

# THE JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE

[Published by Authority of the  
*Royal Medico-Psychological Association*]

No. 430 [NEW SERIES]  
NO. 394

JANUARY, 1957

VOL. 103

## Original Articles

### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF VINCENT VAN GOGH

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VINCENT VAN GOGH was born at Zundert (Province of Noord Brabant) in 1853, the eldest son of a minister of the Protestant church. We know little of his childhood years; he is described as a rather headstrong boy, but not abnormally so, his sister (1) pictures him as a great nature-lover and rather an introvert. His mother, a sensible and strongminded woman, handled him with indulgence, his father, by nature a kindly man, could be stern and forbidding, yet all his children including Vincent adored him. He loved his brother, Theo, quite as much, "who had inherited his father's name and his heart's goodness".

From his 12th until his 16th year he was at a boarding school at Zevenbergen. At this time he was quite a normal boy, not markedly different in any way from the others, as the director of the school stated later.

We know little of his artistic abilities in his youth; probably there were no signs of any exceptional talent in this direction. From 1869 until 1873 he worked as a pupil and assistant in the art-dealer shop of Goupil in the Hague; his uncle, himself an art dealer, introduced him there. In the beginning he appeared to be perfectly adapted to the life and work and was diligent, courteous and kind; customers and painters equally liked him. After four years he went to the London branch of the firm with an excellent testimonial. It seems to me that most psychiatrists who have studied Van Gogh's life do not emphasize sufficiently that the youth Vincent was a perfectly normal, well-adapted and sociable young man, in sharp contrast to his bizarre and abnormal personality in later years. In London the extravert side of his character became even more marked. Here also he did his work with enthusiasm and devotion, was agreeable and sociable, and—imagine this in relation to the later Vincent!—went daily to the city elegantly turned out in a grey top-hat! Also he was pleased when the firm made good profits. We get a definite impression of a well-adapted young man, whose career, until his 21st year, is developing smoothly and easily; in this phase it is hard to find any trace of a psychopathic personality.

In London he soon falls in love with his landlady's daughter. At first this stimulates his "lust for life" even more. He writes home: "I have a wonderful home here" and in the letters he exults about "this rich life—your gift, O God!" His overflowing vitality also expresses itself in making drawings in the evenings along the Thames.

16755 1

Then, about a year after his coming to London, a fundamental change occurs. He proposes to the girl, but learns that she is already engaged and therefore rejects his proposal. He cannot swallow this disillusion which proves to be a definite turning-point in his life. When he returns home on his holiday, his family finds him "changed", depressed, and extremely religious. Even more striking is his different attitude towards his work and his job. He is uncivil towards his customers, careless in his work and queer. When he is transferred to the firm's branch in Paris, it makes no difference; here he gets even more unsociable and queer. He wants to be useful to humanity, but does not know how to achieve this. At any rate he wants to quit trade—suddenly he looks upon trade as some sort of robbery. He gets rude towards his customers, wants only to sell pictures he admires himself, and does not even answer when they ask for something different. He is getting cross and rude and neglects his clothes and appearance. From this time his development took another direction, this disillusion in love precipitated a *bend* in the evolution of his personality. At any rate, a person who reacts in this way hides under his seemingly healthy surface weak points, "complexes", which we shall presently see emerging more and more. We may see here the first slight "Schub", the first attack of his mental disease. The graphologists, Rose and Mannheim (2), however, who found typical schizophrenic deviations in his handwriting, could show the first symptoms of these already, shortly before his proposal. Therefore disillusion over the refusal cannot be the cause of the change in the handwriting. But this change might be connected also with the emotion and uncertainty of this first love, as well as with an internal process that might be secretly developing.

"My tendency to draw has stopped" he writes to Theo a short time after the catastrophe. He seeks some substitute-satisfaction, not only in religion but also in much reading and much smoking. His letters to Theo become gradually more frequent, longer and more detailed. A remarkable difference ensues between his letters and the other, more direct, expressions of his personality. In his letters he is tender, sensitive, full of a sense of duty, extremely religious at this time, but always civilized—in practical life he is intractable and hot-tempered, often neglecting the simplest everyday duties.

We should not conclude that his letters are in some way hypocritical; on the contrary, we must regard the phenomenon as a beginning of the splitting of his personality, which is to manifest itself much more clearly later.

In this time of failure and frustration he quotes from Ernest Renan this formula of his aim in life: "Réaliser de grandes choses—arriver à la noblesse et dépasser la vulgarité où se traîne l'existence de presque tous les individus." (To achieve great things—arrive at nobility and emerge above the vulgarity through which the existence of almost all people drags itself.) Certainly he has reached this in his life. But we cannot read from this those virtues of modesty, complete unselfishness, and lack of ambition, virtues which many of his admirers ascribe to him, picturing him as a kind of saint, only inspired by his love of other people and his art!

He lost his job, and in 1876 went to England as an assistant in a boarding school in two small towns, where he also taught French and German and served as a curate.

His mental attitude in this period is mainly characterized by a growing bigotry, and also a growing repression of sexuality. When Theo writes him he has fallen in love with a girl whom his parents do not like, Vincent sends his brother a devotional reproduction: "I enclose the picture of 'the Huguenot', put this in your room, you know the story—a young man is warned by his

lady-love on the eve of St. Bartholomew's night—she wants him to wear the sign by which the Catholics will recognize each other: a white ribbon round the arm. But he refuses to do this—his Creed and his duty were greater things to him than his girl.”

As in many cases Vincent's attitude towards God was determined by his attitude towards his father. God is clearly a Father-symbol; the attitude which the child had in respect to his father is transferred to God. In this period the adoration of his father runs parallel to his piety. Thus he begins a letter: “Flügel Flügel übers Leben (Wings, wings over Life), Flügel über Grab und Tod (Wings over grave and Death), that is what we need. Don't you think that for instance, Papa has this?”

Also it is obvious that his image of God bears Father-elements. He says for instance: “You say I am sad and alone, yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” In a sermon, which he preached in the school at Isleworth he compares life with a journey from the mother's heart to the father's arms of God.

