

THE WORK OF HANNA SEGAL

A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice

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For Michael and Agnes

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A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics

IN 1908 FREUD WROTE: "We laymen have always wondered greatly—like the cardinal who put the question to Ariosto—how that strange being, the poet, comes by his material. What makes him able to carry us with him in such a way and to arouse emotions in us of which we thought ourselves perhaps not even capable?" And as the science of psychoanalysis developed, repeated attempts were made to answer that question. Freud's discovery of unconscious phantasy life and of symbolism made it possible to attempt a psychological interpretation of works of art. Many papers have been written since, dealing with the problem of the individual artist and reconstructing his early history from an analysis of his work. The foremost of these is Freud's book on Leonardo da Vinci. Other papers have dealt with general psychological problems expressed in works of art and show, for instance, how the latent content of universal infantile anxieties is symbolically expressed in them. Examples are Freud's "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), Ernest Jones's "The Madonna's Conception Through the Ear" (1914), and Melanie Klein's "Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and the Creative Impulse" (1929).

Until recently such papers were not mainly concerned with aesthetics. They dealt with points of psychological interest but not with the central problem of aesthetics, which is: What constitutes good art and in what

essential respect is it different from other human works, from bad art in particular? Psychological writers attempted to answer such questions as: How does the poet work? What is he like? What does he express? In the paper "The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming" (1908) Freud has shown how the work of the artist is a product of phantasy and has its roots, like children's play and dreams, in unconscious phantasy life. But he did not attempt to explain why we should derive such pleasure from listening to the daydreams of a poet. How he achieves his effects is to Freud the poet's "innermost secret." Indeed, Freud was not especially interested in aesthetic problems. In "The Moses of Michelangelo" (1914) he says "I have often observed that the subject-matter of works of art has a stronger attraction for me than their formal and technical qualities, though to the artist their value lies first and foremost in these latter. I am unable rightly to appreciate many of the methods used and the effects obtained in art" (p. 257). He was also aware of the limitations of analytical theory in approaching aesthetics. In the preface to the book on Leonardo he says that he has no intention of discussing why Leonardo was a great painter, since to do that he would have to know more about the ultimate sources of the creative impulse and of sublimation. This was written in 1910. Since that time the work of Melanie Klein has thrown more light on the problem of the creative impulse and sublimation, and has provided a new stimulus to analytical writers on art. In the last fifteen years a number of papers have appeared dealing with problems of creation, beauty, and ugliness. I would mention, in particular, those by Ella Sharpe, Paula Heimann, John Rickman, and W.R.D. Fairbairn in this country, and H. B. Lee in the U.S.A.

Maybe it is possible now, in the light of new analytical discoveries, to ask new questions. Can we isolate in the psychology of the artist the specific factors which enable him to produce a satisfactory work of art? And if we can, will that further our understanding of the aesthetic value of the work of art, and of the aesthetic experience of the audience?

It seems to me that Melanie Klein's concept of the depressive position makes it possible at least to attempt an answer to these questions.

The "depressive position," as described by Melanie Klein, is reached by the infant when he recognizes his mother and other people, and among them his father, as real persons. His object relations then undergo a fundamental change.¹ Where earlier he was aware of "part objects" he now perceives complete persons; instead of "split" objects—ideally good or

1. For the description of the preceding phase of development see Klein (1948) and Rosenfeld (1952).

overwhelmingly persecuting—he sees a whole object both good and bad. The whole object is loved and introjected and forms the core of an integrated ego. But this new constellation ushers in a new anxiety situation: where earlier the infant feared an attack on the ego by persecutory objects, now the predominant fear is that of the loss of the loved object in the external world and in his own inside. The infant at that stage is still under the sway of uncontrollable greedy and sadistic impulses. In phantasy his loved object is continually attacked in greed and hatred, is destroyed, torn into pieces and fragments; and not only is the external object so attacked but also the internal one, and then the whole internal world feels destroyed and shattered as well. Bits of the destroyed object may turn into persecutors, and there is a fear of internal persecution as well as a pining for the lost loved object and guilt for the attack. The memory of the good situation, where the infant's ego contained the whole loved object and the realization that it has been lost through his own attacks, give rise to an intense feeling of loss and guilt, and to the wish to restore and re-create the lost loved object outside and within the ego. This wish to restore and re-create is the basis of later sublimation and creativity.

It is also at this point that a sense of inner reality is developed. If the object is remembered as a whole object, then the ego is faced with the recognition of its own ambivalence toward the object; it holds itself responsible for its impulses and for the damage done to the external and to the internal object. Where, earlier, impulses and parts of the infant's self were projected into the object with the result that a false picture of it was formed, that his own impulses were denied, and that there was often a lack of differentiation between the self and the external object, in the depressive phase a sense of inner reality is developed and in its wake a sense of outer reality as well.

