

## **ART IN THE FREUD FAMILY: SELF AND WORLD COGNITION IN THE PROCESS OF ARTISTIC CREATION**

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*Abstract: The contribution Lucian and Annie Freud have made in support of our understanding of the world and of ourselves is significant. So much so that while 'reading' their message, one contained in the painted figure, the other in the music of words, we come to realise that in terms of the lessons life teaches us, we are not so much dissimilar after all. The gains and the pains we experience interweave to form a unique image, us, mankind, the same since creation. Experience shows that when art is begotten out of an acute sense of frustration, the impact of the fury unleashed in the process, as a predictable after-effect, reaches unimaginable heights. Art has put out its challenge once again: touched by it, Lucian and Annie Freud speak to us, each telling of his and of her own frustration, each in their own way. When doing this, through the unicity of the moment of artistic delight, they give us the chance for self-examination.*

*Key words: artistic creation, visual image, poetic image, psychological portrayal.*

### **Introduction**

One of the most upholding factors in the process of artistic creation is, perhaps, artistic ancestry. This is quite encouraging because if art is a matter of kith and kin, one inherits that special vein through which art flows freely and tumultuously and, most importantly, *meaningfully*. For meaningfulness is both the incentive and the finality of artistic creation on the whole and stands proof of its incontestable entirety.

Where family membership is art-governed the creative energy is unthinkable. It inundates every chamber of one's being and permeates every single cell with its magic.

Art never asks which door to enter. Should it be painting, music, sculpture, dramatic arts, or literature? Or should it be a bit of all these? It actually is. Art is all-encompassing, all-representing and all-integrative. The fact that it is cut into well-defined slices in order to isolate its forms according to their way of addressing the consumer is a matter of interpretation only.

This has been proved already many, many times by ‘artists’. They simply wouldn’t bear to remain confined in a perimeter which, by definition, implies limitation, captivity.

Of the many members of the family, all talented and creative in their own way, two voices at play in the modern world have proven that the substance of art offers the consumer the delight of a metamorphic universe that develops and diversifies but retains the selfsameness of its pristine essence. They are fortunately bound, through bloodline, in art. Lucian and Annie Freud, father and daughter, are two artists that make the world a better place, one through images on canvas, the other through word incantation.

At the sunset of the Venetian Renaissance, Jacopo Tintoretto painted under the urge of a tremendous creative energy and the burning desire to prove that he had a message to transmit in the very personal way that earned him the appellation ‘Il Furioso.’ Five hundred years later, other artists are trying to deal with the world and with their own destiny in a similar way, equally tumultuous in manner and art. Among them, Picasso and, later, Lucian Freud must have experienced a similar feeling when they chose to burn, with fury and passion, for art alone. Their magnetism is manifold and impacting, which is why, irrespective of time, the beholder is flabbergasted by their art, just as once was their entourage by their charisma and their wit.

The poetry of a painting or of a sculpture is encapsulated in the message that addresses our consciousness through the eye, the decoding of which facilitates the ultimate act of self-discovery. The vision produced by a poem addresses our imagination, its message being contained in the words the recitation of which, aloud or silent, creates a mantra that elicits feelings similar with those we experience when we admire a painting.

The delicacy and, at the same time, the energy with which Annie Freud renders the informational content of her poems, their message, create a *mélange* with an extremely visual, almost palpable effect. In her verse, we recognize her self-portrait, amazingly but not surprisingly similar to her father’s self-representations. In their original way, they ‘speak’ of others while ‘speaking’ of themselves.

Lucian’s quirks and works are what made him so special as an individual and as an artist.

### Freud's quest

Lucian Freud is an artist of notable lineage born in a family with diverse scholarly interests among which art occupied a significant place. This line he extended through his children, of whom many were born with a more or less strong urge to express themselves through a form of art. They have channeled their voice and talent towards the domain that suited them most, whether visual arts or literature. He was a grandson of Sigmund Freud's, whose 'art' consisted in the unlocking and representing the mysteries of human psyche, a territory of infinite possibilities which is closely related to art and referred to sometimes as 'container' sometimes as 'generator' or as 'recipient' of artistic emotions. Interestingly, both grandfather and grandson were preoccupied by the relationship between emotions and human sexuality, which they tried to define for the purpose of scientific, respectively artistic interpretation and representation but also out of the drive to express themselves on the physical plan as human beings in relation to other human beings. They were both engaged in a long and exhausting quest for *identity*, for self, individual and collective identity. This is a highly consuming and, for the most part, frustrating enterprise due to, among other causes, our incapacity to reach the intended goal at the proposed time. Often, the quest, a search spiral, goes on and on and without the hoped-for finalization. Despite all this, the artistic quest involves necessarily the generation of a 'product' with a consequential effect on others.

