

SOUNDS FROM THE BELL JAR

Gordon Claridge is a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and University Lecturer in Abnormal Psychology. He was previously Reader in Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychological Medicine at the University of Glasgow. His publications include *Origins of Mental Illness* (also published by Malor), *Personality Differences and Biological Variations* (with S. Canter and W. Hume), *Drugs and Human Behaviour*, and *Personality and Arousal*.

Ruth Pryor has held teaching and research posts at the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of Washington, Seattle; Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford; and the University of Wales. She is the editor of *Letters to Vernon Watkins* and *The Collected Poems of Vernon Watkins*.

Gwen Watkins taught at the University of Washington and the Extra-Mural Department of the University College of Swansea. Her publications include *Portrait of a Friend*, about Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins, and *Dickens in Search of Himself*.

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FROM THE
BELL JAR

TEN PSYCHOTIC AUTHORS

by

Gordon Claridge

Ruth Pryor

Gwen Watkins



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For Tristan

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Preface

Even a cursory glance at the contents of this book will reveal that it falls outside the usual attempts to combine psychological and literary analysis and, having been asked by my co-authors to write the Preface, it rests upon me to explain the purpose of the book and how three people of such disparate professional backgrounds – a mediaevalist, a critic of Victorian literature and an academic/clinical psychologist – have appeared in print together.

My own involvement is easily explained, the germ of such a book being sown many years ago when I was a Sixth Form pupil at school. In preparation for the Oxford Entrance Examination (which I never took) I was asked by my English teacher to write an essay on the subject of the Dryden quotation, part of which forms the title to our first chapter here. I have no idea what I wrote and I cannot imagine that I reached any sensible conclusion about whether or not great wits and madness really are ‘near ally’d’. All I remember is that, either to deter me from reading English at University or to encourage me into my future profession, the teacher wrote across the bottom of the essay: ‘You should become a psychologist!’ And so it turned out, though it is almost a career later – coinciding with my eventual, much more recent arrival in Oxford – that I, for my part, have had the opportunity to try writing the essay again.

The chance to do so arose through a fortuitous meeting with my co-authors, Gwen Watkins and Ruth Pryor, who, I discovered, also had an interest in the topic of creativity and madness, albeit from the different perspective of the literary scholar. A year of incubation (and some trepidation on both sides about whether it would work) and the idea was born for a jointly authored book which drew upon our three respective fields of expertise.

Even so it may be asked what is unique about the book, given that a considerable amount has already been written about creativity and madness generally and about their specific association in literature. The answer, we believe, does indeed lie in the fact that there have been no previous attempts to address the topic in quite the way we have here – by combining a detailed knowledge of literature and literary figures with ideas that can be distilled from contemporary thinking in psychology and psychiatry. As my co-

authors have frequently pointed out to me, literary experts who 'psychologise' about their subject matter are mostly ignorant of psychology. On the other hand, professional clinicians writing on the topic have tended to do so from a very particular point of view. In both cases the most favoured approach has been psychoanalytic. We do not wish to decry the importance of psychoanalytic ideas (indeed we occasionally draw upon them in our book) and we recognise the affinity that has traditionally existed between Art and psychoanalysis, which appears to offer attractive concepts and a natural language for understanding and describing creativity and the creative person. However, by concentrating exclusively (either through choice or through unfamiliarity) on one narrow psychological approach, much has been missed from other branches of psychology and psychiatry which can also inform our understanding. This is especially true of the possible connection between creativity and psychosis. As shown in the opening chapters of this book, we can actually bring to bear on the topic a good deal of empirical evidence and theory from genetics, experimental abnormal and clinical psychology, personality research, and descriptive psychiatry. These sources have never been discussed before in one place; yet taken together we believe they add an entirely new dimension to an old debate.

Having said that, we should make it clear that it is not our main intention to try to prove whether John Dryden (or others who have written in a similar vein) were right or not; but rather to use the conclusions we reach in the first two chapters as a background against which to examine a particular set of authors whose insanity we will demonstrate is not in doubt. A large part of the book is taken up with a detailed discussion of these authors, whose lives and works stand in their own right as examples of the co-existence of serious mental illness and originality of thought. From a literary viewpoint they are of interest because of what a knowledge of their psychopathology can tell us about them as people and about their writings. To the psychologist they are interesting because of the insights they give us into the nature of insanity, some currently popular conceptions of which have, in our view, become grossly oversimplified. Indeed, if we were to try to convey a single message with the book it would be this: that the individuals we discuss (among many others we might have chosen) should give pause for thought to anybody who too readily dismisses as 'merely mad' those, however uncelebrated, whom psychiatry has diagnosed as

psychotic. In other words, tragic though insanity is, we believe our conclusions here signal some hope for those who are likely to suffer it, rather than the total despair with which it is now usually associated.

Being given the opportunity to write this Preface unencumbered by my co-authors has one advantage: it allows me to place on record my personal appreciation of them. When I entered our collaboration I felt as though I was drifting in a sea of ignorance about their subject matter, a sensation heightened by an awareness of their own encyclopaedic knowledge of it. As time went on the sea became deeper and wider and I was saved from drowning only by their lessons in how to remain afloat. Their tuition in English Literature, always gentle and never mocking of their uncultured colleague, was an educative experience I value greatly. Beyond that, however, I also wish to thank them as friends for their warmth, hospitality and determined encouragement to continue when they detected in me some moment of doubt.

I would also like to thank The Nuffield Foundation for a grant that enabled me to be freed of my tutorial duties for one term at Magdalen College in order to start work on the book.

Gordon Claridge

If we saved Dr Claridge from drowning (an idea deriving more from his innate modesty than from reality), he saved us from high-flying, always the occupational disease of the literary critic. He caught hold of our airy assumptions that a knowledge of literature included a knowledge of psychology (and more or less everything else) and tethered them to the firm ground of his own discipline.

Ruth Pryor
Gwen Watkins

Oxford

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Great Wits and Madness

Among its several distinguishing features the human mind has two that most clearly define its uniqueness. One is the capacity to take great leaps of imagination; the other is its susceptibility to the wild aberrations of insane thought. The possibility of an inextricable connection between these qualities has long been debated, with sharp differences of opinion. For some the conjunction has seemed obvious, for others itself a sign of fancy stretched beyond the bounds of credibility. On the face of it the latter view certainly seems the more rational, since the two states in question appear to contain elements that are inherently irreconcilable. One, with its morbid traits of personalised delusion, chaotic thinking, and bizarre affect, is so self-destructive that it frequently reduces the sufferer to psychological incompetence. The other demands talents beyond – in the case of the most creative far beyond – the average, the ability to have insights or craft exquisite objects which, by common consent, we judge of great scientific value or aesthetic worth. Contrasted in this way it seems improbable that madness and creativity could spring from the same source.

