



Henry Moore. TWO FORMS, carving in Iron Stone, 1934.

THE ARTS TO-DAY

Edited, with an Introduction, by
GEOFFREY GRIGSON

PSYCHOLOGY AND ART

W. H. Auden

POETRY

Louis MacNeice

PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

Geoffrey Grigson

FICTION

Arthur Calder-Marshall

MUSIC

Edward Crankshaw

THE THEATRE

Humphrey Jennings

THE CINEMA

John Grierson

ARCHITECTURE

John Summerson

LONDON

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD

1935

PSYCHOLOGY AND ART TO-DAY

BY W. H. AUDEN

Neither in my youth nor later was I able to detect in myself any particular fondness for the position or work of a doctor. I was, rather, spurred on by a sort of itch for knowledge which concerned human relationships far more than the data of natural science.—*Freud*.

Mutual forgiveness of each vice
Such are the gates of paradise.—*Blake*.

TO trace, in the manner of the textual critic, the influence of Freud upon modern art, as one might trace the influence of Plutarch upon Shakespeare, would not only demand an erudition which few, if any, possess, but would be of very doubtful utility. Certain writers, notably Thomas Mann and D. H. Lawrence, have actually written about Freud, certain critics, Robert Graves in *Poetic Unreason* and Herbert Read in *Form in Modern Poetry*, for example, have made use of Freudian terminology, surrealism has adopted a technique resembling the procedure in the analyst's consulting-room;¹ but the importance of Freud in art is greater

¹But not the first. The Elizabethans used madness, not as a subject for clinical description but as opportunity for a particular kind of associational writing (e.g., *Lear* or *The Duchess of Malfi*). Something of the kind occurs even earlier in the nonsense passages in the mummer's play.

than his language, technique or the truth of theoretical details. He is the most typical but not the only representative of a certain attitude to life and living relationships, and to define that attitude and its importance to creative art must be the purpose of this essay.

The Artist in History

Of the earliest artists, the palæolithic rock-drawers, we can of course know nothing for certain, but it is generally agreed that their aim was a practical one, to gain power over objects by representing them; and it has been suggested that they were probably bachelors, i.e., those who, isolated from the social group, had leisure to objectify the phantasies of their group, and were tolerated for their power to do so. Be that as it may, the popular idea of the artist as socially ill adapted has been a constant one, and not unjustified. Homer may have been blind, Milton certainly was, Beethoven deaf, Villon a crook, Dante very difficult, Pope deformed, Swift impotent, Proust asthmatic, Van Gogh mental, and so on. Yet parallel with this has gone a belief in their social value. From the chiefs who kept a bard, down to the Shell-Mex exhibition, patronage, however indiscriminating, has never been wanting as a sign that art provides society with something for which it is worth paying. On both these beliefs, in the artist as neurotic, and in the social value of Art, psychology has thrown a good deal of light.

The Artist as Neurotic

There is a famous passage in Freud's introductory lectures which has infuriated artists, not altogether unjustly:

"Before you leave to-day I should like to direct your attention for a moment to a side of phantasy-life of very general interest. There is, in fact, a path from phantasy back again to reality, and that is—art. The artist has also an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become neurotic. He is one who is urged on by instinctive needs which are too clamorous; he longs to attain to honour, power, riches, fame, and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these gratifications. So, like any other with an unsatisfied longing, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and all his Libido, too, on to the creation of his wishes in life. There must be many factors in combination to prevent this becoming the whole outcome of his development; it is well known how often artists in particular suffer from partial inhibition of their capacities through neurosis. Probably their constitution is endowed with a powerful capacity for sublimation and with a certain flexibility in the repressions determining the conflict. But the way back to reality is found by the artist thus: He is not the only one who has a life of phantasy; the intermediate world of phantasy is sanctioned by general human consent, and every hungry soul looks to it for comfort and consolation. But to those who are not artists the