Probably the most representative illustration of how Lucian Freud understood his role and place in life, himself actually as social element who possesses all the attributes included (idea of family, personal satisfaction, expectations and work) can be seen in his 1953 painting entitled *Hotel Bedroom*. It speaks of the artist's immense regret, the frustration he experienced as a result of his own failure to grasp the essence of family, to settle down in a durable relation with a woman. It is also about the woman's understanding of her 'out-of-placeness' in this relationship and her decision regarding it. As we look at her, she has already decided to put an end to this relation and move on in an attempt to save and protect herself. The woman in the painting is Lady Caroline Blackwood, the artist's second wife. She appears to have been the only woman whose refusal to bear his children was dictated by these very reasons, his instability as both a partner and a father and, instinctively, by her sense of defense of herself and of her potential children.

In Freud's case, the essence of the socio-psychological commitment the source and finality of which is love and moral duty related to the family institution was devoid of meaning.

He was committed solely to his art and all the relations he established along his life were conditioned and controlled entirely by it. That is why, all these relations were inconsistent, insubstantial, fleeting and for all these reasons, frustrating. Even those with his own children for the greatest part of his life. He left them behind, all of them, one by one as he grew bigger and bigger as an artist. We could 'read' this in the 1963 self-portrait, *Reflection with Two Children*. Somehow, it was his 'duty', to grow up, to mature in the life he had chosen. Yet, he was in constant need and search of something else, of somebody to make a difference and fill the gaps of his personal life story.

Of all the relations he had at various times with various women, it was the one he had with Lady Caroline that stood the closest to the notion of love Freud was able to experience with his female partners. The memory of this love in particular and all it involved at that time stood with him throughout his life. In the painting, Lady Caroline is lying in bed and is turned away from him as if trying to deal with her own regrets and disappointments, her unfulfilled dreams about the idea of a couple. Physically, she was also the most beautiful of Freud's women and the most emotionally involving, challenging and also immensely frustrating because of its unfulfillment.

Yet, it is not the physical beauty of a person that creates the real bonds of value, as fails to do wealth, fame or youth. Lady Caroline had all these attributes and also that special 'something', the uniqueness Freud must have always looked for in a woman, in a person. When she ushered herself out of this relationship, frustration was ushered in. Freud was incapable for a long time to put up with this decision of hers, much in the same way as he was when long before that his first lover, Lorna Wishart, had decided to turn her back on the affair they had at the time.

"Formalist critics dislike this biographical approach to looking at art, but with artists like Picasso and Freud it is inevitable because the success of their portraits usually depended on the emotional, psychological or erotic connection they made with their sitters."<sup>1</sup> As far as Freud is concerned, however, this is probably not the case for truly remarkable are not only the paintings that represent the women in the artist's life, all are. He painted men and women alike with the same ardour. The same passion erupts from the brush strokes that he applied on each and every

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Dormant, "Lucian Freud: Portraits, National Portrait Gallery, review: A show that proves Freud's greatness," <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/9063290/Lucian-Freud-Portraits-National-Portrait-Gallery-review-A-show-that-proves-Freuds-greatness>.

canvas on which he was working. And this is applicable to all his productions not only to the works of the second artistic period that dawned in the 1950s. The amazing change of style that marks the transition to a new stage of creation was the result of a change of approach to life and to himself, a change of heart.

The fact that he constantly met people and that he was in a constant process of transformation under their influence, as, in fact, are we all, opened up for him as well unthought-of possibilities of and to interpretation and self-interpretation. He traversed artistic corridors, one after another, in search of a specific concept, *his* ideal concept, and of the perfect way to represent it.

