Psychoanalytic Theory and Aesthetic Value

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Explanatory psychological theories are important to our understanding of aesthetic appreciation and evaluation. By examining some general features of Freudian psychoanalysis, we can hope to become clearer about their contribution.

Freud's theory is favoured over others because of its importance in the history of the analytic movement. Many later theorists follow him in the issues they consider. Even if they may propose different explanations and prognoses, they agree with Freud that the actions of a subject have a meaning which must be excavated. And it is the latter claim, with the philosophical issues it subtends, which is important to a general examination of the relevance of psychoanalytic theory to aesthetic response and evaluation.

Other advantages of Freud's theory lie in its value as a heuristic tool. His work is available in translation[1], in which the theory is presented with a brilliant clarity, and it possesses a useful unity. His last work, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, puts forward Freud's mature thought in a clearly organised form, so that his earlier writings on aesthetics and the development of his theory can be provided with a context.

I

Aesthetic appreciation usually proceeds by assessing a work on the basis of some conception of the nature of art and aesthetic value. Psychoanalysis proposes, first, that we re-understand our actions and intentions generally. Events thought accidental are shown to be significant. Lapses of memory, slips of tongue, likes and dislikes, all of which might be thought arbitrary and incapable of general theoretical explanation, are significant because they are symptoms of the play of psychological mechanisms in a personality. On the basis of claims about the unconscious as a part of the structure of the mind, apparently accidental events are shown to belong to a pattern, and the proposal is that they can be seen to have a meaning. Second, so far as the production and appreciation of art are part of our psychic life, psychoanalysis will aim to explain them also. It proposes that aesthetic activity is at one with the rest of our psychic nature and based on

the very psychological mechanisms which explain jokes, parapraxes, and ordinary likes and dislikes. Accordingly, it requires us to assess the meaning of works, their order, and the relation of their parts, to appreciate them from a psychoanalytic point of view. To a commensurate degree, it seems, appreciation must adjust to theory.

In requiring this adjustment, analytic theory is not trying to make our aesthetic response redundant. It may seem that once we know aesthetic response is based on a psychological mechanism, which is in some sense the *real* ground for our response, we can attend directly to the mechanism, and from there infer all our conclusions about the validity, importance, and interest of the work. However, rather than making the response redundant, supporters of psychoanalysis need only maintain that appreciation belongs within a context provided by the theory, and so the inferences we draw from our response must be constrained by the explanations which the theory provides. Such a revision seems to accept both are reality of aesthetic response and the explanation of its nature without claiming also that the first must be reduced to the second. And if the former is irreducible, then it is possible to find analytic theory inadequate because it fails to deal satisfactorily with some features of our response. In these cases we might rely more heavily on the vocabulary of aesthetic response than on the explanatory concepts provided by the analytic theory.

It we must accept both the possibility of bringing psychoanalytic explanation to bear and the legitimacy of aesthetic response and its attendant appreciation and evaluation, then the use of analytic theory in understanding aesthetic response may be secondary in two ways. The explanation of how meanings are established is gained by *extending* to aesthetic activity the conclusions gained in other contexts. The extension may be contingent: the theory intends to explain all our psychic life, including the production and reception of painting and literature, but it happens that for various reasons works of fine art have not been at the centre of attention. Be that as it may, the development of theory has meant that its contribution to art remains dependent on its validity in other fields, and so is secondary to the theory.

Further, a concern with the relation of psychoanalysis to evaluation is secondary also in that its contribution is important only if it explains features which are vital to evaluation. Psychoanalysis seeks to increase our self-consciousness about ourselves, and treats the subject as an acting and feeling being, capable of understanding his own actions. In part, it succeeds by bringing certain factors to consciousness and thereby changing consciousness. In order to do this, it must not only be able to accept the reality of a subject's self-understanding, it must also show the basis of that understanding in the subjects' own history as a way of bringing them to extend their self-understanding. It

cannot, then, by-pass the subjects' self-understanding of their engagement in aesthetic activity. Rather, it seeks to bring them to a better understanding of their own activity[2], and may be expected to treat their aesthetic response as irreducible. Psychoanalytic explanations do not seek to substitute analytic concepts and explanatory connections for aesthetic evaluation but try to show that the validity claimed for evaluations follows a psychoanalytically significant pattern.