Again and again he compares God with his father and somehow identifies them with one another like this: “Sincere congratulations on Papa's birthday. That is a beautiful text for this day: ‘Faithful is he who calleth you, who also will do it’—What it may be for our father and for us, we do not know, but we can in some sense leave it to Him, whose name is Our Father.” There are numerous similar instances in his letters. The next failure in his career is as junior clerk in a bookshop at Dordrecht. Here he goes to the shop in an old black top hat of his father's, an absurd piece of behaviour of which he would have been incapable in his healthy years. And also, this otherwise so refined and sensible man showed from time to time a rudeness and indifference to others in sharp contrast to the rest of his personality, for instance he ruined his landlady's new wallpaper, fastening small reproduction prints on it with thick nails. His simultaneous rudeness and gentleness of feeling speak of a break in his character of which we shall see many other symptoms.

Then he takes a new step to identify himself with his father. He wishes to become a minister of the Faith, to be completely “about his Father's business”. First of all he wants to pass the state-examination required to get access to the university. He wishes to become a “Sower of the Word”. He goes to Amsterdam, hires a room, and takes lessons in Latin. More and more he wallows in sentimental bigotry. On Sundays he goes to church six or seven times, he prefers composing sermons to making Latin exercises. He tries to identify himself with Christ, a Father-symbol as well as God, by immersing himself in the *Imitatio Christi*. He chastises himself with a club, sleeps on a plank, eats dry bread and feels himself unclean. The meaning of this uncleanliness is clear, his sexuality cannot be destroyed; this he experiences unconsciously, and consciously feels it as uncleanliness. Meanwhile ascetic behaviour of this kind is stimulated by s.c. masochistic drives, by a lust for suffering. Once he produces a typical symptom-action: he throws his gold watch and his gloves into the collection bag in church. Certainly we must see this as a symbolical offering of a piece of himself to God. Those parts of his body and psyche which he fights so bitterly, in the first place the genital part, are here thrown away in a symbolical auto-castration.

Another peculiarity he shows in this period is his continuous and passionate writing.

He copies numerous sermons and calls this studying, His sister tells us: “He wrote so much and so swiftly that the letters on those closely-written sheets

are undecipherable—inkstains without sense, nothing more.” This urge to write, often only nonsense-scribbling, is well-known to us from other cases. There is often no special urge to communicate something to others, nor to write down something as a memory-aid for oneself—it is above all the simple urge to use and move the hand. For these people their hand is “libidinized”, and hand-functioning can give some symbolical discharge to their pent-up eroticism. Their hands have a special sensitivity. This can express itself in all kinds of pleasure-giving manual work, not only writing, drawing, painting and modelling. Therefore it is not surprising that we often find painters who are at the same time distinguished authors and many painters discharge their conflicts also in diaries. Vasari, Delacroix, Leonardo, Alfred Kubin are well-known examples. Goethe was uncertain for a long time whether he could express himself better by writing or by painting. Many art-critics and art-historians are artists who have failed in their career and tried to express their artistic temperament in writing about art. Undoubtedly van Gogh has ventilated his hand-eroticism in his thousands of letters as well as in his tremendous urge to paint. So it is understandable that in this period of repressed sexuality and forced negation of genital instincts, his pent-up energy found an outlet in superfluous writing. In this connection, the fact that he chose his gloves as a symbolical offering to God may also be meaningful—he clearly tried to rid himself of his burning pent-up eroticism, in this period mainly fixated to his manual function.

Suddenly after another year, in 1878, he declares that he wants to preach the Gospel directly, as Christ himself did. He wants to become a missionary in the Borinage, a notorious mining district in Belgium. This was possible after a 3-months’ training course in Brussels. Once more he fails; after a 3-months’ training period he cannot get an appointment. His eccentricity, his queer manners and appearance, his obstinacy and absolute lack of submissiveness are insurmountable obstacles. What a different person he is now from the young Vincent in London, before the “bend” in his development!

He resolves to go to the Borinage without an official appointment at his own risk. There his situation gets worse and worse. He gives away all his possessions, is dressed in rags and filth, does not wash himself and even deliberately soils himself to look as filthy as possible. He tries to preach a bit—without success—and people look upon him as a lunatic. He confesses imaginary sins to miners and punishes himself publicly for these sins. He secured after all a provisional appointment, but lost this because he was declared insane and unfit. He does not care much about this: “Christ also stayed calm in the midst of the Storm”, he says, and he stays where he is. He lives in an empty hut and sleeps on a heap of straw. Theo writes to his parents: “Under his fine words he hides a vegetative lust to suffer.” He does not answer his parents’ letters. Sometimes he just wanders, vagabondizes, sleeps in the open or in a hay-stack. Everybody knows that afterwards in France he suffered from a grave mental illness, but it is not generally realized that in the period in the Borinage he was quite as gravely ill mentally, only the symptoms were different. In the meantime a new turning point in his life begins to shape itself. As the church-authorities are rejecting him he develops a negative attitude towards the church and his anger extends itself also against religion itself. He has a great hunger for love and he writes eloquently. “Tel a un grand foyer dans son âme et personne ne vient jamais s’y chauffer (Here is one who has a big fire in his soul and nobody comes to warm himself by it).” He does not write about religion any more, but a great deal about pictures. Finally, on the 24 September, 1880, he writes the moving statement:

“Nevertheless it was in this deep misery that I felt my energy return, and I said to myself: Whatever may happen, I will surmount these obstacles once more. I will pick up my pencil again, which I dropped in my great discouragement, and will take up drawing again. From this moment on, everything has changed for me.”

Thus in his 27th year he devotes himself definitely to art, “that big fire in his soul, his burning need for love, makes an artist of him”, wrote Meyer-Graefe (3) truly. It was really his pent-up libido, his great desire to love and to be loved, which made him find this way.

Trade and intellectual pursuits, which he followed for a short time, were far too realistic to give him a satisfying outlet for his unconscious complexes. It is true that religion could give an outlet to his father-complex, but Protestant religion is so very much spiritualized—hardly sensual—and better suited to act as an agent to repress sexuality than to express it. But where religion could thus bring him no real solution, art could do that much better. Art possesses a natural sensuality, is nearer to nature and the unconscious can express itself much better in an individual way through art. Herein his libido could direct itself towards real form, and instead of the personal contact with people he could keep himself in the background and work for himself alone, the result being his pictures, which he could give instead of himself. Art gave him an ideal solution to the great controversial trends in his personality: his narcissism and his strong Ego-Ideal to be altruistic, his tendency to introversion and the sometimes equally strong tendency to be an extravert, his need of contact with other people and his aversion towards such contact, through art he could achieve all this alternatively or even at the same time.

