

**E. H. Gombrich, Review of R. W. Pickford, *The Psychology of Cultural Change in Painting*, Burlington Magazine, Vol. 87, 1945, pp.207 [Trapp no. not recorded]**

*The Psychology of Cultural Change in Painting*. By R. W. Pickford, M.A., Ph.D. Lecturer in Psychology, University of Glasgow. 62 pp. (The British Journal of Psychology: Monograph Supplements XXVI. Cambridge University Press), 8s. 6d.

Mr. Peacock's (*sic*) paper may be described as an attempt to apply Prof. F. C. Bartlett's sociological theories to certain problems in the history of painting. The problems of the individual artist in relation to his social setting are briefly analysed in the solutions adopted by Chardin, Goya, Daumier and Cezanne; the function of the group as an agent of cultural change is demonstrated by the school of Barbizon and by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood after which the author turns to the investigation of such group phenomena as the fate of Persian pictorial tradition in Moghul India and of Byzantine painting in Russia.

The general validity of the author's conclusions must needs depend on the authorities he consulted. Unfortunately the scientific standard of the literature on painting is not such that it can always be safe to select its aperçus and clichés as a basis for sweeping generalisations. If Chardin has been compared to Cezanne, for instance, such a parallel was surely never meant to be put to the acid test of a hypothesis (p. 38) that "this is not unlike that form of suggestion in individual psychology in which the suggested material is first ignored or resisted but is nevertheless utilized after many years ..."

It would be wrong, however, to blame only the literature which the author consulted or the theories which he adopted if the results of this paper seem somewhat disappointing. It would seem that the author's basic methodological error lies in the assumption that all that is needed to apply a given theory to a given sphere of research is to translate its ready-made findings into the new terminology without first sifting and testing all available data in the light of that new theory—in other words without original research. To use Mr. Pickford's own terms: "grafting" of this kind is not likely to result in "constructive changes." It is more likely to lead to one-sided generalisations like "the whole Barbizon movement is an example of the spreading of culture by borrowing" (p. 14) or a re-statement of comparatively simple facts in more obscure and ambitious jargon like: "In all cultural changes there are omissions of material or of meanings which do not fit into the new settings, and these losses may take place rapidly or slowly" (p. 2). But all pioneering work involves risks and very likely it is better to fail while exploring uncharted seas than to succeed along the beaten track.