However, it may seem unclear that psychoanalysis succeeds in taking our claims seriously. When Freud explains that religion satisfies an emotional need for social unity under strong laws which are thought of as if they were authorised by a person-like agent[3], he seems to treat our self-understanding less than seriously in that he provides an explanation in which religion is dismissed as a mere psychological contrivance. And we have no reason to expect that analytic theory would be any more sympathetic to aesthetic evaluation.

This criticism misunderstands Freud's intention in writing on religion. As he makes clear[4], his concern is to given an account of the psychology of religion, and he intentionally leaves aside questions of the truth validity of religious claims. These latter will continue to be accepted or rejected on their own grounds. Their truth or falsity may affect the psychology of religion in that a satisfactory proof of God's existence and the attendant religious practices is likely to cast a different light on their socially cohesive force. But this need not contradict the psychological explanation of religion. Similarly, analytic theory may accept the validity of aesthetic response even while it seeks to explain it.

This is not to dismiss the criticism entirely, for it reminds us that we need to specify analytic claims. If the theory is used only to account for the psychology of some practice such as religion while questions of its validity are left aside, then we may expect that the theory will similarly be silent on aesthetic validity. For the psychological explanation of aesthetic activity arguably has little connection with the epistemic validity of our responses and valuations. Alternatively, psychoanalysis may contribute to our understanding of art in other ways, perhaps through homologies between the epistemology of analytic practice and the interpretation of an art work. All these possibilities only remind us that we need to examine the specific criteria of aesthetic evaluation if we are to understand the theory's relevance. And here the theory is secondary in that its importance depends on what we see as crucial features in the production, appreciation and evaluation of works, and on how well it explains them.

The points raised above may seem obvious but they need to be made. Practitioners of psychoanalytic criticism, and their critics, often ignore questions of the detailed

interaction between evaluation and theory. They try instead to provide a general account of their interdependence, thinking that this will provide a space for deploying explanations of the specific relations involved. However, though few would argue that every generalisation must be mistaken, a concern with the aesthetic evaluation of objects and works imposes constraints on the way in which a theory enters consideration. For specific claims are important because our appreciation of a particular work from the view-point of the theory will depend on the role theory plays in explaining that given work.

II

To clarify the relation of theory to appreciation, we will argue that the truth of psychoanalytic theory is important to the aesthetic evaluation of works[5]. First, a number of points need to be made.

To begin with there is the matter of criteria for evaluation. Works of criticism contain numerous references to various criteria. Some critics point to a writer's style, some writers try to make the narrative seamless by minimising signs of their intrusion. Some critics stress a consistency of moral vision, others praise an author's picture of the world. In part this variety occurs because literature displays its art in diverse ways, and critics are trying to articulate their response to each work. But it is present also because critics' reading and evaluation of works rests on a conception of what is important in a work.

In this paper, the presence of unity and depth will be taken as grounds for evaluating works positively. The two are not always thought to be aesthetically significant. Modernists often decry the need for unity, taking it to mean some Aristotlean unity of plot[6]. Similarly, Pop Art thrives on shallowness – in colour, in its penchant for gimmickery, in its concern with ephemera – yet maintains a serious interest in the world it represents. Nevertheless, 'unity' and 'depth' are useful inspite of being less than generally relevant. First, these criteria usually go with the conservative defence that psychology has no relevance for aesthetic evaluations. By showing how the latter, based on the unity and depth of a work, depend on psychoanalytic theories, we can consider the issue in its more conservative formulation. Second, it may be possible to explain unity and depth by using deeper theories, and once we have shown the relevance of psychoanalysis to the unity or depth of a work, and so explained its importance to aesthetic evaluation, we may also extend that explanation.

Clearly, such an extension will have to be justified by further arguments. This raises another issue : the wide range of possible explanations of unity must make it more amorphous in meaning than it is effective in use. Rather than aid our understanding of the way in which theory is material to evaluation, it is useless unless supplemented by

some explanation of what constitutes unity. Yet when the latter is available, unity becomes redundant.

