

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_168655

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OŠMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 808.1/G98 A Accession No. 11982 P.4.

Author P. Gurrey.

Title *The Appreciation of poetry*

“This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

THE
APPRECIATION OF
POETRY

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C. 4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS CAPE TOWN

Geoffrey Cumberlege, Publisher to the University

THE
APPRECIATION OF
POETRY

P. GURREY

LECTURER IN ENGLISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON : GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE

'The people which ceases to care for its
literary inheritance becomes barbaric.'

T. S. ELIOT. *The Use of Poetry and
the Use of Criticism.*

FIRST PUBLISHED 1935
REPRINTED 1938, 1946, 1951
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

THE writing of this book has been stimulated by the belief that an accurate and clear understanding of the poet's equipment and of his resources is vitally necessary for those who undertake to train others in literary appreciation and criticism. The completion of it has been urged forward also by the conviction that it has become necessary to restate and to substantiate the truth that the appreciation of poetry is both '*rich and rare*'.

I am conscious of, and gratefully acknowledge, the very real debt that I owe to all those who, in yearly relays, have wrestled indefatigably with me and against me in the endeavour to arrive at the truth about this subject. And I offer, in particular, my thanks to Miss Maura Brooke Gwynne and to Mr. Raymond O'Malley for their criticism and patient pertinacity in driving me to clarify ideas and sweeten diction until these were more or less presentable.

P. G.

CONTENTS

I. THE PROBLEM	7
II. EXPERIENCE	14
III. THE ELEMENTS	20
IV. THOUGHT	23
V. SUBSIDIARY MEANINGS	30
VI. IMAGERY	39
VII. EMOTION	52
VIII. SOUND	66
IX. RHYTHM	76
X. FORM	90
XI. APPRECIATION	104
XII. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'FORM',	111

THE PROBLEM

§ 1

THIS is an investigation into the nature of 'appreciation' of poetry, primarily for the guidance of students and teachers of literature. A detailed study of the constituent parts of a poem has been made here, because unsoundness of procedure in teaching literature is often the result of careless and inexact thinking about the integral parts of poetry; and because the way in which we carry out a poetry lesson depends very largely on our conception of the relative importance of these constituent parts in poetic appreciation. Even those who are fairly confident that their ways of taking poems in class are right will not lose by scrutinizing their methods and views occasionally, for there is always the possibility that, though their theories in general may be faultless, what they actually do in practice may be unsound in certain particulars on account of some vagueness or incompleteness, or even of some superficiality of their conclusions about poetry.

In order to make this inquiry of some practical value it has been necessary to examine current ideas concerning certain aspects of poetry; unfortunately this course of action has often led the argument away from salient points of the subject; consequently there is not, throughout, that continuous unfolding of a theme which should characterize the structure of such a book as this. Nevertheless each minor discussion may contribute something by clearing away minor obscurities, and the treatment of each aspect in turn should bring us eventually to the solution of the problem of poetic appreciation, though actually it may do no more than reveal its baffling complexity.

In spite of the frequent publication of manuals on poetry teaching in recent years, one must put forward a plea for yet another study of a much discussed subject, partly because the

teaching of poetry has been affected but little up to the present by the best and soundest expositions in this field, and partly because nearly all the smaller books on poetry give more attention to the arousing of enthusiasm for 'the beauties of poetry' than to the indication of what the teacher must avoid, what he can do to foster his pupils' receptiveness to the words of poetry, and how exact he must be in developing their ideas about literature. But the strongest reason for yet another work on the same subject is that nearly all the writers of books on teaching poetry still keep meticulously to the popular and uninformed conventions of poetic study, and do not expose the foolishness and unsoundness of relying on scansion, on paraphrasing, and on the learning of the technical terms of prosody, verse forms, and figures of speech to give value to 'appreciation' lessons. This untimely concern for technique is prevalent in spite of the fact that 'The "technique" that is not studied as the expression of a given particular sensibility is an unprofitable abstraction'.¹ It seems that it is expedient for the children to ransack a poem for rhymes, assonances, cadences, and alliterations, without any regard for the fact that these things are *sounds*, and that they are therefore effective only when they are being heard or imagined, and that talking *about* them is not of much avail. 'We should begin to learn to distinguish the appreciation of poetry from theorizing about poetry, and to know when we are not talking about poetry but about something else suggested by it.'² It seems that figures of speech are still the prey of the amateur collector, and may be lifted from their contexts, explained, named, and docketed without any one's incurring a condemnation of the practice; and it appears that children are not invariably encouraged to discover that figures are best caught as they rise—imaginatively, rather than by a species of ticketing with artificial names from some primer of prosody. In the same fashion, rhyme schemes are frequently noted and learnt, without the hint being given to the class that rhymes have

¹ F. R. Leavis, *How to Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound*.

² T. S. Eliot, 'The Modern Mind', from *The Use of Poetry*.

a definite purpose connected with the balance and proportions of a poem. These popular conventions of poetic study have a tenacious life, though, when dealt with in the usual way, they are almost entirely superficial and do not touch the real life of poetry; and for this reason: that the process of selecting, defining, naming, is scientific procedure, intended to bring about merely a handy acquaintance of things and events. Too often we forget that: 'The accumulation of facts may make you well-informed, but knowledge and wisdom come from the discovery of principle.'¹ Poetry study is not concerned with the acquisition of information; poetry is intended to give us impressions, intuitions, apprehensions of beauty, and above all to provide us with expression of these intangible things. Consequently those whose thinking and teaching go no farther than a knowledge and exposition of rhyme schemes, scansion, authors, story, and even style of a poem are almost certainly missing the true essence of poetry— 'These attractive accessories of a poetical work being more easily seized than the spirit of the whole. . . .'²; and they may be preventing their pupils from perceiving the beauty of the poems which are read under their tuition.

If we have the initiating of children to poetic experience entrusted to us, we ought not to leave them with the impression that the study of poetry is largely a matter of learning facts: rather we should lead them to discover that good poetry will yield more and more as their study of it goes deeper, includes more, and grows more responsive to the full expressiveness of poetry.

§ 2

This book is also an attempt to explain what is meant by the statement 'appreciation of poetry is an experience'. The emphasis on experience implies that judging, evaluating, or appraising is not the essential feature of the appreciation of a work of art. Originally, of course, the word 'appreciation'

¹ Percy C. Buck, *The Scope of Music*.

² Matthew Arnold, *Preface to Poems*.

signified 'form an estimate of value or worth', but, as it is impossible to form a just estimate of the value of a poem until one has experienced all that the poem can give, the appreciation of poetry is not primarily a critical activity, it is creative. When the poet is making a poem, he has to select words, rhythms, sounds, and this selection involves a nice critical judgement, but the reader should not let any critical activities intervene until he has got from the words all that he can. His success or failure to get much or little may be the first criterion in his appraisal of the poem, but clearly his arriving at a judgement follows the experience of understanding and imagining; it can hardly be completely coincident with it, and it cannot precede it. The prominent feature therefore in the appreciation of poetry' is not appraisal. The derivation and the original use of the word cannot categorically determine the meaning of the word to-day. The word 'appreciate' is, indeed, used sometimes to mean merely 'understand',¹ sometimes to mean 'to value highly',² and more frequently 'to participate in enjoyably'; but not one of these meanings is sufficient to explain completely what should be meant when one talks about *the appreciation of poetry*.

If we were to say that appreciation is the act or activity of apprehending beauty, or, simply, the awareness of beauty, and leave this idea unanalysed, all might be well; but unfortunately the majority of those who are interested seem to consider that the arousing of emotion by the various so-called 'appeals' of poetry constitutes almost the whole meaning of the phrase 'appreciation of poetry'.*

This over-insistence on 'the appeals' of poetry leads to earnest discussion about 'the beauty of rhythms', the 'beauty

¹ 'His insight into the hearts of men . . . can only be appreciated by those who have known spiritual suffering.'

² 'It was only of recent years that most Englishmen learnt to appreciate the late poet laureate, Robert Bridges.' P. H. B. Lyon, *The Discovery of Poetry*.

'Morality, then, appreciates emotion by the standard of resultant action. Art appreciates emotion in and for itself.' Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*.

* Some typical quotations from recent books will be found at the end of the chapter.

of word melody', and about 'beautiful examples of alliteration', all of which tends to destroy the perfect proportions of a poem, and to distract one's attention away from the all-important feature of appreciation: the close unity of the whole experience.*

We ought not to be content with any of these interpretations: understanding, appraisal, awareness of reactions, emotion evoked by various appeals; but should demand something more satisfying; for appreciation of poetry is not such a simple affair, it is an unusually complex and closely co-ordinated series of activities. In the act of appreciation we must look not only for comprehension, for awareness of the part that words play in the process, for the awakening of emotion, but also for some imaginative activities; and we must expect to find the closest co-ordination of these into an indivisible and unified whole. Appreciation of poetry is not this or that—some single activity of mind, or something which can be described in a simple sentence; the full understanding of it is not easily achieved, and ample space is required to set it all out clearly. Further, an explanation of what is meant by the appreciation of poetry must take more note of the proportions and of the interrelatedness of all that constitutes poetic appreciation than is given by most of the treatises on the subject. To refuse to see more in poetry than emotional appeals and word-melodies is to remain at the schoolgirl stage of an aesthetic life; deeper thought and inquiry into artistic canons are requisite, for as Lorimer says, 'In mature life, poetry ceases to be mere uncontrolled affective association and primitive rhythm, and becomes charged and controlled by reflective inquiry and canons of technique'.¹

We have then to discover what mental powers are actively playing a part in appreciation, and what conditions are necessary to secure a sense of value and a particular form of awareness to words, as well as a quickening of emotion. We might put these questions to ourselves: How can we achieve this

* Some typical quotations from recent books will be found at the end of the chapter.

¹ *The Growth of Reason.*

awareness, and how can our emotions be quickened in the right way? And when we have discovered what these conditions are, we may understand what part is played by the content of the poem—the story, the argument, the fable, or the philosophy, the meditations, the sentiments expressed in the poem; what, for want of a better word, we may term the ideas in the poem.

Not only have we to discover certain conditions and the relations of the content of a poem to its form, but we must arrive at some conclusions as to the way in which the essentials of appreciation are co-ordinated. For instance, as appraisal obviously cannot come before awareness, are we to regard it as a result, or part of, the act of appreciation? Should it be swayed by the emotion aroused by the poem, or should it be purely cognitive—an act of cold judgement? Does awareness have any effect on emotion? Is there a flash of intuition preceding appraisal? And is emotion an ingredient of intuition? We must seek for the solution of such problems as these if clarity of thought is to be achieved.

Here then is our task: to scrutinize closely all that goes to bring about that complex and co-ordinated experience which we believe appreciation to be, without shirking the difficulties or the danger of disenchantment, and not hoping blindly that 'if one just trusts to one's feelings about the matter it will be quite all right'.

Finally let us not only acknowledge, but also keep always before our minds, the fact that discussions on poetry are valueless when compared with poetry itself: one single line of poetry is of more value than a whole book of explanations, definitions, and critical matter *about* poetry—such as this. 'We learn what poetry is—if we ever learn—from reading it.'¹

This book is theory; poetry is a living experience. The two are opposite, nevertheless they are complementary, or rather the theory is a means to the other: it is a means, not an end. But poetry is an end in itself, though its effects do not end with itself, but remain with us always.

¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

P. 10, l. 28. '... the enjoyment of the appeal of poetry can only be based on emotion.'

'Blake again and again, as Shakespeare now and then, gives us poetry neat or adulterated with so little meaning that nothing except poetic emotion is perceived and matters.'

'... with the volume issued in 1924 by Mr. George Moore... the aim was toward Pure Poetry, and the appeal to emotion, apart from the intellect, was the test of selection.'

'We have defined this appeal as an appeal to the understanding through the emotions, in a metrical form.'

'Its (poetry) first appeal is through the ear direct to the emotions.'

'The heart knows that the lines are poetry *because it is moved by them.*'

P. 11, l. 5. 'It is clear that beautiful effects can be obtained by varying the length of certain lines in otherwise regular stanzas.' It seems that pleasure in variation of length of line can be substituted for genuine delight in the expression of a profound experience.

In the early drafts of this book there was no mention of other and still more unenlightened methods of dealing with poetry, but in 1934 two school test-books, written by senior English masters, have appeared; these advocate a return to the destructive method of using poetry for parsing exercises:—

I. 'Exercise D. Name the part of speech of every word in the following stanza:

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he.
Mourn not for Adonais—Thou, young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air,
Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair. *Adonais.*'

II. 'Divide the following sentences into main and dependent clauses, clearly stating the function of each clause:

No. 16. Go lovely rose,
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows,
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.'

(It is difficult to see why these two poems have been selected in preference to all others for fodder in a grammar lesson.)

II

EXPERIENCE

A POEM presents experience of two kinds. On the one hand there is the story, the argument, meditations, statements about things: all that can be imagined, thought, or conceived, without an equally active and lively consciousness of the words of the poem. For instance, when reading *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* one can identify oneself with the ancient mariner and allow his experiences to become a vivid reality in one's consciousness, and yet not pay very much attention to the words expressing those experiences; and in the same way one can find much enjoyment by imagining the things described in Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, and, in doing so, somewhat neglect the words. Plato aptly describes this imaginative absorption in reality which disregards the poet's words: '. . . are you not rapt and filled with such enthusiasm by the deeds you recite, that you fancy yourself in Ithaca or Troy, or wherever else the poem transports you?'¹ Experiences such as these are concerned almost entirely with the 'content' of poems. On the other hand, there is a contemplation of the words of a poem which includes both a recognition of the full content and also a distinct awareness that the words express that content; it is a vivid consciousness that everything that has been imagined, thought, and conceived has also been fully and perfectly expressed in those words. The difference between the two experiences is largely in the degree of prominence which the words have in the reader's mind. The second type of experience gives a deeper satisfaction, it demands and is the result of a far greater intimacy with words than the first; it is a *literary* experience, and is the reward only of those who have a feeling for words.

Most children and many adults can be interested only in

¹ *Ion*. Shelley's translation.

the content, that is, in the story, the descriptions, the philosophy, and they may never develop or acquire the sensitiveness to words which is required for the true appreciation of literature. To many people this true appreciation can come only as the result of careful training: this is the authority for the study of poetry in school. It is true that people with lively imaginations and ready sympathies, but with no special linguistic sensitiveness, and those who, having literary abilities, neglect to apply the ultimate criterion of worth to the works of the poets, naturally find the first type of experience enjoyable; but they cheapen the words 'beauty' and 'beautiful' by insisting that poems which give them exciting or emotionally moving experiences, regardless of the quality of the words expressing those experiences, deserve such epithets.* And much of the difference of opinion about the excellence or worthlessness of a large number of poems dear to anthologists has been caused by the mistaken belief that the first type of experience described here is the legitimate appreciation of poetry and a guarantee of 'good taste'. It is, indeed, quite easy to allow delight in scenes described, in characters portrayed or sentiments expressed, to override one's distinct awareness of the words and to blind one's judgement on the value of the poem. Imitation or representation in art has long been a stumbling-block to the critics, even two of the greatest have tripped up over it: 'We all naturally take pleasure, says Aristotle, in any imitation or representation whatever: this is the basis of our love of Poetry.'¹ It is true that imitation or representation is usually pleasurable, but the mistake here is to see in representation more than the raw material of poetry, for the basis of our love of *poetry* is a delight in words.

It appears that the essential equipment for appreciating poetry is 'awareness to words'. But does this mean that those who are not so equipped cannot appreciate poetry, and that it is impossible to develop this verbal sensitiveness? It would perhaps be helpful if we worked out the answers to these

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Preface to Poems*.

difficult questions in detail, so that we can see clearly what opportunity a person without well-defined literary abilities has of attaining to all that the greatest works of literature reveal in a complete appreciation.

To begin with, we must acknowledge that the thinking of the ordinary person, even at his best, is never, or very rarely, as exact or intense as the poet's at his best, nor is his feeling so sensitive and finely discriminated; he is rarely so fully aware of fine shades of thought and feeling as the poet frequently is; as Dr. Leavis says of the poet: 'He is unusually sensitive, unusually aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be.'¹ Furthermore the ordinary man's mind does not habitually, and of its own impulses, form imagery which is delicate and significant, and it does not obey for any length of time the dictates of any rhythm of its own: it usually thinks loosely, feels crudely, imagines desultorily, and it does not fashion its thought into shapely form—as a rule it gets along as best it can with a minimum of effort and of felicity.

Nevertheless the mind of an ordinary man *is* able to behave in a way that a poet's mind behaves, but it can do so only with the help of the poet's words. As Mr. Wildon Carr says in his interpretation of Croce's philosophy: 'There is no difference between the intuition of the artist of genius and the intuition of the humblest individual who finds enjoyment in contemplating the work of genius so far as pure intuition is concerned. . . . The great artist enables me to express my intuition, his work assists me.'² The difference, therefore, between the two minds is one of degree, not of kind. The ordinary man is not *sufficiently* influenced by the particular flavour of meaning of the words he uses or by their sound; and he does not naturally use words which, by their freshness and peculiar appropriateness, give uniqueness to the experience he describes. The ordinary mind lacks or, conceivably, has lost the verbal expressiveness which it displayed so triumphantly when it first learnt to use words, and since then

¹ *New Bearings in English Poetry.*

² *The Philosophy of Croce.*

it has rarely achieved intense, vital language; it has too infrequently felt the same urgent need of subjecting the words and structures of language to a significant order and form, and it is unable to capture the essence and vitality of an experience by means of the power to command *words*: '. . . the special gift of speech will, nine times out of ten, have been evolved alongside of the gift of thought or feeling.'¹ To secure the very life of an experience in this way the ordinary mind must therefore rely on the words of the poet.

Absolute reliance on the words of a poem will enable the reader's experience to be similar to that of the poet; and the more accurately a reader discovers the writer's meaning and intention, the more closely will the experience he is achieving approach that which is expressed in the poem, until the words themselves stand for all that the reader is thinking, imagining, and feeling. 'The process of getting to understand a poet is precisely that of constructing his poems in one's own mind.'² The reader has then created the poem anew for himself—by means of the poet's words. This conviction that the true appreciation of poetry is a creative process is upheld by Sir Percy Nunn's delightfully lucid declaration that: 'To lead pupils to "appreciate" is not merely to lead them to admire or to take pleasure in a beautiful thing, but to make them become in a sense its re-creators.'³ But we must remember that the reader's poem will be created as nearly alike to the poet's in proportion to his ability to discover in the words all that the poet intended, or perhaps unknowingly implied.

The discovery of the poet's intention depends primarily on our response to words, and this response must be exact and definite; it depends also on an accurate and sympathetic study of the poem; this, too, must be strictly related to the poet's words, and must be just to the poet. We must not rely on our wayward personal interpretation, but on an interpretation which is subjected at every step to the direction and

¹ Vernon Lee, *The Handling of Words*.

² W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

³ *Education: Its Data and First Principles*.

control of the poet's words. And just as ' . . . the total response to a Shakespeare play can only be attained by an exact and sensitive study of the quality of the verse, of the rhythm and imagery, of the controlled associations of the words and their emotional and intellectual force, in short by an exact and sensitive study of Shakespeare's handling of language . . .',¹ so the reading of a poem in order to attain to the full experience it offers will demand a certain amount of careful work upon it. For the reading of poetry is not a species of poetic abandon, not an unreined emotional excitation, but is an ordering and controlling of the intellectual and emotional experience to which the poem gives expression. This submission of passionate feelings to the control of rhythm was, of course, remarked upon by Coleridge; he refers to 'the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion'.² That we can secure significantly ordered and controlled experiences by means of poetry largely accounts for its importance, and this also indicates that poetry reading is not a hobby with which to dally idly, that it is not something that can be carelessly contemplated in an objective way; but that it is a creative activity which requires our full attention and the exercise of all our powers for it to come into being for us. Even the reading of much mediocre verse requires an effort on the part of the ordinary reader, and still greater demands are made on us by fine poetry: the mind has to be alert, with all its powers in readiness, prepared like a well-tuned 'cello string to sound the right notes with all their overtones, reacting to the words as the strings respond to finger-tips and bow, for, as Coleridge says, "The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity."³ So the complete personality of the reader is immediately concerned if the full experience of the poem is to be attained, not in the vague sense of an appeal to personal tastes, or vagaries, or to one's individual sympathies; but, more simply

¹ L. C. Knights, *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?*

² *Bio. Lit.*

³ *Ibid.*

and more definitely, a poem comes into being again because the words are brought to life in the reader's mind, the imagery becomes a reality to him, sounds are perceived, rhythm is playing an active part in his mind, thoughts and ideas are conceived, emotion felt, and the whole is taking its true and proper shape through the agency of creative mind. It is the mind of the reader which makes the printed poem a full and valuable reality, which gives vitality and beauty to what otherwise would be black marks on a white page.

This does not in any way lower the value of the poet's work: without his peculiarly sharp perceptive and imaginative experiences, his intuition and his creative work in the beginning, the ordinary mind is powerless to transcend its mundane existence or to find adequate expression for its transitory apprehensions of beauty. It is the poet who is the true maker, he determines the thought, the imagery, the sounds, rhythm—everything; he selects his words, and shapes his poem so that his experiences are presented with the greatest intensity, significance, and beauty. Consequently his words select, determine, and shape the experiences of all who read those words with full understanding of their meaning, force, and purpose.

III

THE ELEMENTS

WHEN we say that for the writing of a poem a poet has to rely solely on words, we do not mean to imply that he has rather commonplace and inert material with which to fashion his work of art; but that the study of a poem must be primarily a study of words. And most beginners have to discover that the poet can make his words effect a very great deal because he has at his disposal not only all that can be included under the term *Content*, that is to say, Thought, Associations, Imagery, and Emotion; but also all that is usually termed *Form*, that is, the Sound of the words, their Rhythm, and the verse forms into which they can be arranged. The poet, too, has the power to use words so that when they express his own experiences they will also work on a responsive reader's mind, enabling him to have similar experiences. And it is largely by means of the Form of words that he evokes their content in the reader's mind. So that Form is looked upon here mainly as the medium in which the poetic experience is expressed, as the material stimulus which can be perceived by the senses; and also as the symbol of a complex experience; for it determines, by selection and order, the shape which the experience shall take.

