

Creativity and Madness: Some Psychological Considerations on Čechov's *The Black Monk* and *Ward no. 6* and Ludwig II of Bavaria

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The aim of this research is to identify the relationship between the concept of creativity and psychopathology. The characters depicted in the short stories by the Russian writer Anton Čechov, *Ward no. 6* and *The Black Monk*, and the historical figure of King Ludwig II of Bavaria will be given particular consideration. This paper aims to show how in Čechov's characters Efymič, Dmitrič and Kovrin, the concept of madness plays a negative function, as the protagonists of the abovenamed tales are unable to be creative. Their psychic discomfort leads to pathology by means of hallucinosis and events that, although they induce and promote a function of mental equilibrium in the individual, they do not lead to creativity. The latter constitutes a peculiar, fundamental and present aspect of Ludwig in the poetic, literary and artistic spheres, which specifically led to the realisation of his castles in Bavaria, products of his particular creativity and today admired by visitors from all over the world.

Keywords: Creativity, Čechov, psychopathology, literature, Ludwig

Introduction

The purpose of this analysis is to offer the reader a widely discussed topic in the field of creative thinking studies, which consists precisely in the possible relationship between the creative process and mental disorders, creativity and madness. This idea, inaugurated by Aristotle, found its greatest development in the Romantic era (see also the criticism made by the scholar Cesare Lombroso in the second half of the 19th century as in his work *Genius and Madness* of 1872) (Lombroso, 2000). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that there is a fundamental difference between creativity and psychopathology: mental illness does not lead to something creative, nor does it reveal something of reality, it is more of an incomprehensible and incommunicable phenomenon (Treglia, 2020).

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Even though creativity has an affinity with psychopathology, there is a difference as its purpose is to take into account the constraints of reality, they are under the individual's control and can be shared subjectively (Cesa-Bianchi & Antonietti, 2003).

In the course of this investigation, which primarily analyses the psychological, psychoanalytic, philosophical, literary and artistic spheres, two of the short stories by the Russian medical writer Anton Čechov, *Ward no. 6* and *The Black Monk*, will be examined, with some psychological considerations on the protagonists of the narratives. Particular attention will be dedicated to how madness is viewed negatively by the author and, not only will it have a far from positive influence on the characters, but it will be counterproductive as it prevents their creative development.

Furthermore, the historical character of Ludwig II, King of Bavaria, will also be taken into consideration. His madness, unlike Čechov's characters', will give rise to a concrete development that will pave the way for a creative process identifiable in the realisation of great architectural works and castles.

Objectives

The objective of this enquiry is to analyse the relationship between creativity and psychopathology, the correlation between the creative process and madness in an attempt to understand its dynamics. Čechov's short stories and their protagonists (Efymič and Dmitrič in *Ward no. 6*; Kovrin in *The Black Monk*) were specifically examined in order to analyse them and compare them to the historical character of King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

The specific objectives of the research are:

1. Analysis of the concept of creativity and madness in the fields of psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, literature and art;
2. To recognise and analyse the psychopathological aspect in the protagonists of the two above mentioned Čechov stories;
3. To know and examine the creative element in the historical character of Ludwig when building his castles;
4. Analyses and comparisons of the characters in Čechov's and Ludwig's tales, with focus on a possible similarity between the creative element and the psychopathological one.

Methodology

The study was conducted through the analysis of literary and psychological texts concerning past and contemporary artists and writers, in particular the Russian writer Anton Čechov, analysing the short stories *Ward no. 6* and *The Black Monk* from a psychological perspective. With regard to the Bavarian monarch Ludwig II, documents and texts concerning the king's life were analysed, examined focusing mainly on psychological and behavioural aspects.

On balance we follow the line indicated by the Psychology of Art and Literature founded by Professor Antonio Fusco and consolidated over several years, which consists of researching the psychological motivations that led the author to create certain characters and certain environmental situations (Fusco & Tomassoni, 1982). The symbolic elements present in the literary text are other important aspects, which not only are deciphered by drawing on a rigid interpretative code (e.g. the constant reference to the sexual or complexual sphere of psychoanalysis), but are clarified through a careful and rigorous search for the psychological meanings they

imply. They do not neglect the influence of the broader socio-cultural dimension and the interpreter's irrepressible subjectivity. In the interpretation of the work the research methodology basically tends to integrate, the assumptions proper to the psychoanalytic perspective with the broader pool of contemporary psychological and psychopathological theories (Tomassoni, 2020).

