BEFORE AND BEYOND LAWRENCE S. KUBIE, M.D. (1896-1973):

“Script Dr.”¹ for Lady in the Dark and “Midwife”² of Suddenly Last Summer

Abstract

The vilification of psychoanalysis---warranted and/or unwarranted---has a contentious history. Playwright Moss Hart (1904-1961) [hereafter ‘Moss’ to distinguish him from Lorenz Hart] (i.e., an unrelated composer-librettist colleague with whom he had collaborated earlier in their careers) was a patient of the individual named in the title of this paper. He [hereafter ‘Kubie’] was Moss’s physician/psychiatrist/psychoanalyst. Their relationship became the subject of a scholarly inquest. B. D. McClung, the author of Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical (2007) [hereafter LD], demonstrated how Kubie undertook to enhance Moss’s theatrical career as well as his own persona by ex-tension. Of lesser duration was another therapeutic dyad of Kubie with Thomas Lanier Williams, III [hereafter a/k/a ‘Tennessee’] during the conceptualization of Suddenly Last Summer (1958) [hereafter SLS]. The latter playwright publicly vented disparaging ex post facto reconstructions of his patient relationship with Kubie amongst other physicians (i.e., in actuality as well as metaphorically). In doing so, Tennessee seemingly undertook to insulate and exculpate himself from any blameworthiness or accountability for collateral casualties he may have helped harm.

Key Words

L. S. Kubie; M. Hart, ethical lapses, psychobiography, T. L. Williams, III, privacy invasions, collateral casualties.

1. A Measure of Theatrical Gravitas

“In general, it may be said that the neurotic instability of the public
and the dramatist’s skill in avoiding resistances and offering fore-
pleasures can alone determine the limits set upon the employment
of abnormal characters on the stage.”

---Freud (1942 [1905/1906], p. 310).

2. Moss

During the evening of January 23, 1941, “playwright Moss Hart (with psychiatrist
in tow), lyricist Ira Gershwin, composer Kurt Weill…” et al. (McClung, p. 3) were seated
in Broadway’s Alvin Theatre. They were awaiting the season’s opening curtain for LD.
Kubie was the psychiatrist seated beside Moss who was his patient “from about 1937
until he retired from private practice in 1959…[which] relationship eventually trans-
cended the clinical to include personal correspondence and attending lectures and dinner
engagements together” (ibid., p. 45).³ The published script for LD (Hart et al., 1941 was
dedicated “to L.S.K.” (p. i).

Later, Moss (1959) authored an autobiographical volume entitled Act One. It
remained atop the ‘best seller’ lists of The New York Times for 41-weeks. His memoir
finally became the subject of an eponymously-titled play currently featured at Lincoln

Kubie was not only an esteemed author; but, also a psychiatrist/psychoanalyst.
His professional œuvré has become the subject of several penetrating studies (i.e.,
referenced in the bibliography infra). He began treating Moss while his patient had been
suffering from depression and so-called ‘writer’s block.’ They met, according to B. D.
McClung (ibid.), often twice a day, over more than two decades. Moss was inspired by
his analysis with Kubie to compose LD: he based the play’s “Dr. Brooks” on Kubie. The
leading lady’s script closely follows the broad stages outlined in Kubie’s description of a successful analysis.

Moss at first planned to call the play “I am Listening!,” the remark with which Kubie began each session (McClung, pp. 46-47). Kubie (1941), in his “Preface” to LD, wrote under the pseudonym of “Dr. [Alexander] Brooks.” The ensuing drama was framed to highlight the impact of Freudian concepts on societal understanding of depression and mental illness and praising the ‘revolution’ occurring “in the realm of psychic pain, removing it from the sphere of art and morals to that of scientific inquiry and therapy” (pp. i-vii). McClung (p. 111), in his synopsis, elucidated further insights.

After Kubie attended a performance of LD in the company of the New York World Telegram’s drama critic Sidney B. Whipple, his column (February 21, 1941) was captioned “Diagnosis of Liza Authentic.” When “Whipple bluntly asked him ‘Well, what was the matter with her?’” Kubie replied:

“The patient is suffering from mixed neuroses. It is a combination. This would fall, I think, in the classification of anxiety hysteria with a marked depressive element, one symptom of which was her inability to make decisions…It appears that Liza’s strong Oedipus complex was aggravated by unconscious jealousy of her mother’s beauty, which, she was cruelly told, she completely lacked; narcissism played its part; and there was a bi-sexual predisposition that worked itself out, so to speak. In editing a magazine devoted to feminine beauty; while she herself remained in a plain, unadorned state…” (McClung, p. 105).