gratification that can be drawn from the springs of phantasy is very limited; their inexorable repressions prevent the enjoyment of all but the meagre day-dreams which can become conscious. A true artist has more at his disposal. First of all he understands how to elaborate his day-dreams, so that they lose that personal note which grates upon strange ears and become enjoyable to others; he knows too how to modify them sufficiently so that their origin in prohibited sources is not easily detected. Further, he possesses the mysterious ability to mould his particular material until it expresses the idea of his phantasy faithfully; and then he knows how to attach to this reflection of his phantasy-life so strong a stream of pleasure that, for a time at least, the repressions are out-balanced and dispelled by it. When he can do all this, he opens out to others the way back to the comfort and consolation of their own unconscious sources of pleasure, and so reaps their gratitude and admiration; then he has won—through his phantasy—what before he could only win in phantasy: honour, power, and the love of women.”

Misleading though this may be, it draws attention to two facts, firstly that no artist, however “pure,” is disinterested: he expects certain rewards for his activity, however much his opinion of their nature may change as he develops; and he starts from the same point as the neurotic and the day-dreamer, from emotional frustration in early childhood.

The artist like every other kind of “highbrow” is self-conscious, i.e., he is all of the time what everyone

is some of the time, a man who is active rather than passive to his experience. A man struggling for life in the water, a schoolboy evading an imposition, or a cook getting her mistress out of the house is in the widest sense a highbrow. We only think when we are prevented from feeling or acting as we should like. Perfect satisfaction would be complete unconsciousness. Most people, however, fit into society too neatly for the stimulus to arise except in a crisis such as falling in love or losing their money.¹ The possible family situations which may produce the artist or intellectual are of course innumerable, but those in which one of the parents, usually the mother, seeks a conscious spiritual, in a sense, adult relationship with the child, are probably the commonest, i.e.,

- (1) When the parents are not physically in love with each other. There are several varieties of this: the complete fiasco; the brother sister relationship on a basis of common mental interests; the invalid nurse relationship when one parent is a child to be maternally cared for; and the unpassionate relations of old parents.
- (2) The only child. This alone is most likely to produce early life confidence which on meeting disappointment, {turns like the unwanted child, to illness and anti-social behaviour to secure attention.
- (3) The youngest child. Not only are the parents old

¹E.g., the sale of popular text-books on economics since 1929.

but the whole family field is one of mental stimulation.¹

Early mental stimulation can interfere with physical development and intensify the conflict. It is a true intuition that makes the caricaturist provide the high-brow with a pair of spectacles. Myopia, deafness, delayed puberty, asthma—breathing is the first independent act of the child—are some of the attempts of the mentally awakened child to resist the demands of life.

To a situation of danger and difficulty there are five solutions:

- (1) To sham dead: The idiot.
- (2) To retire into a life of phantasy: The schyzophrene.
- (3) To panic, i.e., to wreak one's grudge upon society: The criminal.
- (4) To excite pity, to become ill: The invalid.
- (5) To understand the mechanism of the trap: The scientist and the artist.

Art and Phantasy

In the passage of Freud quoted above, no distinction was drawn between art and phantasy, between—as Mr. Roger Fry once pointed out—*Madame Bovary* and a *Daily Mirror* serial about earls and housemaids.

¹The success of the youngest son in folk tales is instructive. He is generally his mother's favourite as physically weaker and less assertive than his brothers. If he is often called stupid, his stupidity is physical. He is clumsy and lazy rather than dull. (Clumsiness being due to the interference of fancies with sense data.) He succeeds partly out of good nature and partly because confronted with a problem he overcomes it by understanding rather than with force.