Yet from the earliest times it has been suggested that in the insane there is indeed a hint of genius and, by the same token, that originality demands a degree of lunacy. '*Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae*' (no great imaginative power without a dash of madness), wrote Seneca. He was quoting Aristotle, who had drawn the same conclusion three centuries before, and Plato's view of the poet as one possessed by a 'divine madness'. Ever since, numerous writers have paraphrased these sentiments, either in their fiction or through their own self-scrutiny. For Shakespeare, as for Plato, the poet and the lunatic (and indeed the lover) were considered 'of imagination all compact'. 'How near is madness to genius', said Diderot; while Dr Johnson, confessing that he himself had often been nearly insane, commented that 'all power of fancy over reason is a degree of madness'. Swift put it more pungently, enumerating the brilliant thinkers who would 'in this our undistinguished age incur manifest danger of Phlebotomy, and Whips,

and Chains, and Dark Chambers, and Straw'. Even Wordsworth, seemingly the most sober of men, was driven to write:

We poets in our youth begin in gladness
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

Judged on purely intuitive grounds, therefore, an association between creativity and madness can, with equal certainty, be enthusiastically embraced or vigorously rejected, depending upon one's perspective. Which of these apparently contradictory views is nearer to the truth? Is a trace of insanity a necessary prerequisite for originality? Or is the idea merely a piece of folklore belief, sustained over the centuries by an inexact understanding of the quality of lunacy and destined to go the way of other popular myths, such as phrenology, astrology, and Mesmerism?

We should state at the outset that it is not the purpose, nor within the scope, of this book to try to answer such questions in their entirety. This is partly because, for reasons to be discussed later, we shall be confining ourselves to a certain class of creative person, *viz* authors: it would therefore be presumptuous of us to extrapolate from our conclusions to other forms of originality. Our scope is also even further limited by the set of authors on whom we have chosen to concentrate. They were selected because it is clear that, judged by current psychiatric criteria, they all *did* suffer from episodes of psychosis – to introduce a technical term to be defined more precisely as we proceed through this and the following chapter, but which for the moment can be taken as synonymous with the layperson's conception of mental illness as it occurs in its most disintegrative form and which especially refers to serious disorders, like schizophrenia. Being *both* eminent authors *and* psychotic persons our sample is scarcely representative, either of writers or of the mentally ill and therefore cannot, by itself, stand as evidence for the supposed connection between creativity and insanity.

Our interest in these authors, and our reason for choosing them in particular, were also dictated by the fact that their writings contain abundant evidence of their psychological disorder, which they themselves often described in great detail. The main intention of our book, therefore, is to re-examine their lives and works in a manner not previously attempted, combining the expertise of the literary critic and the professional psychologist, in order to

show how their creativity and their tendency to psychosis shaped and influenced each other. We should stress that we shall not be attempting either complete biographies or conventional literary criticism of our chosen authors, most, if not all, of whom have already received considerable attention from both those points of view. Instead our aim is to show how, through joint literary and psychological analysis, new insights can be achieved into the artistic and personal qualities of the authors in question. This will prove to be true, not only in considering the authors individually, but also in demonstrating some common patterns of behaviour, personality, and creative expression among writers subject to pathological mental states.

Despite focusing on some rather special examples where creativity and psychosis co-existed in the same individuals, our analysis will inevitably lead us to consider whether in these particular persons their tendency to madness and their capacity for unusual originality of thought were indeed, in some fundamental sense, intimately connected. This, in turn, will cause us to address the broader issue of whether there is, in a more general sense, a genuine, causal association between insanity and at least some forms of creativity; and, if that is so, what it can tell us about the underlying qualities of psychosis and of the creative process.

As a background, we shall start by considering the evidence and arguments in the creativity/madness debate. This discussion will be spread over two chapters and it should be noted here that, for clarity of presentation, it will sometimes be necessary to introduce very briefly in this chapter certain ideas which will then be discussed more fully in the next. For, as we shall see, the topic we are about to review has many different strands, having been the subject of extensive and increasingly systematic enquiry from several different points of view that have taken it well beyond the realm of intuitive speculation from which it began. For that reason it will be useful to summarise the main themes that will run through our account. This will provide some guidelines for those readers unfamiliar with the area and also help to clear away in advance some misconceptions which, even among those knowledgeable of it, have sometimes obscured the debate.

The first point to be made echoes a remark in the opening paragraph of this chapter; namely that effective creative production and an ongoing state of serious mental illness seem quite incompatible. We cannot emphasise too strongly here that we

would not disagree with that conclusion. As we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, there are many features of such conditions that make them quite obviously inimical to the creative act. These include not only chaotic disruption of thinking (and perception) upon which originality ultimately depends; but also disturbances of mood, motor response, and volition that secondarily prevent the individual from organising his or her mental processes into the orderly sequence required for creative work. Or, as Sylvia Plath, one of the writers to be considered in this book, put it, with more feeling:

When you are insane you are busy being insane – all the time ...
When I was crazy that was *all* I was.^[38]

We can therefore anticipate – and this brings us to our second theme – that the answers we seek actually lie elsewhere than in a simple equation between creative and mad thought. That is to say, if creativity and psychosis *are* found to be connected then this is more likely to be revealed, not as a function of the psychotic state itself, but in more subtle ways – for example, through certain modes or forms of thinking and perception which the *tendencies* to psychosis and creativity might prove to have in common. Some space will be devoted later to this question, drawing on various lines of research and some current theories about the causes and underlying mechanisms of psychosis. Suffice it to say here that the centrepiece of that part of our discussion will be the idea that normality and psychosis are essentially continuous with each other and that healthy varieties in thinking style and the disposition to psychotic breakdown substantially overlap, indeed may be identical. Viewed in this way some part, at least, of the supposed connection between creativity and madness will then be seen to be entirely comprehensible. In particular it will help to resolve the deep paradox that has already surfaced in this book and will continue to do so: how it is that the same features of individuality can be expressed in such totally disparate forms.

Our third theme will, however, sound several notes of caution. One will be a reminder that, even if the above conclusions are correct, it does not follow that creativity and psychosis (or the tendency to it) are entirely synonymous. The ability to formulate original thoughts, as well as the opportunity to put these into effect, both demand several other qualities, personal as well as

situational, that may be partially or completely independent of those that might be ascribable to 'psychotic' modes of thinking. In other words, in considering a possible connection between the creative and the mad it is the differences, as well as the similarities, between them that need to be understood. Furthermore, we also need to keep in sight the fact that 'creativity' is itself an ambiguous concept, having been given various meanings and judged according to differing criteria depending on the context in which it has been studied. How far, for example, is it simply a sign of high intelligence? And is mere eminence a good yardstick? It is unlikely that a single explanation can fully account for a human activity that has been defined in such varied ways. Even if an agreed definition can be arrived at and some core features identified, it need not be the case that all forms of creative expression demand precisely the same set of mental operations or depend equally upon the same intellectual qualities.