3. The Consultant-Psychoanalyst’s Alter Ego

[Moss] “Hart’s play was scrupulous in its depiction of
Kubie’s brand of psychoanalysis.”

---B. D. McClung (ibid., p. 52).

Broadway critics became effusive in quoting Kubie about several of his psychoanalytic interpretations involving Moss’s theatrical production. Prominently displayed in the dressing room of leading star, Gertrude Lawrence, was an adulatory “letter signed by Lawrence S. Kubie, a New York psychiatrist” (McClung, p. 105). Other praiseworthy passages, within the ambit of the news media, of course, found their way into print. Some seized upon the debate involving the training of medical-school graduate analysts vis-à-vis the training of so-called ‘lay analysts.’ In due course, others became aware of the adaptation by Moss of the Shakespearean allegory to which Freud (1913) had alluded in *The Theme of the Three Caskets*.

Most significantly, LD enabled Moss to give voice---via the staged dialogue of ‘mannishly-outfitted’ editor Lisa Elliott (*i.e.*, Gertrude Lawrence) and ‘effeminately-portrayed’ Russell Paxton (*i.e.*, Danny Kaye) to the dissemination---for a wider audience---of Kubie’s so-called “gender inversion theories” (McClung, pp. 149-153). His theory was posthumously published in “The Drive to Become Both Sexes,” the last paper written by Kubie (1974).

S. A. Leavy (1974), the paper’s reviewer was “not so much a psychoanalytical paper as a philosophical testament, in which he [Kubie] makes clear that his thesis (*i.e.*, how seminal drives evolve within expressions of human sexuality) owes as much to his self-understanding as to his clinical experience and knowledge” (p. 2). By 2011, it became the subject of a symposium entitled “Classics and Controversies” in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (Vol. 80: pp. 357-474). Included within the references---among
the publications listing Kubie (infra.)—was the cited work of Moss and another play (A Streetcar Named Desire) by Tennessee. The latter author, meanwhile, self-identified himself as having been a former analysand of Kubie over a one-year period.⁴

A fruitful psychoanalyst/psychoanalysand pairing has often been described as a dynamic dyad. Conventionally, professional strictures have operated to impair the analyst from featuring “undisguised fragments” of an analysand’s therapy so they do not become readily identifiable figures within the public domain.

4. Unethical “Border Violations”

McClung, moreover, even questioned the propriety of Moss’s analyst to lend his hand in promoting LD: “One wonders if Kubie began to take heat from his colleagues” (p.”105). Not only the Saturday Review of Literature;⁵ but, also the New York Review of Books⁶ began to host allegations and counter-allegations about controversies stemming from alleged lapses in Kubie’s ethical behavior.

In commenting about Hollywood’s 1944 LD film, the authors of Psychiatry and the Cinema (Gabbard & Gabbard, 1999) characterized it as “falling mid-way through the ninety years of psychiatry in American movies.” Psychiatry, in their words:

“…unassumingly introduces conventions we will encounter repeatedly…: the ‘faceless’ psychiatrist, the psychiatrist as plot expediter, the psychiatrist as spokesman for the dominant ideology, as well as the psychiatrist with the ability to effect a dramatic cure after the resurrection of a repressed trauma from child-
5. Of Psychobiographers

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), during his self-analysis, was not averse to masking his own identity beneath the *alter-ego* of a so-called ‘*pseudo*-patient.’ From a biographical perspective, readers of at least one of his reconstructed case-studies are called upon to wrestle with the notion that analyst *vis-à-vis* biographer stances are often indistinguishable from one another.

Both the subject-analysand and the biographer-analyst are, of course, free to portray themselves as ‘psychobiographers’ like Freud did in framing certain of his case-studies like the *Rat Man* and *Little Hans*, neither of whom he had ever seen in a clinical setting. An array of Freud’s analysands (*i.e.*, so-called ‘pupil-patients’) relished their reflected statures as his former trainees. Several elicited favorable remarks from him endorsing their own publications and/or sought signed photographs---as a demonstrative rite of passage---for display upon consultation-room walls.

There is no paucity of analysand-accounts by Freud. Among them are the first-person treatises authored by Smiley Blanton (1971) and Abram Kardiner (1977). Amidst a period of such pairings, Edward G. Glover wrote “A *Festschrift* for Lawrence S. Kubie” (Brody, ed., 1969). In it, Glover posited his axiom that “…the conventional aspects of individual biography…too are subject to analysis” (p. 5).

