

Criticism after Romanticism

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7. Aesthetics and Psychology

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7.1. IDEALIST AESTHETICS AND PSYCHOLOGY

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7.1.1. Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Edgar Allan Poe's ideas were sufficiently attractive to be taken up by the translator of his works into French, Charles Baudelaire, who felt a personal affinity towards him. "Yet Baudelaire was a critical essayist and journalist whose ideas one can hardly constrict within any of the simpler versions of Art for Art's Sake" (Wimsatt and Brooks 480). Baudelaire's views on the relationship of art and morals are more complex than Poe's. He claimed to have written his *Fleurs du Mal* as a work of "pure art": evil was to be treated in these poems in its purely aesthetic aspect. This seems to have been a trick to elude censorship, affecting a fashionable artistic concern. Actually, Baudelaire was a tormented Christian artist, and his views on evil were anything but aesthetic. His work was a kind of penitential recognition of all the shameful and evil inside himself. It seems more correct to believe him when he declared that his poetic work was a "moral statement." In this sense he opposed the lack of moral concern of the Art for Art's Sake movement: art, he believed, must blend itself with morality; only in that way will it be aesthetic. In later works Baudelaire had strong words against the current many people associated him with:

The childish utopianism of the school of *art for art's sake*, in ruling out morals . . . was doomed to sterility. Art for art's sake was a flagrant defiance of human nature. On the authority of the higher and universal principles of life itself, we must convict the movement of heresy

Morality does not appear with a formal title [in art]. Morality simply penetrates and blends itself with art as completely as with life itself. The poet is a moralist in spite of himself, simply through the overflowing abundance of his nature.¹

In a sense, the poet does not have to care about morals, and can concentrate on aesthetic value, because morals come naturally to him. Beauty and morality are the same, given the common origin in God of morals and of the world. We may note that this moralizing view of art is quite different from the ones we have met so far in Classical or Romantic critics, as well as from the far more crude relationship between art and religion which will be established later by Tolstoy. Baudelaire's is a Classical spirit: he is pessimistic, he does not believe, like the Romantics, in the innate goodness of man. Instead, he has a deep concern with original sin. Art is for him a sort of expiation. The task of the poet is more fundamentally civilizing than the task of the politician or the scientist: for Baudelaire, true civilization does not consist in the advance of technology, but in the removal of the traces of the Original Sin. "The romantic imagination did not believe in original sin. Nature was good. Quite the contrary with Baudelaire" (Wimsatt and Brooks 472). He is against the later 18th-century idea,

¹ Charles Baudelaire, *L'art romantique*, qtd. in W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Knopf; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957) 480-481.

incarnated above all in the work of Rousseau, that all good comes from nature. "In the universal blindness of the age the denial of original sin was a thing that passed without notice."² Reason, and not nature, is the source of good. Art is reasonable, and it does not imitate nature. It reduces it to reason. In his essay "Éloge du maquillage" he praises face paint as the most evident way of imposing an ideal form on imperfect nature:

It is the right of woman and her duty to give herself a magnificent finish, a supernatural lustre. She is expected to astonish and charm us. She is a kind of idol, and she ought to gild herself until she is a fit object of our adoration.

Rouge and mascara are the symbols of a heightened, a preternaturally intense mode of existence. The dark framing renders the gaze more profound and individual; it deepens the character of the eye as a window opened into infinity. The hectic color on the cheek increases the brilliance of the eye and creates in a feminine countenance of sufficient loveliness the mysteriously passionate look of the priestess.³

Emerson had seen in Nature the source of all symbolism. Nature is already intelligible in itself, it remains for the poet to unearth the symbols in nature. Baudelaire (see his sonnet "Correspondances") also believes in a symbolism inherent to Nature, but he insists on the active role of the artist. Art is not ultimately subject to nature, as Emerson's view would make us believe. The symbols in nature are like a dictionary, and not like a book of revelation. And what the poet must do with a dictionary is to make something new out of it, not copy the dictionary. "The whole visible universe is but a storehouse of images and signs to which imagination will give a relative place and value; it is a sort of food which the imagination must digest and transform."⁴ "The imagination must shape what nature makes available to it" (Hazard Adams, *Critical Theory since Plato*, 627). Copying nature is not enough: "man must breathe his own life into his experience and his art" (Adams 627). Baudelaire develops this view of imagination in *Le Salon de 1859*, a piece of art criticism where he attacks the current views on realism. Realism, for Baudelaire, does not mean to copy nature: it means to copy one's vision of nature, and not another man's. Baudelaire's views on imagination are remarkably similar to Coleridge's. Imagination goes beyond the arts; it is an universal principle. Morals without imagination are barren.

After Baudelaire, Art for Art's Sake in France fritters away into the second-rank Parnassianist movement. Symbolism, the mainstream of great poetry deriving from Baudelaire, has wider concerns than those of Art for Art's Sake. For the symbolists, art is once again a way of knowledge.

² Charles Baudelaire, "Éloge du maquillage" (1863); qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 483.

³ Qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 483.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *The Salon of 1859*, (select. in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971; 628-630) 630.

7.2.2. Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1818-1869)

Sainte-Beuve was the most influential French critic of the mid-19th century, but not because he held any sophisticated theoretical stance. He is the enemy of all type of fixed and abstract norm or theory. The only basis for criticism is to be the individual reaction of the critic to the work. But then the critic must have good taste and judgement, which leaves us much as we started. In any case, the critic must not judge by first impressions: he must study the work and make sure he understands it before judging. In his own criticism, Sainte-Beuve relies heavily on the psychology of the author in itself, that is, apart from the work; he calls his criticism a "science of genius," whose role is to discover what is most individual and characteristic in a writer. The critic must revive the author, re-create his personality for the reader. As there are no fixed principles to do this, criticism itself becomes an art, a creative activity, and the critic an artist.