He must have taken immense pleasure in roaming the labyrinth as he remained there his whole life, trying yet another passage, secret even to him, and then another one and another one. For Freud, actually for the entire Freud family, it was the search that really mattered, the effect of which was perceived as orgasmic. Art and *the search* – in the sense of both exploration and examination – grandfather Sigmund would have explained, were both sexually motivated. *The couch* – the piece of furniture meant to invite to horizontality or recumbency – was present in the working space of either of them, a relevant object with relevant effects, though, in each case, different, on account of the purpose of its usage.

At some point, out of the urge to prove something to the world and to himself – not necessarily in this order – or, who knows, out of frustration perhaps, Freud resorted to less pleasant, if not downright repulsive ‘stories’ to put on the canvas. His people’s nudity is meant to remind us of our own nudity, our own not-so-pleasant-to-see image. That is why he brackets together people and animals of the kind that nobody would like around or arranges the sitter in positions nobody would like to be seen in, not even by themselves. Those moments that Freud offered to the public tell tales of squalor and hopelessness and guilt and frustration. His own and ours. But they also tell of the effort to transcend these states by exposing them, by ‘speaking’ about them openly, by stripping everything of all embellishment and pretense.

In one of his early period paintings *Memory of London* (1939) Freud ‘explains’ himself: London, is his own life, and he, the stern-looking rambler of its streets. “[But] all painters have to set themselves new challenges, and that’s what Freud did in later large-scale figure compositions such as *Large Interior WII (After Watteau)*, or the pictures in which the naked models assume grossly contorted poses or are placed in irrational juxtapositions with other figures. These – a red-

haired man crouching on a chair or a naked youth clutching a rat – are far less compelling for me than the straightforward character studies. And in the last galleries, the acres of flesh on view sometimes felt more like still lifes than portraits, though they certainly show how Freud carefully distinguishes between the flesh colour of a young woman, the blotchy pallor of an Irishman's torso and the unhealthy grey skin of a dying man.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Annie's wonderfully creative frustrations**

As a child, yes, Annie felt frustrated. She first felt so when she found out that she had other siblings by her father with other women than her mother, Kitty. She *saw*. She saw the things that were going on around her and understood them so well that later she felt the inner urge to commit them to words. She thus created her own poetic language, the vocabulary that could elicit in the reader visual realities. They were her own perceptions of reality, her own paradigm constructed on the basis of her own experience. This experience came as a result of the fact that she belonged by blood to a family of exceptional individuals, all of whom left in her the mark of their specificity in terms of how they dealt with life and with themselves.

Just as her father did when he “constructed a new visual vocabulary with which he can communicate to a world bent on blurring the boundaries between public and private,”<sup>3</sup> Annie is keen on constructing her own vocabulary, this time defined in its expression by poeticity.

The term “poeticity,” term can be applied to both types of Freudian creation: painting and poetry. Even though the present article does not propose to approach the poeticity of creation in detail in the case of the two artists under scrutiny, a few remarks could be worthwhile for the general understanding of the analysis. Poeticity is to be understood here as a linguistic event the role of which is to elicit in its experiencer a poetic state. The linguistic event is in the painting context the poetry of the visual form with all that it includes: colours, representations, technique of representation, etc. In poetry, things are more evident, more ‘at home’ that is to say, since poetry means *speaking*, addressing the mind in poetic language by means of word incantations.

In “My Roses” (*The Remains*, Picador, 2015) Annie *speaks* of the frustration of being “once loved” and now abandoned. She declares her loves unique for they “do not grow/like the

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<sup>2</sup>Idem, Richard Dorment.

<sup>3</sup> Kelly Grovier, “Naked Truths“, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2005/nov/06/art>.

ones in the catalogue.” The roses in the catalogue are ideal prototypes and in this way they may be illusory. Annie’s roses are real and are prolific. She is aware that love is prolific for she, as most of us have experienced it many times. Each love/rose fights for its right to live and when doffed it “cringes against the fence,” frustrated, insecure, to protect itself. She knows very well that abandonment is inescapable after the lover’s interest dwindles. Her father, the flyaway, always on the run and on the look-out for other partners, had fully proved it.

It might be the bitterness of this frustration that makes her conclude in the same tone: “I should have known/that the voluptuary/in me would/always remain partly/theoretical. Her idea of sensuality was only partially put into practice, the rest remained hypothetical.

