

E. H. Gombrich, (with Ernst Kris) The Principles of Caricature, British Journal of Medical Psychology, Vol. 17, 1938, pp.319-42 [Trapp no.1938A.1]

I

CLASSICAL or academic psychology, though concerned in large measure with perception and sensation, fields that are familiar ground to the artist, added comparatively little to our understanding of art (as indeed it added comparatively little to the historical and social sciences). At first this is rather surprising, but it becomes comprehensible when we remember that this branch of psychology deals in the main with the cognitive functions and with stimuli from without; whereas the artist, although the most alive of all men to external stimuli, is nevertheless a person who elaborates, plays with and reshapes sensory experience under the influence of internal and affective states. With the turn of the century came a new means of grasping the ways in which the mind plays with elements of sensory experience and out of them shapes new patterns. Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1913) marks a turning point in the history of aesthetics just as it does in psychiatry.

But more than this, psycho-analysis, though it has up to the present only registered the fact that there must be psychological laws of art-construction as there are laws of dream-construction, is proving of great value to the student of aesthetics, because it deals with man as a creature of conflicts and troubles.

In this paper we shall deal with a small corner of the field of aesthetics caricature—from a double aspect; first a brief historical survey of its development, and then an examination of the factors which produced or 'liberated' caricature, and when and how this liberation came about. In passing it may be noted as one of the aesthetic pleasures of psychoanalytic research that a study such as this which starts out as a survey of pictures of a bygone time may throw some light on the problems of the clinician to-day—there are no boundaries in science, and in none, perhaps, do we meet with so many cross-illuminations as in psychology—the science of the integration of sensation, perception and desire.

II

It is a startling fact that portrait caricature was not known to the world before the end of the sixteenth century (Wittkower and Brauer, 1931). What seems too simple and even primitive to us, the conscious distortion of the features of a person with the aim of ridicule, was not even attempted in classical antiquity nor in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. Artists of these former periods were very well acquainted with comic art in general. They had their clowns, their pictorial satires, their comic illustrations and their grotesque art, but when portrait-caricature was invented—and we use this word in its full meaning — the world of artists realized the fact that the caricaturists exercised a new form of art. Amateurs of the period took pleasure in justifying and defining these drawings, and there are elaborate and clever little treatises on this matter in contemporary art-criticism, or, to be more exact, in that of the generation which follows the Carraccis who invented them and to whom the new joke of mock-portraits is ascribed by the writers Mosini (1646), Bellori (1672) and Baldinucci (1681). These theorists were good observers; they give us good descriptive definitions of their subject. They describe 'ritratti carrichi' or 'caricature' (the original meaning of the word is the same as in 'charge') as portraits where likeness is in a certain sense distorted. The weakest features are exaggerated and this serves to unmask the victim. As a whole, the drawing is like the model though single features are deliberately changed (Baldinucci, 1681). The result produces a comic sensation—comparison being the royal road to the comic [1]—but also it is a likeness more true than mere imitation could be. And caricature, showing more of the essential, is truer than reality itself. This paradox is by no means

meant only as an empty phrase praising the achievements of the caricaturist. It reveals a new credo which is characteristic of the century in question.

Art in the time of Carracci and of Poussin no longer meant a simple 'imitation of nature' as Aristotle had put it. It meant to them penetration of the innermost essence of reality, to 'ideas' in a platonic sense (Panofsky, 1924). It was no longer skill alone that made the artist, but the gift of vision which enabled him to see the everlasting truth of ideas beyond the veil of nature. By the seventeenth century the portrait painter's task was to reveal the character, the essence of the man in an heroic sense. The caricaturist has a corresponding aim. He does not seek the perfect form but the perfect deformity, thus penetrating through the mere outward appearance to the inner being in all its littleness or ugliness.

