

special
articles

MARTIN BRISCOE AND MALCOLM INGRAM

WebGuide

Psychobiography

The main site about psychobiography in general is Jazwinski's (www.condor.stcloud.msus.edu/~jaz/personality/psychobiography.freud.html), which contains lecture notes and illustrates general principles with Freud's paper on Leonardo, perhaps the first example of psychobiography. Finding more requires a search for specific names. If you have a writer or a poet or a musician or a politician in mind you will find something relevant, especially if they have American connections or are academically fashionable. Here are samples of what is available.

Glenn Gould (www.gould.nlc-bnc.ca/docs/epsycho.htm). A marvellous site, and a model of what can be achieved online, containing comprehensive information about the eccentric Canadian pianist, especially a long essay on the 'Psychobiography of a Virtuoso'.



Glenn Gould

James Boswell (www.peele.sas.nl/lib/boswell.html), Samuel Johnson's biographer, famous diarist, and possible manic-depressive, was a heavy drinker. This page is an attempt to put 'drunkenness in a biographical context'.

Virginia Woolf (www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/malcolmi/), the novelist and diarist, suffered from manic-depressive psychosis. This site offers a psychobiography, including details of her family history, her psychiatrists and contemporary views of affective illness.

Nijinsky (www.nybooks.com/nyrev/WWWarchdisplay.cgi?19990114053F) the ballet dancer, developed schizophrenia. This site contains details of his life and career. Like many similar sites, not specifically psychobiographical, it points the reader to the relevant literature in print.

Thomas Carlyle (www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/malcolmi/), the Scottish historian and 'sage of Chelsea' was famously hypochondriacal, and had problems in his marriage with Jane Welsh Carlyle. This is a new psychiatric assessment of his health and personality.

The Case of Alfred Hitchcock (peelee.sas.nl/lib/hitch.html), is a detailed account of the film director's "personality, pathology and the act of creation".

General Advice

There are more specific search engines which can narrow the field. For literature, the Internet Public Library (www.ipl.org/) is immensely useful. For various historical periods there are search engines like the Victorian Web (www.indiana.edu/~victoria/). Medline (www.search.medscape.com/) searched by name – will often yield relevant abstracts. There are sites for composers and artists which can be found by search on general engines.

This page can be viewed at: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/public/webguide/psychobio/pbrcpsych3.htm

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