After a short stay in Brussels, where he took drawing-lessons, he went home to live with his parents at Etten, another village in the province of Brabant, but presently some new conflicts were added to his old ones. Parallel to his negative attitude towards religion he developed a negative attitude towards his father. And here at Etten he experienced his second great disillusion in love. He fell in love with a cousin, a young widow with a child who was staying with his parents. At first this new love gave him some positive revival, like the first one. He wrote: “Once more I am happy to be alive, and I am very glad to be in love. My life and my love are one!” And when she refuses him with a “Never-no-never—” he says, “This answer is for me only a piece of ice, which I press against my heart to melt it with my warmth.” This warmth of life, this ardour which he feels in himself is real enough, but his reaction to the whole episode is again pathological. He could not accept her refusal, kept asking and troubling her until she refused to see him any more. Then he travelled to Amsterdam, where she lived, and annoyed her father, his uncle, who would not allow him to meet her again. To show them the intensity of his love he held his hand in the flame of a candle, until the smell of burning flesh filled the room.

Again we see here his tendency to sacrifice a piece of himself, now not the glove as symbol of the hand, but the hand itself, as an essential part of his personality. His hand was refused—so he wants to throw away that hand. Consciously he wanted to show his love and constancy, unconsciously he was surely driven by his anger against his uncle, and also probably again by his tendency to seek pain, to deliver himself masochistically to the fire. When his father, after the scene, refused to give him money to travel to Amsterdam again, he made a violent scene at home. After this he left his parents' home and went to the Hague in December, 1881.

From now on Theo paid all his expenses and took over the positive father-part permanently. For Vincent he became the ideal Father, and Vincent calmly took it for granted that Theo should support him completely, though Theo really could not well afford to do this.

The period at the Hague is not very important in the development of Vincent's personality, though artistically he learned a lot in these years. His negative attitude towards his father was transferred to all authoritative persons he met there; thus he rebelled rudely against his teacher, Mauve, then a famous painter, whom he admired and loved at the same time.

He took up a relationship with a former model, a vulgar woman with a child, ugly and degraded, whom he at first idealized, but who infected him with gonorrhoea. Of course she could not give him what he needed. The situation became impossible and he left her and the Hague. After some equally unsuccessful months in the province of Drente he sees no alternative but to return home to his parents, who are now living at Nuenen. He had been living entirely at the expense of Theo, but Theo himself cannot continue to support him.

Here at Nuenen he leads a double life. On one side there is his art, to which he devotes himself with great intensity, and his admirable letters to Theo, exquisite expressions of a delicate, artistic and idealistic mind. On the other side we see an impossible person, always quarrelling with his parents and others, rude and disagreeable. In the beginning he has his studio at home, but he estranges himself more and more from everybody and lives a lonely life full of bitterness and self-imposed poverty, sometimes existing for weeks on dry bread and cheese alone.

Sometimes he wanders for hours through the fields, by preference in rainstorm and cold weather. And on his return home he sits in a corner of the room, his back turned towards his parents and casual visitors, without speaking, just reading or eating something. When anyone asks him something he does not answer. Many people who knew him in this period again considered him a lunatic.

Theo once wrote about him: "He seems to consist of two different persons: one wonderfully gifted, sensitive and tender, the other egotistical and heartless. They show themselves alternately, it is a pity that he is his own enemy."

When his father died at the age of 85 years, Vincent's grief was great and real. In spite of his negative attitude towards his father and his permanent quarrel with him, Vincent unconsciously was still much attached to him. After his father's death he soon left his house, this time for ever. Yet he stayed at Nuenen for another six months, a period in which he was very productive. Then he left for Paris, where Theo lived. After a short stay in Antwerp he joined this younger brother who was always his second father.

Before we follow him to Paris a few words must be said about his art in his Dutch period. What did he try to express in his works? His own answer to the question is eloquent: "I want to make drawings that will touch *some* people—I want to reach the point that people will say of my work: 'That man shows deep feeling and he is sensitive'—that is my ambition. I want to make drawings that are *not* understandable to everybody—the figures simplified, only essential traits expressed."

The writers who describe van Gogh as a kind of socialistic "all men-are-equal" idealist, basing this view on some other words of his, should also consider these words. Here speaks an aristocratic mind, whose first object is to express clearly in his work his own values. His main object is even to make drawings which *not everybody* will understand, but which will make an

impression on *some* people. But what about the subjects he drew and painted? Often this period is called his realistic period, but unjustly so. The poor peasants he represents are miserable, misshapen toilers, apeline in their ugliness and degradation, bestial slaves of life, with hollow eyes in starved faces and skinny hands like claws. There still exist some photographs of his models for the famous "Potato-Eaters"; they were not nearly so ugly and miserable-looking as van Gogh represented them. Quite as pessimistic and sombre as his subjects are also his colours in this period—black, brown and dark-grey predominate.

The short period in Antwerp was a transition episode to the Parisian period, both in artistic and in psychological respects an important step towards greater freedom. I want to point out two important factors in his development during this time: his acquiring of the female naked figure as a painting subject and his confrontation with Rubens. In Brabant he never had painted or drawn naked models, had indeed hardly found any opportunity to do so. At the art school in Antwerp he visited, only male models were permitted to pose undraped. But Vincent succeeded in becoming a member of a painters' club where female models were hired, and strangely enough, here he tried to paint with flesh-tones somewhat resembling those of Rubens's female subjects. Already in his last letters from Nuenen he wrote that he was longing to see Rubens's work—a striking change from the atmosphere in which he lived before! In his attempt to imitate Rubens's flesh-tones he showed for the first time a tendency towards a lighter and clearer palette. Also the fuller forms in which Rubens expressed his sexuality attracted him. When at an art-school lesson he had to make a drawing of the Venus de Milo he clearly thought her too slender, and in his drawing he over-accentuated her hips and transformed the Greek beauty into a robust Flemish matron. When his teacher tried to correct these forms with some pencil-strokes, Vincent exploded: "You don't seem to know what a woman is, damn you! A woman must have hips, buttocks, a pelvis where she can keep a child."