Malvasia (1678), a seventeenth-century biographer of the Carraccis, describes how these artists used to look for victims while on their leisurely walks in the town of Bologna; how they noticed peculiarities to form 'ritratti carrichi'. Some of the earliest caricatures which have come down to us (now in Munich) seem to confirm this. We see tentative sketches of the subject from different angles (Figs. 1-3). The man with the crooked nose is first roughly sketched; the features are altered several times, till the final caricature presents him as a comic type with enormous hat and comically grave expression.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

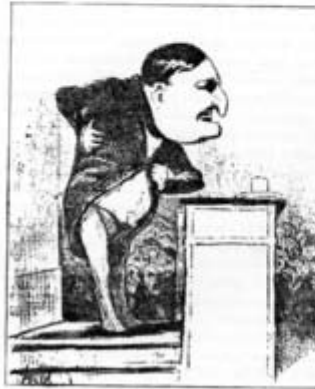


Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

Others of these caricatures are even simpler (Fig. 4). A naturalistic portrait-sketch of a vivid and fleeting expression suffices to produce a comic effect when placed on a dwarfed body. The victim had been transformed into a dwarf. We need hardly say that caricature since those days has never ceased to use this primitive but easy means of transformation. Even the greatest master, Daumier (1810-79), did not refrain from employing it in his famous series of 'Representants Representés' where, for example, the portrait head of Louis Napoleon is fitted upon a dwarf-like body (Fig. 5). It may be emphasized again that it was not the subject of such a picture that was new in the seventeenth century. The comic dwarf with an enormous head was known to Greek art as well as to later times (Fig. 6). But in those times it was only made to ridicule types; never—so far as we know—to reshape an individual as a type until the end of the sixteenth century. Yet that is exactly what the earliest caricatures, made by the circle of the Carraccis, may be described as doing.

III

We do not intend to enumerate all the different means used in this early stage of personal caricature by the inventors. Soon, however, a new feature was added which has ever since then constituted one of the essentials of caricature, namely simplification. As early as the seventeenth century a French art critic, Félibien, after defining a caricature as a comic portrait, added that it was one which is sketched in a few strokes. The caricatures he had in mind were those of that famous master of Baroque art, the sculptor and architect Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). The creator of the Piazza di San Pietro and of the wonderful portrait busts was praised by his contemporaries as a caricaturist of wonderful skill, and what has survived of his drawings fully justifies this reputation.

The strokes of his pen show a sublime freedom. Following the lines of the compositions we realize that it was not by chance that this style came to be used for caricature, for it belongs to the essence of the joke and can scarcely be separated from its inner meaning. The physiognomical expression in the fine drawing of a captain of the fire brigade (Fig. 7) becomes a grin, and this grin consists of a single line. The face of Cardinal Scipione Borghese (Fig. 8) is distilled down to a few lines as if it were

restricted to a formula. Thus the abbreviated style gains its own significance, as if the artist were to say to us: 'See, this great man is nothing but a lot of lines ; I can grasp his personality in a few strokes.'

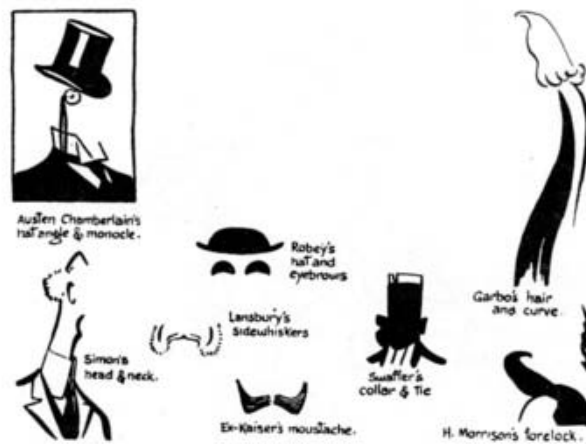


Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

The effectiveness of this quality of caricature has not become less since Bernini's days. Even now caricature has its strongest effect in reduction, in formulae. And in the end it may happen that the way leads from the sketch itself to an elliptical expression. If leading politicians are characterized by their 'tabs of identity' in masterly drawings by Low, this is only the logical continuation of the principle (Fig. 9). Drawings like these will remind the psychologist of the mechanism of dreamwork. Here, too, a single feature often stands for the whole, and a person is represented by one salient characteristic only. To the caricaturist, however, this extreme simplification is not the starting-point of his work. He arrives there often by stages, beginning with a lifelike portrait which he somehow simplifies and distorts in the absence of the model.



Tabs of Identity
Fig. 9.

Of course, simplification is no 'law' of caricatures as is distortion. There are caricatures which do not look sketchy at all. But if we try to describe the 'ideal type' of caricature—as we might describe the 'ideal type' of the Gothic cathedral or of hysteria—then it seems that sketchiness would appear to be an integral part.