The distinction is one which may perhaps be best illustrated by the difference between two kinds of dream. "A child has in the afternoon passed the window of a sweetshop, and would have liked to buy some chocolate it saw there, but its parents have refused the gift—so the child dreams of chocolate"—here is a simple wish fulfilment dream of the *Daily Mirror* kind, and all art, as the juvenile work of artists, starts from this level. But it does not remain there. For the following dream and its analysis I am indebted to Dr. Maurice Nicoll's *Dream Psychology*:

A young man who had begun to take morphia, but was not an addict, had the following dream:

"I was hanging by a rope a short way down a precipice. Above me on the top of the cliff was a small boy who held the rope. I was not alarmed because I knew I had only to tell the boy to pull and I would get to the top safely. The patient could give no associations."

The dream shows that the morphinist has gone a certain way from the top of the cliff—the position of normal safety—down the side of the precipice, but he is still in contact with that which remains on the top. That which remains on the top is now relatively small, but is not inanimate like a fort, but alive: it is a force operating from the level of normal safety. This force is holding the dreamer back from the gulf, but that is all. It is for the dreamer himself to say the word if he wants to be pulled up (i.e., the morphinist is *deliberately* a morphinist).

When the common phrase is used that a man's will is weakening as he goes along some path of self-indulgence, it implies that something is strengthening. What is strengthening is the attractive power of vice. But in the dream, the attractive power of morphia is represented by the force of gravitation, and the force of gravitation is constant.

But there are certain variable elements in the dream. The position of the figure over the cliff can vary and with it the length of the rope. The size of the figure at the top of the cliff might also vary without in any way violating the spirit of the dream. If then, we examine the length of the rope and the size of the figure on the cliff top in the light of relatively variable factors, the explanation of the *smallness* of the figure on the cliff top may be found to lie in the length of the rope, as if the rope drew itself out of the figure, and so caused it to shrink.

Now the figure at the top of the cliff is on firm ground and may there symbolise the forces of some habit and custom that exist in the morphinist and from which he has departed over the edge of the cliff, but which still hold him back from disaster although they are now shrunken. The attractive power of the morphia is not increasing, but *the interest the morphinist takes in morphia* is increasing.

A picture of the balance of interest in the morphinist is thus given, and the dream shows that the part of interest situated in the cliff top is now being drawn increasingly over the precipice.

In this dream, we have something which resembles art much more closely. Not only has the censor transformed the latent content of the dream into symbols but the dream itself is no longer a simple wish fulfilment, it has become constructive, and, if you like, moral. "A picture of the balance of interest"—that is a good description of a work of art. To use a phrase of Blake's "It's like a lawyer serving a writ."

Craftsmanship

There have always been two views of the poetic process, as an inspiration and as a craft, of the poet as the Possessed and as the Maker, e.g.,

"All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed."—*Socrates*.

"That talk of inspiration is sheer nonsense: there is no such thing; it is a matter of craftsmanship."—*William Morris*

And corresponding to this, two theories of imagination:

"Natural objects always weaken, deaden, and obliterate imagination in me."—*Blake*.

"Time and education beget experience: experience begets memory; memory begets judgment and fancy. . . . Imagination is nothing else but sense decaying or weakened by the absence of the object."—*Hobbes*.

The public, fond of marvels and envious of success without trouble, has favoured the first (see any film of

artists at work); but the poets themselves, painfully aware of the labour involved, on the whole have inclined towards the second. Psycho-analysis, naturally enough, first turned its attention to those works where the workings of the unconscious were easiest to follow. Romantic literature like *Peer Gynt*, "queer" plays like *Hamlet*, or fairy tales like *Alice in Wonderland*. I should doubt if Pope's name occurs in any text-book. The poet is inclined to retort that a great deal of literature is not of this kind, that even in a short lyric, let alone a sustained work, the material immediately "given" to consciousness, the automatic element is very small, that, in his own experience, what he is most aware of are technical problems, the management of consonants and vowels, the counterpointing of scenes, or how to get the husband off the stage before the lover's arrival, and that psychology concentrating on the symbols, ignores words; in his treatment of symbols and facts he fails to explain why of two words dealing with the same unconscious material, one is æsthetically good and the other bad; indeed that few psycho-analysts in their published work show any signs of knowing that æsthetic standards exist.