Critical-interpretative reflections and analyses were also carried out concerning Čechov's short stories and the figure of King Ludwig, examining some peculiar moments of the narratives and the monarch's life with special consideration for the genuinely psychopathological and creative aspects.

Characters Analysis

It should be noted that in the realisation of this work, we started from the concept expressed by the young poet Marco Cesa-Bianchi, who passed away at the age of only 18, in a poem entitled *La follia*, in which he stated that madness is a sort of research, probably unconscious in man, that derives from a magnificent insistence to be truly oneself. All this would mean, therefore, not to resign oneself to the hypocrisies and deceitfulness that this world imposes on us (Cesa-Bianchi, 1982). Cesa-Bianchi's thought which is linked to the individual's natural tendency towards madness, would imply the assumption that if one wanted to be accepted by the society in which one lives, then one would have to surrender to hypocrisies and deceitfulness.

Consequently, we believe that in today's society, fully expressing oneself would be the same as speaking one's mind plainly. As a result, this would irreparably generate the conditions for admission to a psychiatric clinic mental health institution.

The young Italian poet's reflection seems to echo very well the thought of the Russian doctor and man of letters Anton Čechov (1860-1904), who lived in the second half of the 19th century and argued that madness is regarded with his meaning because man would remove his mask and show his true face, i.e. his authenticity. We would like to stress that what instantly occurs to us is the story *Il Berretto a sonagli* (1923), one of the comedies by the Italian writer Luigi Pirandello, which undoubtedly, through its three strings (madness, seriousness and civilisation), evokes the three Freudian instances of the Id, Ego and Super-Ego. All human beings are puppets, 'masks', 'characters', rather than real individuals. Each man-burrow is conditioned from the beginning, is not happy with his limited condition and slowly suffocates in the prison of his character. As far as defence is concerned, to contrast with the overwhelming feeling of emptiness and uselessness, everyone tends to defend strongly their 'mask' so as to preserve a veneer of respectability, credibility and existence (Pirandello, 2001). All in all we can find this aspect in the tale written by the Italian avant-garde artist, theatrical director (Tomassoni, Spilabotte, & Coccarelli, 2022) and writer Gian Carlo Riccardi *E fortunatamente nessuno se ne accorse* (1996) in which the protagonist Perricò Antonio plays the role of a prosecutor, scholar and researcher. He enters a state of 'hedonistic' fibrillation with the approach of Carnival that leads him to escape thoroughly from the 'character' forcefully imposed by life and to take on the personality that mainly reflects his desires as a means to meet his need. As far as this condition is concerned, it seems to us that it requires 'disguise', an element that the protagonist prefers for the magic of dual personality (recall Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and the emblematic sentence 'Man is not truly one but truly two') (Stevenson, 2013). This state of pleasure lasts for the entire carnival feast and only afterwards does the protagonist return plays again to the role of prosecutor. A condition of well-being that, although momentary, becomes liberating (Riccardi, 2008).

A corroboration of the link between mental disorders and the creative process can be found in artists such as Edvard Munch. The Norwegian painter, one of the most famous masterpieces in history, *The Scream*, suffered from anxiety and hallucinations (Langer, 2017). It is precisely his most famous work that we consider to represent the agony of modern man and especially of the artist himself.

It is worth looking at two of the most significant tales written by the Russian doctor Čechov, namely *Ward No. 6* (1892) and *The Black Monk* (1894). The origin of the tale *Ward No. 6* stems from a long journey made by Čechov in 1890 to the penal colony of Sachalin where, as a doctor, he took a census of the convicts and their health conditions. At the same time, he also witnessed the violence and torture to which they had to endure, hence showing disgust and disdain for it all, so that this sad experience echoes in the author's narrative (Čechov, 2019).

The central problem is the label of 'mad' for two individuals Ivan Dmitrič and Andrej Efymič (the patient and the psychiatrist, respectively), who are in reality 'different' as they are endowed with an anxiety for knowledge and self-awareness that locks them into the 'enchanted circle' of those marginalised by the social order (Fusco & Lorenzetti, 1986).

