solitude. Is ours an age which fears solitude and sees it in the context of the 'problem of loneliness'? in previous ages, the capacity to seek fulfilment outside society was admired and seen as a measure of inner security. The study of the biographies and lives of many creative individuals, poets, writers, artists, and composers, shows the importance of solitude for them Most have lived alone for the greater part of their livers.

Creativity and insatiable curiosity are at the heart of eccentricity. Those who do possess creative talent, or show indications of genius, can be the targets of an envy which is not always conscious. Such creative people may sometimes be called eccentric, but they can also be described as odd and peculiar, seen as abnormal in their seeking of solitude to pursue their creativity. They do not value relationships because of some inadequacy within their psyches. The belief that creative men and women of genius are unstable has been held for some time.

There are clearly examples of creative people whose relationships have been stormy and who have turned to alcoholism or drug abuse. Whilst this is not the case with eccentrics, it is important to remember that all humans differ in temperament. Some psychologists have recognised these differences as inborn, while psychoanalysis has tended to see them as arising from early experiences. Both positions have validity when considering the individual's need and ability to cope with solitude. At the very least we all have a biological need for the solitude of sleep! But in waking life, people

vary in how much they value experiences which involve other people, and how much they value what happens when they are alone.

How far can eccentrics be 'fitted' into existing models of psychological explanation such as the introvert-extrovert spectrum? Jung introduced the terms 'extrovert' and 'introvert' in 1921 in his book: 'Psychological Types'. He wondered how Freud and Adler could offer such different interpretations of human nature and concluded that human beings must belong to different psychological types. Jung argued that the personalities displayed in the introvert-extravert spectrum were laid down from the beginning of life and co-existing in everyone in varying degrees.

Jung's reasoning derived from his understanding of Freud and Adler. Jung considered that Freud saw the subject as being dependent on, and overall shaped by, significant objects, chiefly, parents and early childhood experiences. The patterns formed in early life explained the patient's difficulties with object relations and were replayed in the transference during therapy. Jung, on the other hand, considered that Adler viewed the subject as compelled to form a protection against the power of significant objects. The subject who feels 'inferior' will try to bring about a false superiority by means of protest, against, for instance, parents, teachers, and other authority figures. For Freud, the emphasis is on objects, and for Adler, on the subject. This may be too simplistic a summary, but Freud's position lies behind the concept of extraversion, the subject in search of and moving towards objects, and Adler's underpins the concept of introversion, the subject needing to establish self-determination and moving away from objects.

Presumably, the psychologically healthiest people will have both characteristics in equal degrees, but for most of us one or the other dominates. The reality remains that even the most introverted person will need some relationships and the most extravert some inner order. It therefore follows that neurosis is likely to occur if either aspect becomes exaggerated, with extreme extraversion leading to a loss of identity in the chaos of people and events, and extreme introversion resulting in a loss of contact with external reality. Such an analysis provides interesting material when we consider the case of the eccentric.

If all individuals vary on where they are on the extraversion-introversion scale, it is possible that so do eccentrics. Weeks' analysis does suggest that there are extraverted and introverted eccentrics. There are, for instance, those who 'dress to impress'. George 'Beau' Brummell bought himself out of the army to concentrate on his clothes! He washed, a very eccentric idea at the time, and took three hours to tie his cravat. Another eccentric Brighton beau, Henry Cope, was known as 'The Green Man of Brighton' as he only wore green, painted his house green, and had green furniture and a green carriage. There seems to be a decidedly extraverted side to such behaviour and personality.

At the other extreme, Henry Cavendish was a scientist who found it almost impossible to talk to anyone. He left notes for his servants and built a separate staircase for his own use to avoid meeting them. A very unworldly individual, when Cavendish was left a fortune by his father and his bank manager enquired how he

wished to use this legacy, Cavendish reprimanded the banker for questioning him about such a trivial matter. The bank manager, left to his own devices, invested wisely and Cavendish amassed an even larger fortune.

George Edward Dering was an inventor and eccentric who avoided his servants by not living in his mansion. He visited just before Christmas to pay the wages and read the mail. He would ride away again on Christmas morning to an unknown destination.

These two cases do illustrate introversion possibly carried to extreme, and one might wonder if there is some suggestion of a schizoid defence at work. Overall, there is evidence then of the extremes being present in the eccentric personality range. Nevertheless, it seems to be the case that most eccentrics are in fact more in touch with the inner world of ideas, creativity, and curiosity and that any extraverted, outrageous behaviour comes from this. Their behaviour, dress, and way of life may all attract attention, but it is their own sense of worth and their obsessions which single them out.