Finally, although covered in more detail in the next chapter, a brief word needs to be inserted here about some psychiatric terminology that will be encountered in what follows. This is necessary in order to clarify certain observations that some authors have made about the precise aspects or forms of psychosis to which creativity might be especially connected. As intimated earlier, the general term 'psychosis' refers to serious disruption of the person's mental and emotional life. As used here, it is also confined to a type of disorder that is normally described as 'functional'. That is to say, it has no obvious or gross organic cause, such as a brain lesion, a fact which sets it apart from the truly neurological conditions – like, for example, Alzheimer's disease or epilepsy. But even functional psychosis can vary in symptomatology and psychiatrists generally distinguish between two main forms. In one – schizophrenia – the emphasis is on bizarreness of thinking, hallucinations, and impaired social behaviour. In the other – affective disorder – the predominant feature, as the name implies, is profound emotional change: either serious depression, or more classically, the wild mood swings of manic-depressive psychosis. Although psychiatrists have traditionally preferred to regard these two varieties of psychosis as distinctly separable 'diseases', it now seems more probable – as we shall have occasion to state several times in this book – that that is not so. For one thing, each can occur in a mild or 'borderline' form. Furthermore, the symptoms of even full-blown affective psychosis and schizophrenia overlap

considerably, suggesting that they simply represent different ways in which a common tendency to insanity can manifest itself. However, for the purpose of discussion in this chapter it will be more appropriate to preserve the distinction between them.

Bearing these points in mind, let us now start to consider the question of creativity and madness in more detail. A complete review of what is now a vast, varied – and sometimes idiosyncratic – literature would take us well beyond our available space and our aim here will be to summarise the main approaches to the topic, in order to try to disentangle some arguments in the debate and draw some general conclusions from it. In doing so we shall concentrate in this chapter on lines of research that address the general issue of whether psychosis and creativity are in fact connected. Then, in the next chapter, after elaborating further on the features of psychosis itself, we shall return to examine how explanations of it might also give an account of certain aspects of the creative process.

The oldest, and what might be termed the ‘classic’, approach to the systematic study of creativity and madness is biographical. Traceable to the early part of the nineteenth century, this consisted of retrospective psychiatric analyses of famous historical figures who, because of their accomplishments, can be judged outstandingly creative. The seminal work of such type was that carried out by the Italian psychiatrist, Lombroso, who set out to demonstrate the pathological nature of genius, quoting examples as varied as Julius Caesar, Mohammed, Newton, Rousseau, and Schopenhauer.^[22] Writing, as he did, in an era before medicine had even begun to construct its modern classification of psychiatric disorder, Lombroso included among his subjects many who would now be considered to have suffered from brain diseases of organic origin (Julius Caesar, for example, was epileptic). In contemporary terms, therefore, his diagnoses were too inexact to stand as definitive evidence for (or against) a connection between creativity and madness, as we would now construe it. Added to which Lombroso – more famous for his theory about the physiognomic stigmata of criminality – interpreted his observations on genius in a similarly negative fashion, viewing social deviance and the propensity to creativity as alternative expressions of biological degeneracy.

These early pathographic analyses nevertheless started a wave

of interest in the topic and subsequently stimulated many other medical writers to apply their diagnostic acumen to the problem. Although mostly not accepting Lombroso's explanation of it, they were virtually unanimous in their opinion that genius is indeed often accompanied by madness, even allowing for cases that could be ascribed to gross disease of the nervous system. Thus, Becker, in his historical survey of the numerous monographs published on the subject in the hundred years up to 1950, notes that the vast majority had reached that conclusion; though he also comments on the many different interpretations that were placed on the evidence.^[7] These range from the notion that creativeness reflects the same warring psychological tendencies that are responsible for insanity to the intriguing, though question-begging, idea that some mad people are simply labelled as geniuses because of their apparently mystical and divinely inspired qualities of thought.

A notable exception to this consensus in the early literature that madness and creativeness are frequently connected is a study carried out at the beginning of the century by Havelock Ellis.^[15] He conducted a survey of 'British genius', examining the psychological, physical, and other characteristics of 1020 eminent people listed in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Ellis found only a moderate rate (about 4 per cent) of frank insanity among his subjects; a figure, incidentally, that included some examples of brain disease. Bowerman, in a less well-known but identical investigation of American geniuses, reported the same result.^[9]

Two points need to be made about these studies, however. First, although rejecting the explanation of creativity that prevailed among medical writers at that time, both Ellis and Bowerman did consider that there was some connection with psychological morbidity, in a more general sense. 'The prevailing temperament of men of genius', Ellis said (and Bowerman agreed with him), 'is one of great nervous sensitivity and irritability', a tendency to melancholy, and what he called a 'germinal nervous instability'.

The second point to note about the Ellis and Bowerman surveys is that neither was concerned with cases of really outstanding creativity, of the kind that have been the subject of individual biographical analyses. The persons surveyed were certainly eminent, but mostly people (even politicians!) whose achievements were rarely so enduring as to place them in the class apart to which we would assign the truly original thinkers in history. It could be argued that if a connection with florid madness

is to be revealed in biographical data this is most likely to be found in a conjunction among extreme cases: the very creative on whom most of the detailed accounts have concentrated. More recent reviewers of the biographical evidence about the latter have certainly continued to comment on the remarkable frequency with which serious mental disorder occurs among outstandingly creative people. For example, Prentky, in his book *Creativity and Psychopathology*, tabulates the probable psychiatric diagnoses that could be applied to certain eminent writers, artists, scientists and composers.^[29] Among writers alone – and even excluding those discussed in the present volume – he concludes that all of the following were either schizophrenic or suffered from an affective psychosis: Strindberg, Baudelaire, Kant, Swift, Shelley, Johnson, Holderlin, Donizetti, Conrad, Kafka, Coleridge, Schopenhauer, Barrie, Schiller, Crane, Chatterton, Rousseau, Tasso, Maupassant, Balzac, and Boswell. In addition, Prentky notes, there were many others who showed signs of ‘borderline psychosis’.