Under the terms Form and Content are grouped what may be crudely called the elements (or the ingredients¹) of poetry. As we have indicated, these elements, which are the integral parts or constituents of a poem, are Thought, Associations

¹ 'Poems very seldom consist of poetry and nothing else; and pleasure can be derived also from their other ingredients' (A. E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*). It is the task of this book, amongst other things, to show that poems—that is, good poems—do consist of poetry and nothing else. Although it is true that pleasure can be derived from each of the ingredients of poetry, yet the reader doing so is not enjoying the poem, because he is not attending to the poem as a whole and is not then even aware of it as a unity.

and Subsidiary Meanings, Imagery, Emotion, Sound, Rhythm, and Verse Form.

Now in order to give an adequate meaning to the words 'appreciation of poetry' it has proved necessary to examine each of these elements in turn. But we are to consider each element separately—where possible—so that we may think clearly in order to 'obtain adequate notions' of truth. Coleridge saw the necessity for such procedure, and we may accept his authority as a sufficient guarantee for it: 'In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical process of philosophy.'¹ For clear thought is essential to us if we are to comprehend with any exactness the nature of poetry and the relation of each element to the whole; in other words, if we are to understand what each has to contribute to the whole. And we may mentally abstract each element in this way from a work of art, and consider it in isolation, only if at the same time we keep fresh in our minds the knowledge that each element does not exist apart from the others, that it cannot be separated from one or more of the others and retain its reality,² and that it is the whole poem which gives each element its importance and its poetic life. As Coleridge adds: 'we must restore them in our conceptions to the unity in which they actually coexist.'³

There must be, then, an examination of the elements which go to make up a subtly complex piece of creative work, and this must lead up to a discovery of how these elements are woven together. It is their very relatedness and their combining together to form a unity which is so important, for therein, we repeat, lies the secret of a clear understanding of appreciation, for, as Clive Bell says: '... in a work of art ... the value of the parts combined into a whole is far greater than the value of the sum of the parts.'⁴ This examination, too,

¹ *Bio. Lit.*

² When a single element of a poem is discussed in isolation without any thought of its relatedness to the rest of the poem it becomes a thing of pure abstraction—a unit of metaphysical thought.

³ *Bio. Lit.*

⁴ *Art.*

involves considerable reference to those mental powers which by their submission to the discipline of words can achieve the experience of poetry; it entails a study of the responses which one should make in reading poetry: not to make these references and this study would be to deny ourselves the possibility of complete understanding.¹

Clarity of thought about an art should increase one's understanding of it, should make one's reaction to it more certain, and should enrich and intensify one's appreciation of it.

¹ 'Frederick Schlegel, in his work on Lessing, remarked . . . what was wanted for the foundation of their literature was . . . a free spirit of investigation struggling to attain just ideas of art, vigorous in logic, but quick in sympathy and extending to the whole domain of literature.' Vide *Preface to Laocoon*, by Sir A. Phillimore.

IV THOUGHT

WHEN Mallarmé said that 'poetry is not made with ideas but is made of words', he was regarding poetry as the art of verbal expression, and not primarily as a valuable vehicle of thought. He was therefore throwing emphasis on Form at the expense of Content, just as Ford Madox Hueffer does in his definition of poetry: 'one unusual word following another unusual word.' And although ultimately a poet must be judged by his use of words, yet these views seem to imply that the quality of the thought in a poem matters little provided the thought or story is decked out with peculiarly adroit, entrancing, or 'poetical' words. To disregard the quality of thought expressed would degrade the value of poetry, for it is obvious that thought plays a prominent part in poetic experience. Indeed it is often* insufficiently realized that a full comprehension of the thought of a poem is an essential part of the appreciation of poetry. The poet's actual words give distinction and vitality to the thought, and therefore they are of the greatest importance, but there should be no emphasis on the words, on their novelty, felicity, or exquisiteness, *at the expense of the thought*, and above all no divorce of words and thought.

On the other hand, some people are prepared to sacrifice almost everything else in order to get the thought exact and complete, forgetting that if one gazes at the sun one may become blind to colours revealed by its light. So we ought always to make sure that we are attending to more than exactness of thought and definiteness of idea, if we wish to get all that is possible from the words of a poem. And the grandeur of the thought, the freshness or delightfulness of the sentiments must not hold our attention so strongly that we neglect the sound of the words, their rhythm and imagery. Yet the

* See quotations at the end of the chapter.

thought of the poem must be as certain and as clear to us, and also as complete, as we can make it. Therefore to read a poem through once is hardly ever sufficient. If a poem has any value to us, it is necessary to read it over and over again, dwelling intently on its words, so that the fullness of their meaning may bring both an enrichment and a comprehensiveness to the whole experience. This ripening and maturing of aesthetic experience is necessary for the other arts too, as Margaret Bulley says: 'A great painting will only yield its secret slowly.'¹ And Epstein remarks: 'I find that you have practically to live with sculpture really to understand it . . . they change in the sun, the rain and the snow . . . They are still a mystery.'²

And not only should we understand the thought of the poem, but also, for the time being, believe it. The suspension of disbelief must be *willing*, because in order to achieve a complete appreciation, belief in the existence of the imagined beings and situation and in the truth of the thought presented by the poem must be one of conviction, not of half-hearted assent. And just for so long as one is reading the poem should the critical attitude of mind be superseded by the positive one of creating. For the moment these two phases of experience, the creative and the critical, should act on and influence one another as little as possible. It is only after full justice has been done to the poem that one's critical search should try to find out weaknesses of thought and expression.

But if poetry 'is made of words', it is the words themselves which we must dwell on. Repetition here is not merely for emphasis, but to indicate a procedure. The phrase 'dwell on' is used in preference to 'study' in order to suggest that the words of the poem are not to be regarded objectively, not to be looked at and examined with detachment; but that they should sink into the mind, and be allowed to repose there as the focus of one's meditation until they yield their fullness: thus they will give to the whole a new power of revelation or penetration, or an even greater depth of meaning. We cannot

¹ *Art and Counterfeit*.

² Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks*.

do better here than to recall the words of Sir Joshua Reynolds: 'The habit of contemplating and brooding over the ideas of great geniuses till you find yourself warmed by the contact, is the true method of an artist-like mind.'

But it is essential to keep the thought in the poet's own words; for if we wish to appreciate *a poem* we must endeavour to think the thoughts in exactly the same way as the poet conceived them. No other form of words is good enough, no other order, no other arrangement. To have a high standard of artistic rectitude about this is essential, for poetry is an exact discipline, and its value will be lowered if we accept presumptuous approximations, such as a paraphrase.¹

Now as a poem is in part an intellectual experience² of unusual cogency and precision, accuracy of poetic experience must be achieved by careful study of all the words of the poem; for every word contributes something to the whole: an idea or some more delicate shade of meaning, some detail which is necessary to its particular context. And again and again it is discoverable that that which a single word contributes will colour all the remainder of the poem. It is easy to find words which give a peculiar force or flavour or distinction to a poem. For instance, Milton's use of the word 'Lodg'd' in the sonnet *On His Blindness* is a good example of this aspect of poetic technique. Remembering that one outstanding characteristic of the true poet is that he uses a word which does far more work than could have been done by any ordinary word, even than any expected 'poetic' word, we see that in this context the word 'Lodg'd' expresses, as no other word could have, the fact that the poet has received some gift, yet cannot possess it, and therefore cannot enjoy

¹ Untold harm is being done by examination requirements, and by the slavish adherence to the accepted method of paraphrasing good poetry when more enlightened procedure is easily acquired. Note particularly what Epstein says: 'Art almost alone cannot make any concessions.' Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks*.

² To state, or even imply, as so many writers have done, that poetry is an expression of emotion is a half-truth which really denies the true nature of poetry as it ignores the significance of Form.

it: that the gift is not really a gift, because the use of it is denied him. And the implication of the half-line 'Lodg'd with me useless' is that the gift is in reality a distasteful and unmerited burden; for the half-line carries on the undercurrent of repressed bitterness which is the key-note of the opening of the sonnet. It is clear that that note is accentuated by the intensity of the words 'that one talent which is death to hide'. The emphasis, of course, is intentionally heavy; it is secured partly by the two words 'that one' and partly by the hint of spiritual extinction which is given in the words 'which is death'.

The tracing back of the influence of word on word or phrase on phrase, by its rich yield of finely expressed thought and feeling, seems to provide a convincing argument that one must pay the very closest attention to the meanings of the actual words of the poet. Mr. Empson emphasizes this point too; he says: 'It is the essential discipline of language that our elaborate reactions to a word are called out only by the word itself . . . It is only when a word has been passed in, accepted as sensible, that it is allowed to echo about in the mind.'¹ Further, one must be aware not only of their immediately perceived meanings and of the subdued or heightened tints that they reflect in the light of one another's presence, but also be aware of the cumulative effect which is produced when each contributes something to the whole. Thus, in the sonnet mentioned, the focusing of the attention on 'deprivation' is effected by the cumulative force of the words 'my light is spent', 'half my days', 'dark world', 'hide'. In this way the poet invests his words with far more than their face value; he can therefore continue a narrative, describe a state of mind or present a situation, and, at the same time, by his sensitive selection of words is able to move a responsive reader emotionally by means of undercurrents of thought, association, and mood.

Another and more obvious example is to be found in the last four lines of the same sonnet, where, although 'service'

¹ *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

is expressed by 'at his bidding', yet the willingness, almost enthusiasm, of that service is not explicit, but is revealed in the subsidiary meaning of the words 'thousands . . . speed and post . . . without rest'. Here 'speed' is unusually expressive; 'post', however, requires 'without rest' in order to convey the untiring quality of the service. The word 'thousands' too has an importance for its contribution of widespread and spontaneous loyalty. But perhaps the simplest example of this striking power of words to influence one another (usually without an ordinary reader realizing it) is supplied by the two words we have already referred to, 'Lodg'd' and 'useless', where the word 'useless' changes the possibly pleasant connotations or associations of the word 'Lodg'd' (as they are in 'Something holy lodges in that breast'¹) to those of a painful sense of affliction and frustration.

Unfortunately it is true what Epstein says, that 'People will not make an effort to understand art'²; it is certain that we do not often trouble to deepen our appreciation of poetry; our first step to do this should be to distil the essence of meaning from the words of the poem in some such way as this. And words that are unknown or strange, and sentences which are obscure, should be dealt with faithfully, for every word and phrase and sentence that is left unknown, misunderstood or confused in meaning, will leave a gap in the mind and a blank in the context. Thus the whole becomes impoverished, left thinner, less effective than it really is: in fact, experience itself will have been left incomplete. But the untrained reader cannot hope to discover the full significance of every word and phrase simply by reading the poem through: only by returning again and again to a poem can he penetrate to its secret.

But though this exactness and fullness of thought is an ideal to aim at, it must not make us forgetful of the common-sense requirements of the classroom: we should not allow our enthusiasms and strict aesthetic code to set up the same standards for young children as we have for ourselves. The

¹ Milton, *Comus*.

² Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks*.

great majority of children are not able to follow trains of thought with the assiduity and attention of which the adult is capable; they are not as a rule particularly attracted by the proposal that they shall get the thought of the poem clear and complete. They are more quickly attracted by the story, the scene or the imagery and by the sound and rhythm of the words; we must not therefore insist on their studying the thought of the poem for too long. To some children this soon becomes a labour and a task; and directly that happens the poetry has no more delight, and so for them it ceases to be poetry. Even at the cost of clear thought this result must always be avoided.

Finally we must remember that the printed word has no meaning in itself, and no virtue. Meaning is given to printed words only when they are acting on mind, only then are they infused with life. The printed words of a poem are inert—until they are caught up in the human mind; until they are embodied in living thought they are but cold ineffective things. And the rich and varied meanings that mind is capable of are fused by a poet's words into glowing thought and imagery. We can then be aware of these meanings and of their strength and clarity or of their richness. So it is we that have to bring what wealth of thought and imagery we can to be submitted to the condensation and fusion of the poet's words, for it is true that: 'Art relies, for its full effect, upon what the spectator brings with him.'¹

Again, let us remember that the thought of a poem provides an intellectual experience of exceptional quality. This exceptional quality is in the particular way in which the poet has expressed the thought. By means of their restraint or freshness or strength or appropriateness, his words give that distinction to an experience which is the true virtue of the poetic art.

But the thought and its expression do not represent, as it were, the very essence of the poem, as if that had been distilled out from its grosser elements. Thought and expression

¹ Greville Cooke, *Art and Reality*.

cannot stand by themselves, as if they were absolute, apart from sound, rhythm, emotion, form. And though we can find pleasure in the nobility, or other excellence, of the thoughts in a poem, and pleasure arising from an admiration of verbal felicity, yet we must not mistake these feelings (as so many do) for appreciation. The true appreciation of poetry is not as simple as that; it goes deeper, is more complex, and more comprehensive. Professor Whitehead reminds us that 'The transitions to new fruitfulness of understanding are achieved by recurrence to the utmost depths of intuition for the refreshment of imagination'.¹ And so, in addition to close attention to thought and awareness to words, appreciation requires imaginative activity: thought has to be fertilized and heightened in significance by the imagination, for 'the artist comprehends things most opposed to his nature through the imagination—the imagination, not the heart'. We are apt to forget this truth, and to disregard Wordsworth's warning, which says:

The voice which is the voice of my poetry
Without imagination cannot be heard.

And we need to attend more closely to the last word in that quotation.

¹ *Adventures of Ideas.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

P. 23, l. 14. 'This is the final test of poetry, that it communicates a mood. There is the artist's function; it has little or nothing to do with the intellect, for it presents not ideas but images.' Poetry, of course, presents ideas *and* images.

'The lyric poet is concerned not alone with the communication of his emotion but also with "the articulation of sweet sounds together."' "

SUBSIDIARY MEANINGS

IT is readily admitted that words do not differ from one another only in meaning, but also in the quality and in the quantity of the meanings which they suggest to us. The differences, too, in triviality and profundity of reference, in commonplaceness and remoteness of implication, are matters of common knowledge. The word 'drone', for instance, has for many people a much richer content than 'hum': it may have a wealth of associations concerning reed instruments, folk-lore, and clan customs, though for others it may suggest nothing more than insect life on a hot summer's afternoon. The word, therefore, in 'the beetle drones his wheeling flight' might suggest to one person a very much more definite sound and a richer sensuous experience than it might to another. Similarly the word 'croon', though still keeping its nursery meaning, has lately taken on a new reference with less pleasant associations. What it immediately suggests to us now may have many more associations than the older meaning has, more actually in number and in complexity. And the subsidiary meanings called up now are no doubt very much more blatant and commonplace than the more unusual and unsophisticated associations which are called up by the older reference. This means that the newer associations are coarser in quality than those of the older meanings, and demand no fineness of feeling.

Here again, as so often, Coleridge has a clear statement about his premisses: 'Be it observed, however, that I include in the *meaning* of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls.'¹ It is obvious, then, that we must give special recognition to the fact that the words in most of the best poems suggest very much more than a plain dictionary meaning, and much more

¹ *Bio. Lit.*

than they express in their everyday conversational usage. On unimportant occasions we are content with stating a fact, with saying, for instance, that the nuts are ripe or are full; but by the word 'plump' in the line 'and plump the hazel shells with a sweet kernel', the poet suggests not only that the nut is full, but that the kernel has grown fat with richness, and that it has swelled out, smooth and round, and, furthermore, that the shell is filled almost to bursting. The word 'plump' in this setting is most expressive: its sound, appearance, and meaning suggest many more impressions to us than the words 'ripe' or 'fat' would have done, although those words would have given the general meaning equally well. In this poem the subsidiary meanings are of utmost importance, they make their contributions of overflowing richness, of full ripe fruitfulness, which is the essence of the subject and of the poem.

Again, in commonplace conversation we are usually content to draw attention in as few words as possible to those things which interest us. On a warm summer evening we might say: 'It's getting dark'; and if we were to notice a staghorn beetle flying over our heads, the most that we need say in order to satisfy our impulses at the moment would be: 'Look at that staghorn beetle flying along. What a noise it's making!' We should then leave it to the senses of our companion to bring about the response we require: surprise, delight, excitement, or whatever it may be. Now the poet is not able to rely on the physical senses in that way, but on the other hand he has language and all the effects of language to bring about the result he desires. And he can work on the imagination, making it create the most elusive form or vision or the simplest intuition, and this he does by saying: 'Light thickens', or 'the shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums'. In using such words he is not only giving us plain, simple meanings, but also the precise quality of the twilight, its gloominess and the ominous closing in of its shadowiness; and instead of the bare idea of noise and of flying, he gives us suggestions of the exact timbre of the noise, and of its

low unceasing note, and of all that is associated with the shard-borne beetle. His words 'drowsy hums' do not mean only that the noise is low and scarcely heard; he has intensified these meanings and made them imaginatively richer by the associations of the word 'drowsy', such as, hearing faint noises as afar off when we are but half-awake. It is, of course, the meanings of these words *when combined with their sounds* which have such a peculiar power over the mind which is open to the richness of language and alive to the sensuous quality of vital experience.

Similarly in the *Ode to the West Wind* the poet uses the word 'locks' in the lines,

there are spread
 On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
 Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
 Of the horizon to the zenith's height
 The locks of the approaching storm.

not to mean merely 'clouds', but, through its subsidiary meanings and associations, to call up a much more eloquent picture of the scene and to make us feel its imminent and terrifying power.¹ The word 'clouds' here would give the vague, general, hazy notion of the impending storm; but the word 'locks', coming as it does after such forceful lines as 'Angels of rain and lightning', and 'bright hair uplifted from the head of some fierce Maenad', carries with it the suggestions that the clouds are hanging low, that they are in curling billowy masses, and that they are in troubled movement. Consequently, instead of a comparatively inexpressive and indecisive word, we are given one which enables us to imagine an extremely exact and spacious scene. But even more than this: we are made *to feel*. So that instead of reacting mechanically like insects, we are able to glory in the

¹ It is absurd to suppose that the word 'clouds', which a competent paraphrase from a fifth-former will produce, is sufficient to indicate that the pupil has got more than the bare prosaic minimum of that part of the poem.

grandeur of the scene and to stand in awe of its might; a response of this nature is secured with subtlety and unobtrusiveness by means of a suggestion of threatening terror gained by associating 'the head of some fierce Maenad' and 'the locks' with the hair of Medusa. Therefore in order to perceive *the poetry* of such poems as these, instead of merely the prosaic, it is necessary to have more than a faint inkling of their undercurrents of reference, and to feel more than a volatile and superficial emotion. An adequate response to poetry is largely a matter of responding to meanings and associations of various degrees of prominence, for 'The poet is dependent upon the reader's knowledge of the primary and associated meanings of words'.¹

On the other hand, a poet may intuitively avoid all words which have rich associations, because he sees only the stark event, and so feels compelled to give a striking impression of its nakedness and isolation; or he may have reacted strongly to the destroying force of ugliness and commonplaceness, and so have used words which impress the reader's imagination in the same way. Thus modern poetry has such lines as:

And each man fixed his eyes before his feet (*The Waste Land*),
the purpose of which is to drain away from that phase of the experience all meaning except that of blank meaningless monotony and fixity; or such lines as:

While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
(*The Waste Land*),

which have a legitimately artistic intention.

So we are concerned here with implied meanings, not with those which are explicit and overt, but with those which may be looked upon as subsidiary. Often, of course, these undercurrents of thought and reference are not subsidiary in importance but only in expression, and these implicit

¹ E. W. M. Potts, *The Appreciation of Poetry* (unpublished).

associations and undercurrents of meaning may be ideas, impressions, states of mind, images, feelings, and attitudes of different kinds. They will not usually be in the centre of consciousness when we read a poem; if we are attending closely to the main theme, thought, and imagery of the poem, they will be peripheral; but nevertheless they are usually as important as any other element—if indeed not more important. We might truthfully say that without them there is no poem; this view may appear extreme, but we must remember that poetry does not consist of merely ‘beautiful words’, ‘beautiful rhythms’, and so forth, but is concerned with giving us new, distinctive, and particular experiences. That is to say, not ‘what is oft felt, but ne’er so well expressed’; but what is rarely felt—and never yet expressed.

The implied meanings of words in poetry are important, because these meanings and associations give precision and reality to general ideas and to amorphous states of mind.¹ For instance, in the first line of Gray’s *Elegy* it is not the ringing of a bell which has any artistic value in that experience, it is the *tolling* of a bell, because that idea carries with it suggestions of death, it is like a funeral bell; consequently it is associated with a more solemn emotion. These undercurrents are enforced by the word ‘knell’, and are supported by ‘curfew’ and ‘parting’. Consequently the opening verses of the poem do not present to us a simple and rather trivial experience of evening, but the day’s departure felt deeply, and in a particular way; the evening is definite, known exactly, and imaginatively, and scrupulously to be verified; it is not general, vague, or to be imagined indifferently. Again and again one must impress on those who underestimate the value of the arts that poetry deals with vital experiences, and that it does not give us an enfeebled, romantic life; but an impact with reality, which is close,

¹ Where there is no precision but only an insincere generality of feeling the reader is often left floundering about in a flood of emotion, as in Tennyson’s

Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes.

vivid, and searching. Dr. Leavis, with his customary acumen, gives even greater emphasis to this point: 'Poetry can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision unapproachable by any other means.'¹ ✓

Another example, Milton's sonnet *On His Blindness*, may furnish still more convincing evidence of the importance of secondary meanings. The 'argument' of this sonnet in plain words would have told us that Milton, having considered how he had been using his life, complained that he was deprived of the one gift with which he might best have served his Maker, and so forth. But the words which the poet selected to express these thoughts and feelings actually tell us far more than that, for they reveal to us the readjustment which his emotional state of mind achieves when it is subjected to the pressure of a more balanced reasoning and a more discerning judgement. By his use of the words 'spent', 'one talent', 'lodg'd . . . useless', 'Which is death to hide', he compels us to realize his loss of hope and his rebelliousness which resisted calm reasoning, and which drove him to a self-willed and obstinate conclusion. We see at once that he is putting himself in the position of the man who buried his one talent in the ground, and who convinced himself of his rectitude by the selfish argument that he might suffer if it were lost. Once the hint of this undercurrent of reference has been seized, it becomes easier to see the force of the words 'and present my true account', 'He returning', and 'chide', in fact, of much of the whole sonnet. ✓

There is then a double thread in the poem: Milton himself, and the parallel of himself and the man with the one talent. This double thread intensifies the feeling expressed and directs its force; it also helps to express fully and accurately Milton's meditations and states of mind. Again the result is that we have not a remote and fanciful, or a partially abstract and superficial, contact with the real world; but on the contrary a particularly complete experience, and we are aware of at least one aspect of life with unusual distinctness and certainty.