Paul Roazen (2000a), in “The Correspondence of Edward Glover and Lawrence S. Kubie” alluded to Glover’s temptation “to write a small study on the science and art of biography, but this project never came to anything” (*ibid.*, p. 177). In commenting about the respective last letters between each of Roazen’s subjects, he noted that analysis was,
as Glover had further supposed: “…inherently incestuous; it seemed to be an intrinsic aspect of the profession” (ibid., p. 186 & Roazen, 2000b, pp. 131-166).

Most startling, perhaps, was the manner in which Glover, as Kubie’s 1st-analyst, felt free enough to discuss their analyst/analysand dyad with and/or without the latter’s express permission. Freud, before them, had also been brutally frank amongst his closest colleagues in characterizing a few of his analysands both during periods while they lay been prone upon his analytic couch and thereafter.

It is further noted that each participant in the Glover/Kubie dyad exchanged semi-patronizing encomiums in 1969 (see bibliography infra) culminating with an essay written by Kubie (1973) eulogizing Glover’s life. Both of their inter-vivos publications about one another merit further scrutiny. What extent, if any, one may ask were such expressions of gratitude too self-effacing or of spurious salience? Had their analytic dyad, as Glover intimated in his quoted context, been somewhat incestuous in its latitude?

Anti-Kubie tirades, more recently voiced by M. Sherman (2011), allege that:

“[Tennessee] Williams wasn’t baring his soul to Kubie because of content-ment…[since] ‘he was plagued with guilt, fear, and insecurity, much of which revolved around both his writing and sexuality, the latter being a matter of public disgrace and criminality in the fifties’…” (p. 129).

According to Sherman’s further vilification:

“Kubie treated many prominent, albeit closeted gay men in the arts; in essence, if not in actuality, he attempted to cure them, and according to Williams suggested that he give up both gay sex and writing. Williams did neither. He wrote Suddenly Last Summer in the mornings and went to sessions with the good doctor in the
afternoons. His attitude toward what he was writing, and then what he was saying must have been ambiguous and conflicted. Williams seemed to mock and pour contempt upon him (which would have pleased Kubie), and yet might he not have admired him as well?” (p. 128).

6. The Right to Privacy?

By way of contrast, another of Tennessee’s recent biographers (Bak, 2013) credited Kubie with having “helped midwife his last triumph [i.e., *SLS*] of the decade” (pp. 160 & 177-178). He not only began to disparage Kubie’s caretaking measures from an ex-consumer’s point of view; but, also by introducing his anti-hero ‘Dr. Cukrowitz’ (i.e., as a staged character whose *nom de plume*, in Polish vis-à-vis English vernacular), was further decipherable as ‘Dr. Sugar.’ Was such a portrayal in *SLS*’s dialogue tantamount to psychoanalytically-charged transference/countertransference residue from Kubie’s recently concluded analysis of Tennessee? His sister Rose had undergone a lobotomy in 1943. Tennessee had featured Dr. Cukrowitz/Sugar as a metaphorical “psyche-surgeon” pondering the acceptance/non-acceptance of a possible bribe from his stage character Violet Venable to operate upon the brain of her niece Catharine.

Kubie initially fomented; but, thereafter seemed to ‘steer clear’ of Broadway gossip. Tangentially, Tennessee continued to publicly complain about his notoriety in a December 6, 1972 Letter to the Editor of *The New York Times*. “In a long piece about Dr. Max Jacobson,” his generic distrust of doctors re-emerged thusly: “I have been singled out among the many persons mentioned as patients of his---and in a manner which is very embarrassing and damaging to my character.” As he further then wrote:

“It is true that two or three years in the late sixties I went to Dr. Jacobson for
treatment of a deep depression. But it is totally untrue that I was ever ‘thrown out’ of the office for ‘boozing it up’ in the waiting room. Whoever dispensed this bit of low-comedy invention should be required to retract it. I would say that the entire matter of listing the doctor’s patients is an invasion of privacy of a highly damaging nature; if the names came from the doctor’s office it is surely a breach of medical ethics. I have not seen the doctor nor been in his office since the spring of ‘69. During the sixties I drank heavily but I have never behaved like a ‘drunken bum’ as I am depicted in your article… You have my word if you will accept it, that the alleged incident did not occur…”

Tennessee’s efforts, on the other hand, to countermand utterances flowing from his own lips appear feeble at best. The cavalier manner in which Tennessee unveiled his privileged version of the analyst/analysand dyad with Kubie was clearly insensitive to the latter during the twilight years of their respective lives.

