



Naftalin, Moses (1962) *The malady of boredom*. MD thesis.

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THE MALADY OF BOREDOM

by

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## Introduction

Boredom or ennui is a subjective feeling that embodies a number of symptoms similar to those implied by the term "depression," and varies in degree of depth from what might be described as normal to several levels of pathology. When met with as a "normal" phenomenon, it is usually of transient duration and of little consequence, although Schopenhauer (1) takes another view of the matter.

"It is clear," he writes, "that as our walking is admittedly merely a constantly prevented falling, the life of our body is only a constantly prevented dying, an ever-postponed death. Finally, in the same way, the activity of our mind is a constantly deferred ennui. On the other hand, as soon as want and suffering permit rest to a man, ennui is at once so near that he necessarily requires diversion.

"The striving after existence is what occupies all living things and maintains them in motion. But when existence is assured, then they know not what to do with it; thus, the second thing that sets them in motion is the effort to get free from the burden of existence, to make it cease to be felt, 'to kill time,' i.e. to escape from boredom...Ennui is by no means an evil to be lightly esteemed; in the end it depicts on the countenance real despair..."

On the other hand, in contrast to Schopenhauer, Sully (2) does not see ennui as something fundamental in life. "...Ennui begins as soon as imagination and the power of conceiving pleasurable activities is sufficiently developed. Thus a dog which, after having been shut indoors for some time, sighs as he lies stretched out before the unappreciated kitchen fire, may reasonably be supposed to feel ennui just because it feels a vague longing for outdoor activity. In our own case, ennui is clearly connected with a craving for activities which are only faintly defined in the imagination. The child is afflicted with ennui when it indistinctly imagines some grateful occupation without perceiving it as a present possibility. The man of idle life becomes a prey to ennui when he vaguely pictures to himself a more active existence without being roused to shape this longing into a definite purpose.

"Ennui thus has for its necessary condition nascent desire and indistinct representation of pleasure. In this truth, it may be said to be the penalty inflicted on us for the non-fulfilment of some normal function, or the reminder which is given us by the natural impulse of an organ to discharge its recruited store of energy. Hence, so far from regarding it as primary, and the activity which it is fitted to prompt as secondary, it would be much more correct to view this activity as the primary condition, and ennui as secondary and dependent on this. In short, the

activity follows its proper impulse (whether a blind instinct or a conscious desire) and ennui is simply an occasional incident in the process."

The type of boredom met with in psychiatric practice is of a chronic nature. At a deeper level than transient boredom, it often goes unrecognized and may have dire consequences for the individual and society. The victims manifest various degrees of indolence and inertia as part of their symptomatology which interfere with and hinder them in their ability to realize their considerable potentialities and ambitions. The extremely pathological type of ennui is always clearly evident. Here the sufferer is afflicted with a deep anguish and emptiness, accompanied by profound lethargy, inertia and apathy, leaving him paralyzed. As will be seen, he has been the subject of several works of fiction in world literature.

The social consequences of boredom are widespread and of a destructive nature. Its victims often resort to gambling, alcohol, narcotics, promiscuity and suicide. In adolescents it has been found to be responsible in large measure for acts of delinquency. According to a recent school survey (3), "The lack of identification with the school by students in high damage schools is corroborated by the reports of students and teachers in those schools that the most significant factor in the causation of vandalism is an attitude of boredom in students."

Writing of a widespread American phenomenon which may be called "retirement neurosis," Alexander (4) describes the man for whom life consisted of making money, financial success being the measure of his self-esteem, and the major organizing principle of his strivings: "Now retired, he finds himself confronted by a never-before experienced void. Life suddenly loses all its meaning. His response is depression and a rapid deterioration of his physical health, as if he really wanted to escape boredom and humiliation..." And again, "It is not difficult to foresee the time when a large proportion of people will be exposed to a more deadly disease than any caused by micro-organisms: to malignant boredom, a disease which threatens not a specific organ of the body, but the organism as a whole. It deprives man of the meaning of life and undermines his wish to live."

Emile Tardieu, in the foreword to his psychological study L'Ennui (5) states, "Ennui drags us down and overwhelms us; it intervenes more or less in all our activities, but often without making itself known and without making up the entire existence of these acts of ours. It is the role of the psychologist to lay bare ennui in the phenomena in which it manifests itself or in which it masks itself, to isolate the part which it plays in all circumstances. This role is enormous, is predicated on our very existence."

In a recent article, Altschule (6) writes, "On the basis of my own introspections, supported by observations in man and other mammals, I am convinced that boredom -- or the need to avoid it -- is the chief factor underlying activity under ordinary conditions of domestication, and that other drives take command in other circumstances."

Primarily, the phenomena of pathological boredom will be dealt with here, although it is understood that the pathological is but an extension of the normal, with quantitative changes eventually being able to bring about conditions and states that are qualitatively different. The subject will be considered under the following headings:

I. Definitions.

II. Literature: (a) Psychoanalytic;  
(b) Psychosocial; (c) Fictional.

III. Clinical Studies.

#### I. Definitions

Webster's New International Dictionary (7) gives the following definitions and quotation under Ennui: A feeling of weariness and dissatisfaction; languor of spirits; tedium; boredom. "The moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metamorphosed...all tragedies, all ennuis vanish" (Emerson).

Tardieu, recognising that the subject of ennui is of vast and diffuse proportions, ventured the following:

"Ennui is a form of suffering which goes from unconscious malaise to reasoned despair; it is conditioned by the most diverse causes; its basic cause is an appreciable slackening of our vital movement. Completely subjective, susceptible of being enormously intensified by the imagination, it reveals itself by emotions which we call disgust, discouragement, impotence, bad humour."

While Fenichel (8) discusses boredom more or less from a theoretical viewpoint, Greenson writes (9), "Boredom is a phenomenon which is easier to describe than to define. The uniqueness of the feeling of being bored seems to depend upon the coexistence of the following components: a state of longing and an inability to state what is longed for; a sense of emptiness; a passive, expectant attitude with the hope that the external world will supply the satisfaction; a distorted sense of time in which time seems to stand still. The German word for boredom is Langeweile which, literally translated, means 'long time.'"

According to Bergler (10), "Boredom is not simply a disagreeable mood; it is an emotional experience which tends to threaten the psychic balance of the individual. It is a universal phenomenon, despite the comparatively few complaints about it. Most people suffer boredom silently; it is by their hectic and almost always futile search for "fun" that they betray its presence. This constant search for fun, characteristic of many people,



is the inner protective device against the constant danger of boredom."

In another work Bergler (11) has this to say, "The problem of extensive boredom has importance clinically, not only because it is painful and makes life empty, but also -- and this is the most important reason -- because it even drives people to suicide, since, as they express it, nothing 'appeals' to them anymore, and they are 'through with everything.' Boredom, per se, of course, does not lead to suicide, but the neurotic reasons behind it do."

## II. Literature: (a) Psychoanalytic.

The authors quoted in this section dealing with the psychodynamics and symptoms of boredom adhere to the theories of Sigmund Freud. The contributions of Fenichel, Greenson and Bergler already referred to are of a psychoanalytic or psychodynamic nature. Fenichel declares that his study leaves many problems unsolved and that the many states or attitudes which are given the name of "boredom" are probably psychologically very different. He adds that his attempt to study the problem designates only a certain type of boredom. He quotes Lipp's definition: "Boredom is a painful feeling originating out of the antagonism between the need for intensive psychic activity and the lack of stimulation therefor -- i.e. the incapacity to be stimulated."

Fenichel, commenting on this definition, adds

that "besides the need for intensive psychic activity which is experienced as such, one does not know how one shall or want to be active -- with awareness of this discrepancy, one looks for stimulation from the outside world." Also, "hunger for stimulation and dissatisfaction with the stimulation offered, characterises boredom. So the quest for the inhibitions of the need for activity as well as the quest for the readiness to accept the desired stimulations become the main problem of the psychology of boredom."

Greenson takes note of the emphasis Fenichel lays on the inhibition of fantasy life in bored people and concludes that the motive for the ego's inhibition of fantasy seems to be based on the fact that fantasy could lead either to dangerous actions or to painful remembrances. In discussing the analysis of one of his patients, Greenson states that he could see the transition between states of boredom which, when lifted, led either to severe depressive reactions or to impulse-ridden behavior. He concludes, also, that in this patient there was a severe disturbance in the thinking processes of the ego and a weakness in the ego's ability to defend itself from the affects attempting to break through into consciousness.

Greenson concludes that from a dynamic point of view boredom results when there is a repression of certain instinctual aims or objects which result in a state of tension, and at this point, if the ego has to inhibit fantasies and thought derivatives of these impulses because they

are too threatening, a feeling of emptiness is experienced, which is perceived as a self-administered deprivation. The combination of tension and emptiness is felt as a kind of hunger, and since the individual doesn't know what he hungers for, he now turns to the external world in the hope that it will provide the missing aim and/or object. "I believe it is this state of affairs which is characteristic of all boredom."

He adds, parenthetically, "If fantasies or other derivatives of forbidden impulses would break through into consciousness, there would be no boredom, but either frustration, anxiety, depression, or obsession, as we see in other neuroses."

Greenson further concludes that the feeling of emptiness, combined with a sense of longing and an absence of fantasies and thoughts that would lead to satisfaction, is characteristic of boredom and that the emptiness is in fact due to repression of forbidden instinctual aims and inhibition of imagination: "...The feeling of emptiness is over-determined, and the mechanism of denial is an important factor in producing this sensation. In this way the ego has attempted to ward off the awareness of strong oral-libidinal and aggressive-incorporative impulses. This defense succeeds since it temporarily prevents the outbreak of a severe depression or self-destructive actions." He goes on to say that although boredom can occur at any

level of libidinal organization, it occurs more frequently in people with strong oral fixations; the connection with depression is an indication of this fixation. He states that the explanation for this lies in the role played by deprivation in the production of boredom, as well as in the related states of depression and apathy.

Fenichel described two forms of boredom, one characterised by motor calmness, and the other by motor restlessness, but he found in both the same essential pathology. He, too, indicated the importance of orality, and sketched briefly some connections between boredom, depersonalisation and depression.

On the other hand, Bergler (12) states: "... Fenichel, e.g. related boredom and jealousy to that stage (orality -- my insert, M.N.) although he first misinterpreted the term, and secondly, applied it to clinical entities where it does not belong. Neither boredom nor jealousy have an oral substructure."

Bieber (13) classifies boredom as either normal or pathological, the former arising when one is compelled to work at stereotyped tasks the requirements of which are far below one's work potential, or when work offers no opportunity for initiative or creative application. He considers pathological boredom and inertia as manifestations of inhibition, of the incapacity to act in some important area of life. He describes inhibition as a biological, defensive reaction designed to protect the

organism from danger, and proceeds to discuss the psychodynamics of pleasure and work inhibitions, "the two major contributors to the feeling of boredom."

He considers that pleasure difficulties can begin in the cradle, but for those people who suffer from difficulties in feeling and expressing pleasure, the trouble begins somewhat later in childhood. The problems arise when children are inculcated with the idea that anything they may wish for themselves is selfish and base; they thus become guilt-ridden.