In defence of unity and depth we may accept the criticism yet suspend its implications. Unity is ambiguous and so its effectiveness may depend on the theory, if any, which it is substituting for. But it does not depend entirely on that theory. For not every theory will be capable of yielding the results we get from the use of these concepts. It users will have to defend their claims, so that the use of unity need not lead to the sort of incoherence hinted at by saying that it is amorphous in meaning. Rather, unity is positively useful in that it organises a number of deeper theories while actually requiring instead of precluding a rational defence of the evaluative criteria which those theories contain.

Another qualification in considering the importance of psychoanalysis to aesthetic evaluation is that it is most easily applicable to persons and their actions. Rather than examine the features which, for example, are stressed in Lacan's theory, it is simplest to look to homologies with our understanding of persons. Freud's writings have been thought to invite such attention, and Lacan's later emphasis on language does not show that this concern is mistaken at every level. There *are* limitations that accrue to this person-oriented psychoanalysis – restrictions Lacan intends to overcome by using linguistics – but the person-oriented theory can be examined for itself within these restrictions[7]. Accordingly, it becomes simplest to consider narrative works like novels and films, whose structure is made up of the actions and motivations of characters. A fictional character responds to the situation an author creates for him just like his real counterpart. Fictionality does not consist in represented motivations and actions being implausible, though they may in the novel depend on the limited context set up by the work itself.

Once we accept these restrictions, the conclusions we arrive at will have a limited validity because not all works are narratives constituted by the actions of characters. How far we can extend the validity of our conclusions will be determined by the comprehensiveness of psychoanalytic theory in relation to other features of works – whether it can explain aspects of non-representational art, the order in paintings, the nature of our response, the role in all art forms of the language and literality which is crucial to gaining psychological competence, and so on[8].

A further point is that the 'aesthetic' is, so to speak, under-analysed here. Some understanding of it has been implicit in what has gone above, namely that it has been understood as a response, dependent on a subject's experience, which has validity over other subjects because it has other and more justification than an expression of purely

derives many theses about the aesthetic from G.T. Fechner. But not every part of that characterisation is crucial to understanding for under-analysing the 'aesthetic' is that as psychoanalysis explains art and aesthetic response, so our understanding the importance of analysis to evaluation. An one reason of the latter will be altered[9], so it is best to hold off making claims about the aesthetic until the contribution of theory is clearer.

III

Given these qualifications, the importance of psychoanalytic theory to the evaluation of works can be proposed in the following way. We take a novel or film whose structure depends on the represented actions and motivations of a group of characters[10]. The actions that the characters perform and the reasons put forward in explanation go to make up the novel or film. And the latter may be thought aesthetically better if they give us a fuller understanding of their characters at the same time as the sequence of their actions is united in the structure of the novel. The more necessary detail or acuity the writer exhibits in developing characters in the context of the novel, or the more deeply the problems and their resolution in the film or novel touch some unavoidable features of our conception of human beings, the better a work we shall think it.

This suggests that we look to the truthfulness of actions and motivations. But 'truthfulness' is not to be understood by reference to events which actually occurred. Rather, it must be understood in terms of the plausibility of the actions, motivations, and situations being described. A work will be valued for providing a better understandings of these factors. And this claim seems to bring in a conception of novels as having to do with explanations of actions and motivations, in that a situation in a novel is plausible to the extent that its depiction may be expected to exhibit the reasons for their occurrence and nature. Here, as a theory of behaviour and personality, psychoanalysis provides a standard in that the actions and events represented in a novel must be compatible with and capable of being explained by psychoanalysis if they are to be plausible. That is, for the sequence of actions and events in a film or novel to be satisfactorily understandable and recogniseable as actions, they must satisfy the requirements of explanation put forward in the theory. In other words, there may be instances where works are found implausible because the conception of action and motivation which a work contains fails to satisfy the requirements of the theory. Further, a novel or film is constituted by the actions and motivations of its characters. Its plot, the story and order of which are formed by following and relating the interaction between characters, the narrative which is moved by the mechanisms governing actions and motivations – these, among other things, make up the work itself. A novel may be much more than the events being depicted, but it is nothing

(Tathandlung), he describes the ultimate in terms of the concept of the free act which underlies all acts.