A similar exercise has been undertaken by Karlsson whose work we shall refer to again because of the interesting comments he has made about his observations from a genetics viewpoint.^[20] To the list of writers who developed psychoses Karlsson adds, among others, Hugo, Scott, Tolstoi, Pope, and Poe and puts the overall incidence of such disorders among the individuals he surveyed at around 30 per cent; a staggeringly high figure, given that, taken together, non-organic forms of psychosis are usually quoted as carrying a lifetime risk of about 5 per cent.

Of course, from a strictly scientific viewpoint these individual biographical studies can be criticised on the grounds that they are biased towards rather special cases; added to which, as Becker points out, such accounts were usually written by clinicians whose professional interest in the abnormal inevitably caused them to focus on signs of pathology. In contrast, some contemporary clinicians who have discussed the topic have been much less enthusiastic about connecting creativity to psychosis. This is especially true of certain psychiatric writers who, drawing on the concepts of psychodynamic psychology, have devoted considerable attention to the nature of the creative process and, in the course of doing so, have expressed an opinion about the idea. Mostly they have been ambivalent, admitting on the one hand that both creativity and psychosis probably share similar underlying psychic mechanisms – unconscious motivation, involvement of

'primary process' thinking (fantasy), ideational styles and so on; yet, on the other hand, unwilling to bring the two states together in any causal sense. Thus, Storr acknowledges that a certain kind of original genius is inseparable from the schizoid (i.e. schizophrenic-like) personality structure, quoting Kafka, among writers, as a particular example.^[36] However, he draws back from incorporating this into a general theory about creativity, preferring instead to emphasise the more superficial differences between the psychotic and the creative person: that the former is overwhelmed by and the latter in control of his or her 'original' thoughts.

Rothenberg, another psychiatrist to consider the question, reacts with similar equivocation.^[33] He vacillates between describing the connection between creativity and psychosis as 'folk-loristic' and 'clearly exaggerated', and confessing to be puzzled that it has been documented so often. Finally, he comes to the conclusion that psychopathology plays no causative role in creativity, except in the choice of subject matter, and that where it does exist it stems from social causes; for example the stress that the person of original mind experiences in being at odds with society. Somewhat like Storr he suggests that it is only in overcoming such psychopathology that effective creating can occur – an uncontroversial conclusion but one that scarcely illuminates our understanding.

Arieti, an expert on both creativity and schizophrenia – and therefore the most qualified among these contemporary psychiatric writers to comment – is equally disappointing in the light he throws on the issue.^[5] Admittedly he is more explicit than the other two in detailing traits, such as unusual forms of thinking, which seem responsible for both psychotic symptomatology and creative production. He even underlines the similarity by noting that such traits can be either adaptive or detrimental – i.e. lead to illness – depending on whether or not they are modified by other, more positive, qualities. However, he then fails to follow through his rather important point to the logical conclusion of considering how it might at least explain those many instances where outstanding originality and insanity have been found to co-exist. In fact Arieti's coverage of the latter is very cursory and he swiftly shifts to a discussion of examples of, to use Pickering's term, 'creative malady'; such as Proust's asthma and Darwin's psychosomatic palpitations – examples that are interesting in themselves but largely irrelevant to the creativity/psychosis debate.^[28]

In short, although all three of these psychiatric authors offer

some fascinating insights into the depth psychology of creativity, we find little in their writings that helps to resolve the question of its possible connection with psychosis. When the issue is addressed it is skirted around, it seems to us, by the unwillingness of all three of the authors concerned – understandable perhaps because of their daily closeness to the victims of mental illness – to see beyond the pathology of the psychotic state itself; their failure to appreciate our – or rather Sylvia Plath's – point made earlier: that when insane the psychotic individual is too preoccupied struggling against overpersonalised or idiosyncratic thoughts to create effectively. Consequently, they never really probe the significance of what those two activities might have in common. As for the results from individual biographical studies, they seem most comfortable with an explanation that simply appeals to the idea of 'special cases'.

An even more negative view of such studies has been taken in academic psychology. Indeed, in some quarters the whole subject matter of creativity and psychosis has been ignored completely. For example, a quite recent book of advanced readings, entitled *The Nature of Creativity*, edited by a very prominent cognitive psychologist, and intended for researchers in the area, makes absolutely no reference to the topic!^[35] Where interest has been shown it has tended to be critical of the idea of connecting creativity to madness. The reason for this can be traced historically to the fact that research on creativity in academic psychology has formed a quite separate strand of enquiry from that originating in the early pathographic analyses carried out by medical writers. In contrast to the latter, academic psychologists have concentrated more on creativity as a normal cognitive trait and with problems like its psychometric measurement, development, and correlations with other – mostly 'desirable' – characteristics. This work has its origins in the early intelligence test movement and, later, in a specific concern with creativeness as a possibly separable aspect of intellectual functioning. Much of that research has, in turn, been inspired by an attempt, especially among American psychologists, to understand and predict 'giftedness': as such, in seeking reasons for differences in creativity, their preference has naturally been to look for evidence of the latter's association with excellence, superiority, and health rather than with maladjustment or psychological deviance. The pioneering example here is a mammoth longitudinal study undertaken and described in a six volume work by Terman

and his colleagues who, beginning in 1921, selected a large group of so-called gifted children and then followed their progress over a period of thirty-five years. We shall refer again to this investigation but there is one aspect of it which it is appropriate to comment upon at this point.

In what was in effect a digression from the main study, Cox, a colleague of Terman, conducted a 'historiometric' analysis of the mental traits of 301 carefully selected individuals, living between 1450 and 1850, who could be recognised as of outstanding genius.^[13] In addition to retrospective estimates of IQ, Cox also constructed 'psychographic' profiles of character and personality for each of her subjects, rating them on the basis of biographical data for a range of social and emotional traits. Since Cox confined herself to the truly great, her sample – unlike, say, Ellis' and Bowerman's – naturally contained the names of many individuals whom others have quoted as evidence for the connection between creativity and psychosis; including, incidentally, one (Cowper) who appears in this book. Yet her own conclusions are strikingly different.

The picture that Cox paints of the prevailing personality of these 'heroes of the past', as she calls them, is glossed in the most adulatory terms, emphasising their extraordinariness in every respect: their single-mindedness, their '... persistence of motive and effort, confidence in their abilities, and great strength or force of character.' Furthermore, she notes:

The rare and striking personality of genius was, in the case of our subjects as a whole, manifested even in early youth by behaviour that deviated from that of average individuals so pronouncedly that the record of its appearance was preserved in documentary form. The remarkable traits of youth were indicative of future greatness. The dynamic quality which, developing, raised performance to so high a level and won for the character it invigorated so large a sphere of influence was present and recognised even in childhood. And even in his earliest years the personality of the genius was something more than the sum of its extraordinary parts.