From our personal standpoint, in the story one can discover a social denunciation of the Russian healthcare system with regard to the so-called mentally ill. The two characters have the desire and the sole guilt to seek a different existence in which coherence, truth rather than hypocrisy can prevail. At this point it is worth mentioning that the fictional characters presented by writers within their novels often represent split parts of the author's personality, which unconsciously projects its contents on the narrating ego (Haruki, 2017). Thus, Čechov's short stories, such as in *Ward No. 6*, allow us to understand the author's implicit poetics, and we are inclined to believe that all this leads to acknowledge the complex psychological dynamics underlying the writer's creative activity (Treglia, 2020). There is no doubt in our minds that the doctor-writer Čechov described with logical coherence the days of Dmitrič's illness, who suffered from insomnia, persecution complex, irrational fears stemming from the unconscious, such as the fear of being arrested at any moment. He argued that those who had to deal with pain (such as doctors, judges...) may diminish their sensitivity gradually, to the point of becoming indifferent to the suffering of others.

Despite the fact that the doctor Efymič wished to rebel against the degradation to which the patients were subjected to, he then decides to endure everything stoically. However, the meeting of the sick Dmitrič with the psychiatrist Efymič will change the lives of both characters considerably. In spite of the fact that they played completely opposite roles, their acquaintance will highlight how they were so close and were both united by a desire for knowledge. This strong impulse will not be forgiven by the men and consequently the psychiatrist will serve it in the morgue or funeral parlour.

As we see it, we would also observe how social judgement can heavily influence and condition man, thus preventing him from being fully himself and considering all this as pure madness. Hence, a crucial aspect that inexorably constitutes an extremely difficult but indispensable research of the *gnōthi seautón* ('know thyself' enunciated by the Greek philosopher Socrates) emerges. Thus, the search for truth is regarded as an enterprise for insane men.

The one who is different, regarded as the black sheep, becomes the scapegoat, consequently he has to pay to society the prize for rejecting social conventions and hypocrisies. The dialogue that follows between the two characters in *Ward no. 6* encapsulates the philosophical discourse that agony leads man to knowledge.

Man can choose to live in a concretely peaceful manner, investing his energies on easily accessible elements of reality. It is possible to live while satisfying material needs and 'gratifying' ourselves with a practically productive life, with accompanied by an implicit renunciation of cognitive needs, which does not lead to a state of psychic discomfort. Several men make this choice, but we must take acknowledge that many others are not able to invest their libidinal energies in a simplistic manner and are 'motivated and condemned' by a desire for knowledge (as in Efymič and Dmitrič) which, lays the foundations for psychic distress while causing trauma (Funari, 1984).

There is no doubt in our minds that Dr Efymič, and a psychiatrist as well, gradually realises the risk he is running of becoming a sick person and anxiously seeks remedies in some way. It is precisely for this reason that the doctor will begin to take part in the ward no. 6 by overcoming and going beyond social conventions. Surpassing that limit imposed by society and the social judgement which not only does it prevent men from existing but from living, due to the fact that even an 'insane man' like Dmitrič, as long as he is endowed with a coherent logic, constitutes an excellent interlocutor in the face tetragonal world which is completely hostile to these cognitive instances. This confrontation between the patient and the doctor will lead the latter to prefer meditation to action. He fails in his role which, on the contrary, according to the dictates of the Super-Ego, should assume a function of concrete, effective assistance and not devote himself to merely abstract thoughts (Fusco, Tomassoni, & Treglia, 2018).

We can speculate that if Efymič had lived on a mountain or in a Buddhist monastery he would have retained a mental equilibrium, without falling into madness and without dying in the ward no. 6. In our consideration the characters represent a split of Čechov's personality that results in the prevalence of emotional energies. The protagonist Efymič follows a friend's advice and goes on a journey to Moscow, the mother city of Russia with its artistic beauties. We tend to believe this the journey can unconsciously be seen as his wish to close any kind of communicative contact (verbal, gestural) with the outside world and with those (the other doctors) who think he is crazy. The expedition often becomes a theme in literature: we can make reference to the physical and psychic journey that we find in the works of the Italian writer Cesare Pavese. It echoes very well Efymič's since it can be understood as a means of both material escape and escape into the past, up to reaching regression into childhood. (Fusco & Tomassoni, 2008).

Efymič's rejection of the men of the city who eat, drink, sleep and die, is reminiscent of the English writer James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), in which the concept of the paralysis of society and escape predominate. The latter is the consequence of immobility and is almost always doomed to failure (that is precisely what happens in Efymič's journey in order to 'distract himself') (Joyce, 2017). Additionally, there is a rejection of works of art, disdaining, a priori, any contact with elements that might become interlocutors. The rejection of reality and humanity is deduced by the doctor's wish to sleep, to enter that dream world that represents an escape from reality, and the protagonist's desire to return home sounds like a need to go back to the mother's womb. All this seems to recall the marines returning from the war in Iraq and their strong desire to place their heads on the mother's womb in order to defend themselves and seek protection from relevant anxieties and anxieties. Nevertheless, when the inability to feel affection and feelings becomes apparent, the non-receptivity of maternity and affectivity inevitably makes it impossible to embrace (Alonzi, 2017).