IV

The questions arise, did people in former times not know abuse and derision in pictures? Were they content with displaying innocent comic types, without any intention of personal aggression? Certainly not. There has, perhaps, always been pictorial abuse. But to put it briefly, these abuses were not art. Not a single acknowledged aggressive work of art has come down to us from classical ages, and the one unskilled wall-scribbling which chance has preserved enlists our attention only as a document of a civilization—not as an example of pictorial art (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10.

This has generally been described as the 'mock-crucifixus' and is considered to be a very vulgar derision of Christ of the times of persecution. This interpretation is not wholly unchallenged, but it is clear that there is a gulf separating a scribbling like this from caricature. The crucified God which Alexamenos, the victim of the drawing, worships, has a donkey's head. We know that there have been gods with animal heads. Egyptian civilization, for example, had known them, deriving perhaps from Totemistic ages. And if such a god was considered by the Roman scribbler as funny, it only shared the fate of many creations of the human mind.[2] But leaving aside this single example, we know of a custom in the late Middle Ages and the days of the Renaissance which used pictures to defame and ridicule and degrade individuals. It was a widespread and striking means of adding shame and humiliation to the acts of penal law or of political hate. In Florence, for instance, the culprit was often painted on the town hall as hanging on the gallows, thus perpetuating his punishment. Sometimes, when the victim succeeded in escaping the hangman, the picture even served instead of the real punishment. We can call these pictures forerunners of caricatures. But forerunners only in a sociological sense, inasmuch as both may serve to attack the person's honour; for artistically they are far from being caricatures.

The examples which are preserved from Northern countries (Hupp, 130) show no distortion of the face, but crude attempts at real likeness. The figure shown on the gallows is a 'portrait', (Fig. 11) but no attempt is made to transform it into a new shape. Simple attributes serve the purpose which later on is served by caricature.



Fig. 11.

This is also the case in political broadsides, which after the invention of printing (and especially during the storms of the Reformation) swell to a real flood (Grisar and Heege, 192; Blum, 1916a). But if Luther is represented in the form of a wolf, or a seventeenth-century preacher as inspired by the devil (Fig. 12), in no case is wolfishness or devilishness expressed in the face.



Huah Peters:

Fig. 12.

A wolf wears Luther's gown or the preacher's likeness remains unaltered in the abusive design. Instead of being a picture, these satirical prints are really a primitive form of picture writing.

We may add that portrait caricature, as established by the Carracci and Bernini, reached its culmination as a social weapon only when it entered the realms of these broadsides and cartoons. This evolution began in England during the eighteenth century (Davis, 1928). And, from a studio joke, caricature has developed into one of the most feared of social weapons, unmasking pretension and killing it by ridicule.

V

But considering the might and vigour of this weapon we are forced back to our starting-point : why is it that what to us seems so simple, so much a part of the artist's potentialities, should have developed only at so late a stage of historical evolution?

Historically, two answers are offered—both as we think unsatisfactory. The one would explain the fact from the artistic side only. Artistic skill, it was suggested, was not developed far enough in primitive times to allow of the free play with features which caricature displays. But why should the artists of classical antiquity, or Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian, lack the skill which every journalist of the pencil has to-day?

The other explanation (Wittkower, 1931) seeks a solution in the evolution of civilization and society. The spirit of witty criticism and mockery on one side, the sense of the individuality of people on the other, were not developed in a way which would lead to the appreciation of the joke of caricature. Certainly there is truth in this explanation. The social atmosphere of the beginning of the seventeenth century is marked by a culture of wit, esprit and an insight into human nature which created the immortal types of Don Quixote and Falstaff.

Nevertheless, there remains some uncertainty as regards this general explanation. Does the Renaissance lack this sense of humour and individuality, not to speak of the classical ages? Is the time of Erasmus (1465-1536) and Aretino (1492-1556) without psychological insight?' [3] The art historian is often tempted to fall back on literature, the literary historian on art, and both on philosophy when they are unable to provide a solution within the realm in which the problem arose.

VI

We have a psychological explanation of caricature to propose, but we feel it will at first sight seem disappointing; we must begin by referring to a historical fact. We can give only the outlines of a historical change - outlines which may seem meagre to you as we cannot include here sufficient details to illustrate our meaning fully.