Her artistic proclivity started to manifest itself from an early age and it was but normal in the given circumstances. She first tried her hand in artistic tapestry and embroidery but her talent was to eventually find its true expression in verse writing, another form of embroidery, this time not with the needle but with words.

Of the many children fathered by the artist Lucian Freud, Annie was born under the sign of ‘firstness’. She is his eldest child born out of his wedlock with Kathleen ‘Kitty’ Epstein Garman, the artist’s first wife. She is also the first of Lucian’s children to have sat for him for the first full-body nude painted by him. It is no longer surprising that Lucian felt no pangs of consciousness to ‘display’ his daughters’ nakedness to the public. For him, they were mere models, sitters like anybody else. For which reason he chose to paint his own daughters’ naked, no one knows. It may have been a gesture of ostentation, to demonstrate that anything can be turned into art, even his children’s intimacy, an act that should be regarded and accepted as such. His remark “I paint what I see, not what people want to see” acts as a counterpoint. The picture in order to move us must never merely remind us of life, but must acquire a life of its own, precisely in order to reflect life.”<sup>4</sup> “I paint people, not because of what they are like, not exactly in spite of what they are like, but how they happen to be.”<sup>5</sup> So, if the sitter “happens” to be his own daughter, that’s that. At that time Annie was only fourteen. Her then bashfulness, a child’s innocence, after all, combined with dawning femininity remained as a hallmark of her personality

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<sup>4</sup> “The Work of Lucian Freud – Paint as Flesh,”

<http://www.winsornewton.com/na/discover/articles-and-inspiration/work-of-lucian-freud-paint-as-flesh-us?lang=gb>.

<sup>5</sup>Geordie Greig, *Breakfast with Lucian*, Random House, 2013. (ebook.)



as well as of the ‘personality’ of her poems. Annie’s poems are all both matter-of-fact reflections of life sequences, and delicate, lace-like handiworks, a reminder of embroidery, her former form of expression.

Her father’s personality is a constant presence in her life irrespective of the fact that they were living quite separate lives which only intersected sporadically and very much when and if he willed so. She has his art in her blood so much so that her poems leave the reader with the impression that they see a painting. They are extremely visual, even when they voice the poet’s feelings regarding an event, or anything that catches her attention at a certain moment.

In “Rare London Cheeses” (*The Best Man that Ever Was*, Picador, 2007) , Annie tells us about her impression of one of her father’s paintings, *Wasteground with Houses, Paddington*, the atmosphere of which reminds her of that captured by Walter Sickert’s paintings. As Lucian paints with with keen attention on detail, so does Annie write her verses. “If I mention London, it’s because of Delamere,/the sadness in the backs of terraced houses,/ the chimney pots in attitudes of strife,/ the featheres discolorations of the render/ and the way each window seems to be leading/its own relentelss Sickertian life.”

“Zaluzianskya” (*The Remains*, Picador, 2015), is a poem that sings the beauty of a flower which she knows only by reputation. An enchanting, sweet-smelling flower, with its enthralling exoticism, whose very name inspires utmost delight to the senses, “voluptuousness.” The poet’s humorous touch is present. She praises, she wants to have that flower which she has not even seen: “I gripped the steering wheel – and laughed and – *I HADN’T EVEN SEEN YOU!*” she laughs wholeheartedly. But then, predictably, she muses on and transposes the flower’s beauty onto a potential daughter who would be named like this. Her child, the fruit of art, would revolutionize the world bringing along truth and justice, as art does: “With a name like that you would have been a bold revolutionary girl,/throwing stones at the totalitarians, telling the truth about everything.” She would have a mesmerizing effect as “Everyone would have wanted to know you./Everyone would have wanted to be on your side./Everyone would have wanted to call out your name:ZALUZIANSKYA!”