In Paris a fundamental change and improvement quickly developed, very striking to everyone, psychiatrist or layman, who has followed Vincent's evolution until now with interest and concern. Theo wrote home in the summer of 1886: "You would hardly recognize Vincent, he has changed so much, he is much gayer than before and everybody likes him here." Two factors may have caused this change, Theo himself and the new freedom. For the first time since his childhood he was now permanently near Theo, the human being whom he loved most of all in the world. In Theo he found again his once adored father but without his father's moralizing tendency. Theo gave him the warmth and protection of his parent's home, but totally freed from the fettered atmosphere which imprisoned him. His parents, though liberal enough in a way, could be very narrow-minded.

Vincent himself tells us how they abhorred everything "French", and "French" meant to them and to their friends "immoral", and he tells how they read Goethe's *Faust* only when the parson-poet Ten Cate had sanctioned this doubtful work by translating it into Dutch; but they looked upon it merely as "the disastrous result of an indelicate love".

But here in Paris he was delighted by a new freedom. He found a circle of friends in the younger impressionists who stimulated him immensely. He felt free to speak and to think as he liked, to drink alcohol and mix with women, to dress as carelessly as he wished. Here at last, he realized, what he had written before, feeling himself then a caged bird: "What opens the prison

is deep-earnest affection. To be friends and brothers, to love, that is the way to open the prison.”

Already in earlier years the rare meetings with Theo had given relaxation to his pent-up libido. And when at the Hague a small shadow had occasionally threatened to fall over their friendship, Vincent had felt each time positively ill.

Thus he grew completely receptive to Theo's impressionist friends, turned from his dark way of painting and took over the clear gay colour of the Parisian impressionists. Now these colours were also in harmony with his mood, with his improved psychical state. We see daily in our profession how a new love, a new friendship, and a liberation from moral views can be an enormous healing force to neurotic patients. Yet in this case we see something truly exceptional, a person, not only on the verge of a grave mental disorder, but who has perhaps already definitely overstepped the boundary between sanity and insanity, who all at once is influenced so strongly and positively and regenerates so fundamentally. The agent of this exceptional recovery must be both his still potent possibility of extraversion, and the lucky circumstance which relieved one of his most damaging complexes—his father-fixation, which he could elaborate better through Theo as a medium.

Yet we must not expect that there in Paris Vincent was all at once changed into a harmonious person, that the well-adapted and well-balanced young man from London and the Hague had returned. A deep cleavage separated him from this early self, a different character had developed. But here he did not seem so very eccentric.

Alas, this considerable improvement did not last very long. Probably the intimate living together with Theo in a very small apartment, as well as the too intimate contact with other friends, irritated his repressed homo-erotic tendencies. He writes himself about this conflict: “If I had stayed in Paris, Theo and I would have become too much immersed in one another.” Perhaps also his once activated introversion was a process which could be stopped for a short period, but which inevitably and spontaneously evolved in the long run. During the winter of 1886 he became more troublesome to others than ever, and made life difficult for Theo, whose own health was precarious. In the spring of 1887 a fresh improvement occurred, probably caused by a new friendship, with a very young painter, the 19-years-old Emile Bernard, who admired him very much and never contradicted him. But once he had a quarrel with Bernard's father about Emile's education and from that moment he never entered the Bernard house again, and during the following winter he was much worse again. He did not feel so well physically either, the noises of the city troubled him and he had a frightening sense of a dark menace, an undefined something in himself that was growing and rising, so that later in St. Rémy he wrote to his sister: “On the whole I prefer to have a definite illness than to be as I was in Paris, when this was smouldering.” Also, he suffered from anxiety-dreams.

Paris now appeared to him cold and dark, a hot-bed of ideas, “but nothing is really fresh here”, he wrote to his sister; he was longing for nature, for light and warmth, for the sun. To find all this and perhaps also to run away from contact with other people, who excited his complexes too much, he went to the South of France in February, 1887, to Arles in Provence. Once more at first he attained a remarkable recovery. As a painter he rose here to his greatest height. The two contrasting sides of his personality, the lover of nature of Holland, and the lover of light of Paris had as yet not reached a synthesis in



his mind. But the burning sun of Provence gave him the warmth he needed, and fused and melted together the still conflicting elements in his art.

At the same time a very important psychological process developed. Vincent experienced an intensive mystical union with nature, especially with the sun. He evolved a regular sun-cult and sun-worship.

He got into a kind of ecstasy, a state of mind which appears to me to have been some kind of healing-effort, a tendency emerging from his unconscious nature. Undoubtedly this was a regression to those well-known primitive experiences of oneness and undividedness, which in extreme cases can result in ecstatic conditions. For Vincent this meant a "reculer pour mieux sauter". He writes about this: "Often I do not know what I am doing, I am working almost like a somnambulist", and also he speaks of "a lover's blindness for my work" which possesses him. Two striking features characterize these ecstatically painted pictures, the ever-present sun and the all dominating yellow colour. He seeks the sun, and in the sun he reaches his greatest ecstasy, and creates his best works. What did the sun mean to his unconscious? I know no better answer to this question than that of the German art-critic Hartlaub (4): "The sun was for Vincent the cosmic mask of God, animating all nature, uniting him with nature and with God." Apparently big words, yet the simple truth.

Similar experiences of being united with God and the world are well known from many mystics in conditions of changed consciousness as well as from many psychotics: In these conditions we see a diffusion of Ego boundaries; these mystics feel themselves part of the world, the sun, the sea or God. In Vincent's case primitive religious experiences emerged, the sun was for him a symbol of God, of the Father, and at the same time of Theo. As Meyer-Graefe writes: "Theo was at the same time his brother, a real and a mystic person. Instead of Vincent and Theo, we can put Vincent and the world, or even Vincent and God." We may add to this: "Vincent and the Sun."

The yellow colour from now on so prominent in his pictures is for him the colour of the sun—the sacred colour—the colour of burning love which he can now at last pour out profusely into his art. Emile Bernard relates how Vincent painted the *Berceuse* as a symbol of Mother-love for lonely sailors; on both sides of this picture should be put two paintings of big yellow sun-flowers, their yellow colour symbolizing Love's omnipotence.