7. A Belated Coda

The psychoanalytic world took notice when another aspect of Freud’s theatrical interests appeared in print. Musicologist Max Graf (1942, pp. 459-464) disclosed the fact that 40-years beforehand, he had received a German transcript from Freud of his then unpublished paper entitled Psychopathic Characters on the Stage. Freud—perhaps gave it to Graf at the time—in gratitude for the paternal family-reporter’s enlightening observations about his then 5-year old son’s behavior. The boy subsequently became widely known as Little Hans. Freud’s paper was thereupon translated by H. A. Bunker and subsequently by J. Strachey (Freud, S.E. 7 [1942 (1905 or 1905)], pp. 303-310).

According to the latter translator’s concluding footnote:
“This play by Hermann Bahr, the Austrian novelist and playwright (1863-1934), was first produced at the end of 1905. Its plot turns upon the dual personality of its heroine, who is unable, in spite of every effort, to escape from an attachment (based upon her physical feelings) to a man who has her in his power.---This paragraph was omitted from the 1942 translation.”

In *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*, Freud postulated that “…the playwright and actor enable ['the interested spectator at a spectacle or play’] “to identify himself [itali-cized in trans.] with a hero” (*ibid.*, p. 305). It does not take much imagination, in the light of Section 2 above, to anticipate which “hero” Moss and/or Kubie may have had in mind for the “Dr. Brooks” role in the Broadway production of *LD*.

By the reckoning of one commentator (Paller, 2005):

[Tennessee] “Williams was as forthcoming in the press about his psychoanalysis as a child displaying a new toy. ‘I think if this analysis works, it will open some doors for me,’ he told the *New York Herald Tribune* within six months into his sessions with Kubie. ‘If I am no longer disturbed myself, I will deal less with disturbed people and violent material. It would be good if I could write with serenity’…” (pp. 130-131).

While it may be said that ethical prohibitions against “two-way traffic” insulated Tennessee from any recourse from Kubie, it cannot be said that neither the latter nor any of his other patients were untouched by the attentiveness of a retinue of media sources the former figure inspired as a newsworthy celebrity.⁹ The accelerated creation of other *forums* of communication by myriad “information highways” had begun to erode the sanctity of psychoanalysis as a ‘safe-haven’ for the baring of one’s innermost thoughts.
During the electronic era, the public ‘face’ of psychoanalysis remains at risk for becoming over-pretentious to the populace at large. In returning, finally to biography, an analyst such as Kubie was arguably remiss in voicing his ‘semi-disguised’ threshold enthusiasm about the genesis of LD in the public press about his plausible collusion with Moss concerning their ongoing relationship.

Endnotes

1 Phrase for Broadway jargon such as headed an Associated Press interview---devoid of a reporter’s byline---which, in part, stated as follows: “…out of Moss Hart’s visits to a psychoanalyst, who asked that his name not be used, [their work] helped him with the play and…tells about the psychoanalytic factors involved…” (McClung, pp.105-106 & excerpted from footnotes 12-14, p. 219).

2 Credit for sub-title’s quoted characterizations belong to biographer J. S. Bak (2013, pp. 160 & 177-178).

3 “Prior to 1937, Hart saw psychoanalysts G. Zilboorg in New York and E. Simmel in Los Angeles” (i.e., excerpted from footnote 37, McClung, p. 208).

4 Although approximately two decades may have elapsed between the commencement of Kubie’s relationship with Moss and then Tennessee, it cannot be said that their respective analyses---while overlapping---became prototypical “grist for the [same] mill.”

5 J. Meyers (1984) was the author of an essay in American Imago entitled “Lawrence Kubie’s Suppressed Essay on Hemmingway” (pp. 1-8). It referenced three publications
the Saturday Review of Literature commissioned Kubie to write. Two of them were published in 1934. The third was withdrawn when Hemingway threatened to launch a libel suit. In June of 1963, Kubie wrote to his lawyer inter alia that he had completely changed his mind about the practice of analyzing living artists: “This is too much like undressing a man in public; in this sense it is a violation of his right to privacy” (p. 7).

