

Inside Darkest John

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CONFIDENTIAL

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Dear Sirs:

In "The Defections of Dr. John,"¹ Delmege Trimble provided us with an intriguing recital of facts but with only clues about their causes. Probing of the wellsprings of John's defection and redefection is necessary because of the wounds already inflicted by turncoats on the Western body politic and the menacing likelihood of deeper cuts to come unless we learn to detect betrayal before it is unsheathed.

Early in his article Mr. Trimble points to the utility of psychological probing: "Erich Ollenhauer may have come closer when he remarked, after John redefected and began to show increasing signs of a persecution and messiah complex; 'This is a case for the psychiatrists rather than the politicians.'" It is.

One psychiatrist who has studied and written extensively about people like Otto John is Dr. Edmund Bergler. Two of his books² are particularly pertinent to an understanding of both the case at hand and the dynamics of clandestinity, including spy-handling and spy-catching.

In the varicolored spectrum of intelligence types, the figure who often seems on first encounter the strangest and most obscure is the psychic masochist. He appears to move in an irrational world of his own. In fact, however, he is not living in another world, as closer acquaintance shows; his values are not random but rather reversed and also unconscious. Unlike the perversion masochist, the psychic masochist derives no conscious gratification from the forces that drive him. Stabilized on the level of rejection, as Bergler would put it, he devotes his life to death, bondage, and the pursuit of unhappiness.

No layman's summary of Bergler's work in masochism can be accurate, and lack of space increases the distortion. But it may not be too far off Bergler's

mark to say that the masochist:

- (1) felt deprived, as a child, of his mother's comfort, food, or affection;
- (2) tried to retaliate, could not, repressed retaliatory wishes, and instead found pleasure in being refused or denied by his mother and, later, by a mother substitute;
- (3) became an injustice-collector who, with unconscious cunning, now contrives situations that can end only in his own defeat and humiliation; and
- (4) savors, like the connoisseur he is, each drop of self pity: "Wrongs like these are done only to me."

The masochist complains loudly but accepts and even provokes new injuries from the source of his grievances. He suspects slights and hidden disparagements in situations that seem perfectly straightforward to others. His career is likely to be one of high promise and "inexplicable" failure. He is prone to other neurotic, chiefly hypochondriacal, symptoms. In his love-life he tends to equate sex with the forbidden and to be or seem promiscuous in order to be found out and punished.

How well does John fit Bergler's pattern? Unfortunately, Mr. Trimble tells us nothing of Otto's parents or of his relationships with them. But he does say that "Otto felt no fraternal jealousy" of his "younger, brighter, and sturdier" brother. Here is repression with a vengeance.

We find that Otto studied assiduously for the German foreign service and then, in opposing Hitlerism because of conscious moral revulsion, subconsciously chose the one course guaranteed to destroy his prospects. Moreover, he did not join forces with an effective opposition party or group. And when World War II erupted, he became "a chief promoter" of the fantasies of Prince Ferdinand and his hopeless pretensions to the vanished Hohenzollern throne. Again his instinct for the fated failure was unerring.

In 1941, acting as a go-between among some anti-Nazi groups that had achieved an "ineffectual half-dozen different attempts to remove Hitler," John seemed to deviate from the masochist's pseudo-aggression by getting in touch with the Allies and providing information. The next year, however, "he was turned in to the Gestapo by an aging and jealous prewar mistress." Psychologically it is no accident that John chose this harpy for his Nemesis. His service for the British had been only the prelude to the disaster that he ensured when he handed to the vindictive mother-substitute the weapon that she promptly turned against him. Here, as elsewhere in his life, John acted in a way that seems wholly illogical but is actually completely consistent with the goal of self-destruction.

Released, he was able for a time to ensure the failure of his mission to the British simply by refusing to name the conspirators whom he represented and thus provoking suspicion about himself. When faced with the threat of

restored confidence in 1944, he was rescued because "the British ascertained that he had transmitted information concerning allied military intentions to Berlin." It would be helpful to know how the British uncovered this fact. Was John their source, directly or not? And why, incidentally, was he providing intelligence to a government that he was supposedly sworn to destroy?

The documentary evidence bearing on John's whereabouts on 20 July 1944 -- the lists of applicants for Spanish visas and the travel manifests -- leaves little doubt that he was in Spain when the climactic day arrived. More interesting than his absence from Germany is his later lying about it and, especially, the clumsiness of the lie. Almost anyone who was at OKW headquarters that day and who survived could have exposed its falsity. Moreover, Otto told not one story about his role in the plot, but several. It is as though, subconsciously, he wanted his falsehoods discovered, wanted to be charged as a fraud whose claim to significant anti-Fascism -- the hub of his public life -- was spurious.

