



THE MYTH OF THE BIRTH OF THE HERO

OTTO RANK

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OTTO RANK**

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endeavors to escape by putting himself in the place of the father or the emperor--the anarchist complies more faithfully with the heroic character, by promptly himself becoming the persecutor of kings, and finally killing the king, precisely like the hero. The remarkable similarity between the career of certain anarchistic criminals and the family romance of hero and child has been elsewhere illustrated by the author, through special instances.¹³⁶ The truly heroic element then consists only in the real justice or even necessity of the act, which is therefore generally endorsed and admired;¹³⁷ while the morbid trait, also in criminal cases, is the pathologic transference of the hatred from the father to the real king, or several kings, when more general and still more distorted.

As the hero is commended for the same deed, without asking for its psychic motivation, so the anarchist might claim indulgence from the severest penalties, for the reason that he has killed an entirely different person from the one he really intended to destroy, in spite of an apparently excellent (perhaps political) motivation of his act.¹³⁸

For the present let us stop at the narrow boundary line where the contents of innocent infantile imaginings, suppressed and unconscious neurotic fantasies, poetical myth structures, and certain forms of mental disease and crime lie close together, although far apart as to their causes and dynamic forces. We resist the temptation to follow one of these divergent paths that lead to altogether different realms, but which are as yet unblazed trails in the wilderness.

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¹³⁶ "Belege zur Bettungsphantasie," *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, I (1911), p. 331; also "Die Rolle des Familienromans in der Psychologie des Attentäters," *Internationale Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse*, I (191,3).

¹³⁷ Compare the contrast between Tell and Parricida, in Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, which is discussed in detail in the author's *Inzestmotiv*.

¹³⁸ Compare in this connection the unsuccessful homicidal attempt of Tatjana Leontiew, and its subtle psychological illumination, in Wittels: *Die sexuelle Not* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1909).