In discussing other circumstances under which pleasure difficulties may arise, Bieber mentions the imposition by some parents of demands that the child's duty is to help support the family rather than to play and pursue his normal interests. Puritanical mores have also accounted for the idea that pleasure, laughter and gaiety are sinful and that righteousness is identified with inhibition of pleasure. The latter attitude particularly affected the behavior of women. "No discussion of pleasure inhibitions can avoid a consideration of the injuries perpetrated on children in the handling of their sexual development. Although attitudes towards adult sexual activity have undergone radical changes, the same does not yet apply to childhood sexuality. Some parents still believe that a child can be indoctrinated with the idea that sex is bad and dirty, and then expect him to believe

that when he reaches adolescence and maturity he will suddenly begin to consider sex as romantic and beautiful. This early indoctrination interferes seriously with comfortable social relations with members of the opposite sex, with good marital relationship, and with a group of functions that are not directly sexual. Inhibitions in dancing, music and creative writing, for example, have their roots in such training."

In discussing work inhibitions, Bieber considers the problem of competition essential for their understanding, including some knowledge of the genesis of competition in children. He finds the two major sources of competitive problems in children to be sibling rivalry and the Oedipus complex. He regards competitive feelings arising out of sibling rivalry as intense and often murderous and feels that parental attitudes often aggravate them. Consequently, success often becomes identified with injury to a sibling and, in turn, guilt feelings and fear of parental disapproval. These feelings are transported to the schoolroom and become integral aspects of the adult personality and adult problems.

In the matter of the competitive feelings engendered by the Oedipus complex, with the father becoming the hated rival of his son and at the same time remaining a figure that is loved and respected, and one from whom love is sought and desired, Bieber sees the origin of the inhibition of competitive attitudes in work, the origin of

anxiety in relation to this competition, and the origin of fear of success. Success means injury to others and it may elicit envy and hostility instead of warmth and friendship.

Fried (14) states, "Boredom bears a resemblance to death, dynamically speaking, and represents a small-scale emotional and psychological death. Boredom is the individual's personal, subjective experience of an existing objective paucity of ego processes within the psychic system. When intrapsychic events (processes taking place within the confines of the psyche) are 'scanty' rather than 'rich,' the feeling the individual has is that of being bored. When there is a mere skeleton of ego processes or when processes are jumbled because the ability to integrate is absent, the existence of a feeble and confused cobweb of psychic functions is experienced as apathy and boredom. Such inner emptiness is drastically different from the pleasant stillness and calm that result from the careful integration of clear and purposeful ego processes. The internal condition that precedes and causes boredom has the characteristics of attrition and sterility. It represents a deficit situation. The subjective experience of a paucity, feebleness and disorganisation of interpsychic and intrapsychic events is very painful. It creates intense suffering and anxiety, the cause of which is not perceived. The anxiety is 'free-floating,' actually the cause of the anxiety is the fear that the psyche cannot and will not be

sufficiently active and this fear resembles the anticipation of death."

Equating boredom with ego apathy, or relative ego inactivity, Fried declares that it is present from time to time in the normally functioning psyche when there has been exhaustion or illness, or in certain circumstances where the output of ego processes has been excessively large. Ego apathy appears with particular frequency and intensity in the company of two contrasting kinds of psychic mechanisms: "We find a relative ego inactivity (1) in connection with psychopathic mechanisms and (2) in conjunction with obsessive-compulsive mechanisms."

Furthermore, Fried stresses the cause of boredom in a deficit of ego processes, in that the processes are not fully developed. As a consequence, "The specific experience of relative inactivity which we call boredom develops." In contrast, an ego that has learned how to organize and integrate is highly developed, and the individual possessed of such an ego, with the ability to integrate stimuli from without and responses within the psyche into structures, is not likely to be the victim of boredom. "Chaotic, unorganised responses, either to chaotic stimuli or to a normal stimulus situation, are momentarily accompanied by a sense of intense and busy living. The first phase of experiencing inner chaos is a sensation of heightened activity and alacrity. Yet, on



the heels of this experience emerges a subjective sense of tiredness and boredom."

Also, Fried states, "The individual who is primarily or periodically given to chaotic forms of drive-release and ego functions is the main victim of boredom..." She concludes that as a consequence of an ego lacking the ability to integrate emotions with ensuing lack of recollection, a sense of instability and unrelatedness results. This makes for loneliness and panic and accentuated attempts to make contact, leading only to greater chaos and loneliness. "The fear of abandonment and the subjective experience of inner emptiness jointly intensify a growing fear of death..."

Bergler refers to three serious psychoanalytic attempts to understand the problems of boredom viz. the papers of V. Winterstein, Fenichel and Spitz. Bergler cites Winterstein as believing that boredom is felt when the psyche has a hypercathexis of narcissism and attempts unsuccessfully to find object-libidinal or destructive aims. Winterstein surmises that there are two types of bored persons, the pleasure type and the duty type. Individuals of the first sort, of whom he considers Baudelaire an example, are blasé and yet <sup>capable of ENJOYING</sup> pleasure. Those of the second kind, as examples of which he mentions Fechner and Darwin, flee into work, since they are bored with anything else. People of both types are incapable of love, have not reached the genital level,

and have regressed to the anal-sadistic level of development. Winterstein holds, furthermore, that some bored persons are slightly depersonalised, and believes that the symptom of boredom itself has perhaps a physiological basis.

After alluding to the work of Fenichel already referred to and examined here, Bergler cites Spitz as stressing the phenomenological fact that children at the ages of one and two show a marked predilection for repetition which lasts until they are about 6, when that tendency disappears. Later, the adult, with but few exceptions, produces a distaste for repetition. The early predilection for repetition represents a measure to save the child from anxiety (everything new is frightening). In wanting to listen to the same fairy tales over and over, and even insisting on the use of the same words whenever a story is related to him, the child is attempting to master anxiety. The age of 6 is the turning point, because it is then that the Oedipus complex is destroyed, and with the prohibition of Oedipal fantasies by the newly established severe unconscious conscience (superego), comes also the prohibition of repetition which holds such an important place in masturbation and pregenital fantasies.

Bergler concludes that boredom is a neurotic disease closely associated with three inner disturbances which he terms the "triad of boredom": (1) weak or

fragile sublimation; (2) inner inhibition of voyeurism; (3) defence against the accusation of masochistic pleasure.

(b) Psychosocial Literature

Tardieu, in his exhaustive and comprehensive study of ennui, describes its many different causes, its multiformity, the varied circumstances in which it is found and its remedies. "The bored man conceived as a type is, first of all, an exhausted man. Ennui, if it is the kind that cannot be assuaged, has, as its basis, an incurable exhaustion and wearing-out. Often his looks betray him; the weakness of his step, the immobility and numbness of his features, an air of being a ghost, the man who is already a hundred feet under the ground, a stranger to everything that surrounds him, forever totally isolated in the world of the living. He does not take part in anything; he is too worn out, too discouraged, to mingle in the joys or sorrows of others. He knows that no passion can any longer arise in him, that his strength is all spent, and that gradually his personality is being obliterated. And yet it does not matter who; he becomes impersonal, anonymous; his life has no purpose; he has lost his identity. He is a person indifferent to everything, for whom nothing is of any significance, who carries in his heart the emptiness that he finds at the bottom of all things, and he casts on the world a look from afar off, and full of disdain..."

"The man who is bored is someone who is obsessed with nothingness. He has experienced the wreckage of everything, the vanity of all effort, the uselessness even of victories; he draws back little by little from any possible enjoyment of life and withdraws all interest from whatever happens to him. Now the spectacle of busy men, the tumult of the big cities, the ambitions which are contending, induce in him a sort of revulsion and an unconquerable sense of discomfort. When, he asks, will all these things be set right, denied? The ennui which is in him is produced out of disillusionment, out of the fruit of analysis; it has opened his eyes to the truth; it neatly distinguishes the chimeras which engage human beings, the general blindness, the madness of today which will be the remorse of tomorrow. He intends, for his part, not to be duped, and, armed with a skepticism that is proof against everything, he clothes himself in wisdom; he arranges all his activity with a view to a sure profit; he pursues only necessary ends; he does not put himself out except for what is essential; he knows the disgusts and the shames that life reserves for those who let themselves be taken in by its temptations and its snares, and dominating it, despising it, he takes refuge in his indifference, and triumphs in his guile."

Tardieu asks, "Has he broken completely with life? Is he forever insensible to its temptations? One

asks oneself these questions in observing him. Follow him: you will unexpectedly come upon strange struggles between weariness and desire. Does he not hide dissimulated forces under his torpor? There are sudden flarings up in him, and unexpected defiances; his divided and contradictory soul does not resemble his looks; ambiguous, restless, impenetrable, he is as amusing as a spectacle and as alluring as an enigma."

Tardieu makes mention of some illustrious victims of ennui and names in addition, Sainte-Beuve and Baudelaire, who wrote "The Taste of Nothingness," Madame du Deffand, Chateaubriand, Musset and Maupassant, ascribing their ennui to weariness or exhaustion.

About Madame du Deffand, Tardieu writes, "The celebrated marquise had experienced all the sensual and intellectual stimulations and, in due time, disillusioned, she was ready to die in agony. But she would not accept this death which was to be anticipated; her heart, her intelligence rose up in revolt; she continued to wish to feel, to love, she had a veritable thirst for happiness; she found the formula for what ailed her; a loss of the capacity to experience emotion, with the added unhappiness of not being able to escape from it. She sets forth her reactions at great length and she analyzes, with an inexorable precision, her ennui and its causes. Suppose we select from her vast correspondence these burning complaints:

"!..that I hate life, that I am desolate from having lived so much, and that I can never console myself for having been born...I find in myself nothing except complete nothingness... I am thus forced to try to pull myself out of it; I attach myself to whatever I can, and from there come all the blunders, all the daily discontents, and a disgust with life which is perhaps good for one certain thing -- it causes me to support patiently the impairments of old age and it lessens my vivacity and my sensibility to all things.'

"'...I fear nothing in the world except boredom; everything that is capable of turning it aside is agreeable to me; I no longer have the good fortune to be self-sufficient; very little reading amuses me, and reflections make me infinitely sad...'"

"Comparing herself to Madame de Sévigné, and humbling herself in the comparison, she says of the latter, '...I do not resemble Mme. de Sévigné in anything at all. I am not in the least affected by things which do not touch me personally; everything is of interest to her; everything kindles her imagination; my own is like ice. I am sometimes stirred, but it is for an instant only; the moment once passed, everything that aroused me is wiped out, to the point where I even lose any memory of it...'"

On the nature of Chateaubriand's ennui, Tardieu refers to other writers and adds in a footnote: "Here are

some of the words in which Chateaubriand expresses his boredom: 'Since the very beginning of my life, I have not ceased to harbor grudges. I carried the seed of them within me, as the tree carries the seed of its fruit...I am bored with life; boredom has always devoured me. Shepherd or king, what should I have done with my crook or my crown? I should be equally tired out with glory or with genius, with work or with leisure, with prosperity or with misfortune.'