The end of the sixteenth century, the period when caricature first appears, is marked by a complete change in the artist's role and his position in society. This refers neither to the artist's income nor to his prestige as a member of a concrete social group, nor to whether or not he carried a sword—but to the fact that he was no longer a manual worker, the *banausos* of antiquity, but he had become a creator. And this only happened fully and completely in this century of the great masters. The artist was no longer bound by fixed patterns, as in the Middle Ages; he was not even bound to the imitation of reality—he shared the supreme right of the poet to form a reality of his own. Imagination rather than technical ability, vision and invention, inspiration and genius made the artist, not merely the mastering of the intricacies of handicraft. From an imitator he became a creator, from a disciple of nature its master (Schlosser, 1924; Panofsky, 1924). The work of art was a vision born in his mind. Its actual

realization was only a mechanical process which added nothing to the aesthetic value and indeed often diminished it. This state of mind is best illustrated by the paradoxical remark of a guide book to Florence published in the late sixteenth century, which expressed the opinion that Michelangelo's unfinished marble blocks of the 'Slaves' are even more admirable than his finished statues, because they are nearer to the state of conception (Kris, 1926). It is not difficult to formulate this aesthetic attitude in psychological terms. The work of art is—for the first time in European history—considered as a *projection* of an inner image. It is not its proximity to reality that proves its value but its nearness to the artist's psychic life. Thus for the first time the sketch was held in high esteem as the most direct document of inspiration. Here is the beginning of the development which culminates in the attempts of expressionism and surrealism to make art a mirror of the artist's conscious or unconscious.

The contemporary art critic did not, of course, use psychological terms to emphasize this new right and sovereignty of the artist, but they expressed the same thing quite clearly in adapting Platonism to aesthetics. The artist, they claimed, is not an imitator of crude reality. He goes beyond reality in visualizing the 'ideas', the essence of things. Only the artistic genius has this gift of vision which enables him to open his mind to the idea of beauty and to realize it in the work of his hand.

'Invenzione', power of imagination, is considered as the most noble of the artist's gifts.[4]

VII

We may illustrate this by one simple example only. Ornament, in earlier times mere patterns or filling in of forms, gained in those days of 'Mannerism' (as the end of the sixteenth century has been called) a freedom which may be described as autonomy. The apparently meaningless, the fantastic and grotesque, was held in high esteem. Contemporaries were fully aware of the new character of this style. 'Dreamwork' they called it sometimes, rightly indicating the role which they let the primary process play in these creations. They are produced to show the artist's creative power: to provide incitement of phantasy rather than true patterns for the craft.

The so-called 'Floris-Decoration' illustrates well this new attitude. Often forms have a double meaning and the play with ambiguities of form becomes the chief feature of these creations (Fig. 13). The character of mere form-play without any meaning or content is clearly described in the preface to a series of woodcuts which appeared in 1569 under the name of Rabelais (Figs. 14, 15). In this series the ambiguity of form is displayed with great virtuosity. Implements are transformed into human beings, the world of the inanimate seems alive. It is instructive to look at the prototypes. These beings are derived from Hieronimus Bosch's devils and the torture instruments of his hell (Fig. 16). But what had a definite meaning in Bosch's religious pictures becomes, two generations later, a mere play of patterns. The uncanny has turned comic, confirming what elsewhere it is endeavoured to describe as the comic phenomena; and this explains its double-edged character.[5]





Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.

VIII

We refrain from giving more examples. Those were only meant to illustrate the new conception of art in the time of 'Mannerism'. It is obvious how near the caricaturist's work of transformation comes to the grotesque-maker's task. The Rabelais woodcuts transformed implements into human beings. The Carracci transformed the portraits of their friends into pots, lanterns or barrels. None of these jokes, related by reliable biographers, are extant; but we can easily imagine what they looked like from the favourite means of metamorphosis, the transformation of man into animal.

A human head, for instance, becomes gradually transformed into the head of an animal without losing the portrait note, the likeness. The Carracci — as their contemporaries already knew — drew this idea from the dogma of physiognomy. The pseudo-Aristotelian idea according to which the human character can be determined from the similarity of the human countenance to that of certain animals was widely disseminated through the writings of Giovanni Battista Porta. The illustrations to Porta's treatises always show the heads of men and animals in convincing similarity (Fig. 17). Caricature exploited for its own purpose what was here the illustration of a 'scientific' doctrine. It turns man into an animal. From a drawing in Munich which shows such a transformation (Fig. 18) we turn to an example from the nineteenth century (Fig. 19) which proves the continuation of the tradition.