Depressive phantasies give rise to the wish to repair and restore, and become a stimulus to further development only insofar as the depressive anxiety can be tolerated by the ego and the sense of psychic reality retained. If there is little belief in the capacity to restore, the good object outside and inside is felt to be irretrievably lost and destroyed, the destroyed fragments turn into persecutors, and the internal situation is felt to be hopeless. The infant's ego is at the mercy of intolerable feelings of guilt, loss, and internal persecution. To protect itself from total despair the ego must have recourse to violent defense mechanisms. Those defense mechanisms which protect it from the feelings arising out of the loss of the good object form a system of manic defenses. The essential features of manic defenses are denial of psychic reality, omnipotent control, and a partial regression to the paranoid

position and its defenses: splitting, idealization, denial, projective identification, etc. This regression strengthens the fear of persecution and that in turn leads to the strengthening of omnipotent control.

But in successful development the experience of love from the environment slowly reassures the infant about his objects. His growing love, strength, and skill give him increasing confidence in his own capacities to restore. And as his confidence increases he can gradually relinquish the manic defenses and experience more and more fully the underlying feelings of loss, guilt, and love, and he can make renewed and increasingly successful attempts at reparation.

By repeated experiences of loss and restoration of the internal objects they become more firmly established and more fully assimilated in the ego.

A successful working through of the depressive anxieties has far-reaching consequences: the ego becomes integrated and enriched through the assimilation of loved objects; the dependence on the external objects is lessened; and deprivation can be better dealt with. Aggression and love can be tolerated, and guilt gives rise to the need to restore and re-create.

Feelings of guilt probably play a role before the depressive position is fully established; they already exist in relation to the part object, and they contribute to later sublimation; but they are then simpler impulses acting in a predominantly paranoid setting, isolated and unintegrated. With the establishment of the depressive position the object becomes more personal and unique and the ego more integrated, and an awareness of an integrated internal world is gradually achieved. Only when this happens does the attack on the object lead to real despair at the destruction of an existing complex and organized internal world and, with it, to the wish to recover such a complete world again.

The task of the artist lies in the creation of a world of his own. In his introduction to the second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Roger Fry writes: "Now these artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse a conviction of a new and different reality. They do not seek to imitate life but to find an equivalent for life." What Roger Fry says of post-impressionists undoubtedly applies to all genuine art. One of the great differences between art and imitation or a superficial "pretty" achievement is that neither the imitation nor the "pretty" production ever achieves this creation of an entirely new reality.

Every creative artist produces a world of his own. Even when he believes himself to be a complete realist and sets himself the task of faithfully reproducing the external world, he in fact only uses elements of the existing external world to create with them a reality of his own. When, for instance,

two realistic writers like Zola and Flaubert try to portray life in the same country, and at very nearly the same time, the two worlds they show us differ from each other as widely as if they were the most fantastic creations of surrealist poets. If two great painters paint the same landscape we have two different worlds.

... and dream
Of waves, flowers, clouds, woods,
Rocks, and all that we
Read in their smiles
And call reality.

How does this creation come about? Of all artists, the one who gives us the fullest description of the creative process is Marcel Proust—a description based on years of self-observation and the fruit of an amazing insight. According to Proust, an artist is compelled to create by his need to recover his lost past. But a purely intellectual memory of the past, even when it is available, is emotionally valueless and dead. A real remembrance sometimes comes about unexpectedly, by chance association. The flavor of a cake brings back to his mind a fragment of his childhood with full emotional vividness. Stumbling over a stone revives a recollection of a holiday in Venice which, before, he had vainly tried to recapture. For years he tries in vain to remember and re-create in his mind a living picture of his beloved grandmother. But only a chance association revives her picture and at last enables him to remember her, and to experience his loss and mourn her. He calls these fleeting associations *intermittences du coeur*, but he says that such memories come and then disappear again, so that the past remains elusive. To capture them, to give them permanent life, to integrate them with the rest of his life, he must create a work of art. "Il fallait . . . faire sortir de la pénombre ce que j'avais senti, de le reconvertir en un équivalent spirituel. Or ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul qu'était-ce autre chose que de créer une oeuvre d'art?" ("I had to recapture from the shade that which I had felt, to reconvert it into its psychic equivalent. But the way to do it, the only one I could see, what was it—but to create a work of art—?")

Through the many volumes of his work the past is being recaptured; all his lost, destroyed, and loved objects are being brought back to life: his parents, his grandmother, his beloved Albertine. "Et certes il n'y aurait pas qu'Albertine, que ma grandmère, mais bien d'autres encore dont j'aurais pu assimiler une parole, un regard, mais en tant que créatures individuelles je ne m'en rappellais plus; un livre est un grand cimetière ou sur la plupart des tombes on ne peut plus lire les noms effacés." ("And indeed it was not only Albertine, not only my grandmother, but many others still from whom I might well have assimilated a gesture or a word, but whom I could not

even remember as distinct persons. A book is a vast graveyard where on most of the tombstones one can read no more the faded names.")

And, according to Proust, it is only the lost past and the lost or dead object that can be made into a work of art. He makes the painter, Elstir, say: "On ne peut recréer ce qu'on aime qu'en le renonçant." ("It is only by renouncing that one can re-create what one loves.") It is only when the loss has been acknowledged and the mourning experienced that re-creation can take place.

In the last volume of his work Proust describes how at last he decided to sacrifice the rest of his life to writing. He came back after a long absence to seek his old friends at a party, and all of them appeared to him as ruins of the real people he knew—useless, ridiculous, ill, on the threshold of death. Others, he found, had died long ago. And on realizing the destruction of a whole world that had been his, he decided to write, to sacrifice himself to the re-creation of the dying and the dead. By virtue of his art he can give his objects an eternal life in his work. And since they represent his internal world too, if he can do that, he himself will no longer be afraid of death.