Sainte-Beuve inspired the determinism of Taine, but was himself more vitally concerned with moral and humanistic values. He also furthered the theory of "generations," that is, the idea that writers tend to start their work as members of a group of friends, connected by a similar enthusiasm, if not by a similar objective or style.

Sainte-Beuve underwent romantic, impressionistic and historical phases, and ended up in a deep respect for classicism. His essay *What is a classic?* (1850)⁵ is the proof that the Romantic insistence on freedom was dying out by the mid-19th. "A classic is, according to the usual definition, an author of past times, already hallowed by general admiration, who is an authority in his own style" (556). But we ought to regard as a classic "an author who has enriched the human mind" and found a style at once individual to himself and universal. Sainte-Beuve wants to dissociate the notion of "classic" from the connotations of regularity, conventionality and conservativeness which it had developed during the Romanticism—to sharply distinguish classic from antique or neoclassical. Sainte-Beuve delights in imagining a house full with the great writers of all history, all engaged in conversation with one another. He views the classics as old and reliable friends, each with his peculiarity, rather than models for imitation.

This faith in the classics is the necessary outcome of his critical ideas. Criticism itself cannot provide any values to decide which writers are good and which are worthless. Sainte-Beuve believes that there is no

⁵ Rpt. in Adams, *Critical Theory since Plato*, 555-562.

danger in this, since the taste of readers cannot go too far from the true classics.

7.2.3. A.C. Bradley (1865-1939)

Bradley's best known work is his influential study *Shakespearean Tragedy*. His critical principles are to be found in the essay "Poetry for poetry's sake" (1901).⁶

Bradley sees in poetry an experience which has its end in itself: the poetic value is *intrinsic* to the poem. Of course, there may be other values present in the poem apart from the poetic value; these are extrinsic. If the poem is guided by them, if the poem has an ulterior end in view, its aesthetic value may be damaged. The poem is at its most perfect when it is most self-enclosed:

Its nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws and ignore for the time beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality (737)

Poetry and life must be kept apart; they cannot be judged according to the same laws, because they are different modes of being. This idea is inherited by some of the New Critics (Ransom); analogues are to be found in the Russian Formalists. It has often been criticised, notably by I.A. Richards: for Richards, poetry is not understood apart from the values of life, but in relationship to them. Bradley says that art must not be submitted to the ordinary laws of life; Richards points out that "extrinsic" considerations are sometimes all-important in some of the greatest works of art, and that art does not provide us with separate values to deal with them. Anyway, the doctrine of art for art's sake does not mean for Bradley that art is superior to life or that art is the most important aim in human life—these ideas he finds absurd. How does he justify, then, the existence of art? Not in itself, but in reference to human good:

The formula [Art for Art's sake] only tells us that we must not place in antithesis poetry and human good, for poetry is one kind of human good; and that we must not determine the intrinsic value of this kind of good by direct reference to another. (737)

The formula does not mean, either, that there is no connection between poetry and life: "There is plenty of connection between life and poetry, but it is, so to say, a connection underground" (738). Life and poetry are both real, only they have different kinds of existence.

⁶ Rpt. in Adams 736-747.

Bradley also challenges another assumption of Art for Art's sake, namely, that form is all-important and that content is indifferent. In art, form eradicates matter, but it is not by elimination: it is by absorption, by assimilation. The matter, understood as that which exists before the work of the poet, the subject-matter previous to the poem, *does not belong to the poem*. Instead of a division in two parts of the poem,

Subject-matter (of poem) / Form (of poem)

what we actually have is two phases in a process, in the way already noted by Aristotle or James:

Subject-matter (previous to poem) —> Poem

Or,

Subject-matter (formless) ---> Form

In a way, the poem is all form. Subject-matter as such is not poetic, and has little to do with the poem: the poetic value is to be found in the poem. The subject-matter is not a part of the poem; it is only a part of the process of composition. "This is not to say that one subject is as potentially good as another. It is to say that a bad poem can be written on any subject" (Adams 736). Instead of subject-matter, what we have in the poem as opposed to the external form of, for instance, verse, is the *content* or *substance*: subject-matter *as it is present in the poem*. This difference, Bradley notes, derives from Aristotle. But it is only a useful abstraction, because it is the form which makes the content into what it is and differentiates it from the subject-matter. Form equals content, they are not separable. Action and character may of course be abstracted from the work (we are doing that from the moment we name them) but cannot be judged apart from it. The same happens with the "moral" of the work. There is no sense in ascribing poetic value to the form as such or to the content as such, because they do not exist apart from each other.

The extreme formalist lays his whole weight on the form because he thinks its opposite is the mere subject. The general reader is angry, but makes the same mistake, and gives to the subject praises that rightly belong to the substance. . . . And this identity of content and form . . . is no accident: it is of the essence of poetry insofar as it is poetry, of art insofar as it is art (Bradley, in Adams 741)

The poet does not know what he wants to say before he says it; there is no content before he builds the form. The meaning is not something pre-existent to the poem; it is constituted when the poem is created. Unlike Croce, who says that an intuition may or may not be externalized, Bradley equals expression, intuition *and* externalization (cf. Blackmur, among the New Critics). The poem creates a meaning of its own, a meaning which is one with the structure of the poem, and cannot be paraphrased or translated:

What you apprehend may be called indifferently an expressed meaning or a significant form. . . . Hence in true poetry it is, in strictness, impossible to express the meaning in any but its own words, or to change the words without changing the meaning. (Bradley, in Adams 743).

Versification is not ornamental or merely harmonical with meaning. It becomes fused with it, it helps create the meaning of the poem. Its value can hardly be exaggerated when it is used adequately. Also, it is not an empty scheme of rhythms and numbers: the sense also influences the pattern and makes it unique: "the music is then the music of the meaning and the two are one" (Bradley, in Adams 744). The pleasure of metre on its own, which is occasionally praised by avant-garde movements, is trifling for Bradley. Metre is not an end in itself, it must help the creation of meaning. Because works of art are not meaningless: "Meaning they have, but what meaning can be said in no language but their own" (746). Poetry is made of words and so looks deceptively "linguistic"; but it can no more be explained by other words than a picture can be painted in words.