There is nothing astonishing in that, for the step revealed in these animal caricatures seems to round off the achievement of caricature in the sense of the definitions of the seventeenth century. 'Like as a whole, unlike in parts' (Baldinucci) is the nucleus of these definitions. Here is sense in the individual change; the unlike parts are united to give a new meaning. They form an animal in which the portrait of man lives on.



This play with forms has its most celebrated example in the drawings showing Louis-Philippe, the Roi Bourgeois (1830-48), as a pear. The idea came from Phillipon, the editor of *La Caricature*, which was the first comic paper that ever appeared (R. Davis, 1928). Phillipon was accused of libel. In defence he produced four drawings which showed the gradual and progressive transformation of the king's likeness into a pear (Fig. 20). The pear became a catchword, a symbol in the battle of the French people for their freedom. This symbol owes its effectiveness to its double meaning: in Parisian slang 'poire' means 'fat-head'. The play in pictures is here supplemented by the play on words. Another excellent example is from the modern caricatures of Low, and reinforces this principle (Fig. 21). Here the leading English politicians are seen anew as animals.

IX

The psychologist has no difficulty in defining what the caricaturist has done. He is well acquainted with this double meaning, this transformation, ambiguity and condensation. It is the *primary process* used in caricatures in the same way that Freud has demonstrated it to be used in 'wit' (Freud, 1916). If we fall asleep and our waking thoughts are submerged by our dreams, then the primary process comes into its own. Conscious logic is out of action, its rules for the time being have lost their force. One of the mechanisms now in action can cause, in a dream, two words to become one, or merge two figures in one. This peculiarity of the psychic apparatus is sometimes exploited in jokes. If, for instance, we think of a joke like the one that describes Christmas as 'Alcoholidays' we understand that the new word, the joke word, is composed of two parts: of 'alcohol' and 'holidays': they are united or — as we say — 'condensed' (Freud). An analogous condensation could also have arisen in a dream. But the origin of a joke is different from that of a dream. A joke is thought out, created. We make use intentionally — which is not synonymous with consciously — of a primitive mechanism in order to achieve a particular aim.

Like words in a joke, the pictures in caricatures are subjected to such readjustment. What impresses one is that the defect in dreams as compared with conscious thought here becomes an achievement in itself. Of course, the primary process must have an instrument to play on. It cannot produce a joke which is not hidden in the language. Neither can the caricaturist follow his arbitrary will alone. He is bound to follow the rule of his language, which is form. And the grammar of form, we may add, differs widely from the grammar of spoken languages, and as yet lacks description.

Sometimes a picture is used merely to stress or underline a pun with words. If, for example, Fox is represented in the form of a fox (and jokes of that kind have appeared in satire ever since the Middle Ages) an infantile attitude towards words is used which is related to all wit. It takes metaphors literally, as does the child. This is not the only case in which wit revives infantile pleasures. In fact — as Freud

has shown us — in all play with words, in puns as well as nonsense talks, there is a renewal of the child's pleasure when it just learns to master language. It is easy to understand that in play with pictures the case is slightly different. Not everyone acquires the mastery of pictorial construction at all. Yet at bottom caricature, too, renews infantile pleasure. Its simplicity makes it resemble the scribbling of the child. This insight is old. It comes from Hogarth. But we have learned to see it from a wider angle. We have learned to define caricature as a process where—under the influence of aggression — primitive structures are used to ridicule the victim. Thus defined, caricature is a psychological mechanism rather than a form of art, and we can now easily understand why, once having come into existence, it has remained always the same in principle.

The reason why the methods evolved by the first caricaturists of the seventeenth century did not lose their vigour but lived on in modern caricature lies in the fact that they set in motion certain psychic mechanisms which, since those days, have always formed the essence of the caricature's effect. Caricatures like those of Louis-Philippe as a pear are at bottom nothing but graphic jokes; and taste in jokes may change but the mechanism as a whole remains the same in essence.

With this insight it is easy to return to the historian's point of view, for we are now able to describe caricature in the psychological terms which cover the whole 'Manneristic' conception of art. In caricature, too, the artist projects an image transformed by the primary process, giving it as his view of the man. He consciously alters his model, distorts it, plays with its features, and thus shows the power of his imagination — which can exalt as well as degrade. Instead of an objective portrayal of the outer world he substitutes his subjective vision, thus starting an evolution which leads by a winding road to its culmination in modern art.