What Proust describes corresponds to a situation of mourning: he sees that his loved objects are dying or dead. Writing a book is for him like the work of mourning in that gradually the external objects are given up, they are reinstated in the ego, and re-created in the book. In her paper "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), Melaine Klein has shown how mourning in grown-up life is a reliving of the early depressive anxieties; not only is the present object in the external world felt to be lost, but also the early objects, the parents; and they are lost as internal objects as well as in the external world. In the process of mourning it is these earliest objects which are lost again, and then re-created. Proust describes how this mourning leads to a wish to re-create the lost world.

I have quoted Proust at length because he reveals such an acute awareness of what I believe is present in the unconscious of all artists: namely, that all creation is really a re-creation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self. It is when the world within us is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments, and we ourselves in helpless despair—it is then that we must re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life.

If the wish to create is rooted in the depressive position and the capacity to create depends on a successful working through it, it would follow that the inability to acknowledge and overcome depressive anxiety must lead to inhibitions in artistic expression.

I should now like to give a few clinical examples from artists who have been inhibited in their creative activities by neurosis, and I shall try to show that in them it was the inability to work through their depressive anxieties which led to inhibitions of artistic activity, or to the production of an unsuccessful artistic product.

Case A was a young girl with a definite gift for painting. An acute rivalry with her mother made her give up painting in her early teens. After some analysis she started to paint again and was working as a decorative artist. She did decorative handicraft work in preference to what she sometimes called "real painting," and this was because she knew that, though correct, neat, and pretty, her work failed to be moving and aesthetically significant. In her manic way she usually denied that this caused her any concern. At the time when I was trying to interpret her unconscious sadistic attacks on her father, the internalization of her mutilated and destroyed father, and the resulting depression, she told me the following dream: She had seen a picture in a shop which represented a wounded man lying alone and desolate in a dark forest. She felt quite overwhelmed with emotion and admiration for this picture; she thought it represented the actual essence of life; if she could only paint like that she would be a really great painter.

It soon appeared that the meaning of the dream was that if she could only acknowledge her depression about the wounding and destruction of her father, she would then be able to express it in her painting and would achieve real art. In fact, however, it was impossible for her to do this, since the unusual strength of her sadism, her resulting despair, and her small capacity to tolerate depression led to its manic denial and to a constant make-believe that all was well with the world. In her dream she confirmed my interpretation about the attack on her father, but she did more than this. Her dream showed something that had not been in any way interpreted or indicated by me: namely, the effect on her painting of her persistent denial of depression. In relation to her painting the denial of the depth and seriousness of her depressive feelings produced the effect of superficiality and prettiness in whatever she chose to do—the dead father was completely denied and no ugliness or conflict was ever allowed to disturb the neat and correct form of her work.

Case B was that of a journalist aged a little over thirty, whose ambition was to be a writer, and who suffered, among other symptoms, from an ever increasing inhibition in creative writing. An important feature of his character was a tendency to regress from the depressive to the paranoid position. The following dream illustrates his problem: He found himself in a room with Goebbels, Goering, and some other Nazis. He was aware that

these men were completely amoral. He knew that they were going to poison him and therefore he tried to make a bargain with them; he suggested that it would be a good thing for them to let him live, since he was a journalist and could write about them and make them live for a time after their death. But this stratagem failed and he knew that he would finally be poisoned.

An important factor in this patient's psychology was his introjection of an extremely bad father-figure who was then blamed for all that the patient did. And one of the results was an unbearable feeling of being internally persecuted by this bad internal father-figure, which was sometimes expressed in hypochondriacal symptoms. He tried to defend himself against it by placating and serving this bad internal figure. He was often driven to do things that he disapproved of and disliked. In the dream he showed how it interfered with his writing: to avoid death at the hands of internal persecutors he had to write for them to keep them immortal; but there is, of course, no real wish to keep such bad figures alive, and consequently he was inhibited in his capacity for writing. He often complained, too, that he had no style of his own; in his associations to the dream it became clear that he had to write not only for the benefit of the persecutors, and to serve their purposes, but also at their command. Thus the style of his writing belonged to the internal parental figure. The case, I think, resembles one described by Paula Heimann (1942). A patient of hers drew a sketch with which she was very displeased. The style was not her own—it was Victorian. It appeared clearly during the session that it was the result of a quarrel with another woman, who stood for her mother. After the quarrel the painter had introjected her as a bad and vengeful mother, and, through guilt and fear, she had to submit to this bad internal figure; it was really the Victorian mother who had dictated the painting.

Paula Heimann described this example of an acute impairment of an already established sublimation. In my patient his submission to a very bad internal figure was a chronic situation preventing him from achieving any internal freedom to create. He was basically fixed in the paranoid position and returned to it whenever depressive feelings were aroused, so that his love and reparative impulses could not become fully active.