7.2.4. Benedetto Croce (1866-1952)

Apart from his influential *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (1902), the Italian scholar Benedetto Croce developed his ideas in the *Breviary of Aesthetics* (1912), *New Essays on Aesthetics* (1920) "Aesthetics" (1927), *The Defence of Poetry* (1933) and *Poetry* (1937).

Croce does actually achieve something like an ultimate definition and synthesis of the expressionistic art theory which first came clearly into view with the Germans and Coleridge and which was tested and matured through such 19th-century vicissitudes as in part we have been describing The theory is precisely an "aesthetic," a master theory of art for art's sake, a profound realization of all that might underlie and in part justify the 19th-century cry that art must be pure. (Wimsatt and Brooks, *Critical Theory since Plato* 501)

Croce's starting point in his *Aesthetic* is the recognition of two possible types of knowledge available to man: intuitive or logical knowledge. They are opposed as imagination is opposed to intellect, the individual to the universal or to the perception of abstract relations, the image to the concept. Intuitive knowledge is held by all to be more direct, a more real and intimate knowledge than logical knowledge. However, logic exists as a science, while there is no science of intuitive knowledge as yet. It must not be mistaken for perception of reality: intuition includes some aspects of perception, but goes beyond it:

the distinction between reality and nonreality is extraneous, secondary, to the true nature of intuition Intuition is the undifferentiated unity of the perception of the real and of the simple image of the possible. In our intuitions we do not oppose ourselves as empirical beings to external reality, but we simply objectify our impressions, whatever they be.⁷

Intuition is not the mechanical association of sensations which we have in perception: rather, it is the active element in both perception and imagination, it is the synthesis of sensations.

There is no doubt that it is a mode of knowledge on its own: even if logical concepts are used in it, they become subordinated to intuition, they become intuitions themselves. For instance, a work of art is a piece of intuitive knowledge. It may contain philosophical ideas, logical knowledge. But "[t]he whole is that which determines the quality of the parts" (*Aesthetic* 727): in the work as a whole, those logical elements function as elements of the overall intuition.

Intuition is inevitably linked to representation, to expression. It consists in the association of sensations, and that association has to be represented in some way, it must find an expression: "Every intuition or representation is also expression. That which does not objectify itself in expression is not intuition or representation but sensation and mere natural fact" (*Aesthetic* 730).

So, an intuition must by definition be translatable into signs. Better still, intuition and expression appear simultaneously, are *one*. The intuition appears not as a vague state of revelation, but as an activity, as the act of translating our impressions into signs. If we are not able to express an intuition, it means that it was not one: it was an illusion, because we can only form intuitions with those signs which are made to express them. The problem with many people is not that they cannot express their intuitions, but rather that they cannot have intuitions.

By the way, this also means that the process of intuition is never pre-conceived, but always *conscious*: there is no such thing as an unconscious intuition. It also means that "the aesthetic fact is form and nothing but form" (*Aesthetic* 733). The "content" is a point of departure, a material, which is then given a form; but a merely formalist analysis or a study of the content are not sufficient.⁸ The content has no determinable qualities until this transformation into form takes place. The work of art is the means an artist uses to convey his intuitions to other people.

Another corollary of the conception of expression as activity is the indivisibility of the work of art. Every expression is a single expression. Activity is a fusion of the impressions into an organic

⁷ Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic* (select. in Adams 727-735) 728.

⁸ Benedetto Croce, *Breviario de estética* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1979) 39 (translations mine). Cf. Bradley's "Poetry for Poetry's Sake."

whole Expression is the synthesis of the various, or the multiple, in one (*Aesthetic* 734).

Croce seems to believe that every expression is completely new, that older impressions must descend to the level of impressions before they are synthesized into the whole. But the mere phenomenon of intertextuality or allusion belies this.

Croce's philosophy has been called a "monism of spirit" (Wimsatt and Brooks 502). As opposed to Marx, who sees spirit or ideal as an offspring of the material world, Croce sees nothing but spirit: the eye creates the object; reality is the product of abstracting thought. This conception has been sufficiently criticised: it is a kind of subjectivized neo-Plotinism: form, beauty and the principle of Being are identified in a sweeping generalization (cf. Wimsatt and Brooks).

Intuition governs alike art and real life, Croce holds. Our everyday intuitions, however, are haphazard and chaotic. Art is a vision or intuition that the artist transmits to other people. Artists develop their own special kind of intuitions, better organized than ours, wider and more complex. But in essence, intuitions are the same in ordinary life and in art. "The whole difference, then, is quantitative, and as such is indifferent to philosophy, *scientia qualitatum*" (*Aesthetic* 732). The limits between art and ordinary intuitions are impossible to define. As the romantics used to say, all men are poets to a greater or lesser degree. Accordingly, "There is but one aesthetic, the science of intuitive or expressive knowledge, which is the aesthetic of artistic fact" (!) (*Aesthetic* 732). Art is not the object, but the intuition of the artist which is transmitted. Intuition is not a previous step towards art. Art begins and ends with intuition. The rest is technique, the labour of an artisan. The labour of the artist as such ends before he begins the work. For Croce, "Art is an ideal activity".⁹ So, Croce's system cannot differentiate art from life, or good art from bad art: it is not a "science of quantities" and it is not concerned with those quantitative questions.

This does not mean that art does not have qualities of its own in Croce's view. Art idealizes, purifies our perception of real life. It is not concerned with physical phenomena, conceptual knowledge or utilitarian intentions of any kind, be it moral instruction: "The myth can become a work of art only for him who no longer believes in it" (*Breviario* 24); "Art that depends on morals, pleasure or philosophy will be philosophy, pleasure or morals, but not art" (*Breviario* 57). In a work of art, ideas or morals are aesthetic elements, something akin to imagery. The logical conclusion of this view is that "the artist is always morally innocent, philosophically unobjectionable" (*Breviario* 66). "Every artist is moral in his creative act, because he is accomplishing a sacred function" (*Breviario* 69). In artistic intuition, "the singular beats at one with the life of the all, and the all is in the life of the singular. Each pure representation is itself and the universe, the universe is that individual form in the universal" (*Breviario* 120).