Another interesting case to consider is that of eccentric hermits. The human impulse to take off and live alone is an ancient one and societies have varied in their responses. Some of the early Christians became hermits to escape from the distractions of life in the village or town. With solitude came peace, a clearer perception of the way to spiritual health, and perhaps an awareness of the self-deceptions of those who lived in society. The tales told by the Desert Fathers are a

rich treasure of psychological insight written with humility, compassion, and humour. Do such writings provide evidence for their process of individuation?

People embark on the journey of psychotherapy or analysis usually with the expressed hope for change. For some, their hope may be that those they are in relationship with will change. It is above all a journey of self-discovery, of becoming whole and more truly oneself. The role of solitude in bringing about such change and insight has been recognised by those religious who have retreated from this world, sometimes for short spells before returning, renewed. Contemporary society, with all its noise, traffic, 'muzak', and mobile phones, makes the peace of solitude elusive.

How does contemporary society view such hermits? Eccentric, yes, odd, and even inadequate – but many people are drawn to know and understand more about such a way of life. Peter France, in his book 'Hermits' (1996), commented on the discovery that partly prompted his interest in the subject. France lives for much of his time on the Greek Aegean Island of Patmos where there are still hermitages and hermits. His house overlooks a hermitage which was abandoned by its hermit because he had so many visitors all seeking his advice, as his reputation for wisdom spread. It amazed France that someone who had withdrawn from life and relationships was called on for his insight into such matters.

Peter France's further research provided the evidence that that this frequently happened – and concluded that 'Hermits are somehow reordering the priorities for those of us who live among people'. (France (1996), p. xiii) He references the case of

Thomas Merton who struggled with his wish to live as a hermit and his need for companionship. Merton himself wrote that withdrawal was about a 'refusal to accept the myths and fictions with which the social life can not help but be full – especially today'. (France (1996), p.177) Perhaps this reordering, this refusal to accept contemporary myths and fictions, is what draws us to the eccentric, whether a recluse or not.

One of Merton's friends, the eccentric American poet Robert Lax, today lives on the island of Patmos. Lax has been described as a hermit in society. He cuts a lean figure, with the look of a Pilgrim Father with a white beard, as he walks the streets, talking to the many friends he has made on the island in the thirty years he has lived there. France describes him as 'concerned, compassionate and sensitive. He is a close and loyal friend …'. (France (1996), p. xvi) However, he returns to a small, empty house and has lived alone for forty years. The silence and solitude are necessary for his writing and the insights which lead to his poetry. Solitude is, for him, above all a working environment. In this there is a parallel with David Fanshawe who travels for long periods on his own and sees this as necessary for his creativity, yet also sociable and a loyal friend. The picture emerging here is of individuals who give to others from their own centre or self rather than from a false persona.

Another interesting feature of Weeks' study was the number of female eccentrics who were reclusive. Weeks also noted that women tend to exhibit their eccentricity later in life than men. While she is married and her children are young, a woman is more likely to conform. Her eccentricity and creativity are given fuller rein when the

children have left home. This seems to fit with Jung's view that 'individuation

belonged to the second half of life'. (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut (1986), p.79)

Some of the eccentric women in Weeks' research went out of their way to point out

that it seems more socially acceptable for a man to choose the solitary life than a

woman. If this adoption of eccentric behaviour by the woman is part of her

individuation, is she, in Jungian terms, exploring her animus? One female artist

remarked:

'People think that because I'm a woman I must be caring, nurturing, and people
orientated. They just can't believe that I prefer my own company. They don't realise
that my happiest times are when I'm alone with my painting and music. … I don't
think male artists are quizzed so much about their social lives. People respect their
need for solitude. When a male artist says he wants to shut himself off and create,
they say he's serious about his work. When I do it, I'm either being selfish or I have a
psychological problem.' (Weeks & James (1995), p.152)

There is much material for psychoanalysis here. Further interviews with eccentrics

may yield more understanding about the process of individuation and the part the

archetypes of animus and anima play in this.

A case can be made that eccentrics are individuals who have achieved 'individuation'

in a way that psychoanalysis has not wholly grasped, although the work of Bowlby

and Winnicott offer pointers to a possible route for understanding.