"And again: 'In the grip of the pleasures of my age, I could see nothing better in the future, and my ardent imagination deprived me even of the little that I did possess.' He traces back this discouraging disposition to the very instant of his birth: 'I had lived only a few hours, and the heavy hand of the time had already set its mark upon my forehead.'"

Tardieu has the following to say in part about Alfred de Musset, "After a youthful outburst of songs and of passionate sobs, rhythms in immortal verse, he stopped short; his life is at an end; he knows nothing but boredom. That word, 'ennui' in his work, recurs on page after page; his soul, wounded and broken, is crystallised in this mysterious term that he repeats complaisantly."

Referring to Guy de Maupassant, Tardieu quotes some fragments of correspondence in which the secret of the truly great writer shines through: "'Madame...I am writing you because I am most abominably bored... I accept everything with indifference, and I go through the two layers

of my time by being profoundly bored...There is not a man under the sun who plagues himself more than I do. Nothing seems to me to be worth the trouble of making an effort or of the exertion of making a motion. I plague myself without relief, without rest, and without hope, because I do not wish for anything; I do not expect anything... Everything is exactly the same to me in life -- men, women, and events...'  
(This indifference was not a matter of affectation: Céard declares 'that he is the man among all those whom he has known, who is the most indifferent to everything, and that the moment when he would appear to be the most passionate in favor of a certain thing, he was already quite detached with regard to it.' -- Journal des Goncourt, July 20, 1893)..  
'Here is my true confession of faith, and let me add, what you will not believe, that I do not favor myself more than I do others. Everything can be divided into -- farce, ennui and misery.' (Letter to Marie Bashkirtseff, written in 1884, published by the Revue des Revues, April 1, 1895)"

"We ourselves had the occasion to exchange letters with Maupassant; in one of them are to be found those lines which, at a distance of several years, follow well upon the excerpts below: '...I am almost bursting with fatigue, with painful lassitude of the brain and with nervous illness. Everything bores me, and I have nothing that is supportable except those hours when I am at my writing. I do not know too well in this mental and physical state, just when I



shall be returning to Paris where life unnerves me and disheartens me beyond measure. I do not experience well-being excepting when I am alone -- near to the sea, or in the mountains.'" (Letter dated from Aix-les-Bains, June 25, 1890.)

Tardieu ends the discussion as follows: "Let us end this chapter by recalling the central idea of which it is an exposition. Exhaustion, physical or mental, the outcome of a definite predisposition or the consequences of age, is the fundamental cause of ennui, and constitutes a cause of it that is difficult to explain. It can be reduced by rest, if one has not been able to prevent it by good hygiene."

#### (c) Fictional Literature

The theme of ennui is dealt with specifically in several works where it constitutes the entire subject matter, e.g. Oblomov (15), Obermann (16), Ennui (17), and here and there in tales and novels in reference to certain characters who were the victims of the condition.

Oblomov, the central character of the novel of that name is the victim of "Oblomovism," a term used in the book to describe the boredom he was suffering from and to which he eventually succumbed. The novel opens with the following description:

"Ilya Ilyitch Oblomov was lying in bed one morning in his flat in Gorohovy Street, in one of the big houses that had almost as many inhabitants as a whole

country town. He was a man of thirty-two or three, of medium height and pleasant appearance, with dark-grey eyes that strayed idly from the walls to the ceiling with a vague dreaminess which showed that nothing troubled or occupied him. His attitude and the very folds of his dressing-gown expressed the same untroubled ease as his face. At times his eyes were dimmed by something like weariness or boredom; but neither weariness nor boredom could banish for a moment the softness which was the dominant and permanent expression not merely of his face but of his whole being. A serene, open, candid mind was reflected in his eyes, his smile, in every movement of his head and his hands. A cold and superficial observer would glance at Oblomov and say: 'A good-hearted, simple fellow, I should think.' A kinder and more thoughtful man would gaze into his face for some time and walk off smiling in pleasant uncertainty.

"Ilya Ilyitch's complexion was neither rosy nor dark nor pale, but indefinite, or perhaps it seemed so because there was a certain slackness about the muscles of his face, unusual at his age; this may have been due to lack of fresh air or exercise, or to some other reason. The smooth and excessively white skin of his neck, his small soft hands and plump shoulders, suggested a certain physical effeminacy. His movements were restrained and gentle; there was a certain lazy gracefulness about them even if he were alarmed. If his mind was troubled, his eyes were clouded, his forehead wrinkled, and an interplay

of hesitation, sadness, and fear was reflected in his face; but the disturbance seldom took the form of a definite idea and still more seldom reached the point of a decision. It merely found expression in a sigh and died down in apathy or drowsiness... Oblomov never wore a tie or a waistcoat at home because he liked comfort and freedom. He wore long, soft, wide slippers; when he got up from bed he put his feet straight into them without looking.

"Lying down was not for Ilya Ilyitch either a necessity as it is for a sick or a sleeping man, or an occasional needs as it is for a person who is tired, or a pleasure as it is for a sluggard; it was his normal state. When he was at home -- and he was almost always at home -- he was lying down, and invariably in the same room, the one in which we have found him and which served him as bedroom, study, and reception-room. He had three more rooms, but he seldom looked into them, only, perhaps in the morning when his servant swept his study -- which did not happen every day. In those other rooms the furniture was covered and the curtains were drawn..."

In further development of his character, he is pictured as an individual who attempts to keep the outside world as far away as possible and is glad that he is not concerned with mundane affairs and with the cares of responsibilities. He abhors them, and preserves his peace and dignity by avoiding them. He is also pictured as one roused from his apathy and lethargy by his defence of all

people -- high and low -- as human beings with feelings.

As to his origin and upbringing, he is described as having been reared in an atmosphere of idleness, sleep, sloth, and monotony, where all was peace and quiet. Although he was guarded against all danger, his nurse engendered fear in him by her tales. "The boy's imagination was peopled with strange phantoms; fear and sadness were rooted in his soul for years, perhaps forever. He looked about him mournfully, seeing harm and trouble everywhere in life, and he dreamed perpetually of the magic land where there were no evils, worries, or sorrows, where Militrissa Kirbityevna lived and splendid food and clothes could be had for nothing." However, in telling these tales, "the nurse -- or the tradition -- so artfully avoided all reference to reality that one's intellect and imagination, nurtured on make-belief, remained enslaved by it till old age."

Without arousal from another source, Oblomov was the victim of apathy, indolence, boredom, and inertia, and though love all but restored him to activity and interest, his almost inborn and habitual torpidity overcame the dangers of passion and he sank again into indifference, laziness and languid indolence, and passivity. Eventually, he did marry himself to a woman who was the personification of motherly instinct, and he was able to lead a life with this passive, selfless being, who devoted her life to his care. He ended his life as he began it, a spoiled darling, and as if enclosed within the confines of the womb --

protected, inert, cared for and free from all responsibility.

When Oblomov is accused of living the life of Oblomovism, he asks, "What, then, is the ideal life, you think? What is not Oblomovism? Doesn't everyone strive for the very same things as I dream of? Why, isn't it the purpose of all your running about, your passions, wars, trade, politics -- to secure rest, to attain this ideal of a lost paradise?"

It would appear to me that an essential aspect of Oblomov's character is revealed where the following dialogue takes place: "'I expect you spent your time reading books?' he (Ivan Metveyitch) observed with the same subservient smile.

"'Books!' Oblomov retorted bitterly, and stopped short. He had not the courage to bare his soul before the man and there was no need for him to do so. 'I know nothing about books either,' was on the tip of his tongue, but he did not say it, and only sighed mournfully.

"'But you must have done something,' Ivan Metveyitch added humbly, as though having read in Oblomov's mind his answer about books, 'It's impossible not to...'

"'No, it isn't, Ivan Metveyitch, and I am the living proof of it! Who am I? What am I? Go and ask Zahar and he will say 'a gentleman'! Yes, I am a gentleman, and I don't know how to do anything. You must do things for me, if you know how to, and help me if you can, and take what you like for your labours -- knowledge is worth something.'"

It is in this passage that Oblomov is revealed as an individual lacking not only in self-confidence, but also in a sense of identity with consequent inability to do things for himself. Uncertainty and self-doubt, with fear of making decisions, render him helpless and afraid. It has been my experience with patients who suffer from a severe form of boredom that this lack of a feeling of self and identity is always present, though it must be admitted that in psychiatric practice one does not always find pathological boredom where a sense of identity is lacking.

Obermann was written between the years 1801 and 1803, was first published in 1804 and is a monody, a prose poem written in the form of letters to a friend. These letters are autobiographical and are in the nature of reveries and philosophical meditations on life, but they give a vivid portrayal of the "ennuyé," intermingled with melancholy, despair, and resignation -- the expression of a thwarted life and unsatisfied cravings. The nature of these cravings is illustrated in Letter XVIII "...I could not well be better off than I am -- free, tranquil, faring well, emancipated from business, indifferent as to a future from which I expect nothing, and relinquishing without any regret a past which I have never enjoyed. Yet there is a disquietude within me which will not depart; a want unknown which dominates and absorbs me, which takes me past all perishable existence...You are mistaken, as I was also mistaken -- it is not the privation of love. There is a

vast distance between the void of my heart and the love which it has desired so much, but there is the infinite between that which I am and that which I yearn to be. Love is great, it is not illimitable. I have no craving for mere enjoyment; it is hope that I ask for, it is knowledge that I would attain! Unbounded illusions are necessary to me, illusions receding ever to deceive me always. Of what consequence to me is anything that can end? The hour which sixty years hence must come, for me is here already. I dislike that which impends, draws nigh, comes to pass, and then is no more. I seek a boon, a dream, in a word, a hope to go always before me, beyond me, greater than my longing itself, greater than that which passes away. I would encompass all intelligence. I would that the eternal order of the world...and thirty years since, that order was, but I had no past therein!

"Fleeting and futile accident, I existed not, and again I shall not exist. I realise with astonishment that my conceptions are greater than my nature, and when I consider that my life is ridiculous in my own eyes, I am lost in impenetrable darkness. Happier, no doubt, is the man who bears wood, burns charcoal, and blesses himself with holy water whenever the thunder growls. He lives like the brute. Nay, but he sings at his work! His peace I shall not know, and yet like him I shall pass away. With time his life slips by; the agitations, the anxieties, the spectres

of an unknown grandeur delude and hurry forward my own."

In Letter XLII, "It is not that I have come to any decision. Weariness overwhelms me, loathing crushes me. I know that all this evil is within me. Why cannot I rest content with eating and sleeping? For in the end I eat and I sleep, nor is the life which I drag on exceedingly miserable. Taken separately, my days are bearable, but their sum overwhelms me. Activity in accordance with his nature is necessary to the organised being... Apathy notwithstanding has become my second nature. The very motion of an active life would seem to terrify or astonish me. Things that are circumscribed repel me, and yet their habit cleaves to me; things that are sublime allure me, but my indolence dreads them. I know not that which I am, that which I love or desire. I bemoan myself with no cause, desire having no object, and discern nothing except that I am out of my true place..."