He used freely contrasting complementary colours, a technique often practised by the neo-impressionists with their unbroken colours. But he put a lot more meaning into this practice than was contained in impressionistic theories. He wanted to "express the love of two lovers by a marriage of two complementaries, their mixture and opposition, to express hope by some star, the ardour of some being by the rays of the setting sun".

The complementary colours yellow and blue-violet, red and green, he used mainly to symbolize the male and female principles; they were to him "the marriage of the complementaries". The woods and mountains he painted were subjected passively to the active radiation of the sun-eroticism. In the more primitive attitude towards the world Vincent himself was sun and earth—man and woman. At one moment he is male like the sower, and sows the yellow colours over the picture, at another he is female like the earth, which receives the seed, as his body passionately receives the sunbeams.

So Art could bring him, be it temporarily, a recovery, and his logical Ego, with its theories found therein as much satisfaction as his ideals and his love for nature; at the same time his repressed erotic tendencies could find some outlet here. On this (partly somnambulistic and primitive) stage, he found a

psychic harmony, all his pent-up forces could express themselves here together. In this period he created his best works.

All too soon, unfortunately, the harmony was shattered by his well-known dramatic collapse at the end of the Arles period. In many descriptions of Vincent's life the authors try to attribute this collapse to causes like overworking, too much sitting in the sun, heavy smoking, under-nourishment, etc. To the psychiatrist such explanations are hardly satisfying. But a short time before the crisis two very important events happened, namely: (1) Theo's engagement to be married, and (2) the difficulties between Vincent and Gauguin, who was then with him at Arles. The bond between Vincent and Theo was so strong and so deeply embedded in Vincent's unconscious, that clearly there existed something like a psychic marriage between them, and his pictures were for him the "children" of this union. In fact he remarks repeatedly that they had again produced "together" a new picture. All his creating was for Vincent a being together with Theo. More especially he speaks about "accoucher d'un tableau" (being delivered of a painting). He signed his pictures only by his Christian name: the explanation he himself gave was that in France the name Van Gogh was unpronounceable, but this is certainly not correct as already in Holland he signed only as Vincent. Surely we have to take into account here that for himself and for Theo he always remained the child Vincent, and that in Love and in Art he always lived for Theo, so that it would have been an absurdity had he entitled himself before him (Theo) as V. van Gogh.

Although Vincent consciously was glad that Theo had found the love of a woman, the happiness of a marriage, it is inevitable that from the moment Theo got a beloved wife to love and cherish, Vincent must have felt himself abandoned. All the more important must have grown for him another project, long cherished by him. He hoped to found with Gauguin and other friends a society of painters, a sort of league of comrades. The most important feature in this was for him the libidinous tie with what he called "les copains" (the pals). Significantly he wrote: "Human beings are more important than things, and as for me, the more trouble I take with my paintings, the more the paintings themselves leave me cold, the reason why I try to make them, is to be among the artists." All his hope was fixed now on Gauguin. He idealized and worshipped Gauguin in a foolish way, called him "Master" and hoped that he would consent to act as head or father of the herd of neo-impressionists—briefly he had a father-transference on Gauguin. But Gauguin thought Vincent a romantic fantasm. When Vincent got the news that Theo was engaged to be married he once more gave Gauguin a detailed account of his plans and ideals and asked him to co-operate. But Gauguin thought these plans ridiculous and roared with laughter at them. This ruined Vincent's last chance of retaining (psychical) stability. Having lost every possible outlet for his pent-up libido, inevitably hostility against Gauguin had to come out. The next day in a cafe Vincent threw a glass of absinthe in the direction of Gauguin's head, without any clear reason, Gauguin brought him home, where he fell asleep. The following day Vincent, vaguely remembering that he had somehow insulted Gauguin, asked his forgiveness, but in the evening he ran after Gauguin in the street with a razor in his hand. Gauguin turned round and looked him sternly in the eyes, whereupon Vincent bowed his head and slunk away. The same evening he cut off an ear-lobe, wrapped it up neatly in a piece of paper and brought it as a present to a prostitute in a house he often visited. The next day he was taken to the hospital.

Here we see, doubtless, the well-known mechanism of an aggressivity

checked at the last moment and then directed against his own person. Had he made a simple attempt at suicide, we could have easily understood it, but to cut off an ear-lobe and then bring it to a prostitute is an insane action. We must look upon this as a symptom-action, psychologically resembling closely what he did in Amsterdam, when he sacrificed his watch and his gloves and burned his hand in a candle-flame. Undoubtedly, what brought him into this situation, besides his excited aggressivity and his self-punishment tendency, was his pent-up eroticism. His love for a woman was frustrated every time, he had been compelled to suppress it and had tried to sublimate it in his art and in his contact with his friends. It is true that he had frequent contacts with prostitutes, but that had only been a superficial attempt to find relaxation, without any deeper meaning for his inner life. Also, we saw how in ecstatic conditions all his libido was directed towards God, his father, Theo and his friends. When he was losing Theo and Gauguin, his inner balance was so gravely disturbed that an attempt to sacrifice his libido seemed a logical reaction. But once more this sacrifice took the form of a dream-like symbolical action, clearly a symbolic attempt at auto-sterilization; the ear-lobe was a symbol for the male genital, which he brought to a place where it would be accepted.

After a short stay in a hospital he returned to his work, but he was no longer the man he was before. From time to time he had twilight-states with anxiety, hallucinations and religious delusions. In one of his last attacks which necessitated his admission to the asylum at St. Rémy, he threw several paintings out of the window to the crowd, crying out with a schizophrenic-like pun which he had also written on the wall of his room, "Je suis le Saint-Esprit, je suis sain d'esprit" (I am the Holy Ghost, I am sane in mind!). One night he sat painting in the open with a crown of burning candles on his hat. And the children from the streets hooted: "fou roux, fou roux" (red-haired madman). Before describing the end of the evolving tragedy, we have to examine his religious experiences. We have seen how he had turned away from religion (at least consciously) and neither his way of living nor his ideas could be called "Christian" in any way. But unconsciously the religious attitude stayed active within him, emerging again in his delusions.

