L. Pierce Clark: An Early Psychobiographer

Elizabeth Wirth Marvick (1925-2005)
Paul H. Elovitz—Ramapo College

An American neurologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst, Leon Dennis Pierce Clark (June 15, 1870-December 3, 1933) dared to go against established wisdom by insisting that the brain damaged could benefit from classic psychoanalytical principles. He was an early psychobiographer of Alexander the Great, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Napoleon Bonaparte, Abraham Lincoln, Michelangelo Buonarroti, the Pharaoh Akhenaten (also spelled Akhenaton), and others. Dr. Clark's main scholarly psychohistorical foci were on the impact of epilepsy and narcissism on geniuses and great men in history. He received favorable public notice for this work, especially on Abraham Lincoln, with positive comments by Carl Sandburg and other historians. William Allen White, the renowned newspaperman, suggested that similar studies "might be made of all our presidents" (*New York Times*, 1934, pp. 123; see the attached bibliography for full citations).

The psychiatrist applied his knowledge of early childhood development, epilepsy, narcissism (at first spelled as "narcism"), and self-defeatism to the lives of the famous historical individuals about whom he wrote. In "The Narcism of Alexander the Great," the doctor questioned the sanity of the great conqueror, who, after defeating the Persian Empire, went off to further conquests rather than consolidating his empire. He describes the narcissist as so loving the self that he may never develop enough to have attachment to the opposite sex—in exceptional cases leading to homosexuality. In describing the family triangle involving King Philip, his wife Olympias, and their son who is described as a "mother's

boy," Clark suggests that there may have been conjugal love with his mother Olympias who was furious at her husband for planning to take another royal wife, perhaps displacing her son as his heir. (Clark is wrong in referring to Philip's having only two rather than seven wives; Olympias was number four.) The assassination of Philip opened the way for Alexander's military genius. But as an extreme narcissist, he refused to accept any criticism, lived with oriental pomp and circumstance, had himself declared a god, and complained that he had no more worlds to conquer, prior to his death from a fever at age 33.

Clark's psychoanalytic studies of historical figures interested many in the lay public. Best known of these was his work on Abraham Lincoln, published in final form in the year of his death. An obituary headline in the *New York Times* (1933) declared that this book revealed that Lincoln's mother had had a "lifelong influence" on the statesman. In *Napoleon: Self-Destroyed*, the early psychobiographer traces the rise of the Corsican from early childhood to the death of his father when he was 15, emphasizing his genius, grandiosity, maternal identification, narcissism, sensitive nature, theatrical quality, and concluding with the conqueror 's quote, "After all, what a romance my life has been!" (p. 243). The neurologist's enjoyment in writing about Bonaparte is quite evident. His psychobiographical and psychohistorical studies were written for the layperson, in non-technical language. Although he recognized that idealization and the paucity of facts made it difficult to write on historical individuals, he excited his audience with the possibility of attaining a deeper understanding of famous individuals. However, by the standards of the present era there is not a great depth of analysis.

One of Clark's significant achievements was the creation in 1926 and editing of the *Archives of Psychoanalysis*, published by the Psychoanalytic Institute of Stamford Connecticut, with editorial offices in New York at Clark's ad-

dress. August Aichhorn, Felix Deutsch, Sandor Ferenczi, Anna and Sigmund Freud, Georg Groddeck, Otto Rank, Wilhelm Reich, and others were among those writing for this interesting, hardcover-bound journal of over 1,233 pages, including many illustrations. Amidst many other studies Freud published "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety"; his daughter, "The Technic of Child Analysis"; Groddeck, "The Book of the It"; and Wilhelm Reich, "The Function of the Orgasm." Clark's many contributions included "The Objective and Subjective Development of the Ego," "Studies of Some Aspects of the Art of the Renaissance," "A Psychological Study of Art vs. Science as Illustrated in Leonardo da Vinci," and "A Psychohistorical Study of Akhnaten, First Idealist and Originator of a Monotheistic Religion." After four impressive parts of volume one, in 1927 the editor discontinued the *Archives of Psychoanalysis,* explaining that it took "too much time and effort" from "the staff of collaborators at the Psychoanalytic Institute" and that it would be replaced by monographs "from time to time."

Leon Pierce Clark was born in rural Ingleside, New York State and educated at the Naples (New York) Academy. In 1892 he completed his medical degree at New York University and subsequently served at City Hospital on Blackwell's Island prior to a Manhattan State Hospital internship. Next he became a neuropathologist and Assistant Director at the Connecticut State Hospital in Middletown where he began his work on epilepsy. He became interested in psychological accompaniments of epilepsy, leading to the study of psychoanalysis on which he wrote his first paper in 1908. John Chynoweth Burnham writes of Clark having a type of "conversion experience" taking him in several years from "materialistic neurology clear into the Freudian camp" (*Psychoanalysis and American Medicine, 1894-1918*, 1967, p. 168). Dr. Clark's publications on aspects of epilepsy that he thought were not organic in origin drew on

early psychoanalytic writings on hysteria and seem to have paralleled the development of Freud's ideas on epileptoid symptoms. Late in his life he would visit Freud in Vienna on the way back from a trip to Egypt. (Although Ernest Jones wrote a little for the *Archives of Psychoanalysis*, he denigrated Clark in letters to Freud, as he had Sandor Ferenzci and Joan Reviere.)