⁹ Vernon Hall, *Breve historia de la crítica literaria* (Mexico: FCE, 1982), 262

Later, Croce develops his theory in the sense of lyricism. What is intuited or expressed is *feeling*: art is feeling objectified and made knowable. Poetry is neither feeling nor image, but "contemplation of feeling", "intuition made knowable." "By elaborating his impressions, man frees himself from them. By objectifying them, he removes them from him and makes himself their superior" (*Aesthetic* 735).

The lyric is not a pouring forth; it is not a cry or lament, it is an objectification, in which the ego sees itself on the stage, narrates itself and dramatizes itself; and this lyrical spirit forms the poetry of epic and drama, which are therefore distinguished from lyric only by external signs.¹⁰

This view is understood by Croce to be in opposition to both the romantic and the classical. Classicism, Croce said, defined art as representation; romanticism defined it as feeling: "Art is feeling enclosed in the circle of representation, and in art feeling lives only for representation" (*Breviario* 34). But this is nothing other than the romantic view, as defined by Coleridge before him.

Croce attacks all the usual concepts used in criticism; he views all of them as fixities, as artificial impositions on the freedom of intuition. Rhetoric figures, literary genres, conventions of decorum, all are useless. Technicalities are of no use in art: only individual intuition has any value. Beauty is the result of an adequate intuition. It is coherence, it is unity, and it cannot be analyzed. It can only be experienced. Ugliness, or incoherence, can be analyzed; this is a possible task for criticism. "Beautiful" and "ugly" are the only critical concepts standing in Croce's theory.

This results in a very inadequate view of both literary history and criticism: there is practically no place left for them in Croce's theory. He does say that criticism is concerned with the study of poetic forms and motives as vehicles for intuition, but then he tends to identify the structure of the poem to the previous intentions of the author, and, as such, as something secondary and previous to the actual intuition which consists in the creative process. So, he neglects the overall structure of the work in favour of the brief outburst of perfection, the Longinian sublime or Arnold's touchstone. Like Poe, he tends to look on epic or dramatic works as collections of lyrical passages; lyrical intuition is all. Every work of art is a separate intuition and as such is completely different from any other work of art; every work is an unique individual: "a painting is as different from another painting as from a poem" (*Breviario* 53).

The only kind of classification he accepts in criticism is literary history: the necessary classification which has made itself; there every work falls into place. But this looks suspiciously like turning literary history into a warehouse of the past. As to the history of criticism, he says that each age must find a new meaning to the essence and role of art, which is all right- but then he adds that it must reject all previous views as false and useless (*Breviario* 13), which is a bit too strong .

¹⁰

Benedetto Croce, "Aesthetic" (1937); qtd. in Wimsatt and Brooks 510.

At length, Croce's theory is anti-formalistic, and it favours critical impressionism, the standards of lyricism and sincerity, veneration for the poetic revelation: "He forbids us in short to do anything for the critical enrichment of our intuitions. We are asked to remain content with the lightning flash" (Wimsatt and Brooks 518). Croce is after all the ultimate romantic critic. His influence in England and the USA (through Collingwood, Carr, Carr, Spingarn, etc.) was enormous.

7.2.5. Edward Bullough (1880-1934)

Bullough's essay " 'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle" (1912)¹¹ is a study of the psychology of the audience in art.

Bullough finds that the distinction between subject and object is inadequate for the analysis of art. This and other oppositions he tries to transcend with the concept of "aesthetic distance", which derives from previous critical concepts such as Kant's 'disinterestedness' of the aesthetic perception.

"There are many ways of conveying aesthetic distance. It can be thought of as the 'space' between the reader and his affections and personal needs" (Adams 754). To enjoy the work, the audience must preserve the proper distance towards it. This does not mean that the audience must adopt an intellectual, non-affective attitude towards the work. Aesthetic distance is compatible with personal and highly emotional feeling, but a feeling which has been 'filtered': "It has been cleared of the practical, concrete nature of its appeal without, however, thereby losing its original constitution" (Bullough 757). It is aesthetic distance which makes irrelevant that a work of art is fiction or non-fiction: "distance, by changing our relation to the characters, renders them seemingly fictitious" (757). And, in fact, our feelings towards the characters do not depend on their being fictitious or not.

Aesthetic distance is necessary because of what Bullough calls the 'antinomy of distance': the fact that an involvement too close and personal with the work prevents our appreciation. An acutely jealous spectator does

¹¹ Rpt. in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971) 755-765.

not enjoy *Othello*. "What is . . . both in appreciation and production most desirable is the utmost decrease of distance without its disappearance" (758). Of course, distance is variable according to the subjects and the audience. It is difficult to achieve the exact degree of distance required. *Overdistancing* is a common defect of the work, and *underdistancing* a common defect in the attitude of the audience. "[O]verdistanced art is specially designed for a kind of appreciation which has difficulty to rise spontaneously to any degree of distance" (758). This is the case, for instance, of medieval religious art. Some subjects are dangerous to handle because the audience finds it difficult to maintain an aesthetic distance towards them: this is the case of sex or red-hot political questions. Underdistancing produces the impression of crude naturalism; overdistancing of coldness and artificiality. As a whole, artists have a greater capacity of distancing than their audience. That is why they often claim a universal significance, or an aesthetic value, to works which the audience sees as merely occasional or irrelevant. Temporal remoteness or ideological disbelief contribute to create aesthetic distance.