Bowlby, in 'Child Care and the Growth of Love (1953), demonstrated that the

confidence in the availability of attachment figures is gradually built up in the very

early years, between six months and five years old. He considered that the child who

has developed trust in the availability of attachment figures is the child who can experience being left by such figures without anxiety. Such a view supports the idea that the capacity to be alone is one aspect of inner security. Secure attachment is at the root of inner security.

Winnicott goes further. His view is that this capacity starts with the infant's experience of being alone in the presence of mother. He writes:

'It is only when alone (that is to say, in the presence of someone) that the infant can discover his personal life.' (Winnicott (1965), p.34)

His suggestion is that the capacity to be alone is related to the individual's ability to be in touch with their own true feelings, arising out of their experience of being alone firstly with their mother – and then without her. It is only then that he can discover what he really needs or wants, separate from what others may want of or from him.

For Winnicott, the issue of true feeling was paramount. The vital question was whether an individual's experience was authentic or not. Many of his patients had learnt to be compliant in childhood, to live the life that was expected of them and that pleased others. He came to call this the 'false self'; Jung had defined such a persona as 'The mask or face a person puts on to confront the world'. (Samuels, Shorter & Plaut (1986), p.107) The sense of self for such people is not based on their true feelings and instinctive needs.

Winnicott was aware he was breaking new ground. He wrote:

'It is probably true that in psycho-analytic literature more has been written on the fear of being alone or the wish to be alone than on the ability to be alone.' (Winicott (1965), p.29)

It is that focus on the ability to be alone which is so interesting, not least because it brings into play the matter of 'individuation'. This brings us back to the question: 'Are eccentrics individuals who are 'individuated'?' If so, might this be part of their fascination for us, in both our ambivalence towards the eccentric and our admiration?

Is there a conclusion?

An academic dissertation requires a conclusion. However, there is a sense in which the relationship between eccentricity and psychoanalysis remains inconclusive since psychoanalysis has scarcely begun to fathom the full mystery of eccentricity.

It has often been said that the health of a society lies in its fringes, in its nonconforming element, among those who have the nerve to say, as the boy did in Hans Christian Anderson's famous fable, 'The Emperor has no clothes'. Societies survive through systems that maintain a measure of equilibrium. Yet they still need to be open systems, not closed. Without innovation and fresh ideas, societies will atrophy. It follows that eccentrics may be essential for the health of any social organism. They provide the ideas and behaviour which will help a group to adapt successfully to changing conditions.

Theory from Evolutionary Psychiatry may be of value here. Stevens and Price argue:

'An individual may acquire a characteristic or a propensity which makes it better adapted than its fellows to respond appropriately to a certain typical situation. … This individual will tend to survive and pass its new genetic configuration to members of subsequent generations. … As a result, the new attribute eventually becomes established as a standard component.' (Stevens & Price (1996), pp. 11-12)

How inheritable is a new idea? Do eccentrics provide the mutations for social evolution? There is much room here for speculation and further research.

It is obvious that all development depends on new ideas. They are the essence of science, art, all intellectual progress, and the origins and continued development of psychoanalysis itself. And it remains the case that many eccentrics have discovered original ways of thinking and acting. Some of these ideas may have been absurd and unrealistic, yet others have provided the basis for social change. A functional society does need a measure of conformity and consensus, but it also needs enough room for nonconformity to avoid withering - intellectually, socially, and politically.

Quinn (1996) notes that the British have been described as a nation of eccentrics. Many will claim to have an aunt, an uncle, or a grandparent who is described as a bit of a character, or wonderfully dotty. We may know individuals – a clock repairer, a nurse, a farmer, a retired colonel, in my case – who strike all as decidedly eccentric. While stories of these individuals and their behaviour are told with fascination and joy, we remain ambivalent about them. We can be unsettled by that degree of freedom and uncomfortable with difference. We need our inner conservative streak reflected by others to prove that we are 'right'. Yet while we may fear the outlandish in ourselves, we can relish meeting it in others.

Weeks provides a wonderful tale which illustrates the ambivalence eccentrics can arouse. Three years after he had begun his study, a programme team on the local TV channel asked him to bring along some of his subjects. They included:

- Screaming Lord Sutch, an aristocratic and perennial parliamentary candidate for the Monster Raving Looney Party of which he was the founder and leader.