Once again, however, the importance of 'knowing thyself' emerges. Freud asserted that the ego is our home, and pain consists in being precariously placed between lucidity and delirium (Freud, 1972). The fragmentation of the ego occurs suddenly, and it induces fear of loss of control, panic, fear of death. This is also found in children

who have been abused, and in the deportees of Auschwitz as well where the ego seems to have broken into fragments permanently. That being the case, there is emotional emptiness in everyone (as doctor Efymič's inability to admire works of art).

We are of the opinion that the doctor's ego desperately tries to cling to simple activities such as book labels, up to even lose interest of their contents. It seems evident that in moments of severe trauma, the ego tends to avoid complex mental processes such as reading or concentration and attention on a given subject. What the man's most courtly forms of expression represent, such as fantasy, imagination that materialise in music, art, poetry, but also memories, seem to have no more than a typically accessory function and fail to have a long-term therapeutic effect. The doctor Efymič discovers first-hand that without any real intervention, the pain of such condition, can only be overcome with death. As far as the patient Dmitrič is concerned, we can state that we are dealing with a mentally ill person who suffers from persecution mania, so he constantly feels haunted, but throughout this psychological mental condition his critical-logical, as well as intuitive, abilities seem to enhance (Fusco, Tomassoni, & Treglia, 2018).

We find particularly interesting, however, the case of the doctor Efymič, the psychiatrist who ends up ill in his own hospital where he was consultant, who seems to suffer from a mental 'paresis abulica' due to the fact that he is able to see all of man's faults, but at the same time he does not have the courage to take concrete action to improve a Society that succeeds in having the better of the doctor. The similarities between the doctor and the sick person seem to be increasingly evident, they both criticise man and Society, but in the end they do not do anything applicative and decisive. Even though they show remarkable critical, logical and reflective abilities, not only does not their psychopathology flow into creativity but it will lead them to pure madness.

We find a dichotomy in Čechov: on the one hand, as a doctor he has a particular vocation for psychology and psychiatry as for example in the works *Ivanov* (1887) and *The Seagull* (1896) (Čechov, 1970). Whereas on the other hand, as a writer he knows how to give a clear figurative and detailed description of the psychiatric hospital. He presents it as a prison, just as a painter would do on a canvas (Efymič dressed as a doctor is also carefully analysed as he switches from the role of the doctor to that of a mentally ill person, or demented or insane, wearing first a normal suit and afterwards a prison uniform, and, ultimately how the clothing can influence the subject's personality, making his suffering even more acute and profound) (Čechov, 2004).

Moreover, we firmly believe that the description of the waxing moon that illuminates Efymič's lifeless face at the end of the narrative, could be an oil painting by an artist and could be considered an example of artistic creativity. In our judgement, Čechov manages to succeed in combining two visions of life that are often considered dissimilar. This aspect can be found in the protagonist of the next story A. V. Kovrin, a music lover, who is described as both a scientist and a 'insane person'.

From our standpoint, the story *Ward no. 6* seems to echo the theme present in the Bohemian writer Franz Kafka's short story *Before the Law* (1915). The story of the man who wishes to know himself and the laws that govern the world makes a useless and absurd effort which will exhaust his psychic potential, thus condemning him to marginalisation and mental destruction first and then to physical death. (Fusco & Tomassoni, 1982).

In the second short story *The Black Monk* by Anton Čechov, a case of mental pathology is presented that can be inscribed within a depressive psychosis. The inherent problem of the relationship between physical illness and mental potential is examined by the German writer Thomas Mann in his novel *The Magic Mountain* (1964). He

presents a hierarchy of values among several mentally ill people in which he considers that the most severely ill were regarded superior to the others in terms of their intellectual potential (Mann, 1965).

The hypothesis, therefore, would consist in the assumption that the psychic dynamic, as a result of illness and a mild feverish state, could stimulate in some authors their creative abilities. This may depend on to the increase of the blood temperature in the brain (the English writer Stevenson, who was affected by a mild form of tuberculosis, wrote his most relevant works when the febrile state was present during his feverish state) (Fusco & Tomassoni, 1982). We presume that the synthesis between the conscious and unconscious would bring the creative potential of artists to the highest level since, quite reliably, one could think that the idea of death determines a strong pressure on the ego by urging it to express deep mental contents as a defense mechanism against the idea of death itself (Fusco, Tomassoni, & Treglia, 2018). In our estimation, obvious examples of this kind can be found particularly in Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists who suffered from pathologies, health problems and agonies and led to the creation of very interesting and introspective creative works such as Claude Monet, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh, Eduard Munch, etc. (Fusco, Tomassoni, & Treglia, 2018).