In Letter LXIV, "...Other resources will be kept within narrow limits, and the extraordinary itself will be regulated. I require a fixed rule in order to fill my life; otherwise I should need excesses with no other term than the limit of my powers, and, even then, how would it be possible to fill a void which has no bounds?..."

In Letter LXVI, "...For the rest, it suits me to have a person about me who is independent of me,



strictly speaking. People who can do nothing on their own initiative, and are forced, naturally and by inaptitude, to owe everything to another, are too difficult to deal with. Never having acquired anything as the result of their own efforts, they have had no opportunity to learn the value of things or to undergo voluntary privations, and hence all these are hateful to them. They do not distinguish between penury and reasonable economy, or between a sordid condition and the momentary discomfort imposed by circumstances; hence their wants are so much the less limited, because without you they could aspire to nothing. Leave them to themselves and they will scarcely earn coarse bread; take them under your charge and they despise vegetables, butcher's meat is too common and water disagrees with their constitution..."

As to the origin of the affliction of which Obermann was the victim, the following excerpt from Letter LXXV is illuminating, "From the moment that I left behind me that infancy which we all regret, I imagined I was conscious of a real life, yet I experienced only fantastic sensations. I beheld the beings of the mind, but here are shadows only; I sought after harmony, and found nothing but its antithesis. Then I became a prey to sadness; the void made furrows in my heart, wants with no limit devoured me in silence, and weariness of life became my sole sentiment at the age when most people are beginning to live..."

Obermann's own origins are described in depth in the edition translated by Jessie Peabody Frothingham (18): "But although Obermann is an internal autobiography of Senancour, we must guard against taking too literally its external details, for the author purposely altered facts and dates in order to mislead the reader. Etienne Pivert de Senancour was born in Paris in 1770, the year of the birth of Wordsworth. His father, who belonged to a noble and a comparatively rich family of Lorraine, and who held the office of comptroller of the revenues under Louis XVI, was a man of inflexible will, and of small sympathy with youth or with what goes to make youth gay. Young Senancour's childhood was not happy: he had little companionship, and no pleasures. A profoundly melancholy temperament, given him by nature, developed by all the conditions of his home life, made him prematurely sombre and discontented; ill health and his father's sternness increased a self-repression, apathy, and awkwardness which were the result partly of physical immaturity and partly of mental precocity. Romantic from childhood, thirsting for joy with an intensity rarely seen in one so young, receiving back from life only disillusion and unsatisfied longings, he soon became acquainted with suffering, and could say with reason that he had never been young. Born without the power, but with the fierce desire for happiness, his 'joy in everything' was withered before it bloomed. The few allusions in Obermann to those early years show how greatly they influence his after life.

But among these memories of his youth, one ray of content pierces now and then the general gloom -- his love for his mother, and her sympathy with him. Later, after death had separated him from her, he pictures, with unwonted tenderness, the walks they took together in the woods of Fontainebleau, when he was a schoolboy spending his vacations with his parents in the country. He was only fifteen at that time, but showed even then his love for all things beautiful in nature, his longing for solitude, his premature seriousness, his changeful moods, his ardent, sensitive, restless temperament which gave him no peace..."

"...At fifteen Senancour entered the Collège de la Marche, at Paris, where he followed the four years' course diligently, not brilliantly, but successfully, and graduated with honor. In those four years, his mind, already open to philosophic doubt, was definitely led into channels which destroyed whatever religious belief may have been feebly lodged there by his mother's teaching. He left college an atheist. It had been the intention of the elder Senancour that his son should enter the priesthood, and being a man of imperious will, unaccustomed to remonstrance or opposition, he immediately made arrangements for Etienne to take a two years' preparatory course at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.

"By nature without depth of Christian religious feeling, by temperament fiercely opposed to rules and

institutions, by education steeped in the philosophic thought of the day, the young student of Malebranche and Helvétius rose in revolt against a step which 'essentially shocked his nature.' In August, 1789, with the help of his mother, he left Paris, and buried himself in the solitude of the Swiss Alps; there in the region of perpetual ice, the primitive man in him strove to wrest from primitive nature the key to life.

"At this period, when we see in him so much to 'essentially shock' our natures -- his atheism, his antagonism to Christianity, his bitterness against institutions -- he has at least the merit of austere sincerity and of scrupulous morality. With a nature so sincere and so strongly opposed to a religious vocation, he could not bring himself to enter the priesthood solely for the sake of earning a living, or to play the hypocrite in order to satisfy an exacting parent.

"'I could not sacrifice my manhood,' he protests, 'in order to become a man of affairs.'

"And in another place, in the same letter, he says, 'It is not enough to look upon a profession as honest for the simple reason that one can earn an income of thirty or forty thousand francs without theft...'"

Maria Edgeworth, in her novelette, has her hero, the earl of Glenthorn, describe himself thus: "Bred up in luxurious indolence, I was surrounded by friends who seemed to have no business in this world but to save me the trouble

of thinking or acting for myself; and I was confirmed in the pride of helplessness by being continually reminded that I was the only son and heir of the earl of Glenthorn. My mother died a few weeks after I was born; and I lost my father when I was very young. I was left to the care of a guardian, who, in hopes of winning my affection, never controlled my wishes or even my whims. I changed schools and masters as often as I pleased, and consequently learned nothing. At last I found a private tutor who suited me exactly, for he was completely of my own opinion, 'that everything which the young earl of Glenthorn did not know by the instinct of genius was not worth his learning.' Money could purchase a reputation for talents and with money I was immoderately supplied... Thus at an early age when other young men are subject to some restraint, either from the necessity of their circumstances, or the discretion of their friends, I became completely master of myself and of my fortune. My companions envied me; but even their envy was not sufficient to make me happy. Whilst yet a boy, I began to feel the dreadful symptoms of that mental malady which baffles the skill of medicine, and for which wealth can purchase only temporary aberration. For this conflict there is no precise English name; but alas! the foreign term is now naturalised in England. Among the higher classes, whether in the wealthy or fashionable world, who is unacquainted with 'ennui?'

"At first I was unconscious of being subject to

this disease; I felt that something was the matter with me, but I did not know what. Yet the symptoms were sufficiently marked. I was afflicted with frequent fits of fidgeting, yawning, and stretching, with a constant restlessness of mind and body; an aversion to the place I was in, or the thing I was doing, or rather to that which was passing before my eyes, for I was never doing anything. I had an utter abhorrence and an incapacity of voluntary exertion; unless roused by extreme stimulus, I sank into that kind of apathy, and vacancy of ideas, vulgarly known by the name of 'a brown study.' If confined in a room for more than half an hour by bad weather or other contrarities, I would pace backwards and forwards, like the restless 'cavia' in his den with a fretful unmeaning pertinacity. I felt an insatiable longing for something new and a childish love of locomotion."

Quotations such as the following testify to the author's profound knowledge of and insight into an individual suffering from this malady. "She (his wife -- my insert. M.N.) was too frivolous to be hated, and the passion of hatred was not to be easily sustained in my mind. The habit of ennui was stronger than all my passions put together...

"After my marriage, my old malady rose to an insupportable height. The pleasures of the table were all that seemed left to me in life...

"Illness was a sort of occupation to me, and I was always sorry to get well. When the interest of being

IN danger ceased, I had no other to supply its place. I fancied that I should enjoy my liberty after my divorce; but even freedom grew tasteless."

Victim of ennui, the hero of the novelette attains to a position of power and consequence, the joys of which enabled him to endure his fatigue, although he comments, "Alas! I discovered to my cost that trouble is the inseparable attendant upon power; and many times, in the course of the first ten days of my reign, I was ready to give up my dignity from excessive fatigue."

And, in another passage, "In short, I was not placed in a situation where I could not hope neither for privacy or leisure, but I had the joys of power, my rising passion for which would certainly have been extinguished in a short time by my habitual indolence, if it had not been kept alive by jealousy."

The following quotation reveals the presence of childhood omnipotent beliefs and wishes that are often unconscious in cases of pathological boredom: "Even in my benevolence I was as impatient and unreasonable as a child. Money, I thought, had the power of Aladdin's lamp, to procure with magical alacrity the gratification of my wishes. I expected that a cottage for Ellinor should rise out of the earth at my command."

The reluctance to act in order to avoid mistakes and the anxieties and uncertainties and self-doubts of the bored individual, together with the remedies for his ennui

are well illustrated in this work. A friend advises him that "'A man must be ridiculous sometimes and bear to be thought so. No man ever distinguished himself who could not bear to be laughed at.'

"'Not exactly,' said I, unwilling to lower the good opinion this gentleman seemed to take for granted of my literature. He took Spenser's poems out of the book-case, and I actually rose from my seat to read the passage, for what trouble will not even the laziest of mortals take to preserve the esteem of one by whom he sees that he is over-valued..."

And, further, "Respited from the agonies of doubt, I now waited very tranquilly for that moment to which most lovers look forward with horror, the moment of separation. I was sensible that I had accustomed myself to think about this lady so much, that I had gradually identified my existence with hers, and thus I found my spirit of animation much increased. I dreaded the departure of Lady Geraldine less than the return of ennui."

The depth of the victim's inertia and boredom and the strength of their hold on him are superbly portrayed in the following passages: (After acting with celerity to obtain an appointment for Devereux which had been refused)... "I was raised in my own estimation -- I revelled a short time in my self-complacent reflections; but when nothing more remained to be done, or to be said -- when the flurry of action, the novelty of generosity, the flow



of enthusiasm, and the freshness of gratitude were over, I felt that, though large motives could invigorate my mind, I was still a prey to habitual indolence, and that I should relapse into my former state of apathy and disease..."

"I remember to have heard, in some epilogue to a tragedy, that the tide of pity and of love, whilst it overwhelms, fertilises the soul. That it may deposit the seeds of future fertilisation, I believe; but some time must elapse before they germinate; on the first returning of the tide, the prospect is barren and desolate. I was absolutely inert, and almost imbecile for a considerable time, after the extraordinary stimulus by which I had been actuated, was withdrawn."

"Evils that were not immediately near me had no power to affect my imagination..."

"Nor did my incredulity as to the magnitude of the peril prevent me from making exertions essential to the defence of my own character, if not to that of the nation. How few act from purely patriotic motives and rational motives! At all events I acted, and acted with energy; and certainly at this period of my life I felt no ennui; perhaps it is for this reason that so many are addicted to its intemperance. All my passions were roused, and my mind and body kept in continual activity. I was either galloping, or haranguing, or fearing, or hoping, or fighting; and so long as it was said that I could not sleep in my

bed, I slept remarkably well, and never had so good an appetite as when I was in hourly danger of having nothing to eat."

The last part of the Edgeworth novel deals in detail with the earl of Glenthorn's successful efforts on his own behalf to conquer permanently what appeared to be an irredeemable sloth, boredom, apathy and inertia -- for whatever relief he had from ennui by all kinds of distractions was of a temporary nature. His agent in Ireland, Mr. McLeod, at one point remarks to him, "'Tis a pity but that there was a conspiracy against you every day of your life; it seems to do you so much good.'" His spontaneous efforts, however, were stimulated and reinforced considerably by events both of an exciting and adverse nature and by the sound advice and encouragement and judicious suggestions of those who believed in him.