All the patients mentioned suffered from sexual maladjustments as well as creative inhibitions. There is clearly a genital aspect of artistic creation which is of paramount importance. Creating a work of art is a psychic equivalent of pro-creation. It is a genital bisexual activity necessitating a good identification with the father who gives, and the mother who receives and bears, the child. The ability to deal with the depressive

position, however, is the precondition of both genital and artistic maturity. If the parents are felt to be so completely destroyed that there is no hope of ever re-creating them, a successful identification is not possible, and neither can the genital position be maintained nor the sublimation in art develop.

This relation between feelings of depression and genital and artistic problems is clearly shown by another patient of mine. C, a man of thirty-five, was a really gifted artist, but at the same time a very ill person. Since the age of eighteen he had suffered from depression, from a variety of conversion symptoms of great intensity, and from what he described as "a complete lack of freedom and spontaneity." This lack of spontaneity interfered considerably with his work, and, though he was physically potent, it also deprived him of all the enjoyment of sexual intercourse. A feeling of impending failure, worthlessness, and hopelessness marred all his efforts. He came to analysis at the age of thirty-five because of a conversion symptom: he suffered from a constant pain in the small of his back and the lower abdomen, a pain aggravated by frequent spasms. He described it as "a constant state of childbirth." It appeared in his analysis that the pain started soon after he learned that the wife of his twin brother was pregnant, and he actually came to me for treatment a week before her confinement. He felt that if I could only liberate him from the spasm he would do marvelous things. In his case, identification with the pregnant woman, representing the mother, was very obvious, but it was not a happy identification. He felt his mother and the babies inside her had been so completely destroyed by his sadism, and his hope of re-creating them was so slight, that the identification with the pregnant mother meant to him a state of anguish, ruin, and abortive pregnancy. Instead of producing the baby, he, like the mother, was destroyed. Feeling destroyed inside and unable to restore the mother, he felt persecuted by her; the internal attacked mother attacked him in turn and robbed him of his babies. Unlike the other three patients described, this one recognized his depression and his reparative drive was therefore very much stronger. The inhibition both in his sexual and artistic achievements was due mainly to a feeling of the inadequacy of his reparative capacity in comparison with the devastation that he felt he had brought about. This feeling of inadequacy made him regress to a paranoid position whenever his anxiety was aroused.

Patient D, a woman writer, was the most disturbed of the patients here. A severe chronic hypochondriac, she suffered from frequent depersonalization and endless phobias, among them food phobias leading at times to almost complete anorexia.

She had been a writer, but had not been able to write for a number of years. I want to describe here how her inability to experience depression led to an inhibition of symbolic expression.

One day she told me the following dream: She was in a nursing home and the matron of this home, dressed in black, was going to kill a man and a woman. She herself was going to a fancy dress ball. She kept running out of the nursing home in various fancy disguises, but somehow something always went wrong, and she had to come back to the nursing home, and to meet the matron. At some point of the dream she was with her friend Joan.

Her friend Joan was for my patient the embodiment of mental health and stability. After telling me the dream she said: "Joan was not in a fancy dress, she was undisguised, and I felt her to be so much more vulnerable than me." Then she immediately corrected herself: "Oh, of course I meant she was so much less vulnerable than me." This slip of the patient gave us the key to the dream. The mentally healthy person is more vulnerable than my patient, she wears no disguises and is vulnerable to illness and death. My patient herself escapes death, represented by the matron, by using various disguises. Her associations to this dream led us to a review of some of her leading symptoms in terms of her fear of, and attempted escape from, death. The disguises in the dream represented personifications, projective and introjective identifications, all three used by her as means of not living her own life and—in the light of the dream—not dying her own death. She also connected other symptoms of hers with the fear of death. For instance, her spending almost half her life lying in bed, "half-dead," was a shamming of death, a way of cheating death. Her phobia of bread, her fear of sex, appeared to her now as ways of escaping full living, which would mean that one day she would have "spent her life" and would have to face death. So far, she had almost lived on "borrowed" life. For instance, she felt extremely well and alive when she was pregnant—she felt she lived on the baby's life; but immediately after the baby's birth she felt depersonalized and half-dead.

I mention here only some of her striking symptoms, which all pointed in the same direction—to a constant preoccupation with the fear of death. The analyst, represented by the matron, tears off her disguises one after another and forces her to lead her own life and so, eventually, to die.

After some three sessions completely taken up with the elaboration of this theme, she started the next one with what appeared to be a completely new trend of thought. She started complaining of her inability to write. Her associations led her to remember her early dislike of using words. She felt that her dislike was still present and she did not really want to use words at all. Using words, she said, made her break "an endless unity into bits." It

was like "chopping up," like "cutting things." It was obviously felt by her as an aggressive act. Besides, using words was "making things finite and separate." To use words meant acknowledging the separateness of the world from herself, and gave her a feeling of loss. She felt that using words made her lose the illusion of possessing and being at one with an endless, undivided world: "When you name a thing you really lose it."² It became clear to her that using a symbol (language) meant an acceptance of the separateness of her object from herself, the acknowledgment of her own aggressiveness, "chopping up," "cutting," and finally losing the object.

In this patient the loss of the object was always felt as an imminent threat to her own survival. So we could eventually connect her difficulties in using language with the material of the earlier sessions. Refusing to face this threat of death to her object and to herself, she had to form the various symptoms devised magically to control and avoid death. She also had to give up her creative writing. In order to write again, she would have to be stripped of her disguises, admit reality, and become vulnerable to loss and death.