- John Slater, who walked barefoot from Land's End to John O'Groats in his pyjamas and appointed his dog Tiny, a 250-pound sheep dog, to be executive director of his tour-guide company.

- Stanley Unwin, an 81-year-old man whose obsession was to speak a gobbledygook that made sense, combining malapropisms, puns, and words of his own invention.

- A native Londoner who now calls himself Chief Shiloh and habitually wears the full regalia of the Cherokee nation.

- Ann Atkin, an elfin-looking woman whose house in Devon is populated by 7,500 garden gnomes.

It was the last eccentric in this list, Ann Atkin, who brought to the studio hats she had knitted and offered them to the other guests on the show.

Weeks explains what happened, setting the scene first:

'The first half of the show before we came on was devoted to school discipline, a subject that was solemnly discussed by three grey-suited headmasters, the staidest group of right-thinking establishment guardians you could ever have assembled. When they met the eccentrics in the green room, they were fascinated and yet repelled, and perhaps even a bit frightened.

When Ann Atkin offered them gnome hats, they avoided her as though she had a contagious disease. Yet they could not keep their eyes off these strange, individualistic people who were obviously enjoying themselves and each other enormously. I remember at the time thinking what a pity it is that these old duffers couldn't loosen up and enjoy such an

interesting and utterly harmless group of people. I suspect they wanted to, but the fear of the unknown kept them firmly on their own side of the room.'

I love this account. It captures the power of the eccentric in our society. It would be interesting from a psychoanalytic perspective to know what these eccentrics did represent for these three grey-suited headmasters.

There is a wide diversity within human nature and psyches; so, too, is there among eccentrics. People, in general, can be schizoid, extravert, introvert, narcissistic; is this true for eccentrics, too? Psychoanalysis has provided many interesting insights into the unconscious and its defence mechanisms. Yet these insights, even with the additional material from Weeks' study, do not seem sufficient to take our understanding of eccentricity that much further. More research and more case studies, slanted towards a psychoanalytic perspective, are needed.

Nevertheless, one conclusion that may be drawn is this: the eccentric's way of interacting with the world is so fundamentally different it may well be impossible to produce any theory or means of understanding using conventional models. As Weeks discovered, when the eccentrics were asked to comment on or explain their eccentricity, their answers were, in a word, eccentric. Weeks also claimed that this was the most cheerful research that he and his team had undertaken. They considered the individuals they met during the research were happy, joyful people and that this joy was infectious. They experienced them as

happier than the rest of us, albeit they could apply no objective standards to substantiate this claim.

Weeks speculated that their curiosity and interests gave them the energy to feel young and alive without being narcissistic. By expressing their creativity over a long period of time, they had overcome any feelings of rejection, unfairness, or anger they may have experienced earlier in life. Their creativity and spontaneity in solving problems had dissolved any neuroses and given them fulfilment, as well as providing a gift to anyone lucky enough to experience their *joie de vivre*. In Weeks' words:

'If you could distil what the essence of human happiness is all about, this would be it'. (Weeks & James (1995), p.178)

In one sense, this returns us to the critical question: 'Are eccentrics individuals who have travelled their own path of individuation?' Samuels has advanced the case that:

'Individuation can also be taken to mean 'becoming oneself', that is, who one 'really' is. … What we are describing is separation from the collective, together with an assumption of responsibility for oneself and a developed attitude towards past and future. Separation from the collective may extend into a withdrawal of investment from relationships and I think it is true to say the tone of Jung's ideas on individuation emphasises the dialogue between the individual and the collective unconscious rather than that between the individual and others.' (Samuels (1985), p.103)

This may well describe the journey of many eccentrics and account for the impression they give of having become the people they were meant to be, living out their full creativity.

At the end of his autobiography, David Fanshawe has this passage:

'"Mr. David, why did you do it?", asked the Hippo Man after a long and appreciative silence. "Why did you make the Sanctus Journey?" "I did it, your Courtship, because I felt I needed to do it."' (Fanshawe (1975), p.201)

Is the journey of individuation the underpinning reason behind the explanations that eccentrics might offer for their eccentricity? When Fanshawe's father is asked for his opinion, he says:

'2% of people DO and 98% of people wish they had. Very few people achieve their aims; the vast majority look back and say "Oh! If only I had …"'. (Ibid, p.202)

Perhaps this is the fundamental explanation for our fascination with and ambivalence towards the eccentric.

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