The adverse circumstances with which he met -- the loss of his title and wealth -- led him out of necessity to fend for himself, to establish his independence, to recognise his worth and ability to mold his own destiny by his own exertions. "It was new and rather strange to me to be without attendants; but I found that when I was forced to it, I could do things admirably well for myself, that I had never suspected I could perform without assistance. After I had travelled two days without servants, how I had travelled with them was the wonder. I once caught myself saying of myself, 'that careless blockhead

has forgotten my night cap!"

His friends who were convinced of his abilities and integrity were so important to him that he overcame his inertia to please them and prove he was worthy of their good opinions. Also, it was made plain to him that it would be necessary to prove himself if he wanted to marry the woman he loved. His friend, Lord Y. tells him, "...I hold that we are the artifices of our own fortune. If there be any whom the gods wish to destroy, these are first deprived of understanding; whom the gods wish to favour, they first endow with integrity, inspire with understanding, and animate with activity. Have I not seen integrity in you, and shall I not see activity? Yes; that supineness of temper or habit with which you reproach yourself has arisen, believe me, only from want of motive..."

The hero has this reaction, "Such was the general purport of what Lord Y. said to me; indeed I believe I have repeated his very words, for they made a great and ineffaceable impression upon my mind. From this day, I date the commencement of a new existence... Fired with ambition -- I hope generous ambition -- to distinguish myself among men and to win the favour of the amiable and the most lovely of women, all the faculties of my soul were awakened. I became active, permanently active. The enchantment of indolence was dissolved, and the demon of ennui was cast out forever."

And later,"... I am now become a plodding man of business, poring over law books from morning till night, and leading a most monotonous life. Yet occupation, and hope, and the constant sense of approaching nearer to my object, rendered this mode of existence, dull as it may seem, infinitely more agreeable than many of my apparently prosperous days, when I had more money, and more time than I knew how to enjoy. I resolutely persevered in my studies."

The book concludes with an account of the hero's persistent and assiduous labours, stimulated and constantly encouraged by ever-present worthwhile motives -- the good will of his friends and the love of his wife and the satisfactions of domestic life, plus an ever-increasing sense of self, self-reliance and independence. As a result of circumstances, his title is eventually restored to him and he concludes, "I flatter myself that I shall not relapse into indolence; my understanding has been cultivated -- I have acquired a taste for literature, and the example of Lord Y. convinces me that a man may be at once rich and noble, and active and happy."

The foregoing examples of victims of pathological boredom are taken from works that are entirely given over to a description of that type of individual and his experiences. In the concluding part of this section, individual characters in general literature who suffered from the disease are included. Among them is Andrey Ivanovitch Tyentyetnikov as portrayed in Gogol's Dead Souls (19):

"Here, however, in a few words is a full chronicle of his day, and from it the reader may judge for himself of his character. He woke up very late in the morning and would sit for a long time on his bed, rubbing his eyes. His eyes were unfortunately rather small and so the rubbing of them lasted a long time. All this time his man Mihailo was standing at the door with the washing basin and a towel. This poor Mihailo would stand waiting for an hour or two, then would go off to the kitchen and come back again -- and his master was still sitting on the bed, rubbing his eyes. At last he got up from his bed, washed himself, put on his dressing gown and went into the drawingroom, there to drink tea, coffee, cocoa, or even milk, sipping a little of each, crumbling up his bread in a merciless way and making a shameless mess everywhere with his tobacco ash. He would spend a couple of hours over his morning tea; and that was not all, he would take a cup of cold tea and go to the window looking out into the yard..."

Gogol goes on to tell the story of Andrey's life, hoping to answer the question as to whether a character such as Andrey was born that way or made so by life. He points out that "as a child, he was a clever, talented boy, lively and thoughtful by turns." The boy had a teacher at school in whom he placed the utmost confidence, and with whom he could be spontaneous and free and yet know he would be completely understood. As for the teacher, "His method was unusual in everything. He used to say that what was most

important was to arouse ambition -- he called ambition the force that urged me onwards -- without which there is no moving him to activity. A great deal of mischief and wild spirits he did not restrain at all: in the pranks of childhood he saw the first stage of the development of character. They enabled him to discern what was hidden in the child, as a skillful physician looks calmly at the temporary symptoms, at rashes coming out on the body, and does not try to suppress them, but watches them intently to find out what is going on inside the patient..."

The teacher taught them to face responsibility and to persevere with endurance against the most formidable obstacles they might meet in life. This rare teacher "from whom one word of approval threw him into a delicious tremor," died before the boy had been approved for the higher course. His place was taken by a strict disciplinarian who gave approval to those who exhibited good conduct rather than those who showed intelligence. There was much learning but no life in the methods of the teachers who were engaged, and the boys lost all respect for the school authorities. Rebellion in class was rampant. Audrey was of a gentle disposition and instead of rebelling he lost heart. "His ambition had been stirred but there was no activity, no career for him. It would have been better if it had not been aroused at all." He became depressed and longed for his former teacher. Though he had hoped for a bright future after leaving school, Audrey soon met with a

dampening of his ambitions and yearnings at the hands of an uncle. He was not appreciated for what he could really do; only minor and inconsequential matters and achievements were important. "The time at school suddenly rose up before him as a paradise lost forever; his studies seemed something so much above this paltry work of copying."

The frustrations of the city and the paltry and useless activity associated with his work led him to start finding fault with others. He had begun to be bored with it all and returned to country life in order to look after his estate actively and with zeal. But he met with just as many frustrations there, and his earnest desire for activity dwindled. He sank into indifference, apathy and daydreaming, withdrew from all contact with humanity.

"Complete solitude reigned in his home. The young man got into his dressing-gown for good, abandoning his body to inactivity and his mind to meditating upon a work on Russia... The days came and went, uniform and monotonous. It cannot be said, however, that there were not moments when he seemed as it were to awaken from sleep. When the post brought him newspapers, new books and magazines, and when he saw in print the familiar name of some old schoolfellow who had already been successful in a distinguished career in the government service, or who had made some modest contribution to science and universal culture, a quiet secret melancholy crept over his heart, and a quiet dumbly-sorrowful aching regret at his own

inactivity rose up in spite of himself. Then his life seemed to him hateful and loathsome. His school-days rose up before him extraordinarily vividly, and Alexandr Petrovitch seemed to stand before him . . . . Tears streamed from his eyes, his sobs lasted almost all day.

"What did those sobs mean? Did his sick soul betray in them the sorrowful secret of its sickness -- that the fine inner man, that had begun to be formed within him, had not had time to develop and grow strong; that unpractised in the struggle with failure he had never attained the precious faculty of rising to higher things and gaining strength from obstacles and difficulties; that the rich treasure of lofty feelings that had glowed within him like molten metal had not been tempered like steel, and now his will had no elasticity and was impotent; that his rare, marvellous teacher had died too soon, and now there was no one in the whole world who could rouse and awaken his forces, flagging from continual hesitation, and his weak, impotent will -- who could cry to the soul in a living, rousing voice, the rousing word: 'Forward!' which the Russian, at every state, in every condition and calling thirsts to hear?..."

The effect of love in his life is described thus: "Andrey Ivanovitch Tyentyetnikov could never have said how it was that from the first day they were as though they had known each other all their lives. A new inexplicable feeling



came into his heart. His life was for an instant lighted up. His dressing-gown was for a time laid aside. He did not linger so long in bed in the morning, and Mihailo did not have to stand so long with a washing basin in his hands. The windows were thrown open in the rooms, and the owner of the picturesque estate spent a long while wandering about the dark winding paths of his garden, and stood for hours gazing at the enchanting view into the distance..."

Finally, the character of Sherlock Holmes affords a good example of this type of individual. Dr. Watson, his fictional Boswell describes him thus (20): "Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion..."

And again, "It is as clear as daylight,' I answered. 'I regret the injustice which I did you. I should have had more faith in your marvellous faculty. May I ask whether you have any professional inquiry on foot at present?'

"None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brainwork. What else is there to live for? Stand at the

window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth."

Holmes had just completed one of his cases, "'You reasoned it out beautifully,' I exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. 'It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true.'

"'It saved me from ennui,' he answered, yawning. 'Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplace of existence. These little problems help me to do so.'

"'And you are a benefactor of the race,' said I. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use,' he remarked. "'L'homme c'est rien -- l'oeuvre c'est tout," as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand."

### III. Clinical Cases

A number of my patients, who have been undergoing psychoanalytic therapy for varying lengths of time, either on first consultation or during the course of their treatment made particular reference to boredom and inertia to such a degree that it appeared to be a constant underlying

condition during much of their lives. In these cases, along with the boredom there was a marked degree of inertia. Other details, too, sustained the general picture of ennui as painted in the literature.

Case 1: A male patient, married, 34 years old when he presented himself to me, complained of work inhibitions, partial sexual impotence, usually followed by anxiety dreams, perverse sexual fantasies and practises and fetishism, accompanied by sexual excitement. These were his outstanding complaints. But during the course of treatment he made constant reference to not doing what he was supposed to do, to his lack of interest in any activity that was expected of him, his lack of motivation and his inertia, and a sense of being bored. He had been aware of these attitudes practically all his life. In addition, this highly intelligent and knowledgable man was especially preoccupied by the matter of accidents, always intensely curious about their origin. He was fascinated by trains and cars, and also would spend hours watching the work going on where demolition and reconstruction of buildings were taking place.

His dreams and associations to them revealed his marked ambivalences. Though longing for appreciation and wanting to be a "good boy," he rebelled strongly against conformity. Not only did he fail to do what was expected of him, what he felt he should do, but he engaged compulsively both as child and adult in antisocial activities.

He felt guilty about his inability to reach the goals he considered he could have reached. While much in need of love, he was afraid of too close a relationship and avoided it. To him it meant he would be overwhelmed or devoured, because he related this feeling to his relationship with his mother.

He wished for success and prestige and independence yet was afraid of attaining them. He himself recognised that his inertia was caused by a fear of action. Success and independence meant being alone, isolated, exposed to physical injury, and not knowing what to do with them or how to control or organise himself in such a situation.

In one of his sessions he said of himself, "My fantasies of being great and receiving adulation are not self-adulation, but self-defeat because I am afraid to take action. It remains in fantasy where as a child, fantasy and reality are close together. My fear of being alone and loneliness are extreme. I often refer to myself, soliloquising, in the third person. It's dramatic, but it is like someone else being there and I'm not alone."

Hardly a drunkard, he indulged fairly heavily in alcohol. "I drink because it relieves me of anxiety and feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction. I feel guilty because I don't do what I'm supposed to do, and it gives me an excuse for being idle. I refuse to be a good boy and when I'm praised especially by a woman for doing a good job, I feel like saying -- 'You fool, what did you expect?'

Yet, I have accomplished nothing. Of course, I was afraid I did not have the ability, but I really didn't want to succeed."

On other occasions, in association to dreams and fantasies which dealt with loss of control and were of a perverse nature, he would say, "I do what I am not supposed to do. I am attracted by vomitus. I urinate and defecate in places where I should not, because it gives me sexual excitement. I am not only afraid of losing control, I want to." In association to these statements, it transpired that there was a great deal of voyeurism, a desire to see, and of exhibitionism, a desire to be looked at. This was especially so in relation to his genitals as an assurance against castration.