¹ *New Bearings in English Poetry.*

Before leaving the study of this facet of poetic experience we should determine, if we can, what degree of attention we ought to give to these undercurrents of expression. Is it advisable to drag into the clear light of consciousness those subsidiary references and implications which the poet has not made explicit? The answer is: No, at all times we must remember the injunction of Erasmus to 'respect the writer'.¹ We must not tamper with his selection of ideas, imagery, themes, or with his words. This refers especially to the occasion when we are reading the poem straight through, that is to say, when we are hoping to secure its complete effect, when we are combining thought with thought, sound with sound, in order to create a unified experience. But on the occasions when we are studying a poem in order to achieve a more exact understanding and a more closely articulated structure, we may have to give more attention to certain words, lines, or verses than their particular and relative value in the poem warrants. When, for instance, it is not certain what an image contributes to the whole, it is necessary to find this out, and therefore there must be a more minute study to search for that which is not overtly expressed. But just as an orchestra will play over a difficult passage of a symphony perhaps a number of times in order to perfect it, and then the whole movement right through with the difficult passage in its proper setting, so certain passages of poetry may have to be worked at until the reader can receive their full contribution, and then be restored to their right proportions by a complete reading of the whole poem. So with the references and implications, those subsidiary meanings which are relevant, can, and often should, receive more attention than a straightforward reading of the poem would allow. There should be no question about this; though it is pertinent to ask: How are we to discover which associations are relevant and which irrelevant?

An example may show a way of deciding what is relevant. In Harvey's poem *Ducks* occur these lines:

¹ *De Ratione Studii*.

But if you go too near
They look at you through black
Small topaz-tinted eyes
And wish you ill.

The question is how far one should follow the associations of a word such as 'topaz'. Is it necessary or advisable to retrace the steps which led one to an exact knowledge of the word? The meaning of 'topaz' may have been acquired by seeing a display of jewels on some expansive dowager's person or in the crown jewels in the Tower or in some jeweller's shop; and many either curious or commonplace experiences may have helped us to build up for ourselves the concept topaz; but that does not mean that those experiences necessarily have immediate value to this particular poem. They have no logically relevant place in it; and therefore, however interesting they may happen to be in themselves, they should be kept out of the experience presented by it, and, if it be possible, kept out of any study of the poem—children's minds must not be encouraged to dissipate their imaginative powers in random fancies; and strong interest in a thing does not warrant the admission of that thing to an exclusive and scrupulously selected experience. In that particular poem one's imagination must be almost solely concerned with farmyard things and with their peculiar indifference to human life and pleasures; such associations as woman's personal adornment, regal symbols, and jewel emporiums are quite alien to the poem, and reference to them will introduce wrong emotional reactions. Such associations as these are irrelevant. The details that are relevant to this passage are the colour, the iridescence and translucence of a topaz, as well as the hard unblinking fixity of a precious stone. These are to be associated with the duck's eyes—synthesized in the image—so that we shall be aware of the exact quality of those sharp eyes. The word 'topaz', or any other word, is used for the value of its particular contribution to that content; neither its value nor its purpose is to provide a clue to all sorts of interests, as if it were a cue which was intended to

start one off on a train of thought away from itself.¹ On the contrary the meanings of the words of a poem combine and coalesce into coherent thought-structures; and, in the hands of a master, the more complex combinations of language deprive their individual words of all associations which do not contribute to the *meaning of the whole*.

Actually a good poem is a close combination of words and content, and this closely related and compact whole forms a clean ring of meaning which keeps out intrusive and irrelevant associations. This is, in part, the value of great literature, for there the words have an exact meaning; their connotations are determined by the whole context; they do not annul or weaken one another's bright clarity of content by indistinctness and overlapping; they are unblurred, and the closeness of their interrelation does not allow the reader to clog up the particular train of thought with every possible meaning: this should save words from being assailed by intrusions—their integrity may not be violated.²

¹ Compare also: 'Since music often acts as a general bodily stimulus, it may also excite the mind to free trains of thought, *which bear no relation to the music itself.*' Philip E. Vernon, *Apprehension and Cognition of Music*. (Italics not in the original.)

² Unless, of course, that effect is intended by the poet, as it is when he uses such phrases as 'dear enemy' or when a clash of meaning is required to express some particularly subtle intuition, or to give point to a satiric expression.

VI

IMAGERY

IMAGERY in poetry has unmeritedly been a source of much error. Misunderstandings of its purpose,* its value, and even of its nature are frequent, and partly for this reason: an image suggested by a poem may have a separate existence, apart from its poem,¹ consequently there is the temptation to take a disproportioned delight in its vividness, originality, or suggestiveness, even abstracting it from its setting in order to do so. And this is done even though the remainder of the poem suffers on account of the imagery being given undue prominence.*

A teacher may be tempted to concentrate on the images in a poem partly because imagery is often definite enough to be easily observed by children; it can be seized upon, pointed at, 'fingered' as it were. But just as the story of a narrative poem must suffer maltreatment and become barbarously misshapen at the command: 'Tell me the story in your own words'; so children are ordered to: 'Pick out the pictures in this poem.' The consequence is that the imagery of the poem is torn from its context, catalogued,² or explained, *to the detriment of its poetic purpose*: perhaps to obscure its exact effect, and certainly to upset the balance of the expression.

This unfortunate predilection for visual imagery* may have yet other harmful results. By fastening on the visual imagery without reference to the other elements of a poem a teacher almost inevitably forces his pupils to believe that visual imagery is more important than anything else in the poem;

* See quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

¹ 'Magic casements' and 'the murmuring of innumerable bees' appear to exist as units in the thought of those who write primers on the nature of poetry, for those primers rarely contain any reference to the part that each phrase plays in a poem, as if the rest of the poem were a sort of background to a phrase within it.

² e.g. the question 'How many flowers does Spenser mention in *Epi-thalamon*?' heard during a poetry lesson.

he may also lead his pupils to make the visual images so prominent that other imagery is fogged or obliterated;* and he may compel his pupils to make their visual images so definite that the finer qualities of the imagery are stamped out by this insistence on hard, clear-cut outlines. Sometimes greater harm still can be done by making images which express imaginative states and impressions beyond the normal experience of man so exact that the more intangible perceptions of things and states of mind are materialized into matter-of-factness.

Before passing on to other considerations, some alternatives to the 'picking out' procedure, and to that of producing necessarily prosaic explanations of imagery, may be suggested. For children, who are learning to find more and more in the words which they were ready to dismiss after a cursory first reading, what seems to be necessary is that they should try to achieve greater accuracy of imagery, and that they should give greater attention to those exact qualities of the imagery which are required by a poem. No kind of 'explanation' of an image can avail much, if indeed anything at all. A discerning reader can deepen his appreciation still further by discovering the exact contribution of these images, and their relative importance as part of the expression.

It is perhaps not widely enough known that poetry is rich in imagery which is not visual, and that one type of imagery is rarely unsupported and unvitalized by other types. It should also be a commonplace that, as a rule, the visual images of poetry require less conscious attention than other kinds of imagery. In the study of poetry, visual images need little attention because they are usually so much more obvious, and because many people use visual images habitually in thinking, writing, and speaking. Therefore, if any of the imagery of a poem is to receive extra attention it should be the imagery which requires a more delicate apprehension. Good poetry does not, as a rule, secure its effects by obvious, harsh, or violent means, or by rough-and-ready methods, that

* See quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

is to say, not by glaring, flat-surfaced poster-work, except, of course, some satiric poetry such as Eliot's *Sweeney Erect*; but rather by rarity and uniqueness of expression, by nuance, shaded high lights, and by depth of imagery. Or more accurately, 'imagery in poetry is not merely visual . . . and it may range from incipient suggestion so faint as not to be consciously registered to complete explicit realization',¹ as Dr. Leavis so penetratingly expresses it. Consequently our contemplation of poetry must be keenly alive to every source of imaginative power, and not merely to the vividness of pictorial imagery.

A study of two examples which are opposite in effect may indicate the varied nature of imagery, and how greater fullness and precision have been secured by the poet when one type of imagery is enriched by one, two, or more other types. Let us take

Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun
Like restless gossameres?

and

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

In the first two lines visual imagery predominates possibly, but swift and elusive movement is suggested there also, and an almost inhuman lightness—imponderability—of matter; in addition, the tenuous quality of the texture of the things mentioned is subtly suggested by the sound, rhythm, and imagery of the words. We may note, too, that both sound and rhythm, by means of their silky liquid quality, make their own contributions of lightness, swiftness, and of slight mysterious movement. It is clear that not one but several types of imagery will become active in the mind of a person reading these two lines with a quickened sense of the immanence of imagined things.

Clearly it is absurd to suppose that a proper response to these lines, where the full potentialities of language are being used, is limited to visual imagery.

¹ *How to Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound*,

We see then that thought, sound, rhythm, and a wealth of imagery are at one in their work of expressing a most delicate and fugitive impression; they all help to preserve the precise qualities of that impression, and to keep out any suggestions which might disturb it or cause it to become blurred, weakened, ineffective, or to have its lightness and frailty destroyed by the addition of even one more implication or image, however relevant.¹

The first quotation forms a striking contrast to the dull heaviness of sound and deadness of movement suggested in the second:

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

Here again the images are all important; they are chiefly of sound and weight, and they suggest especially the quality of a heavy impact. Visual imagery is of little importance in these two lines compared with the emotional power and directness of the auditory, tactile, and muscular images.²

The lines from the *Ancient Mariner* also provide an illustration of what was meant by depth of imagery. If we contrast them with the extreme simplicity of

Or like the snow-flake in the river
A moment white—then melts for ever;

we can see that Burns here has presented an incident mainly in visual images, whereas Coleridge in the lines quoted makes the words, their sound, rhythm, and imagery, do all the work; Burns uses simple words that are fully adequate, but the

¹ We might also note that the thought being couched as a question, and not as a statement of fact, gives to the lines the elusiveness of something unknown, rather than the certainty of definition of that which is imagined as an actual fact. It also betrays the fearful minds of the crew who know the bark is a spectral visitation, but who try to hide their fear behind hope. There is, of course, a strong emotional demand in this part of the poem. We see in these two lines the part that may be played by sentence structure, here as in all great poetry, in alliance with thought, sound, imagery, and rhythm.

² The abrupt rhythm, the end-stopped phrases, and unlinked sentence structure reinforce the impression of deadness and lifelessness expressed in the two lines.

words of Coleridge present impressions which make a more complete and a richer impact on the mind. The difference is that of melody as compared to harmony, or of a flat-wash in painting compared to the depth achieved by Turner or some of the Dutch painters.

The following quotations provide a similar contrast of delicacy and weight:

. . . and as the petals of flowers in falling
Waver and seem not drawn to earth, so he
Seemed over me to hover light as leaves
And closer me than air,

(Ezra Pound, *Speech for Psyche in the Golden Book of Apuleius.*)

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
One too like thee—(Shelley, *Ode to the West Wind.*)

The merit of the words of a poem must be judged by what they can do, and so it is imperative that we find out all that they express and imply. In the last two passages quoted above, the words do more than carry on a story or describe or make statements; they are powerfully expressive because of their power to make the reader imaginatively aware of distinct and compelling impressions. These impressions are so much a part of the poems, and the imagery presents them so faithfully, that it is neither profitable nor necessary to disentangle them. It suffices to be sharply aware both of the imagery and of the impressions.

Although it is impossible to separate the imagery from the poetry without grave loss, it is often possible to break up and grind down the perfect whole, and still have a residuum which is of some value. Some people think that one can secure this value only by disintegration. For from most poems a story or 'argument' of some sort can be separated from the rest; but this is only its paraphrasable meaning; it is not poetry. It is poetry only when that 'argument' is expressed in words which have vitality and distinction. When expressed in such words the ineffective paraphrasable thought itself has become active and exciting. Only then has it the vitality and strength to act on the mind and to make the mind *feel* that it is being

vitalized, that it has come alive under the impact of those words. And the infusion of paraphrasable meanings with imagery is usually sufficient to give these meanings the qualities of exactness, richness, and vitality.

What other kinds of imagery must we be aware of when we read poetry? Is it not likely that we may have slurred over impressions without being fully conscious of the precision which is the virtue of some images, or of the mystery which is the expressive purpose of others? We can experience imaginatively that which has come to us through the senses. And every impression we are conscious of, however ethereal it may be, can be expressed if only the mind can find imagery to represent it: imagery which is definite enough to work on another mind without nebulousness. So we find sense impressions of all sorts are suggested in poetry—cold,¹ heat,² dryness,³ moistness,⁴ tension,⁵ pressure⁶ and movements,⁷ weights,⁸ and sounds⁹—they are suggested by the sound and rhythm of words, but chiefly by imagery.

¹ The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries
He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

² All in a hot and copper sky
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand
No bigger than the Moon.

³ We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

⁴ Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

⁵ As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones;
So doth sin stick close between buying and selling. (Ecclesiasticus.)

⁶ In wild-wood never fawn nor fallow fareth
So silent light. (Ezra Pound: *Ballatetta*.)

⁷ Lean Thirst, lolling its cracked tongue,
Lagging by his side along. (Francis Thompson: *Sister Songs*.)

⁸ For Sorrow, like a heavy, hanging bell,
Once set on ringing with his own weight goes. (Shakespeare.)

⁹ As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name.

(Gerard Manley Hopkins.)

Why is the expression of these sensuous experiences by means of imagery of such importance to poetry? That the value of imagery to poetry is so generally admitted may account for this point's having escaped definite explanation. An attempt must be made, however, for the use of sensuous imagery in poetry is a necessity imposed by the limitations of language, and even a partial elucidation may effect a keener appreciation.

If we take note of everyday conversation we find that it is usually about things known both to speaker and hearer, and that it is usually concerned with very ordinary things; but we find that directly we go beyond the commonplace, and begin to describe unusual incidents, curious happenings, definite feelings, striking impressions, we use imagery in order to 'make our hearer distinctly aware of what we were impressed by. If we do not, our story is merely a flow of ordinary words, vague references and generalizations; it lacks definition, and, unless the hearer is in possession of easily excited feelings and imagination, he does not know exactly what has happened, his knowledge at best is but vague, he may even misunderstand or be confused; consequently, if his interest has been sufficiently aroused, he will begin to ask questions—because the essentials of the experience have not been supplied, and his imagination has not the necessary material with which to reconstruct the scene. But there is no need to ask questions after having read a poem of sound quality. In *Sir Patrick Spens* or *The Wife of Usher's Well* or *The Ancient Mariner* or *The Ode to Autumn*, is there any doubt about what the poet has said? There are no vague references or indistinctness because the poet helps us to make our experience clear¹ and certain by means of his image-shaping words—'to plump the hazel shell', 'soft-lifted', 'the last oozings', 'the gathering swallows twitter in the skies'. And these image-shaping words suggest sense impressions

¹ Naturally what degree of clarity is required depends on the poem; sometimes mystery and shadowiness of story or of impression will be intended, in which case *that* is the certainty aimed at.

of all kinds, and by their scrupulous truth and exact delicacy they bring us into close contact imaginatively with realities. The result of this fidelity and exactness is that poetry can give us a greater degree of definition, of certainty, and of concentration than is usually to be found in ordinary speech or writing; though we must remember that: 'Shakespeare's language gains strength from common speech . . . "the whips and scorns of time" . . . a "bare bodkin" . . . "grunt" and "sweat" with their sharp physical evocation of actuality . . .'¹ This quality of precision, of clarity of definition, is one of the vital contributions which imagery makes to poetry. Without imagery poetry would be abstract; and it would lack those qualities which raise it above clear, logical expression. It is imagery which vitalizes such expression, infusing it with copious suggestions of weights, buoyances, textures, sounds, movements, shapes, and colours. But there is, too, an awakening of emotion, without which an experience would be dead, and also a directing of emotion, without which the experience would be warped, confused, and unshapely. Imagery gives to cold, logical thought the power to excite emotion; the emotion thus engendered acts as an urgent impulse on thought, kindling it and quickening it with fresh strength; for 'the emotions, rooted though they are in instinct, are the finest flower of human evolution without which reason itself is barren and may become evil'.² And when our minds are imbued with exceptional vitality and intense concentration we are able to perceive hitherto unattainable truths—those which can be 'apprehended only in a flood of passion'—and to penetrate into hitherto unexperienced mysteries. For mind rises by means of imagined realities and passionate imagination to achieve new states of vision and insight.³

We must now return to the theme of 'imagined realities' and carry it another step or two farther. Let us first consider

¹ Denys Thompson, *Reading and Discrimination*.

² Frank Howes, *The Borderland of Music and Psychology*.

³ This experience itself is practically the subject of the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins called: *That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection*.

how most poetry is shot through with reference to pleasure-giving things connected with the commonly accepted experiences of men.¹ If we think for a moment of all the references in the *Ode to the Nightingale*, Shelley's *To a Skylark*, *Lycidas*, *Epithalamion*, we must realize that to a great extent a very considerable body of poetry deals with realities. And we must remember that it is through an immediate contact with realities that one can best grow in perceptive sensitiveness, that one can enrich one's imaginative life, and that one can use the imagery which is the vital wealth of that life to such purpose, and with such insight, that one can penetrate into the essence of things and discover their high significance. And we need to grow in perceptive sensitiveness.² How could we ever know the full expressive quality³ of such passages as the following if we had never come into immediate and finely perceptive contact with such real things as are referred to here?

O lip curved high
To mind me of some urn of full delight. (Ezra Pound.)

White as an almond are thy shoulders;
As new almonds stripped from the husk. (Idem.)

Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar. (T. S. Eliot.)

Do we realize constantly that perceptive experience is the ultimate source of almost all, if not quite all, of our imaginative life? And the keener the perception and the swifter it is to

¹ That a poem refers to the things which one particularly delights in—a heron flying over wintry marshes, violets hidden in unfrequented copses, the minute and thymy flowers on bald downs—or that a poem expresses a delight in such things, can be a very good reason for *liking* a poem, but we must not fall into the error of putting it forward as a valid reason for saying that the poem is good poetry.

² And there is a desperate need for the preservation of perceptive sensitiveness in the children who are growing up in towns and who are going to spend their lives unproductively or doing mechanical work.

³ Of course appreciation means more than merely a pleasure in expressive words. Felicitous phrases alone do not make good poetry.

seize on the essence of things—sights, situations, happenings, impressions—the livelier will be the imaginative experience of all those things; livelier in the sense of being alive, that is to say, being active and having peculiarly significant meaning for us; and therefore the more spontaneously shall we be able to find words to express the feelings, impressions, emotions, and all the reactions associated with those perceptive experiences.

What is more striking, and less often noticed, is that such perceptive experiences may, for a poet, be active and significant in another way: they may help to express feelings, impressions, emotions, and other states of mind *not* commonly associated with those perceptive experiences. As in: 'And Pity, like a naked new-born babe, Striding the blast.' Or 'Here lay Duncan, his silver skin lac'd with his golden blood.' Or 'This tiger-footed rage' (*Coriolanus* III. i). Or 'I am . . . one that converses more with the buttock of the night than with the forehead of the morning' (*Coriolanus* II. i).¹ More simply: perceptive experiences are so real imaginatively, and have such vitality for the poet, that they can associate themselves with less tangible or more profound experiences; and in doing so they contribute their own significance, associations, and power of evoking emotion to the expression of these more mystical experiences. It is this virtue which especially distinguishes some of the finest poetry of Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Hopkins, Pound, and Eliot from the best poetry of Sidney, Herrick, Gray, Shelley, and Tennyson. That which the first-mentioned poets often express in their poetry cannot usually be expressed in straightforward, simple, ordinary ways; over and over again these poets are concerned with the expression of unusual things—unusually forceful, unusually elusive, unusually profound—and the ordinary modes of language will not serve their

¹ Also: And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. (*Hamlet*, III. i.)

And: No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning. (*Hamlet*, III. ii.)

purpose. For instance, how could one record *in words* the brutal impact of the ugliness of certain aspects of town life, and all that might be associated with them, except by using unexpected resources, as Eliot has done in his *Preludes*, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, and *Morning at the Window*; with the result that 'the poetry' is misjudged, on the ground that 'it is not beautiful'—as if such subjects and impressions should be beautified. It is not a question of avoiding conventional poetic language; but of finding any way at all of catching just the exact quality of, perhaps, some tremulous shade of beauty, as in Donne's

Thy every hair for love to work upon
Is much too much,¹

or of some transient balance of complex emotion as in

• Take, O take those lips away,
That so sweetly were forsworn.

So imagery is all important, and the true poet has at his disposal imagery belonging to many diverse fields of experience, and the greater the poet is, possibly the more fields in the affairs of life will be at his immediate disposal from which to draw his imagery, and the greater number of cross-associations from one field to another are likely to be detected in his poetry.