I shall now briefly describe a session with the same patient two years later.

She had known for some time that she would have to give up her analysis at the end of the term, through external circumstances. She came to this session very sad, for the first time since it became clear that she would end her analysis. In preceding sessions she felt nausea, felt internally persecuted and "all in bits and pieces." She said at the beginning of the session that she could hardly wait to see me for fear that her sadness would turn into a "sickness and badness." She thought of the end of her analysis, wondered if she would be able to go on liking me and how much she would be able to remember me. She also wondered if she in any way resembled me. There were two things she would wish to resemble me in: the truthfulness, and the capacity to care for people which she attributed to me. She hoped she may have learned these from me. She also felt I was an ordinary kind of person, and she liked that thought. I interpreted her material as a wish to take me in and identify herself with me as a real "ordinary" feeding breast, in contrast to an earlier situation when an idealized breast was internalized, which subsequently turned into a persecuting one.

She then told me the following dream: A baby has died or grown up—she didn't know which—and as a result her breasts were full of milk. She was feeding a baby of another woman, whose breasts were dry.

2. This theme was later linked with the Rumpelstiltskin theme of stealing the baby and the penis, but I cannot follow it up here.

The transference meaning of that dream was that I weaned her—my breast was dry—but she acquired a breast and could be a mother herself. The baby who “died or grew up” is herself. The baby dies and the grown woman takes its place. The losing of the analyst is here an experience involving sadness, guilt (about the rivalry with me in relation to the baby), and anxiety (will she be able to go on remembering me?). But it is also an experience leading to the enrichment of her ego—she now has the breasts full of milk and therefore need no longer depend on me.

Toward the end of the hour, she said: “Words seem to have a meaning again, they are rich,” and she added that she was quite sure she could now write, “provided I can go on being sad for a while, without being sick and hating food”—i.e., provided she could mourn me instead of feeling me as an internal persecutor.

Words acquired a meaning and the wish to write returned again when she could give up my breast as an external object and internalize it. This giving up was experienced by her as the death of the breast, which is dried up in the dream, and the death of a part of herself—the baby part—which in growing up also dies. Insofar as she could mourn me, words became rich in meaning.³

This patient's material confirmed an impression, derived from many other patients, that successful symbol formation is rooted in the depressive position.

One of Freud's greatest contributions to psychology was the discovery that sublimation is the outcome of a successful renunciation of an instinctual aim; I would like to suggest here that such a successful renunciation can happen only through a process of mourning. The giving up of an instinctual aim, or object, is a repetition and at the same time a reliving of the giving up of the breast. It can be successful, like this first situation, if the object to be given up can be assimilated in the ego; by the process of loss and internal restoration. I suggest that such an assimilated object becomes a symbol within the ego. Every aspect of the object, every situation that has to be given up in the process of growing, gives rise to symbol formation.

In this view, symbol formation is the outcome of a loss; it is a creative act involving the pain and the whole work of mourning.

If psychic reality is experienced and differentiated from external reality, the symbol is differentiated from the object; it is felt to be created by the self and can be freely used by the self.

3. I have given here only the transference meaning of the dream in order not to detract from my main theme. The transference situation was linked with past experiences of weaning, birth of the new baby, and the patient's failure in the past to be a “good” mother to the new baby.

I cannot deal here extensively with the problem of symbols; I have brought it up only insofar as it is relevant to my main theme. And it is relevant in that the creation of symbols, the symbolic elaboration of a theme, is the very essence of art.

I should now like to attempt to formulate an answer to the question whether there is a specific factor in the psychology of the successful artist which would differentiate him from the unsuccessful one. In Freud's words: “What distinguishes him, the poet, the artist, from the neurotic day-dreamer?” In his paper “Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning” (1911), Freud says that the artist “finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts he moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality” (p. 19). Indeed, one could say that the artist has an acute reality sense. He is often neurotic and in many situations may show a complete lack of objectivity, but in at least two respects he shows an extremely high reality sense. One is in relation to his own internal reality, and the other in relation to the material of his art. However neurotic Proust was in his attachment to his mother, his homosexuality, his asthma, etc., he had a real insight into the fantastic world of the people inside him, and he knew it was internal, and he knew it was phantasy. He showed an awareness that does not exist in a neurotic who splits off, represses, denies, or acts out his phantasy. The second, the reality sense of the artist in relation to his material, is a highly specialized reality assessment of the nature, needs, possibilities, and limitations of his material, be it words, sounds, paints, or clay. The neurotic uses his material in a magic way, and so does the bad artist. The real artist, being aware of his internal world, which he must express, and of the external materials with which he works, can in all consciousness use the material to express the phantasy. He shares with the neurotic all the difficulties of unresolved depression, the constant threat of the collapse of his internal world; but he differs from the neurotic in that he has a greater capacity for tolerating anxiety and depression. The patients I described could not tolerate depressive phantasies and anxieties; they all made use of manic defenses leading to a denial of psychic reality. Patient A denied both the loss of her father and his importance to her; Patient B projected his impulses onto an internal bad object, with the result that his ego was split and that he was internally persecuted; Patient C did the same, though to a lesser extent; Patient D regressed to the schizoid mechanisms of splitting and projective identification, which led to depersonalization and inhibition in the use of symbols.