His attitude towards women was decidedly ambivalent. He envied them, liked them and hated them. "Women just have to be; they can do as they please, dress as they like; they don't need permission to expose themselves. They are always loved and accepted. They don't have to do anything." He often had dreams of physical injury, accompanied by bleeding, and of buildings being demolished and reconstructed, indicating his great fears of castration but also his desire to be castrated, to be like a woman. An early memory of childhood recalled that a neighborhood girl after having urinated in her underwear boasted that her parents would not punish her for it. These fears of the patient were associated later with

dread of cancer and heart disease. He felt he would be destroyed if he were successful, yet when he was ill or suffered pain he neglected to take medicine for relief. He was often aware that he made efforts to defeat himself.

Control also meant to him being a "good boy" and protecting his mother, because in his childhood his father had made him feel on occasion that his vomiting was the cause of his mother's sickness. Any emotional display on the part of the patient was met with the admonition "Be a man!" from his father. This parental attitude accounted for the patient's fears and uncertainties, for his wish to refuse masculine responsibilities, and for the suppression of any emotion that might be considered feminine. At the same time, how easy it would have been, he thought, to be and remain a female child. He remembered that even as a child he became so disinterested in doing anything and was so lacking in motivation that nothing but sheer necessity would have got him out of bed.

The patient was one of monozygotic twins and had a considerable amount of sibling rivalry with his brother, who was killed in a car accident at the age of 18. Although this added greatly to the patient's feelings of guilt, his difficulties stemmed from early childhood, and were partly caused by his being a twin, which in his case led to a loss of a sense of individuality and personal identity and wholeness. The twins were so alike that it was difficult to tell them apart. As one of the pair,

he was showered with much adulation, admiration and praise and little discipline. He was considered perfect just as he was and nothing much was expected of him. Yet he was compelled, he felt, because of a much respected, cultured and admired family, to live up to the best he could possibly give. He had great respect for his parents, but, for reasons already given, believed they had made many mistakes in his upbringing.

He was often confused, did not know what he wanted to do, or who he really was, and concluded he really had no motivation to do anything. He was entirely lacking in self-confidence. The following are his remarks in association to a short dream in which he was late for an appointment. "I see no sense in working for money only. I don't do what I'm supposed to do, because there is no sense to it, so I am not motivated. I want to do what I want to do, but I feel guilty for not doing what I'm supposed to do, and I really don't know what I want to do. I wasn't disciplined to do things. If I failed it didn't matter to a doting mother, and my father was not particularly involved. There was one thing where my mother expected too much from me -- love. Always she asked 'Do you love me?' And I was afraid to give it. I felt she would smother me or devour me."

On another occasion, he said, "My inertia prevented me from moving that morning, my lethargy. I don't make allowance for time and I seem to elude it. It's

an unwillingness to act -- not quite lethargy. I am conscious of bearing deep resentment against being told what to do and resent the pressure of organised society that compels me to conform. What leisure does a man have to do what he wants to do? And those that do what they want to do are often involved in jobs that are a complete bore -- they might as well be elevator operators and what a drudge that is! Yet I don't do anything different. I do what I want to do, but I refuse to do what is expected of me by others and resent the waste of time in drudgery. But it's not that I don't do what I'm supposed to do. This is why I was thrown out of college. I didn't do what I was supposed to do, but in actuality I don't know what I want to do and don't even want to know what I want. I always resented growing up. I don't want to give up my childish perversions."

On the matter of control, he resented it yet needed it. He remained, despite his potential and abilities, in a dependent, directed position, where he avoided real independent responsibility. He might lose control if he were in a responsible position and those leaning on him might suffer. During the course of therapy he occasionally experienced feelings of depersonalisation, and in association to one particular dream the patient himself felt that he was on the borderline of psychosis. He had no real sense of self or identity.



Case 2: A girl of 17, a senior in high school, presented the following history at her first consultation. Her mother had found her in a mood of depression, crying. She had been the victim of such feelings for about two years, but had never told her mother, since their relationship was not a close one. She associated these moods with periods of self-observation in which she thought about herself obsessively and compulsively. At such moments one part of her was different from the other, and in one of them, she identified herself with the conforming masses, while the other part looked on observing her conforming self with disdain and disgust. She said that for part of the time she was nothing, "There is a nothingness and I feel nothing." In addition, there were periods when she felt what she described as intense boredom.

She described the following different moods:

(1) In the state of "nothingness" there was no feeling and no conception of time; a state of "just being."

(2) A bored state where there was no interest but only apathy, lethargy and inertia and extreme fatigue; "not aware that anything matters." "In the state of boredom

I resist going to bed and when I do go it seems to be an automatic action. In school I am completely bored and

would fall asleep if I could." (3) A state of depression where there were feelings, where she cried and felt sorry for herself and there was paralysis of action: "I cannot go to bed even if I wanted to, but I don't even want to."

There was another state in which she was confused and bewildered and time passed without her doing anything. Only when there was somebody with her and close to her to distract her would this state be modified.

As a child, she was particularly afraid of fires, accidents and death, though fascinated and attracted to all of them. Her sado-masochistic tendencies were strongly developed. She sought out accidents, was drawn to the sight of blood and death, and had fantasies in which she was being whipped by an older man. Her opinion was that she indulged in them to wallow in self-pity. She had feelings of omnipotence, was sure no harm could come to her, and considered all human emotions as weak. "Who wants to be a human being?"

Her parents are both living but separated. In her early childhood, she had some positive emotions towards her mother, but in later years these changed to feelings of disgust. Her father took no interest in the family and she did not recall having a close relationship with either parent. "My mother is disgusting. She was always around me, too much with me, exhorting me to do things and mix with people when I was not ready, but she had no real love. She was only concerned with her own prestige and good name."

She saw no evidences of emotion or any kind of fondness between her parents. Her brothers, aged 21 and 10, teased her and provoked her to rage and fury. Her older brother and a family maid used to fill her with

tales of horror and mystery and what she described as "putting the hex" on her, and she would often lie awake terrified of falling asleep.

As a growing girl, though she did not want to be a boy she did want to be able to participate in sports and other activities with the same freedom and skill that boys did. At the same time she had no desire to remain a girl and would have preferred to be neither. Menstruation was a nuisance that hampered her considerably. Her relationships with people were of a superficial nature. She felt a sense of disgust would overwhelm her if any friendship developed to the point of closeness. She was particularly fond of animals, and identified with them if they were injured, yet treated them sadistically on occasion, then seeking reconciliation.

In the matter of her school work, she was compulsively perfectionistic and her efforts to reach this goal resulted in almost complete paralysis, since she was constantly diverted in her attempts to add continuously to her knowledge and contribution. Although denying her need at any time for approbation, unconsciously she was profoundly in need of it.

Case 3: This patient, a dentist, single, aged 30, complained on first presenting himself that no matter how long he went with a girl, as soon as the time for making a decision about marriage approached, he found fault with her, became tense, nervous and anxious. Also,

he lost interest and suffered from partial sexual impotence. He was aware of feelings of inferiority and strong feelings of jealousy and was highly competitive. He was not able to read or work when alone, becoming anxious and restless when not in the presence of some other person.

As treatment progressed he brought out other aspects of his personality. He imagined himself in fantasy as the leader of a large group of men devoted to doing good works, helping people in need or defending them against injustice, and in these fantasies he was the one who made the decisions. In reality he found it almost impossible to make spontaneous and independent decisions, and in his dreams it was evident that he identified himself with a dependent girl who was free of responsibilities and did not have to make decisions. He had grave doubts about his ability to function as an adult male; he needed to be dependent, but was afraid to be in that position.

His struggle to break away from his doting mother was manifested in his decision to become a dentist. She had wanted him to become a doctor of medicine, and it was an act of rebellion and self-assertion that decided him in his choice of dentistry. Yet, no matter what he engaged in, he was not sure he would ever reach the high standards he felt others would expect of him or that he expected of himself. The question of prestige was of great importance. It was necessary for him to know everything perfectly and gain everybody's admiration. He felt that he was deserving

of perfection. The very contemplation of these standards he equated with their accomplishment.

If he did decide to marry his wife would have to be perfect; if not, he would lose self-esteem and the esteem of his friends. She had to be highly intellectual, but inferior to himself. The need for intellectuality on the part of his girls was admittedly a defence against being involved sexually. "I want the girls to be like men because sex is not involved. If sex is involved, I am not sure of myself and here I go back to my past -- I never know what to do or what is expected of me. And, in any case, it's getting too close and I'm afraid of a close relationship. I never had one at home."

Some of his free associations during the course of therapy were, "I prevent myself from being in love. I don't know what love means. I am anxious about not being able to make a choice and am full of indecisions. I am afraid of boredom. I am afraid that if I marry, I would soon be bored to death and if I did not have someone to stimulate me I would do nothing and die of boredom. My ideas of perfection are a defence against my being involved."

Perhaps his most revealing productions came in one treatment session when he said, "I never settle on one thing: I want to do many things. Not one girl, but many girls; not one sport, but many. I don't want routine. I'm a Jack of all trades, master of none. I hop back and forth in my reading, and I am afraid that is a way of avoiding the

knowledge that I could not be successful in any one thing. I am bored and restless. My restlessness is a hunting feeling without knowing what you are looking for. I am not bored when I am treating a patient, yet I cannot get myself to do things in the solitude of my office.

"I am restless when alone. I am very tired when I arrive home from my office and am unable to read. My restless hunt means looking for everything -- they're writing books faster than I can read them. I want to taste everything. I get bored with my friends and relatives and I try to stimulate myself in all kinds of activities and get overwhelmed by all things I get interested in. I get very bored with my parents and it's a wasted evening. I have no ability to organise myself. I envy him who pursues his purpose without distraction. When I was a child, I never wanted to go to sleep because I had so many activities. I liked to sleep also, but always got up on time no matter how late to bed. I could never sleep during the day -- was a waste of time, even though I had all the time in the world...

"As a kid, I wanted to be a good athlete. I always wanted to be the best. I broadened all my interests, found new friends, new fields, and along came drives to learn these things, but then it became pathological. My appetites became insatiable and uncontrollable. My brothers are not like this, though my oldest brother is content to

be busy. My other brother stays at home in the evening. He's a salesman. Maybe it's just a matter of competition and in every new field. I was always in competition with an ideal and I attempted to pass each one. Competition was always impressed on me at home to get good grades and to get somewhere in the world."

His fears, apathy and inertia come out in the following remarks, "I fear that unless a stimulus is there or is supplied by someone else I would become bored and inert. Enjoyment in music comes from sharing it with someone else. Interests themselves have not been enough to keep me going out. I have a feeling inside of me that if it were not for my friends or circumstances my interests might not have materialised except for classical music. I never did too much reading, though I had the feeling to do it, but I could not get myself to do it. I need a push, otherwise I would stay where I was, though I wouldn't want to. I would not make the initial effort. I need direction. I would not have it by myself. I am afraid of losing interest in many things I have started.