But if our imaginative life relies for its growth and enrichment on perceptive sensitiveness, on variety of sensuous experience, and on aesthetic acuteness to seize on the essential characteristics of a thing or of an event, then it follows that we, too, ought to be at all times sharply aware of the qualities of things—their shapes, movements, colours, textures—and fully alive to every impression that has any degree of completeness. These perceptive experiences are the foundations of our poetic appreciation, the raw material so to speak; they are raw material for the poet, too, as Margaret Bulley has pointed out: 'Without the stimulus and variety offered by contact with nature and with the world

¹ *Air and Angels*.

about him, his work [the artist's] would tend to become monotonous and devitalised, and would grow too subjective in character.¹

When we have come into vivid contact with some thing, however simple, we are able to be sharply aware of the peculiar qualities of that thing whenever the poet includes expression of them in his poem: thus our appreciation will be both richer and more finely controlled than it would otherwise have been. And we shall be able to judge with considerable certainty what truth of detail best represents the uniqueness of that thing, and whether the poet has caught that uniqueness in a true symbol.

When we begin to discover that the poet's words work on our minds in this way, when we begin to be conscious that his words give us impressions of the qualities of things, and at the same time that they express those impressions for us, and that this expression has for us a certain degree of completeness, accuracy, and insight, then we have begun to be aware of words aesthetically; we have begun to be aware of words as an artistic medium, as material which can reveal a beauty of form to us. This realization is such an important part of that complex act which is to be called 'appreciation' that we must return to it again when that act is viewed as a combining of diverse elements.

¹ *Art and Counterfeit.*

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

P. 39, *l.* 2. 'So many of Shelley's similes in the "Skylark" . . . take our attention away from its song to fix it upon irrelevant pictures.'

P. 39, *l.* 10. '. . . the weary Day turned to her rest
Lingering like an unloved guest . . .

By the time that you have got the picture of the unwanted guest hanging about on the doorstep and dragging out tedious good-byes you have clearly in mind the poet's impatience for the end of the day and the coming of night.' We see here that 'the bad critic . . . introduces extraneous elements into his appreciation—smudges the canvas with his own paint', as Mr. L. C. Knights so aptly puts it.

P. 39, *l.* 22. 'In history, fiction, ballad, narrative poem, the depth of your appreciation will to a large measure depend on the vividness with which you can see what is described.' This theory, though plausible, is a crude simplification of a complex process.

'Imagination, as you doubtless know, is the power of making pictures with the mind.'

'He [the literary artist] does his thoughts the honour of wishing to clothe them fittingly: he desires to please his readers by presenting them with a beautiful word-picture.'

P. 40, *l.* 2. 'I want you to shut your eyes for a minute and "see" the brook'—this we are requested to do in spite of the fact that the brook is described as 'hidden . . . in the leafy month of June . . . all night', and that the poet has said explicitly that it is the sound he intends us to hear:

A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

VII

EMOTION

‘NOW, Poetry, Mr. Wordsworth truly affirms, does always imply passion: which word must be here understood in its most general sense, as an excited state of the feelings and faculties.’¹ So we now come to the difficult problems connected with the subject of emotion and the part that it plays in a poetic experience. Here there has been the widest divergence of opinion. Most people are willing, however, to accept the theory that when we read poetry and respond to it appropriately, we experience certain emotions; but from this point differences of view begin, and very soon become irreconcilable. Some people hold that the feelings² should play as small a part as possible in the process of appreciation; that it is harmful to indulge in an activity which so patently demands an ‘overflow of powerful feelings’; and that if these feelings happen to be stirred they should be curbed, they must not on any account be allowed any manifestation. Quite opposite in opinion are those who believe that any poem, song, book, or play that is ‘moving’, that makes them ‘feel’ strongly, that makes them happy or sad or in any way excited, is good. These would consider that *Mary Rose* (or even *Rose Marie!*), *Journey’s End*, and *Milestones* are works of art because these plays make them feel strongly. And the only reason that *The Good Companions*, *Sorrell & Son*, and *Precious Bane* seem to them to be good literature, and, possibly, that *Invictus*, *The Little Waves of Breffny*, and *He Fell Among Thieves* are good poetry, is that these works excite their emotion. We may well ask ourselves if there is not a more reasonable view than either of these two extremes; and one which may indicate how much truth, or how little, has gone to give plausibility to each of them.

¹ Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

² The word is used here in the popular sense as in the statement ‘I feel angry’ or ‘I felt awed in his presence’.

The first view, that an almost conscious restraint of emotion is demanded of us, is justified when it refers to sentimental plays, novels, and poems which pass for works of art; but is quite unsound when it refers to true works of art, which unquestionably demand the presence of deep feeling, not as conscious emotionalism, which obscures thought and swamps the imagination, but as an essential and vitalizing part of the experience. Appreciation of any work of art includes a great deal more than the arousing of emotion; it does not require a consciously willed control of emotion, but a control which is exerted unawares by the Form which expresses the aroused emotion. For appreciation involves the full and adequate *expression* of all the relevant feelings which are roused during the complete and undisturbed absorption of oneself in any work of art. That the feelings are expressed during appreciation and therefore controlled, disciplined, and fulfilled, is the main theme of this chapter; it is one of the most important principles of aesthetics, though one which has unfortunately been neglected.

The second view is sound in so far as it admits that, in the experiences which the arts offer, emotion is quite inevitable.¹ But this view assumes that that main purpose of the arts is to provoke an emotional reaction, and nothing more: this is most unsound. The appreciation of a work of art requires of our feelings much more than their mere activity; as Roger Fry points out: 'Art as created by the artist is in violent revolt against the instinctive life, since it is an expression of the reflective and fully conscious life.'² What more is required is the problem before us.

Very many poems, plays, novels, and songs have owed their popularity, in recent years, solely to the skill of the writers to play on the feelings of audience and readers. A blatant example was the production called *Cavalcade*, in

¹ If emotion played no part in these experiences they would not have a value which is hardly equalled by any other form of experience. The point is—in what way are they valuable?

² *Vision and Design*.

which an astutely manipulated realism preyed upon memories of moving events experienced during one's impressionable years. And all of the best known anthologies of poetry contain very many poems the obvious and main purpose of which is to arouse some emotion or other.¹ A typical example expresses its intention and its naively forced emotion in the two lines:

Oh, I must pass nothing by
Without loving it much. (Sara Teasdale.²)

Obviously all that is necessary here is a 'simple' sentimental response, that is to say, the tender emotion is to be stimulated by anything, worthy or unworthy, and to be squandered indiscriminately—that 'much' woefully betrays the lack of sensitiveness. A similar intention and requirement are to be found in:

I walk the world in wonder,
And have no word to say.
(Bliss Carman, *A Wood-Path*.²)

I bid you Love, be merry,
Where singing hangs the thrush
Beneath the flowering cherry.
(Gwen Clear, *The Goodwife Relents*.²)

And I long to kneel instantly at your feet,
While all about us peal the loud, sweet *Te Deums* of the Canterbury
bells. (Amy Lowell, *Madonna of the Evening Flower*.²)

So we'll drink deep of pleasure
Ere ever our hearts grow grey,
And scatter love at leisure
Along the world's highway.
(Edgar McInnis, *A Song against the Evil Days*.²)

It is to such evidence as the writer's professed intention and the kind of demands the poem makes on us that we may look,

¹ Compare: 'I have been informed by commercial managers and producers that . . . to be a success a commercial show "must not make people think".' Komisarjevsky, *Myself and the Theatre*.

² Quoted from *The Modern Muse*.

in order to distinguish the false from the true in literature.¹ When a writer gives us little more than neat descriptions of things which commonly give pleasure in everyday life, and then completes his poem with prettily expressed meditations on the transience of these things, or with aptly phrased moralizings about the sadness of leaving them, we may begin to suspect that his poem can do nothing more than titillate our feelings and play a plaintive air on the pathetic heart-string.

The kind of demand made on us by the poem is, then, to be the touchstone. If there is no more for us to do than to feel 'moved', or to feel the pathos of partings or the warm comfort of loving somebody or something or other,² then we might be able to say justly that the poem may have some commendable qualities—it is possibly not dead—but it is a poem of effervescent sentiment only; and this judgement condemns it completely as a work of art. Merely to arouse emotion cannot be a criterion of good art. 'It is not enough for a poem that it should be what is called "touching";' writes W. P. Ker, 'one remembers Goethe's deadly saying about the hearts of sensibility: "any bungler can touch them".'³ And to indulge frequently in listening to music, in reading verse or novels, or in seeing plays which stir our feelings without providing us with adequate means of expressing these feelings, without vital words or sounds or situations, is harmful. It is the experiencing of emotion merely for the purpose of relishing excitement, not for any adequate or artistic purpose. And to pander to the pleasures of mere emotional excitations, such as may be obtained from

¹ To look at the content of a poem in this way and to estimate the demands it makes on us has now become a necessity for all those who believe that art is of fundamental importance in life. This necessity is due to the prevalence of published works which in appearance, subject, and manner seem worthy of consideration as works of art, but which cannot last out their brief, effusive reputation because they have little more to offer than a quick emotional reaction.

² And scatter love at leisure
Along the world's highway.

³ *Collected Essays*.

the enjoyment of sentimental novels and verse, for instance, of the Tennyson's *Dora* type, is to degrade an important component of human life. But we need not impute to the reading of good poetry, or to the appreciation of any true work of art, all, or any, of the harmful effects resulting from the enjoyment of pseudo-poetry, melodrama, or from any other unsuccessful work of art.

With great art, on the contrary, the effects are quite different: they are not enfeebling or debasing. The experiences which great works of art provide do not stir up an irresponsible, undisciplined emotion, and they do not inflame passionate feelings merely for the sake of stimulating them or for the purpose of providing a pleasurable feeling of excitement in a reader or listener. For response to the design in a work of art always involves a certain directing and disciplining of emotion, and 'a delicate balance between freedom of emotion and controlling judgment is a quality of all great art'.¹ Art demands the participation of powerful feelings in the experiences it provides, but these powerful feelings are centred on fundamental experiences of life, presented in new and significant ways. And these feelings are so deeply involved in the reader's re-creation of the experience that they combine with the remainder of the experience, giving power to thought, to imagination and to intuition, and fullness to the whole; consequently they do not predominate over clarity of thought, intensity or liveliness of imagination and keenness of intuition; and they are not left without directing purpose. In a fine work of art, thought, imagery, emotion are too closely combined by intuitive awareness of Form into a perfectly balanced whole for emotion or any one element to predominate over any of the others. The mutual interaction of every element of the experience is so immediate and so close that, at the end, there is complete unity; and one is left with a sense of completion, with the realization that the experience has come to a true and satisfying conclusion.

Illuminating illustration of the demands which a work of

¹ Vernon Blake, *Relation in Art*.

art makes on our emotional energies, besides merely a powerful overflow of feelings, can be seen in even a brief consideration of such a play as *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Consider for a moment 'the change of state' in Lear's fortunes: the almost immediate debasement of his material prosperity and power, begun and made doubly sure by the violence of his own dominating personality; his later bewilderment at his daughters' complete turn-about: 'Who is it that can tell me who I am?'; and finally his open self-accusation of the wrong done to Cordelia, which he has so long refused to face:

O Lear, Lear, Lear!
 Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in
 And thy dear judgement out!

Consider, too, the rapid and complete reversal of his kingly state, from 'Pre-eminence and all the large effects That troop with majesty'¹ to 'a poor, bare, forked animal'.² Consider, further, the quick rise and fall of Goneril and Regan, the happy fruition of the careful plans of Edmund, the immediate fall and final, though briefly transient, rise of Cordelia and Kent. And note how closely interwoven is the disastrous fate of the noble houses of Lear and Gloucester. In conclusion, trace the gradual and devastating overthrow of Lear's own powerful mind and proud, stubborn disposition, from 'our fast intent', 'a constant will', 'The dragon and his wrath', 'our potency', 'Our hate', of Act I to

I am a very foolish fond old man,
 Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
 And, to deal plainly,
 I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

¹ *Lear*: . . . Cornwall and Albany,
 With my two daughters' dowers digest this third;
 Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.
 I do invest you jointly with my power,
 Pre-eminence, and all the large effects
 That troop with majesty. (Act I, sc. i.)

² *Lear*: 'Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies . . . unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here.' (Act III, sc. iv.)

You must bear with me.

Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish.

(Act iv. sc. vii.)

When we view the striking quality of these events, their certainty, power, and individuality, the scope and violence of these changes of states, we can realize that here, as in all great art, the significances are too profound, and the structures too complex, the implications of every action, almost of every word, are too deeply interwoven, and the conclusions too absolute and complete for the emotions aroused to be unexpressed and unfulfilled, that is to say, left as so much unused pervading emotionalism. What happens is that the emotions aroused drive the onlooker to attend with profound concentration to every turn of thought, change of state, and development of plot, in order to seek a solution or resolution to these angers, bitternesses, hatreds and loves, which are racking him so inescapably.

So in true art the emotions are not only stirred, they are also brought into artistic relation with the other elements of the experience by the power of the poet's words. The emotions are held to the experience and worked into its unity because they go to intensify the thought and imagination, and thus vitalize those activities.¹ This centring on the experience and combining with the other elements means that emotion in any experience which is expressed significantly enough is directed to an adequate and fully expressed end; in the process, therefore, of this artistic experiencing it is employed creatively.

In our brief study of Lear there was no explicit reference to the importance of the words in an appreciation of the play. Actually, of course, the words, if we attend to them properly, direct and control the emotion. In a great play, situation, reaction of character on character, action, and plot will make

¹ Note also that 'it is not the "greatness", the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts'. T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*.

considerable demands on one's imaginative and intellectual powers, and the exercise of these powers will involve the close co-operation of emotional energies;¹ but though in the cruder forms of drama, and in almost all of the productions of the cinema, action and personality get the main effects, namely, a quick emotional reaction, as in 'When I recite of sorrow my eyes fill with tears; and when of fearful or terrible deeds, my hair stands on end, and my heart beats fast'²; yet words are the most important of the dramatist's resources and the only medium for the poet.

We have, then, to discover in what way the words of literature and of drama can bring emotion into artistic relation with the other elements of the experience, and how it is that emotion can be brought to an adequately expressed conclusion. Comparison between the poetry of Mrs. Browning and that of Shakespeare will help us to see more clearly how mere emotionalism is avoided, and adequate expression achieved. Let us compare, for instance, the opening lines of a few of Mrs. Browning's sonnets, selected almost at random, with the opening lines of some of Shakespeare's; and in doing so estimate the quality of the thought and how much imaginative activity is required of a reader. Compare:

With stammering lips and insufficient sound,
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature . . . (*The Soul's Expression.*)

All are not taken! there are left behind
Living Beloveds, tender looks to bring. (*Consolation.*)

I count the dismal time by months and years,
Since last I felt the greensward under foot. (*The Prisoner.*)

with these opening lines (selected purposely from less well-known sonnets):

If Thou survive my well-contented day,
When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover.

¹ Melodrama and the sentimental play, of course, call for little fresh imaginative effort and no unusual intellectual activity, and consequently emotion predominates consciously, and the onlooker 'feels like weeping' or 'has a good cry'.

² Plato, *Ion* (Shelley's translation).

No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
 Thy pyramids built up with newer might
 To me are nothing novel. . . .

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
 And make the earth devour her own sweet brood.

In the first three quotations no effort of thought or imaginative activity is required, practically all that the words demand from the reader is a flow of the 'tender' emotions. In the second three, much more power of thought and creative effort of imagination is needed to secure all that the words can suggest. How much more penetration of thought or width of comprehension, and how much stronger must be the creative flights of the imagination to attain to all that a complete sonnet of Shakespeare has to offer, or the finer poems of Donne, Marvell, Vaughan!

Comparison between Mrs. Browning and Shakespeare may seem too elementary; illustration from modern poetry is no doubt more apposite. Let us compare certain poems included in a recently published anthology, *The Modern Muse*, with selected poems by Ronald Bottrall, Ezra Pound, Eliot, and Hopkins, and estimate as before what is expected of a reader besides emotion.

Heaven, you say, will be a field in April,
 A friendly field, a long green wave of earth,
 With one domed cloud above it. (Conrad Aiken.¹)

Compare the hackneyed epithet 'friendly' and the all-too-frequent comparison—a corner of this earth is like Heaven, and its 'field in April', well worn since Chaucer—with the vivid freshness and strong flexible movement of

With an underthrust he jolts
 The plough round from the furrow,
 Deftly wristing his steamed
 Pair to a corner row. (Ronald Bottrall, *Ploughing*.²)

The certainty and definition of the second poem give bold

¹ Quoted from *The Modern Muse*.

² Quoted from *Recent Poetry 1923-33*.

distinction to an experience which in less able hands would have received merely conventional presentation.

Compare:

Oh! Sorrow, Sorrow, scarce I knew
Your name when, shaking down the may
In sport, a little child, I grew
Afraid to find you at my play.

But, Sorrow, Sorrow, let me rest,
For oh! I cannot sleep with you!

(Charlotte Mew, *Song*.¹)

with the vitality of

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry *I can no more* . . .

(Gerard Manley Hopkins.)

The vitality of these three lines is not only a characteristic of their sound and rhythm, but also of their imagery, thought, and feeling. The full appreciation of such lines as these requires of the reader no conventional or dulled sensibility, but an imagination which is passionately alive and quick to seize each penetrating image.

Compare:

We drifted to each other like two birds. (Maurice Baring.²)

with

The light became her grace and dwelt among
Blind eyes and shadows that are formed as men.

(Ezra Pound, *Ballatetta*.)

or with

Let us build here an exquisite friendship.

(Ezra Pound, *The Altar*.)

noting the lack of definition of 'drifted' as well as the commonplaceness of the simile 'like two birds', and, in contrast,

¹ Quoted from *The Modern Muse*.

² *Ibid*.

the firm delicacy of the two quotations from Ezra Pound's poems.

Compare:

Old Sandhills, do you know my name,
Do you remember where my feet
Danced like will-o'-the-wisp flame
As light as elfin heart could beat?

(Hubert Church, *The Old Sandhills, Hobart*.¹)

Its invocation to 'Old Sandhills', its pleas of 'Do you remember?' and its tell-tale phrase 'elfin-heart' form a decided contrast to the force of the clear-cut imagery of:

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard.

(T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, III.)

It is evident that on the one hand we have verse which makes little demand on our activities of thought and imagination, which does not require any intensity of effort, but which presents only a loose unity of experience in which a general feeling of sadness, joy, or what not, may pervade, and be left purposeless and uncompleted. And on the other the poetry quoted above presents to us experiences which are fresh, unexpected, and certain. A lazy reaction to them produces nothing.

(As we have said, both sentimental verse and good poetry evoke emotion, but good poetry makes other demands on us. We have now to explain what those demands are, what they have to do with emotion, and how a work of art may be a valuable experience to us. It is evident that during the appreciation of a poem we employ all our powers, including those of emotion, in the carrying out of the effort of attention to the meanings, sounds, and rhythms of the words.) While we are thus closely attending to the words, therefore, our emotion is being subjected to the direction of thought and imagination. For, in following the thought of a poem and in

¹ Quoted from *The Modern Muse*.

reconstructing the imagery, we draw upon mental energies which are largely supplied by emotion. As Coleridge said: 'For the property of passion is not to create, but to set in increased activity.'¹ So that the richer in content the word is, the more concentration of mind it will demand of the reader who is able to respond accurately; and the more vital the words and the thoughts which they express, the more mental activity and precision these words will require; for 'Intellect works not alone but incited by the emotions and directed by the will'²; and the truer, in the sense of poetic truth, is the reference of those words, the wider will be the applications and the comprehensiveness which they will call for. All these greater, deeper, and wider demands of thought necessitate for the reader who is responding adequately a greater utilization of emotional energies; thus Keats writes: 'axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses'³; and these profounder penetrations of thought and these bolder leaps of intuitive comprehension involve the activities of deeper and more complex emotional powers.⁴

And the same is true of imagery. The imagery of the poems of Shakespeare, Bottrall, Hopkins, Pound, and Eliot, quoted above, requires of a reader an imagination which can make the effort of forming vivid, accurate, and precise images, and which, at the same time, can create imagery with quick immediacy. Imagery is an essential to poetry for the reason that its finish, exactitude, and reality are indispensable to thought which reaches out beyond the bounds of common-

¹ *Bio. Lit.*

² Aristotle, *Ethics*.

³ Letter to Reynolds, April 1818.

⁴ 'Lotze's doctrine was that abstract thought is by itself powerless to penetrate to the inner kernel of reality . . . he asserted that feeling was the source of the ideal of knowledge, and that, with no powers than those of mere intellect, we should not reach that ideal or even seek it.' Viscount Haldane, *The Soul of a People*.

The popular view is that 'It [the lyric] is the simplest, the most natural, of all poetry, emotion breaking forth in brief utterance that is little more than a cry.' But this is superficial because in reading verse that requires little thought and imagination all one's powers are not employed, and so emotion remains undirected and, of course, not absorbed by the experience; every lyric therefore would be a trivial work of art.

place observation and speculation. And to secure these qualities during the reading of poetry unusually creative, or re-creative, powers are necessary.

It is obvious that parts of *Paradise Lost* and, to a very much greater extent, Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Eliot's *The Waste Land* demand of us greater imaginative and emotional power than the relatively naive imagery of Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*.¹ On the one hand, the imaginative effort required of us is possible only when it is borne along and sustained by powerful feelings; and, on the other, almost any one can imagine Arthur lying in *that* waste land and being carried over the rocky ledges—without feeling strongly or deeply; the simplest and most easily aroused emotion is all that is needed to provide energy for the imagination and other mental powers to re-create the experience presented by that poem.

We have now arrived at the position that, in the appreciation of a work of art, the forces of the passions are involved in the exacting demands of intense, penetrating, or acute thought, of sensitiveness of intuition and of creative flights of imagery; and not only in these demands, but also in those of awareness to sound and rhythm and to the design of the whole work. The emotional energies therefore are directed into channels, or rather combined with other mental activities, where they are subjected to an artistic purpose, for they are employed creatively. Thus we see that the purpose of arousing emotion is that it shall be of artistic value—not merely to provide pleasure, but to give intensity and reality to the experience: its purpose is then fulfilled, and the experience is complete.