Nishida summed up his key assertions concerning art and aesthetic experience in a short essay he wrote as a preface to an edition of Max Klinger's *Painting and Line Drawing* : " Art is neither a mere description of reality nor a mere subjective fancy. The so-called real world is not the only world given to us. Indeed, the world constructed by such a concept must rather be said to be the mere surface of reality. In the back of such a world is the flow of a truer reality, filled with a larger life whose depths cannot be fathomed. Precisely this reality is the object of art, and this aesthetic world, like our life itself, is infinitely free and profoundly rich."[5] Accordingly, aesthetic experience is not to be regarded as simply an interlude in our contact with the real world as ordinarily conceived, an experience in which we adopt a reflective, distanced or contemplative stance toward an aesthetic object of some kind. By contrast, aesthetic experience is experience of the ultimate, or put another way, of the true self which is the universe: ".. we attain to an even deeper self-consciousness in aesthetic intuition than we do in mere conceptual self-consciousness. It is an error to think that aesthetic intuition is unselfconscious or nonconscious in a sense similar to perceptive consciousness. In aesthetic intuition we transcend the plane of conceptual self-consciousness, include it internally, and truly attain to self-consciousness of the free self."[6] It follows that the creative activity of the artist is among the most extraordinary of all activities. To create in this way is to be in contact with the ultimate, the reality underlying the world of nature: hence Nishida can say, strikingly: "The act of creation is not an act in the natural world." [7] [A&M, p.161] Or again, in Kantian terms: "the artist lives within things in themselves."[8]

It is appropriate to note further a point which Nishida does not make explicitly but which follows from his metaphysic and which is taken for granted in what he has to say about Goethe. The one and the many are non-different: to use Nishida's phrase, they have absolutely contradictory identity (*zettai mujunteki jikodoitsu*). [9] Rightly regarded, therefore, ultimate reality is fully present in every particular. Just as for Blake the universe can be experienced via a grain of sand, for Nishida anything, however small, transient or insignificant, can be the vehicle for the final insight into what there is. This ultimate insight is of something which is in the last analysis beyond description: as he put this point in the vocabulary of the third and last of the conceptual frameworks he devised that of the place of nothingness, *mu no basho*, nothing can be said of the ultimate: "it

has completely transcended the standpoint of knowledge, and may perhaps be called 'the world of mystic intuition', unapproachable by word or thinking." [10] However, it can be hinted at obliquely by an artist who can feel the ultimate in the particular and can so depict the particular as to direct our attention in the appropriate way. To do this does not require a long description or a detailed depiction: indeed detail and expansiveness will get in the way, perpetuating our condition of being trapped in the web of conceptual discriminations, a web which veils rather than reveals the truth. A short poem is all that is needed to direct us to ultimate truth. It is perhaps no accident that the *haiku* should have been so cherished in a zen-informed culture (and this is not to underestimate the purely linguistic reasons for its viability in Japanese): since the ultimate is fully present in everything - in the one hand as in the two when clapping - any thing or event, rightly understood, can indicate the way to the ultimate. This is an issue to which I will return later when dealing directly with Nishida's reaction to Goethe.

These are the general beliefs which inform Nishida's consideration of Goethe: it is now appropriate to set out the complementary beliefs held by Santayana.

Like Nishida in one respect, Santayana adopted certain major philosophical positions at the start of his career and, though he modified the conceptual structures he used to articulate them, these bedrock convictions remain invariant in his philosophy. Most fundamental among these are his materialism and epiphenomenalism: for Santayana reality is the material world as described by science, the mind being not a separate entity or type of substance but an epiphenomenon of matter. There is no spiritual somewhat behind the material universe, no realm to which we may penetrate in moments of privileged insight. What there is matter in a state of constant flux. We are of this world, because this world is all there is: "In truth..man is an animal, a portion of the natural flux; and the consequence is that his nature has a moving centre.." [11] There is no room in such a system for mysticism: knowledge is knowledge of nature, and it is gained via conceptualisation of the flux of experience and representational perception.