X

Thus psychology has taught us to see as a unit a phenomenon which history can only describe in parts. It teaches us to understand the 'invention' of caricature as an organic link in the chain of development. But the aid psychology has given us so far is but a terminological one. We can describe what happened in terms like 'projection', or 'primary process' which more aptly cover the whole development in question. However, we have not yet found what we set out to discover, namely an explanation of why a mechanism so simple that it is employed in every dream should be applied so late to pictorial art. Play with words with a comic intention goes far back into history.[6] Why not play with pictorial shapes? Or, to formulate the question more concretely: why does the same development occur so much later in the realm of pictures than in that of words? The answer, if found, must certainly clarify an important part of the role played by the picture in the human mind. It was for this very reason that we started this investigation. We believe also that psycho-analysis shows us the way to solve the historical problem. One knows from clinical experiences that pictures in fact play a different part in our minds than do words. Pictures are deeper rooted, more primitive. Dream recurs to them as well as emotion. The belief in the magical sign and the thing signified is deepest rooted in pictorial art. Whilst words are easier understood as conventional signs which one can play with, alter and change without affecting the essence of the being they signify, a picture remains for us for all time a sort of a double, which we dare not damage for fear that we might injure the person or being itself. Image-magic is perhaps the most widespread of all spells. It lives on even in modern civilization, and it can regain its old power, partially at least, if our ego loses some part of its directing functions. For example, revolutionaries burn the picture of a ruler, or a lover the picture of the faithless loved one.

XI

You will now understand the conclusion that is forced upon us : caricature as an art could not develop while this belief in image-magic remained strong, while it was considered not as a joke but as a possible injury to distort a man's face—even in pictures. Such play with images presupposes a degree

of mental freedom which was only achieved very late and under very peculiar circumstances. Note that this distortion was, until recently, allowed only as a joke, as a 'recreazione'. 'C'est une espèce de libertinage d'imagination', says the French *Encyclopédie* on Caricature (Vol. 1751) : 'Qu'il ne faut se permettre tout au plus que par délassement.' The storm which expressionism and surrealism raise show us how mighty is the strength of the inhibitions which they challenge. Thus even when caricature became possible it was not wholly appreciated as an art. That is not surprising because if we analyse a little more deeply the aim of the caricaturist we learn that image magic survives under the surface of fun and play. When the victim feels 'wounded', it is the best sign that he at least does not consider his caricature as an innocent play of transforming features. Nor, in fact, does anyone else. If the caricature fits the victim really is transformed in our eyes. We learn through the artist to see him as a caricature. He is not only mocked at, or unmasked, but actually changed.[7] He carries the caricature with him through his life and even through history. And that has happened to many great men—especially to dictators. Great satirists are very well aware of their magic power to evoke in the memory-picture the repetition of the transformatory process. The great poet Ronsard (1524-85) shouts the words to his opponent :

Qu'il craigne ma fureur ! De l'encre la plus noire
Je lui veux engraver les faits de son histoire
D'un long trait sur le front, puis aille où il pourra
Toujours entre les yeux ce trait lui demeurera.
(Blum)

When these verses were written everyone knew that they were meant metaphorically. But no one yet dared to translate such a metaphor into the realm of pictorial art.

XII

We may state in a brief and simplified summary the solution of our historical problem as it affects man's attitude to image-magic.

In the early primitive stage, the hostile action is carried out on the person through the picture. Every injury done to the picture is thought to touch the person and in reality wound the individual. Picture and person are one, damage done to the picture is damage done to the person. This is the stage of all practised effigy magic; which, of course, no longer exists in this ideal form in our culture.

In a second stage the hostile action is carried out on the picture instead of on the person, or else the picture is intended to perpetuate in graphic form a hostile action, injury, degradation or shame. It is carried out only on the picture and does not wound the person himself, but only his honour. That is the stage of the defamatory or shame pictures.

In the third stage, to which caricature belongs, the hostile action is carried out by altering the portrait only. It remains in the picture, in the aesthetic sphere. This sphere denotes the methods peculiar to caricature. Thanks to the power of the artist the picture is altered through the medium of his art. Man is interpreted in a picture and only this interpretation contains criticism and aggression.

Only a few words of interpretation remain to be added. If we speak of elimination of magic in pictorial art we mean no more, but no less either, than what is meant in the history of science when the evolution towards rationalism and abstraction is described.