In contrast to that, Proust could fully experience depressive mourning.

This gave him the possibility of insight into himself, and with it a sense of internal and external reality. Further, this reality sense enabled him to have and to maintain a relationship with other people through the medium of his art. The neurotic's phantasy interferes with his relationships, in which he acts it out. The artist withdraws into a world of phantasy, but he can communicate and share it. In that way he makes reparation, not only to his own internal objects, but to the external world as well.

I have tried, so far, to show how Melanie Klein's work, especially her concept of the depressive position, the reparative drives that are set in motion by it, and her description of the world of inner objects, throws new light on the psychology of the artist, on the conditions necessary for him to be successful, and on those which can inhibit or vitiate his artistic activities. Can this new light on the psychology of the artist help us to understand the aesthetic pleasure experienced by the artist's public? If, for the artist, the work of art is his most complete and satisfactory way of allaying the guilt and despair arising out of the depressive position and of restoring his destroyed objects, it is but one of the many human ways of achieving this end. What is it that makes a work of art such a satisfactory experience for the artist's public? Freud says that he "bribes us with the formal and aesthetic pleasures."

To begin with, we should distinguish between the aesthetic pleasure and other, incidental pleasures to be found in works of art. For instance, the satisfaction derived from identification with particular scenes or characters can also arise in other ways, and it can be derived from bad as well as from good art. The same would apply to the sentimental interests originating in memories and associations. The aesthetic pleasure proper, that is, the pleasure derived from a work of art and unique in that it can only be obtained through a work of art, is due to an identification of ourselves with the work of art as a whole and with the whole internal world of the artist as represented by his work. In my view all aesthetic pleasure includes an unconscious reliving of the artist's experience of creation. In his paper "The Moses of Michaelangelo" (1914), Freud says: "What the artist aims at is to awaken in us the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create."

We find in Dilthey's philosophy (Hodges 1944) the concept *nach-erleben*. This word denotes for him our capacity to understand other people from their behavior and expression. We intuitively reconstruct their mental and emotional states, we live after them; we re-live them. This process is, he says, often deeper than introspection can discover. His concept is, I think, equivalent to unconscious identification. I assume that this kind of uncon-

scious reliving of the creator's state of mind is the foundation of all aesthetic pleasure.

To illustrate what I mean I will take as an example the case of classical tragedy. In a tragedy the hero commits a crime: the crime is fated, it is an "innocent" crime, he is driven to it. Whatever the nature of the crime, the result is always complete destruction—parental figures and child figures alike are engulfed by it. That is, at whatever level the conflict starts—*Oedipus Rex*, for instance, states a genital conflict—in the end we arrive at a picture of the phantasies belonging to the earliest depressive position where all the objects are destroyed. What is the psychological mechanism of the listener's *nach-erleben*? As I see it, he makes two identifications. He identifies himself with the author, and the whole tragedy with the author's internal world. He identifies himself with the author while the latter is facing and expressing his depression. In a simplified way one can summarize the listener's reaction as follows: "The author has, in his hatred, destroyed all his loved objects just as I have done, and like me he felt death and desolation inside him. Yet he can face it and he can make me face it, and despite the ruin and devastation we and the world around us survive. What is more, his objects, which have become evil and were destroyed, have been made alive again and have become immortal by his art. Out of all the chaos and destruction he has created a world which is whole, complete, and unified."

It would appear, then, that two factors are essential to the excellence of a tragedy: the unshrinking expression of the full horror of the depressive phantasy and the achieving of an impression of wholeness and harmony. The external form of classical tragedy is in complete contrast with its content. The formal modes of speech, the unities of time, place, and action, and the strictness and rigidity of the rules are all, I believe, an unconscious demonstration of the fact that order can emerge out of chaos. Without this formal harmony the depression of the audience would be aroused but not resolved. There can be no aesthetic pleasure without perfect form.⁴

4. Roger Fry says: "All the essential aesthetic quality has to do with pure form," and I agree; but he adds later: "The odd thing is that it is, apparently, dangerous for the artist to know about this." Roger Fry feels that it is odd, I think, because of an inherent weakness of the formalist school he represents. The formalists discount the importance of emotional factors in art. According to Fry, art must be completely detached from emotions, all emotion is impurity, and the more the form gets freed from the emotional content the nearer it is to the ideal. What the formalists ignore is that form as much as content is in itself an expression of unconscious emotion. What Fry, following Clive Bell, calls *significant form*, a term he confesses himself incapable of defining, is form expressing and embodying an unconscious emotional experience. The artist is not trying to produce pretty or even beautiful form; he is engaged on the most important task of re-creating his ruined internal world, and the resulting form will depend on how well he succeeds in his task.

In creating a tragedy, I suggest, the success of the artist depends on his being able fully to acknowledge and express his depressive phantasies and anxieties. In expressing them he does work similar to the work of mourning in that he internally re-creates a harmonious world which is projected into his work of art.

The reader identifies with the author through the medium of his work of art. In that way he reexperiences his own early depressive anxieties, and through identifying with the artist he experiences a successful mourning, reestablishes his own internal objects and his own internal world, and feels, therefore, reintegrated and enriched.