Dr. Clark was a lively conversationalist and an active, restless individual who was dauntless in his therapeutic ambitions. He sought to push back the limits on what types of disorders were considered amenable to psychoanalytic treatment, and even as his reputation as a neurologist and authority on epilepsy grew, he published papers on the potential of psychoanalysis for helping those suffering from a wide range of psychoses and neurological impairments—he was a pioneer in the psychoanalytic treatment of those with brain damage resulting in mental retardation (amentia). While others saw the intellectually disabled (mentally handicapped) as too nonverbal—"too stupid"—for talking cures, Clark challenged this approach in his work. "Clarkian" principles have been applied at the Tavistock Clinic and elsewhere. He drew much of his clinical materials from patients at the Psychoanalytic Sanitcrium in Rye, New York, the first facility of its kind in North America. Clark had organized and directed it himself (Anonymous, 1934, p. 121).

As an energetic professional, Clark served as president of various organizations: the New York Neurological Society (1911-12), New York Psychiatric Society (1916), the National Association for the Study of Epilepsy (1919), and the American Psychopathological Association (1923). He served as a trustee of Letchworth Village for Mental Defectives (according to the usage of the time, some of his articles referred to the "feeble minded" and "mental defectives"). In the winter he held informal seminars open to "friends of psychoanalysis"—laymen and physicians. As reflected in his

extensive list of publications, his interests extended from the mentally challenged to suicides.

Epilepsy was the subject this prolific author wrote on quite often, however, as reflected in his extensive list of publications, his interests included dementia, depression, early childhood development, homosexuality, the need for psychological clinics in schools, psychopathetic children, suicide, sycophancy, and much, much more. Regrettably, his work on psychohistory is barely known about by today's psychohistorians.

Leon Clark died suddenly at age 63 from a coronary thrombosis. Not feeling well, he lay down for an afternoon nap from which he never awakened (Anonymous, 1934, p. 121). His body was cremated and the ashes spread at his summer home in New York State on the side of a hill about which he had written the poem, "Happy Hillside" (Anonymous, 1934, pp. 123-24). As with scholars, beyond his family Clark is remembered for his contributions to knowledge.

Elizabeth Wirth Marvick, PhD *(1925-2005), taught political science, political psychology, and psychobiography at CCNY, the University of Bordeaux, the American University in Paris, Cal Tech, the Claremont Graduate School, and UCLA (1960-1990). She was the recipient of American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) grants and a Fulbright Senior Lectureship in France, and served on many professional boards including the editorial boards of* The Psychohistory Review *and* Political Psychology*. Dr. Marvick was the author of the psychobiographies,* The Young Richelieu: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Leadership *(1983) and* Louis XIII: The Making of a King *(1986). Details of her life may be found in a June 2002 interview and a March 2006 memorial in this journal. At the time of her death she was finishing the book,* The Founding Virginians*, on the five men who did*

so much to shape American history. ***Paul H. Elovitz, PhD****, editor of this journal, found Professor Marvick shared his longstanding interest in the early works of Pierce Clark and Preserved Smith and started writing articles on them on the basis of unpublished memorial notices of 253 and 360 words that Marvick had sent to him. Professor Elovitz trained in psychoanalysis and has taught history, psychohistory, and interdisciplinary studies at Temple, Rutgers, and Fairleigh Dickinson universities, as well as at Ramapo College where he is a founding faculty member. He may be contacted at pelovitz@aol.com.*

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*[**Editor's Note:** While generally discouraging them,* Clio's Psyche *occasionally publishes bibliographies when it is apparent that the information is not otherwise available to the reader. For this reason in this issue bibliographies are provided for the articles on Clark and Smith. We wish to express our thanks to Brett Kahr of London, Bob Lentz of Calgary, Nellie Thompson of the Brill Library in New York, Ken Fuchsman of the University of Connecticut, and the interlibrary loan staff of Ramapo College for invaluable assistance with this article.]*

The Psychohistorical Contributions and Lives of Henry Lawton and J. Lee Shneidman

Paul H. Elovitz—Ramapo College

Although their backgrounds and educations are quite different, Henry W. Lawton (1941-) and Jerome Lee Shneidman (1929-2008) share many characteristics and have each made their mark in the application of psychology to history and society. These men are two accomplished and productive scholars who have made significant contributions to the field of psychohistory and scholarship in general.

Both scholars were born as the eldest of two sons into lower-middle-class, economically struggling families. Lee Shneidman was born on June 20, 1929 in New York City to a family of Jewish immigrants from Tsarist Russia, and Henry Lawton arrived on July 1, 1941 in Trenton, New Jersey to a Protestant family whose ancestors were well established in this country. The New Yorker's family remained intact throughout his life, which was plagued by the cancer that struck him as a very young boy and dominated his childhood. In his bed in hospital charity wards, he discovered geogra-