According to Bullough, the doctrine of aesthetic distance suggests that art, as a whole, is anti-naturalistic in varying degrees. Distance of some kind has to be present if we are to recognise art as art, and not as nature. The history of art as a whole consists in the slow reduction of distance: art becomes more and more "realistic" without ever being confused with nature: "A constantly closer approach to nature, a perpetual refining of the limit of distance, yet without overstepping the dividing line of art and nature, has always been the inborn bent of art" (761). Idealization, the classical explanation of the relationship of art to nature, is not satisfactory for Bullough: the idea of aesthetic distance is a better description of the phenomenon. Another classical concept, verisimilitude, is re-defined by Bullough in this sense. Verisimilitude, or probability, has nothing to do with respecting the laws of nature in the work: "'Probability' and 'improbability' in art are not to be measured by their correspondence (or lack of it) with actual experience It is rather a matter of *consistency* of distance" (762). That is, if a work demands a sudden change of distance on the part of the audience, we feel that the laws of probability have been violated, that the work is not credible. Many antitheses of classical criticism are related by Bullough in this way to aesthetic distance (spirituality / sensuality, individuality / typicality, etc.).

Bullough's analysis of distance develops these central ideas in various ways. Distance can also be thought of as a special attitude of the author towards his material: a certain objective attitude, or a control of emotional involvement with his work. Each kind of art, each genre, and each historical age has its own requirements of distance, and its own ways of creating distance or reducing it. The concept of aesthetic distance turns out to be fruitful and far-reaching.

7.2.6. Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and T.E. Hulme (1883-1917)

Henri Bergson was a French philosopher, the anti-materialist philosopher of "élan vital", the creative force at the basis of nature which the Romantics had called spirit.

For Bergson, matter is something dead, inert; only the vital impulse keeps it in continuous evolution. Matter leads us to fixity and death; spirit, intuition, to life, activity and creativity. Bergson develops a psychological theory along these lines. Reality is a myriad of impressions, of phenomena, diverse and infinite. Practical reasons lead us to simplify reality in order to manage it the better: therefore, our perception of reality crystallizes along fixed lines. We abstract, we find common elements in variety and we develop conceptual thought. Conceptual thought can only capture the generality of things, that which they have in common with other things. Individuality escapes it. "We never perceive things as they are, but only certain conventional types."¹²

In *Le rire* (1900) Bergson applies his ideas to art:

Often enough we are not able to see things in themselves, and are frequently satisfied with reading the labels which adhere to them. This tendency, the child of necessity, has become accentuated under the influence of language, because words, except for names, all designate genres. The word fixes none but the commonest function of the thing, and its usual aspect slips between it and us, and would disguise its shape to our eyes had this shape not been already dissimulated by the very need which has created the word.¹³

Bergson's theory was further developed by T. E. Hulme, an English poet who died during the 1st World War. For Bergson and Hulme, art is a way of reaching reality by tearing the veil which custom sets upon it, what Coleridge had called "the film of familiarity." The artist widens the conventional perception of conceptual thought, and shows us again the individual which was hidden under the concept or the habit. The painter reveals to us an aspect of things which we had not learned to perceive: we only see that which we are used to seeing, and we need art to escape from the perceptive prejudices of our practical life. "Only through the ideal can we restore our contact with reality" (Hulme 217). This is the same in all kinds of art. Drama, for instance, shows us the internal reality of characters opposed to the conventions of social life and triumphing over them.

Therefore, art, painting, sculpture, poetry or music has no other mission than setting aside the common symbols, the conventional generalities accepted by society; everything, in short, that sets a

¹² T. E. Hulme, "Bergson's Theory of Art" (1914; rpt. in *Critical Theory since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams, 774-782) 775.

¹³ Henri Bergson, *La risa* (Madrid: SARPE, 1984) 138, my translation.

mask on reality, and after setting aside this mask, showing us both the mask and reality. (Bergson 141).

The conclusions of both critics are the same:

Art, then, tends always to the *individual*. (Bergson 144);

The authentic work of art is never general: it is always individual. (Hulme 260).

We find in Hulme's theory some ideas which are familiar to us since Vico, the German romantics and Shelley. Metaphor and symbol are the instruments of the poet's creation. Metaphor is the best example of how language is poetical in origin. Metaphors die after a time, and must be replaced by new ones.

Prose is in fact the museum where the dead metaphors of poets are preserved. (Hulme 777)

A symbol is the revelation of the universal in the particular, but it is not a translation or a representation in visible form. Rather, it consists in setting an individual as if it were a universal, proposing a new universal to be recognized, a model which enlarges our stock of perceptive models.

Poets fight against the repetitive, against the already said, the conventional expression.

Beneath the conventional expression which hides the individual emotion they are able to see the original shape of it. They induce us to make the same effort ourselves and make us see what they see; by rhythmical arrangements of words they tell us, or rather suggest, things that speech is not calculated to express. (Hulme 778)

The fight of the poet is a fight of individuality against language, because language as such is not individual, it is a social tool.

Language, being a communal apparatus, only conveys that part of the emotion which is common to all of us. (Hulme 780)

A new perception must find a new expression, or it will not be recognized at all. The labour of art could be described as "a passionate desire for accuracy" (Hulme 780). The aesthetic emotion is the emotion of direct communication, which is not linguistic or ordinary communication. According to Hulme, the advantage of Bergson's theory is that it is the foundation for both a general psychology and epistemology, and for a theory of art.

Apart from his Bergsonian theory, Hulme is also known as an apostle of classicism. This aspect of Hulme is in some contradiction with his Bergsonian ideas, and it will lead him away from the notion of art as perception, in order to put forward an anti-Romantic conception of art as construction. In "Romanticism and Classicism" (1914)¹⁴ Hulme claims that "we are in for a classical revival" (Hulme 768). Romanticism was radically individualistic: it believed in the possibilities of the individual, his radical innocence and his self-sufficiency. The twentieth century, Hulme believes, will bring along a reassessment of the role of society, and will demonstrate

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Rpt. in Adams 767-782.

the essential limitation of the individual (this, we might argue, has been the main common lesson of psychoanalysis, Marxism and structuralism). The very idea of art being a refinement of perception, he claims, is more classical than Romantic: it is concerned with representation, and not just with expression of purely subjective feelings. This idea that the Romantic movement has ended and that the new age has more than one trait in common with neoclassicism is shared by T. S. Eliot and the New Critics.