But the experience will not only be complete and in a very real sense have unity, it will also be *completed*, in the sense that something has been initiated, has been worked through, and has come to a satisfying conclusion. And this 'living

¹ A comparison between the imaginative effort required for Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and for Tennyson's would provide a just estimate of the value of the two as works of art.

through' an experience, and having adequate words to sustain one's full mental powers, and to carry them to a clearly seen end, may be accurately regarded as *expression* of that experience. A poem presents a theme to us, thought, feeling, and imagery go to the working out of that theme, and this cogent thinking, feeling, and imagining are expressed because they are represented by the words, and the words stand for all that has been thought and felt and imagined; as Mr. L. C. Knights says: 'There [in Shakespeare's sonnets] is indeed a constant succession of varied images, which, because they are concrete and because they are drawn from the world of familiar experience, give precise expression to emotion . . .'¹ And the words of great poetry (and even good poetry—to distinguish it from good verse) are strong enough or original enough or rich enough to be able to stand for all those experiences of thought and feeling and imagination—to represent them always in the same way and with the same intensity.² And they are vital enough to combine all those activities into a unified experience, so that emotion cannot predominate over the others and remain unfocused, uncontrolled, and purposeless—as it were, irresponsible. And the completion of all that the poem initiates is brought about by a reaching out towards, and arriving at, the ultimate meaning, and by living through the emotional energies aroused, which is in itself a creative process. Consequently stimulation of the feelings is accompanied by creation, and we may say that expression in any art provides both the initiation and the completion of an experience. And the greater the work of art the more co-ordinated, the better proportioned, and above all the more complete it will be.

¹ 'Shakespeare's Sonnets,' *Scrutiny*, September 1934.

² By expression is meant here the words, paint, sound, stone, which the artist has used to embody what he has conceived.

VIII

SOUND

TO judge what has been written on poetry in recent years, by what is said during conferences and discussions on poetry, and by what children include in their so-called critical appreciations, it appears that word-melody is often looked upon as the most important feature of poetry*. At times it is even taken as the criterion of good poetry, so that, provided the verse is sufficiently mellifluous, what else it may be matters little.* Beliefs of this nature persist no doubt as the legacy of those who thought that poetry's main purpose and its greatest virtue was to express 'sentimental blisses' and the romanticized anguish of love-deserted youths and maidens—a relic of Thomas Moore. Indeed, it may be a natural temptation for the poet with a sensitive ear for verbal music to sacrifice vitality at times for 'linked sweetness long drawn out', though a great poet is not so led astray. And those who regard poetry merely as a pleasant pastime may possibly be justified in believing that 'the beautiful melody of the words'* is almost the only thing to be enjoyed in reading poetry. But the artist's pursuit of the beautiful for itself, regardless of expressiveness and of other considerations, has often degenerated into an effort to give pleasing results and to produce mere prettiness; it has had other stultifying results in literature, as in other forms of art.

We ought, no doubt, to pay more attention than we do to what artists working in other media have said. For instance, Epstein's remarks on beauty and character are particularly relevant here: 'I doubt whether an artist aims consciously at producing beauty. I try to express the character of what I am depicting. . . . the danger is the man who aims consciously at beauty, destroying all character.'¹

¹ Haskell, *The Sculptor Speaks*.

• See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

In literature the pursuit of beautiful word-melodies has resulted in a creation of false values, and Mr. Aldington says: 'There are some critics who judge a poet by the noise which his words make, as if poetry were merely a matter of sound.'¹ If we take word-music as the criterion by which to judge poetry, some quite second-rate works must be hailed as masterpieces, and some of the greater poetry relegated to a second rank. In two other directions over-enthusiasm for 'the music of the words' has resulted in unsound doctrine and practice. It has led those who write on 'approaches to poetry' and on other rudimentary critical procedure to dwell on the less important resources of language and so neglect the meaning and appropriateness of the words; it has also encouraged the acceptance of false standards in the speaking of poetry. These two points require a fuller explanation.

Two of the less important resources of language are alliteration and vowel cadence. In most text-books on poetry there is a great deal said about alliteration and vowel-music, usually with the implication that poets should be praised (and wondered at) for their skill in introducing alliteration and vowel-music into their poems.* Though, obviously, if the poet shows too much concern about the sounds and rhythms of his words he will not be expressing anything intellectually or imaginatively of any real value; we can see the result in the verse of Moore and Swinburne. And it is obvious that if he has something vital or distinctive to express, he will choose the most expressive words at his command—and the alliteration and vowel-music will look after themselves. On the other hand, like Browning, he may, at times, concern himself only with the thought-content of his words, and deprive himself of what can be expressed or suggested by sound and rhythm. Nevertheless the attention given to alliteration and verbal effects has been out of all proportion to their real value and purpose.

The popular theory seems to be that the sound of one con-

¹ *The Art of Poetry*.

* See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

sonant or one vowel can *express* effort, or sounds—of gurgling, of cooing; or movements—of water, of falling leaves, of breathing; or feelings—of regret, of horror, and so on.* It is quite impossible to believe that a single letter can express any of these things; far too much is claimed in this theory, that is, if we are to take literally what its exponents say.

It is perhaps sufficient to say that in much of the mediocre poetry of the anthologies all the purpose that alliteration serves is to give a smoothness to a line, or a velvety sound, or a pleasing melody; in a few of these poems it contributes faint suggestions of meaning or else plays a small part in influencing emotion. It is only in the greatest poetry that language is handled in such a way as to employ these and all of its other potentialities effectively.¹

Another failure to preserve a proper balance and sense of proportion is in the speaking of poetry; here there has always been the tendency to aim principally at pleasantness of delivery; unfortunately this is quite inimical to the production of the best results: to accept the merely pleasant as completely satisfactory is to limit one's achievements considerably. When we hear a delightful voice reading a poem aloud we must not be deluded into believing that the poem is necessarily beautiful, for a good voice can conceal weaknesses of thought and expression. What we should demand of a reader is expressiveness and appropriateness of rendering, rather than pleasant sounds. It is palpably absurd to read a trenchantly worded poem expressing strong emotion in such a sweetly melodious tone of voice that the sinewy strength of the words is enfeebled or sentimentalized.

It is true, of course, that in a few poems the sound of the words is almost as important for itself as the sense expressed, for instance, in certain lyrics written for musical accompaniment, such as 'Tell me where is Fancy bred'. And the sound

* See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

¹ For adequate treatment of this topic see *New Bearings in English*, F. R. Leavis, and *Scrutiny*, Sept. 1934, p. 143, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', L. C. Knights.

is important here because such poems are concerned more with the explicit expression of feelings than with the control of emotion by thought. In these lyrics a writer relies mainly upon the sound and the rhythm to give the spirit of the poem, to rouse emotion and to direct it. In other poems the poet may be concerned more with such things as dramatic effect, or with the expression of energetic thought, than with the melodious sound of his verse. We may instance Browning, whose expression in consequence so often rides rough-shod over the more delicate blooms of a sensitive apprehension of things and situations. Yet in most poetry sound has an indisputable importance; but an importance for its power of quickening imagination, thought, and emotion, rather than emotion alone.

If one is to judge from current opinion it is clear that this obvious fact is only too frequently forgotten. The supreme poets do not attend to the sound of their poems to make their poetry merely more pleasant or acceptable, but use it just as they make use of all the other resources of words: in order to express what otherwise would be inexpressible, as Professor Alexander says: 'Creating beauty, that is the last thing the artist thinks of.'¹

Our first conclusion then might be that the sound of the words of poetry has a value in most poetry, but unless it was so intended by the poet (as far as one can determine) sound should not attract our attention so closely to itself that we are lulled into intellectual laziness by its musical qualities, to the exclusion of accurate thinking and lively image forming. Those of us who are particularly affected by melodies or who are quick to notice the charm of the human voice probably need to be on our guard against the natural reaction of allowing word-music to beguile us so much that we get a poem out of proportion. The muscular metaphors of Mr. M. R. Ridley describe with more force than appropriateness the difficulties of those who are thus hypnotized by word-music; he says: '. . . we find it almost excruciatingly difficult to

¹ *Beauty and Other Forms of Value.*

wrench ourselves out of the kind of opium dream into which the music has lulled us and force ourselves to take in the poet's meaning.¹ Our being more conscious of word-melody than of the thoughts and imagery of the poem will often be a sure sign that we are allowing word-music to predominate in the poetic experience, and that we are losing the balance of the poem. This might happen, for instance, in reading Shakespeare's sonnet 'No longer mourn', for in this sonnet, as Mr. L. C. Knights discerningly points out: '... the sound, if not independent of the meaning, usurps a kind of attention that is incompatible with a full and sharp awareness.'²

And the second conclusion we may formulate is that it would be well to find out the degree of importance that the sounds of the words have in a poem in relation to the other resources of language used by the poet in that poem. It would be well to find out such things, that is to say, if poetry is to be more than a passing recreation.

We have, then, to ask ourselves: What part does the sound of the words of poetry, heard or imagined, play in the act of appreciation? To begin with we must remember that the words of a poem were, and are, primarily sounds; even those of us who have persistent visual images of words, who use visual imagery constantly in thinking, and who read without subaudibly saying the words over to ourselves, will have marginal auditory images of the words more frequently than we can be conscious of. And even for those of us who neglect verbal auditory imagery, the sounds of words are so closely bound up in association with the meaning of words, that the mind could rarely apprehend the one without at least some vestige of the other. Consequently, although we may doubt that we are affected by the sound of words in silent reading, and although we may not be able to discover whether or not the sound of words in silent reading affects us, we may rest assured, if we give the words their due attention, that the

¹ *Poetry and the Ordinary Reader*.

² 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Scrutiny*, Sept. 1934.

mind's ear is not asleep, and that the auditory images of the words themselves contribute something to the total effect.

That which is contributed by the actual sounds of the words of poetry is far too varied to be adequately surveyed here, even if one were capable of making such a survey; a rough summary must suffice: they help to express 'atmosphere', impressions, the qualities of things, and sensuous imagery; they also evoke emotion. Mr. W. Empson says: 'All the sounds . . . carry some suggestion of size or shape, or movement, or pressure . . . it explains *some* part of effects of language.'¹ Contrasts between leisurely dignity and urgent excitement are suggested unobtrusively by sound, and one man's cool and calculating mind or the quiet, balanced sympathy of another is revealed in the same way; for instance the sound quality of Claudius' words differs distinctly from that of Hamlet's or of Horatio's, and the sounds of Prospero's words are sometimes euphonious and modulated, sometimes harsh and rigid, sometimes sharp and thin, and so forth—according to the quality of thought and feeling expressed. Actual quotation will illustrate this better than references. Let us take Prospero's long speech to Miranda beginning 'I, thus neglecting worldly ends', and ending in:

To credit his own lie, he did believe
 He was indeed the duke; out o' the substitution,
 And executing the outward face of royalty,
 With all prerogative;—hence his ambition growing,—²

There is here a growing passion expressed as Prospero remembers the wrongs he has suffered, and it is suggested not so much by a swelling eloquence as by a harsh and biting rhetoric. The actor therefore does not give those words a sonorous and grandiloquent sound to bring out the philosophic dignity of the character; he uses a more vehement and clipped utterance to reveal the indignation and righteous anger which rises more and more strongly as Prospero traces the gradual course of Antonio's villainy to 'he needs will be Absolute Milan'.

¹ *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

² *The Tempest*, Act I, sc.ii.

A comparison of the above quotation with the following will show the effect that the sounds of words have on the mind, and how they help it to sense the quality of the things and impressions presented to it:

. . . they hurried us aboard a bark,
 Bore us some leagues to sea; where they prepared
 A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd,
 Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
 Instinctively have quit it . . .

The hard, abrupt, and meagre sounds of this passage could never have been appropriate to the expression of the dignified passion of the first, if there had been the words with the necessary meanings available. The actor here does not therefore glose over these words with dulcet tones, diluting their expressiveness and *beautifying* Prospero's bitter memories with pleasing word-melodies. It is impossible to mistake the purpose of the hard and abrupt sounds of 'A rotten carcass of a butt' and the sharp, thin notes of 'the very rats Instinctively have quit it'.

Again, compare Prospero's summing up of 'Absolute' Milan's ambitions, so damning in its brevity: 'so dry he was for sway', and its plain common sound with the soft whispering sibilance of his kinder memories of a gentle Aeolus:

. . . there they hoist us,
 . . . to sigh
 To the winds whose pity, sighing back again,
 Did us but loving wrong.

Or, note the emotional expressiveness and the close vivid contact of mind with meaning gained by the force of the sounds 'rend an oak', 'peg', 'his knotty entrails', 'howl'd away' in

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,
 And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
 Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.

Clearly it is not pleasantness of sound which matters, but expressiveness. The criterion must not be the melodiousness

of the words, but their appropriateness of sound to the experience, to thought, feeling, and imagery.

Before leaving the discussion of this aspect of poetic art we should perhaps pay a tribute to the *general* virtue of sound; for its purpose and value take effect throughout the poem. Consequently the singling out of simple letter sounds is an ineffective mode of trying to appreciate a poem; even the gleaning of lulling alliterations, soft assonances, and mellow vowel cadences, in order to praise and enjoy, is surely a mis-directed and inadmissible occupation.* It is injurious because it draws so much attention to the sound of poetry that the balance which is essential to a work of art is disturbed. This domination of sound in poetry, causing loss of meaning and slackening of attention, is vividly described by Bergson; he writes: 'When a poet reads me his verses, I can interest myself enough in him to enter into his thought, put myself into his feelings, live over again the simple state he has broken into phrases and words. . . . Now, I need only relax my attention, let go the tension that there is in me, for the sounds, hitherto swallowed up in the sense, to appear to me distinctly: . . . for this I have not to do anything; it is enough to withdraw something.'¹

If sound effects become too pronounced either they will appear to a reader to be false and mannered, or they will secure an emotional response far in excess of the imaginative elements. What we have to remember at all times is that in appreciation each element of the poem has to be brought into close alliance with all the other elements so that a unity can be established; therefore sound effects must be studied only in close association with meaning—with thought, imagery, and rhythm.

* See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

¹ *Creative Evolution*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

P. 66, l. 5. The source of this is due no doubt to such statements as: 'there is a much finer and more subtle music in poetry. . . . It lies in the poet's choice of melodious words . . . and is the secret of greatness, of the grand style.'

P. 66, l. 8. "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank." The effective repetition of one of the sharpest of these notes in two prominent words, "sweet" and "sleeps", a chime of sound which endows the line with a lingering mellifluous charm.'

P. 66, l. 17. Cf. 'In poesy the ear is lord.'

and 'My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky.'

Have they not a beautiful sound? There is the exquisite music of the words.'

P. 67, l. 21. i. 'Most beautiful effects are obtained by this means.'

ii. 'There is another cause of word-melody in this piece (Hood, *Ode to Autumn*). There are many s's—no less than seventeen—and . . . , these help the effect of sadness in this poem, because the sound of an s or an sh is very like a sigh.'

iii. 'When you play or sing a pretty tune . . . you feel that it is all very lovely; and the beauty makes you happy.'

iv. 'A good deal of the pleasures I get from these lines [the last verse of Stevenson's *Requiem*] comes from the repeating of "s" in "sailor" and "sea" and of "h" in "homes", "hunter", and "hill". . . . Alliteration in poetry pleases the ear.'

P. 68, l. 3. *Effort*: 'The quinqueme of Nineveh's laborious passage is perfectly suggested in the line "Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine", where the "O's" and "A's" emphasize the effort of the oarsmen.'

Gurgling: 'An equally arresting use of the "O" sounds occurs in two lines of J. E. Flecker's *The Old Ship*, . . . the O's produce a wonderfully apt gurgle.'

The pirate Genoese hell-raked them till they rolled
Blood, water, fruit, and corpses up the hold.'

Cooing: 'The fifth couplet

From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep

is entirely dominated by vowel-sounds; the throatiness of doves' cooing is wonderfully echoed in a series of open "o" sounds. . . . Vowels dominate in the last two lines. The notion of still fishes poised in crystalline depths is conveyed by long, cold vowels—

“oo”, “ee”, “aw”. To this effect the luminous “l” and the watery “s” contribute.’

Also ‘Selection of deep vowels conveys the idea of lonely waste places.’

Movements: ‘The liquid sound of the letter *l* aptly expresses any slow and gentle movements, such as that of water in W. B. Yeats’ “I hear lake water lapping . . .”, or of falling leaves in William Collins’ “While fallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves”. . . . Or, again, in the last lines of this stanza [“Nor cast one longing, ling’ring look behind”] from Gray’s *Elegy* the repeated *l* sound strikes a note of tender yet unavailing regret. . . . Any muscular effort—effort that is plainly visible to all beholders—is conveyed by the repetition of the letters *b* and *p*, as in “And his fingers”. . . . The guttural sounds *g*, *k*, *j*, *ch*, on the other hand, suggest effort that is not outwardly visible. . . . The repeated aspirate (“helms . . . heaven . . . heathen . . .”) tells of the laboured breathing of the combatants. . . . The *d*’s of the last line (“Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead”) tell of the total cessation of all movement in death. There is no denying the extreme beauty and expressiveness of such effects.’

Feelings: ‘In the question with which the stanza ends we hear a sob which would not be there but for the alliteration.’

Horror: ‘. . . we are justified in stating that . . . the horror of “The Heretic’s Burthing” comes to us with Browning’s repetition of *ch*.’

And ‘Sometimes the mood or character of the verse will be expressed by repeating the same vowel many times’.

P. 73, l. 10. i. ‘Take, O take those lips away
 . . . seal’d in vain.

Puzzle, find nine long *a*’s in four spellings; five long *e*’s in two spellings; three long *i*’s in three; and three short *u*’s in two.’

ii. ‘It is clear that the main sound which . . . is ringing through that stanza [the first of Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale*] is short *u* followed by either *n* or *m*. . . . Here is the stanza with the *um* and *un* sounds indicated by italics. . . .’

iii. ‘Keats’ *Ode to Autumn*, where there is an average of one *z* sound to a line.’

iv. ‘The third, fourth, and fifth lines contain a total of seventeen sounds. . . . And at the very end of the piece you have the words “coronet of golden corn”. These lines are a little sonata on *o* sounds.’

The following abrupt dismissal of the above is sufficient condemnation: “To put sound first and meaning afterwards in poetry is decadence” (R. Aldington, *The Art of Poetry*).

IX

RHYTHM

IT is commonly agreed that rhythm is an essential of poetry; nevertheless many people seem to regard it as if it were a separate element, making an independent contribution to a poem. This view, of course, is unsound. Rhythm itself cannot have any reality apart from the other elements which, when integrated, make up the experience presented by poetry. And because these other elements are all subject to rhythm and obey its time and movement, we know that it exists in them. It is, in fact, so much an inseparable part of them that the simplest and most accurate way of thinking about their interrelation is to consider rhythm as a *characteristic* of the other elements of poetry. But this conception of rhythm will not be an easy one to keep clearly in mind if the popular ideas of scansion and metrical feet are allowed to obtrude into our thinking about rhythm. It would be more helpful, perhaps, to apply this conception of rhythm in a brief study of the rhythm of some everyday activity, so that we may view it as simply and precisely as possible. We may then be able to note the implications of this theory more easily.

Let us consider for a moment the rhythm of rowing, dancing, and flying. We know quite well that the rhythm of a university eight is different from that of a warship's crew rowing in a whaler. The rhythm of the first is smoother and more flowing, and it has a longer swing than the sturdy and emphatic rhythm of the whaler's crew. What do we mean here by the word 'rhythm'? Are we not looking upon rhythm as a quality or feature of the movements of oars, bodies, and limbs? Again, consider the rhythm of a waltz, noting how much smoother, slower, and more graceful it is than the quick and lively polka. Are not the rhythms of these dances qualities or characteristics of two differing movements? And let us imagine the flight of various birds: the steady beat of

the wings of a rook flying across country, and the slow heavy sweep of the heron's wings as it rises out of the reeds and steadily forges ahead in a long ascending course. Is not the rhythm of the flight of birds partly a matter of the way in which they fly, and to be observed in the pace of the flight, in the power and in the duration of each wing-beat? Obviously the rhythm is not a separate element in movement: it is a quality, feature, or characteristic *of* the movement.

The word 'Rhythm', then, is not merely a term in prosody or aesthetics, and it does not name an entity or separate object, which might be called beautiful or which is exclusively artistic. And rhythm itself cannot exist apart from some activity, any more than an activity can exist apart from things. Neither exists *in vacuo*. In the abstract, rhythm and movement have no reality except in the mind of a thinker—as objects of thought.

If one is to accept the idea of rhythm being a quality of movement, one may well ask the question: How then can there be rhythm in poetry? For poetry is a matter of aesthetic experience and appreciation of beauty; yet here one is expected to believe that movements of actual things are involved. To understand what is rhythm in poetry we must call to mind two facts: that poetry is inseparable from words, and that words are effective only when they are used in the process of thinking; that is to say, only in the reaction of mind to spoken or written symbols do words exist; in a very real sense, from a scientific point of view and from an artistic, it is only then that words have their true life or any vitality whatsoever. The rhythm of poetry, therefore, is really the rhythm of our *thinking* when we are reading the words of a poem; and not only of our thinking but of the accompanying activities of perception, imagination, and intuition, as W. P. Ker so delightfully expressed it: 'The thought has to dance to their music', and ' . . . wild fleeting anapaests, that light on the poet in his dreams and tempt his words to dance with them'.¹ Rhythm, then, is an intrinsic part of our re-creation of the poem.

¹ *Form and Style*.

