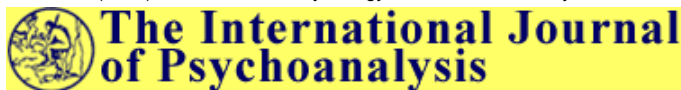


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Aesthetics and Psychology of the Artist

Hanns Sachs ⓘ

Starting from the phantasies of the individual, psycho-analytic research soon began to investigate the way to the phantasies of mankind.

The first steps on this path were made by Rank, far ahead of all others, with his "Künstler". In this book, which recently appeared in a new edition, the turning to the general and historical is not anticipated merely in vague hints, but built up in methodical form a long time before the material of race psychology was used as a new basis. It is still on many points the best formulation of our knowledge.

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Lou Andreas-Salomé (1) has produced a delicate and thorough essay on the conditions of artistic production.

To deduce a piece of fundamental psychology of the artist from one single, though distinguished, example, is the problem Freud has solved with his book on Leonardo da Vinci (5). The second edition is enriched by two findings which fully confirm Freud's hypotheses. One of them a "mistake", or indeed a number of them, in Leonardo's attempt to represent the sexual act schematically, has been discovered and described by Dr. Reitler, the other a "cryptographic" presentation of the vulture on the picture of "Saint Anna" is from O. Pfister.

In a short essay on the poet Dauthendey (11) Hitschmann demonstrates his father-fixation not only as being important for his poetical production, but as the origin of a phenomenon regarded by the poet as "telepathic" and of his religious turning-point Hitschmann has dealt more fully with Gottfried Keller (12) and drawn an excellent picture of his unconscious psychical activity by comparing the poet's typical motives with his behaviour towards mother and sister both in social life and in his work. The most important results are as follows: pleasure in looking directed mainly to the female breasts and its repression which allowed the great depicter of human character to paint only landscapes; the motive of "half family", son and mother, daughter and father, living together as a reminiscence of his childhood-days after his father's early death, a period the boy longed to return to when a step-father arrived who lived unhappily with the mother; the inhibited aggression towards women and its inversion into masochistic phantasies; and finally the mother image in the poet's most interesting female figure, Judith.

A valuable and interesting investigation into the poet's motives is given by Reik's book on Schnitzler (29). The main stress is laid upon the delicate psychological understanding of the poet, which arose from his familiarity with his own unconscious, though a familiarity of a quite special kind. Of special interest are the analyses of the dreams which Schnitzler uses in important passages of his works. Interpretation shows that the construction of these dreams is quite on a line with the rules laid down by Freud.

That the connection between unconscious and poetical production is not an achievement of our generation is proved by Dr. Alice Sperber who deals with Dante's unconscious life (36). Of special

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interest is the view, based on rich and well selected material, that Vergil and Beatrice represent the return of the parent's *imagines*.

The present writer has pointed out that the childhood memories of Spitteler (32) show a striking agreement with the doctrines of Freud as regards the nature and importance of events in childhood.

The investigation of E. Lorenz into the "Geschichte des Bergmanns von Falun" (19) shows in a very clear way how a simple anecdote, provided it contains the germ, keeps producing ever new phantasies. As the poetical modifications advance, the unconscious complex by which the fantasy was awakened reveals itself more and more distinctly till it appears in clear words (Hofmannsthal's "last modification") just as dreams of one night vary the same unconscious thought with progressive clearness.

In another essay (20) the same author shows that the Oedipus tragedy ends quite in accordance with the fulfilment of the unconscious expectations—union with the mother earth. While the two above-mentioned essays only touched on the complex "the mother's womb", MacCurdy shows a novel by Lytton which is completely built on it, and throws light by analysis of that novel in the most interesting way on the connections between these phantasies and the "omnipotence of thought".

The idea running through all those essays, namely the return to primitive thinking by apparently original imagination, cannot easily be proved by a better example than the one found by Dr. Protze (24) in which a tree exercises all the functions that "savages" are wont to attribute to their totem. Rank's book (26) is based on the same idea, but carried out in a quite different, more complete and systematic way. Starting from a topic, still very attractive to modern literature, that of the "Doppelgänger" (double) the author goes back to the superstitions relating to mirrors and shadows, from there to primitive beliefs in the soul connected with mirror images and shadows, and finds at last the psychological resolution of these phenomena in narcissism and in the repression conflict against its radiation leading to object-love. The book contains much material in literary history and ethnology and should become a model through its technical method, never satisfied with mere aphorisms, but always trying to link up connections.