Indeed, Hulme is a forerunner of the New Critics in other respects, and his influence on T. S. Eliot seems to have been considerable. Hulme's conception of poetic structure and of poetic language is close to that defended by Eliot and Ezra Pound. Poetry must be rigorous and precise, the result of discipline and depuration. The literary work must be an organic unity. Here Hulme resorts to Coleridge's exposition of the difference between organic and mechanic structures, though he rejects Coleridge's Romantic conception of the imagination. In Hulme, the organicism of the work is the result of a careful construction. The poet's work on language is all-important. Language is not a medium for the poem, it is the poem itself. In poetry there is no such thing as an idea which is expressed through language. The idea is not translated into words; rather, the idea is inseparable from the linguistic structure of the poem; it is constituted by this structure. Hulme insists that language is an objective, communicable phenomenon, and not a private, mental one. The poet, therefore, works on the public side of language: poetry is something constructed in the poem, not an ineffable emotion which the author tries to convey through an imperfect medium.

7.2. PSYCHOANALYSIS: THE FOUNDING FATHERS

7.2.1. Sigmund Freud

7.2.2. Carl G. Jung

7.2.1. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

Psychoanalytic theories reject the idea that the self is harmonious and rational. Instead, they portray it as a system of tensions between conflicting impulses. According to Freud's model of the human mind, there is a conscious section of the self which represses a more primitive, chaotic and animal unconscious. There is a mechanism of censorship between the conscious and the unconscious, so that the repressed contents cannot be deliberately controlled by the conscious agent. However, there are activities in which the unconscious tension accumulated can be released without any danger to the conscious self-image. We will focus here on Freud's psychological study of literature as an analogue of play and daydreaming, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming."¹⁵

Literature and Play

Art is close to play. "Every child at play", Freud argues, "behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or rather, rearranges the things of his world in a new way which pleases him" ("Creative Writers" 749). This does not mean that art is not a serious activity. Following the parallel, we see that a child at play is completely serious; indeed, the essence of play involves serious adherence to its rules (cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*). Therefore, Freud argues, "the opposite to play is not what is serious but what is real" ("Creative Writers" 749). The difference between the real and the unreal is relevant to art, because unreal things can be pleasurable which, if they were real, would be frightening or disgusting (cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*).

Literature and Fantasy

Fantasy is a substitute for playing. Freud conceives it essentially as a self-gratification which is often socially shameful for adults. At root of fantasy we find dissatisfaction: "every single fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality" ("Creative Writers" 750). Our

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Der Dichter und Phantasieren" (1907); English trans., "Creative Writers and Daydreaming." In *Critical Theory since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. San Diego: Harcourt, 1971. 749-753.

insatisfaction, according to Freud, derives from two basic sources: ambition or the will to power and erotic wishes.

Fantasies span the subject's temporal representation in all directions. A present lack provokes the occasion for the fantasy. The subject is then led to a remembrance of a past occasion in which a similar wish was fulfilled. Usually, this leads us as far back as the golden age of childhood or the union with the mother's body. This analogy with the past is followed by an imaginary projection into the future, and the creation of an imaginary situation where the wish is fulfilled.

A literary work follows a similar pattern. It will usually show some elements of the recent occasion which has provoked the imaginative outburst, as well as of the past memory which serves to appease it. The end of literature, as of fantasy, is then to appease our tensions by giving them a vicarious release. We fantasize ourselves all the time, but we often reject other people's fantasies as disgusting or immoral: they leave us cold. However, the writer manages to give his fantasies an aesthetically valuable form, and he liberates himself from his tensions while he makes us accept his fantasies. The writer is a cheat: he sells us his fantasies under a hidden form, and we accept them. But we are cheats also, because we get a similar liberation by means of this transitional object between two desires which is the work of art. In this way, literature can be defined as a device to enjoy our own daydreams without reproach or shame.

"If fantasies become overluxuriant and overpowerful, the conditions are laid for an onset of neurosis or psychosis" ("Creative Writers" 751). A neurosis, such as anxiety, phobia, hysteria, a compulsive obsession, is less severe than a psychosis (manic-depressive psychosis, schizophrenia).

Dream

Dreams are equivalent to fantasies: after all we call certain kinds of fantasies "daydreaming." But dreams enact fantasies in a hidden way, since these dream fantasies have been repressed into the unconscious.

Freud's theories of oneiric and literary interpretation have then a common root in his psychology of the unconscious. Art is a liberation of tensions in the author, and in a similar way it will liberate unconscious tensions in the reader. Freud's work is not radically new, and it develops earlier work on the psychology of creation¹⁶— for instance, Francis Bacon's conception of literature as compensation or imaginary gratification against the frustrations of reality. Freud himself remarked that it was not he, but the poets, who had discovered the unconscious (Adams, *Critical Theory since Plato*, 748).