But is this experience specific to a work of art that is tragic, or is it an essential part of any aesthetic experience? I think I could generalize my argument. To do so I shall have to introduce the more usual terminology of aesthetics and restate my problems in new terms. The terms I need are *ugly* and *beautiful*. For Rickman, in his paper "On the Nature of Ugliness and the Creative Impulse" (1940), the ugly is the destroyed, the incomplete object. For Ella Sharpe (1930) ugly means destroyed, arhythmic, and connected with painful tension. I think both these views would be included if we say that ugliness is what expresses the state of the internal world in depression. It includes tension, hatred, and its results—the destruction of good and whole objects and their change into persecutory fragments. Rickman, however, when he contrasts ugly and beautiful, seems to equate the latter with what is aesthetically satisfying. With that I cannot agree. Ugly and beautiful are two categories of aesthetic experience and, in certain ways, they can be contrasted; but if beautiful is used as synonymous with aesthetically satisfying, then its contradictory is not ugly, but unaesthetic, or indifferent, or dull. Rickman says that we recoil from the ugly; my contention is that it is a most important and necessary component of a satisfying aesthetic experience. The concept of ugliness as one element in aesthetic satisfaction is not uncommon in the tradition of philosophical aesthetics; it has been most strikingly expressed, however, by the artists themselves. Rodin writes: "We call ugly that which is formless, unhealthy, which suggests illness, suffering, destruction, which is contrary to regularity—the sign of health. We also call ugly the immoral, the vicious, the criminal and all abnormality which brings evil—the soul of the parricide, the traitor, the self-seeker. But let a great artist get hold of this ugliness; immediately he transfigures it—with a touch of his magic wand he makes it into beauty."

What is beauty? Taking again the beautiful as but one of the categories of the aesthetically satisfying, most writers agree that the main elements of

the beautiful—the whole, the complete, and the rhythmical—are in contrast with the ugly. Among analytical writers, Rickman equates the beautiful with the whole object, while Ella Sharpe considers beauty essentially as rhythm and equates it with the experience of goodness in rhythmical sucking, satisfactory defecation, and sexual intercourse. To this I should add rhythmical breathing and the rhythm of our heartbeats. An undisturbed rhythm in a composed whole seems to correspond to the state in which our inner world is at peace. Among nonanalytical writers, Herbert Read comes to a similar conclusion when he says that what we find rhythmical are simple arithmetical proportions which correspond to the way we are built and our bodies work. But these elements of beauty are in themselves insufficient. If they were enough we would find it most satisfactory to contemplate a circle or listen to a regular tattoo on a drum. I suggest that both beauty, in the narrow sense of the word, and ugliness must be present for a full aesthetic experience.

I would reword my attempt at analyzing the tragic in terms of ugliness and beauty. Broadly speaking, in tragedy ugliness is the content—the complete ruin and destruction—and beauty is the form. Ugliness is also an essential part of the comic. The comic here is ugly in that, as in caricature, the overstressing of one or two characteristics ruins the wholeness—the balance—of the character. Ugly and tragic is also the defeat of the comic hero by the sane world. How near the comic hero is to the tragic can be seen from the fact that outstanding comic heroes of past ages are felt, at a later date, to be mainly tragic figures; few people today take Shylock or Falstaff as figures of fun only; we are aware of the tragedy implied. The difference between tragedy and comedy lies, then, in the comic writer's attempt to disassociate himself from the tragedy of his hero, to feel superior to it in a kind of successful manic defense. But the manic defense is never complete; the original depression is still expressed and it must therefore have been to a large extent acknowledged and lived by the author. The audience relives depression, the fear of it, and the aggression against it which are expressed in a comedy and its final successful outcome.

It is easier to discover this pattern of overcoming depression in literature, with its explicit verbal content, than in other forms of art. The further away from literature the more difficult is the task. In music, for instance, we would have to study the introduction of discords, disharmonies, new disorders which are so invariably considered to be ugly before they are universally accepted. New art is considered difficult; it is resisted, misunderstood, treated with bitter hatred, contempt; or, on the other hand, it may be idealized to such an extent that the apparent admiration defeats its aim

and makes its object the butt of ridicule. These prevalent reactions of the public are, I think, manifestations of a manic defense against the depressive anxieties stirred by art. The artists find ever new ways of revealing a repressed and denied depression. The public use against it all their powers of defense until they find the courage to follow the new artist into the depths of his depression, and eventually to share his triumphs.

The idea that ugliness is an essential component of a complete experience seems to be true of the tragic, the comic, the realistic—in fact, of all the commonly accepted categories of the aesthetic except one. And this single exception is of great importance.

There is, undoubtedly, a category of art which shows to the greatest extent all the elements of beauty in the narrow sense of the word, and no apparent sign of ugliness; it is often called “classical” beauty. The beauty of the Parthenon, of the Discobolos, is whole, rhythmical, undisturbed. But soulless imitations of beauty, “pretty” creations, are also whole and rhythmical; yet they fail to stir and rouse anything but boredom. Thus classical beauty must have some other not immediately obvious element.