Granted such a framework, Santayana has to take a view of art, aesthetic experience, the artist, and the function of the imagination of a kind quite other from that offered by Nishida. Most of what Santayana has to say about Goethe be set out in works from the earlier part of his career, from the period in which he elaborated his first philosophical system in the five volumes of *The Life of*

Reason (1905-6), and so it is necessary to say briefly what this work is about. As is also the case with Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good*, Santayana's ultimate purpose in this work is an ethical one. In this period he adopts a variety of ethical eudaemonism: happiness is the good for humankind, and it is best achieved by adopting what he calls the life of reason, the life in which our various wants, needs and desires are harmonised by the use of reason. The latter takes its data from the lessons of experience, the chief lesson being that happiness can be achieved only by accepting the conditions which bound all human endeavour. *The Life of Reason* is a survey of human institutions - of which art is one - from the point of view of this eudaemonism. Of each the question is asked: does this institution, or this form of it, help or hinder humankind in its search for rational and harmonious happiness? [12] Art is justified only if in some way it helps us live more rationally, which for Santayana is equivalent to saying more happily. There is not space here to consider Santayana's views on each how each of the arts does this [13]: granted the subject in hand, it is necessary to focus on his views on poetry.

Throughout his career Santayana defines aesthetic experience, of both artist and spectator (using that term in a broad sense to cover reception of all the arts), as immediate experience. [14] He never makes the sense of this phrase in this context absolutely precise, though he clearly cannot mean that in aesthetic experience the flux of experience is entirely unconceptualised. Rather, what he appears to mean is that the special gift of the artist is to be able to break free of inherited conceptual habits, to be able to escape from the grip of pre-existent conceptual sets and to see things and experience in a fresh light, exhibiting their significance to us. He applies this view to the poet in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900). Great poetry - and the qualification is significant - he defines as "analysis for the sake of creation". [15] The great poet retains a certain innocence of vision, being able to disintegrate the conventionalities of humdrum experience, "and then out of that living but indefinite material to build new structures, richer, finer, fitter to the primary tendencies of our nature, truer to the ultimate possibilities of the soul. Our descent into the elements of our being is then justified by our subsequent free ascent toward its goal; we revert to sense only to find food for reason; we destroy conventions only to construct ideals." [16] No.

What Santayana is driving at becomes clearer if we concentrate on what these 'new structures' might be and how they are related to ideals, this last being a concept of central importance in his theory of poetry. Human beings are never

in perfect accord with their environment, both animate and inanimate. To be fully in accord with the environment would consist in that state in which the environment satisfied all human interests. We have concepts and beliefs which embody our notions of what this state of total accord would be like. They are our ideas of perfection, our ideals. Ideals cannot be the product of the understanding, since in Santayana's usage of the term the understanding is the faculty which most accurately records what is the case, rather than what we would prefer were the case. The faculty responsible for the production of ideals, Santayana argues, is the imagination, and indeed the formation of appropriate ideals he regards as its most important function.[17] To live without ideals Santayana regards as an abject failure of rationality: to live well we must live with them constantly in mind, otherwise we are adrift and directionless. Without ideals, "men would be horses harnessed to their own chariot, docile perhaps and hardworking, but neither knowing where they go, nor indeed going anywhere. All life in the world is also, if rational, life in the ideal..."[18] Moreover it is clear that for Santayana ideals are not to be regarded as logically isolated from one another: the life of reason demands that our ideal vision of life be comprehensive and inclusive, in effect that we have a complete set touching all the major areas of life. These sets of ideals are the new structures articulated by major poets.[19]

To live without regard for ideals, or to have few and fragmentary ones, is to be in the condition Santayana calls barbarism: "For the barbarian is the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being; who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause or by conceiving their ideal goal. He is the man who does not know his derivations or perceive his tendencies, but who merely feels and acts, valuing his life for its force and filling, being careless of its purpose and its form...his delight is in abundance and vehemence; his art, like his life, shows an exclusive respect for quality and splendour of materials. His scorn for what is poorer and weaker than himself is only surpassed by his ignorance of what is higher."[20] Barbarism in this sense Santayana regarded as a central feature of the Romantic outlook, a point to which I will return in more detail presently when dealing with his interpretation of *Faust*.

