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## The AMERICAN SPECTATOR A LITERARY NEWSPAPER

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## FREUDIANISM BEFORE FREUD

by PRESERVED SMITH

TO all appearances psychoanalysis has deeply colored much of contemporary literature. Many biographers apply it as a key to unlocking the soul; novels without end deal with complexes, sublimation, the ego and the id, and various forms of perversion and neurosis; plays like O'Neill's "Mourning Becomes Electra," d'Annunzio's "Città Morta," and Howard's "The Silver Cord" exploit the incest motif: histories of literature, especially Lewisohn's

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a solution, a panacea, in such times is obviously the equivalent of whistling in the dark. When people are bewildered, apprehensive, or down-right frightened, they call for reassuring platitudes, for diverting novelties, for anything that will distract their minds from present fears. If Mother will only tell a bed-time story, Little Fern will be a good girl and go to sleep.

Some children are permitted by their indulgent parents to demand the bed-time story, to be shown the inside of Papa's watch, to demand some childish satisfaction or entertainment, as a condition of falling to sleep and forgetting the bogey-man—of accepting the plain facts of life, in brief. As parents know only too well, the longer Junior is encouraged in his whims, the more he becomes accustomed to

great poets and novelists of the early nineteenth century.

Incest has been much exploited by writers from the time of the Greeks until now because the horror it inspires adds a powerful ingredient to tragedy. It interested the Greeks enormously, the Romans much less, and the medievals hardly at all—so little, in fact, that the word "incest" in medieval Latin almost always means merely the violation of sacerdotal chastity. The subsidence of religious and resurgence of secular ethics in the Renaissance led to a revival of interest in the sexual union of close blood-relations. Lucretia Borgia, Margaret of Navarre, Anne Boleyn, and many other prominent figures were then accused of the

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# SOLILOQUY BEFORE PRINTING

by BRANCH CABELL

THROUGH what mania, friend, need you deliver to the world your uneventful doings, your pointless whims, and your tiny thoughts, of how slight marrow and how slender ambitiousness? Moreover, you speak without enough reticence your actual thinking, and have not garnished it with grave magnanimities.

That is not well. It is meet that in a world ruled by the dull-minded a writer should be dull decorously, and so win for himself respectful applause. It is wise that a writer should concern himself with altruism and with great modern trends of thought and with the future of humanity and with yet other ponderable matters. Let him bear in mind that his views upon communism, when once they have been made judiciously incomprehensible, can be inserted with marked advantage almost anywhere. Nor will prophesying, provided only that it involve not less than four nations in a destruction sufficiently gory, at any time be found amiss. Let him remark, too, that we live nowadays in a changing world: it is an abstruse reflection which the young have received favorably since the prime of Heraclitus.

Let the wise writer speak, in brief, with an assured conviction, as to that which has weightiness, hiding his large ignorance of his own import with large words, and instructing his hearers high-mindedly in all departments of the immense. Let him don dignity, and whinny with due solemnness, whensoever he prints. A very many will hearken to his *duc dame*: the publishers of that writer will call him blessed.

But you, friend, fare alone, perceiving too curiously the folly of your fellows and of your own doings. You forget that you also might be a judge

and a prophet in your own estimation, and so be uplifted hugely, did you not abstain from this one foolishness only. You should accredit yourself with more profound thoughts: if they be nonsense, how few will detect it! Nor will many persons heed this detection, in a world for the most part populated, and in its every part controlled, by the dull-minded.

I counsel you to desist from speaking truthfully about those little matters which continue in your daily thoughts to amuse you, and which keep mirthful your quiet living. When the dull-minded pester you with irrational antics you do well to smile at their folly. Yet, ah, infatuate! when you summon any other persons to smile with you, then has your doing a more doubtful reward. The dull are many in numbers: they do not smile at the deeds of one another: him that smiles at any time-hallowed dullness they esteem as a frivolous fellow, as a piddler with vain notions, and as a witless trifler; for all dullness is found acceptable in the eyes of the dull.

But you fare alone, compromising with the dull-minded unvaliantly in your utterances, indeed, yet offending them through your gestures unprofitably. You shrug too often, without any frank or well-thought-of reason. You avoid the immense a little timorously. Into the drift of new days you forbear to pry after dreams as large and ardent as those which swayed your far-away youth-time. Then you had grief, love, and laughter: now you are merely smug, and a life neither tragic nor blissful you think a desirable traffic. All that is done, you protest, seems well done with; your playthings content you; all that impends must be met, God willing, without any whining. So much alone you have gained from the half of a century's schooling—platitudes flavored with gratitude. Such is life's stunted tuition's end, in so far as you fathom it. That, and that only, you tell us.