Psycho-analysis, he would agree, has increased the artist's interest in dreams, mnemonic fragments, child-art and graphiti, etc., but that the interest is a *conscious* one. Even the most surrealist writing of Mr. James Joyce's latest prose shows every sign of being non-automatic or extremely carefully worked over.

The Conscious Element

Creation, like psycho-analysis, is a process of re-living in a new situation. There are three chief elements:

- (1) The artist himself, a certain person at a certain time with his own limited conflicts, phantasies and interests.
- (2) The data from the outer world which his senses bring him, and which, under the influence of his instincts, he selects, stores, enlarges upon, and by which he sets value and significance.
- (3) The artistic medium, the new situation, which because it is not a personal, but a racial property (and psychological research into the universality of certain symbols confirms this), makes communication possible, and art more than an autobiographical record. Just as modern physics teaches that every physical object is the centre of a field of force which radiating outwards occupies all space and time, so psychology states that every word through fainter and fainter associations is ultimately a sign of the universe. The associations are always greater than those of an individual. A medium complicates and distorts the creative impulse behind it. It is, in fact largely the medium, and thorough familiarity with the medium, with its unexpected results, that enable the artist to develop from elementary uncontrolled phantasy, to deliberate phantasy directed towards understanding.

What would be a Freudian literature

Freudianism cannot be considered apart from other features of the contemporary environment, apart from modern physics with its conception of transferable energy, modern technics, and modern politics. The chart here given makes no attempt to be complete, or accurate; it ignores the perpetual overlap of one historical period with another, and highly important transition periods, like the Renaissance. It is only meant to be suggestive, dividing the Christian era into three periods, the first ending with the fifteenth century, the second with the nineteenth, and the third just beginning; including what would seem the typical characteristics of such periods.

Misconceptions

Freud belongs to the third of these phases, which, in the sphere of psychology may be said to have begun with Nietzsche (though the whole of Freud's teaching may be found in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). Such psychology is historically derived from the Romantic reaction, in particular from Rousseau, and this connection has obscured in the minds of the general public, and others, its essential nature. To the man in the street, "Freudian" literature would embody the following beliefs:

- (1) Sexual pleasure is the only real satisfaction. All other activities are an inadequate and remote substitute.

- (2) All reasoning is rationalisation.
- (3) All men are equal before instincts. It is my parent's fault in the way they brought me up if I am not a Napoleon or a Shakespeare.
- (4) The good life is to do as you like.
- (5) The cure for all ills is (a) indiscriminate sexual intercourse; (b) autobiography.

The Implications of Freud

I do not intend to take writers one by one and examine the influence of Freud upon them. I wish merely to show what the essence of Freud's teaching is, that the reader may judge for himself. I shall enumerate the chief points as briefly as possible:

- (1) The driving force in all forms of life is instinctive; a libido which of itself is undifferentiated and unmoral, the "seed of every virtue and of every act which deserves punishment."
- (2) Its first forms of creative activity are in the ordinary sense of the word physical. It binds cells together and separates them. The first bond observable between individuals is a sexual bond.
- (3) With the growth in importance of the central nervous system with central rather than peripheral control, the number of modes of satisfaction to which the libido can adapt itself become universally increased.
- (4) Man differs from the rest of the organic world in that his development is unfinished.

THE ARTS TO-DAY

	<i>1st Period.</i>	<i>2nd Period.</i>	<i>3rd Period.</i>
First Cause:	God immanent and transcendent.	Official: God transcendent. The universal mechanic. Opposition: God immanent. Pantheism. Romantic.	Energy appearing in many measurable forms, fundamental nature unknown.
World View:	The visible world as symbol of the eternal.	Official: The material world as a mechanism. Opposition: The spiritual world as a private concern.	The interdependence of observed and observer.
The End of Life:	The City of God.	Official: Power over material. Opposition: Personal salvation.	The good life on earth.
Means of Realisation:	Faith and work. The rule of the Church.	Official: Works without moral value. Opposition: Faith.	Self-understanding.
Personal Driving Forces:	Love of God. Submission of private will to will of God.	Official: Conscious will. Rationalised. Mechanised. Opposition: Emotion irrational.	The unconscious directed by reason.
The Sign of Success:	The mystical union.	Wealth and power.	Joy.