We find it interesting to take into consideration the statement of the protagonist of the short story in *The Black Monk* A. V. Kovrin, a respected university professor and talented psychologist who claims that the normal man is flat and mediocre whereas the genius is often 'close to madness'. The expression 'the genius close to madness' refers to the possibility that the energies invested in real facts, pouring into the ego with excessive force, do not all reach a sublimation dimension and thus become self-aggressive for the consciousness to the point of a possible deconstruction in a psychotic sense (Fusco & Tomassoni, 1982). Kovrin was already aware of his own mental illness when he first appeared and his advice to spend the spring and the summer in the countryside, as a way to enhance relaxation, which must not, however, lead to a total disengagement as it would be counterproductive to neurosis in general, could be equivalent to the famous prescription of a trip as an element capable of improving the state of psychic discomfort and trauma. A potential example is the Empress Elisabeth of Bavaria, better known as Sissi and her travels around Europe (Castelli, 2014) or Phaedra from Euripides' *Hippolytus* (428 b. C.), who, suffered from psychic and physical pain due to an obsessive love induced by the goddess Venus towards Hippolytus, and as a result, she continually asks for a different accommodation. Hence, we are dealing with people who are in a constant search for a psychic peacefulness and a state of equilibrium that they desperately pursue but do not manage to find (Tomassoni, 2020).

Kovrin himself finds it right to change place by heading to the countryside, to the Pesockij's house, a massive and aristocratic residence with an ancient park behind it described by Čechov as 'gloomy and rigorous'. There is a careful and accurate description of the garden. Kovrin's psychic condition is not without its problems of insomnia associated with his psychopathology. The other two characters presented in the story are the owner of the house and garden, Egor Semionyč and his daughter Tanja. Within the narrative, a rather definite relationship is established between Kovrin and Egor and between Kovrin and Tanja. Egor believes that Kovrin could be a good husband for his daughter after all, as he is considered 'harmless' since he is interested in different things from her, besides he sees in him an unlikely rival in love for the garden. Tanja is fascinated by Kovrin and if at first she feels that she does not deserve to have such a knowledgeable and committed man by her side, then she feels the explicit desire to be able to invest her Eros in the scholar little by little. That being the case, Kovrin is affected by a hallucination, or rather hallucinosis, which differs from the former as the subject in the latter is

aware of the falsity of the hallucinosis while, contrariwise, he is unaware of the falsity of the hallucination. Furthermore, we regard that the constant appearance of a black monk, will become for the protagonist a real and effective balancing point for true survival. Additionally, it seems that not only does Kovrin's conscious dimension want to criticise, but perhaps also accept the appearance of the monk who comes from his unconscious and who is figuratively transposed into the character of the religious man. The protagonist will desperately try to make the rational ego accept the hallucinatory apparition of the monk as normal.

The mind desperately resorts to various mechanisms that we think could be recognised as an exasperation of creativity and logic, as a result the various unconscious figurations are transformed into true 'apparitions'. The disappearance of the phenomenon will inevitably bring about a mental imbalance that had been established, on the contrary, precisely with the pathological hallucinatory event, which, in our opinion, represents an obvious defense mechanism of the ego to maintain a psychic equilibrium. Kovrin speaks of the hallucinations of Buddha, Mohammed and at the same time of Shakespeare and states again to himself the monk's conviction that man is close to madness (Shakespeare, 1991).

As the story develops, Kovrin becomes increasingly tormented by a factor that by now becomes more and more obsessive, the memory of the black monk. What seems to us interesting, is the modality with which the phenomenon of hallucinosis takes place before Kovrin's eyes which happens in Egor's garden, at dusk and to the sound of a violin and the singing of some people. Probably all these elements become essential and crucial for the phenomenon to occur, almost in a condition of ritual.

The black monk has a real conversation with the mentally ill man, so that his alter ego himself claims to be a vision of him and to be in reality the product of his imagination, as if to underline the concept of split ego with partial acceptance of the fact. We firmly believe that all of this seems evocative of Fëdor Dostoevskij's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), in terms of Ivan Karamazov's devil, the mystery of the double and the borderline between reality and hallucination (Dostoevskij, 1992).