How do we reconcile Cox's impression of genius as superior, adjustive mental health with that which the medical biographers give, remembering that both are referring to a similar set of

individuals? The difference is partly due, we suspect, to Cox's own bias in the selection and interpretation of her data; a bias just as strong as – though, of course, in the opposite direction from – that of which the pathographers have been accused. Indeed, it is rather illuminating to discover that within the first few pages of her book – and before she has even introduced her own work – she peremptorily dismisses the idea that genius is akin to madness. Notably, she reserves her criticism for Lombroso – not by any means, at the time she was writing, the only person to have made the connection – remarking that his method was merely one of 'heaping up instances which support his thesis'.

Even if this is taken as a fair comment on the general scientific validity of the biographical approach to the topic, the preconceptions which Cox brought to her own analysis are also much in evidence. A considerable part of her book is devoted to quite detailed synopses of the lives of the 300-odd geniuses whom she evaluated. Careful scrutiny of these accounts reveals that in almost no instance does she give any hint that there were signs of mental illness in any of her subjects – even among those where this is known to have occurred. For example – chosen, as it happens, from science rather than literature – take the case of Isaac Newton.

It is well-established that Newton had a most difficult personality, revealed on occasions in outright insanity; so much so that his name routinely appears on lists, such as those compiled by Prentky and Karlsson, of psychosis among the outstandingly creative. Even Storr, someone who, as we have seen, is by no means convinced of a general causal connection between psychosis and creativity, writes as follows about Newton, choosing him as another of his examples of 'schizoid' genius:

Newton's quarrels with other scientists were famous, and need not detain us here. His disputes with Hooke, with Flamsteed and with Leibniz are amply documented. But there was a period in his life at which his suspicion and hostility to others overstepped the bounds of sanity. The details of this illness remain obscure, but in 1693 Newton became sufficiently disturbed in mind for rumours of his insanity to gain widespread acceptance. In September of that year he wrote to Pepys, Locke and other friends accusing them of being atheists or Catholics, and of trying to embroil him with women. Various factors may have contributed to this 'paranoid episode', as we should now label it.^[36]

Yet no indication of this appears in Cox's account of Newton. True, her book is devoted mostly to the *early* characteristics of her subjects, the brief biographies she provides for them ending in their mid-twenties. But even here her reporting bias is evident. Newton, for example, she merely refers to as 'a sober, silent, thinking lad', a description that contrasts markedly with Storr's:

In early youth, Newton was anxious, insecure, hypochondriacal and self-disparaging. Indeed, depressive traits are more in evidence than paranoid tendencies. It was only in middle life that he ceased self-denigration and began to accuse others of the faults of which he had previously found himself guilty.

Cox's preference for understating – or perhaps not looking for – early signs of pathology, even in those of her subjects who later showed it, is understandable if one recalls the origins of her study. As noted earlier, the survey formed part of a larger programme of research into giftedness initiated by the American psychologist, Terman. In the main investigation more than 1500 children were selected – on the basis of their very high IQs – and followed through into adulthood. Periodic evaluations of their physical and mental health, personalities, and intellectual achievements showed that they maintained their superiority in all of these domains, including a relative freedom from insanity and other indications of psychological maladjustment.^[37]

Taken in conjunction with Cox's findings, these results are frequently quoted, even in the recent literature, as strong evidence, not merely against the idea that creativity and psychosis are connected, but actually in support of a quite contrary view: that high ability somehow militates against serious mental disorder.^[1] As we shall eventually see, it so happens that the latter point is probably correct, but it is not a conclusion that follows directly from the results of the Terman project, for the following reasons.

As Richards has recently indicated, the Cox survey and the longitudinal study are not as mutually supportive as they seem at first sight.^[30] The reasons essentially have to do with the relevance of IQ to creativity and are exposed when we compare both the similarities and the differences between Cox's historical figures and Terman's gifted children. Both, it can be agreed, showed very high IQ, the latter well into the superior range, averaging around 150, and in some cases running up to 200. Cox, of course, had to make

retrospective IQ estimates for her subjects but these are probably fairly accurate and average about 160, with a range overlapping considerably with that actually found in the gifted children.

Yet the outcome in the two groups is quite different. Cox's subjects were, by any definition, outstandingly creative, to the point of being almost qualitatively distinguishable from their fellow men. This could not be said, however, for any of the gifted children: although many showed talents in various fields and carried these through into adult accomplishments, none achieved the very highest level of creativity seen in Cox's subjects. Admitting this, Terman and Oden comment as follows:

Several possessing superior talent in music and art are heading university departments in these fields and have produced some excellent original work, but none seems likely to achieve a truly great piece of creative work. There are a number of competent and highly successful writers among the subjects but not more than three or four with a high order of creativity.^[37]

The above comparison articulates two, related, conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence reviewed so far. The first is that the question of what constitutes great creativity, at least, is still left open to debate. The second is that IQ, as measured by conventional intelligence tests, does not seem a sufficient explanation of it; even though it might be a necessary accompaniment – and indeed might help entirely to account for some other forms of high intellectual achievement. The latter point has of course long been recognised in academic psychology and from the 1950s onwards considerable effort was expended attempting to identify the unique features of creativity. This work took two directions. One was concerned with the measurement of other intellectual abilities, apart from those revealed in standard IQ tests, that might explain differences in originality. Another concentrated more on non-intellectual factors – such as personality traits – which it was thought might distinguish the highly creative individual.

The first of these lines of research led to the development of so-called creativity tests in which the subject has a free hand to generate his or her own responses to a given problem. In other words, the test situation is open-ended – unlike the usual intelligence test, where the person is required to reach a single (correct) solution. A typical example would be: How many uses can you

think of for a brick (or a paper clip)? While much maligned – some might think justifiably – as trivialising what real-life creativity is about, the use of such procedures has in fact helped, to some extent, to clarify our understanding of what is involved in original thinking. For example, research has shown that performance on these tests is unrelated to intelligence, at least above a certain minimum level of IQ, suggesting that they do tap something different. An important explanatory concept has been that of ‘divergent thinking’; or what de Bono in a different context has called ‘lateral’ thinking.^[14] This pursuing of tangential trains of thought in order to arrive at novel ideas has been seen to contrast with the ‘convergent’ thinking demanded by the items in normal IQ tests.