PSYCHOLOGY AND ART

	<i>1st Period.</i>	<i>2nd Period.</i>	<i>3rd Period.</i>
The worst sinner:	The heretic.	The idle poor (Opposition view — the respectable bourgeois).	The deliberate irrationalist.
Scientific method:	Reasoning without experiment.	Experiment and reason: the experimenter considered impartial. Pure truth. Specialisation.	Experiment directed by conscious human needs.
Sources of power:	Animal, Wind, Water.	Water. Steam.	Electricity.
Technical materials:	Wood, Stone.	Iron. Steel.	Light alloys.
Way of living:	Agricultural and trading. Small towns. Balance of town and country.	Valley towns. Industrialism. Balance of town and country upset.	Dispersed units connected by electrical wires. Restored balance of town and country.
Economic system:	Regional units. Production for use. Usury discouraged.	Laissez-faire Capitalism. Scramble for markets.	Planned socialism.
Political system:	Feudal hierarchy.	National democracy. Power in hands of capitalists.	International Democracy. Government by an Order.

- (5) The introduction of self-consciousness was a complete break in development, and all that we recognise as evil or sin is its consequence. Freud differs both from Rousseau who denied the Fall, attributing evil to purely local conditions ("Rousseau thought all men good by nature. He found them evil and made no friend"), and also from the theological doctrine which makes the Fall the result of a deliberate choice, man being therefore morally responsible.
- (6) The result of this Fall was a divided consciousness in place of the single animal consciousness, consisting of at least three parts: a conscious mind governed by ideas and ideals, the impersonal unconscious from which all its power of the living creature is derived but to which it was largely denied access; and a personal unconscious, all that morality or society demanded should be forgotten and unexpressed.¹
- (7) The nineteenth century doctrine of evolutionary progress, of man working out the beast and letting the ape and tiger die, is largely false. Man's phylogenetic ancestors were meek and sociable, and cruelty, violence, war, all the so-called primitive instincts, do not appear until civilisation has reached a high level. A golden age comparatively speaking (and anthropological research tends to confirm this), is an historical fact.

¹The difference between the two unconscious minds is expressed symbolically in dreams, e.g., motor-cars and manufactured things express the personal unconscious, horses, etc., the impersonal.

- (8) What we call evil was once good, but has been outgrown, and refused development by the conscious mind with its moral ideas. This is the point in Freud which D. H. Lawrence seized and to which he devoted his life:

"Man is immoral because he has got a mind
And can't get used to the fact."

The danger of Lawrence's writing is the ease with which his teaching about the unconscious, by which he means the impersonal unconscious, may be read as meaning, "let your personal unconscious have its fling," i.e., the *acte gratuite* of André Gide. In personal relations this itself may have a liberating effect for the individual. If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise. But folly is folly all the same and a piece of advice like "Anger is just. Justice is never just," which in private life is a plea for emotional honesty, is rotten political advice, where it means "beat up those who disagree with you." Also Lawrence's concentration on the fact that if you want to know what a man is, you must look at his sexual life, is apt to lead many to believe that pursuit of a sexual goal is the only necessary activity.

- (9) Not only what we recognise as sin or crime, but all illness, is purposive. It is an attempt at cure.
- (10) All change, either progressive or regressive is caused by frustration or tension. Had sexual satis-

faction been completely adequate human development could never have occurred. Illness and intellectual activity are both reactions to the same thing, but not of equal value.