We reckon that the ego's equilibrium rests on the presence of an alter ego (the monk) similar to the ego's ideal that reassures him of his extraordinary possibilities and all this leads Kovrin himself to accept a mental condition that also implies the pathological element. The occurrence of the monk's appearance will occur with a certain frequency, about once, twice a week in the garden and will also move to the dining room in the presence of Egor and Tanja. This psychopathological condition of Kovrin will also have a negative influence on reality and on the people who will be by his side, such as Egor, but above all Tanja, who will try in every way to help her husband and to some degree she plays a maternal role in order to have him treated by a doctor. Although this treatment may lead to the disappearance of the monk and the resolution of the hallucinosis, it inevitably worsens the situation and proves to be unsuccessful as it makes Kovrin fall into a serious state of depression.

The fundamental thesis which underpins *The Black Monk* is that the repression of phenomena, symptomatic of mental disorders, can be the cause of their further aggravation and that a hallucinatory process, frankly pathological, known and accepted by the ego can become a paradoxical defence mechanism against psychosis itself (Fusco & Tomassoni, 1982).

On balance, we tend to believe that the term creative may refer to the possibility that psychic energies invested in real facts in an unsatisfactory manner may reveal themselves to the ego and become a self-aggressive energy to the point of a possible deconstruction of the ego itself with the probability of falling into a true

psychosis. Accordingly, we would like to stress at this point that Kovrin is a depressed man who oscillates from a hypomanic state to a depressive state, then this condition of loss of reference point will lead the protagonist to be highly critical of others, such as Egor and Tanja. Subsequently the ego will acquire an aggressive charge that he will vent or relieve particularly on his wife, who he is of the opinion that he has only loved her because she is a fragile creature (we can mention Hamlet's bitter reflection on his mother in the play *Hamlet* (1603) by the English writer William Shakespeare 'Fragility your name is woman') (Shakespeare, 1960).

Afterwards, Kovrin moves to the Crimea and will live with an older woman, Varvara Nicolaevna, as he needed a mother nevertheless, he would always retain a strong memory of Tanja as his wife and mother. At the end of the story, Professor Kovrin will realise that his hallucinosis had led him to destroy the relationship with his wife that could have given her an authentic and not imaginary serenity. At this point in time, the protagonist will clearly make a wish to jump into the water from the balcony of the hotel room where he was staying, and we believe that this desire could be linked to a strong death which leads back to the womb and maternal waters.

It would be worth asking at this point stage why the medical writer Čechov chose a monk as the co-protagonist of his tale as the image of the monk in the Middle Ages often assumed an antithetical symbolism of religion and magic. It can therefore be understood how this figure dressed in black with a long beard that is symbol of authority, became for Čechov a specific character to express cultural and psychological contents.

Čechov's universe, like the world of almost all world literature and like the real world, represents a world of losers, or better still a world of men who are nearly aware of their desire for 'revolt', and at the same time of the concrete impossibility of such a rebellion (Fusco & Lorenzetti, 1986). As a consequence, an exasperated emotionality and a strong desire for happiness is established, which is undermined by the awareness of the impossibility of its realisation, which we can define as the impossibility of the accomplishment of the creative act.

We can observe in the personages presented by Čechov in the stories examined, how the mentally ill characters, such as for example in Efymič and Dmitrič in *Ward No. 6* and in Kovrin in *The Black Monk*, they are unable to be creative and are incapable of exploiting their potential, their own abilities positively, and they escalate inevitably into pure madness.

The insane person can be considered an individual with mental problems, therefore, he is in the grip of irrationality, however, this is also a characteristic of creativity as the creative person attempts new and not always rational solutions. The major difference between these two situations is that, on the one hand, when irrationality produces scientific or artistic works we are in the presence of genius. On the other hand, when it produces destructive attitudes madness prevails. Having said that, it is still thought today that there is a subtle link between creativity, ingeniousness and psychic pathology. According to the Italian psychiatrist Silvano Arieti, the emergence of a creative person is due to the presence of different situations that depend on both the individual and the society in which the personality develops (Arieti, 1990). What the creative person has in common with the mentally ill is the pre-eminence of primary process mechanisms, particularly the paleological process, nonetheless, we must bear in mind that divergent thinking, as Arieti himself states, can lead even to psychosis if it is not supported by logical processes.

At this stage it is worth mentioning the historical figure who lived in the second half of the 19th century that we consider to be of fundamental importance in the field of creativity, King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886). The monarch was an unconventional character, a forerunner and completely detached from the role he played.