What is meant by 'the rhythm of our thinking' should perhaps be explained more fully. If we observe the process of reading a poem, we note that we perceive words and groups of words and respond to them *in succession*, for 'Succession of time is the domain of the poet'.¹ (In doing this we are apprehending first one idea and then another, forming first one image and then another, we are also relating these ideas and images in an unbroken series, combining them and passing on from one to the next throughout the poem); for there is ' . . . perpetual activity of attention required on the part of a reader . . .'²) Thus we are continuously achieving fresh turns of thought, and constantly perceiving a new array of images; this is referred to by Coleridge as 'The rapid flow, the quick change . . . of thoughts and images'. We are also keeping to a certain design as we build up the complete theme by our successive responses, and weave the fabric of the poem for ourselves. Now because this process of reacting to words, following trains of thought, of forming images, and of combining thought, imagery, sound, must be a continuous process—we cannot read all the words of a poem simultaneously—it may be carried out at various speeds, and with varying arrangements of emphasis and timing. Trains of thought may be followed quickly, as they are in reading poems with a facile or with a vigorous rhythm, or may be dwelt on meditatively as in reading a reflective poem. And trivial imagery may be built up fluidly and without effort, or, on the other hand, the imaginative conceptions of a poem may demand an eagerness of mind which must accommodate itself quickly to the varying impulses of a vital movement; so that the rhythmic response of the mind to imagery may proceed with a smooth, undistinguished ease or in a buoyant and spirited manner. And not only may stress on a word rich in images be required, but actually a longer span of attention may be necessary in order to allow the imagery to burgeon in the mind; though in good poetry it is more likely that a slight prolongation of timing and a more finely tempered contact

¹ Lessing, *Laocoon*.

² Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

with the word will obviate the necessity for accentual stress, which in its nature is more gross. It will be clear, too, that the imagery of much of Shakespeare's finest poetry requires greater range of creative imagination, and, consequently, a more flexible and varied rhythmic control than the evenly sustained and calmly elaborate inventions of Milton, which rely so much more on sound alone to support their triumphantly processional rhythm.

Furthermore, if the thought and imagery of a poem are so simple or so commonplace or so thin that the mind, in its passage from phrase to phrase and along line after line, can secure effortlessly (and somewhat listlessly) all that the words offer, the rhythm will be unimportant or facile. On the other hand, if thought and imagery are bold and arresting or in some other way significant and distinctive, the rhythm will have an appreciably slower tempo, or its movement will be more flexible and decisive. In somewhat the same way an epic simile often holds up action or suspends a dramatic situation, thus helping¹ to give the whole a greater deliberateness and a grander spaciousness of conception. A contrast to this deliberation can be seen in the rush and hurried crowding of most of Browning's dramatic monologues, where the imagery compels the reader, if he submits to it, to experience the excitement of an intellectual contest or of an impulsive and moving story.

Thus we see that our thinking, imagining, and perception of verbal effects conform to the rhythm of the poem; and though Coleridge claimed for rhythm no more than 'it tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention',¹ yet the rhythm of a poem is, in fact, the rhythm of our response to words, that is to say, it is a quality of the whole response—of sound, imagery, emotion, thought. This must not be viewed as if it were a mere fact of psychology; because the rhythm is as much a part of the creative process as any other element in appreciation: it is an aspect of Form, and, making its contribution—

¹ *Bio. Lit.*

of power or serenity or liveliness or whatever it may be—through the activity of the other elements, it helps to determine the unity of the whole.

But it is quite impossible to understand rhythm in poetry if we limit our conception of it to one item, and to an item which is comparatively rigid and without much range.* What we should be able to see, if our appreciation is not to be stereotyped, is that the varied and supple movement of poetry cannot be revealed by merely putting light or heavy stress, accent or emphasis on certain syllables; but that the rhythm of poetry is made up, in varying proportions and combinations, of the pace, the weight, and the span of our successive responses to the words as we read the poem through.

In order to distinguish the components of the rhythm of poetry let us compare *Off the Ground* with the Queen Mab passages in *Romeo and Juliet*, noting that they both have a lively movement and rapid succession of thought and imagery, but that there is a decided difference in the weight of sound and enunciation which would be given to the spoken words of the two pieces. The three jolly farmers hop and skip as gaily as they can, and yet the rhythm of their dance is a stamp and a jerk compared with the delicacy of the pressure to be put on the words of the other passage in order to suggest in sound the gossamer lightness of Queen Mab's gallop 'night by night through lovers' brains'. This contrast is rudimentary; but necessarily so, for although 'we can all delight in watching the graceful flowing lines of the movements of deer, squirrels, and horses, yet it is assumed that we have to hammer out and blatantly exhibit the accents of poetry—in the most delicate as well as of rougher poems—in order to 'be taught' appreciation.¹

And an obvious contrast has been made in order to empha-

* See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

¹ It is obvious that the marks $\times / | \times / | \times / |$ or $\cup - | \cup - | \cup - |$ represent no more than the crudest approximation to the varied and supple movement of poetry; yet children are too rarely given the hint that this is so.

size the point that in most of the finest English poems it is not syllabic stress which is important, and which should be indicated, but the absence of it. Again and again one can see that the words in the finest poetry have been disembarassed of their everyday conversational force and weight in order that they shall accord better with and express in sound more precisely the finer or the more finely penetrating expressions and conceptions of the human mind. Consequently it is the smoothness or lightness of enunciation or expressiveness of syllabic quality which beginners should discover, and often need help in finding. It would be better to allow stresses to be marked only on poetry which relies unquestionably on accent to give rhythm a definite movement.

To determine the rhythm of a line of poetry, then, instead of marking the accented syllables, the first thing to do is to note whether stress is the chief feature of the rhythm or not. And before marking stresses one must note carefully whether or no a line is so light and fine of texture that any kind of 'beat' will obliterate its felicity. Certain poems, for instance *The War Song of the Saracens*, *The Cavalier Tunes*, rely on a strong beat to get their effects of energy and forcefulness: but to think of giving definite stress to *He came al so stille* or to *Where e'er you walk* betrays a regrettable obtuseness of sensibility. And if we compare the weight which should be given to the significant words in:

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

with the delicacy of enunciation which is needed to express the unearthly mysteriousness of

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;

we must acknowledge that a perceptible accent is relevant in the one, but quite inexcusable in the other. In the first quotation, stress is of value because it is expressive, also it intensifies the imagery and is appropriate to the subject; but in the other, the second part of each foot carries only the lightest

weight of sound more than the unstressed syllables—all that can be given to keep the rhythm is a slightly longer *timing* and fullness of enunciation. Any kind of stress symbol here would lead beginners to believe that there must be a little extra emphasis needed, whereas none is given when the line is read by a good reader. And in the line ‘Like April hoar-frost spread’, the differences in the pronunciation of the syllables are so slight that none of the ordinary modes of marking metre is precise or fine enough to indicate them.

Again, when the last two lines of the following verse are read aloud, they are given no more weight than a very light *pressure* of sound, only just enough to give a perfectly clear enunciation:

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray; ..
 But or ever a prayer had gusht,
 A wicked whisper came, and made
 My heart as dry as dust.

There must be no suspicion of anything like an obvious beat or regular stress here, but only a smooth breath of rustling sound, shaped into words by alternating soft and hard consonants. It is only when the stresses are imperceptible that the true meaning and the full expressiveness of these lines are revealed to a sensitive imagination.

We see then that the rhythm of poetry is *not* always primarily a matter of stress, and that to indicate the metre of *Fear no more the heat o' the sun*, for instance, which does not require verbal emphasis in order to be effective, in the same way as one indicates the metre of *The Destruction of Sennacherib* is to blur delicate effects and to obscure for a beginner the things of real value. As Mr. M. R. Ridley says, ‘in accentual scansion . . . one cannot wholly disregard “length” in the classical sense.’¹

We must now examine more carefully the poetry which does not have stress as its main rhythmic feature. Let us take a well-used example; that it is well used shows that the

¹ *Poetry and the Ordinary Reader.*

point is generally understood, though it is too infrequently applied:

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot.

Here the use of stress habitually reduces a reading to a jog-trot recitation; it is evident that stress is out of place. The rhythm of these lines, of course, is determined mainly by time; the long vowels of the second and third lines and the short vowels of the last two indicate quite clearly that the length of the syllables is the determinant. But the rhythm here is not a matter only of long and short vowels, because even in these lines the consonants make their contribution of quick or slow time.

It would be more profitable to study the poetry of a less deliberate technician: the *Dirge* from *Cymbeline* provides a definite contrast to *Where the bee sucks*.

The first line of:

Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

has the same number of long vowels as:

In a cowslip's bell I lie;

yet one has a slow movement and the other a quick one; and

The sceptre, learning, physic, must . . .

has fewer long vowels than has

On the bat's back I do fly,

so that the time element of the rhythm of the lines of these two songs is not determined solely by vowel length, for 'On the bat's back I do fly' may be said as quickly as one can and yet not lose its quality, and the lines

The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

may be spoken quite slowly without being spoilt; to speed up the reading of the two lines from the *Dirge* quite destroys their character.

What matters here, as so often in the rhythms of poetry, is the length of time or *duration* given to words. The voice may dwell on the words when reading *Fear no more . . .*; but must spring lightly off the words of 'In a cowslip's bell I lie'. How long the voice dwells on the word or how quickly it springs from it must always be considered in determining rhythm; indeed 'the question of the relative duration of syllables has never been neglected by men with susceptible ears'.¹ And varying the time given to the words of poetry is one of the ways in which a good reader expresses the full meaning of the words and also avoids falling into the regularity of humdrum recitation.

We can now see what contributes to the rhythm of *Off the Ground* and makes it different from that of *The Fiddler of Dooney*. The rhythm of *Off the Ground* comprises a heavy stress and a short duration on the words, while that of *The Fiddler of Dooney* has a light stress and a fairly long duration; the rhythm of *The Fiddler* is therefore not so pronounced as the other. In reading *Off the Ground*, thought and imagery must jig emphatically as the mind jumps from one idea or image to the next without having to notice connecting links between each; but *The Fiddler of Dooney* has continuity, the voice therefore does not spring off the words, but flows from one to another.

We see then in practice that the three elements which determine, by their inclusion and degrees of prominence, the rhythm of a poem are: stress, duration, and pace.

It is more instructive to find what a poet has made of his resources in a single poem than to make deductions from obvious contrasts. Coleridge shows in *The Ancient Mariner* that he is a master of the technique of rhythm and can write poetry which at one moment is flexible and the next stiff, or is fluent, changing suddenly to abruptness; furthermore,

¹ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*.

every turn of rhythm is adapted to the subject and is always appropriate to it. If we were to listen closely to an expressive reading of the following verse we should be able to estimate the poet's skill in using both stress and duration:

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The first line has four long syllables, but only the second and fourth have their full duration; the other two have slightly less than their full length. Stress is not required to bring out the rhythm, the difference in timing is sufficient to keep it. After the first half-line of the verse above to the end of the third, stress—or rather a gentle, firm pressure of sound—becomes gradually more pronounced, so that in the line 'And the balls like pulses beat' stress and length of time are equal in value; and in 'For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky' stress predominates slightly over the other quality. In 'Lay like a load on my weary eye' stress and timing are again equal in value; in the fifth line, 'And the dead were at my feet', marked stress has no place; the length of timing to be given to third, fourth, and seventh words of this line faintly suggests its rhythmic quality; its quietness and stillness must not be disturbed by prominent pulsations; for even a medium stress here would give a melodramatic flavour to the expression.

Other examples of the variations and of the contrasting effects occasioned by pace, stress, and timing are perhaps needed to break the spell which accentual scansion seems to exercise over people's minds. It cannot be that the rhythms of 'Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes' and 'Away! away! for I will fly to thee' are the same in quality, and that the measured timing on the significant words of the first is exactly the same as the timing on those of the second, or that the firm, light, urgent stresses of the second are also given to

the words of the first. The stresses of the line 'Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: O hear!' produce a somewhat similar rhythm to that of the line:

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd
One too like thee—

but the quality of the rhythms of the two quotations is quite different.

Variations of stress and time are used by Pope with extraordinary skill and subtlety. It is likely that his poetry has often been insufficiently appreciated because of readers' inability to be aware of the delightful suppleness of his heroic couplets. This suppleness is due to the changes he rings on pace, stress, and timing, and to the extraordinarily subtle expressiveness of his rhythms; to realize this suppleness one must be fully alive to the many differences in weight that his stressed syllables have, to the many differences of length to be given to both stressed and unstressed syllables, and to the constantly varying proportions of speed, length, and weight. To note one quotation is sufficient:

To arms, to arms! the fierce virago cries,
And swift as lightning to the combat flies,
All side in parties and begin the attack;
Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack.

The pressure of the stresses in the opening line of this canto, the length of the stressed syllables and the brevity of those unstressed give this line a forceful energy and determination; but in the second line this movement changes immediately, with the subject, to one of light swiftness. This change in movement is effected by a series of short syllables and shortened long syllables, none of which have any noticeable stress. In the third line again the movement changes to a bolder, slower rhythm, for out of the first five syllables three are long; this bold striding rhythm aptly reveals and accords with the change to deliberation and studied intention; this again changes to the sharply commanding 'begin the attack', where emphasis and brevity of duration are required. The

last line is striking: the length of 'Fans', the clipped span and stress of 'clap', the lightly hissing length and the feather-weight levity of 'silks rustle', the lengthened tension of the three leathery syllables 'tough whalebones', and the stress and sharpness of the last word 'crack', all go to make up a richly expressive rhythm, the texture of which demands our full understanding and precise, sensitive response. This line, however, is more likely to get an adequate response than most of the others because its rhythm is not so subtle, and because it is possible to demonstrate what its rhythm is. It is, perhaps, necessary to point out that throughout the poem there is everywhere the same mastery of medium and the same delightfully adroit technique. And everywhere there is a masterly employment of technical resources, of rhythm especially, to enforce meaning, to clarify, to make vivid and precise, to make the reader 'aware' in the very movement of his mind.

Variations of rhythm which increase the expressiveness of the words may be taken as one of the criterions of a good poem. Throughout the finest English poems there can be seen constant change in the proportions of pace, stress, and timing. And variation of rhythm in the finest poetry is appropriate to changes in thought and imagery and feeling. This fact implies that many poems which are often praised for 'their beauty of rhythm', such as *The Destruction of Sennacherib*, *The Cloud*, *The War Song of the Saracens*, should have been criticized adversely for their rigid adherence to an unvarying rhythm; the effect of such a movement is one of monotony; and if the stresses are heavy, the plunging and unchanging emphasis carries the mind over finer nuances of imagery and feeling, so that poetry is sacrificed to poetical 'effects'. As Vernon Blake points out, 'a regular and limited sing-song rhythm in poetry is hostile to great suggestion.'¹ To suppose that because a poem has a predominating rhythm, or to suppose that the best poetry has an unvarying rhythm throughout, is an obvious yet prevalent error, for

¹ *Relation in Art.*

'a tidy and invariable rhythm chosen once for all, a studied uniformity in which the pseudo-changes repeat themselves at expected intervals . . . as a consequence rapidly becomes fatiguing and hypnotic . . .'¹ And to talk and write of accents and stresses when the poet has given us lines which make no emphatic statements, and which have no forcefulness or loudness, is to neglect the essential quality of much poetic rhythm.*

And, finally, it is when our thought, imagining, and other responses to the words of poetry are obeying the dictates of a significant rhythm, when all these creative powers are in supple and sensitive movement, that they are under a definite control and are working under the discipline of an ordered and directed *form*; as Mr. Empson points out: 'A metrical scheme imposes a sort of intensity of interpretation upon the grammar, which makes it fruitful.'² And emotion, too, comes under this direction and controlling power, for rhythm acts like a flywheel which both increases power and regulates it.

¹ Vernon Blake, *Relation in Art*.

² *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

* See the quotations and notes on p. 89.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IX

P. 80, l. 6. Most of the current text-books appear to deal only with accent, beat, or stress (see below) and, what is more incredible, do not refer to anything else, in spite of the fact that, with exceptions, the rhythm of a poem is never determined by accent alone. It follows from the wider conception of rhythm that the conventional method of indicating the scansion of poetry is quite inadequate to suggest what it is supposed to describe.

i. 'By *rhythm* in language is meant any noticeable series of accents . . . you must . . . as far as the rhythm is concerned, give every accent its full natural force. . . .'

ii. 'All poetry is made up of words which go to a regular beat, that is to say, which have a regular rhythm.'

iii. 'There are several ways in which rhythm and metre can be produced in language. . . . A fourth method is to notice the accent or stress on syllables—that is, their greater loudness or force—and to arrange the accents in a regular pattern. This is the way of Modern English poetry.'

iv. 'You can realize the metrical effect of this poem ("My heart leaps up") if you point to each foot with a pencil and say "de dee" for each foot.'

v. 'The rhythm of sound is built up on the stressing of certain sounds.'

vi. 'Read these poems aloud, giving full weight to the stressed syllables, then mark the rhythm with the usual symbols. . . . Jonson's *Hymn to Diana*, Herrick's *To Daffodils*, Gray's *Elegy*.' N.B. 'giving full weight' where it should read 'giving as little weight as possible'.

vii. 'Repeat the following lines ("The curfew tolls the knell . . .") aloud, stressing the beat of them with a pronounced emphasis.'

viii. 'We see that the basic principle is the regular recurrence of the stress.'

P. 88, l. 8. There are other even more ambitious claims for rhythm: e.g.

— — —
"Toll for the brave, — — —

The brave that are no more.

Before each of the first two stresses in the first line there is an eloquent silence, occupied perhaps by a sob or a sudden intake of breath.'

Perhaps we should remember that: 'Rhythm and metre are dangerous branches of learning. Some poets and lovers of poetry refuse to think of them, and consequently live more comfortable lives, and give less anxiety to their friends.' (W. P. Ker, *Collected Essays*.)

X

FORM

IT is an error to think of the forms of verse as if they were mere husks, able to exist as so much dry matter, and not having any breath of poetic life in them, or as mere moulds into which the molten stuff of poetry can be poured.* On this point W. P. Ker advanced an illuminating doctrine when he said: 'The form of verse is not separable from the soul of poetry', and 'Poetry has neither kernel nor husk, but is all one'. But in spite of this great man's wise teaching many people seem to concern themselves almost exclusively with names, numbers, and the hard facts of prosody when it comes to the study of the forms of verse. One learns that a sonnet has fourteen lines, the Spenserian stanza nine, the ottava rima eight, and the rime royal seven; that the rhymes are such and such; that there are five feet in each line, or five accents; and so on;* and it is thought that such knowledge as this is an open sesame to the beauties of poetry; though, fortunately, most of us realize that the learning of these and of other factual details does not in any way increase our appreciation of poetry. Information of this sort is a matter of 'general knowledge'; and, though we ought, doubtless, to acquire it so that we may not embarrassingly betray the culpable gaps in our knowledge, yet to deal with verse forms in this way, apart from actual poems and apart from the other elements of poetry, as a study is not only quite unprofitable but often most misleading. It gives children the impression that poetry is a dull and mechanical business.

How, then, does it seem possible to separate verse forms and poetry, as it does when one learns about verse forms without thinking of an actual poem? It is because these details concerning verse forms happen to be facts which can be counted up (upon the fingers), noted down, remarked upon.

• See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

It is a matter of arithmetic and nomenclature—so many lines, so many feet, so many rhymes, and then the customary labels can be affixed. But those who boil down the technical details of poetry in this way, so that children can swallow them whole without thinking, do not appear to notice that these details do not give a true conception of verse form; these details cannot do so because the essential facts are excluded.

The forms of verse have a very much greater importance, and are very much more an integral part of poetic experience, and therefore of appreciation, than an enumeration of many of the details concerning them would suggest; indeed, Livingstone Lowes claims that 'The incommunicable, unique essence of the poem is its form'.¹ So that teachers of English as a whole must stand condemned for not having set their faces against a mere specification of fact, technical terms, and numerical details, where an art is concerned, *without reference to the significance of these details*.

It is unfortunate that the descriptions of verse forms in the text-books usually omit even to mention,* much less to make clear, that the verse form reveals *the design* of a poem, and that one should know the stanza pattern and rhyme-scheme of a poem, not merely in order to be well informed about the poem, but in order to respond more exactly to the continuity, the balance, and the unity which the verse form imposes. It is essential to impress on those who are beginning a study of Form that we take note of stanza pattern and rhyme-scheme so that in reading a poem we shall be guided by the structural lines of the poetic experience *while giving undivided attention to thought, and full scope to imagination*—'as wine during animated conversation, they (the effects of metre) act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed.'² This doctrine deserves the most decisive recognition and the widest currency.

Text-books might at least include suggestions concerning the individual quality which a verse form can impart to a

¹ *The Road to Xanadu*.

² Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

● See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

poem and to a poetic experience, and that this distinctive quality will be quite different from that given by other verse forms. Yet in all the ubiquitous specifications of sonnet forms, to take an example, there is rarely the hint that this particular form communicates experiences to us which have a much closer compactness and unity than have those which are given to us, for instance, by ballad metre, heroic quatrain, or the heroic couplet. And such considerations as these are omitted in spite of the fact that it is a great mistake to give children, even those in the more backward classes, only those facts which they can comprehend easily and retail accurately, and to deny them some glimpse of deeper meanings and of dimly perceived mysteries. Children of sixteen are quite capable of understanding that, as one passes from stanza to stanza in reading a poem, say *Lord Randall*, there is, in a way, some occasion and scope for the imagination to move freely in the life presented, but that such freedom is quite out of place when one has become involved in the intenser and more closely reasoned experience of a good sonnet; and that this greater compactness and concentration usually make for increased vitality and emotional depth; while the greater economy in expression usually effects a more finely ordered restraint.

A study of Form in poetry on these lines compels one to perceive that the true appreciation of poetry cannot be achieved without a submission of the activities of one's mind to the control of verse form; and that these forms require of a reader a particular kind of restraint because they have imposed certain limitations on the experience which the poem gives. So we see that it is the verse form which exerts a particularly vital shaping of the reader's poetic experience, guiding it in such a way that an artistic design is worked out, for 'Each occasion of experience has its own individual pattern'.¹ Thus Form is the shape which the poet's experience takes under the stress of words as well as the shape which the words take when subjected by the poet to a significant design.