- (11) The nature of our moral ideas depends on the nature of our relations with our parents.
- (12) At the root of all disease and sin is a sense of guilt.
- (13) Cure consists in taking away the guilt feeling, in the forgiveness of sins, by confession, the re-living of the experience, and absolution, the understanding its significance.
- (14) The task of psychology, or art for that matter, is not to tell people how to behave, but by drawing their attention to what the impersonal unconscious is trying to tell them, and by increasing their knowledge of good and evil, to render them better able to choose, to become increasingly morally responsible for their destiny.
- (15) For this reason psychology is opposed to all generalisations; force people to hold a generalisation and there will come a time when a situation will arise to which it does not apply. Either they will force the generalisation, the situation, the repression, when it will haunt them, or they will embrace its opposite. The value of advice depends entirely upon the context. You cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them parables; and that is what art really is, particular stories of particular people and experiences, from which each accord-

ing to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions.

- (16) Both Marx and Freud start from the failures of civilisation, one from the poor, one from the ill. Both see human behaviour determined, not consciously, but by instinctive needs, hunger and love. Both desire a world where rational choice and self-determination are possible. The difference between them is the inevitable difference between the man who studies crowds in the street, and the man who sees the patient, or at most the family, in the consulting-room. Marx sees the direction of the relations between outer and inner world from without inwards, Freud vice versa. Both are therefore suspicious of each other. The socialist accuses the psychologist of caving in to the status quo, trying to adapt the neurotic to the system, thus depriving him of a potential revolutionary: the psychologist retorts that the socialist is trying to lift himself by his own boot tags, that he fails to understand himself, or the fact that the lust for money is only one form of the lust for power; and so that after he has won his power by revolution he will recreate the same conditions. Both are right. As long as civilisation remains as it is, the number of patients the psychologist can cure are very few, and as soon as socialism attains power, it must learn to direct its own interior energy and will need the psychologist.

Conclusion

Freud has had certain obvious technical influences on literature, particularly in its treatment of space and time, and the use of words in associational rather than logical sequence. He has directed the attention of the writer to material such as dreams and nervous tics hitherto disregarded; to relations as hitherto unconsidered as the relations between people playing tennis; he has revised hero-worship.

He has been misappropriated by irrationalists eager to escape their conscience. But with these we have not, in this essay, been concerned. We have tried to show what light Freud has thrown on the genesis of the artist and his place and function in society, and what demands he would make upon the serious writer. There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food and deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love, which can enable Freud to say with greater conviction:

“We may insist as often as we please that the human intellect is powerless when compared with the impulses of man, and we may be right in what we say. All the same there is something peculiar about this weakness. The voice of the intellect is soft and low, but it is persistent and continues until it has secured a hearing. After what may be countless repetitions, it does get a hearing. This is one of the few facts which may help to make us rather more hopeful about the future of mankind.”

BOOKS TO READ

- Freud. *Collected Works*. International Library of Psycho-analysis.
- Jung. *Psychology of the Unconscious. Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*.
- Klages. *The Science of Character*.
- Prinzhorn. *Psychotherapy*.
- Rivers. *Conflict and Dream*.
- Nicoll. *Dream Psychology*.
- Burrow. *The Social Basis of Consciousness*.
- Heard. *Social Substance of Religion*.
- Thomas Mann. *Essays*.
- Blake. *Collected Works*.
- D. H. Lawrence. *Psycho-analysis and the Unconscious. Fantasia of the Unconscious. Studies in Classical American Literature*.
- Homer Lane. *Talks to Parents and Teachers*.
- Lord Lytton. *New Treasure*.
- Mathias Alexander. *The Use of the Self*.
- Groeddeck. *Exploring the Unconscious. The World of Man*.
- Herbert Read. *Form in Modern Poetry. Art Now*.
- I. A. Richards. *Principles of Literary Criticism, etc.*
- Bodkin. *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*.
- Robert Graves. *Poetic Unreason*.
- Bergson. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.
- Benedict. *Patterns of Culture*.