The working out and expressing of such comprehensive visions of the ideal is not easy and is not within the powers of the vast majority of human beings: those individuals who have the ability to articulate these visions are the supreme among the world's poets. They have an imagination powerful enough to articulate one of the few genuinely different world-views humanity has yet

makes it immaterial to our understanding of behaviour generally, so to our understanding of represented actions; or where it is false but acceptable in the way some myths are part of the general culture, there its role and spurious validity is open to explanation – and which ever theory provides a satisfactory account of the general acceptance of psychoanalysis will become important to aesthetic evaluation because it succeeds where analytic explanations failed. Thus, the deeper theory will be important for the reasons which would have made the truth of psychoanalysis important. If no deeper defence of analytic theory is available, there we may expect so may variations in the way it is treated by author and audience that general rules are unlikely to give us much help in accounting for the many roles it can play. On the other hand, if analytic theory is valid, then other understandings of human behaviour are unsuccessful or shallow. Accordingly, it is not possible to understand actions fully without analytic theory ; therefore, previous understandings are shallow and so fail in aesthetic evaluations or are false and give rise to incoherent sequences of action and so render impossible the unity of a work in which they are embodied and therefore also fail their aesthetic evaluation.

Our assumption is that analytic theory is valid; that is the basis of our interest in asking whether it is important to aesthetic evaluation. And the answer given in reply to the first point also goes to answer the second. For it only *seems* that a work may be unified – in so far as the motivations and behaviour constituting the novel are independent of analytic theory – yet may satisfy the balances and relationships thought necessary to aesthetic evaluation. If psychoanalytic explanations are true, then the unity gained without analytic theory will be merely shallow because it does not satisfy the requirements of an adequate explanation.

Both these answers are open to an objection based on the distinction made in the third point raised above. This was the assertion that psychoanalysis makes no contribution to aesthetic evaluations of novels because in these our interest is in the way ideas are expressed. This distinctiveness of the expression of ideas in a novel may be brought out through a phrase used by Isenberg[13] when he talks of the "aesthetic mode of commerce with human speech". In the context of the types of work we are considering, characters utter speeches not to evince psychoanalytic truths but as a part of the embodiment of ideas in the events and actions of the novel. Here the constraints of psychoanalytic explanation are as dispensible as any other "non- aesthetic" mode of speech and understanding; and in the aesthetic mode our concern is not with truth or falsity but with the excellence of expression and its resulting unity.

This position may be summarised in the following way. It holds, first, that the only questions important to aesthetic evaluation concern how well or badly ideas are

expressed or embodied in a novel and, second, that the truth of psychoanalysis is immaterial to how well ideas are embodied. Consequently, Psychoanalysis is dispensible in aesthetic evaluation. For example, an author may consistently represent people as motivated by spiritual purposes in order to embody ideas of the essentially striving nature of human beings, and may produce an aesthetically excellent work on this basis, without having to accept the significance of the psychoanalytic theory of behaviour or the constraints it might impose on our understanding of the actions performed by characters in his work.

Plausible though this may seem, we may question both its assertions. To take the first one : we may question the claims made for expression, for it is not clear why it should be incommensurable with psychoanalytic truths. The assertion requires some way of charactersing the supposedly distinctive nature of the "aesthetic mode" whose commerce with human speech allows us to prelude the use of analytic theory. Anything less would have to take some serious account of the theory – for the theory is essential to satisfactory explanations of the behaviour for which an "aesthetic" context is being sought– and so could not legislate to deny its importance generally. Yet this position has not been defended very successfully. Recent attempts to identify a distinctive aesthetic experience, response, or quality have foundered for a number of reasons. The most successful of these is proposed by Sibley[14], who holds that the application of aesthetic concepts depends on the exercise of taste. Their contrast with, say, cognitive judgements, may be explained by saying that while the latter seek agreement with the world, aesthetic concepts are used in the hope of bringing other subjects to share the appreciation of a work or object or to articulate our own response. Here human speech enters "commerce" with the "aesthetic mode" by virtue of its part in bringing subjects to agree in appreciating a work. But there does no seem to be any reason to exclude psychoanalysis in this context, for the important thing is the exercise of taste and there is not reason to suppose that its exercise will be damaged by considerations of the truth of psychoanalysis.