Even in his non-psychotic phases his attitude towards Christ was remarkable, for instance he writes about Him thus: "He lived serenely, a greater artist than all other artists, contemptuous of marble and clay and colours, working in living flesh; he created living men, immortals." And he finishes: "His spoken words are the summits reached by art, which in these words becomes pure creative power."

For him Christ was the artist working in living flesh and by the fertilizing force of his words He became the personification of the highest source of art, the Libido. Undoubtedly in his Unconscious the infantile relationship towards an overpowering Deity, on the one side with father-qualities, on the other magically merging in experiences of libidinous energy, remained of great importance. And this unconscious religion directed his delusions, of which he once said: "I can't understand how a man with such modern ideas as I have can have states in which I have confused and cruel religious ideas, such as I never had in my worst days in Holland."

A strange fire blazes through his paintings in these days and there is in the different figures a peculiar unity with their surroundings, all consisting of revolving, whirling lines; and certainly in these works he always painted himself, his pent-up creative power. This new expressionistic style was a direct

effect of his greater introversion and at the same time of a more direct activity of his primitive mode of reality experience.

Some critics pointed out that Vincent always avoided painting Christ as a person. In the asylum of St. Rémy he produced paintings after etchings by Rembrandt and Delacroix, transposing them into colours; in a curious way he translated the chiaroscuro of these etchings into different hues of colours. Remarkable is his version of the Rembrandt etching, the Resurrection of Lazarus, in this picture the dominating majestic figure of Christ is left out and replaced by the Sun shining over Lazarus.

Only once did he paint Christ. He transposed in St. Rémy a pietá of Delacroix in colours. But here Christ was not the Saviour, but the Man of Sorrows, a completely helpless figure, held up by his mother. And the face of this Christ clearly has the features of Vincent himself—it is a self-portrait. The mother-image had not come to the fore in his conflicts as the father-image had done, it meant to him only the rest before and after all the struggle. In the pietá, that is only in death, he would find that rest. And in the last, difficult days at Arles, the mother-image emerged too and he struggled to find an expression for it in the picture of the Berceuse, of which he made five versions, all much alike. Emile Bernard writes how Vincent painted the Berceuse as a symbol of Mother-love, and his wish had been that sailors, “at the same time children and martyrs” (like himself!), might see it in their cabins and then “experience a rocking feeling, reminding them of the song of their nurse”. The dubious beauty of her yellow face is not to be explained by jaundice of the model, but by the mental disease of Vincent. In a non-realistic, symbolic way of feeling, yellow was to him, as we have seen, the colour of love. And it is very questionable whether any sailors might ever experience any “rocking feeling, reminding them of the song of their nurse”, looking at the picture of this unattractive, introverted yellow woman. Before being able to understand it, we have first to learn that the love lies in the yellow colour, and that the motherliness and the rocking have to do with the cord in her hands (because the cord can be thought to be fastened to a cradle). The natural direct contact between artist and spectator is loosened here, and our thoughts have to make a construction to bridge the gap before we can empathize with Vincent.

In the asylum of St. Rémy the attacks returned, and in the intervals he was more unstable than he had been before. He seriously considered joining the Foreign Legion, and had horrible nightmares. Sometimes he tried to swallow his colours and the materials producing them. Some authors have interpreted this as a suicidal attempt, but I am convinced they are mistaken. In this respect we must remember the libidinous meaning his colours had for him, and his tendency to introject and to unite with all he loved. In his deep regression he realized this also in this most primitive, oral-erotic way.

Charles Mauron (5) in an interesting and accurate study was able to establish a relation in time between his attacks and some unwelcome news in the letters he received from Theo, and Kraus has shown how bad news about Theo's health (far from good in this period) undermined him.

Next to the image of the Sower that had possessed him so passionately and had been for him a symbol of the fertilizing germinative power, of libido, of life, now that of the Mower came to the fore. “I saw in this reaper”, he wrote “the image of death, humanity being the corn he reaps, he is the opposite of the Sower. But in this death, no sadness, I sought the ‘presqu'en souriant’ (almost smiling).” This last expression refers to words said about Delacroix, which Vincent often quoted: “Ainsi mourut presqu'en souriant Eugène

Delacroix, peintre de grande race qui avait un soleil dans la tête et un orage dans le coeur" (Thus died almost smiling Eugène Delacroix, painter of high pedigree, who had a sun in his head and a storm in his heart). And the tree of death, the cypress, became dominating in his pictures and he himself saw it as the counterpart of the sunflowers.

At the beginning of 1890 he went to Auvers, under the care of Dr. Gachet. Curiously enough Vincent also sent Gauguin's bed, from which he could not separate, to Auvers. There he became still more depressed. Kraus has shown that this must have been reactive to letters from Theo, telling him something of Theo's failing health. The pillar he relied on throughout his life staggered. "Je reste toujours toqué (I'll always remain crazy)" he wrote, and he felt that the attacks would return. His last painting, black crows in a wheatfield, with its threatening, oppressive sky, with the crows, the birds of death, flying along, tells of the approaching end. His internal disintegration is reflected in this painting in two crushed setting suns.

On a Sunday morning in July he fired a bullet through his body. So now he sacrificed *himself* to the glorious world and the shining art, preferring this to sinking down into permanent insanity. Instead of the Sun, that demoniac symbol of God, Father and archaic Love, he chose to give himself up to the mother-earth, the Pietá. The very last day of his life, he passed quietly smoking and talking to Gachet and Theo, almost smiling, and dying (on the third day) in the Café de l'Espérance. And the words which he so often quoted about Delacroix are pre-eminently appropriate to himself: "Ainsi mourut presqu'en souriant, V. van Gogh, peintre de grande race, qui avait un soleil dans la tête et un orage dans le coeur."