"I am a pseudo-intellectual. I do not recall studying in high school -- it's a complete blank. Interest itself would not have driven me to study. I was more interested in outside things. I studied for grades, not for interest. Memory was the important thing. Understanding was not important. I had good grades because of my memory. I had no interest in what I was reading. I was not

stimulated by my home. My parents bored me."

The overprotection by his mother, the lack of discipline, the impression she gave him that noone was good enough for him, the fear he had of girls because they were different both intellectually and anatomically all tended to make him feel dependent, and passive and to suppress the development of masculinity. His unconscious fear of castration and ambivalence towards his own masculinity and females were amply illustrated in his dreams following his contacts, sexual or social, with women. He was also afraid of loss of control and once mentioned that he believed the purpose of psychoanalysis was to give control to the patient and that was what he wanted.

His feelings about his father were that the latter was of little importance in the household, that he was more or less a passive spectator of the family scene and nobody who could serve as a model of male identification. The patient seldom made reference to him in therapy.

Case 4: This patient, a woman aged 39, married with two children, presented herself for consultation with the following history. For some years she had had fits of depression with suicidal thoughts, often felt herself to be dazed, in a state of confusion, disorganised. She had no goals, was anxious and bored. She lacked satisfaction of any kind over home chores and was not quite sure what she wanted to do, but had become deeply involved in the



theatre in the capacity of casting director. She had fears of travelling in a car ever since sustaining an injury in a car accident a few years before, and was afraid of walking in the dark. She complained, "I am nothing, though I have tried to be something. I feel empty."

In the course of therapy it was revealed that she lacked ability to control herself in the activity in which she was engaged -- it was a matter of all or nothing. If not very active or interested, she would be completely disinterested and bored, simply stay in bed a good part of the day, doing nothing, and feeling as if she were nothing. She would grow afraid of this condition, since it was like being dead, although as an adolescent it was her revengeful fantasies during this state that frightened her.

Her dreams and conscious feelings made it evident that she was much concerned about injustice. In a masochistic way she sought out circumstances and provoked events in which she became the victim and then felt revengeful, although she was not able to express her hatred. She felt that if she did she would lose all control. She was angry at and envied those with status, feeling she herself belonged to nobody and no group.

Her father was very unstable, with an uncontrollable temper. He would not open the door of his house without having a knife in his hand ready to attack. "Neither my father nor my mother was 'there' for me,"

the patient said. "I remember saying to my father, 'You won't ruin my brother's life the way you ruined mine.'"

She could not depend on her mother nor expect any help from her. She considered her mother an anxious, stupid though good-looking woman for whom she had the utmost contempt, and who had instilled in her a dislike for men. Men were considered by her mother as dirty and lustful and lacking any regard for women.

The patient thought of herself, as a child and adolescent, as ugly but bright and intelligent, always left out, "not belonging," and anxious. She was highly competitive with an older and younger brother who were given all the consideration and respect. She regarded herself as extremely unfortunate because she looked like her father, while her brothers were attractive like her mother. She was always afraid she could never attain the success of her older brother and even if she did someone like her younger brother would manage to dethrone her.

She was not able to identify herself with either her father or mother in any solid way and because of this and her competition and jealousy of her brothers, as well as other possible reasons, she became confused as to her sexual role in life. While needing to be loved by men, she was strongly resentful of and revengeful towards them. She was not overtly homosexual but her dreams were often concerned with homosexuality.

She was most worried about the absence of

self-control and her inability to organise time when at rest. In her destructive fantasies, sado-masochistic and dramatic in nature, she often pictured her own death from an accident or at the hand of fate or something beyond her control. She could not believe that it was in her favor in any way to influence her own destiny.

She was afraid of making mistakes and appearing to be stupid. To her it meant humiliation and this would lead to great anger and desire for vengeance, as did injustice. In treatment she exhibited a strong drive to be liked by the therapist, yet she was afraid she would not be. This attitude was characteristic of her. But she also was afraid that therapy would change her into a dull individual, and that life would lose romanticism for her, and if her therapy were successful she would never fall in love again.

Case 5: This patient, a man of 32, single, complained of having difficulties with people, that he antagonised them with his hostility, that he was distrustful, that he had never loved anyone and did not believe he was ever loved, that he was afraid to marry, that he avoided being tied down, that he had been dismissed from a couple of jobs because of these reasons, that he had periods of depression and withdrawal, and that he had thought of suicide to gain sympathy.

He complained that his father gave him no support and was hardly ever present when he needed him.

The father showed little interest in his son and seldom encouraged him in masculine pursuits. In the course of therapy, the patient made many abusive references to his father in a tearful way, while saying that he ardently wanted his father to love him. "I don't want to be a success. Even though my father is dead, I still want him to be alive, and be a real father to me. If I am a success, it will mean I am independent and do not need my father any more, and I don't want that."

On the other hand, his mother was an over-protective dominating woman who, he felt, gave him little real affection and never encouraged him in male activities. In fact, she discouraged him and suppressed his masculinity by her overprotection. She always cautioned him about what the neighbours might think of his behavior, saying he should not try to win or succeed because it might hurt his opponents.

The patient had three sisters who he felt were given more privileges and were better loved than he. He remembered that as a child he wanted to be one of them because it meant he would gain all that he desired.

A tall, strapping athletic-looking fellow, he was nevertheless very much afraid of physical injury, and unconsciously he was also afraid of losing control and hurting others. From time to time he was given to periods of boredom, lethargy and inertia, the latter two being underlying permanent symptoms. He was untidy in his habits

and seldom thought any effort worthwhile. He had need for direction and control, since that meant being tied to someone, belonging to someone. It also meant he would be less likely to make mistakes, that he would not be entirely responsible and that other people would not be affected by the mistakes he made. He had no real sense of identity, no solid sense of self and was not sure of his role in life.

"I see no reason for working hard, and though I like set hours and control I rebel against them. I don't want to be asked to do more than I want to do. I don't want responsibility and I am afraid I might fail in my efforts and make mistakes. I always felt that my parents implied that I would not succeed no matter how well I did. Yet I always felt I could succeed at anything if I put my mind to it. I am afraid of failure. I would have to be very interested in what I did and I might lose interest. And yet I don't know what I want or what I'm really interested in. I am afraid there would be always something else that would make me happier, and I would raise doubts about my marriage or anything else. I am afraid of monotony and boredom, and must have variety."

This patient had had no real discipline. He was not shown how to behave or what to do, and was incapable of self-discipline.

In association to one of his dreams he remarked that he felt an absence of a solid foundation to his

personality. He felt he was ineffective because his father was passive and lacked masculinity. Moreover, his father did not give him any real competition. He also feared his father. "If I am successful, my father would rise from the dead and get me. I deny myself to punish myself and also to avoid becoming stronger than my father. Then my father would be more of a man than I am and I could get sustenance from him. I am afraid to be an individual on my own. I would surely be struck down. I want to remain a child."

Case 6: This patient was 19 years old and single when he first presented himself for treatment. He had been discharged from the army on medical grounds, specifically gastrointestinal symptoms -- abdominal pain, anorexia and nausea. He also complained of anxiety, depression, and feelings of guilt following the death of his father.

Although he did not originally mention it, during the course of therapy it became evident that boredom had been chronically with him since he was a child. He recalled looking out the window, staring at nothing in particular for hours at a time, especially on Sundays -- just killing time and having nothing else to do. His oft-repeated question to his father was, "What are we going to do today?"

Also, he recalled that as a child he was obsessed with fears of physical injury. If he did sustain an injury, it was followed by fears of cancer. This fear he himself associated to anxieties involving his genitals which he

felt were inferior in size to those of his friends.

Though intelligent and even gifted, lethargy and inertia overcame him in high school and he was compelled to give up his studies. Along with his loss of interest in school work grew his feeling that no matter how well he did, he would not be appreciated for his efforts. Instead of praising him his father always made him feel he could have done better.

As time went on the patient took to gambling and eventually became an inveterate gambler. He was so sure of winning that he would refute any argument to the contrary. In this respect he developed what came close to being delusions of omnipotence and grandeur. He applied himself with diligence to a study of race horses and did in fact win huge sums of money, but also incurred severe losses. Soon he became aware of an unconscious desire to lose for several reasons. He recognised that winning had become too easy for him, that he would be bored by it and by success itself. Besides, he wanted to lose in order to provide a challenge for himself which would keep him active. Masochistic self-punishment was another factor.

In his fantasies he would say, "See, father, you worked hard and died at an early age and left only forty thousand dollars. Look how easily I make money." The content of his fantasies also bore witness to his competition with his father, evidence of his hostility

towards him, and the desire for his love and attention and sympathy which he never succeeded in attaining. Actually, his father left him \$40,000 and he immediately set about losing it by gambling and other extravagances.

He had no interest in any worthwhile endeavor of a social or cultural nature. The idea of occupying himself along such lines, especially if he had to start from scratch and work his way up, was anathema to him and represented the height of boredom. Actually, when he was inactive he was completely lethargic and would lie in bed a good part of the day. He had to keep running; otherwise he would be overcome with feelings of emptiness, boredom and despair. He had marked fears of loneliness and death, imagining himself dead, lying in the grave, cold and lonely and anxious. He had a low frustration tolerance and if he did not get his way at once he became enraged and felt like killing. He could not discipline himself in anything he did.

Over six feet tall, he was heavy and fat with pronounced feminine features. He was aware of being attracted to men, and with women he was apt to have premature ejaculations or be impotent. He had fantasies and dreams of being pregnant and there was considerable confusion as to his sexual identification.

The family history was hardly conducive to the upbringing of stable children, who were three in number. The youngest of the three, the patient was highly



competitive with them and wanted to be the eldest because he seemed to be the one the father most trusted. The patient felt he was his mother's favorite and that she looked to him for protection and solace in the face of the father's alleged infidelities. The mother had strong paranoid tendencies and attitudes. Though the patient loved his mother and even had sexual fantasies about her, he also hated her for her sexuality and because he could not understand her sexual relationship with the father when there was so much hatred between the two. His father discouraged his going with girls and his mother, besides likening him to his father, considered all men as evil.

This patient, too, was subjected to inconsistent behavior on the part of the parents. While setting high standards for him, they overdisciplined and overprotected him and did not allow him to grow as an individual. His fear of making mistakes was based on the fact that he was never allowed to make any and consequently developed a lethargy and an inability to initiate any activity.

He developed gastric symptoms and fears of choking on food. When he went to bed at night he was afraid of suffocating and always worried either that someone would enter the house during the night for the purpose of robbing him or something would happen to him while he slept. He dreaded falling asleep because of the violence of his dreams.

He had a poor sense of time, his attitude toward it indicating a strong desire to make it stand still. This

was based on his wish not to grow up and have to shoulder adult responsibilities. This meant death to him, or the passage of time meant death to his parents on whom he was very dependent, yet whose death he had secretly desired as a child. It was plain that this patient was torn by his ambivalent attitudes.

### Summary and Conclusions

All these patients originally complained of symptoms that one would expect to hear from anyone suffering from a psychoneurosis or borderline psychosis -- anxieties, difficulties in work and in relationships with people, depression in varying degree, partial or complete sexual impotence or frigidity. Some gave expression to feelings of boredom on first presenting themselves, while others did not. But in all the cases it became evident in the course of therapy that a feeling of boredom to a pathological degree did in fact exist.