For the most part, or first and foremost, he will lead an isolated life far from institutional commitments, mainly driven by the desire to build residences and castles. Besides, Ludwig will also have an intense relationship with the German musician-composer Richard Wagner and will finance his expensive lifestyle and works by especially providing financial support for the achievement of the Bayreuth Festival which is inaugurated with one of the composer's masterpieces *The Ring of the Nibelung* (1857) (Montenz, 2010). Ludwig, after having dissipated a lot of money to build his castles (in particular Neuschwanstein Castle, Linderhof Castle and Herrenchiemsee Castle), and being completely detached about his role as statesman, will be declared 'insane' by the luminaries of the time, especially the psychoanalyst Bernhard von Gudden, who, in reality, had never performed a medical examination on Ludwig. At a later time, the king was interdicted and imprisoned in Berg Castle on Lake Starnberg, then on 13 June 1886, once released from prison he goes for a walk with his doctor from which he will not return and the same evening the lifeless bodies of the king and the doctor will be found. On that account, there are many hypotheses about the king's end ranging from suicide to a possible assassination (King, 1999).

The great Italian director Luchino Visconti produced a film entitled *Ludwig* (1973) dedicated to the Bavarian monarch, in which he gives a very careful and faithful interpretation of the historical character, and, at the same time, emphasises the fragilities, weaknesses and obsessions that are part of modern man (Ferrara, 1973).

An element that we consider crucial for Ludwig's highest creative expression is the Venusgrotte or Venus Grotto located in the park of Linderhof Castle. It was a completely artificial cave that the king wanted and built as the setting for Act I of Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* (1845), moreover it should be noted that the light effects were reproduced at the time by a power station that the monarch had installed there in 1878. Generally, the grotto was the place where the king had the operas of Wagner performed, his favourite composer, and he could attend as the only spectator (Oberdorfer, 1973), from our point of view, it seems that Ludwig spent a lot of time in the cave pond on a shell-shaped boat, immersed in his thoughts. It is in this dreamlike and cathartic dimension, immersed between reality and imagination, that the king, far away and distant from everything and everyone, is able to conceive his creativity to the utmost. He even manages to find inspiration for the designs of his castles and for his writings and poems as well which were often addressed to his cousin Elisabeth of Bavaria, better known as Sissi, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, for whom we believe the monarch felt a platonic love (Tomassoni & Spilabotte, 2022). In this 'dream theatre', the dreamer king Ludwig can stage his representations which belong to the imaginary, he can reinvent them, revisit them, revise them without falling victim to the constraints imposed by external reality. In view of this, we presume, rather than gather that he is in the best position to make the most of his freedom of invention (Treglia & Tomassoni, 2020). The atmosphere evoked by the various elements present in the grotto, i.e. Wagner's music, the colours of the lights, and the waves of the pond as well which are always artificially produced, allows him to maintain a psychic equilibrium that, although it keeps him away from his role and duty as monarch and statesman, at the same time, it gives Ludwig's artistic creativity the possibility to express itself to the utmost without flowing into the psychopathology of the characters described by Čechov in the two stories we that analysed.

All things considered, we can understand how Ludwig's creative genius was considered to be madness. Ludwig fantasised, dreamt and finally accomplished architectural works for their own sake, which did not have a utilitarian purpose and were not open to the public, as they were products of his mind and aimed exclusively at satisfying his needs. Unfortunately, his contemporaries failed to fully understand his genius, nevertheless the idea

that there was a correlation between ingeniousness and mental illness dates back to ancient times and has never been fully overcome (Davidson, 1974).

The theme of Ludwig's loneliness is present from the very beginning of his reign: when he was a child he longed to be locked alone in dark rooms, claiming to dream and imagine grandiose projects. The king had his castles built so that he could retire and isolate himself in his fantasy world, and ethereal where he could be himself and fully understand his personality immersed between dream and reality. According to the psychiatrist Arieti, contact between the ego and the unconscious in solitude increases cognitive powers (Arieti, 1990).

In view of this, we can take as an example one of the most important European existentialist filmmakers, Ingmar Bergman, who lived, conceived and shot on the island of Farò, a small island in the Baltic Sea, some of his best films, such as *How in a Mirror* (1961), *Person* (1966), *Shame* (1968), *Passion* (1969) and *Wedding Scenes* (1973), afterwards he died in solitude on this island and was buried underground (Garzia, 2010). Professor Antonio Fusco had been doing research for many years on Bergman's filmology publishing more than 70 articles in this field and his works have convinced us that Bergman lived his life tormented by the pendulum oscillation between agnosticism and the continuous search for proof of God's existence (Fusco & Tomassoni, 2009).