Further, expression was explained in a way that involves some embodiment of ideas in works. The notion of "embodiment" need not be developed further here, for the issue we are concerned with does not turn on every aspect of its nature. But it is important in that, in the cases we are considering, the ideas expressed are exemplified in the motivations and actions of the novel's characters because these constitute the novel. Yet this exemplification seems to invite the use of psychoanalysis : the theory explains the behaviour of the characters whose actions embody the ideas of the novel and, if Lacan is right, will explain its very 'literality'.

This way of stating the need for analytic theory seems to beg the question over the second assertion – that the truth of theory is immaterial to expressing ideas. In answer to

that assertion we may point out that it is not clear what a satisfactory expression of ideas can be if it requires us to abjure all questions of truth, falsity, and theory. For surely the expression and embodiment of ideas can be found inadequate or bad precisely because it involves false representations. For example in *Paris, Texas*, directed by Wim Wenders, the film's ambition is vitiated by its inability to escape the misconceptions afflicting its characters. The film's ambition is set out by one character – a German-speaking doctor. Having treated a man found wandering in the Texan desert, the physician asserts that it is necessary to understand the past in order to diagnose the patient's present condition. *Paris, Texas* then develops as the film shows us more about the patient and his self-understanding. The film is resolved when the patient, having found his ex-wife, is able to unite their son with her but excludes himself from their union and returns to the road for reasons which are appropriate to the country-and-western clarity of emotion which seems to motivate the characters. By being resolved in this way, however, the film's ambition to diagnose the "American Condition' falls prey to its own naïve emotional mood. For the unity of the film, which is the basis for our aesthetic evaluation, is characterised by this sentimentality: the film itself then becomes one of the naively sentimental products it had set out to examine and, instead of diagnosing how these work, itself submits to and leads its audience to give in to that sentimentality. The film is resolved in terms of the very sentimentally it is supposedly explaining, and any attempt to understand the American Condition will treat the film as one among the many other symptoms of that condition. And if this diagnosis of the film is correct, then the ideas embodied or expressed in the work are being found inadequate and the film is considered bad precisely because it involves false representations of its characters and their motivations. This is not to say that people are not motivated by sentimentality in the way the film suggests, but that the film is bad because its attempted understanding of that sentimentality is itself sentimental and, so, false.

To put the matter in another way : the expression of ideas is naïve. And the claim is not that the author lacks the skill to produce images and convey ideas. The latter concern primarily the means of affecting unity and need not have anything to say of the character of the unity itself. Rather, the expression of ideas is inadequate to the truth of these ideas. In the case of *Paris, Texas* the diagnostic intention and its content are inadequately embodied in the behaviour of its characters – or in the sequence of their represented actions which constitute the film – just because the compulsion or necessity involved in the sequence and final order of actions is owed to the very condition which it is trying to understand. To gain its diagnostic goal the work would have to trade on a psychoanalytically true conception of characters and actions, and the film could not then

follow the order and compulsion of the sentimentality it is trying to understand. In the case like this one, where characters and their actions embody the ideas we are concerned with, the latter are inadequate to its ideas. Thus, the film fails aesthetically just because it fails to respect the truth of its ideas in its starting point, its development, and in the way events are organised in order to bring out the ideas expressed.

If these arguments are correct, then they defeat an important attack on the proposal that psychoanalytic theory is significant to aesthetic evaluation. For the claim was that the distinctive nature of aesthetic response, of aesthetic concerns, and of aesthetic unity qualified any "commerce with human speech" and so precluded claims that psychoanalytic theory contributed to aesthetic evaluation. By arguing as we have, we have shown the misconceptions involved in this claim.

Of course the force of such an argument depends on whether psychoanalytic theory is valid. We have assumed that it is. Just how significant a contribution it makes to aesthetic evaluation depends on how powerful a theory it is and how comprehensive its explanations are. We have acknowledged only that it can be one among a number of factors which are constituted by the motivations and actions of subjects. If it can tell us of other sorts of works and features, obviously its importance will increase commensurately. But that is something we have to consider by identifying and analysing the various claims made on behalf of psychoanalytic theory.