Of course, the ability to think divergently does not guarantee creativity, any more than does a high IQ. Both convergent *and* divergent modes of thought are necessary for a creative act to occur: the writer must actually arrange his freely associated ideas into organised prose or the scientist finally home in on the solution to a problem. So it is the capacity to mobilise both of these resources and switch smoothly between them that seems to be the hallmark of effective creative production. When discussing unexpected failures for this to occur, academic psychologists have generally concentrated on the case where, despite high intelligence (and therefore presumably superior ability to think convergently) individuals are nevertheless relatively uncreative, either in real-life or in their performance on divergent thinking tests. Clinicians, however, have long been aware that the opposite can also be found: an excessive tendency to divergent thinking – though they have usually called it something else – which the person has difficulty in translating into focused thought. Arieti makes these points well:

... intelligence, which we have mentioned several times as important for life and creativity, may actually handicap creativity if not accompanied by originality and if used for a too-strict self-criticism and inhibition. On the other hand, originality may lead us astray if not corrected by self-criticism. *Divergent thinking may even bring us to psychosis, if not matched by logical processes.*^[5] (Italics ours)

Although Arieti himself fails properly to follow it through, his

observation underpins an important theme in our understanding of creativity as it relates to psychosis, and we shall have occasion to refer to it again. First, however, it is necessary to consider the second line of research on creativity pursued in academic psychology.

As mentioned earlier, the failure to predict creativity from a narrow view of individual differences based on IQ also led to work focusing more on its personality correlates. This was, in a sense a natural extension of a broadening perspective on intellectual ability, enclosing the idea that psychological qualities such as creativity might be as much a personality trait as a cognitive characteristic. Among other research it led to a series of studies – mostly carried out in the 1950s and 1960s – of the personalities of very creative people. The method adopted differed in important ways from the earlier biographical approach discussed so far. It concentrated instead on living examples of people who were judged highly creative, thereby making it possible to evaluate them at first-hand on objective personality tests or similar assessment procedures. Use of this strategy partly reflected an increasing shift of emphasis among academic psychologists – though continuing the tradition set by Terman – towards redefining creativity as giftedness or eminence. And it meant sampling a more ‘dilute’ domain of creativity, few of the individuals studied entering the ranks of the great innovators (though they, in any case, are rarely recognised as such during their lifetimes). However, the method does have the obvious advantage of avoiding the pitfalls of retrospective analysis, especially the impressionistic biases that certainly coloured many of the earlier biographical accounts of famous figures.

These personality studies usually proceeded by selecting, on the basis of peer evaluation or similar criteria, highly accomplished professionals in various branches of the arts and sciences.^[10,23,32] The personalities of the individuals concerned were then examined using one or other of a number of procedures, ranging from objective personality inventories to depth analysis methods, such as the Rorschach ink-blot test. The results of these studies are too numerous to detail here, but it turns out that the investigators concerned all reached fairly consistent conclusions about the personality traits that typified their subjects. Although differences were to be found – especially comparing the arts and sciences – the highly creative were frequently described in similar

terms as: sceptical, aloof, radical, self-sufficient, independent, bohemian, often introverted and usually more open to experience.

To the untutored eye, this picture of the personality of the creative individual might seem far distant from that of the psychotic; it is certainly often cited as evidence against the two being connected. Again, however, we must be careful not to reach a too hasty conclusion. Thus, research carried out over the past few years indicates that the traits described above actually overlap considerably with those found in so-called 'schizotypal' individuals, i.e. people whose temperamental make-up seems similar to that underlying schizophrenia, continuous with it in the personality domain but without any obvious signs of psychotic illness.^[11] The description 'schizotypal' is really just a modern equivalent of the older one, 'schizoid', which has long been recognised as having an affinity with schizophrenia. Furthermore – and in a more general sense than the 'special cases' quoted by Storr – it has also been regarded as having some association with creativity. Here it is instructive to read the description by Manfred Bleuler (whose father coined the term 'schizophrenia') on some characteristic features of the person of schizoid character.^[8] Noting that many qualities are deviant and undesirable Bleuler also writes of others that are positive:

His behaviour is aloof and devoid of human warmth; yet he does have a rich inner life. In this sense he is introverted ... the schizoid is also capable of pursuing his own thoughts and following his own interests and drives.... He is autistic. The better side of this autism reveals a sturdiness of character, and inflexibility of purpose, an independence, and a predisposition to creativity.

It therefore seems probable that what the early personality studies of living creative subjects had revealed was their tendency to the schizoidness of which Bleuler writes, and which would now be referred to as 'schizotypy'. One particular finding from the original studies supports that conclusion.^[6] There, writers were evaluated on the comprehensive personality questionnaire, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI): the test provides scores on a number of scales, each of which has as its reference point a particular clinical syndrome (depression, psychopathy, schizophrenia and so on) and is labelled accordingly. On

average the subjects scored highly on these scales, including that labelled 'schizophrenia'. This does not of course mean that the subjects concerned were psychotic, in a clinical sense. Indeed an even more striking feature of the results was that the individuals examined were especially high on a measure of 'ego strength', indicating a greater than average *resistance* to mental breakdown: the finding is particularly interesting because the latter is usually very *low* in subjects who deviate markedly on the clinical scales of tests like the MMPI. We seem here to have further evidence of the apparent paradox about creativity and psychosis to which we have referred several times.

The final studies to be reviewed in this chapter help, we believe, to take us a little nearer understanding that paradox, as well as offering more convincing evidence than that considered so far that the connection between creativity and psychosis is indeed genuine. The work to be discussed, some of it quite recent, has generally lain outside both academic psychology and clinical psychiatry, mostly being carried out by experimental researchers from neighbouring disciplines with an interest in the topic. The studies themselves have taken various forms, some directly addressing the issue of creativity and psychosis, others reporting results that bear indirectly on it. All, however, can be gathered together under a common theme: that concerned with the genetics of psychosis.

One of the few established facts about psychotic illness is that it runs in families and only the most stubborn social theorist could now deny that one reason for this is that the disposition to it, at least, is partly inherited. However, like many genetically determined characteristics – some of which indeed may be responsible for illness or deviance – such dispositions may not be expressed, or, if they are, expressed in incomplete form, or even revealed in qualities which at first sight seem distant from, even unconnected with, the pathology for which they are otherwise responsible.^[11] It is this perspective on the genetics of psychosis that provides an entry-point into our understanding of the latter's probable association with creativity.

A geneticist who has done much to articulate the above view is Karlsson, whose observations about the high frequency of psychosis among the outstandingly creative we have already noted. What Karlsson proposes essentially is that the genes responsible for the disposition to schizophrenia (he confines himself to this form of

psychosis) also code for creative ability. Several lines of evidence do support this theory, including the results of one investigation, a large pedigree study, reported by Karlsson himself.^[19] He conducted a retrospective survey of the professional status of the first-degree relatives of psychiatric patients admitted to hospital in his native Iceland between the years 1851 and 1940. Using this same period as a basis for comparison with the general population and examining available records (including the Icelandic *Who's Who*), he was able to show that the relatives concerned significantly more often entered creative occupations. Interestingly, authors appeared in this group with a frequency more than twice that found in the population at large.