⁶ A telling exchange of letters between Kubie’s professional colleague T. Lidz (infra) and G. Vidal (infra), published in the New York Review of Books (1985), speak for themselves: “A Letter to the Editor” from Vidal was published (i.e., captioned ‘Caring for the Bird’) on June 19, 1985. A rejoinder by T. Lidz addressed to the same publication’s Editor and appeared in an ensuing issue. It read: “I was not enlightened by Vidal’s review of the two books about Tennessee Williams and found the review distasteful, if not repugnant…I write because of what he has to say about Dr. Lawrence Kubie. Dr. Kubie is dead and cannot defend himself and he was a friend and colleague of mine. I do not know what transpired in Dr. Kubie’s therapeutic work with Tennessee Williams as Dr. Kubie kept such matters to himself. However, Dr. Kubie was a leading psychoanalyst and psychoanalysts do not order patients to do anything and it seems highly doubtful to me that Dr. Kubie ordered him to give up both writing and sex so that he could be transformed into a team player.’ Also in light of Williams’s dismal last years, why does Vidal write, ‘happily the Bird’s anarchy triumphed over the analyst.’ Throughout the article Vidal quotes a number of instances in which Williams distorted or altered the truth and certainly there is ample reason not to accept Williams’s version of what went on in his analysis…I do not agree and still do not agree with Dr. Kubie’s concepts about creativity, but I find Vidal’s snide comments about a man who devoted his life to the care of
patients and the promotion of mental health highly offensive.” Vidal’s August 15, 1985 reply read: “I am saddened that Dr. Lidz was not ‘enlightened’ by my review, but not all darkness is penetrable, particularly that generated by, if I may so, his own peculiar calling. Perhaps ‘ordered’ was too strong a verb. Certainly Dr. Kubie gently hinted---Is that better? God knows Tennessee dramatized his own life, and he certainly got things wrong, but he was never a liar.” Their published exchange was further escalated with Vidal’s tangential assertion that author Francine du Plessix Gray deployed a character (i.e., under the guise of one “Dr. Sanford Kubie”) in her forthcoming novel. She, in turn, by letter dated February 27, 1986 characterized her aforementioned name-choice as “purely coincidental” whereupon Vidal’s published rejoinder read: “Oh Yeah!”

While reading the detailed 6-page text of Glover’s 1969 psychobiographical memoir about Kubie’s persona, the reader is led back two decades, to the chamber where their psychoanalytic dyad was nurtured. In the course of re-entering their inner sanctum, a reader is led to ponder---amongst other reified memories---Kubie’s purported earlier fits of fiery outbursts in which “he was given to wild rages expressed in physical fights; angry, explosive, rebellious, and argumentative behavior” (p. 7).

An author such as Sherman might have further broadened the scope of his intellectual inquiry by examining the manner in which Tennessee---flaunted his own “psychic gains in life” without regard for the collateral sensitivities of others. According to documentary evidence, it became known that Kubie wrote a congratulatory note to Tennessee on January 13, 1958 after attending an off-Broadway double bill (i.e., under the umbrella-title of “Garden District”) featuring productions of Something Unspoken and SLS. The note’s post-script from Kubie read: “Please extend my greetings to Frank” [Merlo (i.e.,
Tennessee’s companion)] (Kubie, 1958 & excerpted from footnote 13, Parker, 1998, p. 325) after commenting that he “…was especially intrigued because cannibalism is a frequent image with badly disturbed patients.” Tennessee reputedly then flourished Kubie’s note before the entire cast for their viewing. Such behavior puts into question Tennessee’s predilections about whether “to conceal and/or to reveal” which seemingly haunted him throughout his life. Apart from the speculations of Meyer (op. cit.) and Paller (2000), no documentary evidence has yet been adduced that Kubie urged Tennessee to give up both writing and his liaisons with Merlo. According to Paller (ibid.): “[If] [Tennessee] Williams’s reports are to be trusted [insertion of underlining by author] and Kubie did suggest that he give up both writing and sex with men, these may have been the activities with which, Kubie thought, Williams was avoiding his problems” (p. 11).

An anthology, entitled Conversations with Tennessee Williams, was edited by A. J. Devlin (1986) [i.e., paginations hereafter appear as referenced in cited anthology]. Included are transcripts of interviews of Tennessee conducted by several luminaries from the mass media in re: SLS. Interviews by radio personality S. Terkel (1961, p. 86) as well as television talk-show hosts M. Wallace (1958 pp. 56-57) and D. Frost (1970, p. 146) remain applicable. So too, are Tennessee’s single-sided version of his therapeutic alliance with Kubie which became public “grist for the mill.” For more particulars, see contributions of periodical print-journalists D. Ross (1958, pp. 51-52), T. Buckley (1970, p. 169) and C. R. Jennings (1973, pp. 244-245) together with the sundry work-product of various tabloid-page authors, magazine-cover photographers, et al.

Bibliography

Macmillan


Freud, S. (1942 [1905 or 1906]). *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage,* S.E. Vol. VII.

________ (1913). *The Theme of the Three Caskets,* S.E. Vol. XII.


Whipple, S. B. (1941). February 21st Drama Critic’s column (sub-titled “Diagnosis of


Lawrence M, Ginsburg, J.D.
2574 Leslie Drive, NE
Atlanta, GA 30345-1532
lmg24@cornell.edu
770/270-5789