¹ A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*.

When considering the Form of genuine poetry it is essential to keep in mind that 'technique does not function in a vacuum, it can only develop as the servant of an inner impulse'.¹ It follows then that the study of the verse form can grow only out of the study of the poem itself, and that in the study of Form we should not concern ourselves solely with the rhyme-scheme, stanza-form, and metre of a poem, for these are comparatively of slight value by themselves.* Our main concern should be with the grouping, development, and progression of the theme: *its structural lines*. It is of the greatest importance that we should not be blind to the poet's peculiar arrangement of thought, imagery, and sound—to their progression, their pattern, and their leading motif, all of which, in the finest poetry, are revealed by the stanza pattern and rhyme-scheme. The proper study of a poem necessitates, too, a study of its continuity, its unity, and of all the other elements of its design. Again, this doctrine is of paramount importance and cannot be neglected with impunity.

An example to illustrate the point will be better than argument. A simple form of contrast is used by Milton for the opening of *L'Allegro*; but though contrast here is not handled with any delicacy, yet every other element of Form—sound, rhythm, and the heavily weighted long line—is strictly in keeping with thought, imagery, and feeling; consequently the birth of the ill-favoured progeny of 'Cerberus and blackest midnight' is presented with adequate potency of language. Then comes the complete face-about from 'In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell' to 'But com thou Goddess fair and free'; it is secured by marked changes in Form, and the passage from a dragging line to light airy octosyllabics is no mean element in effecting a decisive change.

Another test of the importance of Form in appreciation would be to read aloud a poem in which the structure has a significant arrangement, with one line displaced or omitted, and to note the effect. It is usually impossible to avoid being

¹ L. C. Knights, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Scrutiny*.

* See the quotations and notes at the end of the chapter.

vexed that the continuity of the thought is interrupted, or that the balance of thought and imagery is upset, or that the intricate pattern has in some other way lost just that rightness which one expected. For instance, if one misses out from a reading aloud of *O Mistress Mine* the fourth line of the second stanza, 'In delay there lies no plenty', the reading of the poem finishes with a jerk and a rush because the design has been robbed of its completeness.

In what ways, then, we must ask ourselves, does Form in poetry build up our thinking, feeling, and imagining into a significant design, and how can Form mould our creative activities so that they shall have order, continuity, and unity? More simply, in what ways can a reader's poetic experience be shaped and guided? The answer to these questions provides an answer also to the question: What is the real significance of verse forms in poetry? As we cannot discuss verse forms apart from poetry and make this study profitable, it is of no avail to give direct and logical answers to these questions. The answers can be given only through the study of several poems.

Some of the best examples of verse forms which marshal ideas and feelings with subtle and pointed effect are to be found among Shakespeare's sonnets, among the ballads, and among the poems of Donne, Marvell, and Pope. More obviously striking, because the effects are bolder and more forceful, is the way in which Tennyson and Browning handle verse form; we are aware of the structure of the poems of these two writers without effort; but to think that we can perceive the shapeliness of the designs of the finer craftsmen without a sharpened perception is to be in danger of being attracted by only the coarser effects of poetry, and of missing the fineness of the lines of its development and swift lightness of its 'point'. And to sweep all sonnets into two heaps—Shakespearian and Petrarchan—according to the main lines of their structure (or of their rhymes) shows an abominable disregard of delicate workmanship; and to see no more in the structure of a Shakespearian sonnet than three quatrains

and a couplet is a grossness which is unpardonable.¹ It is even more so when this crude conception of a sonnet is 'rammed home' in the teaching of poetry, and is inflicted on the impressionable and responsive minds of children, who eagerly seize the obvious in order to please—or triumph. Children who have to undergo such treatment are frequently hindered from coming into contact with the intangible and profound things which only art can present to them; and those who show a misplaced zeal for cramming children with facts *about* poetry are likely to forget Clive Bell's observation: 'that it [art] is a means to a state of exaltation is unanimously agreed, and that it comes from the spiritual depths of man's nature is hardly contested.'²

What is of real importance is that the learning of rhyme-schemes and stanza patterns must always be carried out in close conjunction with a study of the design, grouping, and development of the theme. And the careful tracing of the development of thought and feeling in a poem should secure for us a more intelligent response, and one which is more obedient to canons of art, than one which perceives in a sonnet only a set pattern of three equal stanzas and an epigrammatic tail-piece.

Let us take the sonnet 'When in disgrace', with its immediacy of demand on our imaginative sympathy and its certainty of feeling. The opening of this sonnet requires us at once to experience definite feelings which are evoked by a well defined state of mind, 'in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes'—an 'outcast state'. This exactness of definition gives intensity to the opening; there is no diffusion of thought, no indecision of feeling—all is precise; consequently, in spite of its force, 'trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries' and 'curse my fate', there is also the restraint of exact definition. The opening four lines set the stage and given us the central figure. These lead, without a break, on to a lower level of

¹ The printing of sonnets in three separate stanzas with a couplet, to be found in many editions of the *Golden Treasury*, is damning evidence that the unity of the sonnet has been slighted.

² *Art*.

intensity and of dignity. We are now required to experience the meaner emotions of 'wishing me like to one more rich in hope', of 'Desiring this man's art and that man's scope', and 'With what I most enjoy contented least'. Again we have the same precision in the reference to particular feelings as in the revealing of the general state; but the wider sweep of the first four lines has given way in the second four to ignoble feeling: 'myself almost despising', an abasement far below the more dignified self-recrimination of the opening. There is therefore a gradual sinking in intensity and dignity in these first eight lines, which are not two separate quatrains but two phases of one experience, bound together in subject, thought, feeling, and expression, and leading one into the other without a break or separation in thought, feeling, or language.

We pass, again without break of continuity, to the ninth line on which the whole sonnet turns:

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising
Haply I think on thee:

which not only links what has gone before 'in these thoughts' to what comes after, but also brings about a complete change of thought and feeling: it ushers in a rising intensity, from 'at break of day' to 'sings hymns', and culminates in the ecstasy of 'at heaven's gate'. Then comes the quieter close, assessing his happiness and delighting in it: 'For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings', with its tense conclusion, which is so passionate and certain that the bitterest emotion, scorn, can be felt in the exultation of rejecting the highest worldly glory: 'That then I scorn to change my state with kings.'

This sonnet, then, although having the three-quatrain structure, does not obey that triple arrangement mechanically, keeping each quatrain as a separate whole, so that there would be three parallel stanzas, as there are in 'When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced'¹; but has an octave of two closely

¹ See page 98.

articulated quatrains, the second slightly subordinated to the first, so that there shall not be a mere juxtaposition parallelism, and in this octave one facet of the experience is presented and the other facet is in the sestet, which is composed also of two closely articulated elements, quatrain and couplet, which contain the climax and also a conclusion so strong and decisive that in spite of the strength of the rest there is no suggestion of tailing off, but only a definite feeling of satisfaction and completion. This sonnet has all the best qualities of the Shakespearian type and some of those of the Petrarchan. It has the close continuity and the developing progression of the Petrarchan and the triple balance and 'pointed' couplet of the Shakespearian. It obeys the Petrarchan design in the development of motif, the complication and the unravelling, though with a different 'movement'. Milton, of course, has achieved a similar design in the *Sonnet on His Blindness*, where the last line is a pointed commentary on all that has preceded it, thus giving a finish to the whole; but his conclusion is not so inevitably a part of the whole as is Shakespeare's.

It may be necessary to explore several more poems before one can be convinced that a study of the internal structure of a poem, in the way we have traced it here in one sonnet, is of value. For though it is obvious to everybody that a poem is not just thrown together anyhow, yet the study of Form has suffered neglect. Nevertheless even a cursory study of one or two poems must convince that there is an ordered design and a significant marshalling of ideas, imagery, and expression, so that a theme is worked out and completed, and so that every line of the poem works towards, and for, an effective conclusion. We should do well to recall here what Coleridge said about the importance of the form and structure of poetry: 'I learned from him, that poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes. In the truly great poets he would

say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word.¹

Let us consider then, for a moment, the parallelism of 'When I have seen' with the three identical openings of its three quatrains, with the second introducing an entirely new subject (instead of developing one out of the first, as in 'When in disgrace'), and the third composed of meditations on the first two, and the couplet a commentary on the culminating point of the sonnet in the previous line:

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd
 The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age;
 When sometime lofty towers I see down-raz'd,
 And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
 When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
 Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
 And the firm soil win of the watery main,
 Increasing store with loss, and loss with store;
 When I have seen such interchange of state,
 Or state itself confounded to decay;
 Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminat—
 That Time will come and take my love away.
 This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
 But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

Not only does this structure of parallel and successive commentary keep to the three quatrains as if they were stanzas complete in themselves, but throughout there is a couplet arrangement, for every other line is end-stopped. In consequence of this the sonnet has almost the neatness and 'finish' of the heroic couplet; though the rhymes, not being in pairs, do not give the couplets that 'point' and separate completeness which one finds as a rule in the heroic couplet. The epigrammatic effect therefore is not present to hinder the finality of the conclusion and the linked continuity of the sonnet as a whole. The 'movement' of this sonnet then is not one which grows out of the first line or in some such way develops—unfolds itself—and arrives at a conclusion, but it is one

¹ *Bio. Lit.*

especially suited to meditation when one considers a situation and makes profound and deeply felt deductions from it.

The next example, 'Full many a glorious morning', has a finely fashioned design which is comparable only to a masterly piece of musical structure. In the opening four lines we have the rich splendour of 'glorious morning', 'sovereign eye', 'golden face', and 'Gilding . . . with heavenly alchymy'; in the second four the grey overshadowing gloom of 'the basest clouds', 'with ugly rack', 'from the forlorn world . . . Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace'. This octave, which presents a direct description of nature, forms the first half of a simile, the second half of which is completed in the third quatrain:

Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
With all-triumphant splendour on my brow;
But, out, alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.

But we note that the experience which is described here is presented as a metaphor, so we see that this third quatrain fulfils a double function, that of completing the simile and being used there metaphorically to represent a personal experience. And furthermore the first part of the metaphor,

Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
With all-triumphant splendour on my brow;

corresponds to the first quatrain of the simile: 'Full many a glorious morning . . . Flatter the mountain tops,' and the second part of the metaphor:

But, out, alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.

corresponds to the second quatrain of the simile:

Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.

Consequently there is here a perfectly balanced design, it is made up of three balanced contrasts with the third coinciding with the second and repeating the first. The special virtue of this beautifully symmetrical arrangement, where we can detect the cunning hand of the master, is that the metaphor in the third quatrain has gained enormously in clarity and emotional intensity by having had one side of the comparison expressed in full; the carrying over of the natural description to the metaphor ensures that the metaphor will be clearer, richer, and may be more condensed in expression, and it ensures that the emotion will also be carried over to the expression of the personal experience. We see, too, that the final couplet:

Yet him for this, my love no whit disdaineth,
Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

is bound closely in idea and image to the remainder, and this is effected by the same metaphor 'Suns of the world' and by the same simile 'heaven's sun' flowing over to the conclusion. The change in the couplet, however, to recollection of his regard for his friend follows the memory of his loss perhaps too hastily for his unchanging love to be completely convincing: we do not drive triumphantly from the splendid opening to a passionate conclusion, as we do in 'When in disgrace'; there is a slackening of emotional tension and cogency in the ending.

One more example, not in sonnet form, Marvell's *To his Coy Mistress*; two themes are presented: 'World enough and Time' for his love. The first is handled but briefly, for it is abandoned in the seventh line and not picked up again; it seems almost as if the poet started with the intention of developing both themes with some degree of symmetry but found one to be too matter-of-fact and limited; though no doubt the first is intended to be no more than an introduction. Whatever the purpose of the brevity of the handling of the first theme, and we may doubtless take it as purposive, it is evident that the design of the poem never falters, but main-

tains a consistent and high level of perfection. The lavish and extravagant expenditure of time in which to love and to luxuriate in each of love's delights is drawn at full length and with a rich leisureness:

I would
 Love you ten years before the Flood,
 And you should, if you please, refuse
 Till the conversion of the Jews.
 My vegetable love should grow
 Vaster than empires, and more slow.

All this assured and sportive make-believe leads us farther and farther into a state of extravagant fancy, and so sets the stage for that sudden and striking contrast which carries us immediately into the passion and sincerity of the central theme—the transitoriness of beauty, music, honour, and love:

Thy beauty shall no more be found;
 Nor in thy marble vault shall sound
 My echoing song; then worms shall try
 That long-preserv'd virginity,
 And your quaint honour turn to dust;
 And into ashes all my lust.

This depth and earnestness in its turn intensifies the urgency of the concluding theme:

Now, therefore, while the youthful hue
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew . . .
 Now let us sport us while we may;
 And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour,
 Than languish in his slow-chapt power.

In this poem structure is handled with unusual ease, effect, and discernment. Each of the three main themes is developed fully enough for it to receive a full and strong life of its own; and each, by its certainty and richness, intensifies the other two, giving them focus and still greater significance. Mr. T. S. Eliot sums this up succinctly: 'the three strophes of Marvell's poem have something like a syllogistic relation to each other.'¹

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Andrew Marvell*.

And the way that these three themes are shaped—the way that the thought, imagery, and emotion are marshalled—affords a striking example of the truth that Form, especially in its wider aspects, that is, in the general structural lines of the poem, is a means of giving us an experience which is organized in a particular way, a way which brings out the high lights, deepens the shadows, and which, with imperceptible direction, calls upon us to respond with more sensitive feelings. Expression, sound, and rhythm, arranged in a particular pattern which we call the Form, require us to obey a certain order and development of thought, of imagery and emotion; and it is this shaping of a poem structurally which gives to poetry the necessary qualities of Formal Beauty which we find also in sculpture, music, painting: namely, balance, symmetry, climax or focus, contrast, repetition, and that structural rhythm which includes movement, continuity, proportion, and unity. We may remind ourselves that ‘In a work of art nothing is relevant but what contributes to formal significance’.¹

We see, therefore, that a poem is not valuable because ‘it appeals to our emotions’, because ‘it expresses our aesthetic emotions’; but because, when we are experiencing completely what it presents to us, it enables us to subject ourselves—our thought, imagination, emotion—to the discipline and the shaping of a design which has the qualities usually attributed to what is beautiful: thus beauty of Form becomes an intimate part of our lives—for a moment. It may become so intimate that we are conscious of a feeling of exultation; the consequence of this is that in our blindness we suppose that the poem expresses emotion; whereas if we were more sensitive and imaginatively keener we should know that we had been aware of beauty, and that the emotional exultation was a result of this—‘and repeating those lines “I wander like a lost soul upon the Stygian Barks staying for waftage”, I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone.’²

¹ Clive Bell, *Art*. ² Keats, letter to George and Georgiana, Oct. 1818.

NOTES TO CHAPTER X

P. 90, l. 4. (a) 'The metre of a poem is the form into which it is cast: but the material poured into that mould is that of words.'

(b) '. . . it [blank verse] allows him to escape the discipline of rime, and it gives him a regular mould into which he can pour off his subject-matter as fast as he likes.'

'The Spenserian Stanza. This consists of eight iambic pentameters concluding with a hexameter. The rhyming scheme is: ababbcbcc.'

P. 90, l. 15 'Write down the rime-scheme upon which the stanza [Keats' *Ode to Autumn*] is founded.'

'Describe the metre and rhyme-scheme of the poem.' 'Describe briefly the metre and rhyme-scheme of the poem, and point out any special metrical device that you notice.' 'State the rhyme-scheme of this sonnet, and show clearly to what type of sonnet it belongs.'

'What kind of a poem is this? What is its metrical scheme? What is its rhyme scheme?' (Asked of 'Fear no more. . .')

P. 91, l. 19. The opposite view regards the verse form as something imposed on subject-matter or as a fashion, like powdered wigs and patches; e.g. 'A long passage of heroic couplets is like that series of little loops which wall-paper designers use to drive bed-ridden people mad; and the effect on the ear of a sustained piece of heroic verse may prove as devastating as the wall-paper's effect upon tired eyes. Its invariable two-line symmetry, its compression, and its insistent rime make it a measure peculiarly appropriate to a finicky, artificial century.'

P. 93, l. 8. The following views, therefore, seem quite inadequate:

(a) 'The two main elements in verse-design are, as we have seen, rhythm and repetition. . . . From these two elements of rime and rhythm the thread of verse is spun.'

(b) 'The placing of the pause is of supreme importance in blank verse. . . . If, however, the pause is too freely used, it tends to smother the underlying metre.'

The following might refer to some of the quotations above: '. . . fact cannot corrupt taste . . . the real corrupters are those who supply opinion or fancy.' T. S. Eliot, *The Function of Criticism*

XI

APPRECIATION

WE have now arrived at the centre of the labyrinth and must attempt to answer the question: What is 'appreciation of poetry'? But because of the unusual complexity of the subject it might be wiser to review our conclusions before we attempt to summarize all that is involved in a complete answer to our question. We may remind ourselves, too, that failure to achieve an adequate understanding of appreciation has often been due to the acceptance of ideas and theories which are far too simple.¹ Indeed, an exact understanding of appreciation can perhaps be attained only by noting carefully what it is not, so that half-formed ideas will not thrust themselves forward and be taken for the full concept.

In the first place we have seen that appreciation of poetry is not an admiration of the nobility or grandeur or beauty of the thought of a poem. Delight in the moral excellence of the thought expressed in a poem or in the originality or familiarity of the ideas should not be mistaken for the deep-seated pleasure which arises from 'appreciation', for 'Pleasure is attendant upon every sense, as it is also upon every act of intellect and contemplation'.²

And appreciation is not merely the enjoyment of visual images, not even if they are delightfully vivid or picturesque, or especially pleasing in some other way, for 'images however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize a poet'.³ Similarly, as Sir Joshua Reynolds insisted, 'painting is not merely a gratification of the sight.' Pleasure of this

¹ e.g. 'Poetry is really a very simple thing, simpler than prose, very often much simpler than life itself' (P. H. B. Lyon, *The Discovery of Poetry*). 'Alas! It generally turns out that Life and Art are rather more complicated than we could wish' (Clive Bell, *Art*). And 'every simplification is an over-simplification' (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*);

² Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*.

³ Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

sort arises no doubt from successful imagining, from discovering more, for instance, in a landscape than we had perceived by our own efforts, or in a bird's flight, in a flower, or in whatever the poem happens to be about; just as there is pleasure in visualizing those scenes, people, and things with which we have been happily acquainted in days gone by. For reminiscences are pleasant, as are other mental processes successfully performed; but pleasures of this sort must not be taken for appreciation, for they are of a much simpler order, and are much more easily achieved than those resulting from the more exacting experiences provided by poetry. Pope, we may remind ourselves, 'expressly laid it down that whoever wished to bear worthily the name of a poet, ought to renounce as early as possible the mania for pictorial description.'¹

And appreciation is not even the process of understanding all the meanings which are expressed in a word or in a phrase; not the process of identifying recondite references—the scholar's unique reward. And not the process of seeing more expressed in the poem than its face-value, such as one might see in allegory, in *Piers Plowman* or *The Pearl* for instance, rich in deeper meanings as those fine poems are. There is indeed a pleasing gratification in tracking down sources, borrowings, and references, and a ripe satisfaction in the complete comprehension of a work of art, when one is flattered by the feeling of mastery and of having overcome obstacles; but none of these pleasing events and achievements should be taken for appreciation.

Again, appreciation is not even the enjoyment of sounds signifying beautiful things—such as 'melodious plots of beechen green' and as 'breezes blown through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways'. However pleasant the voice of the reader may be, and however soothing the sound of the 'murmuring of innumerable bees', of babbling of brooks on pebbles, of 'ocean softly washing all her warless isles', of 'the moan of doves in immemorial elms'²; yet this

¹ Lessing, *Laocoön*.

² Even though the noises made by doves are not at all like moans—yet it is said that the onomatopoeia makes the line beautiful, and 'we have the voice of the dove itself speaking in music'.

simple—and superficial—enjoyment in the mere sound of words is far from being identical with that richly complex event which we call appreciation. As Professor Whitehead says: 'Sense-perception, despite its prominence in consciousness, belongs to the superficialities of experience.'¹

And appreciation is not such a simple matter as perception of poetic rhythm or as being mentally exhilarated by rhythmic language, for '... the pleasure of metre itself ... we have shown to be conditional and dependent on the appropriateness of the thoughts and expressions to which the metrical form is superadded'.² Insistent or attractive rhythms have the power to affect us and to move our feelings, and this for many people is pleasant; but we need not suppose that such naïve pleasure is the predominating feature in the appreciation of poetry.

Above all, appreciation cannot be defined as 'being transfused with emotion'.³ For although it is the peculiar province of poetry to call up in the reader's mind predetermined thought and emotion so that the thinking will 'be charged with emotion and will thus be invigorated and vitalized, yet the appreciation of poetry does not consist merely of such emotionalized thought. If this were 'appreciation' the crudest melodrama or the most sentimental verse, or best seller, could compel our appreciation of its beauty (so-called)—provided we could suspend our critical activities long enough. The experience of appreciating a poem is far more complex than the relatively simple act of perceiving or—more accurately—feeling an emotion, even though that emotion is supposed to be an aesthetic, or poetic emotion, for 'no art endeavours to express the emotions of the

¹ *Adventures of Ideas*.

² Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

³ The meaning of 'to transfuse with emotion' is supplied by Mr. A. E. Housman whose words they are; he said: 'not to transmit thought but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what is felt by the writer; this, ... is the peculiar function of poetry.' This statement is true when applied to music; but as the reading of poetry always must bring about the evocation of thought this description of the function of poetry is scarcely adequate.

artist in any more particular fashion than it expresses his conceptions or images . . .¹ as Professor Alexander convincingly reasons.