Other investigations, using different research designs, point to the same conclusion, and have further demonstrated that the association is probably, as Karlsson suggests, largely genetic in origin. These have concentrated on individuals adopted shortly after birth, making it possible to disentangle genetic from environmental effects. One study, for example, has shown that children separated early on from their schizophrenic mothers are not only more likely than control children to become schizophrenic themselves but also show greater artistic and musical talent.^[18] Another investigation, looking at the problem as it were from the opposite direction, compared adoptees selected for later estimates of their *creativity* and then examined incidences of mental illness.^[26] Among the adoptees themselves the most highly creative showed an excessive rate of mental illness – as much as 30 per cent. A figure not far short of this was also found in the biological parents from whom they had been separated, though not in their *adoptive* relatives, in whom the incidence was much lower.

It should be noted that the study just described did not focus especially on schizophrenia, the kinds of mental illness observed in the individuals surveyed covering a number of diagnostic categories, albeit mostly ones related in one or another to psychosis and probably reflecting a similar underlying disposition. However, this does raise an important point of debate in contemporary discussions about the relationship between madness and creativity. Thus some investigators have argued that the association is one, not with schizophrenia, but with affective psychosis. As we have already mentioned, and as we shall reiterate in the next chapter, the distinction between these two forms of insanity is probably more a matter of psychiatric convenience than aetiological reality.

Nevertheless they do represent different ways in which psychotic vulnerability can manifest itself and reference to them helps to provide some clues as to which of its aspects might mediate any association that exists with creativity.

One investigator who has put weight on the relationship with affective, rather than schizophrenic, disorder is the American psychiatrist, Andreasen, whose work, also carried out within a partly genetics context, is of particular interest here because it has mainly been concerned with writers.^[2] The individuals concerned were all members of the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, a group which, as Andreasen herself points out, is the oldest and most widely recognised creative teaching programme in the United States, having spawned such eminent authors as Robert Lowell, Kurt Vonnegut and Philip Roth.

In a long study, spanning some fifteen years, Andreasen evaluated members of the Iowa Workshop and their families, comparing them with a carefully selected group of control subjects on indicators of psychopathology. Her findings were that both the writers themselves and their families had a substantially raised incidence of mental illness, but especially of affective psychosis, including depression and forms of the disorder characterised by severe mood swings. The diagnosis of 'schizophrenia', on the other hand, was not very frequent in her samples. On the intellectual side all of the writers, not surprisingly, showed a high tested IQ, though not more so than non-writers, thus confirming other published evidence, discussed earlier, that intelligence as such is not a sufficient prerequisite of creative performance. Finally, complementing these results Andreasen demonstrated that the relatives of her chosen authors also showed unusual creative talent, though over a wider sphere than the literary, including art, music, dance, and mathematics. She concludes from her study that 'the families of the writers were riddled with both creativity and mental illness', the two intertwining to an extent which would make it difficult to deny their real association.

A substantially similar conclusion was reached from another very recent study which again specifically focused on the possible relationship between creativity and the affective features of psychosis.^[31] The aims were similar to Andreasen's, but the investigators used a different research design. Rather than creative individuals being taken as the starting-point, the individuals targetted initially were people who had been diagnosed as having

had a mental illness, either a severe (manic-depressive) form of affective disorder or the milder, but aetiologically related, mood swings of 'cyclothymia'. These subjects, and their relatives, were then assessed for creativeness, as judged by a comprehensive set of 'Lifetime Creativity Scales'. Although somewhat less in individuals who suffered from full-blown manic-depressive psychosis, creativity was found to be significantly raised in both patients and relatives who were rated as cyclothymic. The interpretation put on these results was that the latter may have an optimum level which facilitates creativeness; though beyond that point – as seen in the seriously psychotic – it may hamper creativity.

If, as the above evidence suggests and as Karlsson has argued, sufferers from psychosis – whether we call it schizophrenia or affective disorder – and the highly creative do in fact share the same genes, then it may be asked: what, in psychological terms, is inherited? One view is that it has something to do with the energy, drive and willingness to take risks associated (in the 'up' phase, at least) with traits underlying manic-depression. Although such characteristics probably do play some secondary role, we find this interpretation unconvincing and suspect that it stems from a need to make a connection with what are perceived as the relatively more 'attractive' features of psychosis, rather than with those emphasised in descriptions of schizophrenia, a concept that has taken on almost entirely negative connotations. The explanation is implausible for two reasons. First, it is too general: several other personality traits, such as anxiety – not specifically related to psychosis, though carrying risks for different forms of psychopathology – could equally well be said to generate the motivation necessary for creative production, and often do. Secondly, although certainly important, the current preference by some writers to relate creativity to the affective forms of psychosis should not divert us from the fact that it is actually *schizophrenia* which has inspired most of the theorising – and generated a good deal of the empirical evidence – about how psychotic and creative traits might be related to each other.

It is more likely that what connects creativity to madness is some aspect of the thought styles which psychotic and original forms of thinking have in common and which, in the psychiatric domain, can be observed across the arbitrary diagnostic categories of psychosis. Here, of course, we are referring especially to the capacity for divergent thinking, discussed earlier. Although

academic psychologists have been reluctant to use this notion to cross the boundary between the normal and the abnormal, clinicians have for many years used a similar concept. Their preferred description of it has been *overinclusive* thinking which has frequently been used to explain certain forms of thought disorder seen in psychotic patients, such as the tendency to cognitive 'slippage', loosely associated ideation, and difficulty in maintaining a tight boundary for abstract concepts.^[27] The term itself was coined in the 1930s and arose originally from studies of schizophrenia, though it has since proved equally (if not more) applicable to psychotics with other diagnoses, notably mania.

It is no coincidence that the clinical tests for overinclusive thinking are not all that different from those devised by academic psychologists as measures of divergent, or 'creative', thinking. Although naturally designed more to draw out signs of abnormality, they nevertheless demand similar mental operations, being open-ended procedures in which, for example, subjects are required to interpret proverbs or sort everyday objects in any way they prefer. Such tests are rarely used nowadays, possibly because the concepts of overinclusive and divergent thinking *are* so similar and, in themselves, have little diagnostic value for differentiating the mad from the merely original. Illustrating the point, a colleague of one of the present authors once administered a battery of overinclusion (thought disorder) tests to a group of local artists. Several emerged as patently psychotic! They were not, of course, in a clinical sense.