Notes and References

1. Though some have questioned the use of overly objectivist terms to translate his humanistic concepts – cf. Bruno Bettleheim, *Freud and Man's Soul*.
2. This is not to say that the subject's self-conception is the basic criteria for the success of our explanation in the sense that we would be said to have failed to understand his activity if we used any terms other than those he used. That would be a very restrictive criteria which, in the case where, say, the subject is confused, would require the explanation also to be self-contradictory or as confused as the subject.
3. This description of Freud's claim is a rough composite of what he says in *Totem and Taboo*, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, and *The Future of an Illusion*.
4. cf. *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilisation and its Discontents*.
5. The issue of its truth is not chosen arbitrarily, but it should be made clear that our concern does not coincide with Lacan's understanding of the issue. Lacan claims: "That all texts see their literality increase in proportion to what they properly imply of an actual confrontation with truth, is that for which Freud's discovery demonstrates the structural reason" (*Ecrits*, p. 364). This utterance is based on his claim about language and especially about Saussure's theory of language.

Saussure supposed that language was best understood as a system of sings. The sign, in turn, had two parts : a signifier, which was usually a sound that the users of a language recognised because they were able to distinguish it from others which were possible in the context; and a signified, which was the concept. The signifier was arbitrarily linked to the signified, in one sense, because any sound could have stood for a concept. 'House' in English and *bayt* in Arabic are two sounds which happen to share their signified, while other sounds play corresponding roles in other languages. The particular sound used is arbitrary in that there is nothing intrinsic to the sound itself which shows that it must be used in relation to a particular signified. However, once a relation between signifier and signified has been established in use, then within the language we are using their connection becomes as secure, for Saussure, as that between two sides of a single sheet of paper.
Against the last claim Lacan argues that the link is insecure: Saussure's claim is mistaken because it ignores the process by which people come to refer to things in the world by using language. In order to identify the signified in the world, we must rely on judgement, which is less than incorrigible. And an important consequence of establishing that there is this lacunae is this : unconscius desires can interfere with the conscious use of language, causing the relation between signifier and signified to be distorted in ways explained by analytic theory. If the Real is taken to be the existent, then the Imaginary and the Symbolic are our means of access to the Real, where language – the Symbolic order – must interact with the Imaginary – in our psychological make-up in their attempt to reach the Real. While language is our only access to reality, any distortion in it is bound to affect our ability to deal with the world as it is independent of our desires. The utterance quoted above, then, is intended to tell us of the relation between psychology and language, where the latter sustains our grasp of the world.
While it may point to an important contribution analytic theory is thought to make to our understanding of literature by identifying the role of psychology in determining our use of language to grasp the world, it does not enter directly into our present consideration of aesthetic evaluation. By explaining the nature of literature it introduces constraints on our evaluation because it identifies the means by which art is displayed. But our concern at present is with aesthetic evaluation – with the art displayed – and the contribution that analytic theory makes to evaluating this exhibition.

6. Cf, Aristotle, *Poetics*, Chapter 7ff. Peter Handke, writing of *Left Handed Woman*, thinks consistency of tone more important than the unity of plot.

7. As Lacan's reading of Freud rests on a questionable theory of language, his claim to have escaped these restrictions is doubtful, Cf.R. Wollheim, "The Cabinet of Lacan", in *New York Review of Books*. 1976.

8. Such limitations militate towards identifying a particular conception of the psychological nature of literature, leaving aside, for example, the Lacanian conception.

9. Further, depending on the ways in which analytic theory contributes to evaluation, it may show how

sociological, economic, or political theories are also material to understanding the 'aesthetic'.

10. Many richer descriptions of novels are possible. This one will suffice for our purposes. Other descriptions may add features, they will not necessarily change the argument being made here.
11. The phrase is Freud's : see *Introductory Lectures*.
12. A. Isenberg, "The Problem of Belief", in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 13, (1955), pp. 395-407.
13. Ibid. Similar claims about the distinctiveness of the aesthetic are made in the writings of Cleanth Brooks and W.K. Wimsatt.
14. F. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts", *Philosophical Review*, 58, 1959. The arguments involved can be studied in more detail in *Aesthetics* edited by R. Scalafani and G. Dickie.

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