We have seen in what preceded a parallelism between his psychological and his artistic evolution. We have understood that a consequent realism and impressionism (the latter endeavours, too, to paint nature in an objective way) could not appease his craving for self-expression, so that in due time he inevitably had to come to an expressionistic way of painting. All his pent-up libido, his stirred up unconscious, pushed to the surface and created strange distorted forms. He was the first expressionist, and he became that because he had no choice. His way of painting was not the result of an intellectual theory, but an instinctive creation. In a witty way Jaspers (7) has said: "In the exhibition at Cologne in 1912, where the wonderful van Gogh's were surrounded by expressionistic art from Europe displaying a remarkable monotony, I often had the feeling that van Gogh was the only grand and involuntary crazy person among so many who apparently wished to be crazy and are only too healthy." Vincent's work is more deeply rooted in the vital sphere, it is biologically founded and woven together with his whole life-history, his conflicts and his psychosis. But this expressionistic solution of his conflicts was in fact a going to the utmost limit where a real art still was possible. A further shift of the inner energetic relation could become fatal for the artistic result. He stood on the brink, and he wrote himself in a quiet phase: "Some of my paintings bear the features of the sick person that made them."

Did he cross this threshold in the end, and do his works show any signs of decay? Some critics think they do. Thus F. Knapp (8) writes: "His greatness is finished . . . in the weak, loosened way of handling, in the dissolution of reality and in the somewhat sugary colours we may discern the disintegration of his mental forces." The unity of composition generally is preserved, at least in St. Rémy; from the burning, beaming, swirling air, houses and trees there radiate rays and circles that unite sky and earth into one image of the all-

animating and all-penetrating force of nature. But still there are among his later works several that seem to us more queer and distorted than aesthetic. Moreover, sometimes it looks as if the circles, spirals and revolving lines are beginning to lead a life of their own, whereby they seem to dominate the whole composition. Ornamental traits and patterns appear, and we wonder whether we have here before us, perhaps, unbridled tendencies, forces, repeating themselves stereotypically and somehow emancipating themselves. And with concern we ask ourselves what kind of development we might expect here—especially when we know how with some schizophrenic artists these stereotyped and ornamental trends can overgrow and stifle mental plasticity as an expression of the fact that only a few stronger tendencies got the whole of the psyche in a stiffening grip.

Finally, we have still to consider some questions about the diagnosis, although I consider the matter of labelling of minor importance compared with that of his psychological development and the history of his conflicting trends, in which we have accompanied him in the preceding pages. Diagnosis may be irrelevant now; important is the fact that all Vincent's disturbances have proved to be psychologically motivated, understandable reactions to situations that were traumatic to his sensitive personality, that they never proved to be automatic or autochthonous, and that they could be healed partially—although unfortunately not entirely—by other psychological situations, which he either sought for himself, or which were created by Theo's love.

All authors agree that his psychosis was not a typical one. So several psychiatric concepts are applied to his case and there is talk of "the seven diagnoses of Vincent van Gogh", as if these were as many keys that could unlock for us the entrance to his psyche. They cannot all be discussed here, but as some serious French authors still defend the diagnosis of Epilepsy, I must say something about this, although I wholly agree with Kraus, who wrote: "I consider the diagnosis of Epilepsy an absurdity." Vincent never had epileptic fits, but it is well known that on the periphery of that disease there exist periodic states without fits, wherein consciousness is severely disturbed and hallucinations may appear, whereas in the intervals the patient is quite normal with a complete amnesia for the sick periods. Kleist called them episodic twilight states and they are (furthermore) characterized by fits of severe frenzy, attacks of rudeness to other people and self-injuries. Riese and Minkowska believe that these characteristics exactly fit Van Gogh's case. I do not think they do. He never committed attacks of aggression on others. Probably Riese (9) was thinking of his running after Gauguin with a razor in his hand. But in the first place that act had a very obvious reason (whereas the episodic twilight states should appear without any motive, "autochthonous") and moreover it is nonsense to call this an aggressive "attack", as he did not even touch Gauguin and shrunk back simply because Gauguin looked sternly (squarely) at him. (I would not advise you to try that with an epileptic in his twilight state.) And Vincent's self-injuries never were "autochthonous" but always psychogenic reactions. And weakest of all stands the heredity argument that Riese and others advanced in favour of their diagnosis. In St. Rémy epilepsy was diagnosed because Vincent said that a sister of his mother and other members of the family had suffered from that disease. Probably nobody would ever have thought of calling Vincent "epileptic" had he not himself said so in a confused mood. However, this contention was absolutely false! Not a single epileptic fit ever occurred in his family, as Mr. van Gogh has assured me. The ladies in question were perhaps rather singular personalities, but nothing more. On the other hand it is

absolutely certain that Vincent's youngest sister was a genuine schizophrenic and vegetated for more than 38 years in an asylum. Of great importance, also, is the fact that Vincent did *not* have a total amnesia for his attacks; in a letter to his sister, published in 1955, he described accurately his sensations in them.

Another important question is whether he was "normal" in the intervals. Certainly that was not the case. "I feel myself wholly different from before", he writes, and when he was back in Arles for a short visit, all the people there seemed to him "beings from another world". Now and then there is a mild, quiet confusion. In 1890 Theo writes: "I got a letter from Vincent which again is totally incomprehensible." From St. Rémy Vincent writes how he gets on with other patients—"we understand each other very well, for instance I can chat with a man who answers only with incoherent phrases". But this man was an idiot, who had never learned to speak a single word. To speak to an idiot, who only utters confused sounds and then believe oneself to be very well understood—that sounds very autistic indeed.

Madame Minkowska has tried to differentiate what she calls the "glischroid" character of the epileptic from the schizoid character, and she assigned the "glischroid" character-structure to Vincent. For a few of his character traits this may seem right, for the rest not at all. The coincidence is, however, not very surprising, as Minkowska has moulded her description of that glischroid character-structure a good deal on Vincent, whom she considered a typical epileptic. ("Ich schulde dem Studium Van Gogh's das Verständnis der epileptischen Struktur" (10), p. 200.) But it is unquestionable that some of the most typical epileptic, "glischroid" characteristics are missing in Vincent. "Viscous, with a want of mobility" is the last thing that could be said of this sensitive man, any more than that he was a man "with little initiative, creating nothing new" and "without an individual touch" ("die Affektivität ist dickflüssig und zeigt einen Mangel an Beweglichkeit . . . ihren menschlichen Beziehungen fehlt die individuelle Note . . . sie haben wenig Initiative und schaffen nichts Neues", Minkowska, l.c. 186).

