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literary societies in the United States, each devoted to a single author. Their members indulge in "pedantic, miserlike heaping up of factual knowledge," Barzun snorts, and "inevitably publish a newsletter."

The fact is, he argues, that "culture and scholarship are natural enemies." Great works of art "are great by virtue of being syntheses of the world," says Barzun. To dissect them "scientifically," trying to pry loose their component parts, is to misunderstand them. Works of art are meant to be regarded whole and to nurture mind and spirit.

Barzun perceives a mood of futility in the academic "kingdom of analysis, criticalness, and theory." Sooner or later, he believes, the "forces of fatigue and boredom" will bring scholars' dominion over culture to an end.

Overdosing On Freud

"Freud and Literary Biography" by Richard Ellmann, in *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1984), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Literary biographers once saw it as their business to create dignified portraits of eminent people. Then along came Sigmund Freud. Ever since, the hidden motives and "bedroom quirks" of famous authors have come under closer and closer scrutiny, notes Ellmann, Oxford professor and biographer of James Joyce.

Pre-Freudian biography had its pitfalls. The writers relied heavily on letters (akin to "saints' relics"), memoirs, and other written material; "unofficial" sources and embarrassing information frequently got short shrift. During the early 1880s, James A. Froude published four detailed volumes on English essayist Thomas Carlyle without even mentioning the fact, known to Froude, that Carlyle was impotent. Freud's early 20th-century psychoanalytic theories changed all that but also introduced new perils into the writing of lives.

Freud's theory of a secret, unconscious inner world provided new tools for understanding the complexities of personality. By suggesting that literature be read as an elaborate cover-up of writers' simmering neuroses, it also undercut their impeccable image.

A severe critic of traditional biography, Freud called upon his contemporaries to penetrate "the most fascinating secrets of human nature." These secrets often turned out to be sexual ones, and before long, authors were delving into all manner of other intimate mysteries. "The latest biographies of Fitzgerald and Auden," writes Ellmann, "not only discuss their mating habits but their genital sizes." Armed with Freudian theories about behavior, today's biographers often explain away their subjects' virtues as "vices in disguise."

The hazard is that some try to transform a subject's life, willy-nilly, into a Freudian case history. French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre succumbed to this temptation when he took as the premise of his biography of novelist Gustave Flaubert the (demonstrably untrue) notion that Flaubert was a "slow" student; Sartre simply imagined that the young Flaubert had been called "the idiot of the family," a phrase that Sartre

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used as the title of his book. "With certain presuppositions about family life, largely based on Freud, Sartre can prove his case over and over again," Ellmann writes. "The flimsier the documentation, the more he has to say."

Freud himself was a bit careless about the facts in his biographical speculations about such writers as Goethe and Dostoyevsky. And when it came to his own authorized biographer, he chose a psychiatrist (Ernest Jones) who avoided Freudian analysis of Freud and composed an old-fashioned paean to his subject. In so doing, Ellmann writes, he seemed to acknowledge that "the comprehension of genius was beyond man's powers."

Degas's Dancers

"Degas and the Dance" by Dale Harris, in *Ballet News* (Nov. 1984), 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.

The "ballet boom" of recent years has made Edgar Degas's (1834–1917) paintings of ballerinas as familiar as the Mona Lisa and Whistler's Mother. But neither ballet nor the art of Degas was always viewed so favorably, recalls Harris, who teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

In Degas's late-19th-century Paris, ballerinas stood barely a cut above dance-hall girls in the social pecking order. Ballet itself was considered little more than a "trivial entertainment" with overtones of



Edgar Degas's Dancer Adjusting Her Shoe (1885).