The overt structure of the work is dictated by the conscious mind. Therefore the interpreter has to go beyond this surface structure and discover the way the hidden pulsions of the author are reflected in his work. Literature functions in much the same way as the dream-work (as

¹⁶ C. G. Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry," in *Critical Theory since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971. 810-818) 812.

emphasized by Marie Bonaparte¹⁷): a repressed content is made acceptable when it is transformed through condensation and displacement. The convergence of several lines of symbolic association causes an overdetermination of the motifs. In the practice of classical psychoanalytic criticism, this is often the equivalent of an allegorical reading: the elements of the work are mapped on a pre-established psychological model which determines the sense of each of them. Old men, ogers, figures of authority, kings, etc., are father-figures; elongated objects will be phallic symbols, while concavities, or elements suggestive of embrace or cosiness will be the symbols of the benevolent mother and the womb. The Freudian "family romance," centered around the Oedipus complex and the threat of castration, is read into the literary work, often at the cost of that work's individuality and its properly literary structures. This is what has been called "vulgar Freudianism," most popular from the thirties to the fifties, and best exemplified in Marie Bonaparte's work on Edgar Allan Poe's tales. Bonaparte "wishes to show how the repressed emotion, or affect . . . is transferred to fictional figures and objects, and how any object can serve this purpose, be it the famous house of Usher, the sea, or the earth's depths. . . . Marie Bonaparte is clearly more interested in scoring psychoanalytical points than in elucidating linguistic and literary processes." (Wright 147)

Hazard Adams observes that the standard Freudian approach conceives of meaning as something which can be abstracted from expression, and that "the theory of symbolism developed by the Romantics opposed this sort of allegorization" (Adams 748). Bonaparte, for one, ignores aesthetic rules or literary conventions as a significant element in the work, and she underrates the conscious ability of writers. The approach is also a narrow one, since it is restricted to the relationship between the work and the author. But it can be argued that Freud lay the foundations for a more comprehensive analysis of the way meaning and expression are intrinsically joined.

Another variety of the classical psychoanalytic approach is to psychoanalyze not the author, but the characters, a possibility envisaged by Freud himself in his commentaries on Hamlet in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Freud admits that artistic works of inferior quality may serve the purpose of the analyst better. "The reason for that, he says, is that the lesser works do not take over ready-made materials and themes. This seems naive in that the more simple, sentimental and popular the work the more *obviously* conventional it usually is in theme and plot." (Adams 748) What Freud is most interested in is the personal conventions of the writer. That is why the most original, individual and "distorting" writers would seem to serve his purpose better.

Narrative

¹⁷ In *Edgar Poe: Etude psychanalytique* (Paris: Denoël, 1933), a classic instance of "Freudian" analysis, with a foreword by Sigmund Freud.

The hero is the center of interest in narrative, and he is protected by a kind of providence: in popular fiction the hero is indestructible. This is because the hero is nothing but a projection or incarnation of one side of the author's psyche:

through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability we can immediately recognize His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every daydream and every story. (Freud, "Creative Writers" 752).

Good characters are helpers, and women fall in love with the hero. This would be the standard daydream structure, the most simple narrative. Those fantasies which do not follow the pattern of daydream may be related to it through an uninterrupted series of transitional forms. For instance, in the novel, which is an elaborate and complex genre, this pattern of identification with the hero may adopt the form of a distribution of narrative information, or point of view filter:

It has struck me that in many of what are known as "psychological" novels only one person —once again the hero— is described from within. The author sits inside his mind, as it were, and looks at the other characters from outside. (Freud, "Creative Writers" 752)

In other novels yet, the hero does very little, and is only an observer of other characters' actions. Freud compares this to daydreams where we act as spectators.

In the novel we can witness the ego of the author split by self-observation into partial egos which vie with each other. The conflicting aspects of the author's personality are incarnated in as many characters, and the novel becomes a psychomachy.

7.2.2. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961)

Jung introduces a new version of psychoanalysis, one which tries to escape from that kind of Freudianism which restricts the unconscious to the recapitulation of the sexual experiences of childhood. Jung is not so concerned with clinical experience as Freud: he is a less scientific, more romantic philosopher of the unconscious. His work will be influential on critical theory which comes to the forefront in the fifties and sixties and which is concerned with the study of literature in its relations with symbol, myth and ritual. The best example of this critical current is perhaps Northrop Frye. Jung's ideas will also be highly influential on the "thematic criticism" of the Geneva school, and on the psychoanalytic exploration of archetypes and symbolism undertaken by Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand. Here we will focus on a study of the connections between the collective unconscious and literary imagination, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry."¹⁸

¹⁸ Carl G. Jung, "Über die Beziehungen der analytischen Psychologie zum dichterischen Kunstwerk" (1922); English trans., "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry."

Like Freud, Jung approaches art as a psychologist. "The Practice of art is a psychological activity and, as such, can be approached from a psychological angle" ("Relation" 810). But he restricts the scope of such an approach, and distinguishes it from an intrinsically literary approach. The psychological approach deals not with the essence of art, with beauty or form, but with art as an *activity* —essentially with the process of creation. That is, psychology cannot give the key for the aesthetic appreciation of art: it is not a total explanation of art, only a perspective on it. Art and science cannot explain each other's essence, in Jung's opinion. Through the historical investigation of their roots we can reach at a given point an undifferentiated state of knowledge which shares characteristics of art and science. But this is not a principle of unity for the disciplines in their present state ("Relation" 810).

Therefore, Jung argues, we cannot explain art away as a form of neurosis. He opposes Freud's view in this respect (although, in fact, Freud says that neurosis may be the result of *uncontrolled* imagination). Jung believes that neurosis cannot be the explanatory basis for human activity as a whole. He criticises the sterile approach to art that may derive from a mechanical application of standard Freudianism: often, he argues, what is revealed in such works of psychoanalytical criticism is bad taste masquerading as science.