Her both inherited and acquired love of ‘visuality’, the attribute that words when used in a poetic context can elicit visual representations is there when she compares painting with writing poems: “[...] it is the process of dredging, choosing, selecting and rejecting what material is there



that is so exciting. Even if I eventually chuck most of it out as unnecessary soft furnishing, that's how I often discover what my subject matter might be.”<sup>6</sup>

Somehow, the life of Lucian Freud's children is fated and so is Annie's life. Fated to embrace art so tightly as to find it impossible to ever let it go. She can't help but look for the aesthetic element in everything around her. She is in a permanent quest for beauty, and this is something that she inherited from all the lovers and creators of beauty in her lineage. “When I say that looks matter when it comes to poetry books, I don't mean that I want them to have a florid appearance or to look somehow precious or arty. I want them to have a beauty that is so intrinsically theirs that when I go to the shelf to get one down, its familiar look is inextricably bound up with the pleasure of handling it rereading the poems and thinking about the person that wrote them.”<sup>7</sup>

The beauty for which Annie is on permanent ‘lookout’ can be attributed not only to the poems but to the way she juxtaposes titles and text. Also the beauty consists in the reader's surprise to find out that under the title they will find hardly anything to relate to it. This is the beauty of Annie's paradoxical literary tricks. The irony is in abundance, probably dictated by her sense of not being allowed to fulfil her role as daughter in both ways, not just as the daughter of her mother but as the daughter of her father too. Especially when her father was Lucian Freud. Sarah Crown notes that in her book review on *The Best Man That Ever Was* (2007).<sup>8</sup> The fact that Annie was a quester of (mostly) lost causes, a *Doña Quixote* fond not only of reading books but especially of filling them with words, a versified content with autobiographic touches. “While Freud's characters appear at first to differ wildly on every score, they are in fact united by their shared quest for fulfilment, expressed variously through longings for love, sex, job satisfaction, food - even (in the case of “Rare London Cheeses”) publication. What's more, their quests are invariably unsuccessful: if dreams are realised at all in Freud's universe, it is seldom in the manner that the dreamer expects. “Someone to get permanently drunk with / was all I ever

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/annie-freud>.

<sup>7</sup> Lavinia Singer, “Campus Debate: Poetry books – Do Looks Matter?”, [books-looks-matter/](http://books-looks-matter/)

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Crown, *The Best Man That Ever Was* – book review, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview28>.

wanted," claims the narrator of "The Come-Back Kid", but "now that I'm almost seeing him again / do I really love him like I said I did?"<sup>9</sup>

Annie Freud has covered a long way full of meritorious achievements from back in 1963, when she was but a "naked child laughing," of whom, Lucian, her father, wanted to speak to the world, which he did when he painted her on the canvas that has the same name, to the gallant woman in "Something Gallant", the poem included in her latest volume, *The Remains*. We read in it about a mature, accomplished Annie, the poet who has learnt to deal with her frustrations in a creative way.

The bashful girl on the threshold of her youth has turned into a prolific mother. Blessed with good genes of extraordinary artistic fertility and mettle, she conceives and gives birth to newer and newer children, her poems. She gallantly "holds her newborn" while seeing about her every-day chores – she does them with equal mastery – "chopping an onion", her phone "clapped between shoulder and ear." By now she no longer listens to by no means ill-meant opinions, to people [...] telling her what *she* wants to do for she already knows what she wants to do. She now has a concrete responsibility, *her own* baby with hair the colour of which "no word has yet been found." Each poem, each baby, is singular in 'colour.' The truly great accomplishment lies in the fact that she is now doing things her own way. Just as Lucian, her father, did in his own time. He did it his way. He sired his matchless 'babies' with skin colour that is unique and completely impossible to reproduce.

In "The Things We Do," we learn of the poet's worries about her looseness with respect to her must-dos. To delay her from fulfilling her duties there is always "*Le Pevroque*, the tiny cinema where the tiny cinema/where stark tales of sex and death/beguiled me on so many rainy afternoons/on the velvet pointillism of the screen." Her constant attempts to systematize her life are only partly successful, but this is due to her artistic mind, the disorderliness of which knows no remedy. I have tried to have a system, and I do have one or two." All the orderliness she obeys to is that of (her) Poetry, and nothing else seems to matter thence. This is why "on the cover of this notebook, I have written/Only Poetry." Her 'aids' in putting an order into her life are the "stamps" and the "plan for a display of streptocarpus on your window sill." "Each day their graceful sufficiency will underline/the things we do, the catalogue of our intentions."

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<sup>9</sup> Idem Sarah Crown.