Furthermore, appreciation is not merely the enjoyment of felicitous phrasing, of the poet's 'beautiful choice of words'. It is not the warm appraisal of modes of expression, however apt, sensuous, or moving. There may be considerable pleasure in this facet of poetic experience, it is one which has attracted considerable notice from almost every writer on poetry—poets, critics, and others—often to imply, if indeed not to state explicitly, that appreciation consists solely of this delight in words. But this peculiarly literary pleasure is not an experience which can be divorced from the complete act of appreciation, it must take account of content and of everything else which goes to make up the poem. It is true that this savouring of the words—tasting them, as it were, to get their full flavour of meaning, sound, rhythm, aptness—can be the most conscious part of the experience, it can yield so much, and is the peculiar reward of the reader with a sensitive awareness to words; but it cannot be all that there is in appreciation.

Finally, appreciation cannot be solely, or mainly, the pure apprehension of Form, as if we could be aware of the beauty of a cathedral without realizing that the cathedral was a building and had a noble purpose. To be able to contemplate Formal Beauty and to find delight therein is the culminating point of one's aesthetic development, it can be achieved only as the result of very many rich appreciations, for all these appreciations give meaning to Formal Beauty. Formal Beauty is, as it were, an ideal of Beauty, hinted at through the medium of stone, paint, sound, word, rather than plainly expressed or literally asserted. Just as the circle may be regarded as the perfected shape of all figures bounded by one continuous line, of all figures which are imperfect because they have bulges or crankings-in, or flattenings or elongations, and imperfect because they are temporary and undisciplined

¹ *Beauty and other Forms of Value.*

(that is, they have no law), and just as the circle is the one shape of all those figures which is always the same and is everywhere the same, which is eternal and unchangeable,¹ so in all art there are forms approximating to perfection, forms which the artist has striven to conceive, idealized and perfected; though it is only in mathematics—the philosophy of matter—in which the eternal shape has been perfectly conceived by man. Nevertheless appreciation is not solely the satisfying experience of contemplating formal perfection.

It is belittling the value of poetry, or of any art, to consider appreciation to be any one of the activities already referred to and put aside as insufficient. What, then, constitutes poetic appreciation? To begin with we must emphasize the fact that appreciation includes *all* of those activities.² It is not a simple event, or a process loosely compounded of a few elements; but it is both complex and complete; and it is an experience in which all of man's finest mental powers are involved; it should therefore be indisputable that no single ingredient of such a complete and perfect moment can be omitted. And our sense of rhythm, our powers of forming imagery, our perception of sound, and our emotions are quite inadequate *separately* to bring us to an awareness of beauty: to suppose otherwise is to deceive ourselves. As Professor Buck says of music, that 'He may enjoy the noble sounds, the rolling rhythms, the feeling of splendour and pageantry they evoke, and his enjoyment may be as great as you like; but as to appreciation, that you will maintain, is not a gift of the senses but a reward of the mind'.³ It is indeed paying but a poor tribute to what is really beautiful to suppose that perfection

¹ 'In geometry it is the universal truth which is uppermost in the consciousness; in poetry the individual form in which truth is clothed.' Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

² '... his fundamental excellencies as a poet; what distinguishes the artist from the mere amateur, says Goethe, is *Architectonice* in the highest sense: that power of execution which creates, forms and constitutes not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration.' Matthew Arnold, *Preface to Poems*.

³ *The Scope of Music*.

is easily come by; otherwise any versifier, dauber, organ-grinder, or pot-boiler of sentimental novels could do as much for us.

On the contrary, appreciation is a complex activity in which all the powers of the mind are working together to one end: to experience all that is possible of what was intuitively conceived by the poet's insight and vision, and *at the same time* to have a lively awareness of all the virtues of the poet's words to express those experiences.

We must explain more fully all that is involved here, but with reserve, because it is so much a matter of degree. The appreciation of a poem consists of knowing the full meaning of the words—as far as one is able, of some consciousness of the associations implied, of considerable imaginative activities, and of at least a partial perception of the sounds of the words; and it demands that these activities be animated and vitalized by emotion, and that they combine harmoniously into a complete and co-ordinated unity: associations and imagery enriching thought, the sounds aptly expressing this seasoned thought and emotion, and all being borne along rhythmically, and all ordered and controlled and shaped by the verse form; and the necessary accompaniment of this experience is the distinct awareness of the poet's words: that they fully express all those thoughts, associations, images, emotions, with a clear recognition of their particular qualities and virtues, of their rhythm and pattern.

Thus appreciation of a poem has essentially and necessarily a unity. By unity we mean here not a vague mystical blending or mysterious fusion of elements, but a real and close association of thought, imagery, and emotion; and this, apprehended as a whole, is expressed in rhythmic and patterned language so precisely, so completely, and so inevitably that the language itself is felt *to be* that imaginative and impassioned thought. For 'Poetry in one sense is all form . . . not properly the artistic treatment of the subject, but the subject so translated into form that the mind does not want anything else'.¹ Contempla-

¹ W. P. Ker, *Form and Style*.

tion of the form¹ then becomes also contemplation of what is expressed, and *is*, in fact, the process of bringing about a combination of content and expression; *is*, in fact, the process of becoming aware of the experience which is evoked by the words, and at the same time that the words express that experience. So that in reading poetry one is not only receiving new ideas, new impressions, new conceptions, but one is also receiving at the same time words to express those experiences. And the two complex acts of impassioned, imaginative cognition and of full, precise expression of that activity are one:² the words both evoke experiences in us and express them for us—'The true moment of appreciation is that in which we recognize the "form" of the imaginative creation.'³ It is when this combining, this unifying, of all the elements occurs successfully, when contemplation is rapt, conscious only of the work of art, and with all one's powers at a stretch, then occurs that penetrating insight or vision which is the act of intuition; for it is only in moments of intense and highly sensitive concentration of our powers that we know we have come in contact with something which excites our wonder, which stirs our exultation, and which leaves us with a profound satisfaction.

NOTE ON 'CRITICAL APPRECIATION'

Whether or no appreciation of a poem, in the sense of 'form an estimate of value or worth', occurs subsequently to the process described above is a debatable point. Mr. T. S. Eliot says: 'I believe that it is always opportune to call attention to the torpid superstition that appreciation is one thing, and "intellectual" criticism something else.'⁴ But we may be sure that evaluation is based on the success or failure of the words to engage our creative abilities, to animate these abilities so that they will all work in combination and towards one end, and to satisfy us that all that we are feeling and imaginatively conceiving is being represented by those words.

¹ That is to say, of the words, their combined qualities, their pattern and rhythmic sound.

² There is disagreement here with: 'In poetry form and its significance are not everything; the form and the content are not one.' Clive Bell, *Art*

³ W. P. Ker, *Form and Style*.

⁴ *The Sacred Wood*.

XII

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FORM

AS the subjective nature of poetry, indeed of all art, has frequently been pointed out and is generally acknowledged, as in Lipps' 'Aesthetic pleasure is an enjoyment of *our own* activity *in* an object', why is it that we persist in talking about the beauty of a statue, a picture, a concerto, or of a poem, when the philosophers and the psychologists have put forward so much pressing evidence in support of the contention that beauty is not *in* the work of art, but is in us; that it is not a characteristic of the work of art, but is inherent in our reactions to it? Professor Alexander remarks: 'Some there are who believe beauty to be a character which belongs intrinsically to the beautiful object and is merely observed or discovered by us.'¹ Belief in the objectivity of art perseveres indefatigably in spite of the weight of opposing authority. Is there any rational foundation for this belief, for the ordinary and accepted way of regarding art? There is, of course, the natural and common-sense view which assumes that everything we see or hear or touch is real, and that it exists where our senses tell us it exists; and this view works very well in practice. Although we have no other evidence to prove the reality of the existence of things than is supplied by our senses, most people are satisfied with the common-sense view, and do not feel the need for any further evidence or argumentation. But, we might ask ourselves, may not this common-sense view be an uninformed one, may it not be the one which those who undervalue the arts have accepted, and one which has interfered with an adequate estimate of value; or may it not have led, in another direction, to lazy, incomplete appreciations of art, and to unintelligent, gross, and untrained ways of responding to works of art? Perhaps we may have found that belief in the objectivity of beauty has hitherto been com-

¹ *Beauty and other Forms of Value.*

pletely satisfactory; but can we be sure that we have perceived in a great work of art all that it is possible for us to see, all that a work of art could mean to an intelligent and fully informed person?¹ In short, is the common-sense argument merely an ignorant argument, or is it philosophically sound?

The answering of these questions involves a brief examination of what is meant by the Subjective and Objective in art; it should also serve as a reply to the further question: 'Is there any adequate purpose served by making this distinction and by emphasizing an apparent opposition: Subjective v. Objective?'

What do we mean when we say that art is subjective or that art is an intimate personal experience? If we take poetry as our representative art, we mean that the printed words of a poem are no more than black marks on paper, that they are no more than signs or symbols, and that the reader reacts to those symbols, and thinks, feels, imagines in a way which is governed by the selection and arrangement of those symbols; the result being that the reader has a unified experience in which thought, imagination, and emotion all play a proportioned part, and which, from the first word to the last, develops with rhythmic and continuous progression. Thus whatever meaning there is in the poem, whatever imaginative life there is, whatever emotion to be felt, whatever rhythm, are brought into existence by the reader, and are given a real, though intangible, life in his mind. These things—meaning, emotion, rhythm, and so forth—cannot be perceived, known, or imagined except in so far as they are re-created by that mind.² This is what is meant by the words:

¹ What art could mean to an educated community has rarely been understood, partly for the reason that so few people perceive that 'Like science and philosophy, art is a definite way of knowledge' (Ouspensky, *A New Model of the Universe*). W. P. Ker also pointed out that 'Both art and science have their end to make things clear to the mind' (*On the Philosophy of Art*).

² If a reader has a *concept* of the rhythm of a poem, of the structure, or of some other element of a poem, he has only an abstraction, he is not re-creating the rhythm, is not obeying its dictates; he cannot therefore be having a rhythmic experience.

one must 'experience' the poem, or 'reading poetry must be an experience'. And in so far as we obey rhythm in reading poetry, we ourselves are thinking and imagining rhythmically; and in so far as we are aware that the sound and shape of the words are expressing for us those thoughts, feelings, and imaginative life, and in so far as we re-create all that those sounds and arrangements can give us, we are both bringing to life certain experiences, and also expressing them; and in so far as we are aware of the Form, in so far as we obey its development, arrangement, and composition, we are having our experiences selected, ordered, and, so to say, orchestrated; so that all that we perceive, think, imagine, feel—in fact our whole self at that moment—is being subjected to the discipline of an animating and significant design.

This inner shaping and orchestration of the reader's thought, imagery, and emotion constitute the final step in the apprehension of beauty. It appears that this is not generally understood. Many people seem to believe that their apprehensions of beauty are solely the result of sensation, that it is by the use of their senses and nothing more that they can be aware of beauty, regardless of the truth of 'that which we discover to be beautiful in a work of art is not discovered by our eye, but by the force of our imagination'.¹ In 'appreciating' a picture or a flower we may rave about the richness of the colouring, the delicate shading, the exquisite texture of a surface; but these delights are largely emotional reactions, they are the second step towards awareness of beauty, simple perception being the first. In the appreciation of all the arts, there should be this lively realization of the simple, sensuous qualities of the form; but aesthetic experience goes much farther, it demands much more of us than mere perception, that is, very much more than the senses by themselves can give us—we should beware of what Vernon Blake calls 'the English habit of confusing sensuousness with art'.²

Aesthetic experiences demand of us an 'orchestrating' of all that we had gained strictly by means of our senses and of

¹ Lessing, *Laocoon*.

² *Relation in Art*.

all that we had thought and felt as the result of those sensuous responses; this orchestrating requires all the elements, however diverse, to be brought into harmony with each other—in due proportion, and all to be integrated into one complete whole—the urgency of the demand is due to ‘the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity’.¹ And this can be brought about only by contemplation of Form, of the objective work of art. For it is only when all the elements of a work of art are closely related, in delicately balanced proportions, in finely graded harmonies, and in complete unity, that we can be aware of the qualities of beauty itself, of grace, poise, delicacy, of depth, stability, strength, of continuity, harmony, proportion, and unity. And as we become more and more aware of these qualities we are attaining to a much finer and a more profound and sincere apprehension of beauty.

Now the manifesting of these attributes of beauty to us is undeniably subjective, for just as we can be conscious of the rhythm of a poem because we are thinking rhythmically, and just as we can have knowledge of the imagery of a poem because we ourselves are imagining, and just as we are aware of what the words express because we are thinking and feeling about these things, so the recognition in Form of all those characteristics which contribute, according to their importance and relevance, to the creation of Formal Beauty—that is to say, poise, grace, strength, delicacy, depth, and so on—necessitates that we ourselves should be endowed with those qualities at the moment of submitting ourselves to the requirements of Form. Herein lies the extraordinary value and importance of art, and, too, the baffling nature of that value and importance. It is we ourselves who for a brief moment are endowed with those special qualities which belong exclusively to beauty, to every successful, or partially successful, manifestation of beauty. And so the Beautiful comes into existence. As far as we can ascertain, it comes into existence only in Mind, that is to say, in the highest form of life we know.

¹ Coleridge, *Bio. Lit.*

This same interchange of effect, object on subject, subject on object, may be looked at from another point of view. We may say that the characteristics of poise, grace, strength, and so on, which have been conceived by the poet, are represented in art (that is, in Form) so precisely, purely, and strongly that through our exquisitely sensitive perception of the Form that expresses them we become aware of the presence of beauty. For the perception of anything, material or immaterial, is achieved only by the apprehension of its characteristics. And may we not say that the characteristics of beauty are so much a matter for an intuitive apprehension—just as beauty itself is an idealized concept of mind at its most perfect moment—that we cannot be aware of them except when they are being given a perceptible representation in some objective material, which is so patterned and shaped that it has become symbolic of those characteristics?

Let us reconsider what we mean by a beautiful picture or other work of art. The following position seems logical and sound: if we become aware of a pleasing poise, strength, grace, when we are contemplating a work of art, we can be certain that those qualities are conceived by our minds, that they exist solely in mind, and are a reality to us only in so far as they are imagined precisely, strongly, sincerely; and yet because that external, material work of art has made us apprehend those pleasing qualities, we may *feel* that that work of art also has those qualities. Professor Alexander supports this interpretation; he writes: 'It will be true over the whole field that the beautiful contains ingredients of what does not properly belong to its material but is imputed to it by the constructive mind.'¹ That is to say, we invest that paint, stone, poem, sound, with those qualities—just as we invest everything around us with reality and meaning, and live our whole life on the assumption that what our senses give us is real, an objective reality. We assume, too, that what our intuitions, our impressions, our conceptions give us is also real, actual—is present objectively. The common-sense view

¹ *Beauty and Other Forms of Value.*

is, of course, that even to doubt such a thing is absurd; indeed, this natural habit of investing things external to us with reality, with meaning, with qualities, and with the characteristics of beauty, is extremely important for us. It enables us to regard physical matter (statuary, paint, sound) as capable of being made into symbolic forms, and of being made representative of our thoughts, our imaginings, our concepts, our intuitions, our gropings after beauty—'language . . . furnishes consciousness with an immaterial body in which to incarnate itself, and thus exempts it from dwelling exclusively in material bodies'.¹ So by believing that matter external to us can represent for us what we have thought and imagined, we make that matter express all the fleeting or tenuous or delicate experience that mind has. We then *feel* that the poem or the music or the statuary is 'expressive'.²

But of what value is it to us to have an attitude of mind that can regard objective matter not only as real, but as expressive of our feelings, thoughts, and intuitions, of our intimations of beauty? Is it of any importance to us? Is it worth considering at all? It is, of course, enormously important. These moments when we become aware of beauty are not so frequent that we can afford to lose even a single one—and without the help of some expressive matter they will be lost, because they are never repeated. Our ordinary lives are often so disorganized, often so lacking in unity, in grace, in precision, in many good qualities, that we need to preserve, if we can, all those moments which seem to us to be particularly valuable, so that we can live them over again, so that we can recapture that same apprehension of beauty—beauty in that same pose and mood and power.

By our having formed this habit of believing that objective

¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*.

² This view regards the words and all the elements of Form in poetry and drama to be all-important as expression, and gives them very much greater importance in this matter than Croce does when he says: 'We rejoice, we fear, we laugh, we weep, we desire, with the personages of a drama or of a romance . . . what are these apparent or manifested feelings, but feelings objectified, intuited, expressed.' *Aesthetic* (Ainslie's translation).

matter is endowed with the qualities and activities of our own minds, we are enabled to secure the preservation and repetition of those mental states and experiences which are fraught with the attributes of beauty; our world, then, is considerably enriched by the preservation of a large number of experiences which have been valued by the poets, painters, musicians, sculptors, who have preserved them. And because there is in human nature a spontaneous and almost involuntary response to what is good and beautiful, and also an almost unconscious, and often quite unrealized, desire for the good and beautiful, we can satisfy our needs and unknown longings for these things by turning to works of art. There is, therefore, an enormous gain to us in our retaining a belief in the objective nature of the world long after it has performed its essential functions in the initial stages of our lives.

But if art expresses our emotions for us, as so many writers have insisted that it does, we may legitimately feel uneasy about the necessity and value of this if 'expression of emotion' means no more than 'rousing of emotion', for though the presence of emotion is an essential condition, it does not *of itself* make art of prime importance to us. What is vital in appreciation is that the aroused emotion shall be so closely combined with the other elements that it will be merged in the experience, so that the experience will be both integrated and complete. Appreciation of a work of art is one of the highest forms of human experience. A human experience, to be supreme, must be complete; no partial entering into an experience, no half-measures, will avail; and to be complete an experience must engage all man's creative powers. Then when a man's experience is really unified and complete—so complete that all his mind is participating in that experience, for instance, deep in the contemplation of a Grecian urn or of a poem on a Grecian urn—he has no mental activity to spare with which to observe himself, he is so lost in the event that he cannot become aware of what is happening to him by any sort of consciousness of *self*. Thus T. S. Eliot speaks of 'that excitement, that joyful loss of self in the workmanship

of art, that intense and transitory relief which comes at the moment of contemplation and is the chief reward of creative work'.¹ He who wishes to appreciate a work of art must not be aware of himself, must not make himself in any degree the object of contemplation; otherwise this introspection, which to some people is so ready a habit, will hinder his thought and feelings, and will supervene in his experience, and thus prove an obstacle to his being aware of the more elusive characteristics of beauty; it will prevent his thought from grasping profound truths, and will evoke those more ignoble feelings which promote self-interest. Any sort of introspection is the most damaging mental operation which could compete with those activities of mind which are required for the full participation in a work of art. The harm is implied in the statement that 'an art experience must not be self-conscious'. In spite of the fact, therefore, that it is in ourselves that the work of art is being created anew—with our feelings, our thoughts, our imaginings—we must have no consciousness of ourselves at all, as Sir H. Granville Barker says: 'Tragedy . . . takes us out of ourselves . . . the less conscious of the process we are the better.'² How is it possible? Clearly, because we invest the work of art with the meanings that we have conceived and with our feelings, and because we endow it with all the characteristics of beauty. Consequently we are able to be aware of the experience and to contemplate it without the intrusion of self-consciousness; thus 'It [art] presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence.'³ This is the selfless nature of art which enables us to undergo extraordinarily valuable experiences as if they were not our own activities, as if these activities were removed away from us; in fact, as far as we should be able to judge at that moment, they *are* expressed in the work of art to which we are giving our profound attention. This belief, that we see or hear in the work of art all that we ourselves are imagining and feeling, must at the moment of

¹ Essay on Matthew Arnold in *The Use of Poetry*.

² *Prefaces to Shakespeare*.

³ Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*.

appreciation be one of conviction, for it is then, and only in that way, that we can become aware of our experiences without the destructive interference of self-consciousness. Clutton-Brock is also emphatic on this point: 'It [the human being] cannot be aware of beauty except in self-forgetfulness.'¹ Thus we can *know* the experiences we participate in, for they are then ready for our contemplation, for our delight, and to be understood with what powers of insight we possess—as Prospero says:

I endowed thy purposes
With *words that made them known.*

Thus it is that that essential—'artistic distance'—is secured, for 'there is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design and its true proportions'. And it is by means of artistic distance that we can become aware of the beauty which our own activities have created, but which would be obliterated instantly by introspection; for 'Poetry should be . . . a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself—but with its subject'.²

It is the objectivity of the work of art which gives us artistic distance; therefore 'the Greeks trusted the natural propensity of the mind, trusted language above all, in so far as it naturally externalizes thought'.³ And it is this fact of being external, this objectivity of the work of art, which holds our minds to the artistic experience, enabling them to continue their creative processes as long as contemplation continues—'. . . the only way by which art can be fully experienced, namely, by imaginative insight and contemplation'.⁴ And in the act of an absorbed contemplation those creating, forming, unifying activities occur, through the operation of which the grace and strength and harmony and rhythmic form and expressiveness—all that gives 'character' and distinction to the experience—begin to appear, so that we

¹ *The Ultimate Belief.*

² Keats, Letter to Reynolds, Feb. 1818.

³ Bergson, *Creative Evolution.*

Margaret Bulley, *Art and Counterfeit.*

apprehend the beauty of the poem or of the statue or of the piece of music.

A work of art is therefore subjective; but, as intrusion of self is ugliness, a work of art must be treated as if it were objective, because it thus secures for us freedom from the harmfulness of self-interest. There is no real opposition: the attitude of mind which regards the work of art as objective must reign supreme during the appreciation of the work of art, the attitude of mind which takes note of the subjective nature of the aesthetic experience should intervene only when an evaluation of the work of art is required; but

‘If he . . . holds no converse with the Muses, does not even that intelligence which there may be in him, having no taste of any sort of learning or inquiry or thought or culture, grow feeble and dull and blind, his mind never waking up or receiving nourishment, and his senses not being purged of their mists? True, he said.’—PLATO, *The Republic* (Jowett’s translation).