Returning to the concept of *nach-erleben*, of experiencing along with another, we may say that in order to move us deeply the artist must have embodied in his work some deep experience of his own. And all our analytical experience as well as the knowledge derived from other forms of art suggests that the deep experience must have been what we call, clinically, a depression, and that the stimulus to create such a perfect whole must have lain in the drive to overcome an unusually strong depression. If we consider what is commonly said about beauty by laymen, we find a confirmation of this conclusion. They say that complete beauty makes one both sad and happy at the same time, and that it is a purge for the soul—that it is awe-inspiring. Great artists themselves have been very much aware of the depression and terror embodied in works of classical beauty which are apparently so peaceful. When Faust goes in search of Helen, the perfect classical beauty, he has to face unnamed terrors, to go where there is no road:

Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene
Nicht zu Betretende; ein Weg ins Unerbetene,
Nicht zu Erbittende.

He must face endless emptiness:

—Nichts Wirst du sehn in ewig leerer Ferne,
Den Schritt nicht horen den du tust,
Nichts Festes finden, wo du ruhst.

Rilke writes: “Beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror that we are still just able to bear.”

Thus to the sensitive onlooker, every work of beauty still embodies the terrifying experience of depression and death. Hanns Sachs, in his book *Beauty, Life and Death*, pays particular attention to the awesome aspect of beauty; he says the difficulty is not to understand beauty but to bear it, and he connects this terror with the very peacefulness of the perfect work of art. He calls it the static element; it is peaceful because it seems unchangeable, eternal. And it is terrifying because this eternal unchangeability is the expression of the death instinct—the static element opposed to life and change.

Following quite a different trend of thought I come to similar conclusions about the role of the death instinct in a work of art. Thus far my contention has been that a satisfactory work of art is achieved by a realization and sublimation of the depressive position, and that the effect on the audience is that they unconsciously relive the artist's experience and share his triumph of achievement and his final detachment. But to realize and symbolically express depression the artist must acknowledge the death instinct, both in its aggressive and self-destructive aspects, and accept the reality of death for the object and the self. One of the patients I described could not use symbols because of her failure to work through the depressive position; her failure clearly lay in her inability to accept and use her death instinct and to acknowledge death.

Restated in terms of instincts, ugliness—destruction—is the expression of the death instinct; beauty—the desire to unite into rhythms and wholes—is that of the life instinct. The achievement of the artist is in giving the fullest expression to the conflict and the union between these two.

This is a conclusion which Freud has brought out in two of his essays, though he did not generalize it as applicable to all art. One of these essays is that on Michelangelo's Moses (1914), where he clearly shows that the latent meaning of this work is the overcoming of wrath. The other essay is his analysis of the theme of the three caskets (1913). He shows there that in the choice between the three caskets, or three women, the final choice is always symbolic of death. He interprets Cordelia in *King Lear* as a symbol of death, and for him the solution of the play is Lear's final overcoming of the fear of death and his reconciliation to it. Freud writes: “Thus man overcomes death, which in thought he has acknowledged. No greater triumph of wish-fulfillment is conceivable” (p. 254).

All artists aim at immortality; their objects must not only be brought back to life, but that life must also be eternal. And of all human activities art

comes nearest to achieving immortality; a great work of art is likely to escape destruction and oblivion.

It is tempting to suggest that this is so because in a great work of art the degree of denial of the death instinct is less than in any other human activity, that the death instinct is acknowledged, as fully as can be borne. It is expressed and curbed to the needs of the life instinct and creation.

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Looking back on this paper, the first one I presented in the Society in 1947, although it was published much later, I still find myself in agreement with its main thesis, namely, that the essence of the aesthetic creation is a resolution of the central depressive situation and that the main factor in the aesthetic experience is the identification with this process. I should, however, now emphasize more the role of the idealization arising from the paranoid-schizoid position. I am in agreement here with Adrian Stokes (1965), who says that the artist seeks the precise point at which he can maintain simultaneously an ideal object merged with the self, and an object perceived as separate and independent, as in the depressive position.

I would also have liked to link my work with the paper of Elliot Jaques (1965) on the midlife crisis, and to describe in more detail the difference between a pre-midlife and a post-midlife crisis type of creativity. I think that before the midlife crisis the artist seeks more the ideal object, and that past the midlife crisis he is more in search of the re-creation of the object as seen in the depressive position.

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17

Delusion and Artistic Creativity

THIS ESSAY has no pretensions to literary criticism, nor is it an attempt to "psychoanalyze" a book, or through the book, its author. It is an attempt to use the material of a novel to further a psychoanalytic investigation into the origin and the nature of artistic endeavor. It is a continuation of a trend of thought I started in chapter 16. In particular, it is concerned with the shadowy area in which originate both the psychotic delusion and the artistic creation.

The Spire, a novel by William Golding (1964), is the story, set in the Middle Ages, of the endeavors of Jocelin, Dean of the Cathedral, to build a 400-foot spire, as he has heard that this has been done in France. Despite the opposition of his chapter and advice that such a spire cannot be built because the church has no foundations and the structure no strength, he is certain that he can translate his vision into reality. He has been vouchsafed a vision which convinces him that he has been chosen by God for this task. His conviction that he has been so chosen is also nourished by the fact that his promotion to his present position has been miraculously fast. He is supported by an angel, who "warms his back." Roger Mason is the only man capable of building such a spire, but he is, to begin with, doubtful, and later is completely opposed to the plan. Jocelin must compel him to do the building.