Latterly another variety of the group of epileptic diseases has come to the fore, temporal or psychomotor epilepsy. Although there exists, of course, no EEG of Vincent, and this diagnosis cannot be proved, Gastaut has argued that several of his symptoms at Arles and St. Rémy might fit into this pattern perfectly (14). We need not discuss them all here, for the main fact remains, that this theory cannot give a satisfactory explanation of Vincent's undeniably schizoid behaviour in London and in Holland. In taking the beginning of the disease at Arles, and so studying only the final period, one sees only a last offshoot of the disease and neglects the main and best-known facts. Jaspers, who labels him as schizophrenic, has the merit of seeing that already in Paris his mind was disturbed, but his mistake was to ignore the fact that the most important part of the disease had already taken place in Holland. This disease was considered by his family as serious enough to occasion repeated consideration of putting him under guardianship or placing him at Gheel (a village in Belgium renowned for the nursing of lunatics in family-homes). So we must either accept that he had two diseases, a schizophreniform psychosis in London and Holland and a psychomotor, temporal epilepsy at Arles, or we must see all the symptoms as belonging to one process, and then the choice is not difficult as all his earlier and later symptoms fit into the diagnosis of epilepsy, which is not the case with temporal epilepsy. Furthermore, schizophrenia is for us no longer what dementia praecox was fifty years ago, a wholly

incomprehensible psychosis with absurd, incomprehensible behaviour, caused by an unknown brain-disease. We have learned that all its symptoms are purposive, meaningful, and—in principle—understandable. And, as I have mentioned already, each of Vincent's abnormal actions, the outbreak of each attack, stands in psychological relationship to one or other psychological situation; never are we entitled to dispose of his symptoms by calling them "automatisms", as might be the case in a psychomotor epilepsy.

Of late, however, there are data that seem to bring some cases of schizophrenia into relation with temporal disorders. Erwin, Epstein and King (11), and others have observed cases where a typical schizophrenia was combined with temporal spikes in the EEG. Heath and co-workers reported "septal" spiking in the subcorticograms of schizophrenics. So it is not impossible that, if at Arles an EEG could have been made, some disorder might have been seen therein. But even so it certainly would not have been permissible to proclaim that the "cause" of the whole mental disease, being a damage of a special part of the brain had been found. For in the course of the years many physiological and even anatomical deviations have been found in different organs of schizophrenic patients, and were proclaimed as being the cause of this uncanny disease, but none of them has proved to be regularly present, not even in psychologically similar cases. Up till now schizophrenia remains a disturbance of the total psycho-biological personality in its communication with the environment, wherein, besides an hereditary disposition, damaging environmental influences, for which the patient is specially sensitive, play a role, and to which he reacts with regression and other defence-mechanisms. All this was there in Vincent's case. Schizophrenia being a serious and profound disturbance of the total personality (much deeper than most neuroses), not only are the reactions of the totality (i.e. the psychological reactions) disturbed, but also the reactions of differentiated organs (i.e. the physiological reactions), and more obviously than in neurotic cases. There certainly is what Rosenzweig (12) calls a disturbance of homeostasis, and in severe cases this may lead to anatomical alterations. Of course, such changes in brain-functioning might have had some secondary influence on the form of Vincent's psychotic reactions and may have co-determined the "psychomotor" features of his last period. But all this remains hypothetical, and we prefer to limit ourselves to the psychological facts.

One of the main reasons why psychiatrists again and again hesitate to label him as "schizophrenic" is his striking tendency to turn himself to the outer world, his warm and effective love for others, a love that is no less real, in spite of his strong aggressive, narcissistic and introversive tendencies. But we should not forget that extraversion and introversion do not exclude one another, that a man can be at once strongly introverted and strongly extraverted, that he can live in two forms of life at the same time, especially if his conscious ego is directed in this respect in another way than his unconscious.

Besides schizophrenia, there is yet another diagnosis that must be seriously considered and that is psychogenic attacks in a schizoid psychopath. Kraus formerly thought this quite possible. I could agree with the diagnosis of schizoid psychopathy, only if we consider that in London a mild schizophrenic process had befallen his non-psychopathic personality, and this process after remission left a psychopathized personality. In practice this question of diagnosis would have been important, for the prognosis is much more favourable in cases of psychogenic attacks on a psychopathic basis than it is in schizophrenia, as in later years psychopaths often do very well. But in diagnosing psychopathy not



enough attention is given to the fact that there is a gap between Vincent as a youth, when there were no psychopathic traits at all, and Vincent after the London period, after the bend in his development. And I am sure that any modern psychiatrist who could have had Vincent under observation, could only give an unfavourable prognosis.

In the last few years several cases have been published of severe schizophrenic patients who were treated with great success by a psychotherapy mainly based on bestowing on them an unshakable sympathy and devotion, of giving utterance to this in the right way, and of giving protection and co-operation on the level of the patient without any condemnation. The names of Rosen, Sechehayé, Getr. Schwing and others are connected with this therapy. Now with Vincent the almost unparalleled case presents itself, that he, properly speaking, always had a similar treatment from Theo, a treatment, however, that surely influenced very much the manifest form of his psychosis. Kraus (13) wrote about this: "What would have become of Vincent without the symbiosis with Theo? By his faithful friendship and protection, by his devoted help and support, in brief within the fence with which Theo surrounded him, a complex psychiatric figure was cultivated, that owes its rareness partially to the rareness of such a shelter." Really, I think that we have to thank Theo most of all for the fact that Vincent was not already submerged in his psychosis in Holland, like his sister, that Theo's care and love enabled him to unfold his capacity for extraversion and his biological tendency to recover again and again.

Vincent lived a tragic life—but I fear that a terrible tragedy indeed would have unfolded itself had he not committed suicide. For it was obvious that a permanent synthesis of his split-up personality was no longer attainable, and we shudder at the very thought of what might have happened in the future.

"Einigen sterben zu früh, viele sterben zu spät, noch klingt fremd die Lehre: Stirb zu rechter Zeit" (A few people die too soon, many die too late, strange still sounds the lesson: Die at the right time). The very man who said this, Nietzsche, died too late, but we are grateful to Vincent, not only for what he gave us in his work and his fervent life, but also for having drawn the balance at the right time.

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