A number of essays deal with two great tragic figures of Shakespeare's, Hamlet and Macbeth. The Hamlet essays (15), (27) naturally start from the points in Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams",

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and what Rank says about the "play" and its position in the drama might be considered as the finishing touch of Freud's conception. More interest still is paid to the figure of Lady Macbeth, previously only touched on in a footnote in the "Interpretation of Dream"; the publications 4, 14, 23 occupy themselves with her. The most extensive of these essays is the one by Jekels (14); this yields several valuable results, of which only two will be mentioned: the conception of the distribution between two persons of the originally unitary guilt feeling before and after the deed, and the discovery of "Shakespeare's self reproach", who left wife and children and lost his only son, as the quintessence of the character of Macduff. Freud (6) starts from this discovery and shows how the problem of childlessness runs below the surface through the whole tragedy. In this complex the old nature myth personified in the tragedy, namely the victory of spring coming with green branches over the sterile winter, coincides with the actual event, the accession of James I as successor of the sterile Elizabeth who had beheaded his mother. Freud makes it probable also that the night-wandering of Lady Macbeth goes back directly to the last weeks spent in sleepless disquietude of the virgin queen, who once called herself in grief a fruitless stock. Another of Shakespeare's characters is investigated by Freud in the same essay: Richard III whose personality is developed from the first monologue with logical clearness. He belongs to those who believe they have a special claim on the fulfilment of their wishes because they have been ill-treated by nature at their birth. Among the type of those who break down in success Freud classifies a tragic figure, studied already by Rank, namely Rebecca West from Ibsen's "Rosmersholm". He shows that Rebecca's actual position is the result of a typical phantasy in which the housekeeper sets herself in the place of the housewife. The unconscious root of this phantasy is of course to replace the mother in her relation to the father. When Rebecca learns that this tabooed phantasy was reality for her, that is to say, that she was the mistress of her own father, then she becomes unable to enjoy her success and chooses instead of marriage with Rosmer death with him.

The essay of Furtmüller's (9) on Schnitzler's "Das weite Land" places the strife for power in the centre of action, following the author's prepossession for Adler's conception. A more unfortunate choice than one of Schnitzler's plays to prove such theses could not be made. Schnitzler's later works, especially "Casanova's

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Heimkehr" have reduced *ad absurdum* the idea of replacing the erotic problem by an egoistic one.

In the reviewer's essays (33), (35) the attempt is made to trace back to the psychical situation of the author the production of two of the standard works in literature. In both cases the problem of inhibition in production is hinted at, a temporary one in Schiller's case and a final one in Shakespeare's. In the novel of Th. Mann (34) the agreement with dream symbolism between the understanding shown for the basis of homosexuality is pointed out.

An essay on the Moses of Michelangelo (40) by an anonymous author takes quite a distinctive position. Neither the starting point nor the result belong to the domain of psycho-analysis, but the method of the investigation guessing the past from the present, important things from slight indications, and the psychical tendencies of the artist answers fully to the psycho-analytic method in its best and purest form.

Among the aesthetic investigations directed to general problems most are based on something or other pointed out by Freud e.g. 17, 38; their merit lies in the clear presentation and the working out of details. The parallel drawn by Kaplan between tragic hero and criminal (16) is well-proved psycho-analytically and shows this author's right feeling for the new tendency in defining our problems. Through Freud's "Totem and Taboo" we know that it is more than an analogy, that it is the recurrence of the same original crime in different shapes.

A quite uncommon investigation, which in many passages comes very near psycho-analysis, is that by Sperber and Spitzer (37) on the connection between motives and words. Spitzer proves how in the writings of the grotesque poet Christian Morgenstern the word comes before the thing, indeed how the word stimulates the imagination to creativeness. "To treat words like things" is according to Freud a typical quality of childhood, and Morgenstern's humour is based to a great extent on this quality. Still nearer psycho-analysis comes Sperber's shrewd and charming essay on Gustav Meyrink He shows how certain complexes occur again in this poet's writings, sometimes as a colloquial turn, sometimes as an original comparison. When Sperber speaks about the influence of certain complexes on style and language, the idea arises of completing his investigation in the opposite direction, i. e. instead of working from the complexes to language, from within to without, to feel our way

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from without to within, to the deep unconscious sources of affect. The "complex of bodily inhibitions" found by Sperber in Meyrink, especially paralysis, blindness and suffocation, arouses many thoughts in the analytical expert. The essay by Körner (18) is an appreciation of the two mentioned above.

The two essays on music (2), (39) give us hope that even this difficult subject, lying farthest from psycho-analytic exploration, will perhaps be understood by our methods. The possibility of awakening certain affects by sounds might be explained by their effect on the unconscious. Hirschmann (13) deals, in connection with a dream, with the psychic life of the young Schubert and his family conflict.

The investigation of "uncanniness" by Freud (7) explains in a more detailed way what had been said before in a footnote to the "Drei

Abhandlungen". He points out that *heimlich* is one of the ambivalent words, which unite two opposite meanings, "homely" and "hidden, dangerous". Of special interest are the explanations of the conditions under which the re-awakening of the "omnipotence of thought" causes a disagreeable feeling, this being the reason why they are characterized as "uncanny". The complete revival of the childish omnipotence, as in fairy-tales, does not give us this impression, but if poetry places itself into reality, then a sudden going back to omnipotence has an uncanny effect, quite the same as in reality itself, when a chance makes us believe for a moment in this possibility. The other root of uncanniness lies in the return of the repressed; especially the castration complex plays here an important part.

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