We learn that in 1946, after seeing a film about the Belzen concentration camp, John had "a species of nervous breakdown" and that "the lower part of his face began to discharge a pus-like fluid." The conscious frustration that he adduced as the cause of these phenomena is unconvincing. Nervous breakdowns are the product of intolerable unconscious stress, not of witting frustration. Bergler, who has written at length about the oral basis of masochism, would probably find it significant that the fluid was discharged from the region of the mouth. But why 1946, when the danger and tension of war had ended? Perhaps the answer lies not in what the Germans did to the inmates of Belzen but in what they did not do to John. "He revisited with the wrath of a prosecutor the country which he had fled as a political persecutee. He kept aloof from other Germans ... trying unsuccessfully to pose as an Englishman ..." Here was behavior designed to arouse the indignation, perhaps even the contempt and hatred, of his fellows. Here was a chance to collect an accusation worse than liar, the epithet of *traitor*. But it did not happen, because the Germans were then preoccupied with their own problems.

Three years later he did manage, by extreme provocation, to evoke a little hostility among his countrymen. Appearing as "the chief German assistant to the British prosecution" and "deliberately twisting facts and evidence to the advantage of the prosecutors," he annoyed a number of his compatriots. Consequently there were no conversion symptoms and no breakdown in 1949. In fact, as Rudolf Diels 3 relates, John now sought out, in Wiesbaden and elsewhere, the very Germans likeliest to despise him, and solicited their aid in obtaining governmental employment!

In 1949 John also married -- "the *mother* of the girl he had been expected to wed." We remember that the mistress who turned him in to the Gestapo was also "aging." The pattern of the dominant, punishing mother is repeated in the

marriage. An American who knew both Otto and his wife recalls how she ruled him and how he, the conversationalist, was mutely attentive in her presence. It is also consistent that John kept his mistress after his marriage and continued to share in the sultry parties at Wowo's apartment. There was always the tingling chance that his wife-mother would find out -- and spank.

The fact that John succeeded in becoming BfV chief may seem incompatible with the theory of deep psychic masochism. His success was not a result of chance, an idiot good fortune that persisted in smiling blindly no matter how he tried to win her frowns. On the contrary, he moved realistically and effectively to eliminate his chief rival, Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz. But as Bergler has pointed out repeatedly, clever neurotics play for high stakes. The attainment of eminence, the immediate goal, ensures a deeper and more disastrous fall, the ultimate goal.

From the moment of John's appointment, like the moment of his marriage, he invented naughty irresponsibilities that were likely to lead to punishment. He started by hiring a Soviet spy or ex-spy as his secretary. He embarked upon projects so ridiculous as to guarantee humiliation as failure's bonus. Senior police officials and high-ranking members of the West German government began to detest him. Then -- at last! -- the attacks began, and John could delectate while complaining "about the bad things people were saying about him," could be gleefully "convinced that the newspaper story of changes planned by the Interior Minister was aimed at him."

The "enemies" whom he had created were all "Nazis," of course. John's preoccupation with what he considered the Nazi threat is revealing. Both before and after his defection to the East, he complained shrilly about the "growing influence of the Nazis." No matter what Fascist tendencies the analytic eye could discern in the Germany of 1954 (or can spot today), avowed Nazis were hard to find. Aggression against them was unreal, was pseudo-aggression. Bergler has pointed out that masochists, like other neurotics, are incapable of real aggression and show only its counterfeit.

The BfV chief attended the 20th-of-July decennial and "made an exhibition of himself, sobbing loudly and denouncing two other mourners as Gestapo agents." It is hard to imagine conduct better calculated to evoke a punch in the nose than calling a 20th-of-July mourner a Gestapo stool-pigeon. By this time John's deterioration had progressed, one suspects, through deepening psychic masochism toward paranoia.

After this outbreak the chancellery might have obliged him by kicking him out had he not owed his appointment to the occupying powers. Bilked of the boot, he had to move out on his own. And so Otto, in the ultimate act of pseudo-aggression, ran away from home.

He knew, from his own experiences in Britain and the BfV, that refugees and

defectors encounter suspicion more often than acceptance. He had every right to expect, at the very least, a couple of sound psychic slaps, so that he could turn the other quivering little cheek. But what happened? A full-dress press conference attended by 400 Western and Communist reporters. Plans for a Ministry of German Unity, which he would head. A prolonged visit in the USSR. And even in the West, "a surprisingly good British press."

Hell hath no fury like a masochist unscorned. Now he had to go back; there was no other way to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

If the West had understood Otto John, if some superior had been kind and sagacious enough to slip him just a crust of insult now and then, he might have been one of the most brilliant intelligence officers in Europe. Instead, he was regarded and treated like a normal person. Inevitably, he considered respect and kindness a form of weakness. Inevitably, he became more disturbed the more he was cheated of pleasure-in-displeasure. The West tried to use John not only without understanding him but, as it happened, in contravention of his nature. It was like trying to turn over a garden with a tennis racquet.

Consequently his life followed the course of his own unconscious choosing and became the debacle toward which he had aspired from his youth. Misunderstood, mistreated, and maligned, he can now look forward to a serene old age, his heart warmed by the dear familiar curses, his faith in mankind renewed by the jeers of the younger generation. At last he has what he wanted.

At our cost.

ALFRED PAUMIER

1 Studies IV 4, p. 1 ff.

2 *The Basic Neurosis* (Grune and Stratton Inc., New York, 1949) and *Principles of Self Damage* (Philosophical Library, New York, 1959).

3 *Der Fall Otto John, Hintergruende and Lehren* (Goettinger Verlagsanstalt, 1954).

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