This difficulty in distinguishing the cognitive style of the highly creative from that of the psychotic has also often been noted by others. For example, Andreasen and her colleagues asked a large group of psychiatrists to compare the written productions of two creative writers, including James Joyce, with those of psychotics and, without being given any other information, to try to reach a diagnosis.^[4] A high proportion of the clinicians diagnosed the writers as psychotic, including 42 per cent who suspected Joyce of being schizophrenic (he did, of course, have a schizophrenic daughter). Turning the comparison round the other way, another recent study examined the performance of schizophrenics on two standard 'creativity' tests.^[21] Apart from those with persecutory delusions, the schizophrenics achieved much higher scores than other groups, including normals, with whom they were compared. The authors concluded that creativity and psychotic

symptomatology do indeed reflect equivalent forms of cognitive processing.

It is also very probable that the cognitive style which overinclusive and divergent thinking have in common is strongly inherited. Part of the evidence here comes from genetic analyses (e.g. twin comparisons) of normal subjects' performance on 'creativity' tests.^[12] Other investigations have addressed the same question in a clinical context. Thus, McConaghy and his colleagues carried out a series of experiments on what they call 'allusive thinking', a concept similar to overinclusive thinking and actually measured by them with a clinical 'thought disorder' test.^[24,25] They reported that the healthy relatives of schizophrenic patients show high degrees of allusive thinking; as indeed do the relatives of mentally healthy subjects who themselves have high scores on their allusive thinking test. These results, in turn, confirm a large body of other findings that 'psychotic' characteristics – temperamental as well as cognitive – tend to cluster in families where one of the members is diagnosable as mentally ill.^[34,39]

From a genetics point of view, therefore, a crucial psychological feature connecting creativity to psychosis would seem to be the distinctive cognitive style responsible for both. Certainly Karlsson is clear on this point and, in commenting, also helps to unravel some of the mystery surrounding their apparently unlikely conjunction:

Although there appears to remain little doubt that carriers of the schizophrenia gene indeed differ in thought patterns from noncarriers, no scientific support exists for the view that the deviation is toward inferior thinking. In fact, it may well be in the opposite direction. If one defines 'normality' as the characteristics exhibited by the majority and equates the term with 'superiority', any deviation is by definition abnormal and undesirable. However, if a minority with a different thought pattern can be established scientifically to reason more precisely, despite that way being deviant, it seems unwise to condemn their mode of thinking as automatically somehow inferior. Scholars should not forget that a schizophrenic explained the nature of gravity, which had puzzled 'normal' people for centuries.^[20]

What Karlsson does not explain here, of course, is how some apparently psychotic individuals manage to achieve effective creativity – albeit in some cases only in between periods of illness

– whereas others, probably the majority, fail entirely to do so. Or, more critical perhaps, why – if evidence reviewed earlier is to be believed – many creative individuals even seem to have enhanced resistance to the mental illnesses to which, according to the theory outlined, their dispositions should make them more than usually susceptible. Another problem that remains unresolved is the generality of the connection between psychosis and creativity. In other words, can *all* creativity be explained in this way? Or are we indeed, as some writers quoted previously would argue, merely dealing with certain special cases? We believe that at least partial answers to these questions will emerge later in this book – we shall certainly return to them – but a few brief comments are worth setting down before closing the present chapter.

The first two questions posed above are probably related. Even if the essence of originality lies in certain modes of psychotic thought, the ability to harness this in effective creative work – and by the same token the capacity to resist the psychopathology which it implies – must depend on other factors being present. These *might* be intrinsic to the very temperamental make-up which itself predisposes to psychosis: here it is instructive to recall Manfred Bleuler’s description, cited earlier, of the schizoid personality, with its overtones of hard-edged indifference to others, a quality that many will recognise in the highly creative. Another important factor is certainly intelligence. Although difficult, psychometrically, to disentangle from creativity, intelligence, as measured by IQ at least, certainly seems to represent a distinguishable feature of cognitive performance and, to the extent that it is genetically determined, is probably separately inherited. Almost all outstandingly creative people are high in assessed IQ, a fact which must surely protect them to some extent from mental breakdown, both directly and indirectly, in the first case, by providing them with more flexible psychological resources to cope with stress and, in the second, by enabling them to make socially valued contributions that strengthen self-esteem. In any given individual the balance between these various influences is no doubt a delicate one, and in some instances precarious, depending on numerous casual and pervasive situational factors.

Turning to our third question, whether the undoubted connection with psychosis offers an all-embracing theory of creativity might ultimately reduce to how we define the latter. If we broaden it to mean simply ‘cleverness’ then obviously there can be several other

explanations, mostly elucidated by an understanding of general intelligence and the way in which, even in the absence of 'psychotic' modes of thought, that facilitates high achievement. Eminence as a criterion introduces the additional feature of relying on social judgement, perhaps diluting in various ways our evaluation of what constitutes 'true' creativity. In this respect it is interesting to note a comment made by Andreasen on what she interprets as the relative failure of the Ellis survey to demonstrate very significant evidence of psychosis (or the tendency to it) among the eminent persons he surveyed. She suggests that the people studied by Ellis were mainly those who were merely powerful or influential enough to get their names in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, rather than necessarily being intellectually creative.^[3] However, it is unlikely that this is an entirely sound basis for making a sharp distinction between 'psychotic' and 'non-psychotic' forms of creativity, if such a difference exists. A certain kind of great achievement, as revealed in power or influence over others, might itself spring from traits of a psychotic nature. We have already mentioned the suggestion that the manic's energy might be an important connecting link between creativity and psychosis. Although personally we believe this to be of only secondary importance, its probable role in motivating innovative acts cannot be ignored. Winston Churchill, an evident manic-depressive who rarely slept, is a notable example. Are we to conclude therefore that eminence cannot be allowed as a yardstick of creativity?

Even if we confine ourselves to the more usual outlets for creative expression – in the arts and sciences – there is similar ambiguity. Here we are reminded of studies carried out some years ago in Germany on the personality characteristics of a large group of professional painters and sculptors.^[16,17] It was found that, as predicted, the artists were more deviant on certain personality traits. However, further analysis of the data indicated that the relationship had nothing to do with the individuals' talent, as judged by expert rating of their contributions to contemporary art. Instead, it reflected how successful they had been in aggressively promoting their rather indifferent work. The authors cynically conclude:

This outcome does not surprise us because it confirms our experience in this field, namely, that success in the arts is not synonymous with artistic significance or originality.^[17]

The most reliable and valid yardstick of creativeness, of course, is retrospective, the capacity for the products of originality to survive the fleeting whims of taste, fashion, or claims as to their truth or value. Fortunately, most of the figures who appear in this book meet that criterion or, if not, they were certainly notable enough for them to have been remembered. That they were also all subject to periods of psychotic breakdown makes them of additional interest and in the next chapter we shall examine precisely what that means and how it might help us to understand their particular form of creativity.