### **The permanence of Freud's artistic stamina**

It is difficult for artists such as Lucian Freud, or even as Annie, to build up two families, one with a human partner, the other with their calling. One is usually sacrifice and that is, in most cases, marriage. Of course, attempts existed, so one can say they (have) at least tried. The problem is that art's calling is too strong to resist it, it's like the sirens' song. Once you hear it, there is hardly any escape at all, It takes you into its arms and takes you with it in its strong, passionate embrace deep down into its abyss. Maybe these people are the fortunate ones since such passion is only allowed for the chosen few. But in this cases there is a price and it must be paid. Many would say that what matters is the accomplishment, the result of the sacrifice. If it is so, only those people can tell. The ultimate winners are us, the 'commoners.' We are left to loose ourselves in admiration of those magnificent, unmatched works of art, as it is probably meant to be.

Annie wrote a poem entitled "Marrying Strange Men." It tells us of Someone's, Her, brooding over a 'marriage' with an *apparently* unsuited partner. Yet, despite all incompatibilities, the knot was tied. With all the reproaches, the speaker seems to be perfectly accustomed with all of the partner's idiosyncrasies, the existence of which appears to make the couple so incompatible. However, the speaker seems to be unable to give the partner up. Art may appear to be a strange partner, in the sense that it demands a lot, everything actually, from the one *it* chooses to take in its arms and form a relation with. From the moment the union was sealed, there is no way to "dodge you, though I have tried to dodge the fact of your insistence that" things are the way *you* see and want them to be. And, unavoidably now, your life bears the mark of that union, and in this way "the book you meant to write about your life, would have been called Marrying Strange Men."

Lucian Freud was married to his Art firstly and lastly and stayed so 'till death do them part.' Rest assured, death did not part them after all. They will most certainly remain united and faithful to each other in that sole fulfilling marriage in the afterlife too. Even though he was never able to be faithful to a human being in this way, or maybe he didn't have the chance, or the time to be so as he met and "married the strange person," he passed on to the children he sired the artistic symptom, the acknowledgement of which has by now become their imperative duty.

The realism of his art came as an inner urge to show how well he understood the message coming from the ones he beheld. His eyes went deep beyond the outer expression to capture the

essence. His self-portraits are a vivid testimony in this sense. His eyes cut deep into the soul and his brush followed the same rhythm when they sculptured the thickly applied oil paint. His sitters were the most beautiful human beings ever. The artist captured their beauty entirely and rendered it faithfully. When he did this, his frustrations turned into victories.

Both human and the humanized figures Lucian painted are such victories. Life transformed under the dictates of art.

When Annie speaks with honesty and with grace of her own experiences as woman, as daughter, or simply as someone in the crowd, she lets go of her own frustrations. They soar like party balloons and as she watches them rise higher and higher until they fade from sight, she feels young again, ready to kiss her Art right on the mouth and say that yes, she *has* married the right man.”

### **Conclusion**

An artist has to move on and on and on, in an unremitting quest for personal identity and for the essence of true meanings. Other voices to listen to, other rooms to explore. Other portrayals of the vision within. Never exempt from frustrations and distress, the life of an artist is extraordinary and ordinary at the same time. Often, the exclusive quest turns out to be a winter of discontent as it eventually turns out to be a chase for the Ideal, for the Unreachable. Even so, an artist never falters but engages in the enterprise with all their being and pass everything through their own filter. Lucian Freud’s remark “Everything is autobiographical and everything is a portrait, even if it’s a chair” is in this sense edifying. He was a man who saw art in everything and everything as a form of art. He was an artist who humanized the elements he painted. *Art* is, after all, in the eye of the beholder. If the creator’s mission has been fulfilled is up to us to decide now. We are the beholders, so we should at least try to do our best to *see*.

Like, no doubt, most of his other talented children, Annie has understood what is at stake, where the responsibility of her duty lies. By painting the world beautiful with poems, she shows us where to look and, most importantly, what to *see*.

The frustrations of Lucian were and Annie’s are creative frustrations. They were and continue to be productive in the sense that a disillusioned, troubled soul, if it is sturdy enough, will cry out to the world telling its story and while doing so, it comes up forms of art.

In Freud's story, one can perceive, if we are to play a little with words, the 'magicality of the physicality's chemicality', something that is necessary when rendering the human body and through it the human condition. Annie's is the musicality of the images.

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