In actual fact, Ludwig was a ruler from a parallel world: he was understood by his people but not by the government presumably because of his negligence in running the country and squandering the money from the royal treasury (Mann, 2015).

Although the Bavarian monarch, proved to be able to materialise and accomplish great works of art and architecture through his irrationality and unconventionality, passing then from a condition of apparent madness to a creative one, he would also be judged and condemned like Efyimic by the public opinion and the government of the time and earned the label of 'madman'. This was a status from which he could never free himself except through death which took place at a later date and his disappearance remains shrouded in mystery to this day.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that unlike the characters depicted by Čechov who reach a self-destructive condition and death as an end, King Ludwig manages to overcome death. His constructions can be regarded as daughters of his fantastic mind, as a result, they continue to live on, as does together with the memory of their creator. According to what stated above, we firmly believe that artists, are indeed immortal through their daring creations and become creators of matter. The creative act allows the finite to be made infinite, and what represents the end (such as death) can, on the contrary, signify the eternity of the artist.

We therefore gather that Ludwig, the 'King of Fairytales', as defined by his cousin Sissi, had a sensitive spirit, and was more attracted to art, poetry, music, theatre, stage design, architecture, rather than to matters of state. All this then drove him towards the search for a parallel world which he tried to materialise on a creative level with the construction of the castles that remain the emblem of his personality and that continue to be admired and appreciated by visitors from all over the world. Ultimately it is noteworthy that the fact that in his time the monarch had made the Bavarian royal family almost bankrupt to build his castles, they have become tourist attractions and important sources of income for the state.

Conclusions

On the basis of the considerations and research we have conducted, the obvious conclusion to be drawn is that we can advance the hypothesis that certain thought processes which frequently appear in the mentally ill,

particularly in the schizophrenic person, can become accessible to the creative person. However, while the schizophrenic leads his life according to these unusual modes of thinking, the creative person uses them in her creative work, either in the original form in which they occur, or, more often after having modified them. This happens according to normal logical processes in what appears to be a 'magical synthesis' (Arieti, 1990), from which the new, the unexpected, the desirable emerges. Thus, paleological or primitive thinking plays an important function in the creative process.

We intend to point out that the creative process occurs subconsciously, through access to unconscious material (primary process) that only at a later stage is selected and adapted by applying logical thinking (secondary process). The result is that we can define creativity as 'magic' only if we accept that our minds and our abilities to access their pre-logical, analogical or unconscious dimensions are 'magic', and not trapped in the unconscious as it happens in the schizophrenic, or, likewise, if we do not forget the suggestions we find in the unconscious as occurs in a dreamer (Arieti, 1990). Hence, according to what stated by Arieti, we believe that divergent thinking, if not carefully coordinated with logical processes, can inevitably lead to psychosis.

In Čechov's characters we foresee a self-aggressive energy in the psychopathology that negatively influences the psyche of Efymič, Dmitrič and Kovrin's characters who are unable to be creative. Unfortunately, this condition leads them irremediably, absence of hallucinations, which constitute a crucial help in influencing a psychic equilibrium, towards a depressive condition and to a death that is first psychic and subsequently corporal. Contrariwise, we envisage in Ludwig an active and purposeful psychic energy that does not flow into pure madness, conversely, it is positively invested by the monarch through artistic expression and particularly in the planning of his castles.

To a great degree, the mentally ill person can be regarded as an individual who presents psychic problems and is therefore a victim of irrationality. Nonetheless, this is a peculiarity of creativity as well, since the creative person attempts new solutions that are not always rational. The main difference between the two conditions is that, on the one hand, when irrationality leads to the accomplishment of scientific or artistic works, we experience the presence of genius. On the other hand, when it generates destructive attitudes it leads to the manifestation of madness (Arieti, 1990).

As far as we are concerned, it becomes clear from the relationship between creativity and psychopathology which has not been fully resolved yet by scholars in all its implications, maintain that creativity has its basis in the subject and not in the illness since creative talent is a prerogative, an intrinsic characteristic of the individual. Psychopathology represents a painful and mostly unproductive experience that cannot fully explain artistic production (Treglia, 2021).

All in all, we are convinced that as stated by Treglia (Treglia, 2021), the ultimate meaning and character of the work is essentially in the achievement itself and not in the human conditions which preceded or determined it.

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