One could speak of Galilei's definite step towards this aim in the same terms, which we tried to apply here in describing one of the contemporaneous progressions in fine art. Yet there is no reason to adopt a too simplified picture of such an evolution. Caricature means freedom, but freedom to be

primitive. This innermost primitiveness in style as well as in mechanism, in tendency as well as in form, is the secret of the caricature's appeal. Here, too, the pretext of humour has first conceded what nowadays seems to have conquered a vast field of modern art. But it has since, perhaps, become clear how artificial is this primitiveness and with what difficulty it was acquired.

In comparing these conclusions with the clinical experiences of psychoanalysis, we open a wide field for further research. One thinks of patients to whom caricature and satire are dangerous distortions; the feeling of magic about these comic achievements destroys for such patients their aesthetic value. One is reminded of persons to whom the comic in general is unknown; they fear the regression in all comic pleasure, they lack the faculty of letting themselves go. One finds in analysis that this is due to a lack of strength in the ego. If patients of this type acquire or reacquire the faculty of humour in a deep analysis, it is only after the dominating power of the ego has been restored, and thus regression to comic pleasure has lost its danger. We might then say that the patient has made a new step towards freedom in his attitude to life.

The mechanism of artistic creation itself may be illustrated by other cases, in which the faculty of projection is disturbed. A painter whose interest in caricature is evident is unable to make convincing caricatures so long as he distorts his own personality. The unconscious self-distortion has taken the place of the distortion of his models. We do not insist on the parallels offered by these and similar cases ; but they seem to prove once more that case work and historical research are dealing with two sides of the same phenomenon : the mental life of man in its individual and its social history.

This paper is based on a lecture given by Dr Kris at the Warburg Institute on 25 May 1937. A book on the same subject by the lecturer and Dr Gombrich is in course of preparation. Many questions which are only touched on here will be dealt with fully in the book. [The complete book was never published and remains in manuscript. A very short version was published as a King Penguin in 1940. Ed: RW 31.08.06]

1 We do not intend to deal with this part of the subject, the psychological theory of the comic, because comic comparison as such is not limited to the achievements of fine arts. It occurs in speech and gesture of everyday life as well as when we are ' caricaturing ' somebody in exaggerating or merely isolating one of his habits or peculiarities. The deeper sense of such an action is obvious: by singling out and reproducing an outstanding part of a personality, we destroy its unity, its individuality.

2 It looks almost like a historical law, that it is the fate of any type of picture intended to inspire devotion or horror, to turn comic when it loses its nimbus and its original significance. One may even invert this observation: nearly every type of comic picture derives from a dignified ancestry. The classical satyr was once a horse-demon, and Pulcinella, the Italian clown, a daemonic cock-dancer (Dietrich) like the devil turned comic in the popular mystery plays. The funny gargoyles ('drôleries') on the margin of medieval manuscripts and church stalls may derive directly from daemonic shapes, produced as a defence against evil. Here, too, history repeats what takes place on another level in the evolution of the individual. The child learns to overcome fear by introducing the comic element. One can show that fear always lives on at the bottom of this element, ready to break out when the balance of the labile phenomenon topples over. (Kris, 1934. 1938.)

3 In the polemics of the Humanists we find passages which read exactly as written caricatures. When the great scholar Filelfo (1398-1481) pours out his hate against the elder Medici, Lorenzo, he writes : *Aspice Laurentii latera, aspice palearia, incessum considera ! Nonne cum loquitur mugit? Os vide et linguam a naribus mucum lingentem. Caput cornibus totum insigne est !'* (Look at Lorenzo's sides, at

his head, at his walk! Does he not low when he speaks? Look at the mouth and the tongue, the mucus slipping out of his nostrils. The head boasts its horns.) The parallel to caricature is obvious, yet the first one was not created until a century and a half later.

4 We cannot but feel the insufficiency of this crude and schematic sketch of an evolution which we have each had the opportunity to investigate in special studies. (Kris, 1926; Gombrich, 1934-5.)

5 By 'double edged' is meant the peculiarity of the comic situation in being always, as it were, on the verge of falling down to its primitive character, the uncanny 'or embarrassing, which it was created to overcome. (See also note, p. 327 and Kris, 1924.)

6 It seems that the play on words can only gain its comic effect when the double meaning has been completely mastered by our reason, when a double sense no longer denotes double existence as it does in the language of some primitives.

7 We may add that a similar transformation or distortion of the person itself is intended by mocking imitation in speech or gesture.

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