The Freudian method is basically right, but it is wrongly exalted into a dogmatic doctrine by Freud. Besides, it relies on some arbitrary assumptions: "Neuroses are by no means exclusively caused by sexual repression, and the same holds true for psychoses" (Jung, "Relation" 812). The definition of dreams as repressed wishes is also too simple and biased. The same holds true for literary works: "A work of art is not a disease, and consequently requires a different approach from the medical one" ("Relation" 812). The study of the writer's personal conflicts is not an adequate basis for a knowledge of art. Psychoanalytical criticism of art must take into account what is specifically artistic in the work, and avoid the fallacy of reducing the essence of the work to a clinical case. Freud simplifies the work, as he simplifies, for instance, the concept of symbolism. Jung opposes Freud's use of the concept of "symbol":

These conscious contents which give us a clue to the unconscious background are incorrectly called *symbols* by Freud. They are not true symbols, however, since according to his theory they have merely the role of *signs* or *symptoms* of the subliminal processes. The true symbol differs essentially from this, and should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way. ("Relation" 811)

The work of art, then, is not a mere symptom of the writer: its nature is symbolic. Jung tries to combine the formalist principle of the aesthetic autonomy of the work of art with a psychological approach. He preserves the organicist view of the work of art as having a structure of its own, like a living being. The bridge between the two perspectives, the aesthetic and the psychoanalytic one, is the concept of *autonomous complex*. The work has a

life of its own: it is like an organism which uses the artist only as a nutrient medium in which it can develop following an autonomous law. The structure of the archetype resembles in this the structure of the poem as defined by the New Critics: it is a content shaped by a form, which makes it impossible for us to give an equivalent paraphrasis for it.

Jung draws a difference between two kinds of works. On one hand we have works which are consciously planned by the artist and submitted to the conscious self. In these works the process of creation can be identified with the self of the artist: it is fully intentional and deliberate. On the other we have those spontaneous works which force themselves on the author, springing from an alien impulse within him—the "inspiration" of classical criticism:

Here the artist is not identical with the process of creation; he is aware that he is subordinate to his work or stands outside it, as though he were a second person; or as though a person other than himself had fallen within the magic circle of an alien will. ("Relation" 814)

This phenomenon, this alien force within the self, poses a problem for Jung's psychological theory. The conscious mind is sometimes not merely influenced, but actually guided by the unconscious. The demands of the work may oppose the ordinary life or the conscious interests of the artist: the work is an autonomous entity which cannot be reduced to the personality of the author precisely because it is a kind of second self which has developed beside his personality and in much the same way, a living thing which is not the author's mind:

In the language of analytical psychology this living thing is an *autonomous complex*. It is a split-off portion of the psyche, which leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness. . . . A hitherto unconscious portion of the psyche is thrown into activity, and gains ground by activating the adjacent areas of association. the energy needed for this is naturally drawn from consciousness—unless the latter happens to identify the complex. ("Relation" 815)

The autonomous complex originates in the unconscious. At a given moment it becomes conscious and the author creates his work; but it is never assimilated by the psyche, it is merely perceived. These complexes are not exclusive of art: instincts and many ordinary activities also involve autonomous complexes.

The poet who accepts this spontaneous growth and lets himself go will produce a work different from the poet who struggles to impose a rational and deliberate shape on his work. There are two different kinds of poets, or rather two different ways of creation, since the same poet may adopt different attitudes toward the autonomous complexes. The final result, Jung affirms, will probably show the nature and origin of the work; it is, so to speak, engraved on its form. Even the works of the first kind, those who show a rational meaning, do so only on the outside. The conscious composition is only an illusion, since these works, if they are real works of art, show a hidden coherence of their own. Spontaneous, autonomous works have a symbolic quality. They cannot be reduced to an easily comprehensible meaning: their nature is symbolic, a pregnancy of meaning which nevertheless cannot be defined in conceptual terms, "for a symbol is

the intimation of a meaning beyond the level of our present powers of comprehension" ("Relation" 815) —we might well remember here that Jung was a practising Christian, and that he tried all his life to relate psychoanalytic theory and religious belief.

The autonomous complex is an organizing force, but it is not a really *creative* one. Jung quotes Hauptmann as saying that "poetry evokes out of words the resonance of the primeval world." Under the highly individual structure of the poem there stands a grammar of possibilities, a communal residue of instinct which Jung calls the collective unconscious. Freud had imagined a private, personal unconscious where the work might originate. For Jung, the nature of the unconscious is to a great extent collective, communal, not individual:

I am assuming that the work of art we propose to analyze, as well as being symbolic, has its source not in the *personal unconscious* of the poet but in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind. I have called this sphere the *collective unconscious*, to distinguish it from the personal unconscious. ("Relation" 817)

The personal unconscious is "muddy," since it consists of repressed elements. It is a narrow and exclusive focus on this side of the unconscious which leads us to a narrow view of the psyche. It also leads us to read poetry as a symptom and not as a symbol. The collective unconscious, on the other hand, is not the result of a process of repression: it is somehow inherited in the structure of the brain. Jung does not want to speak of inborn ideas, but rather of inborn possibilities of ideas, which set bonds to conceivable human experience. The collective unconscious is compared by Adams to the imaginative equivalent of Kant's cognitive categories of pure reason —at once a logic of imagination and a pre-established form which shapes experience and constitutes human reality.

Freud had already envisaged the possibility of a collective unconscious which would find its expression in communal forms of fantasy such as myth:

It is extremely probable that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations, the *secular* dreams of youthful humanity. (Freud, "Creative Writers" 753)

Jung believes that we can trace out these fantasies, which he calls the archetypes. They are figures and patterns of thought and association which recur throughout history, reappearing whenever creative fantasy is freely expressed. They represent the typical experiences of our ancestors, and have the nature of deeply ingrained psychical residua. Whenever they are at play, the work acquires a deep emotional intensity, and we feel transported: "At such moments we are no longer individuals, but the race; the voice of all mankind resounds in us" ("Relation" 818). The idea which is expressed through an archetype acquires a universal value; it is lifted out of the transitory and accidental into the realm of the ever-enduring. "That is the secret of great art, and of its effect upon us" ("Relation" 818). Art educates the spirit of the age, conjuring up the images in which it is more lacking. It presents us with what is eternal and enduring in the human condition, and in so doing it frees us from the one-sidedness of the present. "Art represents a self-regulation in the life of nations and epochs" ("Relation" 818).

However, it is not clear from this theory of archetypes why this emotional uplifting should not be the result of primitive and popular art, which nevertheless shows these archetypes in a clearer and more unadulterated way.