For the most part, there was a chronic sense of emptiness or feeling of nothingness; a deep-seated passivity, lethargy, indolence and inertia, which in its extreme form amounted to a torpidity and languor and anguish resembling a state of catatonic stupor. When inertia was overcome, it was usually by the sheer need to do so or by stimulation from an external source on which the individual was entirely dependent.

There was a distorted sense of time in varying degree, and feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent,

in some cases relieved by a continuous and frantic search for involvement in some outside activity. In some instances there was considerable motor restlessness and agitation, manifest during the therapeutic sessions. A number of the patients had periods of depression and self-pity and often indulged in fantasies of a sado-masochistic nature. This latter phenomenon was so marked in almost all my patients that it seemed to be an inevitable concomitant of ennui.

The undisciplined nature of their emotions and actions and fear of the inability to control them seemed to be outstanding aspects of their personalities. Their need to be controlled and directed grew out of their anxieties, uncertainties, and self-doubts, the absence of a sense of "self" and solid ego-processes, resulting in difficulties in integration and organization and planning. On the other hand, they had a strong need to be independent and express their individuality, which showed up in defiance and rebelliousness toward authority and control. Their extreme dependence, passivity and inertia had to be counteracted, especially in those patients with motor restlessness, by an exaggerated amount of activity.

On the whole, these patients were gifted and had the ability and potential for success. Yet they were unable or unwilling out of multiple fears -- fear of loss of control, fear of loneliness, fear of "not belonging," fear of responsibility, fear of physical injury, fear of making mistakes, fear of humiliation, fear of their own passivity,

fear of success -- to make the effort necessary to achieve their goals. It was easier and more comfortable for them to fail than to win. The inertia, therefore, was often a defence against action and activity, although the very fear of change also accounted for the inertia.

In addition, there were evidences of infantile omnipotence and omniscience with the feeling that no effort should be asked of them since effort should not be necessary for them to achieve their objectives. They believed that knowledge, power, and conquest should come to them by magical means -- this, in contrast to their feelings of inadequacy and ineffectiveness.

They lacked true evaluation of themselves and were highly ambivalent in all their attitudes and feelings. They refused to admit to and accept their limitations. Their goals and standards were unrealistic, and they were forever plagued by guilt, anger and self-hate resulting from their inability to reach these goals. These high standards and expectations were also exploited as a defence against acknowledging their defects, and were used as protective shields against the fear that they might not reach even moderate objectives because of their inability to organise and discipline themselves.

They all had in common an inability to enjoy what should have given them pleasure. Or if they did enjoy themselves they would have to pay for it sooner or later. A situation was either "too good to be true," or had to

end in catastrophe. The slightest failure was equivalent to total disaster; they were either completely omnipotent or totally helpless and powerless.

They were lacking in a real sense of identity; and confusion as to their roles in life, particularly their sexual roles, contributed to their self-doubts and uncertainties. Everything was felt to be a waste of time, even life itself. Nothing had aim or purpose. The necessity to indulge arduously in competition, to be the best and foremost, to pass tests with the highest grades, to depend on memory rather than acquire knowledge, contributed to the sense of purposeless and aimlessness.

The absence of emotional stability in the parents, and the presence usually of a disinterested passive father and a dominating mother or other negative environmental situation led to an inability on the part of the patients to identify solidly with either parent, and resulted in fears and conflicts about their sexual roles in life. Deep-seated castration anxieties were prevalent. Particularly important seemed to be errors in discipline and training, and the absence of direction and stimulation. The discipline was either absent or exaggerated, but overprotection and the denial of the child's individuality, his integrity and spontaneity, by not allowing him to make his own mistakes or initiate action, produced fears and a lack of knowledge as to appropriate conduct. The individual was usually refused appreciation for what

he did well, and while much was required of him in one respect, little was expected in another.

In childhood the patients were either left alone or had a feeling of loneliness and were not really part of the family. They indulged in considerable day-dreaming and fantasizing of a nature that brought about fear and guilt and had to be suppressed. They grew up with an inability to love and the feeling that they were unworthy of love and therefore distrusted anyone who offered it.

It must be said, however, that the foregoing conditions and symptoms, which as usual seemed to be multi-factorial in causation, can be found in most if not all cases of neuroses or psychoses without boredom being complained of or being prominent. It is even probably true that boredom is present in all neuroses and psychoses to a degree, but it is probably also true that there is an underlying constitutional element of a more or less high degree involving inertia that contributes to the presence of boredom in those cases where it is predominant and where it might be considered pathological.

The following more or less verbatim report of part of a session with one of my patients, a male, aged 34, is a typical illustration of the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of a victim of pathological boredom and inertia. I have omitted the questions which elicited some of the material. These remarks could have been made by any or all of my patients and similar statements were actually

forthcoming at various stages of therapy.

"I look for variety in women as I do in my jobs. I cannot remain tied down. I cannot remain in the status quo. I cannot remain in a controlled situation because it gets monotonous and I get bored and yet I like it and must have it. If I am told what to do I know what to do. If I am on my own I am lost and don't know what to do. I have no purpose or objective. I am also afraid that I might get to like being completely passive, and then lose all initiative. That's why I always worried about getting out of the Navy. I kept thinking of how I could get out because I was afraid I might like a situation too much where I was told what to do. Yet I was afraid I wouldn't know what to do when I got out. Also, when I am in a controlled situation I rebel against what I should do and what is expected of me.

"I feel that this was because I got no direction at home and no stimulation from my parents. They over-disciplined me and overprotected me. They didn't allow me to initiate anything for myself. My father even buttered my bread until I was 17 years old and if I protested I was told by both my parents that I shouldn't object since it was done out of love. I was never allowed to make my own mistakes and later I became afraid to make them. I lost all sense of self-discipline. I lost all initiative and all desire for it. If I were left to myself I would do nothing. I would become just a lump of nothing if I were not forced into action. I always felt that there was

something missing in me and I know what it is -- my inability to initiate. I always feel I am obligated to do something before I can do something that is pleasurable.

"I bore myself. The world bores me. If I didn't plan my day I would be terrified. I need something new all the time. It's not sex with my girl friend that bothers me, but the fact that it's not new that bothers me. Why do I need something new all the time? My planning must include activities with others. I cannot sit down and read a book by myself or listen to music. I simply could not read a textbook. It would be impossible for me to discipline myself. Yet I have always sought after knowledge -- more and more knowledge."

It should be added that these patients had a need to exhibit their knowledge and to impress others, and were inveterate status and prestige seekers. Their dreams and the associations to them often demonstrated that the desire for knowledge was compensatory for their lack of sexual knowledge and that they were too embarrassed to admit this lack and take steps to eliminate it. Their hunger for all-encompassing knowledge coupled with the sense of futility that they were burdened by inertia, lack of the ability to concentrate and inhibitions that prevented them from doing as well as they felt they could do, or even from completing any task to which they set themselves, contributed to their boredom and sense of emptiness.



In each of the cases discussed there was considerable conscious and unconscious narcissism. To quote Phyllis Greenacre (21), "Now Narcissism is difficult to describe or define. It is, one might say, the great enigma of life, playing some part, at one and the same time, or in alternating phases, in the drag of inertia, and in the drive to the utmost ambition, and contributing its share to the regulating function of the conscience."

The remedy for ennui may be love, as Emerson has suggested, or it may be the instigation, by direct exhortation, of interest in various spheres of activity, but because of the many causes and conflicts involved in the production of the malady, the remedy of choice is the understanding by the patient of himself and his conflicts, by means of psychoanalysis. However, there will be strong resistance to change, as there is in every neurosis, but it will be especially so in cases of ennui because of the brick wall set up against change and action in this condition.

In this connection Menninger (22) writes "...But Freud showed us that resistance is more than fear, that it is a force related perhaps to the inertia discovered by Newton to reside in all matter, a reluctance to change position." It is interesting that Webster gives the following definition of inertia: "Inertia -- 1. Physics. The property of matter by which it will remain at rest, or in uniform motion in the same straight line or

direction unless acted upon by some external force...";

2. Indisposition to motion, exertion or inertness, "Men... have immense irresolution and inertia." Carlyle;

3. Med. Want of activity -- said especially of the uterus in labor when its contractions have nearly or wholly ceased." I may add that the desire to remain motionless, to be enclosed and protected was directly expressed by my patients as a wish to return to the womb and this wish was often symbolically represented in their dreams.

Again according to Webster, the word "inert" always suggests inherent or habitual indisposition to activity. One of the synonyms given for "inert" is "stupid." It is remarkable that these patients often spoke of themselves as "stupid," even though they were highly intelligent, and referred the feeling to their inability to initiate action.

The presence of elements of depersonalisation, the loss of sense of self and identity; states resembling catatonic stupor; what Erikson (23) refers to as "diffusion of time perspective"; the inability to control emotions or exercise self-discipline; depression; feelings of "nothingness" or of being "nothing," marked ambivalence and extreme anxieties relating especially to death, separation loneliness -- all these lead me to believe that the pathological boredom and inertia from which these patients are suffering are part of a severe neurosis or borderline psychosis or outright schizophrenia.

Essentially, these patients are lacking in solid and strong ego-processes and functions, especially those having to do with the ability to organise and integrate. Although the state of depression is allied to that of boredom, when depression is present boredom is absent. In the latter there is primarily numbness rather than emotions, and fantasy life is suppressed. Furthermore, because of the extreme nature of the conflicts of those who are victims of boredom, it is always associated with fatigue, exhaustion and weariness, which are part of and synonymous with the malady.

It would appear, therefore, that severe boredom is a symptom-complex which is determined in its production by constitutional or hereditary factors, on the one hand, and environmental factors, on the other. These factors have been discussed not only in relation to my patients but were mentioned by the authors of the fictional characters as well.

The inertia which is part of boredom may also be viewed as a state of homeostasis and as a resolution of the tug of war between intense activity and deep passivity which is always present and especially marked in cases of ennui with motor restlessness. The activity may lead to a loss of control of emotions that are dangerous and destructive, and the passivity to a state resembling catatonic stupor and death.

Finally, it may be said that the malady of boredom is a deeply-rooted one and it is doubtful if a cure of a permanent nature is possible. Though, as previously mentioned, the German word for boredom is Langeweile, meaning long time, I would stress that the time distortion present in boredom is not an essential element in the condition. What is basic and serious is the inability to organise and plan time or anything else, reflecting the absence of control and discipline in oneself.

In conclusion, a reference to the great man who was perhaps most responsible for this investigation of the malady of boredom is appropriate. Ernest Jones (24) describes Freud thus: "...In the depressed moods he could neither write nor concentrate his thoughts (except during his professional work). He would spend leisure hours of extreme boredom, turning from one thing to another, cutting open books, looking at maps of ancient Pompeii, playing patience or chess, but being unable to continue at anything for long -- a state of restless paralysis. Sometimes there were spells where consciousness would be greatly narrowed: states, difficult to describe, with a veil that produced almost a twilight condition of mind."

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